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# R U T H.

A *Nobel*.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MARY BARTON."

Drop, drop slow tears !  
And bathe those beauteous feet,  
Which brought from heaven  
The news and Prince of peace.  
Cease not, wet eyes,  
For mercy to entreat :  
To cry for vengeance  
Sin doth never cease.  
In your deep floods  
Drown all my faults and fears ;  
Nor let His eye  
See sin, but through my tears.

*Phineas Fletcher.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# R U T H.

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## CHAPTER I.

RUTH felt very shy when she came down (at half-past seven) the next morning, in her widow's cap. Her smooth, pale face, with its oval untouched by time, looked more young and child-like than ever, when contrasted with the head-gear usually associated with ideas of age. She blushed very deeply as Mr. and Miss Benson showed the astonishment, which they could not conceal, in their looks. She said in a low voice to Miss Benson,

“ Sally thought I had better wear it.”

Miss Benson made no reply ; but was startled at the intelligence, which she thought was conveyed in

this speech, of Sally's acquaintance with Ruth's real situation. She noticed Sally's looks particularly this morning. The manner in which the old servant treated Ruth, had in it far more of respect than there had been the day before ; but there was a kind of satisfied way of braving out Miss Benson's glances which made the latter uncertain and uncomfortable.

She followed her brother into his study.

“ Do you know, Thurstan, I am almost certain Sally suspects.”

Mr. Benson sighed. The deception grieved him, and yet he thought he saw its necessity.

“ What makes you think so?” asked he.

“ Oh ! many little things. It was her odd way of ducking her head about, as if to catch a good view of Ruth's left hand, that made me think of the wedding-ring ; and once, yesterday, when I thought I had made up quite a natural speech, and was saying how sad it was for so young a creature to be left a widow, she broke in with ‘ widow be farred !’ in a very strange, contemptuous kind of manner.”



“ If she suspects, we had far better tell her the truth, at once. She will never rest till she finds it out, so we must make a virtue of necessity.”

“ Well, brother, you shall tell her then, for I am sure I daren't. I don't mind doing the thing, since you talked to me that day, and since I've got to know Ruth; but I do mind all the clatter people will make about it.”

“ But Sally is not ‘people.’”

“ Oh, I see it must be done; she'll talk as much as all the other persons put together, so that's the reason I call her ‘people.’ Shall I call her?” (For the house was too homely and primitive to have bells.)

Sally came, fully aware of what was now going to be told her, and determined not to help them out in telling their awkward secret, by understanding the nature of it before it was put into the plainest language. In every pause, when they hoped she had caught the meaning they were hinting at, she

persisted in looking stupid and perplexed, and in saying "Well," as if quite unenlightened as to the end of the story. When it was all complete and plain before her, she said, honestly enough,

"It's just as I thought it was ; and I think you may thank me for having had the sense to put her into widow's caps, and clip off that bonny brown hair that was fitter for a bride in lawful matrimony than for such as her. She took it very well, though. She was as quiet as a lamb, and I clipped her pretty roughly at first. I must say, though, if I'd ha' known who your visitor was, I'd ha' packed up my things and cleared myself out of the house before such as her came into it. As it's done, I suppose I must stand by you, and help you through with it; I only hope I sha'n't lose my character,—and me a parish clerk's daughter."

"Oh, Sally! people know you too well to think any ill of you," said Miss Benson, who was pleased to find the difficulty so easily got over; for, in truth,

Sally had been much softened by the unresisting gentleness with which Ruth had submitted to the "clipping" of the night before.

"If I'd been with you, Master Thurstan, I'd ha' seen sharp after you, for you're always picking up some one or another as nobody else would touch with a pair of tongs. Why, there was that Nelly Brandon's child as was left at our door, if I hadn't gone to th' overseer we should have had that Irish tramp's babby saddled on us for life; but I went off and told th' overseer, and th' mother was caught."

"Yes!" said Mr. Benson, sadly, "and I often lie awake and wonder what is the fate of that poor little thing, forced back on the mother who tried to get quit of it. I often doubt whether I did right; but it's no use thinking about it now."

"I'm thankful it isn't," said Sally; "and now, if we've talked doctrine long enough, I'll go make th' beds. Yon girl's secret is safe enough for me."

Saying this she left the room, and Miss Benson followed. She found Ruth busy washing the

breakfast-things; and they were done in so quiet and orderly a manner, that neither Miss Benson nor Sally, both particular enough, had any of their little fancies or prejudices annoyed. She seemed to have an instinctive knowledge of the exact period when her help was likely to become a hindrance, and withdrew from the busy kitchen just at the right time.

That afternoon, as Miss Benson and Ruth sat at their work, Mrs. and Miss Bradshaw called. Miss Benson was so nervous as to surprise Ruth, who did not understand the probable and possible questions which might be asked respecting any visitor at the minister's house. Ruth went on sewing, absorbed in her own thoughts, and glad that the conversation between the two elder ladies and the silence of the younger one, who sat at some distance from her, gave her an opportunity of retreating into the haunts of memory; and soon the work fell from her hands, and her eyes were fixed on the little garden beyond, but she did not see its flowers

or its walls; she saw the mountains which girdled Llan-dhu, and saw the sun rise from behind their iron outline, just as it had done—how long ago? was it months or was it years?—since she had watched the night through, crouched up at *his* door. Which was the dream and which the reality? that distant life, or this? His moans rang more clearly in her ears than the buzzing of the conversation between Mrs. Bradshaw and Miss Benson.

At length the subdued, scared-looking little lady and her bright-eyed silent daughter rose to take leave; Ruth started into the present, and stood up and curtsied, and turned sick at heart with sudden recollection.

Miss Benson accompanied Mrs. Bradshaw to the door; and in the passage gave her a long explanation of Ruth's (fictitious) history. Mrs. Bradshaw looked so much interested and pleased, that Miss Benson enlarged a little more than was necessary, and rounded off her invention with one or two imaginary details, which, she was quite unconscious,

were overheard by her brother through the half-open study door.

She was rather dismayed when he called her into his room after Mrs. Bradshaw's departure, and asked her what she had been saying about Ruth?

"Oh! I thought it was better to explain it thoroughly—I mean, to tell the story we wished to have believed once for all—you know we agreed about that, Thurstan?" deprecatingly.

"Yes; but I heard you saying you believed her husband had been a young surgeon, did I not?"

"Well, Thurstan, you know he must have been something; and young surgeons are so in the way of dying, it seemed very natural. Besides," said she, with sudden boldness, "I do think I've a talent for fiction, it is so pleasant to invent, and make the incidents dovetail together; and after all, if we are to tell a lie, we may as well do it thoroughly, or else it's of no use. A bungling lie would be worse than useless. And, Thurstan—it may be very wrong—but I believe—I am afraid I enjoy not

being fettered by truth. Don't look so grave. You know it is necessary, if ever it was, to tell falsehoods now; and don't be angry with me because I do it well."

He was shading his eyes with his hand, and did not speak for some time. At last he said:

"If it were not for the child, I would tell all; but the world is so cruel. You don't know how this apparent necessity for falsehood pains me, Faith, or you would not invent all these details, which are so many additional lies."

"Well, well! I will restrain myself if I have to talk about Ruth again. But Mrs. Bradshaw will tell every one who need to know. You don't wish me to contradict it, Thurstan, surely—it was such a pretty, probable story."

"Faith! I hope God will forgive us if we are doing wrong; and pray, dear, don't add one unnecessary word that is not true."

Another day elapsed, and then it was Sunday; and the house seemed filled with a deep peace.

Even Sally's movements were less hasty and abrupt. Mr. Benson seemed invested with a new dignity, which made his bodily deformity be forgotten in his calm, grave composure of spirit. Every trace of week-day occupation was put away; the night before, a bright new handsome tablecloth had been smoothed down over the table, and the jars had been freshly filled with flowers. Sunday was a festival and a holyday in the house. After the very early breakfast, little feet pattered into Mr. Benson's study, for he had a class for boys—a sort of domestic Sunday-school, only that there was more talking between teacher and pupils, than dry, absolute lessons going on. Miss Benson, too, had her little, neat-tippeted maidens sitting with her in the parlour; and she was far more particular in keeping them to their reading and spelling, than her brother was with his boys. Sally, too, put in her word of instruction from the kitchen, helping, as she fancied, though her assistance was often rather *mal-apropos*; for instance, she called out, to a little fat, stupid,



roly-poly girl, to whom Miss Benson was busy explaining the meaning of the word quadruped,

“Quadruped, a thing wi’ four legs, Jenny; a chair is a quadruped, child!”

But Miss Benson had a deaf manner sometimes when her patience was not too severely tried, and she put it on now. Ruth sat on a low hassock, and coaxed the least of the little creatures to her, and showed it pictures till it fell asleep in her arms, and sent a thrill through her, at the thought of the tiny darling who would lie on her breast before long, and whom she would have to cherish and to shelter from the storms of the world.

And then she remembered, that she was once white and sinless as the wee lassie who lay in her arms; and she knew that she had gone astray. By-and-by the children trooped away, and Miss Benson summoned her to put on her things for chapel.

The chapel was up a narrow street, or rather *cul-de-sac*, close by. It stood on the outskirts of the town, almost in fields. It was built about the time

of Matthew and Philip Henry, when the Dissenters were afraid of attracting attention or observation, and hid their places of worship in obscure and out-of-the-way parts of the towns in which they were built. Accordingly, it often happened, as in the present case, that the buildings immediately surrounding, as well as the chapels themselves, looked as if they carried you back to a period a hundred and fifty years ago. The chapel had a picturesque and old-world look, for luckily the congregation had been too poor to rebuild it, or new face it in George the Third's time. The staircases which led to the galleries were outside, at each end of the building, and the irregular roof and worn stone-steps looked grey and stained by time and weather. The grassy hillocks, each with a little upright head-stone, were shaded by a grand old wych-elm. A lilac-bush or two, a white rose-tree, and a few laburnums, all old and gnarled enough, were planted round the chapel yard ; and the casement windows of the chapel were made of heavy-leaded, diamond-shaped panes, almost

covered with ivy, producing a green gloom, not without its solemnity, within. This ivy was the home of an infinite number of little birds, which twittered and warbled, till it might have been thought that they were emulous of the power of praise possessed by the human creatures within, with such earnest, long-drawn strains did this crowd of winged songsters rejoice and be glad in their beautiful gift of life. The interior of the building was plain and simple as plain and simple could be. When it was fitted up, oak-timber was much cheaper than it is now, so the wood-work was all of that description ; but roughly hewed, for the early builders had not much wealth to spare. The walls were whitewashed, and were recipients of the shadows of the beauty without ; on their " white plains" the tracery of the ivy might be seen, now still, now stirred by the sudden flight of some little bird. The congregation consisted of here and there a farmer with his labourers, who came down from the uplands beyond the town to worship where their

fathers worshipped, and who loved the place because they knew how much those fathers had suffered for it, although they never troubled themselves with the reason why they left the parish church; of a few shopkeepers, far more thoughtful and reasoning, who were Dissenters from conviction, unmixed with old ancestral association; and of one or two families of still higher worldly station. With many poor, who were drawn there by love for Mr. Benson's character, and by a feeling that the faith which made him what he was could not be far wrong, for the base of the pyramid, and with Mr. Bradshaw for its apex, the congregation stood complete.

The country people came in sleeking down their hair, and treading with earnest attempts at noiseless lightness of step over the floor of the aisle; and by-and-by, when all were assembled, Mr. Benson followed, unmarshalled and unattended. When he had closed the pulpit-door, and knelt in prayer for an instant or two, he gave out a psalm from the dear old Scottish paraphrase, with its primi-

tive inversion of the simple perfect Bible words; and a kind of precentor stood up, and, having sounded the note on a pitch-pipe, sang a couple of lines by way of indicating the tune; then all the congregation stood up, and sang aloud, Mr. Bradshaw's great bass voice being half a note in advance of the others, in accordance with his place of precedence as principal member of the congregation. His powerful voice was like an organ very badly played, and very much out of tune; but as he had no ear, and no diffidence, it pleased him very much to hear the fine loud sound. He was a tall, large-boned, iron man; stern, powerful, and authoritative in appearance; dressed in clothes of the finest broad-cloth, and scrupulously ill-made, as if to show that he was indifferent to all outward things. His wife was sweet and gentle-looking, but as if she was thoroughly broken into submission.

Ruth did not see this, or hear aught but the words which were reverently—oh, how reverently!—spoken by Mr. Benson. He had had Ruth pre-

sent in his thoughts all the time he had been preparing for his Sunday duty; and he had tried carefully to eschew everything which she might feel as an allusion to her own case. He remembered how the Good Shepherd, in Poussin's beautiful picture, tenderly carried the lambs which had wearied themselves by going astray, and felt how like tenderness was required towards poor Ruth. But where is the chapter which does not contain something which a broken and contrite spirit may not apply to itself? And so it fell out that, as he read, Ruth's heart was smitten, and she sank down, and down, till she was kneeling on the floor of the pew, and speaking to God in the spirit, if not in the words of the Prodigal Son: "Father! I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child!" Miss Benson was thankful (although she loved Ruth the better for this self-abandonment) that the minister's seat was far in the shade of the gallery. She tried to look most attentive to her brother, in order that Mr. Bradshaw might not

suspect anything unusual, while she stealthily took hold of Ruth's passive hand, as it lay helpless on the cushion, and pressed it softly and tenderly. But Ruth sat on the ground, bowed down and crushed in her sorrow, till all was ended.

Miss Benson loitered in her seat, divided between the consciousness that she, as *locum tenens* for the minister's wife, was expected to be at the door to receive the kind greetings of many after her absence from home, and her unwillingness to disturb Ruth, who was evidently praying, and, by her quiet breathing, receiving grave and solemn influences into her soul. At length she rose up, calm and composed even to dignity. The chapel was still and empty; but Miss Benson heard the buzz of voices in the chapel-yard without. They were probably those of people waiting for her; and she summoned courage, and taking Ruth's arm in hers, and holding her hand affectionately, they went out into the broad daylight. As they issued forth, Miss Benson heard Mr. Bradshaw's strong bass voice speaking to her brother,

and winced, as she knew he would be wincing, under the broad praise, which is impertinence, however little it may be intended or esteemed as such.

“ Oh, yes!—my wife told me yesterday about her—her husband was a surgeon; my father was a surgeon too, as I think you have heard. Very much to your credit, I must say, Mr. Benson, with your limited means, to burden yourself with a poor relation. Very creditable indeed.”

Miss Benson glanced at Ruth; she either did not hear or did not understand, but passed on into the awful sphere of Mr. Bradshaw's observation unmoved. He was in a bland and condescending humour of universal approval, and when he saw Ruth, he nodded his head in token of satisfaction. That ordeal was over, Miss Benson thought, and in the thought rejoiced.

“ After dinner, you must go and lie down, my dear,” said she, untying Ruth's bonnet-strings, and kissing her. “ Sally goes to church again, but you won't mind staying alone in the house. I am sorry



we have so many people to dinner, but my brother will always have enough on Sundays for any old or weak people, who may have come from a distance, to stay and dine with us ; and to-day they all seem to have come, because it is his first Sabbath at home."

In this way Rùth's first Sunday passed over.

## CHAPTER II.

“ HERE is a parcel for you, Ruth !” said Miss Benson on the Tuesday morning.

“ For me !” said Ruth, all sorts of rushing thoughts and hopes filling her mind, and turning her dizzy with expectation. If it had been from “ him,” the new-born resolutions would have had a hard struggle for existence.

“ It is directed ‘ Mrs. Denbigh,’ ” said Miss Benson, before giving it up. “ It is in Mrs. Bradshaw’s handwriting ;” and, far more curious than Ruth, she awaited the untying of the close-knotted string. When the paper was opened, it displayed a whole piece of delicate cambric-muslin ; and there was a short note from Mrs. Bradshaw to Ruth, saying her husband had wished her to send this muslin in aid

of any preparations Mrs. Denbigh might have to make. Ruth said nothing, but coloured up, and sat down again to her employment.

“Very fine muslin, indeed,” said Miss Benson, feeling it, and holding it up against the light, with the air of a connoisseur; yet all the time she was glancing at Ruth’s grave face. The latter kept silence, and showed no wish to inspect her present further. At last she said, in a low voice,

“I suppose I may send it back again?”

“My dear child! send it back to Mr. Bradshaw! You’d offend him for life. You may depend upon it, he means it as a mark of high favour!”

“What right had he to send it me?” asked Ruth, still in her quiet voice.

“What right? Mr. Bradshaw thinks—I don’t know exactly what you mean by ‘right.’”

Ruth was silent for a moment, and then said:

“There are people to whom I love to feel that I owe gratitude—gratitude which I cannot express, and had better not talk about—but I cannot see

why a person whom I do not know should lay me under an obligation. Oh! don't say I must take this muslin, please, Miss Benson!"

What Miss Benson might have said if her brother had not just then entered the room, neither he nor any other person could tell; but she felt his presence was most opportune, and called him in as umpire. He had come hastily, for he had much to do; but he no sooner heard the case than he sat down, and tried to draw some more explicit declaration of her feeling from Ruth, who had remained silent during Miss Benson's explanation.

"You would rather send this present back?" said he.

"Yes," she answered, softly. "Is it wrong?"

"Why do you want to return it?"

"Because I feel as if Mr. Bradshaw had no right to offer it me."

Mr. Benson was silent.

"It's beautifully fine," said Miss Benson, still examining the piece.

“ You think that it is a right which must be earned ?”

“ Yes,” said she, after a minute’s pause. “ Don’t you ?”

“ I understand what you mean. It is a delight to have gifts made to you by those whom you esteem and love, because then such gifts are merely to be considered as fringes to the garment—as considerable additions to the mighty treasure of their affection, adding a grace, but no additional value, to what before was precious, and proceeding as naturally out of that as leaves burgeon out upon the trees ; but you feel it to be different when there is no regard for the giver to idealise the gift—when it simply takes its stand among your property as so much money’s value. Is this it, Ruth ?”

“ I think it is. I never reasoned why I felt as I did ; I only knew that Mr. Bradshaw’s giving me a present hurt me, instead of making me glad.”

“ Well, but there is another side of the case we have not looked at yet—we must think of that, too.

You know who said 'Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you?' Mr. Bradshaw may not have had that in his mind when he desired his wife to send you this ; he may have been self-seeking, and only anxious to gratify his love of patronising—that is the worst motive we can give him; and that would be no excuse for your thinking only of yourself, and returning his present."

"But you would not have me pretend to be obliged?" asked Ruth.

"No, I would not. I have often been similarly situated to you, Ruth ; Mr. Bradshaw has frequently opposed me on the points on which I feel the warmest—am the most earnestly convinced. He, no doubt, thinks me Quixotic, and often speaks of me, and to me, with great contempt when he is angry. I suppose he has a little fit of penitence afterwards, or perhaps he thinks he can pay for ungracious speeches by a present ; so, formerly, he invariably sent me something after these occasions.

It was a time, of all others, to feel as you are doing now ; but I became convinced it would be right to accept them, giving only the very cool thanks which I felt. This omission of all show of much gratitude had the best effect—the presents have much diminished ; but if the gifts have lessened, the unjustifiable speeches have decreased in still greater proportion, and I am sure we respect each other more. Take this muslin, Ruth, for the reason I named ; and thank him as your feelings prompt you. Overstrained expressions of gratitude always seem like an endeavour to place the receiver of these expressions in the position of debtor for future favours. But you won't fall into this error."

Ruth listened to Mr. Benson ; but she had not yet fallen sufficiently into the tone of his mind to understand him fully. She only felt that he comprehended her better than Miss Benson, who once more tried to reconcile her to her present, by calling her attention to the length and breadth thereof.

" I will do what you wish me," she said, after a

little pause of thoughtfulness. "May we talk of something else?"

Mr. Benson saw that his sister's frame of mind was not particularly congenial with Ruth's, any more than Ruth's was with Miss Benson's; and, putting aside all thought of returning to the business which had appeared to him so important when he came into the room (but which principally related to himself), he remained above an hour in the parlour, interesting them on subjects far removed from the present, and left them at the end of that time soothed and calm.

But the present gave a new current to Ruth's ideas. Her heart was as yet too sore to speak, but her mind was crowded with plans. She asked Sally to buy her (with the money produced by the sale of a ring or two) the coarsest linen, the homeliest dark blue print, and similar materials; on which she set busily to work to make clothes for herself; and as they were made, she put them on; and as she put them on, she gave a grace to each, which



such homely material and simple shaping had never had before. Then the fine linen and delicate soft white muslin, which she had chosen in preference to more expensive articles of dress when Mr. Bellingham had given her *carte blanche* in London, were cut into small garments, most daintily stitched and made ready for the little creature, for whom in its white purity of soul nothing could be too precious.

The love which dictated this extreme simplicity and coarseness of attire, was taken for stiff, hard economy by Mr. Bradshaw, when he deigned to observe it. And economy by itself, without any soul or spirit in it to make it living and holy, was a great merit in his eyes. Indeed, Ruth altogether found favour with him. Her quiet manner, subdued by an internal consciousness of a deeper cause for sorrow than he was aware of, he interpreted into a very proper and becoming awe of him. He looked off from his own prayers to observe how well she attended to hers at chapel ; when he came to any verse in the hymn relating to immortality or a future

life, he sang it unusually loud, thinking he should thus comfort her in her sorrow for her deceased husband. He desired Mrs. Bradshaw to pay her every attention she could ; and even once remarked, that he thought her so respectable a young person that he should not object to her being asked to tea the next time Mr. and Miss Benson came. He added, that he thought, indeed, Benson had looked last Sunday as if he rather hoped to get an invitation ; and it was right to encourage the ministers, and to show them respect, even though their salaries were small. The only thing against this Mrs. Denbigh was the circumstance of her having married too early, and without any provision for a family. Though Ruth pleaded delicacy of health, and declined accompanying Mr. and Miss Benson on their visit to Mr. Bradshaw, she still preserved her place in his esteem ; and Miss Benson had to call a little upon her “ talent for fiction ” to spare Ruth from the infliction of further presents, in making which his love of patronising delighted.

The yellow and crimson leaves came floating down on the still October air ; November followed, bleak and dreary ; it was more cheerful when the earth put on her beautiful robe of white, which covered up all the grey naked stems, and loaded the leaves of the hollies and evergreens each with its burden of feathery snow. When Ruth sank down to languor and sadness, Miss Benson trotted up-stairs, and rummaged up every article of spare or worn-out clothing, and bringing down a variety of strange materials, she tried to interest Ruth in making them up into garments for the poor. But though Ruth's fingers flew through the work, she still sighed with thought and remembrance. Miss Benson was at first disappointed, and then she was angry. When she heard the low, long sigh, and saw the dreamy eyes filling with glittering tears, she would say, " What is the matter, Ruth ?" in a half-reproachful tone, for the sight of suffering was painful to her ; she had done all in her power to remedy it ; and, though she acknowledged a cause

beyond her reach for Ruth's deep sorrow, and, in fact, loved and respected her all the more for these manifestations of grief, yet at the time they irritated her. Then Ruth would snatch up the dropped work, and stitch away with drooping eyes, from which the hot tears fell fast; and Miss Benson was then angry with herself, yet not at all inclined to agree with Sally when she asked her mistress "why she kept 'mithering' the poor lass with asking her for ever what was the matter, as if she did not know well enough." Some element of harmony was wanting—some little angel of peace, in loving whom all hearts and natures should be drawn together, and their discords hushed.

The earth was still "hiding her guilty front with innocent snow," when a little baby was laid by the side of the pale white mother. It was a boy; beforehand she had wished for a girl, as being less likely to feel the want of a father—as being what a mother, worse than widowed, could most effectually shelter. But now she did not think or

remember this. What it was, she would not have exchanged for a wilderness of girls. It was her own, her darling, her individual baby, already, though not an hour old, separate and sole in her heart, strangely filling up its measure with love and peace, and even hope. For here was a new, pure, beautiful, innocent life, which she fondly imagined, in that early passion of maternal love, she could guard from every touch of corrupting sin by ever watchful and most tender care. And *her* mother had thought the same, most probably; and thousands of others think the same, and pray to God to purify and cleanse their souls, that they may be fit guardians for their little children. Oh, how Ruth prayed, even while she was yet too weak to speak; and how she felt the beauty and significance of the words, "Our Father!"

She was roused from this holy abstraction by the sound of Miss Benson's voice. It was very much as if she had been crying.

"Look, Ruth!" it said, softly, "my brother sends

you these. They are the first snowdrops in the garden." And she put them on the pillow by Ruth; the baby lay on the opposite side.

"Won't you look at him?" said Ruth; "he is so pretty!"

Miss Benson had a strange reluctance to see him. To Ruth, in spite of all that had come and gone, she was reconciled—nay, more, she was deeply attached; but over the baby there hung a cloud of shame and disgrace. Poor little creature, her heart was closed against it—firmly, as she thought. But she could not resist Ruth's low faint voice, nor her pleading eyes, and she went round to peep at him as he lay in his mother's arm, as yet his shield and guard.

"Sally says he will have black hair, she thinks," said Ruth. "His little hand is quite a man's, already. Just feel how firmly he closes it;" and with her own weak fingers she opened his little red fist, and taking Miss Benson's reluctant hand, placed one of her fingers in his grasp. That baby-touch

called out her love; the doors of her heart were thrown open wide for the little infant to go in and take possession.

“ Ah, my darling !” said Ruth, falling back weak and weary. “ If God will but spare you to me, never mother did more than I will. I have done you a grievous wrong—but, if I may but live, I will spend my life in serving you !”

“ And in serving God !” said Miss Benson, with tears in her eyes. “ You must not make him into an idol, or God will, perhaps, punish you through him.”

A pang of affright shot through Ruth’s heart at these words; had she already sinned and made her child into an idol, and was there punishment already in store for her through him? But then the internal voice whispered that God was “ Our Father,” and that He knew our frame, and knew how natural was the first outburst of a mother’s love; so, although she treasured up the warning,

she ceased to affright herself for what had already gushed forth.

“Now go to sleep, Ruth,” said Miss Benson, kissing her, and darkening the room. But Ruth could not sleep; if her heavy eyes closed, she opened them again with a start, for sleep seemed to be an enemy stealing from her the consciousness of being a mother. That one thought excluded all remembrance and all anticipation, in those first hours of delight.

But soon remembrance and anticipation came. Then was the natural want of the person, who alone could take an interest similar in kind, though not in amount, to the mother's. And sadness grew like a giant in the still watches of the night, when she remembered that there would be no father to guide and strengthen the child, and place him in a favourable position for fighting the hard “Battle of Life.” She hoped and believed that no one would know the sin of his parents; and that that struggle might be



spared to him. But a father's powerful care and mighty guidance would never be his; and then, in those hours of spiritual purification, came the wonder and the doubt of how far the real father would be the one to whom, with her desire of heaven for her child, whatever might become of herself, she would wish to entrust him. Slight speeches, telling of a selfish, worldly nature, unnoticed at the time, came back upon her ear, having a new significance. They told of a low standard, of impatient self-indulgence, of no acknowledgment of things spiritual and heavenly. Even while this examination was forced upon her, by the new spirit of maternity that had entered into her, and made her child's welfare supreme, she hated and reproached herself for the necessity there seemed upon her of examining and judging the absent father of her child. And so the compelling presence that had taken possession of her, wearied her into a kind of feverish slumber; in which she dreamt that the innocent babe that lay by her side

in soft ruddy slumber, had started up into man's growth, and, instead of the pure and noble being whom she had prayed to present as her child to "Our Father in heaven," he was a repetition of his father; and, like him, lured some maiden (who in her dream seemed strangely like herself, only more utterly sad and desolate even than she) into sin, and left her there to even a worse fate than that of suicide. For Ruth believed there was a worse. She dreamt she saw the girl, wandering, lost; and that she saw her son in high places, prosperous—but with more than blood on his soul. She saw her son dragged down by the clinging girl into some pit of horrors into which she dared not look, but from whence his father's voice was heard, crying aloud, that in his day and generation he had not remembered the words of God, and that now he was "tormented in this flame." Then she started in sick terror, and saw, by the dim rushlight, Sally, nodding in an arm-chair by the fire; and felt her

little soft warm babe, nestled up against her breast, rocked by her heart, which yet beat hard from the effects of the evil dream. She dared not go to sleep again, but prayed. And every time she prayed, she asked with a more complete wisdom, and a more utter and self-forgetting faith. Little child! thy angel was with God, and drew her nearer and nearer to Him, whose face is continually beheld by the angels of little children.

## CHAPTER III.

SALLY and Miss Benson took it in turns to sit up, or rather, they took it in turns to nod by the fire ; for if Ruth was awake she lay very still in the moonlight calm of her sick bed. That time resembled a beautiful August evening, such as I have seen. The white snowy rolling mist covers up under its great sheet all trees and meadows, and tokens of earth ; but it cannot rise high enough to shut out the heavens, which on such nights seem bending very near, and to be the only real and present objects ; and so near, so real and present, did heaven, and eternity, and God seem to Ruth, as she lay encircling her mysterious holy child.

One night Sally found out she was not asleep.

“ I'm a rare hand at talking folks to sleep,” said

she. "I'll try on thee, for thou must get strength by sleeping and eating. What must I talk to thee about, I wonder. Shall I tell thee a love story or a fairy story, such as I've telled Master Thurstan many a time and many a time, for all his father set his face again fairies, and called it vain talking ; or shall I tell you the dinner I once cooked, when Mr. Harding, as was Miss Faith's sweetheart, came unlooked for, and we'd nought in the house but a neck of mutton, out of which I made seven dishes, all with a different name?"

"Who was Mr. Harding?" asked Ruth.

"Oh, he was a grand gentleman from Lunnon, as had seen Miss Faith, and been struck by her pretty looks when she was out on a visit, and came here to ask her to marry him. She said, 'No, she would never leave Master Thurstan, as could never marry ;' but she pined a deal at after he went away. She kept up afore Master Thurstan, but I seed her fretting, though I never let on that I did, for I thought she'd soonest get over it and be thankful

at after she'd the strength to do right. However, I've no business to be talking of Miss Benson's concerns. I'll tell you of my own sweethearts and welcome, or I'll tell you of the dinner, which was the grandest thing I ever did in my life, but I thought a Lunnoner should never think country folks knew nothing ; and, my word ! I puzzled him with his dinner. I'm doubting whether to this day he knows whether what he was eating was fish, flesh, or fowl. Shall I tell you how I managed?"

But Ruth said she would rather hear about Sally's sweethearts, much to the disappointment of the latter, who considered the dinner by far the greatest achievement.

“ Well, you see, I don't know as I should calt them sweethearts ; for excepting John Rawson, who was shut up in a mad-house the next week, I never had what you may call a downright offer of marriage but once. But I had once ; and so I may say I had a sweetheart. I was beginning to be

aferead though, for one likes to be axed ; that's but civility; and I remember, after I had turned forty, and afore Jeremiah Dixon had spoken, I began to think John Rawson had perhaps not been so very mad, and that I'd done ill to lightly his offer, as a madman's, if it was to be the only one I was ever to have ; I don't mean as I'd have had him, but I thought, if it was to come o'er again, I'd speak respectful of him to folk, and say it were only his way to go about on-all-fours, but that he was a sensible man in most things. However, I'd had my laugh, and so had others, at my crazy lover, and it was late now to set him up as a Solomon. However, I thought it would be no bad thing to be tried again ; but I little thought the trial would come when it did. You see, Saturday night is a leisure night in counting-houses and such like places, while it's the busiest of all for servants Well ! it was a Saturday night, and I'd my baize apron on, and the tails of my bed-gown pinned together behind, down on my knees, pipeclaying

the kitchen, when a knock comes to the back door. 'Come in!' says I; but it knocked again, as if it were too stately to open the door for itself; so I got up, rather cross, and opened the door; and there stood Jerry Dixon, Mr. Holt's head-clerk; only he was not head-clerk then. So I stood, stopping up the door, fancying he wanted to speak to master; but he kind of pushed past me, and telling me summut about the weather (as if I could not see it for myself), he took a chair, and sat down by the oven. 'Cool and easy!' thought I; meaning himself, not his place, which I knew must be pretty hot. Well! it seemed no use standing waiting for my gentleman to go; not that he had much to say either; but he kept twirling his hat round and round, and smoothing the nap on't with the back of his hand. So at last I squatted down to my work, and thinks I, I shall be on my knees all ready if he puts up a prayer, for I knew he was a Methodee by bringing-up, and had only lately turned to master's way of thinking; and them Methodees are



terrible hands at unexpected prayers when one least looks for 'em. I can't say I like their way of taking one by surprise, as it were; but then I'm a parish-clerk's daughter, and could never demean myself to dissenting fashions, always save and except Master Thurstan's, bless him. However, I'd been caught once or twice unawares, so this time I thought I'd be up to it, and I moved a dry duster wherever I went, to kneel upon in case he began when I were in a wet place. By-and-by I thought, if the man would pray it would be a blessing, for it would prevent his sending his eyes after me wherever I went; for when they takes to praying they shuts their eyes, and quivers th' lids in a queer kind o' way—they Dissenters does. I can speak pretty plain to you, for you're bred in the Church like mysel', and must find it as out o' the way as I do to be among dissenting folk. God forbid I should speak disrespectful of Master Thurstan and Miss Faith, though; I never think on them as Church or Dissenters, but just as Christians. But to come back

to Jerry. First, I tried always to be cleaning at his back ; but when he wheeled round, so as always to face me, I thought I'd try a different game. So, says I, ' Master Dixon, I ax your pardon, but I must pipeclay under your chair. Will you please to move?' Well, he moved; and by-and-by I was at him again with the same words; and at after that, again and again, till he were always moving about wi' his chair behind him, like a snail as carries its house on its back. And the great gaupus never seed that I were pipeclaying the same places twice over. At last I got desperate cross, he were so in my way; so I made two big crosses on the tails of his brown coat; for you see, wherever he went, up or down, he drew out the tails of his coat from under him, and stuck them through the bars of the chair; and flesh and blood could not resist pipeclaying them for him; and a pretty brushing he'd have, I reckon, to get it off again. Well! at length he clears his throat uncommon loud; so I spreads my duster, and shuts my eyes all

ready; but when nought comed of it, I opened my eyes a little bit to see what he were about. My word! if there he wasn't down on his knees right facing me, staring as hard as he could. Well! I thought it would be hard work to stand that, if he made a long ado; so I shut my eyes again, and tried to think serious, as became what I fancied were coming; but, forgive me! but I thought why couldn't the fellow go in and pray wi' Master Thurstan, as had always a calm spirit ready for prayer, instead o' me, who had my dresser to scour, let alone an apron to iron. At last he says, says he, 'Sally! will you oblige me with your hand?' So I thought it were, maybe, Methodee fashion to pray hand in hand; and I'll not deny but I wished I'd washed it better after black-leading the kitchen fire. I thought I'd better tell him it were not so clean as I could wish, so says I, 'Master Dixon, you shall have it, and welcome, if I may just go and wash 'em first.' But, says

he, 'My dear Sally, dirty or clean it's all the same to me, seeing I'm only speaking in a figuring way. What I'm asking on my bended knees is, that you'd please to be so kind as to be my wedded wife ; week after next will suit me, if it's agreeable to you!' My word! I were up on my feet in an instant! It were odd now, weren't it? I never thought of taking the fellow, and getting married; for all, I'll not deny, I had been thinking it would be agreeable to be axed. But all at once, I couldn't abide the chap. 'Sir,' says I, trying to look shame-faced as became the occasion, but for all that, feeling a twittering round my mouth that I were afeard might end in a laugh—'Master Dixon, I'm obleeged to you for the compliment, and thank ye all the same, but I think I'd prefer a single life.' He looked mighty taken aback ; but in a minute he cleared up, and was as sweet as ever. He still kept on his knees, and I wished he'd take himself up; but, I reckon, he thought it would give force to his

words ; says he, ' Think again, my dear Sally. I've a four-roomed house, and furniture conformable ; and eighty pound a year. You may never have such a chance again.' There were truth enough in that, but it was not pretty in the man to say it ; and it put me up a bit. ' As for that, neither you nor I can tell, Master Dixon. You're not the first chap as I've had down on his knees afore me, axing me to marry him (you see I were thinking of John Rawson, only I thought there were no need to say he were on-all-fours — it were truth he were on his knees, you know), and maybe you'll not be the last. Anyhow, I've no wish to change my condition just now.' ' I'll wait till Christmas,' says he. ' I've a pig as will be ready for killing then, so I must get married before that.' Well now ! would you believe it ? the pig were a temptation. I'd a receipt for curing hams, as Miss Faith would never let me try, saying the old way were good enough. However, I resisted.

Says I, very stern, because I felt I'd been wavering, 'Master Dixon, once for all, pig or no pig, I'll not marry you. And if you'll take my advice, you'll get up off your knees. The flag is but damp yet, and it would be an awkward thing to have rheumatiz just before winter.' With that he got up, stiff enough. He looked as sulky a chap as ever I clapped eyes on. And as he were so black and cross, I thought I'd done well (whatever came of the pig) to say 'No' to him. 'You may live to repent this,' says he, very red. 'But I'll not be too hard upon ye, I'll give you another chance. I'll let you have the night to think about it, and I'll just call in to hear your second thoughts, after chapel to-morrow.' Well now! did ever you hear the like? But that is the way with all of them men, thinking so much of theirselves, and that it's but ask and have. They've never had me, though; and I shall be sixty-one next Martinmas, so there's not much time left for them to try me, I reckon. Well! when

Jeremiah said that, he put me up more than ever, and I says, 'My first thoughts, second thoughts, and third thoughts is all one and the same; you've but tempted me once, and that was when you spoke of your pig. But of yoursel' you're nothing to boast on, and so I'll bid you good night, and I'll keep my manners, or else, if I told the truth, I should say it had been a great loss of time listening to you. But I'll be civil — so good-night.' He never said a word, but went off as black as thunder, slamming the door after him. The master called me in to prayers, but I can't say I could put my mind to them, for my heart was beating so. However, it was a comfort to have had an offer of holy matrimony; and though it flustered me, it made me think more of myself. In the night, I began to wonder if I'd not been cruel and hard to him. You see, I were feverish-like; and the old song of Barbary Allen would keep running in my head, and I thought I were Barbary, and he were

young Jemmy Gray, and that maybe he'd die for love of me; and I pictured him to mysel', lying on his death-bed, with his face turned to the wall, 'wi' deadly sorrow sighing,' and I could ha' pinched mysel' for having been so like cruel Barbary Allen. And when I got up next day, I found it hard to think on the real Jerry Dixon I had seen the night before, apart from the sad and sorrowful Jerry I thought on a-dying, when I were between sleeping and waking. And for many a day I turned sick, when I heard the passing bell, for I thought it were the bell loud-knelling which were to break my heart wi' a sense of what I'd missed in saying 'No' to Jerry, and so killing him with cruelty. But in less than a three week, I heard parish bells a-ringing merrily for a wedding; and in the course of the morning, some one says to me, 'Hark! how the bells is ringing for Jerry Dixon's wedding!' And, all on a sudden, he changed back again from a heart-broken young fellow, like Jemmy Gray, into a stout, middle-



aged man, ruddy complexioned, with a wart on his left cheek like life!"

Sally waited for some exclamation at the conclusion of her tale; but receiving none, she stepped softly to the bedside, and there lay Ruth, peaceful as death, with her baby on her breast.

"I thought I'd lost some of my gifts if I could not talk a body to sleep," said Sally, in a satisfied and self-complacent tone.

Youth is strong and powerful, and makes a hard battle against sorrow. So Ruth strove and strengthened, and her baby flourished accordingly; and before the little celandines were out on the hedge-banks, or the white violets had sent forth their fragrance from the border under the south wall of Miss Benson's small garden, Ruth was able to carry her baby into that sheltered place on sunny days.

She often wished to thank Mr. Benson and his sister, but she did not know how to tell the deep

gratitude she felt, and therefore she was silent. But they understood her silence well. One day, as she watched her sleeping child, she spoke to Miss Benson, with whom she happened to be alone.

“Do you know of any cottage where the people are clean, and where they would not mind taking me in?” asked she.

“Taking you in! What do you mean?” said Miss Benson, dropping her knitting, in order to observe Ruth more closely.

“I mean,” said Ruth, “where I might lodge with my baby—any very poor place would do, only it must be clean, or he might be ill.”

“And what in the world do you want to go and lodge in a cottage for?” said Miss Benson, indignantly.

Ruth did not lift up her eyes, but she spoke with a firmness which showed that she had considered the subject.

“I think I could make dresses. I know I did not learn as much as I might, but perhaps I might

do for servants, and people who are not particular."

"Servants are as particular as any one," said Miss Benson, glad to lay hold of the first objection that she could.

"Well! somebody who would be patient with me," said Ruth.

"Nobody is patient over an ill-fitting gown," put in Miss Benson. "There's the stuff spoilt, and what not?"

"Perhaps I could find plain work to do," said Ruth, very meekly. "That I can do very well; mamma taught me, and I liked to learn from her. If you would be so good, Miss Benson, you might tell people I could do plain work very neatly, and punctually, and cheaply."

"You'd get sixpence a day, perhaps," said Miss Benson, "and who would take care of baby, I should like to know? Prettily he'd be neglected, would not he? Why, he'd have the croup and the typhus fever in no time, and be burnt to ashes after."

“I have thought of all. Look how he sleeps! Hush, darling,” for just at this point he began to cry, and to show his determination to be awake, as if in contradiction to his mother’s words. Ruth took him up, and carried him about the room while she went on speaking.

“Yes, just now I know he will not sleep; but very often he will, and in the night he always does.”

“And so you’d work in the night and kill yourself, and leave your poor baby an orphan. Ruth! I’m ashamed of you. Now brother” (Mr. Benson had just come in), “is not this too bad of Ruth; here she is planning to go away and leave us, just as we—as I, at least—have grown so fond of baby, and he’s beginning to know me.”

“Where were you thinking of going to, Ruth?” interrupted Mr. Benson, with mild surprise.

“Anywhere to be near you and Miss Benson; in any poor cottage where I might lodge very cheaply, and earn my livelihood by taking in plain

sewing, and perhaps a little dress-making ; and where I could come and see you and dear Miss Benson sometimes and bring baby."

"If he was not dead before then of some fever, or burn, or scald, poor neglected child ; or you had not worked yourself to death with never sleeping," said Miss Benson.

Mr. Benson thought a minute or two, and then he spoke to Ruth.

"Whatever you may do when this little fellow is a year old, and able to dispense with some of a mother's care, let me beg you, Ruth, as a favour to me—as a still greater favour to my sister, is it not, Faith?"

"Yes ; you may put it so if you like."

"To stay with us," continued he, "till then. When baby is twelve months old, we'll talk about it again, and very likely before then some opening may be shown us. Never fear leading an idle life, Ruth. We'll treat you as a daughter, and set you all the household tasks ; and it is not for your sake

that we ask you to stay, but for this little dumb helpless child's; and it is not for our sake that you must stay, but for his."

Ruth was sobbing.

"I do not deserve your kindness," said she, in a broken voice; "I do not deserve it."

Her tears fell fast and soft like summer rain, but no further word was spoken. Mr. Benson quietly passed on to make the inquiry for which he had entered the room.

But when there was nothing to decide upon, and no necessity for entering upon any new course of action, Ruth's mind relaxed from its strung-up state. She fell into trains of reverie, and mournful regretful recollections which rendered her languid and tearful. This was noticed both by Miss Benson and Sally, and as each had keen sympathies, and felt depressed when they saw any one near them depressed, and as each, without much reasoning on the cause or reason for such depression, felt irritated at the uncomfortable state into which they them-

selves were thrown, they both resolved to speak to Ruth on the next fitting occasion.

Accordingly, one afternoon—the morning of that day had been spent by Ruth in house-work, for she had insisted on Mr. Benson's words, and had taken Miss Benson's share of the more active and fatiguing household duties, but she went through them heavily, and as if her heart was far away—in the afternoon when she was nursing her child, Sally, on coming into the back parlour, found her there alone, and easily detected the fact that she was crying.

“Where's Miss Benson?” asked Sally, gruffly.

“Gone out with Mr. Benson,” answered Ruth, with an absent sadness in her voice and manner. Her tears, scarce checked while she spoke, began to fall afresh; and as Sally stood and gazed she saw the babe look back in his mother's face, and his little lip begin to quiver, and his open blue eye to grow over-clouded, as with some mysterious sympathy with the sorrowful face bent over him. Sally

took him briskly from his mother's arms; Ruth looked up in grave surprise, for in truth she had forgotten Sally's presence, and the suddenness of the motion startled her.

“ My bonny boy! are they letting the salt tears drop on thy sweet face before thou'rt weaned! Little somebody knows how to be a mother—I could make a better myself. ‘Dance, thumbkin, dance—dance, ye merry men every one.’ Ay, that's it! smile, my pretty. Any one but a child like thee,” continued she, turning to Ruth, “ would have known better than to bring ill-luck on thy babby by letting tears fall on its face before it was weaned. But thou'rt not fit to have a babby, and so I've said many a time. I've a great mind to buy thee a doll, and take thy babby mysel'.”

Sally did not look at Ruth, for she was too much engaged in amusing the baby with the tassel of the string to the window-blind, or else she would have seen the dignity which the mother's soul put into



Ruth at that moment. Sally was quelled into silence by the gentle composure, the self-command over her passionate sorrow, which gave to Ruth an unconscious grandeur of demeanour as she came up to the old servant.

“Give him back to me, please. I did not know it brought ill-luck, or if my heart broke I would not have let a tear drop on his face—I never will again. Thank you, Sally,” as the servant relinquished him to her who came in the name of a mother. Sally watched Ruth’s grave, sweet smile, as she followed up Sally’s play with the tassel, and imitated, with all the docility inspired by love, every movement and sound which had amused her babe.

“Thou’lt be a mother, after all,” said Sally, with a kind of admiration of the control which Ruth was exercising over herself. “But why talk of thy heart breaking? I don’t question thee about what’s past and gone; but now thou’rt wanting for nothing, nor thy child either; the time to come is the Lord’s, and in His hands; and yet thou goest

about a-sighing and a-moaning in a way that I can't stand or thole."

"What do I do wrong?" said Ruth; "I try to do all I can."

"Yes, in a way," said Sally, puzzled to know how to describe her meaning. "Thou dost it—but there's a right and a wrong way of setting about everything—and to my thinking, the right way is to take a thing up heartily, if it is only making a bed. Why! dear ah me, making a bed may be done after a Christian fashion, I take it, or else what's to come of such as me in heaven, who've had little enough time on earth for clapping ourselves down on our knees for set prayers? When I was a girl, and wretched enough about Master Thurstan, and the crook on his back which came of the fall I gave him, I took to praying and sighing, and giving up the world; and I thought it were wicked to care for the flesh, so I made heavy puddings, and was careless about dinner and the rooms, and thought I was doing my duty, though I did

call myself a miserable sinner. But one night, the old missus (Master Thurstan's mother) came in, and sat down by me, as I was a-scolding myself, without thinking of what I was saying; and, says she, 'Sally! what are you blaming yourself about, and groaning over? We hear you in the parlour every night, and it makes my heart ache.' 'Oh, ma'am,' says I, 'I'm a miserable sinner, and I'm travailing in the new birth.' 'Was that the reason,' says she, 'why the pudding was so heavy to-day?' 'Oh, ma'am, ma'am,' said I, 'if you would not think of the things of the flesh, but trouble yourself about your immortal soul.' And I sat a-shaking my head to think about her soul. 'But,' says she, in her sweet-dropping voice, 'I do try to think of my soul every hour of the day, if by that you mean trying to do the will of God, but we'll talk now about the pudding; Master Thurstan could not eat it, and I know you'll be sorry for that.' Well! I was sorry, but I didn't choose to say so, as she seemed to expect me; so

says I, 'It's a pity to see children brought up to care for things of the flesh;' and then I could have bitten my tongue out, for the missus looked so grave, and I thought of my darling little lad pining for want of his food. At last, says she, 'Sally, do you think God has put us into the world just to be selfish, and do nothing but see after our own souls? or to help one another with heart and hand, as Christ did to all who wanted help?' I was silent, for, you see, she puzzled me. So she went on, 'What is that beautiful answer in your Church catechism, Sally?' I were pleased to hear a Dissenter, as I did not think would have done it, speak so knowledgably about the catechism, and she went on: "'to do my duty in that station of life unto which it shall please God to call me;" well, your station is a servant, and it is as honourable as a king's, if you look at it right; you are to help and serve others in one way, just as a king is to help others in another. Now what way are you to help and serve, or to do your duty, in that station of life

unto which it has pleased God to call you? Did it answer God's purpose, and serve Him, when the food was unfit for a child to eat, and unwholesome for any one?" Well! I would not give it up, I was so pig-headed about my soul; so says I, 'I wish folks would be content with locusts and wild honey, and leave other folks in peace to work out their salvation;' and I groaned out pretty loud to think of missus's soul. I often think since she smiled a bit at me; but she said, 'Well, Sally, to-morrow, you shall have time to work out your salvation; but as we have no locusts in England, and I don't think they'd agree with Master Thurstan if we had, I will come and make the pudding; but I shall try and do it well, not only for him to like it, but because everything may be done in a right way or a wrong; the right way is to do it as well as we can, as in God's sight; the wrong is to do it in a self-seeking spirit, which either leads us to neglect it to follow out some device of our own for our own ends, or to give up too much time and

thought to it both before and after the doing.' Well! I thought of all old missus's words this morning, when I saw you making the beds. You sighed so, you could not half shake the pillows; your heart was not in your work; and yet it was the duty God had set you, I reckon; I know it's not the work parsons preach about; though I don't think they go so far off the mark when they read, 'whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, that do with all thy might.' Just try for a day to think of all the odd jobs as to be done well and truly as in God's sight, not just slurred over anyhow, and you'll go through them twice as cheerfully, and have no thought to spare for sighing or crying."

Sally bustled off to set on the kettle for tea, and felt half ashamed, in the quiet of the kitchen, to think of the oration she had made in the parlour. But she saw with much satisfaction, that henceforward Ruth nursed her boy with a vigour and cheerfulness that were reflected back from him; and the household work was no longer performed with a languid

indifference, as if life and duty were distasteful. Miss Benson had her share in this improvement, though Sally placidly took all the credit to herself. One day as she and Ruth sat together, Miss Benson spoke of the child, and thence went on to talk about her own childhood. By degrees they spoke of education, and the book-learning that forms one part of it; and the result was that Ruth determined to get up early all through the bright summer mornings, to acquire the knowledge hereafter to be given to her child. Her mind was uncultivated, her reading scant; beyond the mere mechanical arts of education she knew nothing; but she had a refined taste, and excellent sense and judgment to separate the true from the false. With these qualities, she set to work under Mr. Benson's directions. She read in the early morning the books that he marked out; she trained herself with strict perseverance to do all thoroughly; she did not attempt to acquire any foreign language, although her ambition was to learn Latin, in order to teach it to

her boy. Those summer mornings were happy, for she was learning neither to look backwards nor forwards, but to live faithfully and earnestly in the present. She rose while the hedge-sparrow was yet singing his *réveille* to his mate; she dressed and opened her window, shading the soft-blowing air and the sunny eastern light from her baby. If she grew tired, she went and looked at him, and all her thoughts were holy prayers for him. Then she would gaze a while out of the high upper window on to the moorlands, that swelled in waves one behind the other, in the grey, cool morning light. These were her occasional relaxations, and after them she returned with strength to her work.



## CHAPTER IV.

IN that body of Dissenters to which Mr. Benson belonged, it is not considered necessary to baptise infants as early as the ceremony can be performed; and many circumstances concurred to cause the solemn thanksgiving and dedication of the child (for so these Dissenters look upon christenings) to be deferred until it was probably somewhere about six months old. There had been many conversations in the little sitting-room between the brother and sister and their *protégée*, which had consisted more of questions betraying a thoughtful wondering kind of ignorance on the part of Ruth, and answers more suggestive than explanatory from Mr. Benson; while Miss Benson kept up a kind of running commentary, always simple and often quaint, but with that

intuition into the very heart of all things truly religious which is often the gift of those who seem, at first sight, to be only affectionate and sensible. When Mr. Benson had explained his own views of what a christening ought to be considered, and, by calling out Ruth's latent feelings into pious earnestness, brought her into a right frame of mind, he felt that he had done what he could to make the ceremony more than a mere form, and to invest it, quiet, humble, and obscure as it must necessarily be in outward shape—mournful and anxious as much of its antecedents had rendered it—with the severe grandeur of an act done in faith and truth.

It was not far to carry the little one, for, as I said, the chapel almost adjoined the minister's house. The whole procession was to have consisted of Mr. and Miss Benson, Ruth carrying her babe, and Sally, who felt herself, as a Church-of-England woman, to be condescending and kind in requesting leave to attend a baptism among "them Dissenters;" but unless she had asked permission, she would not

have been desired to attend, so careful was the habit of her master and mistress that she should be allowed that freedom which they claimed for themselves. But they were glad she wished to go; they liked the feeling that all were of one household, and that the interests of one were the interests of all. It produced a consequence, however, which they did not anticipate. Sally was full of the event which her presence was to sanction, and, as it were, to redeem from the character of being utterly schismatic; she spoke about it with an air of patronage to three or four, and among them to some of the servants at Mr. Bradshaw's.

Miss Benson was rather surprised to receive a call from Jemima Bradshaw, on the very morning of the day on which little Leonard was to be baptised; Miss Bradshaw was rosy and breathless with eagerness. Although the second in the family, she had been at school when her younger sisters had been christened, and she was now come, in the full warmth of a girl's fancy to ask if she might be

present at the afternoon's service. She had been struck with Mrs. Denbigh's grace and beauty at the very first sight, when she had accompanied her mother to call upon the Bensons on their return from Wales; and had kept up an enthusiastic interest in the widow only a little older than herself, whose very reserve and retirement but added to her unconscious power of enchantment.

"Oh, Miss Benson! I never saw a christening; papa says I may go, if you think Mr. Benson and Mrs. Denbigh would not dislike it; and I will be quite quiet, and sit up behind the door, or anywhere; and that sweet little baby! I should so like to see him christened; is he to be called Leonard, did you say? After Mr. Denbigh, is it?"

"No—not exactly," said Miss Benson, rather discomfited.

"Was not Mr. Denbigh's name Leonard, then! Mamma thought it would be sure to be called after him, and so did I. But I may come to the christening, may I not, dear Miss Benson?"

Miss Benson gave her consent with a little inward reluctance. Both her brother and Ruth shared in this feeling, although no one expressed it; and it was presently forgotten.

Jemima stood grave and quiet in the old-fashioned vestry adjoining the chapel, as they entered with steps subdued to slowness. She thought Ruth looked so pale and awed because she was left a solitary parent; but Ruth came to the presence of God, as one who had gone astray, and doubted her own worthiness to be called His child; she came as a mother who had incurred a heavy responsibility, and who entreated His almighty aid to enable her to discharge it; full of passionate, yearning love which craved for more faith in God, to still her distrust and fear of the future that might hang over her darling. When she thought of her boy, she sickened and trembled; but when she heard of God's loving kindness, far beyond all tender mother's love, she was hushed into peace and prayer. There she stood, her fair pale cheek resting on her

baby's head, as he slumbered on her bosom; her eyes went slanting down under their half-closed white lids; but their gaze was not on the primitive cottage-like room, it was earnestly fixed on a dim mist, through which she fain would have seen the life that lay before her child; but the mist was still and dense, too thick a veil for anxious human love to penetrate. The future was hid with God.

Mr. Benson stood right under the casement window that was placed high up in the room; he was almost in shade, except for one or two marked lights which fell on hair already silvery white; his voice was always low and musical when he spoke to few; it was too weak to speak so as to be heard by many without becoming harsh and strange; but now it filled the little room with a loving sound, like the stock-dove's brooding murmur over her young. He and Ruth forgot all in their earnestness of thought; and when he said "Let us pray," and the little congregation knelt down, you might have heard the baby's faint breathing, scarcely sighing

out upon the stillness, so absorbed were all in the solemnity. But the prayer was long; thought followed thought, and fear crowded upon fear, and all were to be laid bare before God, and His aid and counsel asked. Before the end Sally, had shuffled quietly out of the vestry into the green chapel-yard, upon which the door opened. Miss Benson was alive to this movement, and so full of curiosity as to what it might mean that she could no longer attend to her brother, and felt inclined to rush off and question Sally, the moment all was ended. Miss Bradshaw hung about the babe and Ruth, and begged to be allowed to carry the child home, but Ruth pressed him to her, as if there was no safe harbour for him but in his mother's breast. Mr. Benson saw her feeling, and caught Miss Bradshaw's look of disappointment.

“Come home with us,” said he, “and stay to tea. You have never drank tea with us since you went to school.”

“I wish I might,” said Miss Bradshaw, colouring

with pleasure. "But I must ask papa. May I run home, and ask?"

"To be sure my dear!"

Jemima flew off; and fortunately her father was at home; for her mother's permission would have been deemed insufficient. She received many directions about her behaviour.

"Take no sugar in your tea, Jemima. I am sure the Bensons ought not to be able to afford sugar, with their means. And do not eat much; you can have plenty at home on your return; remember Mrs. Denbigh's keep must cost them a great deal."

So Jemima returned considerably sobered, and very much afraid of her hunger leading her to forget Mr. Benson's poverty. Meanwhile Miss Benson and Sally, acquainted with Mr. Benson's invitation to Jemima, set about making some capital tea-cakes on which they piqued themselves. They both enjoyed the offices of hospitality; and were glad to place some home-made tempting dainty before their guests.



“What made ye leave the chapel-vestry before my brother had ended ?” inquired Miss Benson.

“Indeed, ma’am, I thought master had prayed so long he’d be drouthy. So I just slipped out to put on the kettle for tea.”

Miss Benson was on the point of reprimanding her for thinking of anything besides the object of the prayer, when she remembered how she herself had been unable to attend after Sally’s departure for wondering what had become of her ; so she was silent.

It was a disappointment to Miss Benson’s kind and hospitable expectation when Jemima, as hungry as a hound, confined herself to one piece of the cake which her hostess had had such pleasure in making. And Jemima wished she had not a prophetic feeling all tea-time of the manner in which her father would inquire into the particulars of the meal, elevating his eyebrows at every viand named beyond plain bread-and-butter, and winding up with some such sentence as this : “ Well, I marvel

how, with Benson's salary, he can afford to keep such a table." Sally could have told of self-denial when no one was by, when the left hand did not know what the right hand did, on the part of both her master and mistress, practised without thinking even to themselves that it was either a sacrifice or a virtue, in order to enable them to help those who were in need, or even to gratify Miss Benson's kind, old-fashioned feelings on such occasions as the present, when a stranger came to the house. Her homely, affectionate pleasure in making others comfortable, might have shown that such little occasional extravagances were not waste, but a good work; and were not to be guaged by the standard of money spending. This evening her spirits were damped by Jemima's refusal to eat. Poor Jemima! the cakes were so good, and she was so hungry; but still she refused.

While Sally was clearing away the tea-things, Miss Benson and Jemima accompanied Ruth upstairs, when she went to put little Leonard to bed.

“ A christening is a very solemn service,” said Miss Bradshaw; “ I had no idea it was so solemn. Mr. Benson seemed to speak as if he had a weight of care on his heart that God alone could relieve or lighten.”

“ My brother feels these things very much,” said Miss Benson, rather wishing to cut short the conversation, for she had been aware of several parts in the prayer which she knew were suggested by the peculiarity and sadness of the case before him.

“ I could not quite follow him all through,” continued Jemima; “ what did he mean by saying, ‘ This child, rebuked by the world and bidden to stand apart, thou wilt not rebuke, but wilt suffer it to come to thee and be blessed with thine almighty blessing?’ Why is this little darling to be rebuked? I do not think I remember the exact words, but he said something like that.”

“ My dear! your gown is dripping wet! it must have dipped into the tub; let me wring it out.”

“ Oh, thank you! Never mind my gown!” said

Jemima, hastily, and wanting to return to her question; but just then she caught the sight of tears falling fast down the cheeks of the silent Ruth as she bent over her child, crowing and splashing away in his tub. With a sudden consciousness that unwittingly she had touched on some painful chord, Jemima rushed into another subject, and was eagerly seconded by Miss Benson. The circumstance seemed to die away, and leave no trace; but in after-years it rose, vivid and significant, before Jemima's memory. At present it was enough for her, if Mrs. Denbigh would let her serve her in every possible way. Her admiration for beauty was keen, and little indulged at home; and Ruth was very beautiful in her quiet mournfulness; her mean and homely dress left her herself only the more open to admiration, for she gave it a charm by her unconscious wearing of it that made it seem like the drapery of an old Greek statue—subordinate to the figure it covered, yet imbued by it with an unspeakable grace. Then the pretended circumstances

of her life were such as to catch the imagination of a young romantic girl. Altogether, Jemima could have kissed her hand and professed herself Ruth's slave. She moved away all the articles used at this little *coucher*; she folded up Leonard's day-clothes; she felt only too much honoured when Ruth trusted him to her for a few minutes—only too amply rewarded when Ruth thanked her with a grave, sweet smile, and a grateful look of her loving eyes.

When Jemima had gone away with the servant who was sent to fetch her, there was a little chorus of praise.

“She's a warm-hearted girl,” said Miss Benson. “She remembers all the old days before she went to school. She is worth two of Mr. Richard. They're each of them just the same as they were when they were children, when they broke that window in the chapel, and he ran away home, and she came knocking at our door, with a single knock, just like a beggar's, and I went to see who it was, and was

quite startled to see her round, brown, honest face looking up at me, half-frightened, and telling me what she had done, and offering me the money in her savings bank to pay for it. We never should have heard of Master Richard's share in the business if it had not been for Sally."

"But remember," said Mr. Benson, "how strict Mr. Bradshaw has always been with his children. It is no wonder if poor Richard was a coward in those days."

"He is now, or I'm much mistaken," answered Miss Benson. "And Mr. Bradshaw was just as strict with Jemima, and she's no coward. But I've no faith in Richard. He has a look about him that I don't like. And when Mr. Bradshaw was away on business in Holland last year, for those months my young gentleman did not come half as regularly to chapel, and I always believe that story of his being seen out with the hounds at Smithiles."

"Those are neither of them great offences in a young man of twenty," said Mr. Benson, smiling.

“No! I don’t mind them in themselves; but when he could change back so easily to being regular and mim when his father came home, I don’t like that.”

“Leonard shall never be afraid of me,” said Ruth, following her own train of thought. “I will be his friend from the very first; and I will try and learn how to be a wise friend, and you will teach me, won’t you, sir?”

“What made you wish to call him Leonard, Ruth?” asked Miss Benson.

“It was my mother’s father’s name; and she used to tell me about him and his goodness, and I thought if Leonard could be like him——”

“Do you remember the discussion there was about Miss Bradshaw’s name, Thurstan? Her father wanting her to be called Hepzibah, but insisting that she was to have a Scripture name at any rate; and Mrs. Bradshaw wanting her to be Juliana, after some novel she had read not long before; and at last Jemima was fixed upon, because it would do

either for a Scripture name or a name for a heroine out of a book."

"I did not know Jemima was a Scripture name," said Ruth.

"Oh yes, it is. One of Job's daughters; Jemima, Kezia, and Keren-Happuch. There are a good many Jemimas in the world, and some Kezias, but I never heard of a Keren-Happuch; and yet we know just as much of one as of another. People really like a pretty name, whether in Scripture or out of it."

"When there is no particular association with the name," said Mr. Benson.

"Now, I was called Faith after the cardinal virtue; and I like my name, though many people would think it too Puritan; that was according to our gentle mother's pious desire. And Thurstan was called by his name because my father wished it; for, although he was what people called a radical and a democrat in his ways of talking and thinking, he was very proud in his heart of being descended



from some old Sir Thurstan, who figured away in the French wars."

"The difference between theory and practice, thinking and being," put in Mr. Benson, who was in a mood for allowing himself a little social enjoyment. He leant back in his chair, with his eyes looking at, but not seeing the ceiling. Miss Benson was clicking away with her eternal knitting-needles, looking at her brother, and seeing him, too. Ruth was arranging her child's clothes against the morrow. It was but their usual way of spending an evening; the variety was given by the different tone which the conversation assumed on the different nights. Yet, somehow, the peacefulness of the time, the window open into the little garden, the scents that came stealing in, and the clear summer heaven above, made the time be remembered as a happy festival by Ruth. Even Sally seemed more placid than usual when she came in to prayers; and she and Miss Benson followed Ruth to her bedroom, to look at the beautiful sleeping Leonard.

“God bless him!” said Miss Benson, stooping down to kiss his little dimpled hand, which lay outside the coverlet, tossed abroad in the heat of the evening.

“Now, don’t get up too early, Ruth! Injuring your health will be short-sighted wisdom, and poor economy. Good night!”

“Good night, dear Miss Benson. Good night, Sally.” When Ruth had shut her door, she went again to the bed, and looked at her boy till her eyes filled with tears.

“God bless thee, darling! I only ask to be one of His instruments, and not thrown aside as useless—or worse than useless.”

So ended the day of Leonard’s christening.

Mr. Benson had sometimes taught the children of different people as an especial favour, when requested by them. But then his pupils were only children, and by their progress he was little prepared for Ruth’s. She had had early teaching, of that kind which need never be unlearnt, from her

mother ; enough to unfold many of her powers ; they had remained inactive now for several years, but had grown strong in the dark and quiet time. Her tutor was surprised at the bounds by which she surmounted obstacles, the quick perception and ready adaptation of truths and first principles, and her immediate sense of the fitness of things. Her delight in what was strong and beautiful called out her master's sympathy ; but, most of all, he admired the complete unconsciousness of uncommon power, or unusual progress. It was less of a wonder than he considered it to be, it is true, for she never thought of comparing what she was now with her former self, much less with another. Indeed, she did not think of herself at all, but of her boy, and what she must learn in order to teach him to be and to do as suited her hope and her prayer. If any one's devotion could have flattered her into self-consciousness, it was Jemima's. Mr. Bradshaw never dreamed that his daughter could feel herself inferior to the minister's *protegée*, but so it was ;

and no knight-errant of old could consider himself more honoured by his lady's commands than did Jemima, if Ruth allowed her to do anything for her or for her boy. Ruth loved her heartily, even while she was rather annoyed at the open expressions Jemima used of admiration.

"Please, I really would rather not be told if people do think me pretty."

"But it was not merely beautiful; it was sweet-looking and good, Mrs. Postlethwaite called you," replied Jemima.

"All the more I would rather not hear it. I may be pretty, but I know I am not good. Besides, I don't think we ought to hear what is said of us behind our backs."

Ruth spoke so gravely, that Jemima feared lest she was displeased.

"Dear Mrs. Denbigh, I never will admire or praise you again. Only let me love you."

"And let me love you!" said Ruth, with a tender kiss.

Jemima would not have been allowed to come so frequently if Mr. Bradshaw had not been possessed with the idea of patronising Ruth. If the latter had chosen, she might have gone dressed from head to foot in the presents which he wished to make her, but she refused them constantly; occasionally to Miss Benson's great annoyance. But if he could not load her with gifts, he could show his approbation by asking her to his house; and after some deliberation, she consented to accompany Mr. and Miss Benson there. The house was square and massy-looking, with a great deal of drab-colour about the furniture. Mrs. Bradshaw, in her lack-a-daisical, sweet-tempered way, seconded her husband in his desire of being kind to Ruth; and as she cherished privately a great taste for what was beautiful or interesting, as opposed to her husband's love of the purely useful, this taste of hers had rarely had so healthy and true a mode of gratification as when she watched Ruth's movements about the room, which seemed in its unobtrusiveness and poverty of

colour to receive the requisite ornament of light and splendour from Ruth's presence. Mrs. Bradshaw sighed, and wished she had a daughter as lovely, about whom to weave a romance; for castle-building, after the manner of the Minerva press, was the outlet by which she escaped from the pressure of her prosaic life, as Mr. Bradshaw's wife. Her perception was only of external beauty, and she was not always alive to that, or she might have seen how a warm, affectionate, ardent nature, free from all envy or carking care of self, gave an unspeakable charm to her plain, bright-faced daughter Jemima, whose dark eyes kept challenging admiration for her friend. The first evening spent at Mr. Bradshaw's passed like many succeeding visits there. There was tea, the equipage for which was as handsome and as ugly as money could purchase. Then the ladies produced their sewing, while Mr. Bradshaw stood before the fire, and gave the assembled party the benefit of his opinions on many subjects. The opinions were as good and excellent as the opinions

of any man can be who sees one side of a case very strongly, and almost ignores the other. They coincided in many points with those held by Mr. Benson, but he once or twice interposed with a plea for those who might differ; and then he was heard by Mr. Bradshaw with a kind of evident and indulgent pity, such as one feels for a child who unwittingly talks nonsense. By-and-by, Mrs. Bradshaw and Miss Benson fell into one *tête-à-tête*, and Ruth and Jemima into another. Two well-behaved but unnaturally quiet children were sent to bed early in the evening, in an authoritative voice, by their father, because one of them had spoken too loud while he was enlarging on an alteration in the tariff. Just before the supper-tray was brought in, a gentleman was announced whom Ruth had never previously seen, but who appeared well known to the rest of the party. It was Mr. Farquhar, Mr. Bradshaw's partner; he had been on the Continent for the last year, and had only recently returned. He seemed perfectly at home, but spoke little. He

leaned back in his chair, screwed up his eyes, and watched everybody; yet there was nothing unpleasant or impertinent in his keenness of observation. Ruth wondered to hear him contradict Mr. Bradshaw, and almost expected some rebuff, but Mr. Bradshaw, if he did not yield the point, admitted, for the first time that evening, that it was possible something might be said on the other side. Mr. Farquhar differed also from Mr. Benson, but it was in a more respectful manner than Mr. Bradshaw had done. For these reasons, although Mr. Farquhar had never spoken to Ruth, she came away with the impression that he was a man to be respected, and perhaps liked.

Sally would have thought herself mightily aggrieved if, on their return, she had not heard some account of the evening. As soon as Miss Benson came in, the old servant began:

“ Well, and who was there? and what did they give you for supper?”

“ Only Mr. Farquhar besides ourselves; and sand-



wiches, sponge-cake, and wine ; there was no occasion for anything more," replied Miss Benson, who was tired and preparing to go up-stairs.

"Mr. Farquhar! Why they do say he's thinking of Miss Jemima!"

"Nonsense, Sally! why he's old enough to be her father!" said Miss Benson, half-way up the first flight.

"There's no need for it to be called nonsense, though he may be ten year older," muttered Sally, retreating towards the kitchen. "Bradshaw's Betsy knows what she's about, and wouldn't have said it for nothing."

Ruth wondered a little about it. She loved Jemima well enough to be interested in what related to her ; but, after thinking for a few minutes, she decided that such a marriage was, and would ever be, very unlikely.

## CHAPTER V.

ONE afternoon, not long after this, Mr. and Miss Benson set off to call upon a farmer, who attended the chapel, but lived at some distance from the town. They intended to stay to tea if they were invited, and Ruth and Sally were left to spend a long afternoon together. At first, Sally was busy in her kitchen, and Ruth employed herself in carrying her baby out into the garden. It was now nearly a year since she came to the Bensons'; it seemed like yesterday, and yet as if a life time had gone between. The flowers were budding now, that were all in bloom when she came down, on the first autumnal morning, into the sunny parlour. The yellow jessamine, that was then a tender plant, had now taken firm root in the soil, and was sending out

strong shoots; the wallflowers, which Miss Benson had sown on the wall a day or two after her arrival, were scenting the air with their fragrant flowers. Ruth knew every plant now; it seemed as though she had always lived here, and always known the inhabitants of the house. She heard Sally singing her accustomed song in the kitchen, a song she never varied over her afternoon's work. It began,

As I was going to Derby, sir,  
Upon a market-day.

And if music is a necessary element in a song, perhaps I had better call it by some other name.

But the strange change was in Ruth herself. She was conscious of it though she could not define it, and did not dwell upon it. Life had become significant and full of duty to her. She delighted in the exercise of her intellectual powers, and liked the idea of the infinite amount of which she was ignorant; for it was a grand pleasure to learn—to crave, and be satisfied. She strove to forget what had gone before this last twelve months. She shuddered

up from contemplating it; it was like a bad, unholy dream. And yet, there was a strange yearning kind of love for the father of the child whom she pressed to her heart, which came, and she could not bid it begone as sinful, it was so pure and natural, even when thinking of it, as in the sight of God. Little Leonard cooed to the flowers, and stretched after their bright colours; and Ruth laid him on the dry turf, and pelted him with the gay petals. He chinked and crowed with laughing delight, and clutched at her cap, and pulled it off. Her short rich curls were golden-brown in the slanting sunlight, and by their very shortness made her look more child-like. She hardly seemed as if she could be the mother of the noble babe over whom she knelt, now snatching kisses, now matching his cheek with rose leaves. All at once, the bells of the old church struck the hour; and far away, high up in the air, began slowly to play the old tune of "Life let us cherish;" they had played it for years—for the life of man—and it always sounded fresh and

strange and aërial. Ruth was still in a moment, she knew not why; and the tears came into her eyes as she listened. When it was ended, she kissed her baby, and bade God bless him.

Just then Sally came out, dressed for the evening, with a leisurely look about her. She had done her work, and she and Ruth were to drink tea together in the exquisitely clean kitchen; but while the kettle was boiling, she came out to enjoy the flowers. She gathered a piece of southern-wood, and stuffed it up her nose, by way of smelling it.

“Whatten you call this in your country?” asked she.

“Old-man,” replied Ruth.

“We call it here lad’s-love. It and peppermint-drops always remind me of going to church in the country. Here! I’ll get you a black currant-leaf to put in the teapot. It gives it a flavour. We had bees once against this wall; but when missus died, we forgot to tell ’em, and put ’em in mourning, and, in course, they swarmed away without our knowing,

and the next winter came a hard frost, and they died. Now, I dare say, the water will be boiling; and it's time for little master there to come in, for the dew is falling. See, all the daisies is shutting themselves up."

Sally was most gracious as a hostess. She quite put on her company manners to receive Ruth in the kitchen. They laid Leonard to sleep on the sofa in the parlour, that they might hear him the more easily, and then they sat quietly down to their sewing by the bright kitchen fire. Sally was, as usual, the talker; and, as usual, the subject was the family of whom for so many years she had formed a part.

"Ay! things was different when I was a girl," quoth she. "Eggs was thirty for a shilling, and butter only sixpence a pound. My wage when I came here was but three pound, and I did on it, and was always clean and tidy, which is more than many a lass can say now who gets her seven and eight pound a year; and tea was kept for an after-

noon drink, and pudding was eaten afore meat in them days, and the upshot was, people paid their debts better ; ay, ay ! we'n gone backwards, and we thinken we'n gone forrards."

After shaking her head a little over the degeneracy of the times, Sally returned to a part of the subject on which she thought she had given Ruth a wrong idea.

"You'll not go for to think now that I've not more than three pound a year. I've a deal above that now. First of all, old missus gave me four pound, for she said I were worth it, and I thought in my heart that I were; so I took it without more ado; but after her death, Master Thurstan and Miss Faith took a fit of spending, and says they to me, one day as I carried tea in, 'Sally, we think your wages ought to be raised.' 'What matter what you think!' said I, pretty sharp, for I thought they'd ha' shown more respect to missus if they'd let things stand as they were in her time; and they'd gone and moved the sofa away from the wall to where

it stands now, already that very day. So I speaks up sharp, and, says I, 'As long as I'm content, I think it's no business of yours to be meddling wi' me and my money matters.' But, says Miss Faith (she's always the one to speak first if you'll notice, though it's master that comes in and clinches the matter with some reason she'd never ha' thought of—he were always a sensible lad), 'Sally, all the servants in the town have six pound and better, and you have as hard a place as any of 'em.' 'Did you ever hear me grumble about my work that you talk about it in that way? wait till I grumble,' says I, 'but don't meddle wi' me till then.' So I flung off in a huff; but in the course of the evening, Master Thurstan came in and sat down in the kitchen, and he's such winning ways he wiles one over to anything; and besides, a notion had come into my head—now you'll not tell," said she, glancing round the room, and hitching her chair nearer to Ruth in a confidential manner; Ruth promised, and Sally went on:



“I thought I should like to be an heiress wi’ money, and leave it all to Master and Miss Faith; and I thought if I’d six pound a year I could, maybe, get to be an heiress; all I was feared on was that some chap or other might marry me for my money, but I’ve managed to keep the fellows off; so I looks mim and grateful, and I thanks Master Thurstan for his offer, and I takes the wages; and what do you think I’ve done?” asked Sall, with an exultant air.

“What have you done?” asked Ruth.

“Why,” replied Sally, slowly and emphatically, “I’ve saved thirty pound!” but that’s not it. I’ve gotten a lawyer to make me a will; that’s it, wench!” said she, slapping Ruth on the back.

“How did you manage it?” asked Ruth.

“Ay, that was it,” said Sally; “I thowt about it many a night before. I hit on the right way. I was afeared the money might be thrown into Chancery if I didn’t make it all safe, and yet I could na’ ask Master Thurstan. At last and at

length, John Jackson, the grocer, had a nephew come to stay a week with him, as was 'prentice to a lawyer in Liverpool; so now was my time, and here was my lawyer. Wait a minute! I could tell you my story better if I had my will in my hand; and I'll scornfish you if ever you go for to tell."

She held up her hand, and threatened Ruth as she left the kitchen to fetch the will.

When she came back, she brought a parcel tied up in a blue pocket-handkerchief; she sat down, squared her knees, untied the handkerchief, and displayed a small piece of parchment.

"Now, do you know what this is?" said she, holding it up. "It's parchment, and it's the right stuff to make wills on. People gets into Chancery if they don't make them o' this stuff, and I reckon Tom Jackson thowt he'd have a fresh job on it if he could get it into Chancery; for the rascal went and wrote it on a piece of paper at first, and came and read it me out loud off a piece of paper no better

than what one writes letters upon. I were up to him; and, thinks I, come, come, my lad, I'm not a fool, though you may think so; I know a paper will won't stand, but I'll let you run your rig. So I sits and I listens. And would you belie' me, he read it out as if it were as clear a business as your giving me that thimble—no more ado, though it were thirty pound! I could understand it mysel'—that were no law for me. I wanted summat to consider about, and for th' meaning to be wrapped up as I wrap up my best gown. So says I, 'Tom! it's not on parchment. I mun have it on parchment.' 'This 'ill do as well,' says he. 'We'll get it witnessed, and it will stand good.' Well! I liked the notion of having it witnessed, and for a while that soothed me; but after a bit, I felt I should like it done according to law, and not plain out as anybody might ha' done it; I mysel', if I could have written. So says I, 'Tom! I mun have it on parchment.' 'Parch-

ment costs money,' says he, very grave. 'Oh, oh, my lad! are ye there?' thinks I. 'That's the reason I'm clipped of law.' So says I, 'Tom! I mun have it on parchment. I'll pay the money and welcome. It's thirty pound, and what I can lay to it. I'll make it safe. It shall be on parchment, and I'll tell thee what, lad! I'll gie ye sixpence for every good law-word you put in it, sounding like, and not to be caught up as a person runs. Your master had need to be ashamed of you as a 'prentice if you can't do a thing more tradesman-like than this!' Well! he laughed above a bit, but I were firm, and stood to it. So he made it out on parchment. Now, woman, try and read it!" said she, giving it to Ruth.

Ruth smiled, and began to read; Sally listening with rapt attention. When Ruth came to the word "testatrix," Sally stopped her.

"That was the first sixpence," said she. "I thowt he was going to fob me off again wi' plain

language; but when that word came, I out wi' my sixpence, and gave it to him on the spot. Now go on."

Presently Ruth read, "accruing."

"That was the second sixpence. Four sixpences it were in all, besides six-and-eightpence as we bargained at first, and three-and-fourpence parchment. There! that's what I call a will; witnessed according to law, and all. Master Thurstan will be prettily taken in when I die, and he finds all his extra wage left back to him. But it will teach him it's not so easy as he thinks for, to make a woman give up her way."

The time was now drawing near when little Leonard might be weaned—the time appointed by all three for Ruth to endeavour to support herself in some way more or less independent of Mr. and Miss Benson. This prospect dwelt much in all of their minds, and was in each shaded with some degree of perplexity; but they none of them spoke

of it for fear of accelerating the event. If they had felt clear and determined as to the best course to be pursued, they were none of them deficient in courage to commence upon that course at once. Miss Benson would, perhaps, have objected the most to any alteration in their present daily mode of life; but that was because she had the habit of speaking out her thoughts as they arose, and she particularly disliked and dreaded change. Besides this, she had felt her heart open out, and warm towards the little helpless child, in a strong and powerful manner. Nature had intended her warm instincts to find vent in a mother's duties; her heart had yearned after children, and made her restless in her childless state, without her well knowing why; but now, the delight she experienced in tending, nursing, and contriving for the little boy—even contriving to the point of sacrificing many of her cherished whims—made her happy and satisfied and peaceful. It was more difficult to sacrifice her whims than her com-

forts; but all had been given up when and where required by the sweet lordly baby, who reigned paramount in his very helplessness.

From some cause or other, an exchange of ministers for one Sunday was to be effected with a neighbouring congregation, and Mr. Benson went on a short absence from home. When he returned on Monday, he was met at the house-door by his sister, who had evidently been looking out for him some time. She stepped out to greet him.

“Don't hurry yourself, Thurstan! all's well; only I wanted to tell you something. Don't fidget yourself—baby is quite well, bless him! It's only good news. Come into your room, and let me talk a little quietly with you.”

She drew him into his study, which was near the outer door, and then she took off his coat, and put his carpet-bag in a corner, and wheeled a chair to the fire, before she would begin.

“Well, now! to think how often things fall out just as we want them, Thurstan! Have not you often

wondered what was to be done with Ruth when the time came at which we promised her she should earn her living? I am sure you have, because I have so often thought about it myself. And yet I never dared to speak out my fear, because that seemed giving it a shape. And now Mr. Bradshaw has put all to rights. He invited Mr. Jackson to dinner yesterday, just as we were going into chapel; and then he turned to me and asked me if I would come to tea—straight from afternoon chapel, because Mrs. Bradshaw wanted to speak to me. He made it very clear I was not to bring Ruth; and, indeed, she was only too happy to stay at home with baby. And so I went; and Mrs. Bradshaw took me into her bedroom, and shut the doors, and said Mr. Bradshaw had told her, that he did not like Jemima being so much confined with the younger ones while they were at their lessons, and that he wanted some one above a nursemaid to sit with them while their masters were there—some one who would see about their learning their lessons, and



who would walk out with them; a sort of nursery governess I think she meant, though she did not say so; and Mr. Bradshaw (for, of course, I saw his thoughts and words constantly peeping out, though he had told her to speak to me) believed that our Ruth would be the very person. Now, Thurstan, don't look so surprised, as if she had never come into your head! I am sure I saw what Mrs. Bradshaw was driving at, long before she came to the point; and I could scarcely keep from smiling, and saying, 'We'd jump at the proposal'—long before I ought to have known anything about it."

"Oh, I wonder what we ought to do!" said Mr. Benson. "Or rather, I believe I see what we ought to do, if I durst but do it."

"Why, what ought we to do?" asked his sister, in surprise.

"I ought to go and tell Mr. Bradshaw the whole story——"

"And get Ruth turned out of our house," said Miss Benson, indignantly.

“They can’t make us do that,” said her brother.  
“I do not think they would try.”

“Yes, Mr. Bradshaw would try; and he would blazon out poor Ruth’s sin, and there would not be a chance for her left. I know him well, Thurstan; and why should he be told now, more than a year ago?”

“A year ago, he did not want to put her in a situation of trust about his children.”

“And you think she’ll abuse that trust, do you? You’ve lived a twelvemonth in the house with Ruth, and the end of it is, you think she will do his children harm! Besides, who encouraged Jemima to come to the house so much to see Ruth? Did you not say it would do them both good to see something of each other?”

Mr. Benson sat thinking.

“If you had not known Ruth as well as you do —if during her stay with us you had marked anything wrong, or forward, or deceitful, or immodest, I would say at once, don’t allow Mr. Bradshaw to

take her into his house ; but still I would say, don't tell of her sin and her sorrow to so severe a man—so unpitiful a judge. But here I ask you, Thurstan, can you, or I, or Sally (quick-eyed as she is), say, that in any one thing we have had true, just occasion to find fault with Ruth ? I don't mean that she is perfect—she acts without thinking, her temper is sometimes warm and hasty ; but have we any right to go and injure her prospects for life, by telling Mr. Bradshaw all we know of her errors—only sixteen when she did so wrong, and never to escape from it all her many years to come—to have the despair which would arise from its being known, clutching her back into worse sin ? What harm do you think she can do ? What is the risk to which you think you are exposing Mr. Bradshaw's children ?” She paused, out of breath, her eyes glittering with tears of indignation, and impatient for an answer, that she might knock it to pieces.

“ I do not see any danger that can arise,” said he at length, and with slow difficulty, as if not fully con-

vinced. "I have watched Ruth, and I believe she is pure and truthful; and the very sorrow and penitence she has felt—the very suffering she has gone through—has given her a thoughtful conscientiousness beyond her age."

"That and the care of her baby," said Miss Benson, secretly delighted at the tone of her brother's thoughts.

"Ah, Faith! that baby you so much dreaded once, is turning out a blessing, you see," said Thurstan, with a faint, quiet smile.

"Yes! any one might be thankful, and better too, for Leonard; but how could I tell that it would be like him?"

"But to return to Ruth and Mr. Bradshaw. What did you say?"

"Oh! with my feelings, of course, I was only too glad to accept the proposal, and so I told Mrs. Bradshaw then; and I afterwards repeated it to Mr. Bradshaw, when he asked me if his wife had mentioned their plans. They would understand that I

must consult you and Ruth, before it could be considered as finally settled."

"And have you named it to her?"

"Yes," answered Miss Benson, half afraid lest he should think she had been too precipitate.

"And what did she say?" asked he, after a little pause of grave silence.

"At first she seemed very glad, and fell into my mood of planning how it should all be managed; how Sally and I should take care of the baby the hours that she was away at Mr. Bradshaw's; but by-and-by she became silent and thoughtful, and knelt down by me and hid her face in my lap, and shook a little as if she was crying; and then I heard her speak in a very low smothered voice, for her head was still bent down—quite hanging down, indeed, so that I could not see her face, so I stooped to listen, and I heard her say, 'Do you think I should be good enough to teach little girls, Miss Benson?' She said it so humbly and fearfully that all I thought of was how to cheer her, and I

answered and asked her if she did not hope to be good enough to bring up her own darling to be a brave Christian man? And she lifted up her head, and I saw her eyes looking wild and wet and earnest, and she said, 'With God's help, that will I try to make my child.' And I said then, 'Ruth, as you strive and as you pray for your own child, so you must strive and pray to make Mary and Elizabeth good, if you are trusted with them.' And she said out quite clear, though her face was hidden from me once more, 'I will strive, and I will pray.' You would not have had any fears, Thurstan, if you could have heard and seen her last night."

"I have no fear," said he, decidedly. "Let the plan go on." After a minute, he added, "But I am glad it was so far arranged before I heard of it. My indecision about right and wrong—my perplexity as to how far we are to calculate consequences—grows upon me, I fear."

"You look tired and weary, dear. You should

blame your body rather than your conscience at these times."

" A very dangerous doctrine."

The scroll of Fate was closed, and they could not foresee the Future; and yet, if they could have seen it, though they might have shrank fearfully at first, they would have smiled and thanked God when all was done and said.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE quiet days grew into weeks and months, and even years, without any event to startle the little circle into the consciousness of the lapse of time. One who had known them at the date of Ruth's becoming a governess in Mr. Bradshaw's family, and had been absent until the time of which I am now going to tell you, would have noted some changes which had imperceptibly come over all; but he, too, would have thought, that the life which had brought so little of turmoil and vicissitude must have been calm and tranquil, and in accordance with the bygone activity of the town in which their existence passed away.

The alterations that he would have perceived were those caused by the natural progress of time. The



Benson home was brightened into vividness by the presence of the little Leonard, now a noble boy of six, large and grand in limb and stature, and with a face of marked beauty and intelligence. Indeed, he might have been considered by many as too intelligent for his years; and often the living with old and thoughtful people gave him, beyond most children, the appearance of pondering over the mysteries which meet the young on the threshold of life, but which fade away as advancing years bring us more into contact with the practical and tangible—fade away and vanish, until it seems to require the agitation of some great storm of the soul before we can again realise spiritual things.

But, at times, Leonard seemed oppressed and bewildered, after listening intent, with grave and wondering eyes, to the conversation around him; at others, the bright animal life shone forth radiant, and no three-months' kitten—no foal, suddenly tossing up its heels by the side of its sedate dam, and careering around the pasture in pure mad en-

joyment—no young creature of any kind, could show more merriment and gladness of heart.

“For ever in mischief,” was Sally’s account of him at such times; but it was not intentional mischief; and Sally herself would have been the first to scold any one else who had used the same words in reference to her darling. Indeed, she was once nearly giving warning, because she thought the boy was being ill-used. The occasion was this: Leonard had for some time shown a strange odd disregard of truth; he invented stories, and told them with so grave a face, that unless there was some internal evidence of their incorrectness (such as describing a cow with a bonnet on), he was generally believed, and his statements, which were given with the full appearance of relating a real occurrence, had once or twice led to awkward results. All the three, whose hearts were pained by this apparent unconsciousness of the difference between truth and falsehood, were unaccustomed to children, or they would have recognised this as a stage

through which most infants, who have lively imaginations, pass; and, accordingly, there was a consultation in Mr. Benson's study one morning. Ruth was there, quiet, very pale, and with compressed lips, sick at heart as she heard Miss Benson's arguments for the necessity of whipping, in order to cure Leonard of his story-telling. Mr. Benson looked unhappy and uncomfortable. Education was but a series of experiments to them all, and they all had a secret dread of spoiling the noble boy, who was the darling of their hearts. And, perhaps, this very intensity of love begot an impatient, unnecessary anxiety, and made them resolve on sterner measures than the parent of a large family (where love was more spread abroad) would have dared to use. At any rate, the vote for whipping carried the day; and even Ruth, trembling and cold, agreed that it must be done; only she asked, in a meek, sad voice, if she need be present (Mr. Benson was to be the executioner—the scene, the study); and being instantly told that she had better not, she went slowly

and languidly up to her room, and kneeling down, she closed her ears, and prayed.

Miss Benson, having carried her point, was very sorry for the child, and would have begged him off; but Mr. Benson had listened more to her arguments than now to her pleadings, and only answered, "If it is right, it shall be done!" He went into the garden, and deliberately, almost as if he wished to gain time, chose and cut off a little switch from the laburnum-tree. Then he returned through the kitchen, and gravely taking the awed and wondering little fellow by the hand, he led him silently into the study, and placing him before him, began an admonition on the importance of truthfulness, meaning to conclude with what he believed to be the moral of all punishment: "As you cannot remember this of yourself, I must give you a little pain to make you remember it. I am very sorry it is necessary, and that you cannot recollect without my doing so."

But before he had reached this very proper and

desirable conclusion, and while he was yet working his way, his heart aching with the terrified look of the child at the solemnly sad face and words of upbraiding, Sally burst in:

“And what may ye be going to do with that fine switch I saw ye gathering, Master Thurstan?” asked she, her eyes gleaming with anger at the answer she knew must come, if answer she had at all.

“Go away, Sally,” said Mr. Benson, annoyed at the fresh difficulty in his path.

“I’ll not stir never a step till you give me that switch, as you’ve got for some mischief, I’ll be bound.”

“Sally! remember where it is said, ‘He that spareth the rod, spoileth the child,’” said Mr. Benson, austerely.

“Ay, I remember; and I remember a bit more than you want me to remember, I reckon. It were King Solomon as spoke them words, and it were King Solomon’s son that were King Rehoboam,

and no great shakes either. I can remember what is said on him, II. Chronicles, xii. chapter, 14th v.: 'And he,' that's King Rehoboam, the lad that tasted the rod, 'did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.' I've not been reading my chapters every night for fifty year to be caught napping by a Dissenter, neither!" said she, triumphantly. "Come along, Leonard." She stretched out her hand to the child, thinking that she had conquered.

But Leonard did not stir. He looked wistfully at Mr. Benson. "Come!" said she, impatiently. The boy's mouth quivered.

"If you want to whip me, uncle, you may do it. I don't much mind."

Put in this form, it was impossible to carry out his intentions; and so Mr. Benson told the lad he might go—that he would speak to him another time. Leonard went away, more subdued in spirit than if he had been whipped. Sally lingered a moment. She stopped to add: "I think it's for

them without sin to throw stones at a poor child, and cut up good laburnum branches to whip him. I only do as my betters do, when I call Leonard's mother Mrs. ——." The moment she had said this she was sorry; it was an ungenerous advantage after the enemy had acknowledged himself defeated. Mr. Benson dropped his head upon his hands, and hid his face, and sighed deeply.

Leonard flew in search of his mother, as in search of a refuge. If he had found her calm, he would have burst into a passion of crying after his agitation; as it was, he came upon her kneeling and sobbing, and he stood quite still. Then he threw his arms round her neck, and said: "Mamma! mamma! I will be good—I make a promise; I will speak true—I make a promise." And he kept his word.

Miss Benson piqued herself upon being less carried away by her love for this child than any one else in the house; she talked severely, and had capital theories; but her severity ended in talk, and

her theories would not work. However, she read several books on education, knitting socks for Leonard all the while; and, upon the whole, I think, the hands were more usefully employed than the head, and the good honest heart better than either. She looked older than when we first knew her, but it was a ripe, kindly age that was coming over her. Her excellent practical sense, perhaps, made her a more masculine character than her brother. He was often so much perplexed by the problems of life, that he let the time for action go by; but she kept him in check by her clear, pithy talk, which brought back his wandering thoughts to the duty that lay straight before him, waiting for action; and then he remembered that it was the faithful part to "wait patiently upon God," and leave the ends in His hands, who alone knows why Evil exists in this world, and why it ever hovers on either side of Good. In this respect, Miss Benson had more faith than her brother—or so it seemed; for quick, resolute action in the next step of Life was all she



required, while he deliberated and trembled, and often did wrong from his very deliberation, when his first instinct would have led him right.

But although decided and prompt as ever, Miss Benson was grown older since the summer afternoon when she dismounted from the coach at the foot of the long Welsh hill that led to Llan-dhu, where her brother awaited her to consult her about Ruth. Though her eye was as bright and straight-looking as ever, quick and brave in its glances, her hair had become almost snowy white; and it was on this point she consulted Sally, soon after the date of Leonard's last untruth. The two were arranging Miss Benson's room one morning, when, after dusting the looking-glass, she suddenly stopped in her operation, and after a close inspection of herself, startled Sally by this speech:

“Sally! I'm looking a great deal older than I used to do!”

Sally, who was busy dilating on the increased price of flour, considered this remark of Miss Ben-

son's as strangely irrelevant to the matter in hand, and only noticed it by a

“To be sure! I suppose we all on us do. But two-and-fourpence a dozen is too much to make us pay for it.”

Miss Benson went on with her inspection of herself, and Sally with her economical projects.

“Sally!” said Miss Benson, “my hair is nearly white. The last time I looked it was only pepper-and-salt. What must I do?”

“Do—why, what would the wench do?” asked Sally, contemptuously. “Ye're never going to be taken in, at your time of life, by hair-dyes and such gimeracks, as can only take in young girls whose wisdom-teeth are not cut.”

“And who are not very likely to want them,” said Miss Benson, quietly. “No! but you see, Sally, it's very awkward having such grey hair, and feeling so young. Do you know, Sally, I've as great a mind for dancing, when I hear a lively tune on the street-organs, as ever; and as great a

mind to sing when I'm happy—to sing in my old way, Sally, you know.”

“ Ay, you had it from a girl,” said Sally; “ and many a time, when the door's been shut, I did not know if it was you in the parlour, or a big bumble-bee in the kitchen, as was making that drumbling noise. I heard you at it yesterday.”

“ But an old woman with grey hair ought not to have a fancy for dancing or singing,” continued Miss Benson.

“ Whatten nonsense are ye talking?” said Sally, roused to indignation. “ Calling yoursel' an old woman when you're better than ten years younger than me! and many a girl has grey hair at five-and-twenty.”

“ But I'm more than five-and-twenty, Sally—I'm fifty-seven next May!”

“ More shame for ye, then, not to know better than to talk of dyeing your hair. I cannot abide such vanities!”

“ Oh, dear! Sally, when will you understand

what I mean? I want to know how I'm to keep remembering how old I am, so as to prevent myself from feeling so young? I was quite startled just now to see my hair in the glass, for I can generally tell if my cap is straight by feeling. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll cut off a piece of my grey hair, and plait it together for a marker in my Bible!" Miss Benson expected applause for this bright idea, but Sally only made answer:

"You'll be taking to painting your cheeks next, now you've once thought of dyeing your hair." So Miss Benson plaited her grey hair in silence and quietness, Leonard holding one end of it while she wove it, and admiring the colour and texture all the time, with a sort of implied dissatisfaction at the auburn colour of his own curls, which was only half-comforted away by Miss Benson's information, that, if he lived long enough, his hair would be like hers.

Mr. Benson, who had looked old and frail while he was yet but young, was now stationary as to the

date of his appearance. But there was something more of nervous restlessness in his voice and ways than formerly; that was the only change six years had brought to him. And as for Sally, she chose to forget age and the passage of years altogether, and had as much work in her, to use her own expression, as she had at sixteen; nor was her appearance very explicit as to the flight of time. Fifty, sixty, or seventy, she might be—not more than the last, not less than the first—though her usual answer to any circuitous inquiry as to her age was now (what it had been for many years past), “I’m feared I shall never see thirty again.”

Then as to the house. It was not one where the sitting-rooms are refurnished every two or three years; not now, even (since Ruth came to share their living) a place where, as an article grew shabby or worn, a new one was purchased. The furniture looked poor, and the carpets almost threadbare; but there was such a dainty spirit of cleanliness abroad, such exquisite neatness of repair,

and altogether so bright and cheerful a look about the rooms—everything so above-board—no shifts to conceal poverty under flimsy ornament—that many a splendid drawing-room would give less pleasure to those who could see evidences of character in inanimate things. But whatever poverty there might be in the house, there was full luxuriance in the little square wall-encircled garden, on two sides of which the parlour and kitchen looked. The laburnum-tree, which when Ruth came was like a twig stuck into the ground, was now a golden glory in spring, and a pleasant shade in summer. The wild hop, that Mr. Benson had brought home from one of his country rambles, and planted by the parlour-window, while Leonard was yet a baby in his mother's arms, was now a garland over the casement, hanging down long tendrils, that waved in the breezes, and threw pleasant shadows and traceries, like some old Bacchanalian carving, on the parlour-walls, at "morn or dusky eve." The yellow rose had clambered up to the window of Mr. Ben-

son's bedroom, and its blossom-laden branches were supported by a jargonelle pear-tree rich in autumnal fruit.

But, perhaps, in Ruth herself there was the greatest external change; for of the change which had gone on in her heart, and mind, and soul, or if there had been any, neither she nor any one around her was conscious; but sometimes Miss Benson did say to Sally, "How very handsome Ruth is grown!" To which Sally made ungracious answer, "Yes! she's well enough. Beauty is deceitful, and favour a snare, and I'm thankful the Lord has spared me from such man-traps and spring-guns." But even Sally could not help secretly admiring Ruth. If her early brilliancy of colouring was gone, a clear ivory skin, as smooth as satin, told of complete and perfect health, and was as lovely, if not so striking in effect, as the banished lilies and roses. Her hair had grown darker and deeper, in the shadow that lingered in its masses; her eyes, even if you could have guessed that they had shed bitter tears in their

day, had a thoughtful spiritual look about them, that made you wonder at their depth, and look—and look again. The increase of dignity in her face had been imparted to her form. I do not know if she had grown taller since the birth of her child, but she looked as if she had. And although she had lived in a very humble home, yet there was something about either it or her, or the people amongst whom she had been thrown during the last few years, which had so changed her; that whereas, six or seven years ago, you would have perceived that she was not altogether a lady by birth and education, yet now she might have been placed among the highest in the land, and would have been taken by the most critical judge for their equal, although ignorant of their conventional etiquette—an ignorance which she would have acknowledged in a simple childlike way, being unconscious of any false shame.

Her whole heart was in her boy. She often feared that she loved him too much—more than God himself—yet she could not bear to pray to have her



love for her child lessened. But she would kneel down by his little bed at night—at the deep, still midnight—with the stars that kept watch over Rizpah shining down upon her, and tell God what I have now told you, that she feared she loved her child too much, yet could not, would not, love him less; and speak to Him of her one treasure as she could speak to no earthly friend. And so, unconsciously, her love for her child led her up to love to God, to the All-knowing, who<sup>\*</sup> read her heart.

It might be superstition—I dare say it was—but, somehow, she never lay down to rest without saying, as she looked her last on her boy, “Thy will, not mine, be done;” and even while she trembled and shrunk with infinite dread from sounding the depths of what that will might be, she felt as if her treasure were more secure to waken up rosy and bright in the morning, as one over whose slumbers God’s holy angels had watched, for the very words which she had turned away in sick terror from realising the night before.

Her daily absence at her duties to the Bradshaw children only ministered to her love for Leonard. Everything does minister to love when its foundation lies deep in a true heart, and it was with an exquisite pang of delight that, after a moment of vague fear

(Oh, mercy! to myself I said,  
If Lucy should be dead!),

she saw her child's bright face of welcome as he threw open the door every afternoon on her return home. For it was his silently-appointed work to listen for her knock, and rush breathless to let her in. If he were in the garden, or up-stairs among the treasures of the lumber-room, either Miss Benson, or her brother, or Sally, would fetch him to his happy little task; no one so sacred as he to the allotted duty. And the joyous meeting was not deadened by custom, to either mother or child.

Ruth gave the Bradshaws the highest satisfaction, as Mr. Bradshaw often said both to her and to the Bensons; indeed, she rather winced under his

pompous approbation. But his favourite recreation was patronising; and when Ruth saw how quietly and meekly Mr. Benson submitted to gifts and praise, when an honest word of affection, or a tacit, implied acknowledgment of equality, would have been worth everything said and done, she tried to be more meek in spirit, and to recognise the good that undoubtedly existed in Mr. Bradshaw. He was richer and more prosperous than ever;—a keen, far-seeing man of business, with an undisguised contempt for all who failed in the success which he had achieved. But it was not alone those who were less fortunate in obtaining wealth than himself that he visited with severity of judgment; every moral error or delinquency came under his unsparing comment. Stained by no vice himself, either in his own eyes or in that of any human being who cared to judge him, having nicely and wisely proportioned and adapted his means to his ends, he could afford to speak and act with a severity which was almost

sanctimonious in its ostentation of thankfulness as to himself. Not a misfortune or a sin was brought to light but Mr. Bradshaw could trace it to its cause in some former mode of action, which he had long ago foretold would lead to shame. If another's son turned out wild or bad, Mr. Bradshaw had little sympathy; it might have been prevented by a stricter rule, or more religious life at home; young Richard Bradshaw was quiet and steady, and other fathers might have had sons like him if they had taken the same pains to enforce obedience. Richard was an only son, and yet Mr. Bradshaw might venture to say, he had never had his own way in his life. Mrs. Bradshaw was, he confessed (Mr. Bradshaw did not dislike confessing his wife's errors), rather less firm than he should have liked with the girls; and with some people, he believed, Jemima was rather headstrong; but to his wishes, she had always shown herself obedient. All children were obedient, if their parents were decided and autho-

ritative; and every one would turn out well, if properly managed. If they did not prove good, they must take the consequences of their errors.

Mrs. Bradshaw murmured faintly at her husband when his back was turned; but if his voice was heard, or his footsteps sounded in the distance, she was mute, and hurried her children into the attitude or action most pleasing to their father. Jemima, it is true, rebelled against this manner of proceeding, which savoured to her a little of deceit; but even she had not, as yet, overcome her awe of her father sufficiently to act independently of him, and according to her own sense of right—or, rather, I should say, according to her own warm, passionate impulses. Before him, the wilfulness which made her dark eyes blaze out at times was hushed and still; he had no idea of her self-tormenting, no notion of the almost southern jealousy which seemed to belong to her brunette complexion. Jemima was not pretty, the flatness and shortness of her face made her almost plain; yet most people

looked twice at her expressive countenance, at the eyes which flamed or melted at every trifle, at the rich colour which came at every expressed emotion into her usually sallow face, at the faultless teeth which made her smile like a sunbeam. But then, again, when she thought she was not kindly treated, when a suspicion crossed her mind, or when she was angry with herself, her lips were tight-pressed together, her colour was wan and almost livid, and a stormy gloom clouded her eyes as with a film. But before her father her words were few, and he did not notice looks or tones.

Her brother Richard had been equally silent before his father, in boyhood and early youth; but since he had gone to be clerk in a London house, preparatory to assuming his place as junior partner in Mr. Bradshaw's business, he spoke more on his occasional visits at home. And very proper and highly moral was his conversation; set sentences of goodness, which were like the flowers that children stick in the ground, and that have not sprang up-

wards from roots—deep down in the hidden life and experience of the heart. He was as severe a judge as his father of other people's conduct, but you felt that Mr. Bradshaw was sincere in his condemnation of all outward error and vice, and that he would try himself by the same laws as he tried others; somehow, Richard's words were frequently heard with a lurking distrust, and many shook their heads over the pattern son; but then it was those whose sons had gone astray, and been condemned, in no private or tender manner, by Mr. Bradshaw, so it might be revenge in them. Still, Jemima felt that all was not right; her heart sympathised in the rebellion against his father's commands, which her brother had confessed to her in an unusual moment of confidence, but her uneasy conscience condemned the deceit which he had practised.

The brother and sister were sitting alone over a blazing Christmas fire, and Jemima held an old newspaper in her hand to shield her face from the

hot light. They were talking of family events, when, during a pause, Jemima's eye caught the name of a great actor, who had lately given prominence and life to a character in one of Shakspeare's plays. The criticism in the paper was fine, and warmed Jemima's heart.

"How I should like to see a play!" exclaimed she.

"Should you?" said her brother, listlessly.

"Yes, to be sure! Just hear this!" and she began to read a fine passage of criticism.

"Those newspaper people can make an article out of anything," said he, yawning. "I've seen the man myself, and it was all very well, but nothing to make such a fuss about."

"You! you seen——! Have you seen a play, Richard? Oh, why did you never tell me before? Tell me all about it! Why did you never name seeing —— in your letters?"

He half smiled, contemptuously enough. "Oh! at first it strikes one rather, but after a while one



cares no more for the theatre than one does for mince-pies."

"Oh, I wish I might go to London!" said Jemima, impatiently. "I've a great mind to ask papa to let me go to the George Smiths', and then I could see——. I would not think him like mince-pies."

"You must not do any such thing!" said Richard, now neither yawning nor contemptuous. "My father would never allow you to go to the theatre; and the George Smiths are such old fogeys—they would be sure to tell."

"How do you go, then? Does my father give you leave?"

"Oh! many things are right for men which are not for girls."

Jemima sat and pondered. Richard wished he had not been so confidential.

"You need not name it," said he, rather anxiously.

"Name what?" said she, startled, for her thoughts had gone far a-field.

“Oh, name my going once or twice to the theatre!”

“No, I sha’n’t name it!” said she. “No one here would care to hear it.”

But it was with some little surprise, and almost with a feeling of disgust, that she heard Richard join with her father in condemning some one, and add to Mr. Bradshaw’s list of offences, by alleging that the young man was a play-goer. He did not think his sister heard his words.

Mary and Elizabeth were the two girls whom Ruth had in charge; they resembled Jemima more than their brother in character. The household rules were occasionally a little relaxed in their favour, for Mary, the elder, was nearly eight years younger than Jemima, and three intermediate children had died. They loved Ruth dearly, made a great pet of Leonard, and had many profound secrets together, most of which related to their wonders if Jemima and Mr. Farquhar would ever be married. They watched their sister closely;

and every day had some fresh confidence to make to each other, confirming or discouraging to their hopes.

Ruth rose early, and shared the household work with Sally and Miss Benson, till seven; and then she helped Leonard to dress, and had a quiet time alone with him till prayers and breakfast. At nine she was to be at Mr. Bradshaw's house. She sat in the room with Mary and Elizabeth during the Latin, the writing, and arithmetic lessons, which they received from masters; then she read, and walked with them, they clinging to her as to an elder sister; she dined with her pupils at the family lunch, and reached home by four. That happy home—those quiet days!

And so the peaceful days passed on into weeks, and months, and years, and Ruth and Leonard grew and strengthened into the riper beauty of their respective ages; while as yet no touch of decay had come on the quaint, primitive elders of the household.

## CHAPTER VII.

IT was no wonder that the lookers-on were perplexed as to the state of affairs between Jemima and Mr. Farquhar, for they two were sorely puzzled themselves at the sort of relationship between them. Was it love, or was it not? that was the question in Mr. Farquhar's mind. He hoped it was not; he believed it was not; and yet he felt as if it were. There was something preposterous, he thought, in a man, nearly forty years of age, being in love with a girl of twenty. He had gone on reasoning through all the days of his manhood on the idea of a staid, noble-minded wife, grave and sedate, the fit companion in experience of her husband. He had spoken with admiration of reticent characters, full of self-control and dignity; and he hoped—he

trusted, that all this time he had not been allowing himself unconsciously to fall in love with a wild-hearted, impetuous girl, who knew nothing of life beyond her father's house, and who chafed under the strict discipline enforced there. For it was rather a suspicious symptom of the state of Mr. Farquhar's affections, that he had discovered the silent rebellion which continued in Jemima's heart, unperceived by any of her own family, against the severe laws and opinions of her father. Mr. Farquhar shared in these opinions; but in him they were modified, and took a milder form. Still he approved of much that Mr. Bradshaw did and said; and this made it all the more strange that he should wince so for Jemima, whenever anything took place which he instinctively knew that she would dislike. After an evening at Mr. Bradshaw's, when Jemima had gone to the very verge of questioning or disputing some of her father's severe judgments, Mr. Farquhar went home in a dissatisfied, restless state of mind, which he was almost afraid to analyse. He

admired the inflexible integrity—and almost the pomp of principle—evinced by Mr. Bradshaw on every occasion ; he wondered how it was that Jemima could not see how grand a life might be, whose every action was shaped in obedience to some eternal law; instead of which, he was afraid she rebelled against every law, and was only guided by impulse. Mr. Farquhar had been taught to dread impulses as promptings of the devil. Sometimes, if he tried to present her father's opinions before her in another form, so as to bring himself and her rather more into that state of agreement he longed for, she flashed out upon him with the indignation of difference that she dared not show to, or before, her father, as if she had some diviner instinct which taught her more truly than they knew, with all their experience; at least, in her first expressions there seemed something good and fine; but opposition made her angry and irritable, and the arguments which he was constantly provoking (whenever he was with her in her father's absence) frequently

ended in some vehemence of expression on her part that offended Mr. Farquhar, who did not see how she expiated her anger in tears and self-reproaches when alone in her chamber. Then he would lecture himself severely on the interest he could not help feeling in a wilful girl; he would determine not to interfere with her opinions in future, and yet, the very next time they differed, he strove to argue her into harmony with himself, in spite of all resolutions to the contrary.

Mr. Bradshaw saw just enough of this interest which Jemima had excited in his partner's mind, to determine him in considering their future marriage as a settled affair. The fitness of the thing had long ago struck him; her father's partner—so the fortune he meant to give her might continue in the business; a man of such steadiness of character, and such a capital eye for a desirable speculation as Mr. Farquhar—just the right age to unite the paternal with the conjugal affection, and consequently the very man for Jemima, who had something un-

ruly in her, which might break out under a *régime* less wisely adjusted to the circumstances than was Mr. Bradshaw's (in his own opinion)—a house ready-furnished, at a convenient distance from her home—no near relations on Mr. Farquhar's side, who might be inclined to consider his residence as their own for an indefinite time, and so add to the household expenses—in short, what could be more suitable in every way? Mr. Bradshaw respected the very self-restraint he thought he saw in Mr. Farquhar's demeanour, attributing it to a wise desire to wait until trade should be rather more slack, and the map of business more at leisure to become the lover.

As for Jemima, at times she thought she almost hated Mr. Farquhar.

“What business has he,” she would think, “to lecture me? Often I can hardly bear it from papa, and I will not bear it from him. He treats me just like a child, and as if I should lose all my present opinions when I know more of the world. I am



sure I should like never to know the world, if it was to make me think as he does, hard man that he is! I wonder what made him take Jem Brown on as gardener again, if he does not believe that above one criminal in a thousand is restored to goodness. I'll ask him, some day, if that was not acting on impulse rather than principle. Poor impulse! how you do get abused. But I will tell Mr. Farquhar, I will not let him interfere with me. If I do what papa bids me, no one has a right to notice whether I do it willingly or not."

So then she tried to defy Mr. Farquhar, by doing and saying things that she knew he would disapprove. She went so far that he was seriously grieved, and did not even remonstrate and "lecture," and then she was disappointed and irritated; for, somehow, with all her indignation at interference, she liked to be lectured by him; not that she was aware of this liking of hers, but still it would have been more pleasant to be scolded than so quietly passed over. Her two little sisters, with their wide-

awake eyes, had long ago put things together, and conjectured. Every day they had some fresh mystery together, to be imparted in garden-walks and whispered talks.

“Lizzie, did you see how the tears came into Mimie’s eyes when Mr. Farquhar looked so displeased when she said good people were always dull? I think she’s in love.” Mary said the last words with grave emphasis, and felt like an oracle of twelve years of age.

“I don’t,” said Lizzie. “I know I cry often enough when papa is cross, and I’m not in love with him.”

“Yes! but you don’t look as Mimie did.”

“Don’t call her Mimie—you know papa does not like it.”

“Yes; but there are so many things papa does not like I can never remember them all. Never mind about that; but listen to something I’ve got to tell you, if you’ll never, never tell.”

“No, indeed I won’t, Mary. What is it?”

“Not to Mrs. Denbigh?”

“No, not even to Mrs. Denbigh.”

“Well, then, the other day — last Friday, Mimie——”

“Jemima!” interrupted the more conscientious Elizabeth.

“Jemima, if it must be so,” jerked out Mary, “sent me to her desk for an envelope, and what do you think I saw?”

“What?” asked Elizabeth, expecting nothing less than a red-hot Valentine, signed Walter Farquhar, *pro* Bradshaw, Farquhar, and Co., in full.

“Why, a piece of paper, with dull-looking lines upon it, just like the scientific dialogues; and I remembered all about it. It was once when Mr. Farquhar had been telling us that a bullet does not go in a straight line, but in a something curve, and he drew some lines on a piece of paper; and Mimie——”

“Jemima,” put in Elizabeth.

“Well, well! she had treasured it up, and written in a corner, ‘W. F., April 3rd.’ Now,

that's rather like love, is not it? For Jemima hates useful information just as much as I do, and that's saying a great deal; and yet she had kept this paper, and dated it."

"If that's all, I know Dick keeps a paper with Miss Benson's name written on it, and yet he's not in love with her; and perhaps Jemima may like Mr. Farquhar, and he may not like her. It seems such a little while since her hair was turned up, and he has always been a grave middle-aged man ever since I can recollect; and then, have you never noticed how often he finds fault with her—almost lectures her?"

"To be sure," said Mary; "but he may be in love, for all that. Just think how often papa lectures mamma; and yet, of course, they're in love with each other."

"Well! we shall see," said Elizabeth.

Poor Jemima little thought of the four sharp eyes that watched her daily course while she sat alone, as she fancied, with her secret in her own

room. For, in a passionate fit of grieving, at the impatient hasty temper which had made her so seriously displeasè Mr. Farquhar that he had gone away without remonstrance, without more leave-taking than a distant bow, she had begun to suspect that rather than not be noticed at all by him, rather than be an object of indifference to him—oh! far rather would she be an object of anger and upbraiding; and the thoughts that followed this confession to herself, stunned and bewildered her; and for once that they made her dizzy with hope, ten times they made her sick with fear. For an instant she planned to become and to be all he could wish her; to change her very nature for him. And then a great gush of pride came over her, and she set her teeth tight together, and determined that he should either love her as she was, or not at all. Unless he could take her with all her faults, she would not care for his regard; “love” was too noble a word to call such cold calculating feeling as his must be, who went about with a pattern idea in his mind, trying to find

a wife to match. Besides, there was something degrading, Jemima thought, in trying to alter herself to gain the love of any human creature. And yet, if he did not care for her, if this late indifference were to last, what a great shroud was drawn over life! Could she bear it?

From the agony she dared not look at, but which she was going to risk encountering, she was aroused by the presence of her mother.

“Jemima! your father wants to speak to you in the dining-room.”

“What for?” asked the girl.

“Oh! he is fidgeted by something Mr. Farquhar said to me, and which I repeated. I am sure I thought there was no harm in it, and your father always likes me to tell him what everybody says in his absence.”

Jemima went with a heavy heart into her father's presence.

He was walking up and down the room, and did not see her at first.

‘ Oh, Jemima! is that you? Has your mother told you what I want to speak to you about?’

“ No!” said Jemima. “ Not exactly.”

“ She has been telling me, what proves to me how very seriously you must have displeased and offended Mr. Farquhar, before he could have expressed himself to her as he did, when he left the house; you know what he said?”

“ No!” said Jemima, her heart swelling within her. “ He has no right to say anything about me.” She was desperate, or she durst not have said this before her father.

“ No right!—what do you mean, Jemima?” said Mr. Bradshaw, turning sharp round. “ Surely you must know that I hope he may one day be your husband; that is to say, if you prove yourself worthy of the excellent training I have given you. I cannot suppose Mr. Farquhar would take any undisciplined girl as a wife.”

Jemima held tight by a chair near which she was standing. She did not speak; her father was pleased

by her silence—it was the way in which he liked his projects to be received.

“But you cannot suppose,” he continued, “that Mr. Farquhar will consent to marry you—”

“Consent to marry me!” repeated Jemima, in a low tone of brooding indignation; were those the terms upon which her rich, woman’s heart was to be given, with a calm consent of acquiescent acceptance, but a little above resignation on the part of the receiver?

—“if you give way to a temper which, although you have never dared to show it to me, I am well aware exists, although I hoped the habits of self-examination I had instilled had done much to cure you of manifesting it. At one time, Richard promised to be the more headstrong of the two; now, I must desire you to take pattern by him. Yes,” he continued, falling into his old train of thought, “it would be a most fortunate connexion for you in every way. I should have you under my own eye, and could still assist you in the formation of



your character, and I should be at hand to strengthen and confirm your principles. Mr. Farquhar's connexion with the firm would be convenient and agreeable to me in a pecuniary point of view. He ——" Mr. Bradshaw was going on in his enumeration of the advantages which he in particular, and Jemima in the second place, would derive from this marriage, when his daughter spoke, at first so low that he could not hear her, as he walked up and down the room with his creaking boots, and he had to stop to listen.

"Has Mr. Farquhar ever spoken to you about it?" Jemima's cheek was flushed as she asked the question; she wished that she might have been the person to whom he had first addressed himself.

Mr. Bradshaw answered,

"No! not spoken. It has been implied between us for some time. At least, I have been so aware of his intentions that I have made several allusions, in the course of business, to it, as a thing that might take place. He can hardly have misunderstood; he

must have seen that I perceived his design, and approved of it," said Mr. Bradshaw, rather doubtfully; as he remembered how very little, in fact, passed between him and his partner which could have reference to the subject, to any but a mind prepared to receive it. Perhaps Mr. Farquhar had not really thought of it; but then again, that would imply that his own penetration had been mistaken, a thing not impossible certainly, but quite beyond the range of probability. So he reassured himself, and (as he thought) his daughter, by saying,

"The whole thing is so suitable—the advantages arising from the connexion are so obvious; besides which, I am quite aware, from many little speeches of Mr. Farquhar's, that he contemplates marriage at no very distant time; and he seldom leaves Eccleston, and visits few families besides our own—certainly, none that can compare with ours in the advantages you have all received in moral and religious training." But then Mr. Bradshaw was

checked in his implied praises of himself (and only himself could be his martingale when he once set out on such a career), by a recollection that Jemima must not feel too secure, as she might become if he dwelt too much on the advantages of her being her father's daughter. Accordingly, he said: "But you must be aware, Jemima, that you do very little credit to the education I have given you, when you make such an impression as you must have done to-day, before Mr. Farquhar could have said what he did of you!"

"What did he say?" asked Jemima, still in the low, husky tone of suppressed anger.

"Your mother says he remarked to her, 'What a pity it is, that Jemima cannot maintain her opinions without going into a passion; and what a pity it is, that her opinions are such as to sanction, rather than curb, these fits of rudeness and anger!'"

"Did he say that?" said Jemima, in a still lower tone, not questioning her father, but speaking rather to herself.

“I have no doubt he did,” replied her father, gravely. “Your mother is in the habit of repeating accurately to me what takes place in my absence; besides which, the whole speech is not one of hers; she has not altered a word in the repetition, I am convinced. I have trained her to habits of accuracy very unusual in a woman.”

At another time, Jemima might have been inclined to rebel against this system of carrying constant intelligence to head-quarters, which she had long ago felt as an insurmountable obstacle to any free communication with her mother; but now, her father’s means of acquiring knowledge faded into insignificance before the nature of the information he imparted. She stood quite still, grasping the chair-back, longing to be dismissed.

“I have said enough now, I hope, to make you behave in a becoming manner to Mr. Farquhar; if your temper is too unruly to be always under your own control, at least have respect to my injunctions, and take some pains to curb it before him.”

“ May I go ?” asked Jemima, chafing more and more.

“ You may,” said her father. When she left the room he gently rubbed his hands together, satisfied with the effect he had produced, and wondering how it was, that one so well brought up as his daughter, could ever say or do anything to provoke such a remark from Mr. Farquhar as that which he had heard repeated.

“ Nothing can be more gentle and docile than she is when spoken to in the proper manner. I must give Farquhar a hint,” said Mr. Bradshaw to himself.

Jemima rushed up-stairs, and locked herself into her room. She began pacing up and down at first, without shedding a tear; but then she suddenly stopped, and burst out crying with passionate indignation.

“ So! I am to behave well, not because it is right—not because it is right—but to show off before Mr. Farquhar. Oh, Mr. Farquhar !” said she, suddenly changing to a sort of upbraiding tone of

voice, "I did not think so of you an hour ago. I did not think you could choose a wife in that cold-hearted way, though you did profess to act by rule and line; but you think to have me, do you? because it is fitting and suitable, and you want to be married, and can't spare time for wooing" (she was lashing herself up by an exaggeration of all her father had said). "And how often I have thought you were too grand for me! but now I know better. Now I can believe that all you do is done from calculation; you are good because it adds to your business credit—you talk in that high strain about principle because it sounds well, and is respectable—and even these things are better than your cold way of looking out for a wife, just as you would do for a carpet, to add to your comforts, and settle you respectably. But I won't be that wife. You shall see something of me which shall make you not acquiesce so quietly in the arrangements of the firm." She cried too vehemently to go on thinking or speaking. Then she stopped, and said:

“ Only an hour ago I was hoping—I don’t know what I was hoping—but I thought—oh! how I was deceived!—I thought he had a true, deep, loving, manly heart, which God might let me win; but now I know he has only a calm, calculating head——”

If Jemima had been vehement and passionate before this conversation with her father, it was better than the sullen reserve she assumed now whenever Mr. Farquhar came to the house. He felt it deeply; no reasoning with himself took off the pain he experienced. He tried to speak on the subjects she liked, in the manner she liked, until he despised himself for the unsuccessful efforts.

He stood between her and her father once or twice, in obvious inconsistency with his own previously-expressed opinions; and Mr. Bradshaw piqued himself upon his admirable management, in making Jemima feel that she owed his indulgence or forbearance to Mr. Farquhar’s interference; but Jemima—perverse, miserable Jemima—thought

that she hated Mr. Farquhar all the more. She respected her father inflexible, much more than her father pompously giving up to Mr. Farquhar's subdued remonstrances on her behalf. Even Mr. Bradshaw was perplexed, and shut himself up to consider how Jemima was to be made more fully to understand his wishes and her own interests. But there was nothing to take hold of as a ground for any further conversation with her. Her actions were so submissive that they were spiritless; she did all her father desired; she did it with a nervous quickness and haste, if she thought that otherwise Mr. Farquhar would interfere in any way. She wished evidently to owe nothing to him. She had begun by leaving the room when he came in, after the conversation she had had with her father; but at Mr. Bradshaw's first expression of his wish that she should remain, she remained—silent, indifferent, inattentive to all that was going on; at least there was this appearance of inattention. She would work away at her sewing as if she were to earn her liveli-



hood by it; the light was gone out of her eyes as she lifted them up heavily before replying to any question, and the eyelids were often swollen with crying.

But in all this there was no positive fault. Mr. Bradshaw could not have told her not to do this, or to do that, without her doing it; for she had become much more docile of late.

It was a wonderful proof of the influence Ruth had gained in the family, that Mr. Bradshaw, after much deliberation, congratulated himself on the wise determination he had made of requesting her to speak to Jemima, and find out what feeling was at the bottom of all this change in her ways of going on.

He rang the bell.

"Is Mrs. Denbigh here?" he inquired of the servant who answered it.

"Yes, sir; she is just come."

"Beg her to come to me in this room as soon as she can leave the young ladies."

Ruth came.

“ Sit down, Mrs. Denbigh, sit down. I want to have a little conversation with you; not about your pupils, they are going on well under your care, I am sure; and I often congratulate myself on the choice I made—I assure you I do. But now I want to speak to you about Jemima. She is very fond of you, and perhaps you could take some opportunity of observing to her—in short, of saying to her, that she is behaving very foolishly—in fact, disgusting Mr. Farquhar (who was, I know, inclined to like her) by the sullen, sulky way she behaves in, when he is by.”

He paused for the ready acquiescence he expected. But Ruth did not quite comprehend what was required of her, and disliked the glimpse she had gained of the task very much.

“ I hardly understand, sir. You are displeased with Miss Bradshaw’s manners to Mr. Farquhar.”

“ Well, well! not quite that; I am displeased with her manners—they are sulky and abrupt,

particularly when he is by—and I want you (of whom she is so fond) to speak to her about it.”

“But I have never had the opportunity of noticing them. Whenever I have seen her, she has been most gentle and affectionate.”

“But I think you do not hesitate to believe me, when I say that I have noticed the reverse,” said Mr. Bradshaw, drawing himself up.

“No, sir. I beg your pardon if I have expressed myself so badly as to seem to doubt. But am I to tell Miss Bradshaw that you have spoken of her faults to me?” asked Ruth, a little astonished, and shrinking more than ever from the proposed task.

“If you would allow me to finish what I have got to say, without interruption, I could then tell you what I do wish.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said Ruth, gently.

“I wish you to join our circle occasionally in an evening; Mrs. Bradshaw shall send you an invitation when Mr. Farquhar is likely to be here. Warned by me, and, consequently, with your obser-

vation quickened, you can hardly fail to notice instances of what I have pointed out ; and then I will trust to your own good sense" (Mr. Bradshaw bowed to her at this part of his sentence) " to find an opportunity to remonstrate with her."

Ruth was beginning to speak, but he waved his hand for another minute of silence.

" Only a minute, Mrs. Denbigh ; I am quite aware that, in requesting your presence occasionally in the evening, I shall be trespassing upon the time which is, in fact, your money ; you may be assured that I shall not forget this little circumstance, and you can explain what I have said on this head to Benson and his sister."

" I am afraid I cannot do it," Ruth began : but while she was choosing words delicate enough to express her reluctance to act as he wished, he had almost bowed her out of the room ; and thinking that she was modest in her estimate of her qualifications for remonstrating with his daughter, he added, blandly,

“No one so able, Mrs. Denbigh. I have observed many qualities in you—observed when, perhaps, you have little thought it.”

If he had observed Ruth that morning, he would have seen an absence of mind, and depression of spirits, not much to her credit as a teacher; for she could not bring herself to feel, that she had any right to go into the family purposely to watch over and find fault with any one member of it. If she had seen anything wrong in Jemima, Ruth loved her so much that she would have told her of it in private; and with many doubts, how far she was the one to pull out the mote from any one's eye, even in the most tender manner;—she would have had to conquer reluctance before she could have done even this; but there was something undefinably repugnant to her in the manner of acting which Mr. Bradshaw had proposed, and she determined not to accept the invitations which were to place her in so false a position.

But as she was leaving the house, after the end

of the lessons, while she stood in the hall tying on her bonnet, and listening to the last small confidences of her two pupils, she saw Jemima coming in through the garden-door, and was struck by the change in her looks. The large eyes, so brilliant once, were dim and clouded; the complexion sallow and colourless; a lowering expression was on the dark brow, and the corners of her mouth drooped as with sorrowful thoughts. She looked up, and her eyes met Ruth's.

“ Oh! you beautiful creature!” thought Jemima, “ with your still, calm, heavenly face, what are you to know of earth's trials? You have lost your beloved by death—but that is a blessed sorrow; the sorrow I have pulls me down and down, and makes me despise and hate every one—not you, though.” And her face changing to a soft, tender look, she went up to Ruth, and kissed her fondly; as if it were a relief to be near some one on whose true pure heart she relied. Ruth returned the caress; and even while she did so, she suddenly rescinded her resolution to

keep clear of what Mr. Bradshaw had desired her to do. On her way home she resolved, if she could, to find out what were Jemima's secret feelings; and if (as from some previous knowledge she suspected) they were morbid and exaggerated in any way, to try and help her right with all the wisdom which true love gives. It was time that some one should come to still the storm in Jemima's turbulent heart, which was daily and hourly knowing less and less of peace. The irritating difficulty was to separate the two characters, which at two different times she had attributed to Mr. Farquhar—the old one, which she had formerly believed to be true, that he was a man acting up to a high standard of lofty principle, and acting up without a struggle (and this last had been the circumstance which had made her rebellious and irritable once); the new one, which her father had excited in her suspicious mind, that Mr. Farquhar was cold and calculating in all he did, and that she was to be transferred by the former, and accepted by the latter,

as a sort of stock in trade—these were the two Mr. Farquhars who clashed together in her mind. And in this state of irritation and prejudice, she could not bear the way in which he gave up his opinions to please her; that was not the way to win her; she liked him far better when he inflexibly and rigidly adhered to his idea of right and wrong, not even allowing any force to temptation, and hardly any grace to repentance, compared with that beauty of holiness which had never yielded to sin. He had been her idol in those days, as she found out now, however much at the time she had opposed him with violence.

As for Mr. Farquhar, he was almost weary of himself; no reasoning, even no principle, seemed to have influence over him, for he saw that Jemima was not at all what he approved of in woman. He saw her uncurbed and passionate, affecting to despise the rules of life he held most sacred, and indifferent to, if not positively disliking him; and yet he loved her dearly. But he resolved to make



a great effort of will, and break loose from these trammels of sense. And while he resolved, some old recollection would bring her up, hanging on his arm, in all the confidence of early girlhood, looking up in his face with her soft dark eyes, and questioning him upon the mysterious subjects which had so much interest for both of them at that time, although they had become only matter for dissension in these later days.

It was also true, as Mr. Bradshaw had said, Mr. Farquhar wished to marry, and had not much choice in the small town of Eccleston. He never put this so plainly before himself, as a reason for choosing Jemima, as her father had done to her; but it was an unconscious motive all the same. However, now he had lectured himself into the resolution to make a pretty long absence from Eccleston, and see if, amongst his distant friends, there was no woman more in accordance with his ideal, who could put the naughty, wilful, plaguing Jemima Bradshaw out of his head, if he did not soon perceive some change in her for the better.

A few days after Ruth's conversation with Mr. Bradshaw, the invitation she had been expecting, yet dreading, came. It was to her alone. Mr. and Miss Benson were pleased at the compliment to her, and urged her acceptance of it. She wished that they had been included; she had not thought it right, or kind to Jemima, to tell them why she was going, and she feared now lest they should feel a little hurt that they were not asked too. But she need not have been afraid. They were glad and proud of the attention to her, and never thought of themselves.

“ Ruthie, what gown shall you wear to-night? your dark grey one, I suppose?” asked Miss Benson.

“ Yes, I suppose so. I never thought of it; but that is my best.”

“ Well, then, I shall quill up a ruff for you. You know I am a famous quiller of net.”

Ruth came down-stairs with a little flush on her cheeks when she was ready to go. She held her bonnet and shawl in her hand, for she knew Miss Benson and Sally would want to see her dressed.

“ Is not mamma pretty ?” asked Leonard, with a child’s pride.

“ She looks very nice and tidy,” said Miss Benson, who had an idea that children should not talk or think about beauty.

“ I think my ruff looks so nice,” said Ruth, with gentle pleasure. And indeed it did look nice, and set off the pretty round throat most becomingly. Her hair, now grown long and thick, was smoothed as close to her head as its waving nature would allow, and plaited up in a great rich knot low down behind. The grey gown was as plain as plain could be.

“ You should have light gloves, Ruth,” said Miss Benson. She went up-stairs, and brought down a delicate pair of Limerick ones, which had been long treasured up in a walnut-shell.

“ They say them gloves is made of chicken’s-skins,” said Sally, examining them curiously. “ I wonder how they set about skinning ’em.”

“ Here, Ruth,” said Mr. Benson, coming in from

the garden, "here's a rose or two for you. I am sorry there are no more; I hoped I should have had my yellow rose out by this time, but the damask and the white are in a warmer corner, and have got the start."

Miss Benson and Leonard stood at the door, and watched her down the little passage-street till she was out of sight.

She had hardly touched the bell at Mr. Bradshaw's door, when Mary and Elizabeth opened it with boisterous glee.

"We saw you coming—we've been watching for you—we want you to come round the garden before tea; papa is not come in yet. Do come."

She went round the garden with a little girl clinging to each arm. It was full of sunshine and flowers, and this made the contrast between it and the usual large family room (which fronted the north-east, and therefore had no evening sun to light up its cold drab furniture) more striking than usual. It looked very gloomy. There was the great

dining-table, heavy and square; the range of chairs, straight and square; the work-boxes, useful and square; the colouring of walls, and carpet, and curtains, all of the coldest description; everything was handsome, and everything was ugly. Mrs. Bradshaw was asleep in her easy-chair when they came in. Jemima had just put down her work, and, lost in thought, she leant her cheek on her hand. When she saw Ruth she brightened a little, and went to her and kissed her. Mrs. Bradshaw jumped up at the sound of their entrance, and was wide awake in a moment.

“ Oh ! I thought your father was here,” said she, evidently relieved to find that he had not come in and caught her sleeping.

“ Thank you, Mrs. Denbigh, for coming to us to-night,” said she, in the quiet tone in which she generally spoke in her husband’s absence. When he was there, a sort of constant terror of displeasing him made her voice sharp and nervous ; the children knew that many a thing passed over by their mother

when their father was away, was sure to be noticed by her when he was present ; and noticed, too, in a cross and querulous manner, for she was so much afraid of the blame which on any occasion of their misbehaviour fell upon her. And yet she looked up to her husband with a reverence, and regard, and a faithfulness of love, which his decision of character was likely to produce on a weak and anxious mind. He was a rest and a support to her, on whom she cast all her responsibilities ; she was an obedient, unremonstrating wife to him ; no stronger affection had ever brought her duty to him into conflict with any desire of her heart. She loved her children dearly, though they all perplexed her very frequently. Her son was her especial darling, because he very seldom brought her into any scrapes with his father ; he was so cautious and prudent, and had the art of “keeping a calm sough” about any difficulty he might be in. With all her dutiful sense of the obligation, which her husband enforced upon her, to notice and tell him everything that was going

wrong in the household, and especially among his children, Mrs. Bradshaw, somehow, contrived to be honestly blind to a good deal that was not praiseworthy in Master Richard.

Mr. Bradshaw came in before long, bringing with him Mr. Farquhar. Jemima had been talking to Ruth with some interest before then ; but, on seeing Mr. Farquhar, she bent her head down over her work, went a little paler, and turned obstinately silent. Mr. Bradshaw longed to command her to speak ; but even he had a suspicion that what she might say, when so commanded, might be rather worse in its effect than her gloomy silence ; so he held his peace, and a discontented, angry kind of peace it was. Mrs. Bradshaw saw that something was wrong, but could not tell what ; only she became every moment more trembling, and nervous, and irritable, and sent Mary and Elizabeth off on all sorts of contradictory errands to the servants, and made the tea twice as strong, and sweetened it

twice as much as usual, in hopes of pacifying her husband with good things.

Mr. Farquhar had gone for the last time, or so he thought. He had resolved (for the fifth time) that he would go and watch Jemima once more, and if her temper got the better of her, and she showed the old sullenness again, and gave the old proofs of indifference to his good opinion, he would give her up altogether, and seek a wife elsewhere. He sat watching her with folded arms, and in silence. Altogether they were a pleasant family party!

Jemima wanted to wind a skein of wool. Mr. Farquhar saw it, and came to her, anxious to do her this little service. She turned away pettishly, and asked Ruth to hold it for her.

Ruth was hurt for Mr. Farquhar, and looked sorrowfully at Jemima; but Jemima would not see her glance of upbraiding, as Ruth, hoping that she would relent, delayed a little to comply with her request. Mr. Farquhar did; and went back to his



seat to watch them both. He saw Jemima turbulent and stormy in look ; he saw Ruth, to all appearance, heavenly calm as the angels, or with only that little tinge of sorrow which her friend's behaviour had called forth. He saw the unusual beauty of her face and form, which he had never noticed before ; and he saw Jemima, with all the brilliancy she once possessed in eyes and complexion, dimmed and faded. He watched Ruth, speaking low and soft to the little girls, who seemed to come to her in every difficulty ; and he remarked her gentle firmness when their bedtime came, and they pleaded to stay up longer (their father was absent in his counting-house, or they would not have dared to do so). He liked Ruth's soft, distinct, unwavering "No ! you must go. You must keep to what is right," far better than the good-natured yielding to entreaty he had formerly admired in Jemima. He was wandering off into this comparison, while Ruth, with delicate and unconscious tact, was trying to lead Jemima into some subject which should

take her away from the thoughts, whatever they were, that made her so ungracious and rude.

Jemima was ashamed of herself before Ruth, in a way which she had never been before any one else. She valued Ruth's good opinion so highly, that she dreaded lest her friend should perceive her faults. She put a check upon herself—a check at first; but after a little time she had forgotten something of her trouble, and listened to Ruth, and questioned her about Leonard, and smiled at his little witticisms; and only the sighs, that would come up from the very force of habit, brought back the consciousness of her unhappiness. Before the end of the evening, Jemima had allowed herself to speak to Mr. Farquhar in the old way—questioning, differing, disputing. She was recalled to the remembrance of that miserable conversation by the entrance of her father. After that she was silent. But he had seen her face more animated, and bright with a smile, as she spoke to Mr. Farquhar; and although he regretted the loss of her complexion

(for she was still very pale), he was highly pleased with the success of his project. He never doubted but that Ruth had given her some sort of private exhortation to behave better. He could not have understood the pretty art with which, by simply banishing unpleasant subjects, and throwing a wholesome natural sunlit tone over others, Ruth had insensibly drawn Jemima out of her gloom. He resolved to buy Mrs. Denbigh a handsome silk gown the very next day. He did not believe she had a silk gown, poor creature! He had noticed that dark grey stuff, this long long time, as her Sunday dress. He liked the colour; the silk one should be just the same tinge. Then he thought that it would, perhaps, be better to choose a lighter shade, one which might be noticed as different to the old gown. For he had no doubt she would like to have it remarked, and, perhaps, would not object to tell people that it was a present from Mr. Bradshaw—a token of his approbation. He smiled a little to himself as he thought of this additional source

of pleasure to Ruth. She, in the mean time, was getting up to go home. While Jemima was lighting the bed-candle at the lamp, Ruth came round to bid good night. Mr. Bradshaw could not allow her to remain till the morrow, uncertain whether he was satisfied or not.

“Good night, Mrs. Denbigh,” said he. “Good night. Thank you. I am obliged to you—I am exceedingly obliged to you.”

He laid emphasis on these words, for he was pleased to see Mr. Farquhar step forwards to help Jemima in her little office.

Mr. Farquhar offered to accompany Ruth home; but the streets that intervened between Mr. Bradshaw's and the Chapel-house were so quiet that he desisted, when he learnt from Ruth's manner how much she disliked his proposal. Mr. Bradshaw, too, instantly observed:

“Oh! Mrs. Denbigh need not trouble you, Farquhar. I have servants at liberty at any moment to attend on her, if she wishes it.”

In fact, he wanted to make hay while the sun shone, and to detain Mr. Farquhar a little longer, now that Jemima was so gracious. She went upstairs with Ruth to help her to put on her things.

“Dear Jemima!” said Ruth, “I am so glad to see you looking better to-night! You quite frightened me this morning, you looked so ill.”

“Did I?” replied Jemima. “Oh, Ruth! I have been so unhappy lately. I want you to come and put me to-rights,” she continued, half smiling. “You know I’m a sort of out-pupil of yours, though we are so nearly of an age. You ought to lecture me, and make me good.”

“Should I, dear?” said Ruth. “I don’t think I’m the one to do it.”

“Oh, yes! you are—you’ve done me good to-night.”

“Well, if I can do anything for you, tell me what it is?” asked Ruth, tenderly.

“Oh, not now—not now,” replied Jemima. “I

could not tell you here. It's a long story, and I don't know that I can tell you at all. Mamma might come up at any moment, and papa would be sure to ask what we had been talking about so long."

"Take your own time, love," said Ruth; "only remember, as far as I can, how glad I am to help you."

"You're too good, my darling!" said Jemima, fondly.

"Don't say so," replied Ruth, earnestly, almost as if she were afraid. "God knows I am not."

"Well! we're none of us too good," answered Jemima; "I know that. But you *are* very good. Nay, I won't call you so, if it makes you look so miserable. But come away down-stairs."

With the fragrance of Ruth's sweetness lingering about her, Jemima was her best self during the next half hour. Mr. Bradshaw was more and more pleased, and raised the price of the silk, which he

was going to give Ruth, sixpence a yard during the time. Mr. Farquhar went home through the garden-way, happier than he had been this long time. He even caught himself humming the old refrain:

On revient, on revient toujours,  
A ses premiers amours.

But as soon as he was aware of what he was doing, he cleared away the remnants of the song into a cough, which was sonorous, if not perfectly real.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning, as Jemima and her mother sat at their work, it came into the head of the former to remember her father's very marked way of thanking Ruth the evening before.

“What a favourite Mrs. Denbigh is with papa,” said she. “I am sure I don't wonder at it. Did you notice, mamma, how he thanked her for coming here last night?”

“Yes, dear ; but I don't think it was all——” Mrs. Bradshaw stopped short. She was never certain if it was right or wrong to say anything.

“Not all what?” asked Jemima, when she saw her mother was not going to finish the sentence.

“Not all because Mrs. Denbigh came to tea here,” replied Mrs. Bradshaw.



“Why, what else could he be thanking her for? What has she done?” asked Jemima, stimulated to curiosity by her mother’s hesitating manner.

“I don’t know if I ought to tell you,” said Mrs. Bradshaw.

“Oh, very well!” said Jemima, rather annoyed.

“Nay, dear! your papa never said I was not to tell; perhaps I may.”

“Never mind! I don’t want to hear,” in a piqued tone.

There was silence for a little while. Jemima was trying to think of something else, but her thoughts would revert to the wonder what Mrs. Denbigh could have done for her father.

“I think I may tell you, though,” said Mrs. Bradshaw, half questioning.

Jemima had the honour not to urge any confidence, but she was too curious to take any active step towards repressing it.

Mrs. Bradshaw went on. “I think you deserve to know. It is partly your doing that papa is so

pleased with Mrs. Denbigh. He is going to buy her a silk gown this morning, and I think you ought to know why."

"Why?" asked Jemima.

"Because papa is so pleased to find that you mind what she says."

"I mind what she says! to be sure I do, and always did. But why should papa give her a gown for that? I think he ought to give it me rather," said Jemima, half laughing.

"I am sure he would, dear; he will give you one, I am certain, if you want one. He was so pleased to see you like your old self to Mr. Farquhar last night. We neither of us could think what had come over you this last month; but now all seems right."

A dark cloud came over Jemima's face. She did not like this close observation and constant comment upon her manners; and what had Ruth to do with it?

"I am glad you were pleased," said she, very

coldly. Then, after a pause, she added, "But you have not told me what Mrs. Denbigh had to do with my good behaviour."

"Did not she speak to you about it?" asked Mrs. Bradshaw, looking up.

"No; why should she. She has no right to criticise what I do. She would not be so impertinent," said Jemima, feeling very uncomfortable and suspicious.

"Yes, love! she would have had a right, for papa had desired her to do it."

"Papa desired her! What do you mean, mamma?"

"Oh, dear! I dare say I should not have told you," said Mrs. Bradshaw, perceiving, from Jemima's tone of voice, that something had gone wrong. "Only you spoke as if it would be impertinent in Mrs. Denbigh, and I am sure she would not do anything that was impertinent. You know, it would be but right for her to do what papa told her; and he said a great deal to her, the other day,

about finding out why you were so cross, and bringing you right. And you are right now, dear!" said Mrs. Bradshaw, soothingly, thinking that Jemima was annoyed (like a good child) at the recollection of how naughty she had been.

"Then papa is going to give Mrs. Denbigh a gown because I was civil to Mr. Farquhar last night."

"Yes, dear!" said Mrs. Bradshaw, more and more frightened at Jemima's angry manner of speaking—low-toned, but very indignant.

Jemima remembered, with smouldered anger, Ruth's pleading way of wiling her from her sullessness the night before. Management everywhere! but in this case it was peculiarly revolting; so much so, that she could hardly bear to believe that the seemingly-transparent Ruth had lent herself to it.

"Are you sure, mamma, that papa asked Mrs. Denbigh to make me behave differently? It seems so strange."

“I am quite sure. He spoke to her last Friday morning in the study. I remember it was Friday, because Mrs. Dean was working here.”

Jemima remembered now that she had gone into the school-room on the Friday, and found her sisters lounging about, and wondering what papa could possibly want with Mrs. Denbigh.

After this conversation, Jemima repulsed all Ruth's timid efforts to ascertain the cause of her disturbance, and to help her if she could. Ruth's tender, sympathising manner, as she saw Jemima daily looking more wretched, was distasteful to the latter in the highest degree. She could not say that Mrs. Denbigh's conduct was positively wrong—it might even be quite right; but it was inexpressibly repugnant to her to think of her father consulting with a stranger (a week ago she almost considered Ruth as a sister) how to manage his daughter, so as to obtain the end he wished for; yes, even if that end was for her own good.

She was thankful and glad to see a brown-paper parcel lying on the hall-table, with a note in Ruth's handwriting, addressed to her father. She *knew* what it was, the grey silk dress. That she was sure Ruth would never accept.

No one henceforward could induce Jemima to enter into conversation with Mr. Farquhar. She suspected manœuvring in the simplest actions, and was miserable in this constant state of suspicion. She would not allow herself to like Mr. Farquhar, even when he said things the most after her own heart. She heard him, one evening, talking with her father about the principles of trade. Her father stood out for the keenest, sharpest work, consistent with honesty; if he had not been her father she would, perhaps, have thought some of his sayings inconsistent with true Christian honesty. He was for driving hard bargains; exacting interest and payment of just bills to a day. That was (he said) the only way in which trade could be conducted.

Once allow a margin of uncertainty, or where feelings, instead of maxims, were to be the guide, and all hope of there ever being any good men of business was ended.

“Suppose a delay of a month in requiring payment, might save a man’s credit—prevent his becoming a bankrupt?” put in Mr. Farquhar.

“I would not give it him. I would let him have money to set up again as soon as he had passed the Bankruptcy Court; if he never passed, I might, in some cases, make him an allowance, but I would always keep my justice and my charity separate.”

“And yet charity (in your sense of the word) degrades; justice, tempered with mercy and consideration, elevates.”

“That is not justice—justice is certain and inflexible. No! Mr. Farquhar, you must not allow any Quixotic notions to mingle with your conduct as a tradesman.”

And so they went on; Jemima’s face glowing with sympathy in all Mr. Farquhar said; till once,

on looking up suddenly with sparkling eyes, she saw a glance of her father's which told her, as plain as words could say, that he was watching the effect of Mr. Farquhar's speeches upon his daughter. She was chilled thenceforward; she thought her father prolonged the argument, in order to call out those sentiments which he knew would most recommend his partner to his daughter. She would so fain have let herself love Mr. Farquhar; but this constant manœuvring, in which she did not feel clear that he did not take a passive part, made her sick at heart. She even wished that they might not go through the form of pretending to try to gain her consent to the marriage, if it involved all this premeditated action and speech-making—such moving about of every one into their right places, like pieces at chess. She felt as if she would rather be bought openly, like an Oriental daughter, where no one is degraded in their own eyes by being parties to such a contract. The consequences of all this “admirable management” of Mr. Bradshaw's would



have been very unfortunate to Mr. Farquhar (who was innocent of all connivance in any of the plots—indeed, would have been as much annoyed at them as Jemima, had he been aware of them), but that the impression made upon him by Ruth on the evening I have so lately described, was deepened by the contrast which her behaviour made to Miss Bradshaw's on one or two more recent occasions.

There was no use, he thought, in continuing attentions so evidently distasteful to Jemima. To her, a young girl hardly out of the school-room, he probably appeared like an old man ; and he might even lose the friendship with which she used to regard him, and which was, and ever would be, very dear to him, if he persevered in trying to be considered as a lover. He should always feel affectionately towards her ; her very faults gave her an interest in his eyes, for which he had blamed himself most conscientiously and most uselessly when he was looking upon her as his future wife, but which the said conscience would learn to ap-

prove of when she sank down to the place of a young friend, over whom he might exercise a good and salutary interest. Mrs. Denbigh, if not many months older in years, had known sorrow and cares so early that she was much older in character. Besides, her shy reserve, and her quiet daily walk within the lines of duty, were much in accordance with Mr. Farquhar's notion of what a wife should be. Still, it was a wrench to take his affections away from Jemima. If she had not helped him to do so by every means in her power, he could never have accomplished it.

Yes! by every means in her power had Jemima alienated her lover, her beloved—for so he was in fact. And now her quick-sighted eyes saw he was gone for ever—past recal; for did not her jealous, sore heart feel, even before he himself was conscious of the fact, that he was drawn towards sweet, lovely, composed, and dignified Ruth—one who always thought before she spoke (as Mr. Farquhar used to bid Jemima do)—who never was tempted by sudden

impulse, but walked the world calm and self-governed. What now availed Jemima's reproaches, as she remembered the days when he had watched her with earnest, attentive eyes, as he now watched Ruth; and the times since, when, led astray by her morbid fancy, she had turned away from all his advances!

“It was only in March—last March, he called me ‘dear Jemima.’ Ah, don’t I remember it well? The pretty nosegay of green-house flowers that he gave me in exchange for the wild daffodils—and how he seemed to care for the flowers I gave him—and how he looked at me, and thanked me—that is all gone and over now.”

Her sisters came in bright and glowing.

“Oh, Jemima, how nice and cool you are; sitting in this shady room!” (she had felt it even chilly.) “We have been such a long walk! We are so tired. It is so hot.”

“Why did you go, then?” said she.

“ Oh ! we wanted to go. We would not have stayed at home on any account. It has been so pleasant,” said Mary.

“ We’ve been to Scaurside Wood, to gather wild-strawberries,” said Elizabeth. “ Such a quantity ! We’ve left a whole basket-full in the dairy. Mr. Farquhar says he’ll teach us how to dress them in the way he learnt in Germany, if we can get him some hock. Do you think papa will let us have some ?”

“ Was Mr. Farquhar with you ?” asked Jemima, a dull light coming into her eyes.

“ Yes, we told him this morning that mamma wanted us to take some old linen to the lame man at Scaurside Farm, and that we meant to coax Mrs. Denbigh to let us go into the wood and gather strawberries,” said Elizabeth.

“ I thought he would make some excuse and come,” said the quick-witted Mary, as eager and thoughtless an observer of one love-affair as of an-

other, and quite forgetting that, not many weeks ago, she had fancied an attachment between him and Jemima.

“ Did you ? I did not,” replied Elizabeth. “ At least I never thought about it. I was quite startled when I heard his horse’s feet behind us on the road.”

“ He said he was going to the farm, and could take our basket. Was not it kind of him ?” Jemima did not answer, so Mary continued:

“ You know it’s a great pull up to the farm, and we were so hot already. The road was quite white and baked; it hurt my eyes terribly. I was so glad when Mrs. Denbigh said we might turn into the wood. The light was quite green there, the branches are so thick overhead.”

“ And there are whole beds of wild-strawberries,” said Elizabeth, taking up the tale now Mary was out of breath. Mary fanned herself with her bonnet, while Elizabeth went on:

“ You know where the grey rock crops out,

don't you, Jemima? Well, there was a complete carpet of strawberry runners. So pretty! And we could hardly step without treading the little bright scarlet berries under foot."

"We did so wish for Leonard," put in Mary.

"Yes! but Mrs. Denbigh gathered a great many for him. And Mr. Farquhar gave her all his."

"I thought you said he had gone on to Dawson's farm," said Jemima.

"Oh, yes! he just went up there; and then he left his horse there, like a wise man, and came to us in the pretty, cool, green wood. Oh, Jemima, it was so pretty—little flecks of light coming down here and there through the leaves, and quivering on the ground. You must go with us to-morrow."

"Yes," said Mary, "we're going again to-morrow. We could not gather nearly all the strawberries."

"And Leonard is to go too, to-morrow."

"Yes! we thought of such a capital plan. That's to say, Mr. Farquhar thought of it—we wanted to

carry Leonard up the hill in a king's cushion, but Mrs. Denbigh would not hear of it."

"She said it would tire us so; and yet she wanted him to gather strawberries!"

"And so," interrupted Mary, for by this time the two girls were almost speaking together, "Mr Farquhar is to bring him up before him on his horse."

"You'll go with us, won't you, dear Jemima?" asked Elizabeth; "it will be at——"

"No! I can't go!" said Jemima, abruptly. "Don't ask me—I can't."

The little girls were hushed into silence by her manner; for whatever she might be to those above her in age and position, to those below her Jemima was almost invariably gentle. She felt that they were wondering at her.

"Go up-stairs and take off your things. You know papa does not like you to come into this room in the shoes in which you have been out."

She was glad to cut her sisters short in the details

which they were so mercilessly inflicting—details which she must harden herself to, before she could hear them quietly and unmoved. She saw that she had lost her place as the first object in Mr. Farquhar's eyes—a position she had hardly cared for while she was secure in the enjoyment of it; but the charm of it now was redoubled, in her acute sense of how she had forfeited it by her own doing, and her own fault. For if he were the cold, calculating man her father had believed him to be, and had represented him as being to her, would he care for a portionless widow in humble circumstances like Mrs. Denbigh; no money, no connexion, encumbered with her boy? The very action which proved Mr. Farquhar to be lost to Jemima, reinstated him on his throne in her fancy. And she must go on in hushed quietness, quivering with every fresh token of his preference for another! That other, too, one so infinitely more worthy of him than herself; so that she could not have even the poor comfort of thinking, that he had no discrimination, and was throwing himself away



on a common or worthless person. Ruth was beautiful, gentle, good, and conscientious. The hot colour flushed up into Jemima's sallow face as she became aware that, even while she acknowledged these excellencies on Mrs. Denbigh's part, she hated her. The recollection of her marble face wearied her even to sickness; the tones of her low voice were irritating from their very softness. Her goodness, undoubted as it was, was more distasteful than many faults which had more savour of human struggle in them.

“What was this terrible demon in her heart?” asked Jemima's better angel. “Was she, indeed, given up to possession? Was not this the old stinging hatred which had prompted so many crimes? The hatred of all sweet virtues which might win the love denied to us? The old anger that wrought in the elder brother's heart, till it ended in the murder of the gentle Abel, while yet the world was young?”

“Oh, God! help me! I did not know I was so

wicked," cried Jemima aloud in her agony. It had been a terrible glimpse into the dark lurid gulf—the capability for evil, in her heart. She wrestled with the demon, but he would not depart ; it was to be a struggle whether or not she was to be given up to him, in this her time of sore temptation.

All the next day long, she sat and pictured the happy strawberry gathering going on, even then, in pleasant Scaurside Wood. Every touch of fancy which could heighten her idea of their enjoyment, and of Mr. Farquhar's attention to the blushing, conscious Ruth—every such touch which would add a pang to her self-reproach and keen jealousy, was added by her imagination. She got up and walked about, to try and stop her over-busy fancy by bodily exercise. But she had eaten little all day, and was weak and faint in the intense heat of the sunny garden. Even the long grass walk under the filbert hedge, was parched and dry in the glowing August sun. Yet her sisters found her there

when they returned, walking quickly up and down, as if to warm herself on some winter's day. They were very weary; and not half so communicative as on the day before, now that Jemima was craving for every detail to add to her agony.

"Yes! Leonard came up before Mr. Farquhar. Oh! how hot it is, Jemima; do sit down, and I'll tell you about it, but I can't if you keep walking so!"

"I can't sit still to-day," said Jemima, springing up from the turf as soon as she had sat down. "Tell me! I can hear you while I walk about."

"Oh! but I can't shout; I can hardly speak I am so tired. Mr. Farquhar brought Leonard——"

"You've told me that before," said Jemima, sharply.

"Well! I don't know what else to tell. Somebody had been since yesterday, and gathered nearly all the strawberries off the grey rock. Jemima! Jemima!" said Elizabeth, faintly, "I am so dizzy—I think I am ill."

The next minute the tired girl lay swooning on the grass. It was an outlet for Jemima's fierce energy. With a strength she had never again, and never had known before, she lifted up her fainting sister, and bidding Mary run and clear the way, she carried her in through the open garden-door, up the wide old-fashioned stairs, and laid her on the bed in her own room, where the breeze from the window came softly and pleasantly through the green shade of the vine-leaves and jessamine.

"Give me the water. Run for mamma, Mary," said Jemima, as she saw that the fainting-fit did not yield to the usual remedy of a horizontal position, and the water sprinkling.

"Dear! dear Lizzie!" said Jemima, kissing the pale, unconscious face. "I think you loved me, darling."

The long walk on the hot day had been too much for the delicate Elizabeth, who was fast outgrowing her strength. It was many days before she regained any portion of her spirit and vigour. After that

fainting-fit, she lay listless and weary, without appetite or interest, through the long sunny autumn weather, on the bed or on the couch in Jemima's room, whither she had been carried at first. It was a comfort to Mrs. Bradshaw to be able at once to discover what it was that had knocked up Elizabeth; she did not rest easily until she had settled upon a cause for every ailment or illness in the family. It was a stern consolation to Mr. Bradshaw, during his time of anxiety respecting his daughter, to be able to blame somebody. He could not, like his wife, have taken comfort from an inanimate fact; he wanted the satisfaction of feeling that some one had been in fault, or else this never could have happened. Poor Ruth did not need his implied reproaches. When she saw her gentle Elizabeth lying feeble and languid, her heart blamed her for thoughtlessness, so severely as to make her take all Mr. Bradshaw's words and hints as too light censure for the careless way in which, to please her own child, she had

allowed her two pupils to fatigue themselves with such long walks. She begged hard to take her share of nursing. Every spare moment she went to Mr. Bradshaw's, and asked, with earnest humility, to be allowed to pass them with Elizabeth and, as it was often a relief to have her assistance, Mrs. Bradshaw received these entreaties very kindly, and desired her to go up-stairs, where Elizabeth's pale countenance brightened when she saw her, but where Jemima sat in silent annoyance that her own room was now become open ground for one, whom her heart rose up against, to enter in and be welcomed. Whether it was that Ruth, who was not an inmate of the house, brought with her a fresher air, more change of thought to the invalid, I do not know, but Elizabeth always gave her a peculiarly tender greeting; and if she had sunk down into languid fatigue, in spite of all Jemima's endeavours to interest her, she roused up into animation when Ruth came in with a flower,

a book, or a brown and ruddy pear, sending out the warm fragrance it retained from the sunny garden-wall at Chapel-house.

The jealous dislike which Jemima was allowing to grow up in her heart against Ruth was, as she thought, never shown in word or deed. She was cold in manner; because she could not be hypocritical; but her words were polite and kind in purport; and she took pains to make her actions the same as formerly. But rule and line may measure out the figure of a man; it is the soul that gives it life; and there was no soul, no inner meaning, breathing out in Jemima's actions. Ruth felt the change acutely. She suffered from it some time before she ventured to ask what had occasioned it. But, one day, she took Miss Bradshaw by surprise, when they were alone together for a few minutes, by asking her if she had vexed her in any way, she was so changed? It is sad when friendship has cooled so far as to render such a question necessary.

Jemima went rather paler than usual, and then made answer:

“Changed! How do you mean? How am I changed? What do I say or do different from what I used to do?”

But the tone was so constrained and cold, that Ruth's heart sank within her. She knew now, as well as words could have told her, that not only had the old feeling of love passed away from Jemima, but that it had gone unregretted, and no attempt had been made to recal it. Love was very precious to Ruth now, as of old time. It was one of the faults of her nature to be ready to make any sacrifices for those who loved her, and to value affection almost above its price. She had yet to learn the lesson, that it is more blessed to love than to be beloved; and lonely as the impressible years of her youth had been—without parents, without brother or sister—it was, perhaps, no wonder that she clung tenaciously to every symptom of regard,



and could not relinquish the love of any one without a pang.

The doctor who was called in to Elizabeth prescribed sea-air as the best means of recruiting her strength. Mr. Bradshaw, who liked to spend money ostentatiously, went down straight to Abermouth, and engaged a house for the remainder of the autumn; for, as he told the medical man, money was no object to him in comparison with his children's health; and the doctor cared too little about the mode in which his remedy was administered, to tell Mr. Bradshaw that lodgings would have done as well, or better, than the complete house he had seen fit to take. For it was now necessary to engage servants, and take much trouble, which might have been obviated, and Elizabeth's removal effected more quietly and speedily, if she had gone into lodgings. As it was, she was weary of hearing all the planning and talking, and deciding and undecideding, and re-deciding, before it was possible for

her to go. Her only comfort was in the thought, that dear Mrs. Denbigh was to go with her.

It had not been entirely by way of pompously spending his money that Mr. Bradshaw had engaged this sea-side house. He was glad to get his little girls and their governess out of the way; for a busy time was impending, when he should want his head clear for electioneering purposes, and his house clear for electioneering hospitality. He was the mover of a project for bringing forward a man, on the Liberal and Dissenting interest, to contest the election with the old Tory member, who had on several successive occasions walked over the course, as he and his family owned half the town, and votes and rent were paid alike to the landlord.

Kings of Eccleston had Mr. Cranworth and his ancestors been this many a long year; their right was so little disputed that they never thought of acknowledging the allegiance so readily paid to them. The old feudal feeling between landowner

and tenant did not quake prophetically at the introduction of manufactures ; the Cranworth family ignored the growing power of the manufacturers, more especially as the principal person engaged in the trade was a Dissenter. But notwithstanding this lack of patronage from the one great family in the neighbourhood, the business flourished, increased, and spread wide ; and the Dissenting head thereof looked around, about the time of which I speak, and felt himself powerful enough to defy the great Cranworth interest even in their hereditary stronghold, and, by so doing, avenge the slights of many years—slights which rankled in Mr. Bradshaw's mind as much as if he did not go to chapel twice every Sunday, and pay the largest pew-rent of any member of Mr. Benson's congregation.

Accordingly, Mr. Bradshaw had applied to one of the Liberal parliamentary agents in London—a man whose only principle was to do wrong on the Liberal side ; he would not act, right or wrong, for

a Tory, but for a Whig the latitude of his conscience had never yet been discovered. It was possible Mr. Bradshaw was not aware of the character of this agent; at any rate, he knew he was the man for his purpose, which was to hear of some one who would come forward as a candidate for the representation of Eccleston on the Dissenting interest.

“There are in round numbers about six hundred voters,” said he; “two hundred are decidedly in the Cranworth interest—dare not offend Mr. Cranworth, poor souls! Two hundred more we may calculate upon as pretty certain—factory hands, or people connected with our trade in some way or another—who are indignant at the stubborn way in which Cranworth has contested the right of water; two hundred are doubtful.”

“Don’t much care either way,” said the parliamentary agent. “Of course, we must make them care.”

Mr. Bradshaw rather shrunk from the knowing

look with which this was said. He hoped that Mr. Pilson did not mean to allude to bribery; but he did not express this hope, because he thought it would deter the agent from using this means, and it was possible it might prove to be the only way. And if he (Mr. Bradshaw) once embarked on such an enterprise, there must be no failure. By some expedient or another, success must be certain, or he could have nothing to do with it.

The parliamentary agent was well accustomed to deal with all kinds and shades of scruples. He was most at home with men who had none; but still he could allow for human weakness; and he perfectly understood Mr. Bradshaw.

“I have a notion I know of a man who will just suit your purpose. Plenty of money—does not know what to do with it, in fact—tired of yachting, travelling, wants something new. I heard, through some of the means of intelligence I employ, that not very long ago he was wishing for a seat in Parliament.”

“A Liberal?” said Mr. Bradshaw.

“Decidedly. Belongs to a family who were in the Long Parliament in their day.”

Mr. Bradshaw rubbed his hands.

“Dissenter?” asked he.

“No, no! Not so far as that. But very lax Church.”

“What is his name?” asked Mr. Bradshaw, eagerly.

“Excuse me. Until I am certain that he would like to come forward for Eccleston, I think I had better not mention his name.”

The anonymous gentleman did like to come forward, and his name proved to be Donne. He and Mr. Bradshaw had been in correspondence during all the time of Mr. Ralph Cranworth's illness, and when he died, everything was arranged ready for a start, even before the Cranworths had determined who should keep the seat warm till the eldest son came of age, for the father was already member for the county. Mr. Donne was to come down to can-

vass in person, and was to take up his abode at Mr. Bradshaw's; and therefore it was that the seaside house, within twenty miles' distance of Eccleston, was found to be so convenient as an infirmary and nursery for those members of his family who were likely to be useless, if not positive encumbrances, during the forthcoming election.

## CHAPTER IX.

JEMIMA did not know whether she wished to go to Abermouth or not. She longed for change. She wearied of the sights and sounds of home. But yet she could not bear to leave the neighbourhood of Mr. Farquhar; especially as, if she went to Abermouth, Ruth would in all probability be left to take her holiday at home.

When Mr. Bradshaw decided that she was to go, Ruth tried to feel glad that he gave her the means of repairing her fault towards Elizabeth; and she resolved to watch over the two girls most faithfully and carefully, and to do all in her power to restore the invalid to health. But a tremor came over her whenever she thought of leaving Leonard; she had never quitted him for a day, and it seemed



to her as if her brooding, constant care, was his natural and necessary shelter from all evils—from very death itself. She would not go to sleep at nights, in order to enjoy the blessed consciousness of having him near her; when she was away from him teaching her pupils, she kept trying to remember his face, and print it deep on her heart, against the time when days and days would elapse without her seeing that little darling countenance. Miss Benson would wonder to her brother that Mr. Bradshaw did not propose that Leonard should accompany his mother; he only begged her not to put such an idea into Ruth's head, as he was sure Mr. Bradshaw had no thoughts of doing any such thing, yet to Ruth it might be a hope, and then a disappointment. His sister scolded him for being so cold-hearted; but he was full of sympathy, although he did not express it, and made some quiet little sacrifices in order to set himself at liberty to take Leonard a long walking expedition on the day when his mother left Eccleston.

Ruth cried until she could cry no longer, and felt very much ashamed of herself as she saw the grave and wondering looks of her pupils, whose only feeling on leaving home was delight at the idea of Abermouth, and into whose minds the possibility of death to any of their beloved ones never entered. Ruth dried her eyes, and spoke cheerfully as soon as she caught the perplexed expression of their faces; and by the time they arrived at Abermouth, she was as much delighted with all the new scenery as they were, and found it hard work to resist their entreaties to go rambling out on the sea-shore at once; but Elizabeth had undergone more fatigue that day, than she had had before for many weeks, and Ruth was determined to be prudent.

Meanwhile, the Bradshaws' house at Eccleston was being rapidly adapted for electioneering hospitality. The partition-wall between the un-used drawing-room and the school-room was broken down, in order to admit of folding-doors; the "ingenious" upholsterer of the town (and what

town does not boast of the upholsterer full of contrivances and resources, in opposition to the upholsterer of steady capital and no imagination, who looks down with uneasy contempt on ingenuity?) had come in to give his opinion, that "nothing could be easier than to convert a bath-room into a bedroom, by the assistance of a little drapery to conceal the shower-bath," the string of which was to be carefully concealed, for fear that the unconscious occupier of the bath-bed might innocently take it for a bell-rope. The professional cook of the town had been already engaged to take up her abode for a month at Mr. Bradshaw's, much to the indignation of Betsy, who became a vehement partisan of Mr. Cranworth, as soon as ever she heard of the plan of her deposition from sovereign authority in the kitchen, in which she had reigned supreme for fourteen years. Mrs. Bradshaw sighed and bemoaned herself in all her leisure moments, which were not many, and wondered why their house was to be turned into an inn for this Mr.

Donne, when everybody knew that the George was good enough for the Cranworths, who never thought of asking the electors to the Hall;—and they had lived at Cranworth ever since Julius Cæsar's time, and if that was not being an old family, she did not know what was. The excitement soothed Jemima. There was something to do. It was she who planned with the upholsterer; it was she who soothed Betsy into angry silence; it was she who persuaded her mother to lie down and rest, while she herself went out to buy the heterogencous things required to make the family and house presentable to Mr. Donne, and his precursor—the friend of the parliamentary agent. This latter gentleman never appeared himself on the scene of action, but pulled all the strings notwithstanding. The friend was a Mr. Hickson, a lawyer—a briefless barrister, some people called him; but he himself professed a great disgust to the law, as a “great sham,” which involved an immensity of underhand action, and truckling and time-serving, and was perfectly en-

cumbered by useless forms and ceremonies, and dead obsolete words. So, instead of putting his shoulder to the wheel to reform the law, he talked eloquently against it, in such a high-priest style, that it was occasionally a matter of surprise how he could ever have made a friend of the parliamentary agent before mentioned. But, as Mr. Hickson himself said, it was the very corruptness of the law which he was fighting against, in doing all he could to effect the return of certain members to Parliament; these certain members being pledged to effect a reform in the law, according to Mr. Hickson. And, as he once observed confidentially, "If you had to destroy a hydra-headed monster, would you measure swords with the demon as if he were a gentleman? Would you not rather seize the first weapon that came to hand? And so do I. My great object in life, sir, is to reform the law of England, sir. Once get a majority of Liberal members into the House, and the thing is done. And I consider myself justified, for so high—for, I may say, so

holy—an end, in using men's weaknesses to work out my purpose. Of course, if men were angels, or even immaculate—men invulnerable to bribes, we would not bribe.”

“Could you?” asked Jemima, for the conversation took place at Mr. Bradshaw's dinner-table, where a few friends were gathered together to meet Mr. Hickson; and among them was Mr. Benson.

“We neither would nor could,” said the ardent barrister, disregarding in his vehemence the point of the question, and floating on over the bar of argument into the wide ocean of his own eloquence: “As it is—as the world stands, they who would succeed even in good deeds, must come down to the level of expediency; and therefore, I say once more, if Mr. Donne is the man for your purpose, and your purpose is a good one, a lofty one, a holy one” (for Mr. Hickson remembered the Dissenting character of his little audience, and privately considered the introduction of the word ‘holy’ a most happy hit), “then, I say, we must put all the

squeamish scruples which might befit Utopia, or some such place, on one side, and treat men as they are. If they are avaricious, it is not we who have made them so; but as we have to do with them, we must consider their failings in dealing with them; if they have been careless or extravagant, or have had their little peccadillos, we must administer the screw. The glorious reform of the law will justify, in my idea, all means to obtain the end—that law, from the profession of which I have withdrawn myself from perhaps a too scrupulous conscience!" He concluded softly to himself.

"We are not to do evil that good may come," said Mr. Benson. He was startled at the deep sound of his own voice as he uttered these words; but he had not been speaking for some time, and his voice came forth strong and unmodulated.

"True, sir; most true," said Mr. Hickson, bowing. "I honour you for the observation." And he profited by it, insomuch that he confined his further remarks on elections to the end of the table, where

he sat near Mr. Bradshaw, and one or two equally eager, though not equally influential partisans of Mr. Donne's. Meanwhile, Mr. Farquhar took up Mr. Benson's quotation, at the end where he and Jemima sat near to Mrs. Bradshaw and him.

“ But in the present state of the world, as Mr. Hickson says, it is rather difficult to act upon that precept.”

“ Oh, Mr. Farquhar !” said Jemima, indignantly, the tears springing to her eyes with a feeling of disappointment. For she had been chafing under all that Mr. Hickson had been saying, perhaps the more for one or two attempts on his part at a flirtation with the daughter of his wealthy host, which she resented with all the loathing of a pre-occupied heart; and she had longed to be a man, to speak out her wrath at this paltering with right and wrong. She had felt grateful to Mr. Benson for his one, clear, short precept, coming down with a divine force against which there was no appeal; and now to have Mr. Farquhar taking the side of expediency! It was too bad.



“Nay, Jemima!” said Mr. Farquhar, touched, and secretly flattered by the visible pain his speech had given. “Don’t be indignant with me till I have explained myself a little more. I don’t understand myself yet; and it is a very intricate question, or so it appears to me, which I was going to put, really, earnestly, and humbly, for Mr. Benson’s opinion. Now, Mr. Benson, may I ask, if you always find it practicable to act strictly in accordance with that principle? For if you do not, I am sure no man living can! Are there not occasions when it is absolutely necessary to wade through evil to good? I am not speaking in the careless, presumptuous way of that man yonder,” said he, lowering his voice, and addressing himself to Jemima more exclusively, “I am really anxious to hear what Mr. Benson will say on the subject, for I know no one to whose candid opinion I should attach more weight.”

But Mr. Benson was silent. He did not see Mrs. Bradshaw and Jemima leave the room. He was really, as Mr. Farquhar supposed him, completely

absent, questioning himself as to how far his practice tallied with his principle. By degrees he came to himself; he found the conversation still turned on the election; and Mr. Hickson, who felt that he had jarred against the little minister's principles, and yet knew, from the *carte du pays* which the scouts of the parliamentary agent had given him, that Mr. Benson was a person to be conciliated, on account of his influence over many of the working people, began to ask him questions with an air of deferring to superior knowledge, that almost surprised Mr. Bradshaw, who had been accustomed to treat "Benson" in a very different fashion, of civil condescending indulgence, just as one listens to a child who can have had no opportunities of knowing better.

At the end of a conversation that Mr. Hickson held with Mr. Benson, on a subject in which the latter was really interested, and on which he had expressed himself at some length, the young barrister turned to Mr. Bradshaw, and said very audibly,

“I wish Donne had been here. This conversation during the last half hour would have interested him almost as much as it has done me.”

Mr. Bradshaw little guessed the truth, that Mr. Donne was, at that very moment, coaching up the various subjects of public interest in Eccleston, and privately cursing the particular subject on which Mr. Benson had been holding forth, as being an unintelligible piece of Quixotism; or the leading Dissenter of the town need not have experienced a pang of jealousy, at the possible future admiration his minister might excite in the possible future member for Eccleston. And if Mr. Benson had been clairvoyant, he need not have made an especial subject of gratitude out of the likelihood that he might have an opportunity of so far interesting Mr. Donne in the condition of the people of Eccleston as to induce him to set his face against any attempts at bribery.

Mr. Benson thought of this, half the night through; and ended by determining to write a sermon on the

Christian view of political duties, which might be good for all, both electors and member, to hear on the eve of an election. For Mr. Donne was expected at Mr. Bradshaw's before the next Sunday; and, of course, as Mr. and Miss Benson had settled it, he would appear at the chapel with them on that day. But the stinging conscience refused to be quieted. No present plan of usefulness allayed the aching remembrance of the evil he had done that good might come. Not even the look of Leonard, as the early dawn fell on him, and Mr. Benson's sleepless eyes saw the rosy glow on his firm round cheeks; his open mouth, through which the soft, long-drawn breath came gently quivering; and his eyes not fully shut, but closed to outward sight—not even the aspect of the quiet innocent child could soothe the troubled spirit.

Leonard and his mother dreamt of each other that night. Her dream of him was one of undefined terror—terror so great that it wakened her up, and she strove not to sleep again, for fear that

ominous ghastly dream should return. He, on the contrary, dreamt of her sitting watching and smiling by his bedside, as her gentle self had been many a morning; and when she saw him awake (so it fell out in the dream), she smiled still more sweetly, and bending down she kissed him, and then spread out large, soft, white-feathered wings (which in no way surprised her child—he seemed to have known they were there all along), and sailed away through the open window far into the blue sky of a summer's day. Leonard wakened up then, and remembered how far away she really was—far more distant and inaccessible than the beautiful blue sky to which she had betaken herself in his dream—and cried himself to sleep again.

In spite of her absence from her child, which made one great and abiding sorrow, Ruth enjoyed her sea-side visit exceedingly. In the first place, there was the delight of seeing Elizabeth's daily and almost hourly improvement. Then, at the doctor's express orders, there were so few lessons to be done,

that there was time for the long-exploring rambles, which all three delighted in. And when the rain came on and the storms blew, the house with its wild sea views was equally delightful.

It was a large house, built on the summit of a rock, which nearly overhung the shore below; there were, to be sure, a series of zig-zag tacking paths down the face of this rock, but from the house they could not be seen. Old or delicate people would have considered the situation bleak and exposed; indeed, the present proprietor wanted to dispose of it on this very account; but by its present inhabitants, this exposure and bleakness were called by other names, and considered as charms. From every part of the rooms, they saw the grey storms gather on the sea horizon, and put themselves in marching array; and soon the march became a sweep, and the great dome of the heavens was covered with the lurid clouds, between which and the vivid green earth below there seemed to come a purple atmosphere, making the very threatening beautiful; and

by-and-by the house was wrapped in sheets of rain, shutting out sky and sea, and inland view; till, of a sudden, the storm was gone by, and the heavy rain-drops glistened in the sun as they hung on leaf and grass, and the "little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west," and there was a pleasant sound of running waters all abroad.

"Oh! if papa would but buy this house!" exclaimed Elizabeth, after one such storm, which she had watched silently from the very beginning of the "little cloud no bigger than a man's hand."

"Mamma would never like it, I am afraid," said Mary. "She would call our delicious gushes of air, draughts, and think we should catch cold."

"Jemima would be on our side. But how long Mrs. Denbigh is! I hope she was near enough to the post-office when the rain came on!"

Ruth had gone to "the shop" in the little village, about half a mile distant, where all letters were left till fetched. She only expected one, but that one was to tell her of Leonard. She, however, received

two; the unexpected one was from Mr. Bradshaw, and the news it contained was, if possible, a greater surprise than the letter itself. Mr. Bradshaw informed her, that he planned arriving by dinner-time the following Saturday, at Eagle's Crag; and more, that he intended bringing Mr. Donne and one or two other gentlemen with him, to spend the Sunday there! The letter went on to give every possible direction regarding the household preparations. The dinner-hour was fixed to be at six; but, of course, Ruth and the girls would have dined long before. The (professional) cook would arrive the day before, laden with all the provisions that could not be obtained on the spot. Ruth was to engage a waiter from the inn, and this it was that detained her so long. While she sat in the little parlour, awaiting the coming of the landlady, she could not help wondering why Mr. Bradshaw was bringing this strange gentleman to spend two days at Abermouth, and thus giving himself so much trouble and fuss of preparation.



There were so many small reasons that went to make up the large one which had convinced Mr. Bradshaw of the desirableness of this step, that it was not likely that Ruth should guess at one half of them. In the first place, Miss Benson, in the pride and fullness of her heart, had told Mrs. Bradshaw what her brother had told her; how he meant to preach upon the Christian view of the duties involved in political rights; and as, of course, Mrs. Bradshaw had told Mr. Bradshaw, he began to dislike the idea of attending chapel on that Sunday at all; for he had an uncomfortable idea that by the Christian standard—that divine test of the true and pure—bribery would not be altogether approved of; and yet he was tacitly coming round to the understanding that “packets” would be required, for what purpose both he and Mr. Donne were to be supposed to remain ignorant. But it would be very awkward, so near to the time, if he were to be clearly convinced that bribery, however disguised by names and words, was in plain terms a sin. And yet he

knew Mr. Benson had once or twice convinced him against his will of certain things, which he had thenceforward found it impossible to do, without such great uneasiness of mind, that he had left off doing them, which was sadly against his interest. And if Mr. Donne (whom he had intended to take with him to chapel, as fair Dissenting prey) should also become convinced, why the Cranworths would win the day, and he should be the laughing-stock of Eccleston. No! in this one case bribery must be allowed—was allowable; but it was a great pity human nature was so corrupt, and if his member succeeded, he would double his subscription to the schools, in order that the next generation might be taught better. There were various other reasons, which strengthened Mr. Bradshaw in the bright idea of going down to Abermouth for the Sunday; some connected with the out-of-door politics, and some with the domestic. For instance, it had been the plan of the house to have a cold dinner on the Sundays—Mr. Bradshaw had piqued himself on this

strictness—and yet he had an instinctive feeling that Mr. Donne was not quite the man to partake of cold meat for conscience' sake with cheerful indifference to his fare.

Mr. Donne had, in fact, taken the Bradshaw household a little by surprise. Before he came, Mr. Bradshaw had pleased himself with thinking, that more unlikely things had happened than the espousal of his daughter with the member of a small borough. But this pretty airy bubble burst as soon as he saw Mr. Donne; and its very existence was forgotten in less than half an hour, when he felt the quiet, but incontestible difference of rank and standard that there was, in every respect, between his guest and his own family. It was not through any circumstance so palpable, and possibly accidental, as the bringing down a servant, whom Mr. Donne seemed to consider as much a matter of course as a carpet-bag (though the smart gentleman's arrival "fluttered the Volscians in Corioli" considerably more than his gentle-spoken master's). It was nothing

like this ; it was something indescribable—a quiet being at ease, and expecting every one else to be so—an attention to women, which was so habitual as to be unconsciously exercised to those subordinate persons in Mr. Bradshaw's family—a happy choice of simple and expressive words, some of which it must be confessed were slang, but fashionable slang, and that makes all the difference—a measured, graceful way of utterance, with a style of pronunciation quite different to that of Eccleston. All these put together make but a part of the indescribable whole which unconsciously affected Mr. Bradshaw, and established Mr. Donne in his estimation as a creature quite different to any he had seen before, and as most unfit to mate with Jemima. Mr. Hickson, who had appeared as a model of gentlemanly ease before Mr. Donne's arrival, now became vulgar and coarse in Mr. Bradshaw's eyes. And yet, such was the charm of that languid, high-bred manner, that Mr. Bradshaw "cottoned" (as he expressed it to Mr. Farquhar) to his new candidate at once. He

was only afraid lest Mr. Donne was too indifferent to all things under the sun, to care whether he gained or lost the election; but he was reassured, after the first conversation they had together on the subject. Mr. Donne's eye lightened with an eagerness that was almost fierce, though his tones were as musical, and nearly as slow as ever; and when Mr. Bradshaw alluded distantly to "probable expenses" and "packets," Mr. Donne replied,

"Oh, of course! disagreeable necessity! Better speak as little about such things as possible; other people can be found to arrange all the dirty work. Neither you nor I would like to soil our fingers by it, I am sure. Four thousand pounds are in Mr. Pilson's hands, and I shall never inquire what becomes of them; they may, very probably, be absorbed in the law expenses, you know. I shall let it be clearly understood from the hustings, that I most decidedly disapprove of bribery, and leave the rest to Hickson's management. He is accustomed to these sort of things. I am not."

Mr. Bradshaw was rather perplexed by this want

of bustling energy on the part of the new candidate ; and if it had not been for the four thousand pounds aforesaid, would have doubted whether Mr. Donne cared sufficiently for the result of the election. Jemima thought differently. She watched her father's visitor attentively, with something like the curious observation which a naturalist bestows on a new species of animal.

“Do you know what Mr. Donne reminds me of, mamma?” said she, one day, as the two sat at work, while the gentlemen were absent canvassing.

“No! he is not like anybody I ever saw. He quite frightens me, by being so ready to open the door for me if I am going out of the room, and by giving me a chair when I come in. I never saw any one like him. Who is it, Jemima?”

“Not any person — not any human being, mamma,” said Jemima, half smiling. “Do you remember our stopping at Wakefield once, on our way to Scarborough, and there were horse-races going on somewhere, and some of the racers were in the stables at the inn where we dined?”

“Yes! I remember it; but what about that?”

“Why Richard, somehow, knew one of the jockeys, and, as we were coming in from our ramble through the town, this man, or boy, asked us to look at one of the racers he had the charge of.”

“Well, my dear!”

“Well, mamma! Mr. Donne is like that horse!”

“Nonsense, Jemima; you must not say so. I don't know what your father would say, if he heard you likening Mr. Donne to a brute.”

“Brutes are sometimes very beautiful, mamma. I am sure I should think it a compliment to be likened to a race-horse, such as the one we saw. But the thing in which they are alike, is the sort of repressed eagerness in both.”

“Eager! Why, I should say there never was any one cooler than Mr. Donne. Think of the trouble your papá has had this month past, and then remember the slow way in which Mr. Donne moves when he is going out to canvass, and the

low drawling voice in which he questions the people who bring him intelligence. I can see your papa standing by, ready to shake them to get out their news."

"But Mr. Donne's questions are always to the point, and force out the grain without the chaff. And look at him, if any one tells him ill news about the election! Have you never seen a dull red light come into his eyes? That is like my race-horse. Her flesh quivered all over, at certain sounds and noises which had some meaning to her; but she stood quite still, pretty creature! Now, Mr. Donne is just as eager as she was, though he may be too proud to show it. Though he seems so gentle, I almost think he is very headstrong in following out his own will."

"Well! don't call him like a horse again, for I am sure papa would not like it. Do you know, I thought you were going to say he was like little Leonard, when you asked me who he was like."



“Leonard! Oh, mamma, he is not in the least like Leonard. He is twenty times more like my race-horse.”

“Now, my dear Jemima, do be quiet. Your father thinks racing so wrong, that I am sure he would be very seriously displeased if he were to hear you.”

To return to Mr. Bradshaw, and to give one more of his various reasons for wishing to take Mr. Donne to Abermouth. The wealthy Eccleston manufacturer was uncomfortably impressed with an indefinable sense of inferiority to his visitor. It was not in education, for Mr. Bradshaw was a well-educated man; it was not in power, for, if he chose, the present object of Mr. Donne's life might be utterly defeated; it did not arise from anything overbearing in manner, for Mr. Donne was habitually polite and courteous, and was just now anxious to propitiate his host, whom he looked upon as a very useful man. Whatever this sense of inferiority arose from, Mr. Bradshaw was anxious to relieve

himself of it, and imagined that if he could make more display of his wealth his object would be obtained. Now his house in Eccleston was old-fashioned, and ill-calculated to exhibit money's worth. His mode of living, though strained to a high pitch just at this time, he became aware was no more than Mr. Donne was accustomed to every day of his life. The first day at dessert, some remark (some opportune remark, as Mr. Bradshaw in his innocence had thought) was made regarding the price of pine-apples, which was rather exorbitant that year, and Mr. Donne asked Mrs. Bradshaw, with quiet surprise, if they had no pinery, as if to be without a pinery were indeed a depth of pitiable destitution. In fact, Mr. Donne had been born and cradled in all that wealth could purchase, and so had his ancestors before him for so many generations, that refinement and luxury seemed the natural condition of man, and they that dwelt without were in the position of monsters. The absence was noticed; but not the presence.

Now Mr. Bradshaw knew that the house and grounds of Eagle's Crag were exorbitantly dear, and yet he really thought of purchasing them. And as one means of exhibiting his wealth, and so raising himself up to the level of Mr. Donne, he thought that if he could take the latter down to Abermouth, and show him the place for which, "because his little girls had taken a fancy to it," he was willing to give the fancy-price of fourteen thousand pounds, he should at last make those half-shut dreamy eyes open wide, and their owner confess that, in wealth at least, the Eccleston manufacturer stood on a par with him.

All these mingled motives caused the determination which made Ruth sit in the little inn-parlour at Abermouth during the wild storm's passage.

She wondered if she had fulfilled all Mr. Bradshaw's directions. She looked at the letter. Yes! everything was done. And now home with her news, through the wet lane, where the little pools by the roadside reflected the deep blue sky and the

round white clouds with even deeper blue and clearer white ; and the rain-drops hung so thick on the trees, that even a little bird's flight was enough to shake them down in a bright shower as of rain. When she told the news, Mary exclaimed,

“ Oh, how charming ! Then we shall see this new member after all ! ” while Elizabeth added,

“ Yes ! I shall like to do that. But where must we be ? Papa will want the dining-room and this room, and where must we sit ? ”

“ Oh ! ” said Ruth, “ in the dressing-room next to my room. All that your papa wants always, is that you are quiet and out of the way. ”

## CHAPTER X.

SATURDAY came. Torn, ragged clouds were driven across the sky. It was not a becoming day for the scenery, and the little girls regretted it much. First they hoped for a change at twelve o'clock, and then at the afternoon tide-turning. But at neither time did the sun show his face.

“Papa will never buy this dear place,” said Elizabeth, sadly, as she watched the weather. “The sun is everything to it. The sea looks quite leaden to-day, and there is no sparkle on it. And the sands, that were so yellow and sun-speckled on Thursday, are all one dull brown now.”

“Never mind! to-morrow may be better,” said Ruth, cheerily.

“ I wonder what time they will come at ?” inquired Mary.

“ Your papa said they would be at the station at five o'clock. And the landlady at the Swan said it would take them half an hour to get here.”

“ And they are to dine at six ?” asked Elizabeth.

“ Yes,” answered Ruth. “ And I think if we had our teahalf an hour earlier, at half-past four, and then went out for a walk, we should be nicely out of the way just during the bustle of the arrival and dinner; and we could be in the drawing-room ready against your papa came in after dinner.”

“ Oh ! that would be nice,” said they; and tea was ordered accordingly.

The south-westerly wind had dropped, and the clouds were stationary, when they went out on the sands. They dug little holes near the in-coming tide, and made canals to them from the water, and blew the light sea-foam against each other; and then stole on tiptoe near to the groups of grey and white sea-gulls, which despised their caution, flying

softly and slowly away to a little distance as soon as they drew near. And in all this Ruth was as great a child as any. Only she longed for Leonard with a mother's longing, as indeed she did every day, and all hours of the day. By-and-by the clouds thickened yet more, and one or two drops of rain were felt. It was very little, but Ruth feared a shower for her delicate Elizabeth, and besides, the September evening was fast closing in the dark and sunless day. As they turned homewards in the rapidly increasing dusk, they saw three figures on the sand near the rocks, coming in their direction.

“ Papa and Mr. Donne ! ” exclaimed Mary.  
“ Now we shall see him ! ”

“ Which do you make out is him ? ” asked Elizabeth.

“ Oh ! the tall one, to be sure. Don't you see how papa always turns to him, as if he was speaking to him, and not to the other ? ”

“ Who is the other ? ” asked Elizabeth.

“ Mr. Bradshaw said that Mr. Farquhar and Mr. Hickson would come with him. But that is not Mr. Farquhar, I am sure,” said Ruth.

The girls looked at each other, as they always did, when Ruth mentioned Mr. Farquhar’s name; but she was perfectly unconscious both of the look and of the conjectures which gave rise to it.

As soon as the two parties drew near, Mr. Bradshaw called out in his strong voice,

“ Well, my dears ! we found there was an hour before dinner, so we came down upon the sands, and here you are.”

The tone of his voice assured them that he was in a bland and indulgent mood, and the two little girls ran towards him. He kissed them, and shook hands with Ruth; told his companions that these were the little girls who were tempting him to this extravagance of purchasing Eagle’s Crag; and then, rather doubtfully, and because he saw that Mr. Donne expected it, he introduced “My daughters’ governess, Mrs. Denbigh.”



It was growing darker every moment, and it was time they should hasten back to the rocks, which were even now indistinct in the grey haze. Mr. Bradshaw held a hand of each of his daughters, and Ruth walked alongside, the two strange gentlemen being on the outskirts of the party.

Mr. Bradshaw began to give his little girls some home news. He told them that Mr. Farquhar was ill, and could not accompany them; but Jemima and their mamma were quite well.

The gentleman nearest to Ruth spoke to her.

“Are you fond of the sea?” asked he. There was no answer, so he repeated his question in a different form.

“Do you enjoy staying by the sea-side, I should rather ask?”

The reply was “Yes,” rather breathed out in a deep inspiration than spoken in a sound. The sands heaved and trembled beneath Ruth. The figures near her vanished into strange nothingness; the sounds of their voices were as distant sounds in a dream, while the

echo of one voice thrilled through and through. She could have caught at his arm for support, in the awful dizziness which wrapped her up, body and soul. That voice! No! if name, and face, and figure, were all changed, that voice was the same which had touched her girlish heart, which had spoken most tender words of love, which had won, and wrecked her, and which she had last heard in the low mutterings of fever. She dared not look round to see the figure of him who spoke, dark as it was. She knew he was there—she heard him speak in the manner in which he used to address strangers years ago; perhaps she answered him, perhaps she did not—God knew. It seemed as if weights were tied to her feet—as if the steadfast rocks receded—as if time stood still;—it was so long, so terrible, that path across the reeling sand.

At the foot of the rocks they separated. Mr. Bradshaw, afraid lest dinner should cool, preferred the shorter way for himself and his friends. On Elizabeth's account, the girls were to take the longer

and easier path, which wound upwards through a rocky field, where larks' nests abounded, and where wild thyme and heather were now throwing out their sweets to the soft night-air.

The little girls spoke in eager discussion of the strangers. They appealed to Ruth, but Ruth did not answer, and they were too impatient to convince each other to repeat the question. The first little ascent from the sands to the field surmounted, Ruth sat down suddenly, and covered her face with her hands. This was so unusual—their wishes, their good, was so invariably the rule of motion or of rest in their walks—that the girls, suddenly checked, stood silent and affrighted in surprise. They were still more startled when Ruth wailed aloud some inarticulate words.

“Are you not well, dear Mrs. Denbigh?” asked Elizabeth, gently, kneeling down on the grass by Ruth.

She sat facing the west. The low watery twilight was on her face as she took her hands away. So

pale, so haggard, so wild and wandering a look, the girls had never seen on human countenance before.

“Well! what are you doing here with me? You should not be with me,” said she, shaking her head slowly.

They looked at each other.

“You are sadly tired,” said Elizabeth, soothingly. “Come home, and let me help you to bed. I will tell papa you are ill, and ask him to send for a doctor.”

Ruth looked at her, as if she did not understand the meaning of her words. No more she did at first. But by-and-by the dulled brain began to think most vividly and rapidly, and she spoke in a sharp way which deceived the girls into a belief that nothing had been the matter.

“Yes! I was tired. I am tired. Those sands—oh! those sands, those weary, dreadful sands! But that is all over now. Only my heart aches still. Feel how it flutters and beats,” said she, taking Elizabeth’s hand, and holding it to her side. “I am

quite well, though," she continued, reading pity in the child's looks, as she felt the trembling, quivering beat. "We will go straight to the dressing-room, and read a chapter, that will still my heart; and then I'll go to bed, and Mr. Bradshaw will excuse me, I know, this one night. I only ask for one night. Put on your right frocks, dears, and do all you ought to do. But I know you will," said she, bending down to kiss Elizabeth, and then, before she had done so, raising her head abruptly. "You are good and dear girls—God keep you so!"

By a strong effort at self-command, she went onwards at an even pace, neither rushing nor pausing to sob and think. The very regularity of motion calmed her. The front and back doors of the house were on two sides, at right angles with each other. They all shrunk a little from the idea of 'going in at the front door, now that the strange gentlemen were about, and, accordingly, they went through the quiet farm-yard right into the bright, ruddy kitchen, where the servants were dashing

about with the dinner things. It was a contrast in more than colour to the lonely dusky field, which even the little girls perceived; and the noise, the warmth, the very bustle of the servants, were a positive relief to Ruth, and for the time lifted off the heavy press of pent-up passion. A silent house, with moonlit rooms, or with a faint gloom brooding over the apartments, would have been more to be dreaded. Then, she must have given way, and cried out. As it was, she went up the old awkward back stairs, and into the room they were to sit in. There was no candle. Mary volunteered to go down for one; and when she returned she was full of the wonders of preparation in the drawing-room, and ready and eager to dress, so as to take her place there before the gentlemen had finished dinner. But she was struck by the strange paleness of Ruth's face, now that the light fell upon it.

“Stay up here, dear Mrs. Denbigh! We'll tell papa you are tired, and are gone to bed.”

Another time Ruth would have dreaded Mr.

Bradshaw's displeasure; for it was an understood thing that no one was to be ill or tired in his household without leave asked, and cause given and assigned. But she never thought of that now. Her great desire was to hold quiet till she was alone. Quietness it was not—it was rigidity; but she succeeded in being rigid in look and movement, and went through her duties to Elizabeth (who preferred remaining with her up-stairs) with wooden precision. But her heart felt at times like ice, at times like burning fire; always a heavy, heavy weight within her. At last Elizabeth went to bed. Still Ruth dared not think. Mary would come up-stairs soon; and with a strange, sick, shrinking yearning, Ruth awaited her—and the crumbs of intelligence she might drop out about *him*. Ruth's sense of hearing was quickened to miserable intensity as she stood before the chimney-piece, grasping it tight with both hands—gazing into the dying fire, but seeing—not the dead grey embers, or the little sparks of vivid light that ran hither and thither among the

wood-ashes—but an old farm-house, and climbing winding road, and a little golden breezy common, with a rural inn on the hill-top, far, far away. And through the thoughts of the past came the sharp sounds of the present—of three voices, one of which was almost silence, it was so hushed. Indifferent people would only have guessed that Mr. Donne was speaking by the quietness in which the others listened; but Ruth heard the voice and many of the words, though they conveyed no idea to her mind. She was too much stunned even to feel curious to know to what they related. *He* spoke. That was her one fact.

Presently up came Mary, bounding, exultant. Papa had let her stay up one quarter of an hour longer, because Mr. Hickson had asked. Mr. Hickson was so clever! She did not know what to make of Mr. Donne, he seemed such a dawdle. But he was very handsome. Had Ruth seen him? Oh, no! She could not, it was so dark on those stupid sands. Well, never mind, she would see him to-morrow.



She *must* be well to-morrow. Papa seemed a good deal put out that neither she nor Elizabeth were in the drawing-room to-night; and his last words were, "Tell Mrs. Denbigh I hope" (and papa's "hopes" always meant "expect") "she will be able to make breakfast at nine o'clock;" and then she would see Mr. Donne.

That was all Ruth heard about him. She went with Mary into her bedroom, helped her to undress, and put the candle out. At length she was alone in her own room! At length!

But the tension did not give way immediately. She fastened her door, and threw open the window, cold and threatening as was the night. She tore off her gown; she put her hair back from her heated face. It seemed now as if she could not think—as if thought and emotion had been repressed so sternly that they would not come to relieve her stupified brain. Till all at once, like a flash of lightning, her life, past and present, was revealed to her to its minutest detail. And when she saw her very present

“ Now,” the strange confusion of agony was too great to be borne, and she cried aloud. Then she was quite dead, and listened as to the sound of galloping armies.

“ If I might see him! If I might see him! If I might just ask him why he left me; if I had vexed him in any way; it was so strange—so cruel! It was not him, it was his mother,” said she, almost fiercely, as if answering herself. “ Oh, God! but he might have found me out before this,” she continued, sadly. “ He did not care for me, as I did for him. He did not care for me at all,” she went on wildly and sharply. “ He did me cruel harm. I can never again lift up my face in innocence. They think I have forgotten all, because I do not speak. Oh, darling love! am I talking against you?” asked she, tenderly. “ I am so torn and perplexed! You, who are the father of my child!”

But that very circumstance, full of such tender meaning in many cases, threw a new light into her

mind. It changed her from the woman into the mother—the stern guardian of her child. She was still for a time, thinking. Then she began again, but in a low, deep voice,

“He left me. He might have been hurried off, but he might have inquired—he might have learnt, and explained. He left me to bear the burden and the shame; and never cared to learn, as he might have done, of Leonard’s birth. He has no love for his child, and I will have no love for him.”

She raised her voice while uttering this determination, and then, feeling her own weakness, she moaned out, “Alas! alas!”

And then she started up, for all this time she had been rocking herself backwards and forwards as she sat on the ground, and began to pace the room with hurried steps.

“What am I thinking of? Where am I? I who have been praying these years and years to be worthy to be Leonard’s mother. My God! what

a depth of sin is in my heart! Why, the old time would be as white as snow to what it would be now, if I sought him out, and prayed for the explanation, which should re-establish him in my heart. I who have striven (or made a mock of trying) to learn God's holy will, in order to bring up Leonard into the full strength of a Christian—I who have taught his sweet innocent lips to pray 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;' and yet, somehow, I've been longing to give him to his father, who is—who is——" she almost choked, till at last she cried sharp out, "Oh, my God! I do believe Leonard's father is a bad man, and yet, oh! pitiful God, I love him; I cannot forget—I cannot!"

She threw her body half out of the window into the cold night air. The wind was rising, and came in great gusts. The rain beat down on her. It did her good. A still, calm night would not have soothed her as this did. The wild tattered clouds,

hurrying past the moon, gave her a foolish kind of pleasure that almost made her smile a vacant smile. The blast-driven rain came on her again, and drenched her hair through and through. The words "stormy wind fulfilling his word" came into her mind.

She sat down on the floor. This time her hands were clasped round her knees. The uneasy rocking motion was stilled.

"I wonder if my darling is frightened with this blustering, noisy wind. I wonder if he is awake."

And then her thoughts went back to the various times of old, when, affrighted by the weather—sounds so mysterious in the night—he had crept into her bed and clung to her, and she had soothed him, and sweetly awed him into stillness and childlike faith, by telling him of the goodness and power of God.

Of a sudden, she crept to a chair, and there knelt as in the very presence of God, hiding her face, at first not speaking a word (for did He not

know her heart), but by-and-by moaning out, amid her sobs and tears (and now for the first time she wept),

“Oh, my God, help me, for I am very weak. My God! I pray thee be my rock and my strong fortress, for I of myself am nothing. If I ask in His name, thou wilt give it me. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray for strength to do Thy will!”

She could not think, or, indeed, remember anything but that she was weak, and God was strong, and “a very present help in time of trouble;” and the wind rose yet higher, and the house shook and vibrated as, in measured time, the great and terrible gusts came from the four quarters of the heavens and blew around it, dying away in the distance with loud and unearthly wails, which were not utterly still before the sound of the coming blast was heard like the trumpets of the vanguard of the Prince of Air.

There was a knock at the bedroom door—a little gentle knock, and a soft, child’s voice.

“Mrs. Denbigh, may I come in, please? I am so frightened!”

It was Elizabeth. Ruth calmed her passionate breathing by one hasty draught of water, and opened the door to the timid girl.

“Oh, Mrs. Denbigh! did you ever hear such a night? I am so frightened! and Mary sleeps so sound.”

Ruth was too much shaken to be able to speak all at once; but she took Elizabeth in her arms to reassure her. Elizabeth stood back.

“Why, how wet you are, Mrs. Denbigh! and there’s the window open, I do believe! Oh, how cold it is!” said she, shivering.

“Get into my bed, dear!” said Ruth.

“But do come too! The candle gives such a strange light with that long wick, and, somehow, your face does not look like you. Please, put the candle out, and come to bed. I am so frightened, and it seems as if I should be safer if you were by me.”

Ruth shut the window, and went to bed. Eliza-

beth was all shivering and quaking. To soothe her, Ruth made a great effort; and spoke of Leonard and his fears, and, in a low hesitating voice, she spoke of God's tender mercy, but very humbly, for she feared lest Elizabeth should think her better and holier than she was. The little girl was soon asleep, her fears forgotten; and Ruth, worn out by passionate emotion, and obliged to be still for fear of awaking her bedfellow, went off into a short slumber, through the depths of which the echoes of her waking sobs quivered up.

When she awoke, the grey light of autumnal dawn was in the room. Elizabeth slept on; but Ruth heard the servants about, and the early farm-yard sounds. After she had recovered from the shock of consciousness and recollection, she collected her thoughts with a stern calmness. He was here. In a few hours she must meet him. There was no escape, except through subterfuges and contrivances that were both false and cowardly. How it would all turn out she could not say, or even guess. But



of one thing she was clear, and to one thing she would hold fast; that was, that, come what might, she would obey God's law, and, be the end of all what it might, she would say "Thy will be done!" She only asked for strength enough to do this when the time came. How the time would come—what speech or action would be requisite on her part, she did not know—she did not even try to conjecture, She left that in His hands.

She was icy cold, but very calm when the breakfast-bell rang. She went down immediately; because she felt that there was less chance of a recognition, if she were already at her place behind the tea-urn, and busied with the cups, than if she came in after all were settled. Her heart seemed to stand still, but she felt almost a strange exultant sense of power over herself. She felt, rather than saw, that he was not there. Mr. Bradshaw and Mr. Hickson were, and so busy talking election-politics that they did not interrupt their conversation even when they bowed to her. Her pupils sat one on each side of her.

Before they were quite settled, and while the other two gentlemen yet hung over the fire, Mr. Donne came in. Ruth felt as if that moment was like death. She had a kind of desire to make some sharp sound, to relieve a choking sensation, but it was over in an instant, and she sat on very composed and silent—to all outward appearance, the very model of a governess who knew her place. And by-and-by she felt strangely at ease in her sense of power. She could even listen to what was being said. She had never dared as yet to look at Mr. Donne, though her heart burnt to see him once again. He sounded changed. The voice had lost its fresh and youthful eagerness of tone, though in peculiarity of modulation it was the same. It could never be mistaken for the voice of another person. There was a good deal said at that breakfast, for none seemed inclined to hurry, although it was Sunday morning. Ruth was compelled to sit there, and it was good for her that she did. That half hour seemed to separate the present Mr. Donne

very effectively, from her imagination of what Mr. Bellingham had been. She was no analyser; she hardly even had learnt to notice character; but she felt there was some strange difference between the people she had lived with lately and the man who now leant back in his chair, listening in a careless manner to the conversation, but never joining in, or expressing any interest in it, unless it somewhere, or somehow, touched him himself. Now, Mr. Bradshaw always threw himself into a subject; it might be in a pompous, dogmatic sort of way, but he did do it, whether it related to himself or not; and it was part of Mr. Hickson's trade to assume an interest if he felt it not. But Mr. Donne did neither the one nor the other. When the other two were talking of many of the topics of the day, he put his glass in his eye the better to examine into the exact nature of a cold game-pie at the other side of the table. Suddenly Ruth felt that his attention was caught by her. Until now, seeing his short-sightedness, she had believed herself safe; now her

face flushed with a painful, miserable blush. But, in an instant, she was strong and quiet. She looked up straight at his face; and, as if this action took him aback, he dropped his glass, and began eating away with great diligence. She had seen him. He was changed, she knew not how. In fact, the expression, which had been only occasional formerly, when his worse self predominated, had become permanent. He looked restless and dissatisfied. But he was very handsome still; and her quick eye had recognised, with a sort of strange pride, that the eyes and mouth were like Leonard's. Although perplexed by the straightforward brave look she had sent right at him, he was not entirely baffled. He thought this Mrs. Denbigh was certainly like poor Ruth; but this woman was far handsomer. Her face was positively Greek; and then such a proud, superb turn of her head; quite queenly! A governess in Mr. Bradshaw's family! Why, she might be a Percy or a Howard for the grandeur of her grace! Poor Ruth! This woman's hair was darker, though;

and she had less colour; altogether a more refined-looking person. Poor Ruth! and, for the first time for several years, he wondered what had become of her; though, of course, there was but one thing that could have happened, and perhaps it was as well he did not know her end, for most likely it would have made him very uncomfortable. He leant back in his chair, and, unobserved (for he would not have thought it gentlemanly to look so fixedly at her, if she or any one noticed him), he put up his glass again. She was speaking to one of her pupils, and did not see him.

By Jove! it must be she, though! There were little dimples came out about the mouth as she spoke, just like those he used to admire so much in Ruth, and which he had never seen in any one else—the sunshine without the positive movement of a smile. The longer he looked the more he was convinced; and it was with a jerk that he recovered himself enough to answer Mr. Bradshaw's question, whether he wished to go to church or not.

“Church? how far—a mile? No, I think I shall perform my devotions at home to-day.”

He absolutely felt jealous when Mr. Hickson sprang up to open the door, as Ruth and her pupils left the room. He was pleased to feel jealous again. He had been really afraid he was too much “used-up” for such sensations. But Hickson must keep his place. What he was paid for, was doing the talking to the electors, not paying attention to the ladies in their families. Mr. Donne had noticed that Mr. Hickson had tried to be gallant to Miss Bradshaw; let him, if he liked; but let him beware how he behaved to this fair creature, Ruth or no Ruth. It certainly was Ruth; only how the devil had she played her cards so well as to be the governess—the respected governess, in such a family as Mr. Bradshaw’s?

Mr. Donne’s movements were evidently to be the guide of Mr. Hickson’s. Mr. Bradshaw always disliked going to church, partly from principle, partly because he never could find the places in the Prayer-

book. Mr. Donne was in the drawing-room as Mary came down ready equipped; he was turning over the leaves of the large and handsome Bible. Seeing Mary, he was struck with a new idea.

“How singular it is,” said he, “that the name of Ruth is so seldom chosen by those good people who go to the Bible before they christen their children. It is a very pretty name, I think.”

Mr. Bradshaw looked up. “Why, Mary!” said he, “is not that Mrs. Denbigh’s name?”

“Yes, papa,” replied Mary, eagerly; “and I know two other Ruths; there’s Ruth Brown here, and Ruth Macartney at Eccleston.”

“And I have an aunt called Ruth, Mr. Donne! I don’t think your observation holds good. Besides my daughter’s governess, I know three other Ruths.”

“Oh! I have no doubt I was wrong. It was just a speech of which one perceives the folly the moment it is made.”

But, secretly, he rejoiced with a fierce joy over the success of his device.

Elizabeth came to summon Mary.

Ruth was glad when she got into the open air, and away from the house. Two hours were gone and over. Two out of a day, a day and a half—for it might be late on Monday morning before the Eccleston party returned.

She felt weak and trembling in body, but strong in power over herself. They had left the house in good time for church, so they needed not to hurry; and they went leisurely along the road, now and then passing some country person whom they knew, and with whom they exchanged a kindly placid greeting. But presently, to Ruth's dismay, she heard a step behind, coming at a rapid pace, a peculiar clank of rather high-heeled boots, which gave a springy sound to the walk, that she had known well long ago. It was like a nightmare, where the Evil dreaded is never avoided, never completely shunned,



but is by one's side at the very moment of triumph in escape. There he was by her side; and there was still a quarter of a mile intervening between her and the church; but even yet she trusted that he had not recognised her.

“ I have changed my mind, you see,” said he, quietly. “ I have some curiosity to see the architecture of the church; some of these old country churches have singular bits about them. Mr. Bradshaw kindly directed me part of the way, but I was so much puzzled by ‘ turns to the right,’ and ‘ turns to the left,’ that I was quite glad to espy your party.”

That speech required no positive answer of any kind; and no answer did it receive. He had not expected a reply. He knew, if she were Ruth, she could not answer any indifferent words of his; and her silence made him more certain of her identity with the lady by his side.

“ The scenery here is of a kind new to me; neither grand, wild, nor yet marked by high cul-

tivation; and yet it has great charms. It reminds me of some parts of Wales." He breathed deeply, and then added, "You have been in Wales, I believe?"

He spoke low; almost in a whisper. The little church-bell began to call the lagging people with its quick sharp summons. Ruth writhed in body and spirit, but struggled on. The church-door would be gained at last; and in that holy place she would find peace.

He repeated in a louder tone, so as to compel an answer in order to conceal her agitation from the girls.

"Have you never been in Wales?" He used "never," instead of "ever," and laid the emphasis on that word, in order to mark his meaning to Ruth, and Ruth only. But he drove her to bay.

"I have been in Wales, sir," she replied, in a calm, grave tone. "I was there many years ago. Events took place there, which contribute to make the recollections of that time most miserable to me.

I shall be obliged to you, sir, if you will make no further reference to it."

The little girls wondered how Mrs. Denbigh could speak in such a tone of quiet authority to Mr. Donne, who was almost a member of Parliament. But they settled that her husband must have died in Wales, and, of course, that would make the recollection of the country "most miserable," as she said.

Mr. Donne did not dislike the answer, and he positively admired the dignity with which she spoke. His leaving her as he did, must have made her very miserable; and he liked the pride that made her retain her indignation, until he could speak to her in private, and explain away a good deal of what she might complain of with some justice.

The church was reached. They all went up the middle aisle into the Eagle's Crag pew. He followed them in, entered himself, and shut the door. Ruth's heart sank as she saw him there; just oppo-

site to her ; coming between her and the clergyman who was to read out the word of God. It was merciless—it was cruel to haunt her there. She durst not lift her eyes to the bright eastern light—she could not see how peacefully the marble images of the dead lay on their tombs, for he was between her and all Light and Peace. She knew that his look was on her ; that he never turned his glance away. She could not join in the prayer for the remission of sins while he was there, for his very presence seemed as a sign that their stain would never be washed out of her life. But, although goaded and chafed by her thoughts and recollections, she kept very still. No sign of emotion, no flush of colour was on her face, as he looked at her. Elizabeth could not find her place, and then Ruth breathed once, long and deeply, as she moved up the pew, and out of the straight burning glance of those eyes of evil meaning. When they sat down for the reading of the first lesson, Ruth turned the corner of the seat so as no longer to be

opposite to him. She could not listen. The words seemed to be uttered in some world far away, from which she was exiled and cast out; their sound, and yet more their meaning, was dim and distant. But in this extreme tension of mind to hold in her bewildered agony, it so happened that one of her senses was preternaturally acute. While all the church and the people swam in misty haze, one point in a dark corner grew clearer and clearer till she saw (what, at another time she could not have discerned at all) a face—a gargoyle I think they call it—at the end of the arch next to the narrowing of the nave into the chancel, and in the shadow of that contraction. The face was beautiful in feature (the next to it was a grinning monkey), but it was not the features that were the most striking part. There was a half-open mouth, not in any way distorted out of its exquisite beauty by the intense expression of suffering it conveyed. Any distortion of the face by mental agony, implies that a struggle with circum-

stance is going on. But in this face, if such struggle had been, it was over now. Circumstance had conquered; and there was no hope from mortal endeavour, or help from mortal creature to be had. But the eyes looked onward and upward to the "Hills from whence cometh our help." And though the parted lips seemed ready to quiver with agony, yet the expression of the whole face, owing to these strange, stony, and yet spiritual eyes, was high and consoling. If mortal gaze had never sought its meaning before, in the deep shadow where it had been placed long centuries ago, yet Ruth's did now. Who could have imagined such a look? Who could have witnessed—perhaps felt—such infinite sorrow, and yet dared to lift it up by Faith into a peace so pure? Or was it a mere conception? If so, what a soul the unknown carver must have had! for creator and handicraftsman must have been one; no two minds could have been in such perfect harmony. Whatever it was—however it came there—imagineer, carver, sufferer,

all were long passed away. Human art was ended — human life done — human suffering over ; but this remained ; it stilled Ruth's beating heart to look on it. She grew still enough to hear words, which have come to many in their time of need, and awed them in the presence of the extremest suffering that the hushed world has ever heard of.

The second lesson for the morning of the 25th of September, is the 26th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.

And when they prayed again, Ruth's tongue was unloosed, and she also could pray, in His name, who underwent the agony in the garden.

As they came out of church, there was a little pause and gathering at the door. It had begun to rain ; those who had umbrellas were putting them up ; those who had not were regretting, and wondering how long it would last. Standing for a moment, impeded by the people who were thus collected under the porch, Ruth heard a voice close to her say, very low but very distinctly,

“ I have much to say to you—much to explain. I entreat you to give me the opportunity.”

Ruth did not reply. She would not acknowledge that she heard; but she trembled nevertheless, for the well-remembered voice was low and soft, and had yet its power to thrill. She earnestly desired to know why and how he had left her. It appeared to her, as if that knowledge could alone give her a relief from the restless wondering that distracted her mind, and that one explanation could do no harm.

“ *No!*” the higher spirit made answer; “ *it must not be.*”

Ruth and the girls had each an umbrella. She turned to Mary, and said,

“ Mary, give your umbrella to Mr. Donne, and come under mine.” Her way of speaking was short and decided; she was compressing her meaning into as few words as possible. The little girls obeyed in silence. As they went first through the church-yard stile, Mr. Donne spoke again.



“ You are unforgiving,” said he. “ I only ask you to hear me. I have a right to be heard, Ruth ! I won’t believe you are so much changed, as not to listen to me when I entreat.”

He spoke in a tone of soft complaint. But he himself had done much to destroy the illusion which had hung about his memory for years, whenever Ruth had allowed herself to think of it. Besides which, during the time of her residence in the Benson family, her feeling of what people ought to be had been unconsciously raised and refined; and Mr. Donne, even while she had to struggle against the force of past recollections, repelled her so much by what he was at present, that every speech of his, every minute they were together, served to make her path more and more easy to follow. His voice retained something of its former influence. When he spoke, without her seeing him, she could not help remembering former days.

She did not answer this last speech any more than the first. She saw clearly, that, putting aside

all thought as to the character of their former relationship, it had been dissolved by his will—his act and deed; and that, therefore, the power to refuse any further intercourse whatsoever remained with her.

It sometimes seems a little strange how, after having earnestly prayed to be delivered from temptation, and having given ourselves with shut eyes into God's hand, from that time every thought, every outward influence, every acknowledged law of life, seems to lead us on from strength to strength. It seems strange sometimes, because we notice the coincidence; but it is the natural, unavoidable consequence of all, truth and goodness being one and the same, and therefore carried out in every circumstance, external and internal, of God's creation.

When Mr. Donne saw that Ruth would not answer him, he became only the more determined that she should hear what he had to say. What that was he did not exactly know. The whole affair was most mysterious and piquant.

The umbrella protected Ruth from more than the rain on that walk homewards, for under its shelter she could not be spoken to unheard. She had not rightly understood at what time she and the girls were to dine. From the gathering at meal-times she must not shrink. She must show no sign of weakness. But, oh! the relief, after that walk, to sit in her own room, locked up, so that neither Mary or Elizabeth could come by surprise, and to let her weary frame (weary with being so long braced up to rigidity and stiff quiet) fall into a chair anyhow—all helpless, nerveless, motionless, as if the very ones had melted out of her!

The peaceful rest which her mind took was in thinking of Leonard. She dared not look before or behind, but she could see him well at present. She brooded over the thought of him, till she dreaded his father more and more. By the light of her child's purity and innocence, she saw evil clearly, and yet more clearly. She thought that, if Leonard ever came

to know the nature of his birth, she had nothing for it but to die out of his sight. He could never know—human heart could never know, her ignorant innocence, and all the small circumstances which had impelled her onwards. But God knew. And if Leonard heard of his mother's error, why nothing remained but death; for she felt, then, as if she had it in her power to die innocently out of such future agony; but that escape is not so easy. Suddenly a fresh thought came, and she prayed that, through whatever suffering, she might be purified. Whatever trials, woes, measureless pangs, God might see fit to chastise her with, she would not shrink, if only at last she might come into His presence in Heaven. Alas! the shrinking from suffering we cannot help. That part of her prayer was vain. And as for the rest, was not the sure justice of His law finding her out even now? His laws once broken, His justice and the very nature of those laws bring the immutable retribution; but if we

turn penitently to Him, He enables us to bear our punishment with a meek and docile heart, "for His mercy endureth for ever."

Mr. Bradshaw had felt himself rather wanting in proper attention to his guest, inasmuch as he had been unable, all in a minute, to comprehend Mr. Donne's rapid change of purpose; and, before it had entered into his mind that, notwithstanding the distance of the church, Mr. Donne was going thither, that gentleman was out of the sight, and far out of the reach, of his burly host. But though the latter had so far neglected the duties of hospitality as to allow his visitor to sit in the Eagle's Crag pew with no other guard of honour than the children and the governess, Mr. Bradshaw determined to make up for it by extra attention during the remainder of the day. Accordingly he never left Mr. Donne. Whatever wish that gentleman expressed, it was the study of his host to gratify. Did he hint at the pleasure which a walk in such beautiful scenery would give him, Mr. Bradshaw was will-

ing to accompany him, although at Eccleston it was a principle with him not to take any walks for pleasure on a Sunday. When Mr. Donne turned round, and recollected letters which must be written, and which would compel him to stay at home, Mr. Bradshaw instantly gave up the walk, and remained at hand, ready to furnish him with any writing materials which could be wanted, and which were not laid out in the half-furnished house. Nobody knew where Mr. Hickson was all this time. He had sauntered out after Mr. Donne, when the latter set off for church, and he had never returned. Mr. Donne kept wondering if he could have met Ruth—if, in fact, she had gone out with her pupils, now that the afternoon had cleared up. This uneasy wonder, and a few mental imprecations on his host's polite attention, together with the letter-writing pretence, passed away the afternoon—the longest afternoon he had ever spent; and of weariness he had had his share. Lunch was lingering in the dining-room, left there for the truant Mr. Hickson;

but of the children or Ruth there was no sign. He ventured on a distant inquiry as to their whereabouts.

“They dine early; they are gone to church again. Mrs. Denbigh was a member of the Establishment once; and, though she attends chapel at home, she seems glad to have an opportunity of going to church.”

Mr. Donne was on the point of asking some further questions about “Mrs. Denbigh,” when Mr. Hickson came in, loud-spoken, cheerful, hungry, and as ready to talk about his ramble, and the way in which he had lost and found himself, as he was about everything else. He knew how to dress up the commonest occurrence with a little exaggeration, a few puns, and a happy quotation or two, so as to make it sound very agreeable. He could read faces, and saw that he had been missed; both host and visitor looked moped to death. He determined to devote himself to their amusement

during the remainder of the day, for he had really lost himself, and felt that he had been away too long on a dull Sunday, when people were apt to get hypped if not well amused.

“It is really a shame to be in-doors in such a place. Rain? yes, it rained some hours ago, but now it is splendid weather. I feel myself quite qualified for guide, I assure you. I can show you all the beauties of the neighbourhood, and throw in a bog and a nest of vipers to boot.”

Mr. Donne languidly assented to this proposal of going out, and then he became restless until Mr. Hickson had eaten a hasty lunch, for he hoped to meet Ruth on the way from church, to be near her, and watch her, though he might not be able to speak to her. To have the slow hours roll away—to know he must leave the next day—and yet, so close to her, not to be seeing her—was more than he could bear. In an impetuous kind of way, he disregarded all Mr. Hickson’s offers of guidance to lovely views, and turned a deaf ear to Mr. Bradshaw’s expressed



wish of showing him the land belonging to the house ("very little for fourteen thousand pounds"), and set off wilfully on the road leading to the church, from which, he averred, he had seen a view which nothing else about the place could equal.

They met the country people dropping homewards. No Ruth was there. She and her pupils had returned by the field-way, as Mr. Bradshaw informed his guests at dinner-time. Mr. Donne was very captious all through dinner. He thought it never would be over, and cursed Hickson's interminable stories, which were told on purpose to amuse him. His heart gave a fierce bound when he saw her in the drawing-room with the little girls.

She was reading to them—with how sick and trembling a heart, no words can tell. But she could master and keep down outward signs of her emotion. An hour more to-night (part of which was to be spent in family prayer, and all in the safety of company), another hour in the morning (when all

would be engaged in the bustle of departure)—if, during this short space of time, she could not avoid speaking to him, she could at least keep him at such a distance as to make him feel that henceforward her world and his belonged to separate systems, wide as the heavens apart.

By degrees she felt that he was drawing near to where she stood. He was by the table examining the books that lay upon it. Mary and Elizabeth drew off a little space, awe-stricken by the future member for Eccleston. As he bent his head over a book, he said, “I implore you ; five minutes alone.”

The little girls could not hear ; but Ruth, hemmed in so that no escape was possible, did hear.

She took sudden courage, and said, in a clear voice,

“Will you read the whole passage aloud? I do not remember it.”

Mr. Hickson, hovering at no great distance, heard these words, and drew near to second Mrs. Denbigh's

request. Mr. Bradshaw, who was very sleepy after his unusually late dinner, and longing for bedtime, joined in the request, for it would save the necessity for making talk, and he might, perhaps, get in a nap, undisturbed and unnoticed, before the servants came in to prayers.

Mr. Donne was caught; he was obliged to read aloud, although he did not know what he was reading. In the middle of some sentence, the door opened, a rush of servants came in, and Mr. Bradshaw became particularly wide awake in an instant, and read them a long sermon with great emphasis and unction, winding up with a prayer almost as long.

Ruth sat with her head drooping, more from exhaustion after a season of effort than because she shunned Mr. Donne's looks. He had so lost his power over her—his power, which had stirred her so deeply the night before—that, except as one knowing her error and her shame, and making a cruel use of such knowledge, she had quite separated him

from the idol of her youth. And yet, for the sake of that first and only love, she would gladly have known what explanation he could offer to account for leaving her. It would have been something gained to her own self-respect, if she had learnt that he was not then, as she felt him to be now, cold and egotistical, caring for no one and nothing but what related to himself.

Home, and Leonard—how strangely peaceful the two seemed! Oh, for the rest that a dream about Leonard would bring!

Mary and Elizabeth went to bed immediately after prayers, and Ruth accompanied them. It was planned that the gentlemen should leave early the next morning. They were to breakfast half an hour sooner, to catch the railway train; and this by Mr. Donne's own arrangement, who had been as eager about his canvassing, the week before, as it was possible for him to be, but who now wished Eccleston and the Dissenting interest therein very fervently at the devil.

Just as the carriage came round, Mr. Bradshaw turned to Ruth: "Any message for Leonard beyond love, which is a matter of course?"

Ruth gasped—for she saw Mr. Donne catch at the name; she did not guess the sudden sharp jealousy called out by the idea that Leonard was a grown-up man.

"Who is Leonard?" said he, to the little girl standing by him; he did not know which she was.

"Mrs. Denbigh's little boy," answered Mary.

Under some pretence or other, he drew near to Ruth; and in that low voice, which she had learnt to loathe, he said,

"Our child!"

By the white misery that turned her face to stone—by the wild terror in her imploring eyes—by the gasping breath, which came out as the carriage drove away—he knew that he had seized the spell to make her listen at last.

## CHAPTER XI.

“HE will take him away from me. He will take the child from me.”

These words rang like a tolling bell through Ruth's head. It seemed to her that her doom was certain. Leonard would be taken from her! She had a firm conviction—not the less firm because she knew not on what it was based—that a child, whether legitimate or not, belonged of legal right to the father. And Leonard, of all children was the prince and monarch. Every man's heart would long to call Leonard “Child!” She had been too strongly taxed to have much power left her to reason coolly and dispassionately, just then, even if she had been with any one who could furnish her with information from which to draw correct conclusions. The

one thought haunted her night and day. "He will take my child away from me!" In her dreams she saw Leonard borne away into some dim land, to which she could not follow. Sometimes he sat in a swiftly-moving carriage, at his father's side, and smiled on her as he passed by, as if going to promised pleasure. At another time, he was struggling to return to her; stretching out his little arms, and crying to her for the help she could not give. How she got through the days, she did not know; her body moved about and habitually acted, but her spirit was with her child. She thought often of writing and warning Mr. Benson of Leonard's danger: but then she shrank from recurring to circumstances, all mention of which had ceased years ago; the very recollection of which seemed buried deep for ever. Besides, she feared occasioning discord or commotion in the quiet circle in which she lived. Mr. Benson's deep anger against her betrayer had been shown too clearly in the old time to allow her to think that he would keep it down without

expression now. He would cease to do anything to forward his election; he would oppose him as much as he could; and Mr. Bradshaw would be angry, and a storm would arise,' from the bare thought of which Ruth shrank with the cowardliness of a person thoroughly worn out with late contest. She was bodily wearied with her spiritual buffeting.

One morning, three or four days after their departure, she received a letter from Miss Benson. She could not open it at first, and put it on one side, clenching her hand over it all the time. At last she tore it open. Leonard was safe as yet. There were a few lines in his great round hand, speaking of events no larger than the loss of a beautiful "alley." There was a sheet from Miss Benson. She always wrote letters in the manner of a diary. "Monday we did so-and-so; Tuesday, so-and-so, &c." Ruth glanced rapidly down the page. Yes, here it was! Sick, fluttering heart, be still!

"In the middle of the damsons, when they were



just on the fire, there was a knock at the door. My brother was out, and Sally was washing up, and I was stirring the preserve with my great apron and bib on; so I bade Leonard come in from the garden, and open the door. But I would have washed his face first, if I had known who it was! It was Mr. Bradshaw, and the Mr. Donne that they hope to send up to the House of Commons, as member of Parliament for Eccleston, and another gentleman, whose name I never heard. They had come canvassing; and when they found my brother was out, they asked Leonard if they could see me. The child said 'Yes! if I could leave the damsons;' and straightway came to call me, leaving them standing in the passage. I whipped off my apron, and took Leonard by the hand, for I fancied I should feel less awkward if he was with me, and then I went and asked them all into the study, for I thought I should like them to see how many books Thurstan had got. Then they began talking politics at me in a very polite manner, only I could not

make head or tail of what they meant; and Mr. Donne took a deal of notice of Leonard, and called him to him; and I am sure he noticed what a noble, handsome boy he was, though his face was very brown and red, and hot with digging, and his curls all tangled. Leonard talked back as if he had known him all his life, till, I think, Mr. Bradshaw thought he was making too much noise, and bid him remember he ought to be seen, not heard. So he stood as still and stiff as a soldier, close to Mr. Donne; and as I could not help looking at the two, and thinking how handsome they both were in their different ways, I could not tell Thurstan half the messages the gentlemen left for him. But there was one thing more I must tell you, though I said I would not. When Mr. Donne was talking to Leonard, he took off his watch and chain and put it round the boy's neck, who was pleased enough, you may be sure. I bade him give it back to the gentleman, when they were all going away; and I was quite surprised, and very uncomfortable, when

Mr. Donne said he had given it to Leonard, and that he was to keep it for his own. I could see Mr. Bradshaw was annyed, and he and the other gentleman spoke to Mr. Donne, and I heard them say, 'too barefaced;' and I shall never forget Mr. Donne's proud, stubborn look back at them, nor his way of saying, 'I allow no one to interfere with what I choose to do with my own.' And he looked so haughty and displeased, I durst say nothing at the time. But when I told Thurstan, he was very grieved and angry; and said he had heard that our party were bribing, but that he never could have thought they would have tried to do it at his house. Thurstan is very much out of spirits about this election altogether; and, indeed, it does make sad work up and down the town. However, he sent back the watch with a letter to Mr. Bradshaw; and Leonard was very good about it, so I gave him a taste of the new damson-preserve on his bread for supper."

Although a stranger might have considered this

letter wearisome from the multiplicity of the details, Ruth craved greedily after more. What had Mr. Donne said to Leonard? Had Leonard liked his new acquaintance? Were they likely to meet again? After wondering and wondering over these points, Ruth composed herself by the hope that in a day or two she should hear again; and to secure this end, she answered the letters by return of post. That was on Thursday. On Friday she had another letter, in a strange hand. It was from Mr. Donne. No name, no initials were given. If it had fallen into another person's hands, they could not have recognised the writer, nor guessed to whom it was sent. It contained simply these words:

“ For our child's sake, and in his name, I summon you to appoint a place where I can speak, and you can listen, undisturbed. The time must be on Sunday; the limit of distance may be the circumference of your power of walking. My words may be commands, but my fond heart entreats.

More I shall not say now, but, remember! your boy's welfare depends on your acceding to this request. Address B. D., Post-office, Eccleston."

Ruth did not attempt to answer this letter till the last five minutes before the post went out. She could not decide until forced to it. Either way she dreaded. She was very nearly leaving the letter altogether unanswered. But suddenly she resolved she would know all, the best, the worst. No cowardly dread of herself, or of others, should make her neglect aught that came to her in her child's name. She took up a pen and wrote:

"The sands below the rocks, where we met you the other night. Time, afternoon church."

Sunday came.

"I shall not go to church this afternoon. You know the way, of course; and I can trust you to go steadily by yourselves."

When they came to kiss her before leaving her, according to their fond wont, they were struck by the coldness of her face and lips.

“Are you not well, dear Mrs. Denbigh? How cold you are!”

“Yes, darling! I am well;” and tears sprang into her eyes as she looked at their anxious little faces. “Go now, dears. Five o’clock will soon be here, and then we will have tea.”

“And that will warm you!” said they, leaving the room.

“And then it will be over,” she murmured—  
“over.”

It never came into her head to watch the girls, as they disappeared down the lane on their way to church. She knew them too well to distrust their doing what they were told. She sat still, her head bowed on her arms for a few minutes, and then rose up and went to put on her walking things. Some thoughts impelled her to sudden haste. She crossed the field by the side of the house, ran down the steep and rocky path, and was carried by the impetus of her descent far out on the level sands—but not far enough for her intent. Without looking

to the right hand or to the left, where comers might be seen, she went forwards to the black posts, which, rising above the heaving waters, marked where the fishermen's nets were laid. She went straight towards this place, and hardly stinted her pace even where the wet sands were glittering with the receding waves. Once there, she turned round, and in a darting glance, saw that as yet no one was near. She was perhaps half a mile or more from the grey silvery rocks, which sloped away into brown moorland, interspersed with a field here and there of golden, waving corn. Behind were purple hills, with sharp, clear outlines, touching the sky. A little on one side from where she stood, she saw the white cottages and houses which formed the village of Abermouth, scattered up and down, and, on a windy hill, about a mile inland, she saw the little grey church, where even now many were worshipping in peace.

“Pray for me!” she sighed out, as this object caught her eye.

And now, close under the heathery fields, where they fell softly down and touched the sands, she saw a figure moving in the direction of the great shadow made by the rocks—going towards the very point where the path from Eagle's Crag came down to the shore.

“It is he!” said she to herself. And she turned round and looked seaward. The tide had turned; the waves were slowly receding, as if loth to lose the hold they had, so lately, and with such swift bounds, gained on the yellow sands. The eternal moan they have made since the world began filled the ear, broken only by the skirl of the grey sea-birds as they alighted in groups on the edge of the waters, or as they rose up with their measured, balancing motion, and the sun-light caught their white breasts. There was no sign of human life to be seen; no boat, or distant sail, or near shrimper. The black posts there were all that spoke of men's work or labour. Beyond a stretch of the waters, a few pale grey hills showed like films; their summits clear, though faint, their bases lost in a vapoury mist.



On the hard, echoing sands, and distinct from the ceaseless murmur of the salt sea waves, came footsteps—nearer—nearer. Very near they were when Ruth, unwilling to show the fear that rioted in her heart, turned round, and faced Mr. Donne.

He came forward, with both hands extended.

“This is kind! my own Ruth,” said he. Ruth’s arms hung down motionless at her sides.

“What! Ruth, have you no word for me?”

“I have nothing to say,” said Ruth.

“Why, you little revengeful creature! And so I am to explain all before you will even treat me with decent civility.”

“I do not want explanations,” said Ruth, in a trembling tone. “We must not speak of the past. You asked me to come in Leonard’s—in my child’s name, and to hear what you had to say about him.”

“But what I have to say about him relates to you even more. And how can we talk about him without recurring to the past? That past, which

you try to ignore—I know you cannot do it in your heart—is full of happy recollections to me. Were you not happy in Wales?” he said, in his tenderest tone.

But there was no answer; not even one faint sigh, though he listened intently.

“ You dare not speak ; you dare not answer me. Your heart will not allow you to prevaricate, and you know you were happy.”

Suddenly Ruth’s beautiful eyes were raised to him, full of lucid splendour, but grave and serious in their expression; and her cheeks, heretofore so faintly tinged with the tenderest blush, flashed into a ruddy glow.

“ I was happy. I do not deny it. Whatever comes, I will not blench from the truth. I have answered you.”

“ And yet,” replied he, secretly exulting in her admission, and not perceiving the inner strength of which she must have been conscious before she would have dared to make it—“ and yet, Ruth,

we are not to recur to the past! Why not? If it was happy at the time, is the recollection of it so miserable to you?"

He tried once more to take her hand, but she quietly stepped back.

"I came to hear what you had to say about my child," said she, beginning to feel very weary.

"*Our* child, Ruth."

She drew herself up, and her face went very pale.

"What have you to say about him?" asked she, coldly.

"Much," exclaimed he—"much that may affect his whole life. But it all depends upon whether you will hear me or not."

"I listen."

"Good Heavens! Ruth, you will drive me mad. Oh! what a changed person you are from the sweet, loving creature you were! I wish you were not so beautiful." She did not reply, but he caught a deep, involuntary sigh.

"Will you hear me if I speak, though I may

not begin all at once to talk of this boy—a boy of whom any mother—any parent, might be proud? I could see that, Ruth. I have seen him; he looked like a prince in that cramped, miserable house, and with no earthly advantages. It is a shame he should not have every kind of opportunity laid open before him.”

There was no sign of maternal ambition on the motionless face, though there might be some little spring in her heart, as it beat quick and strong at the idea of the proposal she imagined he was going to make of taking her boy away to give him the careful education she had often craved for him. She should refuse it, as she would everything else which seemed to imply that she acknowledged a claim over Leonard; but yet sometimes, for her boy's sake, she had longed for a larger opening—a more extended sphere.

“Ruth! you acknowledge we were happy once;—there were circumstances which, if I could tell you them all in detail, would show you how in my weak, convalescent state I was almost passive in the

hands of others. Ah, Ruth! I have not forgotten the tender nurse who soothed me in my delirium. When I am feverish, I dream that I am again at Llan-dhu, in the little old bedchamber, and you, in white—which you always wore then, you know—fitting about me.”

The tears dropped, large and round, from Ruth's eyes—she could not help it—how could she?

“We were happy then,” continued he, gaining confidence from the sight of her melted mood, and recurring once more to the admission which he considered so much in his favour. “Can such happiness never return?” Thus he went on, quickly, anxious to lay before her all he had to offer, before she should fully understand his meaning.

“If you would consent, Leonard should be always with you—educated where and how you liked—money to any amount you might choose to name should be secured to you and him—if only, Ruth—if only those happy days might return.”

Ruth spoke.

“ I said that I was happy, because I had asked God to protect and help me—and I dared not tell a lie. I was happy. Oh! what is happiness or misery that we should talk about them now?”

Mr. Donne looked at her, as she uttered these words, to see if she was wandering in her mind, they seemed to him so utterly strange and incoherent.

“ I dare not think of happiness—I must not look forward to sorrow. God did not put me here to consider either of these things.”

“ My dear Ruth, compose yourself! There is no hurry in answering the question I asked.”

“ What was it?” said Ruth.

“ I love you so, I cannot live without you. I offer you my heart, my life—I offer to place Leonard wherever you would have him placed. I have the power and the means to advance him in any path of life you choose. All who have shown kindness to you shall be rewarded by me, with a gratitude even surpassing your own. If there is any-

thing else I can do that you can suggest, I will do it.”

“Listen to me!” said Ruth, now that the idea of what he proposed had entered her mind. “When I said that I was happy with you long ago, I was choked with shame as I said it. And yet it may be a vain, false excuse that I make for myself. I was very young; I did not know how such a life was against God’s pure and holy will—at least, not as I know it now; and I tell you truth—all the days of my years since I have gone about with a stain on my hidden soul—a stain which made me loathe myself, and envy those who stood spotless and undefiled; which made me shrink from my child—from Mr. Benson, from his sister, from the innocent girls whom I teach—nay, even I have cowered away from God himself; and what I did wrong then, I did blindly to what I should do now if I listened to you.”

She was so strongly agitated that she put her hands over her face, and sobbed without restraint.

Then, taking them away, she looked at him with a glowing face, and beautiful, honest, wet eyes, and tried to speak calmly, as she asked if she needed to stay longer (she would have gone away at once but that she thought of Leonard, and wished to hear all that his father might have to say). He was so struck anew by her beauty, and understood her so little, that he believed that she only required a little more urging to consent to what he wished; for in all she had said there was no trace of the anger and resentment for his desertion of her, which he had expected would be a prominent feature—the greatest obstacle he had to encounter. The deep sense of penitence she expressed, he mistook for earthly shame; which he imagined he could soon soothe away.

“Yes, I have much more to say. I have not said half. I cannot tell you how fondly I will—how fondly I do love you—how my life shall be spent in ministering to your wishes. Money, I see—I know, you despise——”



“Mr. Bellingham! I will not stay to hear you speak to me so again. I have been sinful, but it is not you who should——” She could not speak, she was so choking with passionate sorrow.

He wanted to calm her, as he saw her shaken with repressed sobs. He put his hand on her arm. She shook it off impatiently, and moved away in an instant.

“Ruth!” said he, nettled by her action of repugnance, “I begin to think you never loved me.”

“I!—I never loved you! Do you dare to say so?”

Her eyes flamed on him as she spoke. Her red, round lip curled into beautiful contempt.

“Why do you shrink so from me?” said he, in his turn getting impatient.

“I did not come here to be spoken to in this way,” said she. “I came, if by any chance I could do Leonard good. I would submit to many humiliations for his sake—but to no more from you.”

“Are not you afraid to brave me so?” said he. “Don’t you know how much you are in my power?”

She was silent. She longed to go away, but dreaded lest he should follow her, where she might be less subject to interruption than she was here—near the fisherman's nets, which the receding tide was leaving every moment barer and more bare, and the posts they were fastened to more blackly uprising above the waters.

Mr. Donne put his hands on her arms as they hung down before her—her hands tightly clasped together.

“Ask me to let you go,” said he. “I will, if you will ask me.” He looked very fierce and passionate and determined. The vehemence of his action took Ruth by surprise, and the painful tightness of the grasp almost made her exclaim. But she was quite still and mute.

“Ask me,” said he, giving her a little shake. She did not speak. Her eyes, fixed on the distant shore, were slowly filling with tears. Suddenly a light came through the mist that obscured them, and the shut lips parted. She saw some distant object that gave her hope.

“It is Stephen Bromley,” said she. “He is coming to his nets. They say he is a very desperate, violent man, but he will protect me.”

“You obstinate, wilful creature!” said Mr. Donne, releasing his grasp. “You forget that one word of mine could undeceive all these good people at Eccleston; and that if I spoke out ever so little, they would throw you off in an instant. Now!” he continued, “do you understand how much you are in my power?”

“Mr. and Miss Benson know all—they have not thrown me off,” Ruth gasped out. “Oh! for Leonard’s sake! you would not be so cruel.”

“Then do not you be cruel to him—to me. Think once more!”

“I think once more;” she spoke solemnly. “To save Leonard from the shame and agony of knowing my disgrace, I would lie down and die. Oh! perhaps it would be best for him—for me, if I might; my death would be a stingless grief—but to go back into sin would be the real cruelty to him. The errors of my youth may be washed away by

my tears—it was so once when the gentle, blessed Christ was upon earth ; but now, if I went into wilful guilt, as you would have me, how could I teach Leonard God's holy will ? I should not mind his knowing my past sin, compared to the awful corruption it would be if he knew me living now, as you would have me, lost to all fear of God——” Her speech was broken by sobs. “ Whatever may be my doom—God is just—I leave myself in His hands. I will save Leonard from evil. Evil would it be for him if I lived with you. I will let him die first !” She lifted her eyes to heaven, and clasped and wreathed her hands together tight. Then she said : “ You have humbled me enough, sir. I shall leave you now.”

She turned away resolutely. The dark, grey fisherman was at hand. Mr. Donne folded his arms, and set his teeth, and looked after her.

“ What a stately step she has ! How majestic and graceful all her attitudes were ! She thinks she has baffled me now. We will try something more, and bid a higher price.” He unfolded his

arms, and began to follow her. He gained upon her, for her beautiful walk was now wavering and unsteady. The works which had kept her in motion were running down fast.

“Ruth!” said he, overtaking her. “You shall hear me once more. Ay, look round! Your fisherman is near. He may hear me, if he chooses—hear your triumph. I am come to offer to marry you, Ruth; come what may, I will have you. Nay—I will make you hear me. I will hold this hand till you have heard me. To-morrow I will speak to any one in Eccleston you like—to Mr. Bradshaw; Mr. ——, the little minister, I mean. We can make it worth while for him to keep our secret, and no one else need know but what you are really Mrs. Denbigh. Leonard shall still bear this name, but in all things else he shall be treated as my son. He and you would grace any situation. I will take care the highest paths are open to him!”

He looked to see the lovely face brighten into sudden joy; on the contrary, the head was still hung down with a heavy droop.

“I cannot,” said she; her voice was very faint and low.

“It is sudden for you, my dearest. But be calm. It will all be easily managed. Leave it to me.”

“I cannot,” repeated she, more distinct and clear, though still very low.

“Why! what on earth makes you say that?” asked he, in a mood to be irritated by any repetition of such words.

“I do not love you. I did once. Don’t say I did not love you then; but I do not now. I could never love you again. All you have said and done since you came with Mr. Bradshaw to Abermouth first, has only made me wonder how I ever could have loved you. We are very far apart. The time that has pressed down my life like brands of hot iron, and scarred me for ever, has been nothing to you. You have talked of it with no sound of moaning in your voice—no shadow over the brightness of your face; it has left no sense of sin on your conscience, while me it haunts and haunts; and yet I might plead that I was an ignorant child—only I

will not plead anything, for God knows all——  
But this is only one piece of our great difference——”

“You mean that I am no saint,” he said, impatient at her speech. “Granted. But people who are no saints have made very good husbands before now. Come, don’t let any morbid, overstrained conscientiousness interfere with substantial happiness—happiness both to you and to me—for I am sure I can make you happy—ay! and make you love me, too, in spite of your pretty defiance. I love you so dearly I must win love back. And here are advantages for Leonard, to be gained by you quite in a holy and legitimate way.”

She stood very erect.

“If there was one thing needed to confirm me, you have named it. You shall have nothing to do with my boy, by my consent, much less by my agency. I would rather see him working on the roadside than leading such a life—being such a one as you are. You have heard my mind now, Mr.

Bellingham. You have humbled me—you have baited me; and if at last I have spoken out too harshly, and too much in a spirit of judgment, the fault is yours. If there were no other reason to prevent our marriage but the one fact that it would bring Leonard into contact with you, that would be enough."

"It is enough!" said he, making her a low bow. "Neither you nor your child shall ever more be annoyed by me. I wish you a good evening."

They walked apart—he back to the inn, to set off instantly, while the blood was hot in him, from the place where he had been so mortified—she to steady herself along till she reached the little path, more like a rude staircase than anything else, by which she had to climb to the house.

She did not turn round for some time after she was fairly lost to the sight of any one on the shore; she clambered on, almost stunned by the rapid beating of her heart. Her eyes were hot and dry; and at last became as if she were suddenly blind. Unable to go on, she tottered into the tangled



underwood which grew among the stones, filling every niche and crevice, and little shelving space, with green and delicate tracery. She sank down behind a great overhanging rock, which hid her from any one coming up the path. An ash-tree was rooted in this rock, slanting away from the sea-breezes that were prevalent in most weathers ; but this was a still autumnal Sabbath evening. As Ruth's limbs fell, so they lay. She had no strength, no power of volition to move a finger. She could not think or remember. She was literally stunned. The first sharp sensation which roused her from her torpor was a quick desire to see him once more ; up she sprang, and climbed to an out-jutting dizzy point of rock, but a little above her sheltered nook, yet commanding a wide view over the bare naked sands ; — far away below, touching the rippling water-line, was Stephen Bromley, busily gathering in his nets ; besides him there was no living creature visible. Ruth shaded her eyes, as if she thought they might have deceived her ; but no, there was

no one there. She went slowly down to her old place, crying sadly as she went.

“ Oh! if I had not spoken so angrily to him—the last things I said were so bitter—so reproachful!—and I shall never, never see him again!”

She could not take in the general view and scope of their conversation—the event was too near her for that; but her heart felt sore at the echo of her last words, just and true as their severity was. Her struggle, her constant flowing tears, which fell from very weakness, made her experience a sensation of intense bodily fatigue; and her soul had lost the power of throwing itself forward, or contemplating anything beyond the dreary present, when the expanse of grey, wild, bleak moors, stretching wide away below a sunless sky, seemed only an outward sign of the waste world within her heart, for which she could claim no sympathy;—for she could not even define what its woes were; and if she could, no one would understand how the present time was haunted by the terrible ghost of the former love.

“ I am so weary ! I am so weary ! ” she moaned aloud at last. “ I wonder if I might stop here, and just die away. ”

She shut her eyes, until through the closed lids came a ruddy blaze of light. The clouds had parted away, and the sun was going down in a crimson glory behind the distant purple hills. The whole western sky was one flame of fire. Ruth forgot herself in looking at the gorgeous sight. She sat up gazing, and, as she gazed, the tears dried on her cheeks ; and, somehow, all human care and sorrow were swallowed up in the unconscious sense of God’s infinity. The sunset calmed her more than any words, however wise and tender, could have done. It even seemed to give her strength and courage ; she did not know how or why, but so it was.

She rose, and went slowly towards home. Her limbs were very stiff, and every now and then she had to choke down an unbidden sob. Her pupils had been long returned from church, and had

busied themselves in preparing tea—an occupation which had probably made them feel the time less long.

If they had ever seen a sleep-walker, they might have likened Ruth to one for the next few days, so slow and measured did her movements seem—so far away was her intelligence from all that was passing around her—so hushed and strange were the tones of her voice! They had letters from home announcing the triumphant return of Mr. Donne as M.P. for Eccleston. Mrs. Denbigh heard the news without a word, and was too languid to join in the search after purple and yellow flowers with which to deck the sitting-room at Eagle's Crag.

A letter from Jemima came the next day, summoning them home. Mr. Donne and his friends had left the place, and quiet was restored in the Bradshaw household; so it was time that Mary's and Elizabeth's holiday should cease. Mrs. Denbigh had also a letter—a letter from Miss Benson, saying that Leonard was not quite well. There was so

much pains taken to disguise anxiety, that it was very evident much anxiety was felt; and the girls were almost alarmed by Ruth's sudden change from taciturn languor to eager, vehement energy. Body and mind seemed strained to exertion. Every plan that could facilitate packing and winding-up affairs at Abermouth, every errand and arrangement that could expedite their departure by one minute, was done by Ruth with stern promptitude. She spared herself in nothing. She made them rest, made them lie down, while she herself lifted weights and transacted business with feverish power, never resting, and trying never to have time to think.

For in remembrance of the Past there was Remorse,—how had she forgotten Leonard these last few days!—how had she repined and been dull of heart to her blessing! And in anticipation of the Future there was one sharp point of red light in the darkness which pierced her brain with agony, and which she would not see or recognise—and saw and recognised all the more for such mad determination

—which is not the true shield against the bitterness of the arrows of Death.

When the sea-side party arrived in Eccleston, they were met by Mrs. and Miss Bradshaw and Mr. Benson. By a firm resolution, Ruth kept from shaping the question, "Is he alive?" as if by giving shape to her fears she made their realisation more imminent. She said merely, "How is he?" but she said it with drawn, tight, bloodless lips, and in her eyes Mr. Benson read her anguish of anxiety.

"He is very ill, but we hope he will soon be better. It is what every child has to go through."

END OF VOL. II.



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