

CAMEOS



MARIE CORELLI.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE following short stories, now for the first time collected in one volume for publication in England, have all, with the exception of the last, ("The Soul of the Newly Born") appeared in various magazines and journals, such as *Temple Bar*, *Belgravia*, *The Woman at Home*, *The Lady's Pictorial*, and others. Their merits are slight,—their defects numerous ; my friends, however, will be generous and quick enough to discover the former, and my enemies will find ample food to delight them in the latter, so that it is possible both sides may be satisfied. Concerning the opening sketch entitled "God's Light on the Mountains," which is not so much a story as a very roughly drawn allegory, I may here relate

a rather curious incident. It was originally written in a friend's album and was never intended for publication. But one fine day this very friend suddenly and unexpectedly developed the disposition of a practical joker, and caused the allegory to be printed in the *Pall Mall Budget* under very peculiar circumstances, and without in the least consulting me on the matter. The *Pall Mall* people were at that time busily "booming" the 'Dreams' of Madame Olive Schreiner. I was abroad, wintering at Montreux in Switzerland; and my waggish friend, who, I am bound to admit was also a devoted partisan, copied out my hastily written "idyll," the composition of which had originally taken me about ten minutes, and sent it to the *Pall Mall* with an ambiguously-worded epistle suggesting, or rather querying, whether it might not possibly be the work of Olive Schreiner? Without making any inquiries, the *Pall Mall* editors, losing sober discretion and judgment in their desire to keep up the 'boom' they had begun, pounced on the story, decided

that it *was* by Madame Schreiner and published it proudly and prominently under the heading "Another 'Dream' by Olive Schreiner," appending to it that lady's portrait and autograph, together with a flattering eulogy of both the story and its writer ! My astonishment when I received the number of the *Budget* containing my half-forgotten 'scrap' thus singularly appropriated may be better imagined than described. However, I lost no time in clearing up the mistake. I wrote to the editor of the *Pall Mall* claiming the story as my own, and thanking him for the praise bestowed upon so slight an effort. My letter was printed in due course,—but the discovery that *I* was the author of the story, and not Madame Schreiner, of course put a stop to the *Pall Mall's* approval and enthusiasm !

I am so often wrongfully accused of misjudging the Press, that I am glad to be able to acquaint my friends and readers with this pleasing type of journalistic 'fair play,' which distinctly shows, at

any rate, that so long as the *Pall Mall* authorities thought the story was by a woman whom they had elected to 'boom,' it was worth prominent notice ; but that, on the contrary, as soon as they had learned it was by another woman, whom they were strenuously endeavouring to 'quash,' it became quite a different matter ! Yet the story itself remained the same,—neither better nor worse for praise or censure,—and so trifling do I myself consider it that it would not have been included at all in the present collection were it not for this little 'Press-anecdote,' connected with it, which I think well worth telling,—and which I warmly commend to the shrewd consideration and comprehension of the public.

MARIE CORELLI.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
GOD'S LIGHT ON THE MOUNTAINS	1
THE HIRED BABY	5
NEHEMIAH P. HOSKINS, ARTIST	39
THE SILENCE OF THE MAHARAJAH	59
"THREE WISE MEN OF GOTHAM"	107
THE LADY WITH THE CARNATIONS	156
AN OLD BUNDLE	173
'MADEMOISELLE ZÉPHYR'	188
ONE OF THE WORLD'S WONDERS	197
ANGEL'S WICKEDNESS	210
THE DISTANT VOICE	230
THE WITHERING OF A ROSE	246
TINY TRAMPS	289
THE SONG OF MIRIAM	300
THE SOUL OF THE NEWLY BORN	324

CAMEOS.

GOD'S LIGHT ON THE MOUNTAINS.

AN ALLEGORY.

"And God said, Let there be light. And there was light."

ONE by one the clouds lifted, and the dense drooping veils of mist were slowly withdrawn. The great mountains became visible, clearly defined against the heaven's ethereally faint blue. Eternal snow lay frozen white upon them, and their cold, high peaks seemed very far away. But one wide bar of luminous gold lightened their slopes towards the East; and in that warm and tender haze the hard snow melted, and the purple violets opened into bloom.

* * * * *

Two dark figures of men advanced into the Light. They had climbed for many hours. They had seen the radiance from afar, and now they

God's Light on the Mountains

entered it together. They were brothers in their common lot and creed, but as they stepped into the golden glory their brows grew heavy with distrust and wrath.

"What doest thou here?" said the one. "The Light is mine!"

"Nay, fool," said the other, "thou liest—the Light is mine!"

And the evil frown deepened on their faces, and they forgot their brotherhood, and fought; fought with a merciless blind fury for every inch of that wondrous Light that was not theirs; fought till the violets on the turf sickened and died in the torrent of blood that was shed.

But suddenly between them a Shadow fell. And the Shadow's name was Death. Then those contesting twain shrank from each other's grasp in fear, and covering their eyes they fled swiftly, and the Shadow went with them. And their blood sank into the cool brown earth, and the violets bloomed again. And God's Light lay still upon the mountains.

* * * * *

Two women came into the Light. They were great Queens, browbound with gold and burdened with a weight of gems. With them they dragged a fainting and feeble creature like a child with wings; an almost dying thing that wept and

wailed aloud and shuddered as it came. Reaching the Light the women paused and faced each other.

"Loose thou thy hold of Love," said the one ; "for lo, we have reached the goal, and, by the wonder of my beauty in the Light, both Light and Love are mine !"

"O traitress !" cried the other. "What hast thou to do with beauty where I am ? I am the mistress of the world ; Love is my servant, Light my heritage. Dispute no more, for Love and Light are mine !"

And again the Shadow fell. Then those two rival Queens grew pale and thin, and melted like frail ghosts into the darkness. But the winged child remained alone, weeping. And God's Light lay softly on the mountains.

* * * * *

A solitary wayfarer advanced into the Light. Bare-headed and with uplifted eyes he paused and looked,—and smiled. His limbs were very weary ; his hands were hard with unrewarded toil ; but though his face was pale and careworn, it was beautiful. His lips parted in a sigh of rapture.

"This is the Light !" he said. "My God, I thank Thee !"

And the winged Love, who wept alone, drew near to him and kissed his feet.

"Oh, who art thou ?" it questioned him sob-

bingly, "Who art thou that has toiled so far to find the Light, and has no word of envy on thy lips, but only peace and praise?"

And the Stranger, smiling, answered,—

"I am known as the Despised and Lonely! in all the world I possess nothing, not even a blessing. Alone I have sought the Light and found it; wherefore I praise the Giver of the Light who hath not suffered me to be dismayed. For I bear the name most hated among men; the name of Truth!"

And again the Shadow fell. Only it was no more a Shadow but a Brightness, brightening into the Light itself. And tired Truth drank in the golden Glory, and grew strong. Love dried its childish tears, and afar off there was a sweet sound as of the singing of angels. And God's Light widened on the mountains.

THE HIRED BABY.

A ROMANCE OF THE LONDON STREETS.

A DARK, desolate December night—a night that clung to the metropolis like a wet black shroud—a night in which the heavy low-hanging vapours melted every now and then into a slow reluctant rain, cold as icicle drops in a rock-cavern. People passed and repassed in the streets like ghosts in a bad dream; the twinkling gaslight showed them at one moment rising out of the fog and then disappearing from view as though suddenly engulfed in a vaporous ebon sea. With muffled angry shrieks, the metropolitan trains deposited their shoals of shivering, coughing travellers at the several stations, where sleepy officials, rendered vicious by the weather, snatched the tickets from their hands with offensive haste and roughness. Omnibus conductors grew ill-tempered and abusive without any seemingly adequate reason; shopkeepers became flippant, disobliging, and careless of custom; cabmen shouted derisive

or denunciatory language after their rapidly retreating fares ;—in short, everybody was in a discontented, almost spiteful humour, with the exception of those few aggressively cheerful persons who are in the habit of always making the best of everything, even bad weather.

Down the long wide vista of the Cromwell Road, Kensington, the fog had it all its own way ; it swept on steadily, like thick smoke from a huge fire, choking the throats and blinding the eyes of foot-passengers, stealing through the crannies of the houses, and chilling the blood of even those luxurious individuals who, seated in elegant drawing-rooms before blazing fires, easily forgot that there were such bitter things as cold and poverty in that outside world against which they had barred their doors. At one house in particular—a house with gaudy glass doors and somewhat soiled yellow silk curtains at the windows—a house that plainly said of itself—“ Done up for show ! ” to all who cared to examine its exterior—there stood a closed brougham drawn by a prancing pair of fat horses. A coachman of distinguished appearance sat on the box ; a footman of irreproachable figure stood waiting on the pavement, his yellow-gloved hand resting elegantly on the polished silver knob of the carriage-door.

Both these gentleman were resolute and inflex-

ible of face ; they looked as if they had determined on some great deed that should move the world to wild applause,—but, truth to tell, they had only just finished a highly satisfactory “ meat-tea,” and before this grave silence had fallen upon them they had been discussing the advisability of broiled steak and onions for supper. The coachman had inclined to plain mutton-chops as being easier of digestion ; the footman had earnestly asseverated his belief in the superior succulence and sweetness of the steak and onions, and in the end he had gained his point. This weighty question being settled, they had gradually grown reflective on the past, present, and future joys of eating at some one else’s expense, and in this bland and pleasing state of meditation they were still absorbed. The horses were impatient, and pawed the muddy ground with many a toss of their long manes and tails, the steam from their glossy coats mingling with the ever-thickening density of the fog.

On the white stone steps of the residence before which they waited, was an almost invisible bundle, apparently shapeless and immovable. Neither of the two gorgeous personages in livery observed it ; it was too far back in a dim corner, too unobtrusive for the casual regard of their lofty eyes. Suddenly the glass doors before-mentioned were

thrown apart with a clattering noise,—a warmth and radiance from the entrance-hall thus displayed streamed into the foggy street, and at the same instant the footman, still with grave and imperturbable countenance, opened the brougham. An elderly lady, richly dressed, with diamonds sparkling in her grey hair, came rustling down the steps, bringing with her faint odours of patchouli and violet powder. She was followed by a girl of doll-like prettiness with a snub nose and petulant little mouth, who held up her satin and lace skirts with a sort of fastidious disdain, as though she scorned to set foot on earth that was not carpeted with the best velvet pile. As they approached their carriage, the inert dark bundle crouched in the corner started into life,—a woman with wild hair and wilder eyes,—whose pale lips quivered with suppressed weeping as her piteous voice broke into sudden clamour :

“Oh lady !” she cried, “for the love of God a trifle ! Oh lady, lady !”

But the ‘lady,’ with a contemptuous sniff and a shake of her scented garments, passed her before she could continue her appeal, and she turned with a sort of faint hope to the softer face of the girl.

“Oh, my dear, *do* have pity ! Just the smallest little thing, and God will bless you ! You are

rich and happy—and I am starving! Only a penny! For the baby—the poor little baby!” and she made as though she would open her tattered shawl and reveal some treasure hidden therein, but shrank back repelled by the cold merciless gaze that fell upon her from those eyes in which youth dwelt without tenderness.

“You have no business on our door-step,” said the girl harshly. “Go away directly, or I shall tell my servant to call a policeman.”

Then as she entered the brougham after her mother, she addressed the respectable footman angrily, giving him the benefit of a strong nasal intonation.

“Howard, why do you let such dirty beggars come near the carriage? What are you paid for I should like to know? It is perfectly disgraceful to the house!”

“Very sorry, miss!” said the footman gravely; “I didn’t see the—the person before.” Then shutting the brougham door, he turned with a dignified air to the unfortunate creature who still lingered near, and with a sweeping gesture of his gold-embroidered coat-sleeve, said majestically,—

“Do you ’ear? Be hoff!”

Then having thus performed his duty, he mounted the box beside his friend the coachman, and the equipage rattled quickly away, its gleaming

lights soon lost in the smoke-laden vapours that drooped downwards like funeral hangings from the invisible sky to the scarcely visible ground. Left to herself, the woman who had vainly sought charity from those in whom no charity existed, looked up despairingly as one distraught, and seemed as though she would have given vent to some fierce exclamation, when a feeble wail came pitifully forth from the sheltering folds of her shawl. She restrained herself instantly and walked on at a rapid pace, scarcely heeding whither she went, till she reached the Catholic church known as the 'Oratory.' Its *façade* loomed darkly out of the fog; there was nothing particularly inviting about it, yet there were people passing softly in and out, and through the swinging to and fro of the red baize-covered doors there came a comforting warm glimmer of light. The woman paused, hesitated,—and then having apparently made up her mind, ascended the broad steps, looked in and finally entered. The place was strange to her,—she knew nothing of its religious meaning, and its solemn appearance oppressed her. There were only some half-dozen persons scattered about like black specks in its vast white interior, and the fog hung heavily in the vaulted dome and dark little chapels. One corner alone blazed with brilliancy and colour;—this was the Altar

of the Virgin. Towards it the tired vagrant made her way, and on reaching it sank on the nearest chair as though exhausted. She did not raise her eyes to the marble splendours of the shrine—one of the masterpieces of old Italian art ; she had been merely attracted to the spot by the glitter of the lamps and candles, and took no thought as to the reason of their being lit, though she was sensible of a certain comfort in the soft lustre shed around her. She seemed still young ; her face, rendered haggard by long and bitter privation, showed traces of past beauty, and her eyes, full of feverish trouble, were large, dark and still lustrous. Her mouth alone—that sensitive betrayer of the life's good and bad actions—revealed that all had not been well with her ; its lines were hard and vicious, and the resentful curve of the upper lip spoke of foolish pride not unmingled with reckless sensuality. She sat for a minute or two motionless,—then with exceeding care and tenderness she began to unfold her thin torn shawl by gentle degrees, looking down with anxious solicitude at the object concealed within it.

Only a baby,—and withal a baby so tiny and white and frail that it seemed as though it must melt like a snow-flake beneath the lightest touch. As its wrappings were loosened, it opened a pair of large, solemn blue eyes and gazed at the

woman's face, with a strange pitiful wistfulness. It lay quiet, without moan, a pinched pale miniature of suffering humanity,—an infant with sorrow's mark painfully impressed upon its drawn small features. Presently it stretched forth a puny hand and feebly caressed its protectress, and this too with the faintest glimmer of a smile. The woman responded to its affection with a sort of rapture; she caught it fondly to her breast and covered it with kisses, rocking it to and fro with broken words of motherly endearment. "My little darling!" she whispered softly. "My little pet! Yes, yes I know! So tired, so cold and hungry! Never mind, baby, never mind!—we will rest here a little, then we will sing a song presently and get some money to take us home. Sleep a while longer, dearie! There! now we are warm and cosy again."

So saying she re-arranged her shawl in closer and tighter folds so as to protect the child more thoroughly. While she was engaged in this operation, a lady in deep mourning passed close by her, and advancing to the very steps of the altar, knelt down, hiding her face with her clasped hands. The tired wayfarer's attention was attracted by this; she gazed with a sort of dull wonder at the kneeling figure robed in rich rustling silk and crape, and gradually her eyes

wandered upwards, upwards, till they rested on the gravely sweet and serenely smiling marble image of the Virgin and Child. She looked and looked again, surprised, incredulous; then suddenly rose to her feet and made her way to the altar railing. There she paused, staring vaguely at a basket of flowers, white and odorous, that had been left there by some reverent worshipper. She glanced doubtfully at the swinging silver lamps, the twinkling candles; she was conscious too of a subtle strange fragrance in the air as though a basketful of spring violets and daffodils had just been carried by; then, as her wandering gaze came back to the solitary woman in black who still knelt motionless near her, a sort of choking sensation came into her throat and a stinging moisture struggled in her eyes. She strove to turn this hysterical sensation to a low laugh of disdain. "Lord, Lord!" she muttered beneath her breath, "What sort of place is this, where they pray to a woman and a baby?"

At that moment the lady in black rose; she was young, with a proud, fair but weary face. Her eyes lighted on her soiled and poverty-stricken sister, and she paused with a pitying look. The street wanderer made use of the opportunity thus offered, and in an urgent whisper implored charity. The lady drew out her purse, then

hesitated, looking wistfully at the bundle in the shawl.

"You have a little child there?" she asked in gentle accents. "May I see it?"

"Yes, lady;" and the wrapper was turned down sufficiently to disclose the tiny white face, now more infinitely touching than ever in the pathos of sleep.

"I lost my little one a week ago," said the lady simply, as she looked at it. "He was all I had." Her voice trembled; she opened her purse and placed a half-crown in the hand of the astonished suppliant. "You are happier than I am; perhaps you will pray for me! I am very lonely!"

Then dropping her long crape veil so that it completely hid her features, she bent her head and moved softly away. The woman watched her till her graceful figure was completely lost in the gloom of the great church, and then turned again vaguely to the altar.

"Pray for her!" she thought. "I! As if I could pray!" And she smiled bitterly. Again she looked at the statue in the shrine; it had no meaning at all for her. She had never heard of Christianity save through the medium of a tract, whose consoling title had been "Stop! You are going to Hell!" Religion of every

sort was mocked at by those among whom her lot was cast; the name of Christ was only used as a convenience to swear by, and therefore this mysteriously smiling, gently inviting marble figure was incomprehensible to her mind.

"As if I could pray!" she repeated with a sort of derision. Then she looked at the broad silver coin in her hand and the sleeping baby in her arms. With a sudden impulse she dropped on her knees.

"Whoever you are," she muttered, addressing the statue above her, "it seems you've got a child of your own; perhaps you'll help me to take care of this one. It isn't mine; I wish it was! Anyway I love it more than its own mother does. I daresay you won't listen to the likes of me, but if there was God anywhere about I'd ask Him to bless that good soul that's lost her baby. I bless her with all my heart, but my blessing ain't good for much. Ah!" and she surveyed anew the Virgin's serene white countenance, "you look just as if you understood me, but I don't believe you do! Never mind, I've said all I wanted to say this time."

Her strange petition or rather discourse concluded, she rose and walked away. The great doors of the church swung heavily behind her as she stepped out and stood once more in the muddy

street. It was raining steadily—a fine, cold, penetrating rain. But the coin she held was a talisman against outer discomforts, and she continued to walk on till she came to a clean-looking dairy, where for a couple of pence she was able to replenish the infant's long ago emptied feeding-bottle; but she purchased nothing for herself. She had starved all day and was now too faint to eat. Soon she entered an omnibus and was driven to Charing Cross, and alighting at the great station, brilliant with its electric light, she paced up and down outside it, accosting several of the passers-by and imploring their pity. One man gave her a penny; another, young and handsome, with a flushed intemperate face and a look of his fast-fading boyhood still about him, put his hand in his pocket and drew out all the loose coppers it contained, amounting to three pennies and an odd farthing, and dropping them into her outstretched palm, said half gaily, half boldly,—

“You ought to do better than that with those big eyes of yours?” She drew back and shuddered; he broke into a coarse laugh and went his way. Standing where he had left her, she seemed for a time lost in wretched reflections. The fretful wailing cry of the child she carried roused her, and hushing it softly, she murmured, “Yes, yes, darling, it is too wet and cold for you;

we had better go." And acting suddenly on her resolve, she hailed another omnibus, this time bound for Tottenham Court Road, and was, after some dreary jolting, set down at her final destination—a dirty alley in the worst part of Seven Dials. Entering it, she was hailed with a shout of derisive laughter from some rough-looking men and women who were standing grouped round a low ginshop at the corner.

"Here's Liz!" cried one. "Here's Liz and the bloomin' kid!"

"Now, old gel, fork out! How much 'ave yer got, Liz? Treat us to a drop all round!"

Liz walked past them steadily; the conspicuous curve of her upper lip came into full play and her eyes flashed disdainfully, but she said nothing. Her silence exasperated a tangle-haired, cat-faced girl of some seventeen years, who, more than half drunk, sat on the ground clasping her knees with both arms and rocking herself lazily to and fro. "Mother Mawks!" cried she, "Mother Mawks! You're wanted! Here's Liz come back with your babby!"

As if her words had been a powerful incantation to summon forth an evil spirit, a door in one of the miserable houses was thrown open and a stout woman, nearly naked to the waist, with a swollen, blotched and most hideous countenance, rushed

out furiously, and darting at Liz shook her violently by the arm.

“Where’s my shullin’?” she yelled, “where’s my gin? Out with it! Out with my shullin’ and fourpence! None of your sneakin’ ways with me; a bargain’s a bargain all the world over! You’re makin’ a fortin’ with my babby—yer know y’are; pays yer a deal better than yer old trade! Don’t say it don’t—yer knows it do. Yer’ll not find such a sickly kid anywheres, an’ it’s the sickly kids wot pays an’ moves the ’arts of the *kyind* ladies and *good* gentlemen,”—this with an imitative whine that excited the laughter and applause of her hearers. “You’ve got it cheap, I kin tell yer, an’ if yer don’t pay up reg’lar, there’s others that’ll take the chance, and thankful too!”

She stopped for lack of breath, and Liz spoke quietly:

“It’s all right, Mother Mawks,” she said, with an attempt at a smile; “here’s your shilling; here’s the four pennies for the gin. I don’t owe you anything for the child now.” She stopped and hesitated, looking down tenderly at the frail creature in her arms, then added almost pleadingly, “It’s asleep now. May I take it with me to-night?”

Mother Mawks, who had been testing the coins Liz had given her by biting them ferociously

with her large yellow teeth, broke into a loud laugh.

“Take it with yer ! I like that ! Wot impercence ! Take it with yer !” Then with her huge red arms akimbo, she added with a grin, “Tell yer wot, if yer likes to pay me ’arf-a-crown, yer can ’ave it to cuddle an’ welcome !”

Another shout of approving merriment burst from the drink-soddened spectators of the little scene, and the girl crouched on the ground removed her encircling hands from her knees to clap them loudly, as she exclaimed,—

“Well done, Mother Mawks ! One doesn’t let out kids at night for nothing ! ’Tought to be more expensive than day-time !”

The face of Liz had grown white and rigid.

“You know I can’t give you that money,” she said slowly. “I have not tasted bit or drop all day. I must live, though it doesn’t seem worth while. The child,” and her voice softened involuntarily, “is fast asleep ; it’s a pity to wake it, that’s all. It will cry and fret all night, and—and I would make it warm and comfortable if you’d let me.” She raised her eyes hopefully and anxiously, “Will you ?”

Mother Mawks was evidently a lady of an excitable disposition. The simple request seemed to drive her nearly frantic. She raised her voice

The Hired Baby

to an absolute scream, thrusting her dirty hands through her still dirtier hair as the proper accompanying gesture to her vituperative oratory.

“Will I? Will I?” she screeched. “Will I let out my hown babby for the night for nothing? Will I? No, I won’t! I’ll see yer blowed into the middle of next week fust! Lor’ a’mussey! ’ow ’igh an’ mighty we are gittin’, *to* be sure! The babby’ll be quiet with you, Miss Liz; will it hindeed! An’ it will cry an’ fret with its hown mother; will it hindeed!” And at every sentence she approached Liz more nearly, increasing in fury as she advanced. “Yer low hussey! D’ye think I’d let yer ’ave my babby for a hour unless yer paid for’t? As it is yer pays far too little. I’m a honest woman as works for my livin’ an’ wot drinks reasonable, better than you by a long sight, with your stuck-up airs! A pretty drab *you* are! Gi’ me the babby; ye an’t no business to keep it a minit longer;” and she made a grab at Liz’s sheltering shawl.

“Oh, don’t hurt it!” pleaded Liz tremblingly. “Such a little thing; don’t hurt it!”

Mother Mawks stared so wildly that her blood-shot eyes seemed protruding from her head.

“’Urt it! Hain’t I a right to do wot I likes with my hown babby? ’Urt it! Well I never! Look ’ere!” and she turned round on the

assembled neighbours. "Hain't she a reg'lar one ! She don't care for the law, not she ! She's keepin' back a child from its hown mother !" And with that she made a fierce attack on the shawl, and succeeded in dragging the infant from Liz's reluctant arms. Wakened thus roughly from its slumbers, the poor mite set up a feeble wailing ; its mother, enraged at the sound, shook it violently till it gasped for breath.

"Drat the little beast !" she cried. "Why don't it choke an' 'ave done with it !"

And without heeding the terrified remonstrances of Liz she flung the child roughly, as though it were a ball, through the open door of her lodging, where it fell on a heap of dirty clothes, and lay motionless ; its wailing had ceased.

"Oh, baby, baby !" exclaimed Liz in accents of poignant distress. "Oh ! you have killed it I am sure ! Oh, you are cruel, cruel ! Oh, baby, baby !"

And she broke into a tempestuous passion of sobs and tears. The bystanders looked on in unmoved silence. Mother Mawks gathered her torn garments round her with a gesture of defiance, and sniffed the air as though she said, "Any one who wants to meddle with me will get the worst of it." There was a brief pause ; suddenly a man staggered out of the gin-shop, smearing the back

The Hired Baby

of his hand across his mouth as he came,—a massively-built, ill-favoured brute with a shock of uncombed red hair and small ferret-like eyes. He stared stupidly at the weeping Liz, then at Mother Mawks, finally from one to the other of the loafers who stood by. “Wot’s the row?” he demanded thickly, “Wot’s up? ’Ave it out fair! Joe Mawks’ll stand by an’ see fair game. Fire away, my hearties! fire, fire away!” And with a chuckling idiot laugh he dived into the pocket of his torn corduroy trousers and produced a pipe. Filling this leisurely from a greasy pouch, with such unsteady fingers that the tobacco dropped all over him, he lit it, repeating with increased thickness of utterance, “Wot’s the row? ’Ave it out fair!”

“It’s about your babby, Joe!” cried the girl before-mentioned, jumping up from her seat on the ground with such force that her hair came tumbling all about her in a dark dank mist, through which her thin eager face spitefully peered. “Liz has gone crazy! She wants your babby to cuddle!” And she screamed with sudden laughter, “Eh, eh! fancy! Wants a babby to cuddle!”

The stupefied Joe blinked drowsily and sucked the stem of his pipe with apparent relish. Then, as if he had been engaged in deep meditation on the subject, he removed his smoky consoler from his

mouth and said, "W'y not? Wants a babby to 'cuddle? All right! Let 'er 'ave it—w'y not?"

At these words Liz looked up hopefully through her tears, but Mother Mawks darted forward in raving indignation.

"Yer great drunken fool!" she yelled to her besotted spouse, "aren't yer ashamed of yerself? Wot! Let out yer babby a whole night for nuthin'?' It's lucky I've got my wits about me; an' I say Liz *sha'n't* 'ave it! There now!"

The man looked at her and a dogged resolution darkened his repulsive countenance. He raised his big fist, clenched it, and hit straight out, giving his infuriated wife a black eye in much less than a minute. "An' I say she *shall* 'ave it! Wheer are ye now?"

In answer to this query Mother Mawks might have said that she was 'all there,' for she returned her husband's blow with interest and force, and in a couple of seconds the happy pair were engaged in a 'stand-up' fight, to the intense admiration and excitement of all the inhabitants of the little alley. Every one in the place thronged to watch the combatants and to hear the blasphemous oaths and curses with which the battle was accompanied. In the midst of the affray, a wizened, bent old man, who had been sitting at his door sorting rags in a basket, and apparently taking no heed

of the clamour around him, made a sign to Liz.

“Take the kid now,” he whispered. “Nobody ’ll notice. I’ll see they don’t come arter ye.” Liz thanked him mutely by a look, and rushing to the house where the child still lay, seemingly inanimate, on the floor among the soiled clothes, she caught it up eagerly and hurried away to her own poor garret in a tumble-down tenement at the furthest end of the alley. The infant had been stunned by its fall, but under her tender care, and rocked in the warmth of her caressing arms, it soon recovered, though when its blue eyes opened they were full of a bewildered pain such as may be seen in the eyes of a shot bird.

“My pet! my poor little darling!” she murmured over and over again, kissing its wee white face and soft hands; “I wish I was your mother—Lord knows I do! As it is you’re all I’ve got to care for. And you do love me, baby, don’t you? just a little, little bit!” And as she renewed her fondling embraces, the tiny, sad-visaged creature uttered a low crooning sound of baby satisfaction in response to her endearments—a sound more sweet to her ears than the most exquisite music, and which brought a smile to her mouth and a pathos to her dark eyes, rendering her face for the moment almost beautiful.

Holding the child closely to her breast, she looked cautiously out of her narrow window, and perceived that the connubial fight was over. From the shouts of laughter and plaudits that reached her ears, Joe Mawks had evidently won the day; his wife had disappeared from the field. She saw the little crowd dispersing, most of those who composed it entering the gin-shop; and very soon the alley was comparatively quiet and deserted. By-and-by she heard her name called in a low voice: "Liz! Liz!"

She looked down and saw the old man who had promised her his protection in case Mother Mawks should persecute her. "Is that you, Jim? Come upstairs; it's better than talking out there." He obeyed, and stood before her in the wretched room, looking curiously both at her and the baby. A wiry, wolfish-faced being was Jim Duds, as he was familiarly called, though his own name was the aristocratic and singularly inappropriate one of James Douglas; he was more like an animal than a human creature, with his straggling grey hair, bushy beard, and sharp teeth protruding like fangs from beneath his upper lip. His profession was that of an area-thief, and he considered it a sufficiently respectable calling.

"Mother Mawks has got it this time," he said, with a grin which was more like a snarl. "Joe's

blood was up an' he pounded her nigh into a jelly. She'll leave ye quiet now ; so long as ye pay the hire reg'lar ye'll have Joe on yer side. If so be as there's a bad day, ye'd better not come home at all."

"I know," said Liz ; "but she's always had the money for the child, and surely it wasn't much to ask her to let me keep it warm on such a cold night as this."

Jim Duds looked meditative. "Wot makes ye care for that babby so much?" he asked. "Tain't yourn."

Liz sighed.

"No!" she said sadly. "That's true. But it seems something to hold on to like. See what my life has been!" She stopped and a wave of colour flushed her pallid features. "From a little girl, nothing but the streets—the long cruel streets! and I just a bit of dirt on the pavement—no more; flung here, flung there, and at last swept into the gutter. All dark—all useless!" She laughed a little. "Fancy, Jim! I've never seen the country!"

"Nor I," said Jim, biting a piece of straw reflectively. "It must be powerful fine, with nought but green trees an' posies a-blowin' an' a-growin' everywheres. There ain't many kitching areas there though, I'm told."

Liz went on, scarcely heeding him: "The baby seems to me like what the country must be—all harmless and sweet and quiet; when I hold it so, my heart gets peaceful somehow,—I don't know why."

Again Jim looked speculative. He waved his bitten straw expressively.

"Ye've had 'sperience, Liz. Hain't ye met no man like, wot ye could care fur?"

Liz trembled and her eyes grew wild.

"Men!" she cried with bitterest scorn—"no *men* have come my way,—only brutes!"

Jim stared, but was silent; he had no fit answer ready. Presently Liz spoke again more softly:

"Jim, do you know I went into a great church to-day?"

"Worse luck!" said Jim sententiously. "Church ain't no use nohow as fur as I can see."

"There was a figure there, Jim," went on Liz, earnestly, "of a Woman holding up a Baby, and people knelt down before it. What do you s'pose it was?"

"Can't say!" replied the puzzled Jim. "Are ye sure 'twas a church? Most like 'twas a mooseum."

"No, no!" said Liz. "'Twas a church for certain; there were folks praying in it."

“Ah well!” growled Jim gruffly, “much good may it do ’em! I’m not of the prayin’ sort. A woman an’ a babby, did ye say? Don’t ye get such cranky notions into yer head, Liz! Women an’ babbies are common enough—too common by a long chalk, an’ as for prayin’ to ’em——” Jim’s utter contempt and incredulity were too great for further expression, and he turned away, wishing her a curt “Good-night!”

“Good-night!” said Liz softly; and long after he had left her, she still sat silent, thinking, thinking, with the baby asleep in her arms, listening to the rain as it dripped, dripped, heavily, like clods falling on a coffin-lid. She was not a good woman—far from it. Her very motive in hiring the infant at so much a day was entirely inexcusable—it was simply to gain money upon false pretences, by exciting more pity than would otherwise have been bestowed on her had she begged for herself alone, without a child in her arms. At first she had carried the baby about to serve as a mere trick of her trade, but the warm feel of its little helpless body against her bosom day after day had softened her heart towards its innocence and pitiful weakness, and at last she had grown to love it with a strange, intense passion,—so much so that she would willingly have sacrificed her life for its sake. She knew that its own parents cared

nothing for it, except for the money it brought them through her hands, and often wild plans would form in her poor tired brain,—plans of running away with it altogether from the roaring devouring city, to some sweet humble country village, there to obtain work, and devote herself to making this one little child happy. Poor Liz! Poor, bewildered, heart-broken Liz! Ignorant London heathen as she was, there was one fragrant flower blossoming in the desert of her soiled and wasted existence—the flower of a pure and guileless love for one of those ‘little ones’ of whom it hath been said by an All-Pitying Divinity unknown to her: “Suffer them to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

The dreary winter days crept on apace, and as they drew near Christmas, dwellers in the streets leading off the Strand grew accustomed of nights to hear the plaintive voice of a woman, singing in a peculiarly thrilling and pathetic manner, some of the old songs and ballads familiar and dear to the heart of every Englishman,—“The Banks of Allan Water,” “The Bailiff’s Daughter,” “Sally in our Alley,” “The Last Rose of Summer.” All these well-loved ditties she sang one after the other, and though her notes were neither fresh nor powerful they were true and often tender, more

particularly in the hackneyed but still captivating melody of "Home, sweet Home." Windows were opened and pennies freely showered on the street-vocalist, who was accompanied in all her wanderings by a fragile infant, which she seemed to carry with especial care and tenderness.

Sometimes too, in the bleak afternoons, she would be seen wending her way through mud and mire, setting her weary face against the bitter east wind, and patiently singing on,—and motherly women coming from the gay shops and stores where they had been purchasing Christmas toys for their own children would often stop to look at the baby's pinched white features with pity, and would say, while giving their spare pennies, "Poor little thing! Is it not very ill?" And Liz, her heart freezing with sudden terror, would exclaim hurriedly, "Oh, no, no! It is always pale; it is just a little bit weak, that's all!" And the kindly questioners, touched by the large despair of her dark eyes, would pass on and say no more.

And Christmas came—the birthday of the Child-Christ—a feast, the sacred meaning of which was unknown to Liz; she only recognised it as a sort of large and somewhat dull bank-holiday, when all London devoted itself to church-going and the eating of roast beef and plum pudding. The whole thing was incomprehensible to her mind,—

but even her sad countenance was brighter than usual on Christmas Eve and she felt almost gay, for had she not, by means of a little extra starvation on her own part, been able to buy a wondrous gold and crimson worsted bird suspended from an elastic string—a bird which bobbed up and down to command in the most lively and artistic manner? And had not her hired baby actually laughed at the clumsy toy?—laughed an elfish and weird little laugh, the first it had ever indulged in? And Liz had laughed too, for pure gladness in the child's mirth, and the worsted bird became a sort of uncouth charm to make them both merry.

But after Christmas had come and gone, and the melancholy days, the last beatings of the failing pulse of the Old Year, throbbed slowly and heavily away, the baby took upon its wan visage a strange expression,—the expression of worn-out and suffering age. Its blue eyes grew more solemnly speculative and dreamy, and after a while it seemed to lose all taste for the petty things of this world and the low desires of mere humanity. It lay very quiet in Liz's arms; it never cried, and was no longer fretful, and it seemed to listen with a sort of mild approval to the tones of her voice as they rang out in the dreary streets through which, by day and night, she patiently wandered. By-and-by the worsted bird, too, fell out of favour;

it jumped and glittered in vain ; the baby surveyed it with an unmoved air of superior wisdom,—just as if it had suddenly found out what real birds were like, and was not to be deceived into accepting so poor an imitation of Nature.

Liz grew uneasy, but she had no one in whom to confide her fears. She had been very regular in her payments to Mother Mawks, and that irate lady, kept in order by her bull-dog of a husband, had been of late very contented to let her have the child without further interference. Liz knew well enough that no one in the miserable alley where she dwelt would care whether the baby were ill or not. They would tell her, “The more sickly the better for your trade.” Besides, she was jealous,—she could not endure the idea of any one touching or tending it but herself. Children were often ailing, she thought, and if left to themselves without doctor’s stuff, they recovered sometimes more quickly than they had sickened. Thus soothing her inward tremors as best she might, she took more care than ever of her frail charge, stinting herself that she might nourish it, though the baby seemed to care less and less for mundane necessities, and only submitted to be fed, as it were, under patient and silent protest.

And so the sands in Time’s hour-glass ran slowly but surely away, and it was New Year’s

Eve. Liz had wandered about all day singing her little *répertoire* of ballads in the teeth of a cruel, snow-laden wind—so cruel, that people, otherwise charitably disposed, had shut close their doors and windows, and had not even heard her voice. Thus the last span of the Old Year had proved most unprofitable and dreary; she had gained no more than sixpence; how could she return with only that humble amount to face Mother Mawks and her vituperative fury? Her throat ached—she was very tired, and as the night darkened from pale to deep and starless shadows, she strolled mechanically from the Strand to the Embankment, and after walking some little distance she sat down in a corner close to Cleopatra's Needle,—that mocking obelisk that has looked upon the decay of empires, itself impassive, and that still appears to say, "Pass on, ye puny generations! I, a mere carven block of stone, shall outlive you all!"

For the first time in all her experience the child in her arms seemed a heavy burden. She put aside her shawl and surveyed it tenderly; it was fast asleep, a small, peaceful smile on its thin quiet face. Thoroughly worn out herself, she leaned her head against the damp stone wall behind her, and clasping the infant tightly to her breast, she also slept,—the heavy dreamless sleep of utter fatigue and physical exhaustion. The solemn

night moved on, a night of black vapours ; the pageant of the Old Year's death-bed was unbrightened by so much as a single star. None of the hurrying passers-by perceived the weary woman where she slept in that obscure corner, and for a long while she rested there undisturbed. Suddenly a vivid glare of light dazzled her eyes ; she started to her feet half-asleep, but still instinctively retaining the infant in her close embrace. A dark form, buttoned to the throat, and holding a brilliant bull's-eye lantern, stood before her.

"Come now," said this personage, "this won't do ! Move on !"

Liz smiled, faintly and apologetically.

"All right !" she answered, striving to speak cheerfully and raising her eyes to the policeman's good-natured countenance. "I didn't mean to fall asleep here. I don't know how I came to do it. I must go home of course."

"Of course !" said the policeman, somewhat mollified by her evident humility, and touched in spite of himself by the pathos of her eyes. Then turning his lamp more fully upon her, he continued, "Is that a baby you've got there ?"

"Yes," said Liz, half proudly, half tenderly. "Poor little dear ! it's been ailing sadly,—but I think it's better now than it was." And encouraged by his friendly tone, she opened the folds of

her shawl to show him her one treasure. The bull's-eye came into still closer requisition, as the kindly guardian of the peace peered inquiringly at the tiny bundle. He had scarcely looked when he started back with an exclamation :

"God bless my soul!" he cried, "it's dead!"

"*Dead!*" shrieked Liz, "Oh, no, no! Not *dead!* *Don't* say so, oh, don't, *don't* say so! Oh, you *can't* mean it! Oh, for God's love say you didn't mean it! It can't be dead, not really *dead*, no, no indeed! Oh, baby, baby! You are not dead, my pet, my angel, not *dead*, oh no!"

And breathless, frantic with fear, she felt the little thing's hands and feet and face, kissed it wildly and called it by a thousand endearing names, in vain—in vain! Its tiny body was already stiff and rigid; it had been a corpse more than two hours.

The policeman coughed, and brushed his thick gauntlet glove across his eyes. He was an emissary of the law, but he had a heart. He thought of his bright-eyed wife at home, and of the soft-cheeked cuddling little creature that clung to her bosom and crowed with rapture whenever he came near.

"Look here," he said very gently, laying one hand on the woman's shoulder as she crouched shivering against the wall and staring piteously at

the motionless waxen form in her arms, "It's no use fretting about it." He paused,—there was an uncomfortable lump in his throat and he had to cough again to get it down. "The poor little creature's gone,—there's no help for it. The next world's a better place than this, you know! There, there! don't take on so about it,"—this as Liz shuddered and sighed—a sigh of such complete despair that it went straight to his honest soul and showed him how futile were his efforts at consolation. But he had his duty to attend to and he went on in firmer tones. "Now, like a good woman, you just move off from here and go home. If I leave you here by yourself a bit, will you promise me to go straight home? I mustn't find you here when I come back on this beat, d'ye understand?" Liz nodded. "That's right!" he resumed cheerily. "I'll give you just ten minutes; you just go straight home."

And with a "Good-night," uttered in accents meant to be comforting, he turned away and paced on, his measured tread echoing on the silence at first loudly, then fainter and fainter, till it altogether died away, as his bulky figure disappeared in the distance. Left to herself, Liz rose from her crouching posture; rocking the dead child in her arms, she smiled. "Go straight home!" she murmured half aloud, "Home, sweet home! Yes,

baby ; yes, my darling, we will go home together !” And creeping cautiously along in the shadows she reached a flight of the broad stone steps leading down to the river. She descended them one by one ; the black water lapped against them heavily, heavily ; the tide was full up. She paused ; a sonorous deep-toned iron voice rang through the air with reverberating, solemn melody. It was the great bell of St. Paul’s tolling midnight,—the Old Year was dead. “Straight home !” she repeated with a beautiful expectant look in her wild, weary eyes. “My little darling ! Yes, we are both tired ; we will go home ! Home, sweet Home ! We will go !”

Kissing the cold face of the baby corpse she held, she threw herself forward ; there followed a sullen deep splash—a slight struggle—and all was over ! The water lapped against the steps heavily, heavily as before ; the policeman passed once more, and saw to his satisfaction that the coast was clear ; through the dark veil of the sky one star looked out and twinkled for a brief instant, then disappeared again. A clash and clamour of bells startled the brooding night ;—here and there a window was opened and figures appeared in balconies to listen. They were ringing in the New Year,—the festival of hope, the birthday of the world ! But what were New Years to her,

who with white upturned face and arms that embraced an infant in the tenacious grip of death, went drifting, drifting, solemnly down the dark river, unseen, unpitied of all those who awoke to new hopes and aspirations on that first morning of another life-probation! Liz had gone—gone to make her peace with God—perhaps through the aid of her ‘hired’ baby—the little sinless soul she had so fondly cherished, gone to that sweetest ‘home’ we dream of and pray for, where the lost and bewildered wanderers on this earth shall find true welcome and rest from grief and exile,—gone to that fair, far Glory-World where reigns the Divine Master whose words still ring above the tumult of ages: “See that you despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that their Angels do always behold the face of My Father who is in Heaven!”

NEHEMIAH P. HOSKINS, ARTIST.

“ I HEV,” said Mr. Hoskins, “ made up my mind that this ‘ Daphne ’ will be the picture of the year—that is, so far as visitors to Rome are concerned. I do not exhibit at the French Salon, nor at the English Academy. I find ”—and Mr. Hoskins ran his hand through his hair and smiled complacently—“ that Rome suffices me. My pictures need no other setting than Rome. The memories of the Cæsars are enough to hallow their very frames ! Rome and Nehemiah Hoskins are old friends. What ? ”

This “ What ? ” was one of Mr. Hoskins’s favourite expressions. It finished all his sentences interrogatively. It gracefully implied that the person to whom he was speaking had said, or was going to say, something, and it politely expressed Mr. Hoskins’s own belief that no one would or could be so rude as to hear his eulogies of himself without instantly corroborating and enlarging them. Therefore, when, on the present occasion, Mr.

Hoskins said "What?" it was evident that he expected me to respond, and make myself agreeable. Unfortunately, I had no flatteries ready; flattery does not come easy to me, but I was able to smile. Indeed, I found it convenient to smile just then: the intimate association of the two names, 'Rome' and 'Hoskins,' moved me to this pleasantness. Then, without speaking, I took up a good position in the studio, and looked at the 'Daphne.'

There was not the least doubt in the world that it was a very fine picture. Drawing, grouping, colouring, all were as near perfection as human brain and hand could possibly devise. The scene depicted was the legended pursuit of Daphne by Apollo. It was an evening landscape; a young moon gleamed in the sky, and over a field of nodding lilies came the amorous god, with flying feet and hair blown backward by the wind, his ardent poetic face glowing with the impatience and fierceness of repulsed passion. Pale Daphne, turning round in fear, with hands uplifted in agonised supplication, was already changing into the laurel; half of her flowing golden tresses were transformed into clustering leaves, and from her arched and slender feet the twisted twigs of the tree of Fame were swiftly springing upward. The picture was a large one; and for ideality of concep-

tion, bold treatment, and harmony of composition would have been considered by most impartial judges, who have no 'art-clique' to please, a marvellous piece of work. Yet the wonder of it to me was that it should have been painted by Nehemiah P. Hoskins. The 'Daphne' was grand, but Hoskins looked mean, and the contrast was singular. Hoskins, with his greased and scented hair, his velveteen coat, his flowing blue tie, and his aggressive, self-appreciative, 'up-to-date' American 'art' manner, clashed with the beauty of his work discordantly.

"I presume," he said, twirling his moustache with a confident air, "that picture is worth its price. What?"

"It is very fine—very fine, indeed, Mr. Hoskins!" I murmured. "What are you asking for it?"

"Fifteen thousand dollars is my price," he answered jauntily. "And cheap it is at that. My friends tell me it is far too cheap. But what matter? I am not hampered by mercenary considerations. I work for the work's sake. Art is my goddess! Rome is my altar of worship! I will not debase myself or my profession by vulgar bargaining. When I first set this picture up on the easel for exhibition I said fifteen thousand dollars would content me. Since that time my

countless admirers have reproached me, saying, 'You ask too little, Hoskins; you are too modest, you do not realise your own greatness. You should demand a hundred thousand dollars!' But no! Having said fifteen thousand, I stick to it. I know it is cheap, ridiculously cheap, but never mind! there are more ideas still left in the brain that produced this work. What?"

"Indeed, I hope so," I said earnestly, endeavouring to overcome my dislike of the man's personality. "It is a magnificent picture, Mr. Hoskins, and I wish I could afford to purchase it. But as I cannot, let me say at least how warmly I congratulate you on the possession of so much true genius."

Mr. Hoskins bowed complacently.

"A word of appreciation is always welcome," he observed grandiloquently. "Sympathy is, after all, the best reward of the inspired artist. What is money?—Dross! When a friend comprehends the greatness of my work and acknowledges its successful accomplishment, my soul is satisfied. Money can only supply the vulgar necessities of life, but sympathy feeds the mind and rouses anew the divine fires! What?"

I really could not find any words to meet his interrogative "What?" this time. It seemed to

me that he had said all there was to say, and more than was necessary. I took my leave and passed out of the studio, vaguely irritated and dissatisfied. The 'Daphne' haunted me, and I felt unreasonably annoyed to think that one so vulgar and egotistical as Nehemiah P. Hoskins should have painted it. How came such a man to possess the all-potent talisman of Genius? I could now comprehend why the American colony in Rome made such a fuss about Hoskins; no wonder they were proud of him if he could produce such masterpieces as the 'Daphne'! Still thinking over the matter perplexedly, I re-entered the carriage which had waited for me outside the artist's studio, and should have driven away home, had it not been for the occurrence of one of those apparently trifling incidents which sometimes give the clue to a whole history. A little dog was suddenly run over in the street where my carriage stood—one of its forelegs was badly cut and bled profusely, but otherwise it was not seriously injured. The driver of the vehicle that had caused the mishap came to me and expressed his regrets, thinking that I was the owner of the wounded animal, as, indeed, I seemed to be, for it had limped directly up to me, yelping pitifully, as though appealing for assistance. I raised the small sufferer in my arms, and seeing that it wore a plain brass collar

inscribed "Mitû, 8, Via Tritone," I bade my coachman drive to that address, resolving to restore the strayed pet to its owner or owners. It was a pretty dog, white and fluffy as a ball of wool, with soft brown eyes and an absurdly small black nose. It was very clean and well kept, and from its appearance was evidently a favourite with its master or mistress. It took very kindly to me, and lay quiet on my lap, allowing me to bind up its wounded paw with my handkerchief, now and then licking my hand by way of gratitude.

"Mitû," said I, "if that is your name, you are more frightened than hurt, it seems to me. Somebody spoils you, Mitû, and you are affected! Your precious paw is not half so bad as you would make it out to be!"

Mitû sighed and wagged his tail; he was evidently accustomed to be talked to, and liked it. When we neared the Via Tritone he grew quite brisk, perked up his silky ears, and looked about him with a marked and joyful recognition of his surroundings; and when we stopped at No. 8 his excitement became so intense that he would certainly have jumped out of my arms, in complete forgetfulness of his injured limb, had I not restrained him. The door of the house was opened to us by a stout, good-natured-looking lady, arrayed in the true Italian style of morning *dés-*

habille, but who, in spite of excessive fat and slovenliness, possessed a smile sunny enough to make amends for far worse faults.

“Oh, Mitû! Mitû!” she cried, holding up her hands in grave remonstrance, as she caught sight of the little dog. “How wicked thou art! Well dost thou deserve misfortune! To run away and leave thy pretty signora!”

Mitû looked honestly ashamed of himself, and tried to hide his abashed head under my cloak. Curious to see the ‘pretty signora’ alluded to, I asked if I might personally restore the stray pet to its owner then and there.

“But certainly!” said the smiling padrona, in mellifluous tones of Roman courtesy. “If you will generously give yourself the trouble to ascend the stairs to the top—the very top, you understand? of the house, you will find the signora’s studio. The signora’s name, Giuletta Marchini, is on the door. Ah, *Dio!* But a minute ago she was here weeping for the wicked Mitû!”

Plainly, Mitû understood this remark, for he gave a smothered yelp by way of relieving his feelings. And to put him out of his declared remorse, suspense, and wretchedness as soon as possible, I straightway began to ‘generously give myself the trouble’ of climbing up to his mistress’s domicile. The stairs were many and

steep, but at last, well-nigh breathless, I reached the topmost floor of the tall old house, and knocked gently at the door, which directly faced me, and on which the name 'Giuletta Marchini' was painted in neat black letters. Mitû was now trembling all over with excitement, and when the door opened and a fair woman looked out, exclaiming in surprised glad accents, "Oh, Mitû ! *caro* Mitû !" he could stand it no longer. Wriggling out of my arms he bounced on the floor, and writhed there with yelps and barks of mingled pain and ecstasy, while I, in a few words, explained to his owner the nature of his misadventure. She listened, with a sweet expression of interest in her thoughtful dark eyes, and a smile lighting up one of the most *spirituelle* faces I ever saw.

"You have been very kind," she said, "and I do not know how to thank you enough. Mitû is such a dear little friend to me that I should have been miserable had I lost him. But he is of a very roving disposition, I'm afraid, and he is always getting into trouble. Do come into the studio and rest—the stairs are so fatiguing."

I accepted this invitation gladly, but scarcely had I crossed the threshold of the room than I started back with an involuntary exclamation. There, facing me on the wall, was a rough cartoon

in black and white of the 'Daphne' as exhibited by Nehemiah P. Hoskins'.

"Why!" I cried, "that is a sketch of the picture I have just seen!"

Giuletta Marchini smiled, and looked at me attentively.

"Ah! you have been visiting the American studios?" she asked.

"Not all of them. This morning I have only seen Mr. Hoskins's work."

"Ah!" she said again, and was silent.

Impulsively I turned and looked at her. She was attending to Mitû's injured paw. She had placed him on a cushion and was bandaging his wound carefully, with deft, almost surgical skill. I noticed her hands, how refined they were in shape, with the delicate tapering fingers that frequently indicate an artistic temperament—I studied the woman herself. Young and as slight as a reed, with a quantity of fair hair partially lifted in thick waves from a broad intelligent brow, she did not bear any semblance to that type known as an 'ordinary' woman. She was evidently something apart from the commonplace. By-and-by I found out a certain likeness in her to the 'Daphne' of Hoskins's wonderful picture, and, thinking I had made a discovery, I said—

“Surely you sat to Mr. Hoskins for the figure of Daphne?”

Smiling, she shook her head in the negative.

I felt a little embarrassed. I had taken her for a model, whereas it was possible she might be an artist herself of great talent. I murmured something apologetic, and she laughed—a clear, sweet, rippling laugh of purest mirth and good-humour.

“Oh, you must not apologise,” she said. “I know it must seem to you very singular to find the first sketch of the ‘Daphne’ here and the finished picture in Mr. Hoskins’s studio. And it is really such an odd coincidence that, through Mitû, you should come to me immediately after visiting Mr. Hoskins, that I feel I shall have to explain the matter. But, first, may I ask you to look round my studio? You will find other things beside that ‘Daphne’ cartoon.”

I did look round, with ever-growing wonder and admiration. There were “other things,” as she said—things of such marvellous beauty and genius as it would be difficult to find in any modern art-studio. In something of incredulity and amazement I instantly asked—

“These studies are yours?—you did them all yourself?”

Her level brows contracted a little—then she smiled.

“If you had been a man I should have expected that question. But, being a woman, I wonder at your suggesting it! Yes—I do my work myself, every bit of it! I love it! I am jealous of it while it remains with me. I have no master—I have taught myself all I know, and everything you see in this room is designed and finished by my own hand—*I am not Mr. Hoskins!*”

A sudden light broke in upon me.

“You painted the ‘Daphne’!” I cried.

She looked full at me, with a touch of melancholy in her brilliant eyes.

“Yes, I painted the ‘Daphne.’”

“Then how—why——” I began excitedly.

“Why do I allow Mr. Hoskins to put his name to it?” she said. “Well, he gives me two thousand francs for the permission—and two thousand francs is a small fortune to my mother and to me.”

“But you could sell your pictures yourself!” I exclaimed. “You could make heaps of money, and fame!”

“You think so?” and she smiled very sadly. “Well, I used to think so, too, once. But that dream is past. I want very little money, and my whole nature sickens at the thought of fame. Fame for a woman in these days means slander and jealousy—no more! Here is my history,”

and with a quick movement of her hand she drew aside a curtain which had concealed another picture of great size and magnificent execution—representing a group of wild horses racing furiously onward together, without saddle or bridle, and entitled “I Barberi.”

“I painted this,” she said, while I stood lost in admiration before the bold and powerful treatment of so difficult a subject, “when I was eighteen. I am twenty-seven now. At eighteen I believed in ideals ; and, of course, in love, as a part of them. I was betrothed to a man—an Austrian, who was studying art here in Rome. He saw me paint this picture—he watched me draw every line and lay on every tint. Well, to make a long story short, he copied it. He brought his canvas here in this studio and worked with me—out of love, he said—for he wished to keep an exact fac-simile of the work which he declared would make me famous. I believed him, for I loved him ! When he had nearly finished his copy he took it away, and two days afterwards came to bid me farewell. He was obliged to go to Vienna, he told me, but he would return to Rome again within the month. We parted as lovers part—with tenderness on both sides—and when he had gone I set to work to give the last finishing touches to my picture. When I had done all I thought I could do, I wrote

to a famous dealer in the city and asked him to come and give me his judgment as to the worth of my work. Directly he entered this room he started back, and looked at me reproachfully. 'I can do nothing with a copy,' he said; 'I have just purchased the original picture by Max Wieland.'"

I uttered an exclamation of indignation and compassion.

"Yes," continued Giuletta Marchini, "Max Wieland was my lover. He had stolen my picture, he had robbed me of my fame. I do not quite know what happened when I heard it. I think I lost my head completely for a time—my mother tells me I was ill for months. But I myself have no remembrance of anything but a long blank of hopeless misery. Of course, I never saw Max again. I wrote to him; he never answered. I told the picture-dealer my story, but he would not believe it. 'The design of "I Barberi,"' he said, 'is not that of a feminine hand. It is purely masculine. If Max Wieland is your *dama*, you do him a great and cruel injustice by striving to pass off your very accurate copy as the original. It will not do, my dear little sly one, it will not do! I am too old and experienced a judge for that. No girl of your age was ever capable of designing such a work—look at the anatomy and the colouring! It is the *man's* touch all over—nothing

feminine about it.' And then," went on Giuletta slowly, "the story got about that I tried to steal Max Wieland's picture, and that he had broken off his engagement with me on that account. My mother, who is old and feeble, grew almost mad with anger, for she had witnessed his work of copying from me—but no one would believe her either. They only said it was natural she should try to defend her own daughter. Then we were poor, and we had no money to appeal to the law. No dealer would purchase anything that bore my name—as an artist I was ruined."

Here the dog Mitû, conscious that his mistress's voice had rather a sad tone in it, limped across to her on his three legs, holding up his bandaged paw. She smiled and lifted him up in her arms.

"Yes—we were ruined, Mitû!" she said, resting her pretty rounded chin on his silky head. "Ruined as far as the world and the world's applause went. But one cannot put a stop to thoughts—they will grow, like flowers, wherever there is any soil to give them root. And though I knew I could not sell my pictures, I continued to paint for my own pleasure; and to keep my mother and myself alive I gave drawing-lessons to children. But we were poor—intolerably, squalidly poor—till one day Mr. Hoskins came."

"And then?" I inquired eagerly.

“Why, then—well!” and the fair Marchini laughed a little. “He made me a curious proposal. He said he was an American artist who desired to establish himself in Rome. He could only paint landscapes, he told me, and he knew he would require to have ‘figure-pictures’ in his studio to ‘draw.’ He said he would pay me handsomely to do these ‘figure-pictures’ if I would sell them to him outright, let him put his name to them, and ask no more about them. I hesitated at first, but my mother was very ill at the time, and I had no money. I was driven by necessity, and at last I consented. And Mr. Hoskins has kept his word about payment—he is very generous—and my mother and I are quite well off now.”

“But he is asking fifteen thousand dollars for the ‘Daphne,’” I cried, “and he only gives you two thousand francs! Do you call that generous?”

Giuletta Marchini looked thoughtful.

“Well, I don’t know!” she said sweetly, with a plaintive uplifting of her eyebrows; “you see it costs him a great deal to live in Rome; he entertains numbers of people and has to keep a carriage. Now it costs us very little to live as we do, and we have no friends at all. Two thousand francs is quite as large a sum to me as fifteen thousand dollars is to him.”

“And you will never make any attempt to secure for yourself the personal fame you so well deserve?” I asked in astonishment.

She shrugged her shoulders.

“I think not! What is the use of it—to a woman? Celebrity for our sex, as I said before, simply means—slander! A man may secure fame through the vilest and most illegitimate means, he may steal other people’s brains to make his own career, he may bribe the critics, he may do anything and everything in his power, dishonourably or otherwise—provided he succeeds he is never blamed. But let a woman become famous through the unaided exertions of her own hand and brain, she is always suspected of having been ‘helped’ by somebody. No, I cannot say I care for fame. I painted my picture, or, rather, Mr. Hoskins’s picture”—and she smiled—“out of a strong feeling of sympathy with the legend. The god approaches, and the woman is transformed from a creature of throbbing joys and hopes and passions into the laurel—a tree of bitter taste and scentless flower! I am happier as I am—unknown to the world—while Hoskins ‘is an honourable man’!” she finished, making the Shakesperian quotation with a bright laugh, as she dropped the curtain over the great canvas of “I Barberi,” the picture that had been the cause of so much sorrow in her life.

After this adventure I visited Giuletta Marchini often, and tried to argue with her on the erroneous position she occupied. I pointed out to her that Nehemiah P. Hoskins was making out of her genius a fraudulent reputation for himself. But she assured me there were many struggling artists in Rome who made their living in the same way as she did—namely, by painting pictures for American “artists” who had no idea of painting for themselves. I discussed the matter with her mother, a dried-up little chip of an old woman with black eyes that sparkled like jewels, and I found her quite as incorrigible on the subject as Giuletta herself.

“When a girl’s heart is broken, what can you do?” she said, with eloquent gestures of her head and hands. “The Austrian devil is to blame—Max Wieland; may all evil follow him! Giuletta loved him. I believe, if she would only confess it, she loves him now. Her character is not a changeful one. She is one of those women who would let her lover kill her and kiss the hand that dealt the blow. She has genius—oh, yes! Genius is not rare in Italy. It is in the blood of the people, and we do not wonder at it. Things are best as they are. She is not happy, perhaps, but she is at peace. She loves her work, and we are able to live. That is enough, and all we want in

this world. And for Giuletta—a woman does not care for fame when she has lost love.”

And from her I could get no other verdict. She had, however, a strong sense of humour, I found, and fully recognised the art-fraud practised on his patrons by Nehemiah P. Hoskins ; but she could not see that her daughter was either affected or injured by it. At Giuletta's own earnest request I therefore refrained from any immediate interference with Nehemiah's prosperity and growing reputation. He was quite the ‘lion’ in Rome that year, and entertained whole embassies at tea. The ‘Daphne’ was purchased at his own price by one of the wealthiest of his countrymen (a former ‘navvy,’ who now keeps ‘secretaries’ and buys historical land in England), who has had it carefully ‘hung’ in the most conspicuous part of his new picture-gallery, and who calls Hoskins ‘the American Raphael.’

Meanwhile, at my suggestion, Giuletta Marchini is painting a work which she intends to submit to some of the best judges of art in Paris ; and, judging from its design so far as it has proceeded, I think it is possible that in a couple of years Nehemiah P. Hoskins will be found to have ‘gone off’ in a singular manner, while Giuletta Marchini will have ‘come up,’ to be received, no doubt, with the usual mixture of abuse and grudging

praise awarded to work that is known to be woman's, instead of the applause that frequently attends the inane productions of pretentious and fraudulent men. In truth, it would sometimes seem that it is better, as this world goes, to be a man and an impostor, than a woman and honest. And concerning American artists in Rome, it is well known how many a one has there enjoyed a brief but dazzling reputation for 'genius,' which has suddenly ended in 'smoke,' because the gifted Italian who has played 'ghost' behind the scenes has died, or emigrated, or gone elsewhere to make a name for himself. This rapid and apparently mysterious failure has attended the career of one Max Wieland, upon whom the Viennese journals now and then comment in terms of reproach and disappointment. His great picture, they say, of "I Barberi," had led the world of art to expect works from him of the very highest order, but, strange to say, he has done nothing since worthy of remark or criticism. Giuletta knows this, but is silent on the subject, and for herself, is certainly more alarmed than pleased at the prospect of winning her deserved fame.

"To be censured and misunderstood," she says, "is it pleasant—for a woman? To be pointed out as if one were a branded criminal, and regarded with jealousy, suspicion, and even hatred—is it

worth fighting for? I myself doubt it. Yet if the laurel must grow from a human heart I suppose it cannot but cause pain."

And even while she works steadily on at her new picture, she tells me she is quite contented as she is, and happier than she thinks she is likely to be as an art 'celebrity.' In the interim, Nehemiah P. Hoskins, the 'American Raphael,' is triumphant; accepting homage for genius not his own, and pocketing cash for work he has not done; while he is never so magnificently convincing, so grandiloquently impressive, as when, surrounded by admiring male friends, he discourses complacently upon the 'totally mistaken' vocation of 'woman in art'!

THE SILENCE OF THE MAHARAJAH.

OUT in India at a certain English station which was generally admitted to be socially 'fast,' with that unique sort of fastness peculiar to Anglo-Indian life, the leader of the most 'rapid' set was a handsome, dashing woman, known to the irreverent as 'Lolly,' and to the more orthodox as Mrs. Claude Annesley. She was the wife of Colonel Claude Annesley, of course, but this fact had to be strongly borne in upon the minds of those who were not thoroughly well acquainted with her, because at first sight she did not appear to be the wife of anybody. She gave you the impression of being a 'free lance' among women, joyously insolent and independent; and the bonds of matrimony seemed to press very lightly on her frivolous butterfly soul. She was not what one would call positively young any longer, being a trifle over forty, but she was so slim and light on her feet, besides knowing exactly what kind of corsets would give her the most

perfectly pliant and *svelte* figure, that she was generously allowed by her men friends (though not by her women rivals) to pass for being still in the early thirties. She went in thoroughly, too, for all the newest methods of 'skin treatment,' and succeeded in preserving a fresh and even brilliant natural complexion, despite the heats of India. She was tall and brown-haired, with dark eyes which had a sparkle of the devil's own mischief in them; she had very white even teeth, and could smile bewitchingly.

Her husband was younger than herself—some said four or five years younger—though at times he looked ten years older. He was a big, gaunt, grave-featured man with a turn for philosophy. He would sit silently smoking for hours, meditating inwardly and looking very old; but if a friendly comrade came in and disturbed his solitude with some senseless yet well-meaning remark about the weather or the Government, he would spring up to give a hearty return greeting; his eyes, which were a clear blue, would flash with pleasure, and in a moment he became young—quite young, with an almost boyish youngness which was amazing. It was on these occasions that people called him handsome, and murmured among themselves *sotto-voce*, "I wonder why he married Lolly?"

And somehow it did seem a singular thing, till one fine day somebody discovered the reason of it. It was very simple, and not at all uncommon. 'Lolly' had money; Colonel Annesley had none, or what was as bad as none. 'Lolly' entertained largely, and gave expensive luncheons and garden-parties; her husband was little more than an invited guest at these. He did not pay for them—he could not pay; and though he was supposed to do the honours, he fulfilled this duty with so timid and hesitating a demeanour that Mrs. Annesley would generally send him away to smoke by himself, saying, with a perfectly unruffled brow and good-natured laugh, "Really, Claude, you have no tact!" And certainly he did appear to be deficient in this social quality. It was impossible to the gaunt, young-old Colonel to feign things—to pretend he was rich when he knew he was poor; to assume the airs of manly and easy independence when his wife had all the sinews of war and reins of government and expenditure in her hands, and seldom lost an opportunity of reminding him of the fact. Of course he had his pay, but that he scrupulously set aside for his own clothes, tobacco, and extras. A good deal of it went, by the by, in his annual birthday present to his wife. He was at heart a good fellow, yet somehow as soon as people found out that his

wife had all the money and he had none, he got generally misunderstood. Sentimental young ladies exclaimed to one another, "What a horrid man!—to marry for money!" Mothers who had dowerless daughters to wed experienced a violent revulsion of feeling against him, and observed, "Dear me! Fancy if *all* men were as selfish as Colonel Annesley!" His own sex, however, thought more leniently of him. Impecunious officers judged him by themselves, and said feelingly, "He's not to be blamed for looking after the main chance. And Lolly must be a trial, even taking the cash in."

Nevertheless they were obliged to own that 'Lolly' was not without her charm. She was extremely good-tempered, an excellent hostess, a clever match-maker, a sprightly talker, and a generally accomplished society woman all round. So that everybody was not a little interested and excited when it was known that Mrs. Claude Annesley had made up her mind to entertain for three or four days in the grandest style the Maharajah of the neighbouring province, a prince noted for his wealth and the enormous quantity of his jewels. He was young, and had received a first-class English college education, and according to report was a very superior type of native potentate, being something of a poet in his own

fanciful way of Eastern symbolism, and having furthermore distinguished himself by the publication of a brilliantly-written treatise in Hindustani on the most recent discoveries in astronomy. Wherefore Mrs. Annesley determined to 'lionise' him. She did not consult the Colonel on the subject at all ; his opinion would have been worth nothing. She believed somewhat in the creed of the 'New' woman, which declares men generally to be either brutes or fools. She did not include her husband in the former class ; he was too gentlemanly and inoffensive ; but she silently and without open incivility placed him among the latter. Consequently, in her proposed intention to 'make capital' out of the entertainment of a bejewelled Maharajah, he—'poor Claude,' as she called him—was not admitted into the discussion of ways and means. He was only the ornamental dummy or figure-head of the establishment. The house, the biggest residence in the whole place, and almost palatial, was Hers ; the money was Hers. He had nothing to do with it ; he was merely Her husband. Therefore, when he met people who said, "So the Maharajah is coming to stay with you?" he answered absently, "I believe so," without being at all certain on the point. He thought about it now and then while smoking his own tobacco, tobacco which he found particularly

soothing because he had paid for it himself, and did not owe it to his wife's purse. And he was not at all sure that he liked the idea of the Maharajah's visit. He did not take kindly to native princes. He had all the prejudices of the pugnacious Briton 'born for precedence,' and had no love for that type of human being known to some poets as the 'dusky, dark-eyed Oriental.' Dusky and dark-eyed the Oriental might be, but he was also likely to be dirty. And 'poor Claude,' though apparently vague on other matters, had particularly strong ideas on the subject of frequent 'tubbing.' It was to this, perhaps, that he owed his rather fine, clear skin, under which the blood flowed with such easy freedom that he was frequently accused of blushing. The least emotion or excitement of a pleasurable nature brought a ruddy tint to his cheeks, and gave them that 'glow of health' for which certain beauties pay so much per box or bottle at the perfumer's. He blushed now at the possibility of having an untubbed Maharajah in the house.

"However," he murmured, "he's had an English education, and she *will* have her way"—the 'she' referring to his wife, lady, and ruler—"I like a quiet life, and it's best not to interfere. She's got a perfect right to do as she likes with her own money."

And he resigned himself as usual to the inevitable. For there was no doubt that the Maharajah was coming. He had accepted the invitation given him, and he was known to be a man of his word. His treatise on astronomy had proved him to be that. He had said he would write that treatise, and nobody believed him, not even his college tutors. "He's too lazy," one Englishman remarked of him, the said Englishman having been four years at work on the writing of an extremely feeble novel which he had sent to London to get published, and which no publisher would accept; "he'll never write anything. I know these native fellows!" But, despite this prophecy, he had done it, and done it so well that it was the subject of interested and admiring comment among scientific people generally. And this very treatise on modern astronomy was one of the reasons why Mrs. Annesley wanted to lionise him. But it was not the chief reason—not by any means. The chief reason was perfectly human and particularly feminine: it was that Mrs. Claude Annesley wished to impress everybody in the place with a sense of *her* wealth, *her* importance, *her* influence, *her* position generally. And she had chosen this special time to do it because—well, the 'because' involves a little explanation, which runs as follows:—

Long ago, and long before handsome Laura Egerton, now Mrs. Claude Annesley, had married Colonel Claude Annesley, while she was yet the dashing belle of the London 'season,' she had contracted what was for her a curiously sentimental friendship with a girl several years younger than herself—a pale, slim, tiny, golden-haired creature with great plaintive grey eyes set in her small face like stars too big for the position in which they found themselves. This elf-like being exercised a peculiar fascination over the sprightly 'Lolly,' partly on account of her ethereal looks, which caused her to be sometimes called *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, after Keats's heart-throbbing poem, partly because she was so unworldly and childlike, and partly because she had such naïve and fantastic notions concerning men. She was named Idreana, which had the advantage of being an unusual name and fascinating in its long-drawn vowel sound.

Idreana used to say in her soft, thrilling voice, that a man, according to the notion *she* had formed of the one she could 'love, honour and obey,' must be a hero, morally and physically; that she pictured him as brave and tender, chivalrous and true. A grand great creature whom to look upon was to honour, revere, and adore! To lose one's very identity in an absorbing passion for

such an one, to sacrifice everything for so worthy a master and lord, would be the happiest, proudest, most glorious fate imaginable for any woman! So she would speak, this fairy-like feminine bundle of nerves and sentiment, her whole little frame a-quiver with enthusiasm. And 'Lolly,' then in the thick of motley 'society,' would listen vaguely entranced, compassionately amused, wholly astonished, wondering within herself as to what would become of this self-deluding, imaginative small maiden when she came to know the world—when Fashion and Frivolity burst in like drunken clowns upon the holy quiet of her girlish fancies, and with blatant laughter and lascivious jest tore down the rose-coloured veil she had woven about herself, and forced her to look on social life as it is, and on men as they are. 'Lolly' did not suffer from sentiment as a rule; and the only really violent attack of that malady she ever had was during her intimacy with this weird little Idreana.

And now Idreana was married—had been married three years or more, to a Captain Le Marchant, whose regiment was also stationed in India, but at a rather dismal place, a good way distant from the 'happy valley,' where Mrs. Claude Annesley held her social court; and thus it had happened that the two ladies, since their respective marriages,

had never met. But they were going to meet now. Mrs. Annesley had invited Captain and Mrs. Le Marchant to stay with her, and after some little delay the Captain had obtained a month's leave of absence, and the invitation was accepted. It was after this acceptance of the Le Marchants that Mrs. Annesley had bethought herself of entertaining the Maharajah. "It will astonish the Le Marchants," was her first thought. "It will please Idreana's picturesque turn of mind," was her second. Perhaps if her motive had been probed down to its farthest root, it would have been found to be nothing more nor less than a desire to 'show off' before the friend of her unmarried days, and prove that her position as a wife was unexceptionable. She knew that *la belle dame sans merci* had made a poor match, financially considered, and she had heard (only through friendly rumour of course) that Captain Le Marchant, though a 'fine man,' had contracted rather a disagreeable habit, that of getting heavily drunk on occasions. But she could not quite believe this. "If it were so, Idreana, with her fastidious notions about men, would never have married him," she thought. Yet she admitted within herself that it was quite possible Idreana, like other women 'with fastidious notions,' might have been deceived.

It was with a certain amount of curiosity and excitement, therefore, that Mrs. Claude Annesley prepared to receive the Le Marchants on the afternoon of their arrival. They came a few days before the date fixed for the visit of the Maharajah, and it is due to Mrs. Claude Annesley's sense of old friendship and hospitality to observe that she was much more particular over the comfortable arrangements of the rooms set apart for Idreana and Idreana's husband than she was for the adornment of those palatial apartments, the best in her large luxurious residence, which were destined to receive the Maharajah. She was genuinely eager to see her little friend of former days again, and wondered if marriage had altered her—if she had lost that singularly sylph-like *belle dame sans merci* expression that had once marked her out from ordinary young women.

“ ‘ Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild! ’ ”

hummed Mrs. Annesley softly, as she moved from room to room, setting flowers here, a mirror there, and giving to everything that final touch which is essentially feminine, and which imparts even to lifeless furniture a sentient, confidential, and welcoming air. “ What will she think of us all, I wonder ? ” ‘ Us all ’ included herself and a very large number of officers and civilians, married

and unmarried—"the boys," as she called them. The wives of the married ones did not come into the category, neither was Colonel Annesley counted among "the boys." In fact, he was not to be discovered in any particular social roll-call; he was not exactly a "boy"; and as he was in a manner dependent on his wife, he was not exactly a man. This is socially speaking. In his regiment he was thought a good deal of. But as this story has nothing to do with his regiment, and does not in the least concern his military career, there is no occasion to enlarge on the ideas of the regiment concerning him. They were old-fashioned ideas, very blunt and commonplace, and did not take in Mrs. Annesley at all as part of the Colonel's existence. They are very well known, and have been duly chronicled.

"What will she think of us all?" repeated Mrs. Annesley with a smile and an approving glance at her well-dressed figure as she passed a convenient mirror. "She was always such a quixotic little thing. I am curious to see what sort of a husband she has chosen."

Her curiosity was almost immediately gratified, for as she entered her drawing-room, after a final survey of the apartments prepared for her visitors, Captain and Mrs. Le Marchant, with their ser-

vants, their bag and baggage, duly arrived, and were straightway announced.

"My dear Idreana!" cried Mrs. Annesley, stepping quickly to embrace the small, slight figure of the woman now entering the doorway, "What an age it is since we met!" Then again, "My dear Idreana!"

The small woman smiled—a rather grave and doubtful smile.

"It is pleasant to see you again, Laura," she said in a low voice. Then with a touch of something like appeal in her tone, "Let me introduce—my husband."

A tall, heavily-made man, thickly moustached, with fine eyes and a somewhat flushed face, bowed.

"Charmed to meet you!" he drawled. "Old friend of my wife's—delightful! Awfully good of you to put us up!"

"Oh, the pleasure is mine, I assure you!" exclaimed Mrs. Annesley eagerly, anxious to put an end to the temporary embarrassment of introduction, and nervously conscious that she had taken an instant dislike to Captain Le Marchant. "I cannot tell you how delighted I am to see dear Idreana again. And as sweet as ever! Positively, my dear, you look a mere child still; no one would ever take you for a married woman. Do

sit down and have some tea before you go to your rooms. Claude ! Claude ! ”

Colonel Annesley, part of whose marital duty it was to be always within call on the arrival of visitors, entered from the verandah.

“ This is *my* husband,” said Mrs. Annesley with a sudden glow of unaccustomed pride as she noticed that ‘ poor Claude ’ did really look singularly distinguished as contrasted with Le Marchant—“ Colonel Annesley, Captain Le Marchant ; and this, Claude, is Mrs. Le Marchant, my dear little friend of old days at home, Idreana.”

Colonel Annesley bowed, not without a certain grace. In one keen glance he had taken in the characteristics of the married pair.

“ The man is of the ‘ fine brute ’ bull-throated type,” he said inwardly, “ and his wife—poor little sweet soul ! ”

These were his only mental comments ; he was accustomed to disguise his feelings. He sat down by Mrs. Le Marchant and began talking to her, now and then asking her husband the particulars of their journey and other trifles, in order to bring him into the conversation. For once Mrs. Annesley felt grateful to ‘ poor Claude.’ He was making things easy—things that she would somehow have found difficult. For not only did

she not like the look of Captain Le Marchant but she was painfully impressed by the expression in Mrs. Le Marchant's face. Idreana was still wonderful to look at with her cloud of gold hair and small delicate face—she was still the very ideal of the *belle dame sans merci*, but she was a *belle dame* who had been mysteriously insulted and outraged. A silent tragedy was written in her large deep eyes ; a hint of it was set in the proud curve of her upper lip ; traces of it were discernible in one or two lines about her mouth and forehead. She was choicely though simply attired. She listened to Colonel Annesley's conversation attentively, and answered his various questions with that gentleness and grace which mark perfect breeding ; and then, tea being finished, she accompanied Mrs. Annesley to her room, leaving her husband to smoke with his host in the verandah. Once alone together, the two women looked each other steadily in the face. Then Mrs. Annesley spoke out impulsively.

“ Idreana, you are not happy ? ”

“ I'm sorry my condition is so evident,” said Idreana with a pale smile, setting aside her hat and cloak. “ Certainly, I am not happy. But it doesn't matter.”

“ Doesn't matter ? ”

“ No ! Why should it ? People are not meant

to be happy in this world." She sat down, and clasping her hands in her lap looked up seriously. "Dreams fade, delusions die—life is never what it seems to promise. This is everybody's story ; it is mine. I do not complain."

"But you married for love, Idreana ?"

"Certainly I did," she answered. "You put it exactly—for love. I wanted love—I longed for it, as they say the saints long for God. One hears and reads so much about love in one's youth, you know, one actually believes in it. I believed in it ; it was foolish of me to fasten my faith on a mere rumour. Did you marry for love too ?"

A faint flush tinted Mrs. Annesley's well-preserved skin.

"No dear," she admitted frankly. "I married—well, because it was time I married. I was getting what they call *passée*. I wanted a sober and respectable husband. And Colonel Annesley is that."

"Ah !" and Idreana's straight brows contracted. "Well, Captain Le Marchant is *not* that."

Mrs. Annesley started. The report she had heard, the friendly report, was true, then.

"My dear, I am sorry," she began stammeringly.

"Don't be sorry," said Idreana, rising and beginning to arrange her hair in front of the

mirror. "And don't let us talk about it. You know what fancies I used to have? Well, they are dead and done for. I have buried them all, and—sometimes—I brood a little over the grave. But you were always sensible; you never had any delusions to bury, and my griefs, such as they are, have chiefly arisen from my own wilful ignorance of things. I understand life now, and am quite prepared to live it out without undue grumbling at the inevitable."

She raised a mass of her bright hair and settled it in its place. Mrs. Annesley looked at her wonderingly, and the former romantic fascination this slight creature used to exercise over her own matter-of-fact disposition, returned.

"How pretty you are, Idreana!" she said with ungrudging admiration. "How very pretty! Whatever you have suffered, your looks are not spoilt."

"I am glad of that," returned Mrs. Le Marchant with a little laugh in which there was a ring of bitterness. "No woman likes to grow ugly—the sense of ugliness almost makes one lose one's self-respect. But, my dear Laura"—here her voice softened—"you always thought too much of me. You were a beauty in your girlhood—I never was."

"No, you were never a beauty," returned Mrs.

Annesley musingly, "but you were what you are still—an indescribable being. And, do you know, I don't think men get on with indescribable beings. Antony liked Cleopatra, and she was indescribable ; but then the modern man is never a Marc Antony, though I believe there are plenty of Cleopatras among modern women. You are a sort of enigma, you know ; you can't help it—you were made like that, and men are always silly at guessing enigmas."

Idreana smiled rather sadly. "I think you mistake me, dear," she said gently : "I am not an enigma. I am only a weak, loving woman whose best emotions have been killed like leaves in a frost. There never was any mystery about my nature, and if there seems to you any mystery now, it is only because I try to shut within myself the secret of my life's disappointment and sorrow. If my heart is broken, the world need not know it. And you will help me, will you not?" she added with a certain tremulous eagerness. "You will not let any one guess my husband's——" here she paused and sought for a word, and finally said, "my husband's failing. One must always keep up appearances, and there is no occasion to make an exhibition of one's domestic griefs for the benefit of unsympathetic society. While we are here, you, as hostess, can do so much for me ; in your hospi-

tality you will not, I am sure, encourage Captain Le Marchant in his habit——”

She broke off, and her self-command gave way a little. Mrs. Annesley saw the tears in her eyes, and her own throat contracted unpleasantly.

“Of course not, my dear,” she said hastily. “But—I must tell Claude. Otherwise, you see, he will keep on passing the wine and other things. He is very good-natured, and he has an idea that every decent man knows when he has had enough——” Here she paused, remembering that ‘poor Claude’ himself was one of these decent men. “He is really an awfully good fellow,” she thought, with a most curious and quite novel touch of remorse. “Now I come to consider it, he has been the most perfect of husbands!” Aloud, she went on, “You agree with me, don’t you, Idreana, that it will be best just to mention it to Claude?”

Mrs. Le Marchant’s large pathetic eyes appeared to be looking dreamily into futurity.

“Yes, it will be best,” she answered at last. “Besides, your husband is a good man, and naturally you can have no secrets from him.”

Mrs. Annesley winced a little and flushed. Things were not exactly as Idreana put them. But never mind! Idreana was always fanciful.

She was silent, and presently Mrs. Le Marchant spoke again.

"One thing I have not told you," she said. "I had a child."

"You had, Idreana!" and Mrs. Annesley gazed at her with a lurking envy in her soul, for in this respect the Fates had not been good to her. "When?"

"Oh! nearly two years ago." And the delicate face of the *belle dame sans merci* grew paler and more wistful. "It was a pretty little creature, and I always imagine it loved me, though it was so young. It died when it was three months old."

"My poor darling," exclaimed Mrs. Annesley, slipping an arm round the younger woman's waist. "What a trial for you! What a grief!"

"No, it was a gladness," said Idreana quietly. "I have thanked God many a time for my baby's death. If it had lived"—she shuddered—"it might have grown up to be like its father!"

The intense horror in her tone sent quite a disagreeable chill through her listener's blood. This was dreadful! Idreana was dreadful; the conversation was dreadful! It must be put a stop to. Mrs. Annesley's eminently practical nature suddenly asserted itself.

"My dear girl, for goodness' sake don't let us

get on these melancholy subjects," she said briskly, the social 'Lolly,' beginning to shine out of every feature of her still handsome face. "You mustn't think about troubles while you are with me. You are here for a little change and gaiety, and I intend that you shall enjoy yourself. We'll manage Captain Le Marchant, and you will have no need to fret yourself. Just you put on a pretty gown now, and make yourself look as sweet as ever you can; there are some nice fellows coming to dine to-night, and I want them to admire you. I shall have to run away myself now to change my dress. Will you be long?"

"No," answered Mrs. Le Marchant gently, "I shall not be long."

Mrs. Annesley paused on the threshold, with a bright look. "And, oh!" she said, "I forgot to tell you that we are going to have a wonderful native prince here on a visit—a really very delightful Maharajah, extremely well educated. He speaks English perfectly, and he wears—oh! my dear! *such* diamonds! We are going to hold some big receptions in his honour, and wind up with a ball. I am sure you will enjoy it all immensely."

She nodded and tripped off, meeting Captain Le Marchant on the way. He was coming up

to his room to dress for dinner, under the escort of Colonel Annesley.

"Claude," she said in her sweetest voice, "when you have shown Captain Le Marchant his room, will you come to me? I want to speak to you."

The Colonel returned assent, and presently came into the drawing-room, where he found his wife awaiting him.

"Claude," she began hesitatingly, "it's a dreadful thing to have to say, but I'm obliged to tell you, Captain Le Marchant *drinks!*"

"He looks it," responded the Colonel briefly, and then stood 'at attention' ready for further revelations.

"Oh, Claude," exclaimed 'Lolly' irrelevantly, "I have never seen *you* drunk!"

Colonel Annesley stared.

"Of course not! What's that got to do with it?"

"Oh, I don't know." And Mrs. Annesley looked up, and then down nervously, and finally assuming her most impressive and wife-like manner she added, "I'm only so *glad* and *proud*, Claude, that I never *have!*"

The tall Colonel blushed and looked extremely young. A stranger observing him would have said he was evidently ashamed of himself. Perhaps he was. He said nothing, however, and only smiled dreamily.

"Claude," went on Mrs. Annesley, "you must try and keep this man sober—you must, really! Fancy if he were to make a scene with Idreana, *before* people, and *here*!"

"*Does* he make scenes with her?" inquired the Colonel.

"Well, she hasn't actually said so much, but I imagine he does. Anyway, keep the wine and spirits out of his reach, because, you see, if he never knows when to stop——"

"Beast!" muttered the Colonel under his breath.

His wife looked at him almost humbly. "Yes, he must be," she agreed. "Poor little Idreana!"

The Colonel did not echo this sentiment. He was playing with a small bullet that was set as a charm on his watch-chain (a bullet that had a history) and appeared stolidly unmoved.

"You understand, Claude, don't you?" went on his wife. "You are the host, and you mustn't be the one to set temptation in his way. Don't let him have the chance to disgrace himself."

The Colonel looked perplexed. "I'll do my best," he said curtly, and turned on his heel to leave the room.

"Claude!" called his wife softly.

He came back obediently.

"You haven't got a flower in your coat for

dinner," she said with a trembling little laugh. "Let me give you one."

She took a small, sweet-scented blossom from a vase and fastened it in his button-hole. Under his clear skin the blood swiftly reddened and rose to the very roots of his close-cropped brown hair. He was blushing again apparently, and again he looked extraordinarily young. A novel and peculiar sense of being petted and made much of was on him, but he was quite silent. He was too much astonished to speak.

"There!" said Mrs. Annesley with a coquettish look of triumph as she finished decorating him. "Now you do me credit!"

Surprise gave him a little catch in his throat. He coughed nervously.

"Do I?" he managed to say at last. "I—er—thank you!" And out he went in a whirl of amazement. She meanwhile laughed and scolded herself for indulging in a sort of side flirtation with her own husband.

"Poor Claude!" she murmured, repeating that favourite phrase which had now become almost hackneyed. "But he really *is* a gentleman."

The dinner that night went off successfully. Captain Le Marchant made himself most agreeable, and managed to impress everybody more or less with the idea that he was really a 'charming'

man. Even Mrs. Annesley decided that he was "not so bad after all," and that perhaps Idreana, always imaginative, had unconsciously exaggerated his 'failing.' The Colonel sat listening to him, like a good host, with polite and apparently absorbed attention. The gentlemen who added the intellectual grace and splendour of their presence to the table were chiefly young subalterns, open admirers and followers of Mrs. Annesley, who alternately flattered them, laughed at them, mocked them, neglected them, and drove them to despair, just as her humour suited her; and on this particular occasion these 'boys' were rendered rather awkward and bashful by the fairy-like loveliness of Mrs. Le Marchant.

Idreana, dressed in pure white, with her gold hair knotted in a Greek twist, and her tragic-sweet eyes, was a wonderful sight to see. She said so little, she looked so much. She was only a small woman, but to the dazzled subalterns she was 'immense!' They found her, as Mrs. Annesley had said, 'indescribable,' and did not quite know what to make of her. Her husband himself seemed to stand just a little in awe of her. What Colonel Annesley thought concerning her was not new. His first comment, "Poor little sweet soul!" still held good as the sum and substance of his opinion. It was a relief to the whole party to talk

of the coming Maharajah. What he would do, and what they would do, formed a perpetually interesting topic of conversation. The 'boys' commented silently on the fact that neither Colonel nor Mrs. Annesley seemed very lavish of wines at dinner, and that the 'drink' generally was dispensed with a somewhat stingy care. But they were charitable 'boys' and concluded that 'Lolly' had run out of supplies and was laying in fresh stock. So that the evening passed off pleasantly without a hitch, and Captain Le Marchant showed no tendency whatever to fall into his 'habit.'

Some days now passed in pleasant tranquillity. Colonel Annesley, though he kept a constant watch on his guest with the 'failing,' began himself to think that the case had been over-stated. Beyond a more or less settled gloominess of disposition, Captain Le Marchant was very much like any other ordinary army man. He was not clever, and in conversation he was occasionally coarse, but on the whole he maintained a decent and well-bred behaviour. He was a magnificent athlete and a keen sportsman, and these attributes made him rather a popular 'man's man.' Idreana began to look happier; a little of the tragedy went out of her eyes, leaving the light of hope there instead, whereat Mrs. Annesley rejoiced unselfishly.

And at last the Maharajah arrived. In splendid garb he came, and showed himself to be a somewhat remarkable specimen of an Oriental. In the first place he was exceedingly handsome ; secondly, he was exceptionally well-mannered. Courteous, yet not abating one jot of his dignity, he and a limited suite—limited in order not to put his hosts to too much trouble—took possession of that part of Mrs. Annesley's house reserved and arranged for his special accommodation. All the particulars of his caste had been noted and remembered, and he showed his appreciation of this careful forethought and consideration by proving himself to be what rumour had already described him, a brilliant and gifted man, whose conversational capacities were not to be despised. From the first hour of his arrival, he had fastened his glowing dark eyes on the fair and *spirituelle* beauty of Mrs. Le Marchant, and had, in the briefest possible space of time, fallen secretly a victim to her unconsciously exerted charm. For *her* he strove to appear at his best ; to interest *her* he spoke of the long vigils which he was wont to pass on the flower-garlanded flat roof of his palace, his great telescope set up and pointed at the stars ; to *her* he told strange legends of the East, myths and fantasies of India's oldest period ; to see her large eyes sparkle and her sweet lips part in

breathless attention he related hair-breadth escapes from the jaws of wild beasts, and wonderful adventures in forest or jungle.

And the other visitors would listen to him entranced, fascinated not only by his attractive personality, but also by the priceless jewels that flashed on his breast, diamonds clear as drops of dew, and opals shining with the mystic evanescent light of frozen foam. He had about him a certain air of sovereignty which became him well, and which kept the fashionable vulgarity of the 'fast' set in check. He was by turns elegant, wise, witty and humorous, and distinctly proved to a few of the frivolous and empty-headed that there is no necessity to cultivate 'chaff' or learn stable slang in order to be considered clever. He was a curious lesson in good-breeding to some of the English, this Maharajah ; and one or two of the more thoughtful mused unpleasantly on what might happen in India if 'college education' turned out goodly numbers of 'natives' such as he. His visit to the station, however, was an undoubted success ; nothing else was talked of in the whole place, and Mrs. Claude Annesley had 'scored' again, and added another to her long list of social triumphs.

Meanwhile, if the truth must be told, the Maharajah himself was undergoing the tortures of

the damned. His beautiful manners were with difficulty maintained, his polished grace, his fluent talk, his easy urbanity and apparent calm covered a passion and a rage as fierce as that of any famished tiger. For the *belle dame sans merci* had him in thrall. The strange and subtle languor that lurked in her large pathetic eyes, her delicate and elfin beauty, had run like a swift poison through his Eastern blood and set it on fire. Of what avail? None, he knew; she was as absolutely denied to him as the stars he studied in the hot summer midnights. Nevertheless, he loved her; loved her with a fury and despair that nearly drove him frantic. To approach her made him tremble; the wondering, unconscious, half-wistful looks she gave him made his heart beat to a sense of tears and suffocation. Once, when she by chance dropped a few flowers from her bosom, and he snatched them up stealthily, his act unseen, he thought he must have gone mad with the joy of kissing them. Yet with all this fever at work within him he kept his secret; no hint of it ever escaped him by so much as an unguarded look or tremor of the voice, for he was brave. He had received his death-blow, so he said within himself, but none should see the wound. And he played his part as a manly man should, living his agony down hour by hour heroically, till the last day of

his sojourn came, the day fixed by Mrs. Annesley for her grand ball.

This entertainment was to be the climax of the festivities, and was to outdo everything in the way of balls that had ever been given in the neighbourhood. A splendid pavilion was erected for dancing, the decorations were magnificent, everything was as complete as it could be, and Mrs. Annesley herself was satisfied. Mrs. Annesley, indeed, was in a state of devout thankfulness generally—she was even thankful for her husband. She felt instinctively sure that it was owing to his apparently unobservant observation that Captain Le Marchant had had no lapse into his ‘habit,’ and had always passed muster as a gentleman and officer worthy of serving the Queen.

On the evening of the ball and just before it, a grand dinner-party was arranged to take place, at which the Maharajah was not present. From the half-open door of his apartment he saw Idreana descend the stairs, dressed for both dinner and ball, and as he beheld her, himself unseen, his heart sank like an aching weight within him. What was code or caste or anything in the world compared to the desire of possessing this ethereal small woman, clad in her floating white draperies, her gold hair knotted loosely on her neck, and a strange scarlet flower at her bosom! He peered

after her, she all unconscious of his anguished gaze, then, withdrawing himself softly he closed the door, and covered his eyes with his hand, ashamed of the great tears that forced their burning way through his lashes. "The difference of race, the difference of creed, the difference of law," he muttered. "These part man and woman more than God and Nature would ever part them!"

That night, when some twenty or more people sat down to dine at Mrs. Claude Annesley's well-spread table, there could naturally be no stint of wine. The Colonel kept a vigilant eye on Captain Le Marchant, and judged him to be drinking moderately, and keeping well within bounds. Before dessert was quite over the ladies adjourned to the ball-pavilion, and Mrs. Annesley insisted on her husband accompanying them, in order to help her in receiving the already arriving guests. The Maharajah, attired in a dazzling glitter of gold and gems, entered with his attendants, and took his seat in a gilded chair set on a canopied daïs for his special honour and accommodation.

The music struck up and the dancing commenced. At the first sound of the band all the other lingerers at the dinner-table came in, Captain Le Marchant among them. Colonel Annesley, busy assisting his wife as well as he was able,

glanced at him as he entered, decided that he was all right, and took no further notice of him. The Captain sauntered about aimlessly for a little, spoke to two or three people, and then left the ball-room again without his departure being noticed. Dancing was soon in full swing, and the tide of swift motion and merriment rose quickly to its height. The Maharajah, sitting enthroned apart, the flashing jewels he wore contrasting singularly with his dark and rather grave features, was entirely absorbed in watching Mrs. Le Marchant dancing. His ardent sombre eyes followed her everywhere as she floated to and fro, round and round, light as thistle-down, with her different partners, the loose knot of glistening hair shining at the back of her white neck, the scarlet flower like a flame on her white bosom.

And as she danced on, he presently descended from the daïs, and stood at the side of the pavilion in order to observe her more closely, and also in the hope that haply her white gown might touch him in its silvery whirl, for he felt he could not bear to lose even that possible chance of contact with her. And by-and-by he saw a young subaltern approach her rapidly and say something to her in a low tone. She turned very pale, and her eyes seemed to close, then rousing herself she smiled faintly, murmured some excuse to her

partner and hurried away. Led by some instinct, and careless of what might be thought of his also absenting himself, the Maharajah followed. He had the stealthy step of a cat or a panther, and his tread behind her was unheard. She passed out of the ball-pavilion, and along the flower-garlanded corridor which divided it from the house—the young subaltern was with her, and together they entered Mrs. Annesley's dining-room. There, at the half-cleared dinner-table, fallen forward in a sort of stupor, sat Captain Le Marchant, with one empty brandy bottle before him and another half begun. The Maharajah came to a stand-still outside the door—he was still unheard and unperceived.

Mrs. Le Marchant went up to the tumbled heap by the table, and put her little white-gloved hand on its shoulder.

"Richard!" she said in a trembling voice, "Richard, don't stay here. Do come away, upstairs, anywhere."

She broke off, and the young sub., somewhat distressed, tried what he could do. He put his wholesome strong young arm round the disgraceful bundle before him, and said cheerily, "Hullo, Captain! I say, get out of this, you know! You mustn't go to sleep here, they want to lay the supper. Get up, there's a good fellow!"

The bundle stirred and raised itself. A red face showed above a crumpled dress-shirt ; two bloodshot eyes opened slowly, and the individual, understood to be an officer and a gentleman, made a vaguely threatening movement of his arms.

“ Richard ! ” murmured his wife again earnestly, “ do come upstairs ; you are not well, you know. I can easily say you are not well if you will only come upstairs and go to bed. Richard, do come ! ”

He looked at her stupidly and laughed. She touched his arm entreatingly.

“ Richard ! ” she said, “ don’t let the Annesleys see you like this ! ”

With a sudden oath and a savage movement of his body, he clenched his big fist and struck straight out at her white pleading face,—a brutal blow that stretched her on the ground senseless. In one second the Maharajah had sprung upon him and pinned him by the throat. Down on the floor he rolled him and knelt upon him, his long, brown, lithe fingers clutching at the thick bull-neck in such a masterly manner that the young subaltern, overcome with confusion and terror, rushed into the ball-room for the Colonel and brought him forth in frantic haste, explaining in a few incoherent words the whole extraordinary situation. The Colonel proved himself a man of

action. Flinging himself upon the Maharajah he dragged him away from the prostrate body of Le Marchant.

“Don’t you see he’s drunk?” he exclaimed. “You can’t fight a man who is unable to defend himself. You are neither a coward nor a murderer ; you must let him be.” Then, seeing Mrs. Le Marchant where she lay senseless, he addressed the pale-faced young subaltern : “Fetch Mrs. Annesley.”

The Maharajah stood mute and breathless, with folded arms and flashing eyes. Captain Le Marchant was, with many unsavoury oaths, endeavouring to pick himself up from the ground. The Colonel surveyed the erect proud figure of the Indian potentate with a look in which military resolve was blended with a good deal of respect.

“Your Highness is my guest,” he said calmly, “and I must apologise for laying hands roughly upon you. But you cannot quarrel with a drunkard ; the thing is manifestly impossible.”

“He has killed his wife!” exclaimed the Maharajah fiercely.

“I think not ; but even if he has, that is not your Highness’s affair. You have no right to defend an English lady from even the blows of her own lawful husband. Pardon me ! You, like

myself, are a subject of the Empress ; these things are known to you without further explanation."

The Maharajah was silent and immovable for a moment. Then with a slight, haughty bow, he left the room. As he went, he glanced back once, a world of pent-up agony and yearning in his eyes. Mrs. Annesley had hurried in, and was compassionately raising her friend Idreana from the floor, and all that he seemed to see in the air, as he made his way out, was a small pale face, and a scarlet flower.

The affair soon got wind, and the ball that evening came to a hasty and rather disastrous conclusion. Idreana was carried to her room still unconscious ; Captain Le Marchant was given an apartment on the other side of the house, where he could swear to his heart's content, and sleep off his brandy potations ; and when the morning broke, it found them all more or less haggard and anxious. It was the day of the Maharajah's departure, however, for which Colonel Annesley was secretly thankful, though 'Lolly' was in despair that his visit should have had such an untoward termination. Captain Le Marchant woke up sober and furious. He had been attacked by an 'Indian beast,' he said, and he would shake his 'dirty life' out of him. He

was still soliloquising in this fashion when Colonel Annesley entered his room.

“Captain Le Marchant, your wife is very ill.”

Captain Le Marchant growled something unintelligible.

“You conducted yourself disgracefully last night,” went on the Colonel. “I am glad you do not belong to *my* regiment. As a soldier, I am ashamed of you; as a gentleman, I find you insufferable. You—an English officer—to strike your wife! Good God! what a cowardly act! and what humiliation to us all to think that the Maharajah witnessed it! A nice impression to give him of our social civilisation! He nearly killed you, by the way; it is fortunate I came in at the moment I did, otherwise he would have done so. He is leaving this morning, and he has asked me to tell you that he wishes to see you before his departure.”

“I sha’n’t comply with his wish, then,” retorted Le Marchant; “I’ll see him damned first!”

“I’ll see *you* damned, if you don’t!” said the Colonel, with sudden heat and vehemence. “If you refuse to go to him it looks as if you were afraid of him, and, by Jove sir! no British officer shall play the coward *twice* where I am!”

Captain Le Marchant stared, then looked

down slightly disconcerted, and pulled his long moustaches.

"Very well," he muttered crossly. "Where is he?"

"In his own rooms, and *alone*," replied the Colonel meaningly. "I may as well tell you that he wishes to apologise."

"Oh!" and Le Marchant laughed. "That alters the case entirely. Rather funny to see him eating humble pie! I'll go at once."

And out he sauntered, whistling carelessly.

"Cad!" commented Colonel Annesley, under his breath. "That poor child Idreana and her 'ideals'! Now, Laura never had any ideals, she says, and that is how she has managed to put up with me."

This idea served him as a favourable theme for meditation, and he went to have a smoke and think it out. Meanwhile, Captain Le Marchant rapped at the door of the Maharajah's apartment.

A servant admitted him, and without a word ushered him into a small interior chamber, where at an open window, looking out on a fair garden below, sat the Maharajah himself. Dismissing his attendant by a sign, he turned his head towards Le Marchant, in acknowledgment of his presence, but made no further salutation or movement to rise. And now, for the first time since his last

night's brandy debauch, the Captain began to be ashamed of himself. Fidgety and embarrassed, he felt singularly unable to hold himself with any dignity or display the jaunty air of indifferent ease he desired to assume. He looked about for a chair to sit down on : there was not one in the room save that on which the Maharajah was himself enthroned. And the composed sovereignty of the Maharajah's attitude, the terrible steadfastness of the Maharajah's eyes, which regarded him with a look wherein hatred, contempt, reproach and wonder were all combined in one dark and piercing flash, began to be distinctly trying to the not over-steady nerves of this particular officer and gentleman. He shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other, and studied the pattern of the floor, finding the atmosphere suddenly warmer than usual. Two minutes, perhaps, passed like this in uncomfortable stillness ; then the Maharajah spoke.

" Captain Le Marchant," he said, in low, but very clear accents, " I regret that I attacked you last night when you were unable to defend yourself. Men of my race and caste do not drink, hence we are not always able to realise the degradation of drunkenness in others. I understand that I was wrong. I therefore apologise."

Captain Le Marchant moistened his dry lips

and bowed stiffly. The Maharajah went on, still in the same even voice :

“Do you demand further satisfaction, or do you accept this apology ? ”

The Captain raised his head and endeavoured to look magnanimous, but only succeeded in looking foolish. He cleared his throat and twirled one end of his tawny moustache.

“I accept it,” he said, and his voice was husky and uncertain.

The Maharajah’s burning glance swept over him like lightning, and a faint, contemptuous smile rested on the proud mouth.

“I wish you to comprehend me perfectly, Captain Le Marchant,” he went on. “If I could fight you now that you are capable of fighting, hand to hand, man to man, I would do it ! I am ready for it at this moment ! It would give me the keenest joy ! ” His brown hands clenched, his chest heaved. Anon he resumed : “But I cannot. The lady whose cause I would defend, whose sorrows move me to indignation, is your wife ; you can do what you will with her—it is your law. I, at any rate, have no right to protect her ! ”

A shuddering sigh broke from him. Le Marchant stared amazed. A new light dawned upon his mind—a sudden conviction that moved

his coarse and flippant nature to a sense of malicious amusement. And now in his excitement the Maharajah rose, fiercely gripping with both hands the carved ivory arm-rests of his chair.

“If I could *buy* your wife from you,” he said, his mellow voice quivering with passion, “and save her from another such outrage upon her as that which I witnessed last night, I would give you half my possessions! If I could steal her from you without shame to her or to me, I should be ‘uncivilised’ enough to do it! Of course you know what this means, and you can make scorn of me if you choose. I am powerless to prevent you. We are a conquered race, and you English despise us. I will not say that we do not merit your contempt—we have allowed ourselves to be kept down under the yoke of evil custom and barbarous superstition for countless ages, and we have never truly discovered our own intellectual force. Perhaps we shall discover it some day—who knows? Yours is a great nation, but men such as you disgrace it. You buy our Indian women, and neglect and ill-treat your own. This I cannot understand. But I waste words. I have made you an apology which you have accepted; so much being clear between us, I ask you one thing before we part for ever—give me your word as a man that the scene of last night shall never be repeated;”

that you will cherish your wife with the tenderness she merits, and never give her further cause to regret having married you. I have no right to appeal to you, I know, but for once forget this—forget the difference of race and creed between us, and as man to man before the Eternal, give me your promise ! ”

He spoke with eloquence and earnestness, and as he concluded stretched out his hands with a gesture of entreaty. But Captain Le Marchant was now himself again. He realised the situation completely, and felt he was the master of it. He folded his arms and looked the Maharajah full in the face.

“ Your request is most extraordinary,” he said coldly and with a haughty stare. “ I can promise nothing of the kind—to *you* ! ”

The Maharajah advanced a step towards him.

“ You are a Christian ? ” he demanded.

Le Marchant bent his head in stiff assent.

“ I am often told that Christianity is the one true faith,” said the Maharajah with impressive slowness, “ the one pure creed. I also have a creed—not Christian. But in my creed there are oaths which bind. Is there nothing in yours which can bind *you* ? ”

The Captain smiled superciliously, and flicked a little dust off his coat.

“ Nothing ! ” he replied.

With a stifled cry of indignation the Maharajah suddenly drew a dagger from his belt. Poising it aloft he made one tigerish spring forward ; then, as swiftly as he had advanced, he drew back, and flung the glittering weapon harmlessly on the ground. Pale and breathless he fixed his glowing eyes full on the startled Captain, who at sight of the lifted sharp steel had recoiled, and pointed imperiously to the door.

“ Go ! ” he said.

And without another word, another look, Le Marchant went.

Two hours later the Maharajah and his suite had departed, with many courteous farewells to Colonel and Mrs. Annesley, and profuse thanks for all the hospitality enjoyed. No special message of any sort was left by the Indian prince for Mrs. Le Marchant beyond a formally expressed regret at her continued indisposition. Nothing ambiguous was said or even hinted, and the ‘ society ’ that circled round the brilliant ‘ Lolly ’ was speedily left to itself to discuss the events of the past evening in the usual way that society does discuss things everywhere, propounding utterly erroneous suppositions and arriving at totally wrong conclusions. All the gossips, however, were un-animously correct in observing that ‘ Lolly ’

herself was singularly silent and subdued, and that what was still more wonderful was, that she appeared to have grown suddenly fond of her husband the Colonel.

That same night, on the shining flat roof of his own palace, a roof which resembled a broad open terrace decked with creepers and flowers, after the style of the ancient Babylonian 'hanging gardens,' the Maharajah sat alone. Above him the dense blue of the sky arched itself like a dome, pierced through by the golden fire-ball of the Indian moon that sailed slowly along her course with a lazy, languid movement, suggesting voluptuous idleness and sleep. Close by him a great telescope was set up, man's peephole of inquiry at worlds inscrutable; but he did not turn to consult this, the favourite companion of his studies, as was his nightly habitude. He reclined restfully in a low chair, the shield-shape back of which was carved curiously, and studded here and there with turquoise, on which now and again the moon-rays flashed with a greenish-white glitter. His attitude was one of calm meditation; his eyes dreamily watched the solemn splendour of the midnight heavens. The diamond clasp of his turban scintillated in the moonlight like a stray star fallen out of the clear ether, and the priceless ruby, set as

a ring on his right hand, glowed warmly with the hue of blood. He was thinking deeply, and his thoughts were of love, thoughts widely different from those of most men on the same subject.

“Let me not hide this thing from myself,” he said half aloud. “It is a sin and it is a glory. It is a sin to love her whom I may not love if I live on to bear that guilty living love towards her, but it is a glory to love if I die, and with myself kill all my erring passion. He—her husband—has guessed, and will most surely tell her of my folly. I saw that in his cruel face. She in her gentle nature will be grieved and pained, perchance she may be offended, and rightly, to think that I should dare to love her and live on. With this fever in my soul, this desire in my blood, my very life insults her. Dead, she will think kindly of me if she thinks at all. Moreover, love is life; without love life is death. What we shall therefore do now, my soul, is to leave this world; we shall learn the news of other worlds best so. To live on and think of her, my pearl, my white lily!—yes, let me call her so once in secret, as if she were indeed mine—to think of her in the pitiless possession of the man who is her husband,—this would drive me out of sober reason. Better to forget it and go elsewhere. Love is a mystery which God or the gods only can explain. But of this I am

sure—that if a man loves once and truly, he must so love always. Custom and law and creed cannot control it, nothing can change it, nothing can pacify it, nothing can quench the fire burning here”—and he laid one hand on his breast—“except the full possession of the one beloved, and—the other alternative—death. And after death? What shall I find? Myself again with all my sorrow? or God?”

He raised his eyes with a wondering look to the bright moon and stars.

“Worlds unexplored, universes unguessed, mysteries unfathomed!” he murmured—“all vague and vast and inexplicable, yet surely full of promise. There must be *Something*—something behind the veil, when spirits are stripped of mortality and front each other unafraid! There must be Love—there should be Peace! God! in Thy unknown deeps of Life, let me lose myself and find—Thee!”

Still keeping the same restful, half-reclining attitude, he slowly raised his right hand, and looked thoughtfully at the ruby ring that shone there; then he deliberately placed the splendid jewel between his lips, drawing it in with the lingering delicacy of one who is tasting for the first time some rare and precious cordial. A minute or so elapsed, and he let his hand drop gently again at

his side. The ruby centre of the ring was open and showed a small cavity within, a cavity now quite empty.

An hour passed and the Maharajah did not move. Apparently he slept, and a peaceful smile rested on his features. He might have been taken for a figure cast in bronze, he was so very still. The moon sank out of sight, and the pale pink flush of dawn began to spread softly over the horizon. Delicious puffs of fragrance arose from the thousands of flowers and scented shrubs that grew in the fairy-like gardens surrounding the palace, and presently as the morning advanced, the Maharajah's confidential servant appeared according to his usual custom, to bring his master's breakfast and receive his orders for the day. He approached noiselessly, and, with a look of wonder, which quickly deepened into fear, surveyed his lord. He touched his robe—there was no responsive movement of that still figure, majestic in its attitude of proud repose ; he called, first softly, then loudly—there was no answer. Falling on his knees, he caught up the inert right hand and saw the ruby ring with its secret cavity open—the ring which he alone of all the household knew had contained the swiftest and deadliest of Eastern poisons. With a cry of horror he sprang up and looked wildly about him, then, realising that all help was

unavailing, he fell down again at his master's feet, and there crouching, covered his face and wept despairingly.

Not a hundred miles away a certain 'officer and gentleman' was playing off coarse witticisms among his fellows at the expense of 'a petty native prince' who had presumed to fall in love with his wife—"an English married woman, by Jove! like his confounded impudence!"—the 'petty native prince' himself being far beyond even the wide-reaching influence of that supreme British scorn which is levied against everything not of its own cult and country. A bright gold point like a lifted spear flashed above the eastern hills—the sun was rising—the faint murmuring of insects and the fluttering of birds' wings stirred the warm and odorous foliage; the light swiftly broadened upwards and fell in ardent waves of heat and splendour over the palace roof and its twisted garlands of flowers, touching with tender warmth the rigid figure seated in grave kingliness beside the great telescope pointed heavenwards; all the gentle and familiar noises of waking life beginning a new day filled the air with their customary sweet monotony. But the silence of the Maharajah was complete, and never to be broken.

“THREE WISE MEN OF GOTHAM.”

AN OLD RHYME WITH A ‘NEW’ READING.

*“Three Wise Men of Gotham
Went to sea in a bowl,
Had the bowl been stronger
My song might have been longer.”*

THE Three Wise Men sat together in their club smoking-room. They were met there for a purpose—a solemnly resolved purpose—though that fact was not to be discovered in the expression of their faces or their attitudes. The casual observer, glancing at them in that ignorant yet opiniated fashion which casual observers generally affect, would have sternly pronounced them to be idle loafers and loungers without a purpose of any sort, and only fit to be classified with the ‘drones’ or do-nothings of the social hive. Three stalwart bodies reclined at ease in the soft depths of three roomy saddle-bag chairs; and from three cigars of the finest flavour three little spiral wreaths of pale blue smoke mounted steadily towards the ceiling.

It was a fine day : the window was open, and outside roared the surging sea of human life in Piccadilly. Rays of sunshine danced round the Wise Men, polishing up the bald spot on head number one, malignly bringing into prominence the grey hairs on head number two, and shining a warm approval on the curly brown locks of head number three. The screech of the wild newsboy echoed up and down the street—"Hextra speshul! Evening piper! Evening pepper! Piper! Westy-min-ister speshul! Hall the winners!" A spruce dandy alighting from a hansom commenced a lively altercation with the cabby thereof, creating intense excitement in the breasts of four Christian brethren—to wit, a dirty crossing-sweeper, a match-seller, a District Messenger-boy and a man carrying a leaden water-pipe. "Call yerself a masher!" cried cabby vociferously. "Git along with yer, an' hask one of the club blokes to lend yer 'arf a crown!" Here the man carrying the leaden water-pipe became convulsed with mirth, and observed, "Bully, ain't it?" confidentially to the messenger-boy, who grinningly agreed, the smartly dressed young dandy growing scarlet with rage and insulted dignity. The dispute was noisy, and some minutes elapsed before it was settled—yet through it all the mystic Three Wise Men never

stirred to see what was the matter, but smoked on in tranquil silence with closed eyes.

At last one of them moved, yawned, and broke the spell. He was fair, stoutish and florid ; and when he opened his eyes they proved to be of a good clear blue—honest in expression, and evidently meant for fun ; so much so, indeed, that though their owner was by no means in a laughing humour at the moment, he was powerless to repress their comic twinkle. His name was George—George Fairfax—and he was a ‘gentleman at ease,’ with nothing to do but to look after his estates, which, as he was not addicted to either betting, drinking, or gambling, brought him in a considerably substantial yearly income.

“Fact is,” he said, addressing himself to his two companions, whose eyelids were still fast shut, “the world’s a mistake. It ought never to have been created. Things go wrong in it from morning till night. Fellows who write books tell you how wrong it is ; *they* ought to know.” Here he knocked off the end of his cigar into the ash-tray. “Then read the newspapers : by the Lord Harry ! *they’ll* soon prove to you how wrong everything is everywhere !”

Man number two, in the chair next to Fairfax, happened to be the individual with the hair approved of by the sunshine—a long-limbed, well-

built fellow with a rather handsome face. Unclosing his eyes, which were dark and languid, he sighed wearily.

"No world in it!" he murmured in brief sleepy accents, "Social institutions—civilisation—wrong. Man meant for free life—savage—forest; no houses—no clubs—raw meat—suits digestion—no dyspepsia—tear with fingers; polygamy. Read 'Woman Who Did'—female polygamist—live with anybody, noble; marriage, base degradation—white rose in hair—polygamous purity—died."

Exhausted by this speech, he closed his eyes again, and would no doubt have relapsed into an easy slumber had not Man number three suddenly waked up in earnest, disclosing a pair of very keen bright grey eyes, sparkling under brows that, by their shelving form, would have seemed to denote a fair depth of intelligence.

"Look here, you fellows," he said sharply, "it's no use mincing matters. Things have come to a crisis. We must take the law into our own hands and see what can be done. Life as we live it—married life—has become impossible. You said so yourself, Adair"—this with head reproachfully turned towards the languid being with the shut eyes—"you said no man of sense or spirit would stand it!"

Adair rolled his head feebly to and fro on the saddle-bag chair-pillow.

"Sense—spirit—all up in me!" he replied dolefully. "Pioneers!"

As this word escaped him, more in the way of a groan than an utterance, Man number three, otherwise known as John Dennison, gave a gesture of contempt. Dennison was a particularly lucky individual, who had managed to make a large fortune while he was yet young, through successful land speculations; and now at his present age of forty-eight he bore scarcely any traces of the passing of time, save the small bald spot on the top of his head which the sunlight had discovered, but which few less probing searchers would have perceived. He was of an energetic, determined temperament, and the listless attitude and confessed helplessness of Adair excited him to action. Shaking himself out of his reclining posture, and sitting bolt upright, he said sternly,—

"Look here, Adair, you're too lazy to go through with this thing. If you don't show a little more character and firmness, Fairfax and I will have to slope it without you."

At this Adair opened his eyes wide, and also sat up, wearing an extremely astonished and injured expression.

"I say, old man!" he expostulated—"no

threats—bad form—sneak out of promise—oh, by Jove!"

"Well then, pay some attention to the question in hand," said Dennison, mollified. "Have we, or have we not, resolved to make a move?"

"We have!" declared Fairfax emphatically.

"*Must* make a move!" groaned Adair.

"I ask you both," went on Dennison, "does it look well, is it creditable to us as *men*—men of position, influence, and sufficient wealth—that we should be known in society as the merest appendages to our wives? Is it decent?"

"Damned *indecent*, *I* think!" said Fairfax hotly.

Adair gazed straight before him with the most woebegone expression.

"Awful lot of fellows—same predicament," he remarked. "Wife pretty—drags ugly man round—introduces him casually, 'Oh, my husband!'—and all Society grins at the poor chap. Wife ugly—goes in for football—asks husband to be spectator—kicks ball his way—says 'Excuse me!'—then explains to people standing by, 'My husband!' and the poor devil wishes he were dead. Fact! Lots of 'em, I tell you! We're not the only ones."

"Of course we're not," said Dennison. "I never supposed we were. But we are Three—and

three of us can show an example to the others. We will give these women a lesson, my boys!—a lesson they'll never forget. Have you made up your minds?”

“*I have!*” said Fairfax determinedly. “And I know Adair will be with me—why, he and I were married on the same day, weren't we, Frank?”

Frank smiled mournfully.

“Yes, and didn't the girls look pretty then—your Belle and my Laura!”

“Ah! who would have thought it!” sighed Fairfax. “Why *my* wife was the simplest soul that ever lived then—happy as a bird, full of life and fun, no nonsense of any sort in her head; and as for dogs—well, she liked them, of course, but she didn't worship them; she didn't belong to the Ladies' Kennel Association, or any other association, and she didn't worry herself about prizes and exhibitions. Now it's all dogs—dogs and horses; and as for that little beast Bibi, who has taken more medals than a fighting general, I believe she loves it better than her own boys. It's a horrible craze for a woman to be *doggy*.”

“It's not so bad as being Pioneery,” said Adair, rousing himself up at this part of the conversation. “Your wife's a very pretty woman, George, and a clever one, but *my* wife—well——”

He broke off and waved his hand in a descriptive fashion.

"Yes, I admit it," said Fairfax respectfully. "Your wife is lovely—a really beautiful creature; no one can deny it."

"That being the case," continued Adair, "what do you suppose *she* can want with the Pioneers?"

The other two Wise Men shook their heads desperately.

"Only yesterday," resumed Adair, "I went home quite unexpectedly in time for afternoon tea. She was in the drawing-room, wearing a new tea-gown and looking charming. 'Oh!' said she, with a cool smile, '*you* home! At this hour! How strange! Have some tea?' And nothing more. Presently in came a gaunt woman—short hair, skimped skirt, and man's coat. Up jumps Laura, hugs her, kisses her, cries 'Oh, you *dear* thing! How sweet of you to come!' She was a Pioneer—and she got kissed. *I* had no kiss. *I* was not called a 'dear thing.' I've got short hair and a man's coat, but it doesn't go down somehow, on me. It used to, before we were married; but it doesn't now."

"Stop a bit!" interposed Dennison suddenly and almost fiercely. "Think of *me*! I've been married longer than either of you, and I know a

thing or two ! Talk of fads ! my wife goes in for them all ! She's mad on 'em ! Wherever there's a faddist, you'll find her. Whether it's the Anti-Corset League, or the Nourishing Bread Society, or the Social Reformation Body, or anything else you like to think of—she's in it. I've got nothing to say against her intentions ; she means well, *too* well, all round ; but she is so absorbed in her 'meetings,' and 'councils,' and 'boards,' and what not, that I assure you she forgets *me* entirely—I don't believe she realises my existence ! When I go home of an evening she hands me the papers and magazines with an amiably provoking smile, as if she thought the damned news was all I could possibly want ; then she goes to her desk and writes letters—scratch, scratch all the time. She never gives me a word ; and as for a kiss !"—here he gave an angry laugh—"God bless my soul ! she never thinks of it !"

"I expect," said George Fairfax seriously, "we are too old-fashioned in our notions, Dennison. Lots of fellows would go and console themselves with other women."

"Of course they would," retorted Dennison. "There are plenty of dirty cads about who act that way. And I believe, as it is, *we* don't get much credit for keeping clean. I daresay our wives think we are as bad as we might be."

"They've no cause to," said Adair quietly. "And if I had any suspicion that Laura entertained a low opinion of me, I should take the liberty of giving her a piece of my mind."

Fairfax and Dennison looked at him, gravely at first ; then they laughed.

"A piece of your mind," echoed Dennison. "I think I know what it would amount to ; just a 'By Jove ! too bad !' and you would go to smoke and think it over. No ; we cannot offer 'pieces of our minds' to our spouses on any subject whatsoever, because, you see, we cannot bring any actual cause of complaint against them. They are good women——"

His friends nodded.

"Good-looking women——"

More nods.

"And clever women."

"Yes !" sighed Adair. "That's the worst of it. If they had only been stupid——"

"They would have been dull !" interposed Fairfax.

"And they *might* have grown fat," murmured Adair, with a shudder.

"Well," went on Dennison, "they are *not* stupid, they are *not* dull, and they are *not* fat. We have agreed that they are good, good-looking, and clever. Yet, with these three

qualities, something is wrong with them. What is it?"

"I know," said Adair. "It is want of heart."

"Indifference to home and home-affections," said Fairfax sternly.

"All comprised in one glaring fault," declared Dennison; "a fault that entirely spoils the natural sweetness of their original dispositions. It is the want of proper respect and reverence for *Us*; for *Us* as men; for *Us* as husbands!"

Nothing could have been more majestically grandiloquent than Dennison's manner while making this statement, and his two friends gazed admiringly at him in speechless approval.

"This state of things," he went on, "must be remedied. All the unloved, miserable, hysterical women who have lately taken to cackling about their rights and wrongs, are doing it, I believe, out of sheer malice and envy, in an effort to make happy wives discontented. The upheaval and rending of home-affections must be stopped. Our wives, for example, appear to have no conception of our admiration and affection for them——"

"Perhaps," interposed Fairfax, "*they* think that *we* have no conception of their admiration and affection for us!"

"Oh! I say, that won't do, old fellow," murmured Adair. "Admiration for *us* is no go!"

You don't suppose Laura, for instance, admires *me*? Not much; though I believe she used to. Of course Mrs. Fairfax may admire *you*——"

Here a faint smile began to play about his mouth, which widened into an open laugh as he surveyed Fairfax's broad, good-natured countenance—a laugh in which Fairfax himself joined so heartily that the water came into his eyes.

"No; of course it's ridiculous," he said, recovering himself at last. "She couldn't admire me. She's too pretty herself. All she sees is a red-faced man coming home punctually to dinner. However, she admires Bibi."

"Bother admiration," struck in Dennison sharply. "I didn't suggest that our wives should *admire* us; I said that they should reverence and respect us; and I also said I thought they appeared to be quite indifferent to the admiration and affection we have for them."

"That's true!" said Fairfax gloomily. "It's a positive fact."

"Well then," went on Dennison, "as they don't seem to want us, let's clear out."

"Agreed!" said Adair. "Gold coast and fever for me!"

"Same for me," said Fairfax. "I don't want a healthy climate!"

"All right. I'll see to that!" And Dennison

stood up, smiling a grim smile. "We'll take the worst part of the coast, where even the natives die! *Of course I shall tell my wife where I am going.*"

This with dreadful emphasis.

"And I shall tell mine," said Fairfax.

"And I mine," sighed Adair.

"Now come and look at the maps and the days of sailing," went on Dennison. "We can easily start in a fortnight."

They left the smoking-room for the reading-room, and were soon absorbed in the discussion of their plans.

That evening, when Adair went home, he found his wife dressed for a party, and looking radiantly youthful and lovely.

"Going out somewhere to-night, Laura?" he inquired languidly, as his eyes took in every detail of her graceful figure and really beautiful face.

"Yes," she replied. "Only round the corner to the Jacksons'. They have an 'at home.' Will you come?"

"No, thanks," he said, as he sat down to dinner. "I hate crushes."

She made no comment, but simply took her place at table and smiled upon him like a beneficent angel. He, meanwhile, was thinking within himself that she was the very prettiest woman he

had ever seen ; but he considered that if he ventured to express that thought aloud she would laugh at him. A husband to compliment his wife ? Pooh ! the thing was unheard of ! Besides, the butler was in the room—a civil man in black, of high repute and decorous character—and he would have been truly shocked had his master made any remark of a personal nature during the course of his attendance at dinner. When this dignified retainer had departed, leaving husband and wife alone to dessert, the impulse to say pretty things to his better half was no longer dominant in Adair's mind, so instead of a compliment he made an announcement.

"Laura, I am going away."

She looked at him straightly, her soft violet eyes opening a little more than usual.

"Are you ?"

"Yes. I want a change," he said, keeping his gaze riveted on the table-cloth, and trying to work himself up to the required pitch of melodramatic feeling, "a change from this hum-drum society life where—where I am not wanted. You see, I don't get enough to do here in London. I'm sick of town life. I'm not necessary to *you*"—this with a touch of bitterness. "You can do the social round well enough without me, and I—I'm going to try roughing it for a time."

Had he looked up that moment, he would have seen his wife's face growing pale, and he might also have noted that her breath came and went quickly, as though she were trying to suppress some strong emotion; but he did not look—not just then; he only heard her speak, and her voice was both cheerful and calm.

“What fun!” she said. “It will do you a world of good!”

He looked up this time, and his expression was one of reproachful astonishment.

“Fun!” he echoed. “Well, I don't know about that. I am going to the Gold Coast with Jack Dennison. It's full of fever, and even the natives die. I don't suppose I shall escape scot-free.”

“Why do you go, then?” she asked, with a smile, rising from her chair and preparing to put on her evening cloak. Adair rose also, and, taking the mantle from her hands, put it round her.

“Why do I go?” he echoed, with just the slightest suspicion of a tremor in his voice. “Well, if *you* can't guess, Laura, *I* can't explain. I couldn't be rough with you for the world, and it might sound rough to say that I know you're sick of me, and that I'm better out of your way for a time. Married people ought to separate

occasionally ; it's quite natural you should get bored seeing me every day of your life. You wouldn't take to the 'Pioneers' if you weren't in need of a change of some sort from the monotony of my company. If I go off to Africa, I shall have the pleasure of hoping you'll be glad to see me back. It'll give you time to be glad. At present you can't be glad, because you see too much of me. You don't mind my going?"

"Not in the least!" she answered, and to his secret indignation he fancied he saw almost a laugh in her eyes. "I think it will be jolly for you. And Jack Dennison is going, is he?"

"Yes ; and George Fairfax."

"Really ! How nice ! You three were always such good chums. I expect you'll have a perfectly lovely trip. When are you thinking of starting?"

"In a fortnight."

"Delightful ! We must have a little dinner-party before you go to wish you all luck ! I hope you mean to bring me some nuggets and any amount of queer necklaces and bracelets and barbaric ornaments. Ta-ta for the present ! I must be off or I shall be late at the Jacksons'. Don't sit up for me !"

She floated gracefully out of the room like a sylph on wings, giving him a dazzling smile as

she went. When she had quite disappeared he flung himself into a chair and said, “Damn it!” very gently. Then he lit a big cigar, and meditated.

“She doesn’t care a bit!” he reflected. “That hint about even the natives dying didn’t affect her in the least. She is quite callous. Ah! this is what comes of social faddists and problemists, and the artificial ‘tone’ at which life is taken nowadays. All humbug and ‘sham, and no time for sentiment. Love?—pooh!—that’s over and done with; there’s no such thing. Upon my life, I believe if I were dead, Laura would only squeeze a couple of tears out of those pretty eyes of hers, and then set about considering the newest fashions for mourning.”

While he sat thus absorbed in solitary musings of a sufficiently dreary and despondent character, his friend George Fairfax had likewise gone home to dinner, and had, in quite another sort of fashion, broken the news of his intended departure to *his* wife, an exceedingly pretty, lively little woman, with a quantity of fair hair and dancing, laughing, roguish blue eyes.

“Well, I sha’n’t be here for the Dog Show!” he remarked abruptly, shooting out the words with fierce emphasis, and casting an indignant glance at a tiny Yorkshire ‘toy’ terrier that was curled up

in its mistress's lap like a ball of fine spun silk. "I shall be thousands of miles away. And if you want to 'wire' me any of Bibi's triumphs you'll find it expensive."

"Really!" and Mrs. Fairfax looked up sweetly, stroking her pet the while. "Why, where are you going?"

"To Africa!" replied her husband solemnly. "To the Gold Coast—to the worst part, where fever rages, and *where even the natives die.*"

He pronounced the last words with particular emphasis. But she remained perfectly placid: she only bent over Bibi, and murmured with an ecstatic chuckle, "Oh, zoo ducky 'ittle sing!"

George stared very hard at her without producing any impression, and in a deeply injured tone he resumed: "Yes; I am going out with Jack Dennison. I find it necessary; in fact, imperative, to go——"

"Ah, yes, agricultural affairs *are* in a bad way!" she said sympathetically. "Do you know, I *thought* you would have losses this year on the lands—rentals are going down so much, and everything is so hopeless for the farmers; I really think you are wise to try and recuperate. I suppose Dennison has got a mine or something?"

He favoured her with a look that was meant to

be scornful, but which only succeeded in being plaintive.

“You mistake the position, Belle,” he said, with severe politeness. “I have had *no* losses, I do not need to recuperate, and Dennison has *no* mine. I am going because I *wish* to go ; because, as I have had occasion to mention to you before, I do not appear to be wanted here. You are too much absorbed in—in your ‘kennel’ duties to attend to me;” and here he gave vent to what he considered a culminating burst of sarcasm. “Yes, I feel in the dog’s way. The dog is master here—I am not. You have several dogs, I know ; but *the* dog, the one I mean at present in your lap, is the chief object of your consideration, tenderness, and interest. He always takes prizes ; he deserves attention. I do not take prizes ; I cannot compete with him. Therefore I am going away for a change—a change from society and dog shows. It will do me good to grapple with danger and death”—here he looked as tragic as his amiable round face would allow him—“and when I return home again, after many adventures, you will be glad, perhaps, to see me.”

His wife’s eyes twinkled prettily, like sapphires, as she surveyed him.

“Of course I shall be glad,” she said frankly ; “but I quite agree with you in thinking that the

trip will do you all the good in the world. I have thought for some time that you've been a little out of sorts—a trifle hypochondriacal—or a touch of the spleen; because you say such funny things." ("Funny things?" George was speechless.) "And Dennison will make a splendid travelling companion. When do you go?"

"In a fortnight," he answered feebly, utterly bewildered at her cool way of taking what he thought would prove a startling and fulminating announcement.

"Oh, then I must see to your flannel shirts," she observed. "They wear flannel next to the skin as a preventive of fever in Africa."

"Ah! there's no preventive against *that* fever," he muttered morosely, adding almost under his breath, "Even the natives die!"

"Oh, I should think quinine and flannel would be useful," she responded cheerfully. "The natives don't know how to take care of themselves, poor things! Englishmen do. I sha'n't be a bit anxious about *you*."

"Won't you? No, I don't suppose you will;" and Fairfax began to feel rather snappish. "It isn't as if I were Bibi. Adair is going, too."

"Is he really? Can he bear to leave his lovely Laura?"

"His lovely Laura will get on very well

without him, I dare say,” retorted Fairfax. “By the time he comes back she’ll very likely be in knicker-bockers, playing football with the Pioneers !”

With this parting shot he marched out of the room in haste, disappointed and indignant at his wife’s indifference. She, left alone, lay back in her chair and indulged in a hearty laugh, which had the effect of rousing the pampered ‘Bibi’ to such a pitch of wonder that he found it necessary to rise on his hind legs and apply his cold, wet nose to his mistress’s chin with a mild sniff of inquiry. She caught the pretty little animal up in her arms and kissed its silky head, still laughing and murmuring, “Oh, Bibi ! men *are* funny creatures !—ever so much funnier than dogs ! You can’t imagine how nice and funny they are, Bibi !”

After a while she became serious, though her eyes still danced with mirth. Putting her little dog down, she began to count on her fingers.

“In a fortnight—well, I must see Laura, and find out what *she* thinks about it. Then we’ll both go and consult Mrs. Dennison. The boys are at school—so *that’s* all right. I wonder what the steamer is ? We can easily find out. Dear old George ! what a silly he is ! And John Dennison and Frank Adair are equally silly—three

of the dearest old noodles that ever lived ! I must see Laura to-morrow.”

Meanwhile a conversation more or less similar had taken place between Mr. and Mrs. Dennison. John was a man of action, and prided himself on the swift (and obstinate) manner in which he invariably made up his mind. His wife did not consider herself behind him in resolution ; she was a handsome woman of about thirty-eight, with a bright expression and a frank, sweet smile of her own which proved very attractive to her friends, who came to her with all their troubles, and gave her their unbounded confidence. She was active, strong, and energetic, and never wasted a moment in useless argument ; so that when her husband said, quite suddenly, “ I am going to Africa,” she accepted the statement calmly as a settled thing, and merely inquired,—

“ When ? ”

He eyed her severely.

“ In a fortnight,” he answered, jerking out his words like so many clicks of a toy-pistol. “ Gold Coast. Bad place for fever. Even the natives die.”

Mrs. Dennison’s tender heart was touched at once, but, as her husband thought, in quite the wrong way.

“ Poor things ! ” she said pityingly ; “ I dare

say their notions of medicine are very primitive. You must take a double quantity of quinine with you, John, dear, and you may be able to save many lives.”

He stared at her, his face reddening visibly.

“God bless my soul, Mary, I shall have enough to do in taking care of my own life,” he snapped out, “without bothering after the natives. You don’t seem to think of that !”

“Oh, yes, I do,” responded Mary, very tranquilly. “But you are a strong, healthy man, John, and very sensible ; you know how to look after yourself—no one better ; and I should indeed be silly if I felt any anxiety about *you*. May I ask what you are going to the Gold Coast for ? or is it a secret ?”

Now, John Dennison was, on the whole, a good fellow ; honest, honourable, and true to the heart’s core ; but with all his virtues he had a temper, and he showed it just then.

“No, it is not a secret, madam !” he burst forth, trembling from head to foot with the violence of his emotions. “If I were to speak quite plainly, I should say the reason of my going is an open scandal ! Yes, that is what it is ! Oh, you may look at me as if you thought me a troublesome lunatic—you have that irritating way, you know—but I mean it. I may as well be a

wanderer and a vagabond on the face of the earth, for I have no home. What *should* be my home is turned into a meeting-place for all the crack-brained faddists in London, who form ‘societies’ for want of anything better or more useful to do. It *may* be very interesting to talk and make speeches about the necessity of feeding the people on nourishing bread instead of non-nourishing alum stuff, but it has nothing to do with *Me*! I don’t personally care what the people eat, or what they don’t eat. I ought to care, I suppose, but I don’t! When I was a hard-working lad, I ate what I could get, and was thankful; no nice ladies and gentlemen met in drawing-rooms to assert that I was badly fed, and that I ought to be looked after more tenderly. ‘Fads’ were not in fashion then; people fought for themselves manfully, as they should do, and came up or went down according to their own capabilities; and there wasn’t all this cossetting and coddling of the silly and incompetent. It is quite ridiculous that in an age like ours a ‘society’ should be formed for the purpose of teaching the majority what sort of bread to eat. By the Lord Harry! if they’re such confounded idiots that they can’t distinguish between good bread and bad, they deserve to starve. Even the dullest donkey knows the difference between a real turnip and a sham one. I’ve

given you my opinion on these sort of subjects before. I'm against all 'Leagues' and 'Bodies' and 'Working Committees.' I hate them. *You* like them. That's where we differ. *You*, in your Anti-Corset League, want to make girls give up tight-lacing; now, *I* say, let them tight-lace till they split in half, if they like it; there'll only be so many feminine fools the less in the world. And as for the 'Social Reformation' business—pah! that's not fit for a decent woman to meddle with. If women would only begin to 'reform' themselves, and make their husbands happy, society might be purified to a great extent; but so long as households are looked upon as a nuisance, husbands a bore, and children a curse, nothing but misery can come of it. And the reason I am going away is this—that I do not feel myself the master of my own house; there are too many 'Committees' accustomed to meet in it at their own discretion; *your* time is entirely taken up with laudable efforts to improve the community"—here he indulged in a mild sneer—"so much so that I have become nothing but an unnecessary appendage to the importance of your position. Now"—and he grew fierce again—"I do not choose to play second fiddle to any one, least of all to my own wife. So I shall clear out and leave you to it. George Fairfax and Frank Adair

feel the domestic wretchedness of their positions as keenly as I do, and they are going out to the Gold Coast with me. I shall provide you amply with means—and *they* will do the same on behalf of *their* wives—and we shall be absent for a considerable time. In fact, who knows whether we may ever come back at all?"—here his voice became sepulchral. "Fortunately, our wills are made!"

He ceased. Throughout his somewhat lengthy tirade, his wife had sat quite still, patiently listening, her hands reposefully folded over a book on her knee, her eyes regarding him with a clear steadfastness in which there was a soft lurking gleam of something like compassion. Now that he had finished what he had to say she spoke, in gentle deliberate accents.

"I am to understand then, my poor John," she said, almost maternally, "that you are leaving home on account of your dislike to the way I try to employ myself (very ineffectually I admit) in doing good to others?"

He gave a short nod of assent and turned his eyes away from her. It rather troubled him to be called 'my poor John!'

"And Mr. Adair finds equal fault with his beautiful girl-wife Laura!"

"Poor Adair has equal reason to find fault," was the stern reply. "A man may very well

become crusty when he finds the woman he loves to adoration deliberately rejecting *his* affection for that of a Pioneer !”

A curious little trembling appeared to affect Mrs. Dennison’s full white throat, suggestive of a rising bubble of laughter that was instantly suppressed.

“Mr. Fairfax, you say, is going also?” she murmured gently.

“He is. Not having the necessary qualifications for a dog-trainer, he is not required in his home,” replied her husband with intense bitterness. “Dogs now occupy Mrs. Fairfax’s whole time, to the total exclusion of her domestic duties.”

Mrs. Dennison was silent for a little while, thinking. Then she put the book she held carefully down on a side-table, and rose in all her stately height and elegance, looking the very *beau idéal* of a handsome English matron. Crossing over to where her husband stood, she laid her plump pretty hand, sparkling with rings, tenderly on his bald spot, and said in the sweetest of voices ;—

“Well, John, dear, all I can say is that I am delighted you are going! It will do you good ; in fact, it’s the very best thing possible for all three of you. I think you’ve all been too comfortable and lazy for a long time ; a voyage to the Gold

Coast will be the very tonic you require. Of course I'm sorry you've no sympathy with me in my humble efforts to do a little useful work among my fellow-women during my leisure days and while the children are at school, but I don't blame you a bit. Of course you have your ideas of life just as I have mine, and there's no need for us to be rude to each other or quarrel about it. An ocean-trip will be just splendid for you. I'll see to your things. I know pretty well what you will want in Africa. I fitted out a poor fellow only the other day, who was convicted of his first theft; the gentleman he robbed wouldn't prosecute, because of the sad circumstances. It's too long a story to tell now, but we got him a place out in Africa with a kind farmer, and I fitted him out. So I know just the kind of flannels and things required."

"Exactly!" said Dennison, quivering and snorting with repressed wrath and pain. "Fit me out like a convicted thief! Nothing could be better! Suit me down to the ground!"

His wife looked at him with that kind maternal air of hers and laughed. She had a very musical laugh.

"Oh, you dear old boy!" she said cheerfully. "You must always have your little joke, you know!"

And with that she moved in a queen-like way across the room, and out of it.

Left alone, John sank into a chair and wiped his fevered brow.

“Was there ever such a woman!” he groaned within himself despairingly. “To think that she once loved me! and now—now she takes my going to a malarial climate as coolly as if it were a mere trip across Channel and back! What a heart of stone! These handsome women (*she is* a handsome woman) are as impervious to all sentiment as—as icebergs! And as for tact, she has none. Fancy bringing that convicted thief into the conversation! Almost as if she thought I resembled him! Oh, the sooner I’m out of England the better! I’ll lose myself in Africa, and she can get up an ‘Exploration Fund’ with a working committee, and pretend to try and find me. And then when she *hasn’t* found me, she can write a book of adventure (made up at home) entitled *How I Found my Husband*. That’s the way reputations are made nowadays, and by the Lord Harry, what devilish humbug it all is!”

Plunging his hands deep in his pockets he sat and stared at the pattern of the carpet in solitary reverie, angrily conscious, through all his musings, of having ‘felt small’ in the presence of his wife, inasmuch as throughout their conversation *she* had

maintained her wonted composure and grace, and *he*, though of the 'superior' sex, had been unwise enough to lose his temper.

Two or three days later Mrs. Dennison, Mrs. Fairfax, and Mrs. Adair had what they called 'a quiet tea.' They spent the whole afternoon together, shut up in Mrs. Adair's elegant little boudoir, and spoke in low voices like conspirators. The only witness of their conference was Bibi, who took no interest whatever in their conversation, he being entirely absorbed in the contemplation of a tiger-skin rug which had a stuffed and very life-like head. Desiring, yet fearing, to spring at the open throat and glittering teeth of this dreadfully-alive looking beast, Bibi occupied his time in making short runs and doubtful barks at it, and quite ignored the occasional ripples of soft and smothered laughter that escaped from the three fair ones seated round the tea-table, because he thought, in his 'prize-terrier' importance, that their amusement was merely derived from watching his cleverness. It never entered into his head that there could be any other subject in the world so entertaining and delightful as himself. So he continued his dead-tiger hunt, and the ladies continued their *causerie*, till the tiny Louis Seize clock on the mantelpiece tinkled a silvery warning

that it was time to break up the mysterious debate.

“You’re quite agreed then?” said Mrs. Dennison, as she rose and drew her mantle round her in readiness to depart.

“Quite!” exclaimed Laura Adair, clasping her hands in ecstasy. “It will be glorious!”

“Simply magnificent!” echoed Belle Fairfax, with rapture sparkling in her blue eyes; then suddenly perceiving her Liliputian dog nigh upon actually getting bodily into the elaborately-modelled throat of the tiger-head, she caught him up, murmuring, “Zoo naughty sing! zoo sall go too; rocky-pocky, uppy-downy, jiggamaree!”

“Good heavens, Belle,” cried Mrs. Dennison, putting up her hands to her ears in affected horror, “no wonder your husband complains if he hears you talk such rubbish to that little monster!”

“He isn’t a monster!” protested Belle indignantly. “You can’t say it; you daren’t! Just look at him!”

And she held Bibi up, sitting gravely on his haunches in one little palm of her hand. He looked so absurdly small and quaint, and withal had such a loving, clever, bright, wee face of his own, that Mrs. Dennison relented.

“Positively he *is* a darling!” she said; “I’m bound to admit it. Landseer might have raved

over him. No wonder your husband's jealous of him!"

All three ladies laughed gaily, though Laura had something like tears in her beautiful eyes.

"I think," she said softly, "that as far as I am concerned, Frank *may* have a little cause to feel himself neglected. You see when one goes very much into society, as I do, one falls unconsciously into society's ways, and one gets ashamed of showing too decided a liking for one's own husband. It is a false shame, of course, but there it is. And I am really so deeply in love with Frank, that when we were first married, people remarked it, and other women made fun of me, and then—then I joined the Pioneers out of a silly notion of self-defence. The Pioneers, you know, are all against husbands and the tyrannies of men generally—even the loving tyrannies; and I thought if I was a Pioneer nobody would tease me any more for being too fond of my own husband. It was very stupid of me, yet when I once got among them I felt so sorry for them all; they seemed to have such topsy-turvy notions of marriage and life generally, that I set myself to try and cheer up some of the loneliest and most embittered of the members, and do you know I *have* succeeded in making a few of them happier, but Frank sees it in the wrong light——"

She stopped, and Belle Fairfax kissed her enthusiastically.

“You are a dear!” she declared. “The prettiest and sweetest woman alive! The upshot of it all is, that if *we* have made mistakes with the dear old boys, so have they made mistakes with us, and we’ve hit upon the best plan in the world for proving how wrong they are. All we’ve got to do now is to carry out our scheme thoroughly and secretly.”

“Leave that to me!” said Mrs. Dennison, smiling placidly; “only you two girls be ready—the rest is plain sailing.”

The following week Mr. and Mrs. Dennison gave a little dinner-party. The company numbered six, and were the host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Adair, and Mr. and Mrs. Fairfax. It was a ‘farewell’ feast; the ladies were in high spirits, the gentlemen spasmodically mirthful and anon depressed. Bright Mrs. Fairfax, at dessert, made a telling little speech, proposing the healths of “Our Three dear Husbands! A pleasant trip and a safe return to their loving wives!” Laura smiled sweetly, and looked volumes as she kissed her glass and waved it prettily to Adair. Mrs. Dennison nodded smiling from the head of the table to her husband sitting glumly at the foot thereof, and Mrs. Fairfax openly wafted a kiss to

the silent George, whose face was uncommonly red, and who, moreover, had evidently lost his usual excellent appetite. As a matter of fact the Three Wise Men were very uncomfortable. Their wives had never seemed to them so perfectly fascinating, and they themselves had never felt so utterly 'small' and embarrassed. However, they were all too obstinate to confess their sensations one to another; their resolve was made, and there was no going back upon it without, as they considered, a loss of dignity.

The days flew on with incalculable speed, and the evening came at last when they all said 'good-bye' to the fair partners of their lives, and started for Southampton. They had purposely arranged to leave London on the evening before the steamer sailed, in order that during the silence and solitude of night each wife might have ample opportunity for mournful meditation and the shedding of such repentant tears as are supposed to befit these occasions. But up to the last moment the fair ones maintained their aggravating cheerfulness; they were evidently more inclined to laugh than to cry, and they bade farewell to their husbands "with nods and becks and wreathèd smiles" suitable to festal jollity. There was no sentiment in their last words either: Mrs. Dennison tripped out of her house to see her husband into his hansom,

and pitching her 'sweet soprano' in its highest key cried, "Remember, your things for the voyage are in the yellow portmanteau! The *yellow* portmanteau, mind! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" growled John. Then gathering himself into a heap in one corner of the cab, he said, "*Damn* the yellow portmanteau!"

"Good-bye, Frank, dear!" Laura Adair had chirruped like some pretty tame bird, as she raised herself on tip-toe to kiss her tall and handsome spouse. "All I ask is, *do* try not to get your nose sunburnt! It *is* so unbecoming. Such a lot of African travellers have a peeled nose!"

"I'll do my best, Laura," returned Frank, with melancholy resignation. "If I live, I will take care of—my—nose. If I die——"

"Oh, but you won't die!" declared Laura vivaciously. "You will come home and bring me *heaps* of nuggets."

Then the cab had driven off with him, and Laura had run into the house like a wild creature to cry over the chair where he had lately sat, and to kiss the stump of cigar he had left in the ash-tray, and roll it up in paper like a precious relic. Laughing and crying together, she behaved like a lunatic for about five minutes; then becoming rapidly sensible, she murmured "*Darling!*"

It will soon be all right!" and went quietly upstairs to finish something she had to do in the way of packing.

George Fairfax had to kiss the dog Bibi as well as his wife when he left, and his parting words were gruff and husky. He loved the bright little woman with the blue eyes, who stood watching him off with her little toy-terrier in her arms—loved her with all the tenderness of a strong man's heart—and once or twice he was tempted to break his promise to Dennison and throw up the whole business. But he fought obstinately against his rising sentiment, and said, "Ta-ta, Belle!" as if he were going to the club for an hour, and she laughed, waved her hand, and said, "Ta-ta" also. When he had actually gone, however, she, like her friend Laura, cried and kissed things of his which she found lying about; then she, too, became composed and practical, and drying her eyes, went in *her* turn to finish something *she* had to do in the way of packing.

Next morning the Three Wise Men stood together on the deck of the great ship outward bound, and mournfully watched the shores of England receding rapidly from their view. They had been almost the last to come on board, for having carefully told their wives at what hotel in Southampton a telegram would find them, they

had, each one secretly, hoped against hope that some urgent message from home might have forced them (much against their wills, of course) to return in haste to London. But no such 'reprieve' had been granted; no news of any kind had arrived, and so there they were—perfectly free to carry out their plans, and steaming away as fast as possible from the land they held dearest and fairest in all the world. They were very silent, but they thought a good deal. The captain of the ship, a jolly man, with a pleasant twinkle in his eye, spoke to them now and then in passing, and told them casually that there were several very pleasant ladies among the saloon passengers. They heard this with stoical indifference, verging on bilious melancholy. As the English coast vanished at last into a thin blue line on the edge of the horizon, George Fairfax broke the 'dumb spell' by a profane 'swear.'

"Damn it! I think Belle might have wired to say good-bye!"

"I confess I am surprised," murmured Adair slowly, "that Laura never thought of it."

"Women are all alike," snapped Dennison. "Court them and they're all romance; marry them, and they're dead to feeling." And grumbling inaudibly he went below. The other two followed him in gloomy resignation,

angry with themselves and with all their surroundings. When, later on, they took their places at the dinner-table, they were so unsociable, morose, and irritable, that none of the passengers cared to talk to them or attempted to ‘draw them out.’ As for the women—“I see no pretty ones,” said Adair.

“All old frumps!” grunted Fairfax.

“Women’s rights and men’s lefts!” snarled Dennison.

Three seats at table were empty.

“Those three ladies who came on board early this morning are dining below?” inquired the captain cheerfully of the steward.

“Yes, sir.”

Towards evening the wind freshened, and presently blew a heavy gale. The waves ran high, and many a bold heart began to sicken at the giddy whirl of waters, the nervous plunging of the ship, the shuddering of her huge bulk as she slipped down into the gulfs and climbed up again on the peaks of the foam-crested and furious billows. Next day, and the two next after that, the storm went on increasing, till, in the Bay of Biscay, the clamour and confusion of the elements became truly appalling. All the passengers were kept below by the captain’s orders. The Three Wise Men lay in their berths, because it seemed

better to lie there than try to stand upright, and be tumbled about with the risk of breaking bones. Adair, too, was grievously sea-sick, and so reduced to utter mental and bodily misery, that he thought nothing, knew nothing, and cared nothing, though the heavens should crack. One night the wind sank suddenly, the waves continued to run into high hills and deep hollows with dizzy pertinacity; but there was a comparative calm, and with the calm came a blinding close grey sea-fog. The steamer's speed was slackened: the dismal fog-horn blew its melancholy warning note across the heaving waste of waters; and partially soothed by the deadly monotony of the sound, and the slower pace at which the ship moved, all Three Wise Men dropped off into a profound and peaceful slumber—the deepest and most restful they had enjoyed since they came on board. All at once, about the middle of the night, they were startled up and thrown violently from their berths by a frightful shock—a huge crash and cracking of timber. All the lights went out; then came roarings of men's voices, whistlings, and faint shriekings of women, accompanied by the rush and swirl of water.

“What's the matter?” shouted Dennison, picking himself up from the floor of his cabin.

“Collision, *I* should say!” returned Adair, out

of the darkness. “Get your clothes on. Where’s George?”

“Here!” answered Fairfax. “I am standing in a pool of water. Our window’s smashed in—the sea’s pouring through the port-hole.”

They threw on what clothes they could find, and made the best of their way on deck, where they at once learned the extent of the disaster. A large foreign steamer had borne down upon their vessel in the fog, making a huge rent in the hull, through which the water was pouring; and the prospect of sinking within half an hour seemed imminent. The foreign liner had gone on her way, as usual, without stopping to learn what damage she had done. All the passengers and crew were assembled on deck, the former quiet and self-possessed, the latter engaged in actively lowering the boats; and the captain was issuing his orders with the customary coolness of a brave Englishman who cares little whether his own lot be death or life so long as he does his duty.

“By Jove!” exclaimed Dennison as he surveyed the scene: “we’re in for it! They’re beginning to fill the boats; women and children first, of course. If there’s no room for us, we’ll have to sink or swim in grim earnest!”

His two friends, Fairfax and Adair, looked on at the scene for a moment in silence. What each

man thought within himself concerning the comfortable homes they had left behind cannot here be expressed—they kept their feelings to themselves, and merely went forward at once to proffer their assistance to the captain.

"Oh, you will take care of *me*, I'm sure!" suddenly said a sweet pleading voice behind Adair, while a face, fair as an angel's, shone full upon him out of the storm and darkness. "I shall not be at all frightened with *you*!"

Adair turned sharply round.

"*Laura*!" he gasped.

She slipped her arm through his, and smiled bravely up at him.

"Yes, it's me!" she said. "You didn't suppose I was going to part with you for such a long, uncertain time, did you? Oh no, darling! How *could* you think it! Are we going to be drowned? I don't mind, if I stop with you, and you hold me very tight as we go down. I'm so glad I came!"

He caught her in his arms, and kissed her with the frenzied passion of a Romeo. Indeed, it would have been difficult even for a Shakespeare to depict the tragic tumult then raging in this 'modern' husband's soul—the love, joy, terror, remorse, and reverence that centred round this delicate and beautiful creature who loved him so

well that she was ready to confront a horrible death for his sake! Meanwhile a little blue-eyed woman was clinging to George Fairfax, sobbing and laughing together.

"Oh, are we going to die?" she inquired hysterically. "Dear George, are we going to die? Do let us keep together, and poor Bibi with us! I've brought Bibi!"

"Heaven bless Bibi!" cried George fervently, hugging little woman and little dog together. "Oh, my darling Belle! who would have thought of seeing you here? *Why* did you come?"

"To take care of you, of course!" she replied, her blue eyes full of tears. "I didn't mean to show myself till we got to that horrid place in Africa, where you said the natives die of fever and things. Oh dear, are we to get into boats? I won't go without you, George; nothing shall induce me!"

"My dearest, women and children *must* go first," said the unhappy George. "Oh, what fools we were to leave England! To think we should have brought you to this! Why, there's Mrs. Dennison!"

There she was indeed, calm, and almost smiling in the midst of danger. She held her husband's arm, for bluff John Dennison was completely taken aback and unnerved, and made no attempt

to hide the tears that filled his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

“It’s all my fault,” he said huskily. “If it hadn’t been for me, Fairfax and Adair would never have started on this unlucky journey, and you dear women would not have got into this danger. As it is, God help us all! I believe we are doomed.”

“Oh, let us hope not,” answered Mrs. Dennison softly and cheerily; “and if we are, it’s not a hard death if we can only keep together. Look! there’s the captain beckoning us now; come, girls!”

And how it happened none of them could ever quite realise, but certain it is that within the next few minutes the Three Wise Men found themselves in a small open boat, with their three wives, rocking up and down in the wallowing trough of the sea, the dog Bibi being the only other passenger. Fortunately, the clearance of the living freight from the sinking steamer had been effected with such promptness and method, that every soul on board got safely away before she began to heel under, and the pale light of morning showed the little fleet of boats riding high on the crests of the still uproarious billows. But as the hours went on, and the sun rose, these boats began to part company, and by ten o’clock in the morning, the

little skiff containing the Three Wise Men and their fair partners was the only object visible on the shining expanse of the sea. The steamer had sunk.

Slowly and heedfully the Three pulled at their oars, and many a loving and anxious look did each man cast at the soft bundled-up figures in the stern, huddled together for warmth and support. All three women slept, out of sheer exhaustion, and the morning sunshine beamed full on the sweet face of the beautiful Laura, her peacefully closed eyelids making her look like some dreaming saint, while the fresh wind ruffled the bright uncovered locks of Belle Fairfax, whose tiny dog, curled close against her breast, was not asleep, but, on the contrary, was watchfully observing, with sharp eyes and attentively quivering nose, every wave that threatened to disturb his mistress's slumbers. Presently John Dennison essayed a remark.

"They're too good for us."

The silence of his friends gave tacit consent. Encouraged, he offered another opinion.

"If we drown we shall deserve it. We've been fools."

Again silence implied agreement. Then all three bent to the oars more earnestly, now and then turning their heads to scan the ocean in

search of some home-returning ship which might offer them rescue. The sun rose higher and higher, the great sea sank to smoothness and turned to liquid gold, and at about midday Belle awoke. At first she looked frightened ; but, meeting her husband's fond eyes, she smiled.

"Well, we're not dead yet!" she said briskly. "But I'm afraid we shall soon be hungry!"

"I'm afraid so too!" responded George dejectedly.

Laura sat up just then, whereupon Mrs. Denison spoke as if she herself had not been asleep at all.

"I have some biscuits and some brandy," she said, in her bright clear voice. "We can hold out for a little while on that."

"Of course," said Belle ; then mournfully, "If the worst comes to the worst, we must eat Bibi!"

At this a smile came on every face. Bibi himself, always alert at the mention of his own name, seemed much interested at the direful proposal ; and presently, despite anxiety and danger, they all laughed outright.

"I'd cut off my own hand and eat it rather than eat Bibi," declared George emphatically. "Besides, poor little chap, he would hardly be a mouthful for a hungry man."

"Oh, but he would be better than nothing!"

said Belle bravely, winking away the tears that *would* come at the thought of the possible end of her small favourite. “I would rather he were eaten than that anybody should suffer——”

As she spoke the distant heavy throbbing of engines across the water was heard. Adair sprang up in the boat, shading his eyes from the sun.

“Here comes a liner!” he cried, “bearing straight down upon us, by Jove! Here, let us wave something; they’re sure to see us!”

Quick as thought Mrs. Dennison slipped off a dainty white petticoat she wore, and handed it to her husband to serve as a signal of distress. Tied to an oar, its lace frills fluttered to the breeze, and in less time than it takes to relate they were perceived and rescued. The vessel that took them on board was bound for Southampton, and in due time the Three Wise Men, with their wives and Bibi, were landed on their native shore, none the worse, though much the wiser, for their little experience. The rest of the shipwrecked passengers, together with the captain and crew, were similarly rescued.

About a week after their safe return to London, Mr. and Mrs. Dennison gave another little dinner-party. The same number sat down to table as before, and the party was composed of the same persons. It was a very blithe and festive gather-

ing indeed, and the Three Wise Men were much merrier than most wise men are supposed to be. Healths were proposed of a strange and wild character by both the ladies and the gentlemen.

“Here’s to Bibi!” cried George Fairfax enthusiastically. “Long may he hold his own as the smallest and prettiest of Yorkshires!”

Loud applause ensued, accompanied by wild yapping on the part of the toasted canine hero, who, in due consideration of his having been shipwrecked and run the risk of being eaten, was on a velvet cushion within kissable distance of his mistress. Then Mrs. Adair got up, glass in hand.

“I beg to propose the continuance of love-making between husbands and wives!” she said, blushing divinely. “Kind words never do harm,—tender nothings are more than learned somethings! Pretty courtesies save many misunderstandings; and, coupled with my toast, I will ask you to drink to the womanlier and happier enlightenment of my friends the Pioneers!”

Amid loud clappings the toast was drunk; and, on silence being restored, John Dennison rose to his feet, and, in a voice somewhat tremulous with feeling, said,—

“My dear boys—Frank Adair and George Fairfax, I have only one toast to propose, the only one in my opinion worth proposing—our wives!”

The dear women who have patiently borne with our humours ; who have allowed us to have our own way ; who followed us in faithful devotion when out of a mere fit of the spleen we left them ; and who proved that they were ready and willing to die with us if death had come. We imagined they were faulty women—just because they endeavoured to find some useful employment for themselves while we were wasting our time at our clubs and billiard-rooms ; but we have discovered that the biggest fault we can accuse them of is their love for us ! My boys, we don't deserve it, but we may as well try to. Any man who has won for himself the treasure of a good woman's entire love, should do his level best to make himself as worthy of it as he can. We're all lucky men ; we've got three of the best women alive to share our fortunes with us ; we behaved like fools in leaving them, and they behaved like angels in coming after us ; and now we're all together again there's nothing more to say, but here's to them with all our hearts. Our love to them ! our devotion ! our reverence ! ”

The applause here was somewhat subdued because too deeply felt ; and Belle Fairfax was crying a little out of sheer happiness. Mrs. Dennison thought it was time to make a diversion, and rose to the occasion with her usual spirit.

“John, dear!” she said, smiling at him across the table, “do you know when we were all in that little boat in mid-ocean, uncertain whether we should be rescued, or killed with starvation and exposure, I was irresistibly reminded of the old nursery jingle about the Wise Men of Gotham. Do you remember it?—

‘Three wise men of Gotham
Went to sea in a bowl—
If the bowl had been stronger
My song might have been longer!’

You know, dear, you were all so like those wonderful men! You went to sea—you *would* go to sea—in your own bowl of a theory! Now, if that bowl had been stronger, why the song might have been longer! As it is——”

“It is finished,” said John, with a smile, coming round from his place and openly kissing her where she sat. “And I defy any man to show me a better ending!”

THE LADY WITH THE CARNATIONS.

A DREAM OR A DELUSION ?

IT was in the Louvre that I first saw her—or rather her picture. Greuze painted her—so I was told ; but the name of the artist scarcely affected me—I was absorbed in the woman herself, who looked at me from the dumb canvas with that still smile on her face, and that burning cluster of carnations clasped to her breast. I felt that I knew her. Moreover, there was a strange attraction in her eyes that held mine fascinated. It was as though she said, “Stay till I have told thee all !” A faint blush tinged her cheek—one loose tress of fair hair fell caressingly on her half-uncovered bosom. And, surely, was I dreaming ?—or did I smell the odour of carnations on the air ? I started from my reverie—a slight tremor shook my nerves. I turned to go. An artist carrying a large easel and painting materials just then approached, and placing himself opposite the picture, began to copy it. I watched him at work for a

few moments—his strokes were firm, and his eye accurate ; but I knew, without waiting to observe his further progress, that there was an indefinable something in that pictured face that he with all his skill would never be able to delineate as Greuze had done—if Greuze indeed were the painter, of which I did not then, and do not now, feel sure. I walked slowly away.

On the threshold of the room I looked back. Yes ! there it was—that fleeting, strange, appealing expression that seemed mutely to call to *me* ; that half-wild yet sweet smile that had a world of unuttered pathos in it. A kind of misgiving troubled me—a presentiment of evil that I could not understand—and, vexed with myself for my own foolish imaginings, I hastened down the broad staircase that led from the picture-galleries, and began to make my way out through that noble hall of ancient sculpture in which stands the defiantly beautiful *Apollo Belvedere* and the world-famous *Artemis*.

The sun shone brilliantly ; numbers of people were passing and repassing. Suddenly my heart gave a violent throb, and I stopped short in my walk, amazed and incredulous. Who was that seated on the bench close to the *Artemis*, reading ? Who, if not ‘the Lady with the Carnations,’ clad in white, her head slightly bent,

and her hand clasping a bunch of her own symbolic flowers! Nervously I approached her. As my steps echoed on the marble pavement she looked up; her grey-green eyes met mine in that slow wistful smile that was so indescribably sad. Confused as my thoughts were, I observed her pallor, and the ethereal delicacy of her face and form—she had no hat on, and her neck and shoulders were uncovered. Struck by this peculiarity, I wondered if the other people who were passing through the hall noticed her *déshabille*. I looked around me inquiringly—not one passer-by turned a glance in our direction! Yet surely the lady's costume was strange enough to attract attention? A chill of horror quivered through me—was *I* the only one who saw her sitting there?

This idea was so alarming that I uttered an involuntary exclamation: the next moment the seat before me was empty, the strange lady had gone, and nothing remained of her but—the strong sweet odour of the carnations she had carried! With a sort of sickness at my heart I hurried out of the Louvre, and was glad when I found myself in the bright Paris streets filled with eager, pressing people, all bent on their different errands of business or pleasure. I entered a carriage and was driven rapidly to the Grand

Hotel, where I was staying with a party of friends. I refrained from speaking of the curious sensations that had overcome me—I did not even mention the picture that had exercised so weird an influence upon me. The brilliancy of the life we led, the constant change and activity of our movements, soon dispersed the nervous emotion I had undergone; and though sometimes the remembrance of it returned to me, I avoided dwelling on the subject. Ten or twelve days passed, and one night we all went to the Théâtre Français—it was the first evening of my life that I ever was in the strange position of being witness to a play without either knowing its name or understanding its meaning. I could only realise one thing—namely, that ‘the Lady with the Carnations’ sat in the box opposite to me, regarding me fixedly. She was alone; her costume was unchanged. I addressed one of our party in a low voice,—

“Do you see that girl opposite, in white, with the shaded crimson carnations in her dress?”

My friend looked, shook her head, and rejoined,—

“No; where is she sitting?”

“Right opposite!” I repeated in a more excited tone. “Surely you can see her! She is alone in that large box *en face*.”

My friend turned to me in wonder. "You must be dreaming, my dear! That large box is perfectly empty!"

Empty—I knew better! But I endeavoured to smile; I said I had made a mistake—that the lady I spoke of had moved—and so changed the subject. But throughout the evening, though I feigned to watch the stage, my eyes were continually turning to the place where SHE sat so quietly, with her steadfast mournful gaze fixed upon me. One addition to her costume she had—a fan—which from the distance at which I beheld it seemed to be made of very old yellow lace, mounted on sticks of filigree silver. She used this occasionally, waving it slowly to and fro in a sort of dreamy, meditative fashion; and ever and again she smiled that pained, patient smile which, though it hinted much, betrayed nothing. When we rose to leave the theatre 'the Lady with the Carnations' rose also, and drawing a lace wrap about her head, she disappeared. Afterwards I saw her gliding through one of the outer lobbies; she looked so slight and frail and childlike, alone in the pushing, brilliant crowd, that my heart went out to her in a sort of fantastic tenderness. "Whether she be a disembodied spirit," I mused, "or an illusion called up by some disorder of my own imagination, I do not know; but she seems

so sad, that even were she a Dream, I pity her ! ”

This thought passed through my brain as in company with my friends I reached the outer door of the theatre. A touch on my arm startled me—a little white hand clasping a cluster of carnations rested there for a second—then vanished. I was somewhat overcome by this new experience ; but my sensations this time were not those of fear. I became certain that this haunting image followed me for some reason ; and I determined not to give way to any foolish terror concerning it, but to calmly await the course of events, that would in time, I felt convinced, explain everything.

I stayed a fortnight longer in Paris without seeing anything more of ‘ the Lady with the Carnations,’ except photographs of her picture in the Louvre, one of which I bought—though it gave but a feeble idea of the original masterpiece—and then I left for Brittany. Some English friends of mine, Mr. and Mrs. Fairleigh, had taken up their abode in a quaint old rambling château near Quimperlé on the coast of Finisterre, and they had pressed me cordially to stay with them for a fortnight—an invitation which I gladly accepted. The house was built on a lofty rock overlooking the sea ; the surrounding coast was eminently wild and picturesque ; and on the day I arrived, there

was a boisterous wind which lifted high the crests of the billows and dashed them against the jutting crags with grand and terrific uproar. Mrs. Fairleigh, a bright, practical woman, whose life was entirely absorbed in household management, welcomed me with effusion—she and her two handsome boys, Rupert and Frank, were full of enthusiasm for the glories and advantages of their holiday resort.

“Such a beach!” cried Rupert, executing a sort of Indian war-dance beside me on the path.

“And such jolly walks and drives!” chorussed his brother.

“Yes, really!” warbled my hostess in her clear gay voice. “I’m delighted we came here. And the château is such a funny old place, full of odd nooks and corners. The country people, you know, are dreadfully superstitious, and they say it is haunted; but of course that’s all nonsense! Though if there *were* a ghost, we should send you to interrogate it, my dear!”

This with a smile of good-natured irony at me. I laughed. Mrs. Fairleigh was one of those eminently sensible persons who had seriously lectured me on a book known as “A Romance of Two Worlds,” as inculcating spiritualistic theories, and therefore deserving condemnation.

I turned the subject.

“How long have you been here?” I asked.

“Three weeks—and we haven’t explored half the neighbourhood yet. There are parts of the house itself we don’t know. Once upon a time—so the villagers say—a great painter lived here. Well, his studio runs the whole length of the château, and that and some other rooms are locked up. It seems they are never let to strangers. Not that we want them—the place is too big for us as it is.”

“What was the painter’s name?” I inquired, pausing as I ascended the terrace to admire the grand sweep of the sea.

“Oh, I forget! His pictures were so like those of Greuze that few can tell the difference between them—and——”

I interrupted her. “Tell me,” I said, with a faint smile, “have you any carnations growing here?”

“Carnations! I should think so! The place is full of them. Isn’t the odour delicious?” And as we reached the highest terrace in front of the château I saw that the garden was ablaze with these brilliant scented blossoms, of every shade, varying from the palest salmon pink to the deepest, darkest scarlet. This time that subtle fragrance was not my fancy, and I gathered a few of the flowers to wear in my dress at dinner. Mr.

Fairleigh now came out to receive us, and the conversation became general.

I was delighted with the interior of the house ; it was so quaint, and old, and suggestive. There was a dark oaken staircase, with a most curiously carved and twisted balustrade—some ancient tapestry still hung on the walls,—and there were faded portraits of stiff ladies in ruffs, and maliciously smiling knights in armour, that depressed rather than decorated the dining-room. The chamber assigned to me upstairs was rather bright than otherwise—it fronted the sea, and was cheerfully and prettily furnished. I noticed, however, that it was next door to the shut-up and long-deserted studio. The garden was, as Mrs. Fairleigh had declared, full of carnations. I never saw so many of these flowers growing in one spot. They seemed to spring up everywhere, like weeds, even in the most deserted and shady corners.

I had been at the château some three or four days, and one morning I happened to be walking alone in a sort of shrubbery at the back of the house, when I perceived in the long dank grass at my feet a large grey stone, that had evidently once stood upright, but had now fallen flat, burying itself partly in the earth. There was something carved upon it. I stooped down, and clearing away the grass and weeds, made out the words,—

“ MANON

Cœur perfide ! ”

Surely this was a strange inscription ! I told my discovery to the Fairleighs, and we all examined and re-examined the mysterious slab, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory explanation of its pictures. Even inquiries made among the villagers failed to elicit anything save shakes of the head, and such remarks as ‘ Ah, Madame ! si on savait ! . . . ’ or ‘ Je crois bien qu’il y a une histoire là ! ’

One evening we all returned to the château at rather a later hour than usual, after a long and delightful walk on the beach in the mellow radiance of a glorious moon. When I went to my room I had no inclination to go to bed—I was wide awake, and moreover in a sort of expectant frame of mind ; expectant, though I knew not what I expected.

I threw my window open, leaning out and looking at the moon-enchanted sea, and inhaling the exquisite fragrance of the carnations wafted to me on every breath of the night wind. I thought of many things—the glory of life ; the large benevolence of Nature ; the mystery of death ; the beauty and certainty of immortality ; and then, though my back was turned to the interior of my room, I knew—I felt, I was no longer alone. I

forced myself to move round from the window ; slowly but determinedly I brought myself to confront whoever it was that had thus entered through my locked door ; and I was scarcely surprised when I saw ‘the Lady with the Carnations’ standing at a little distance from me, with a most woebegone appealing expression on her shadowy lovely face. I looked at her, resolved not to fear her, and then brought all my will to bear on unravelling the mystery of my strange visitant. As I met her gaze unflinchingly she made a sort of timid gesture with her hands, as though she besought something.

“ Why are you here ? ” I asked, in a low, clear tone. “ Why do you follow me ? ”

Again she made that little appealing movement. Her answer, soft as a child’s whisper, floated through the room,—

“ You pitied me ! ”

“ Are you unhappy ? ”

“ Very ! ” And here she clasped her wan white fingers together in a sort of agony. I was growing nervous, but I continued,—

“ Tell, me, then, what you wish me to do ? ”

She raised her eyes in passionate supplication.

“ Pray for me ! No one has prayed for me ever since I died—no one has pitied me for a hundred years ! ”

"How did you die?" I asked, trying to control the rapid beating of my heart. 'The Lady with the Carnations' smiled most mournfully, and slowly unfastened the cluster of flowers from her breast—there her white robe was darkly stained with blood. She pointed to the stain, and then replaced the flowers. I understood.

"Murdered!" I whispered, more to myself than to my pale visitor—"murdered!"

"No one knows, and no one prays for me!" wailed the faint sweet spirit voice—"and though I am dead I cannot rest. Pray for me—I am tired!"

And her slender head drooped wearily—she seemed about to vanish. I conquered my rising terrors by a strong effort, and said,—

"Tell me—you *must* tell me"—here she raised her head, and her large pensive eyes met mine obediently—"who was your murderer?"

"He did not mean it," she answered. "He loved me. It was here"—and she raised one hand and motioned towards the adjacent studio—"here he drew my picture. He thought me false—but I was true. 'Manon, cœur perfide!' Oh, no, no, no! It should be 'Manon, cœur fidèle!'"

She paused and looked at me appealingly. Again she pointed to the studio.

"Go and see!" she sighed. "Then you will

pray—and I will never come again. Promise you will pray for me—it was here he killed me—and I died without a prayer.”

“Where were you buried?” I asked, in a hushed voice.

“In the waves,” she murmured; “thrown in the wild cold waves; and no one knew—no one ever found poor Manon; alone and sad for a hundred years, with no word said to God for her!”

Her face was so full of plaintive pathos, that I could have wept. Watching her as she stood, I knelt at the quaint old *prie-Dieu* just within my reach, and prayed as she desired. Slowly, slowly, slowly a rapturous light came into her eyes; she smiled and waved her hands towards me in farewell. She glided backwards towards the door—and her figure grew dim and indistinct. For the last time she turned her now radiant countenance upon me, and said in thrilling accents,—

“Write, ‘Manon, cœur fidèle!’”

I cannot remember how the rest of the night passed, but I know that with the early morning, rousing myself from the stupor of sleep into which I had fallen, I hurried to the door of the closed studio. It was ajar! I pushed it boldly open and entered. The room was long and lofty, but destitute of all furniture save a battered-looking,

worm-eaten easel that leaned up against the damp stained wall. I approached this relic of the painter's art, and examining it closely, perceived the name "Manon" cut roughly yet deeply upon it. Looking curiously about, I saw what had nearly escaped my notice—a sort of hanging cupboard, on the left-hand side of the large central bay window. I tried its handle—it was unlocked, and opened easily. Within it lay three things—a palette, on which the blurring marks of long-obliterated pigments were still faintly visible; a dagger, unsheathed, with its blade almost black with rust; and—the silver filigree sticks of a fan, to which clung some mouldy shreds of yellow lace. I remembered the fan 'the Lady with the Carnations' had carried at the Théâtre Français, and I pieced together her broken story. She had been slain by her artist lover—slain in a sudden fit of jealousy ere the soft colours on his picture of her were yet dry—murdered in this very studio; and no doubt that hidden dagger was the weapon used. Poor Manon! Her frail body had been cast from the high rock on which the château stood "into the wild cold waves," as she or her spirit had said; and her cruel lover had carried his wrath against her so far as to perpetuate a slander against her by writing "Cœur perfide" on that imperishable block of stone! Full of

pitying thoughts I shut the cupboard, and slowly left the studio, closing the door noiselessly after me.

That morning as soon as I could get Mrs. Fairleigh alone I told her my adventure, beginning with the very first experience I had had of the picture in the Louvre. Needless to say, she heard me with the utmost incredulity.

"I know you, my dear!" she said, shaking her head at me wisely; "you are full of fancies, and always dreaming about the next world, as if this one wasn't good enough for you. The whole thing is a delusion."

"But," I persisted, "you know the studio was shut and locked; how is it that it is open now?"

"It isn't open!" declared Mrs. Fairleigh—"though I am quite willing to believe you dreamt it *was*."

"Come and see!" I exclaimed eagerly; and I took her upstairs, though she was somewhat reluctant to follow me. As I had said, the studio was open. I led her in, and showed her the name cut on the easel, and the hanging cupboard with its contents. As these convincing proofs of my story met her eyes, she shivered a little, and grew rather pale.

"Come away," she said nervously—"you are really *too* horrid! I can't bear this sort of thing!

For goodness' sake, keep your ghosts to yourself!" I saw she was vexed and pettish, and I readily followed her out of the barren, forlorn-looking room. Scarcely were we well outside the door when it shut to with a sharp click. I tried it—it was fast locked! This was too much for Mrs. Fairleigh. She rushed downstairs in a perfect paroxysm of terror, and when I found her in the breakfast-room she declared she would not stop another day in the house. I managed to calm her fears, however; but she insisted on my remaining with her to brave out whatever else might happen at what she persisted now in calling the 'haunted' château, in spite of her practical theories. And so I stayed on. And when we left Brittany, we left altogether, without having had our peace disturbed by any more manifestations of an unearthly nature.

One thing alone troubled me a little—I should have liked to obliterate the word "perfidie" from that stone, and to have had "fidèle" carved on it instead; but it was too deeply engraved for this. However, I have seen no more of 'the Lady with the Carnations.' But I know the dead need praying for—and that they often suffer for lack of such prayers—though I cannot pretend to explain the reason why. And I know that the picture in the Louvre is not a Greuze, though it is called

one—it is the portrait of a faithful woman deeply wronged ; and her name is here written as she told me to write it,—

“ MANON ”

Cœur Fidèle !

AN OLD BUNDLE.

“SHE’S a reg’lar old bundle—she is ; more worry than she’s wuth !”

The speaker was a buxom laundress of some thirty-five or forty years of age, with a plump, merry face, a twinkling eye, and an all-round comfortable kindly manner ; and her words, though in themselves apparently harsh, were uttered in such a tone of genuine, if half-playful, affection, as robbed them of every suspicion of ill-humour. She was ironing out some dainty articles of feminine apparel profusely trimmed with lace, and though her attention was chiefly bent on her work, she glanced every now and then, with a curious mingling of wearied patience and keen anxiety, to the chimney-corner of her ironing-room, where, in a large chair, propped up by a large pillow, sat the ‘old bundle’ alluded to.

“She *will* come in here on ironin’ days ; it ain’t no good tryin’ to prevent ’er. She can’t see a bit how the things is bein’ done ; but she fancies she

can, an' that's just as good for 'er. Lor', now! Look at 'er, all droopin' forward fit to break 'erself in two! Here, granny!—Hold up!"

And thus exclaiming, she hurried to the chair, and, with tender zeal, lifted the 'bundle' into a better sitting posture, thereby disclosing to view a little old woman with a nut-brown wrinkled face like that of some well-preserved mummy. Two very small, very dim eyes peered up at her as she settled the pillow, and a weak wheezy voice piped out—

"That's 'er! That's my little Betty, my youngest grandarter! I knows 'er—I knows 'em all—fine-grown boys an' gels, for sure! Betty, she's a good hand at frills, but she can't do 'em as I could when I was a gel. Lor'! when I was a gel—eh, dearie, dearie me——" Here the voice sighed away into indistinct murmurings, and ceased.

Her 'youngest grandarter' looked round with a matronly smile.

"That's the way old folks allus goes on," she observed indulgently. "I 'xpect I'll do the same if I'm ever 'er age. She's a wonderful one for 'er time of life—ninety-five come Christmas. Such a memory as she's got! A bit mixed now an' then, but there's a'most nothing she can't remember. She was a married woman with a family before

the Queen was crowned ; an' once she was somewhere nigh Windsor Park an' saw the Prince o' Wales carried about as a baby. Didn't ye, granny ? " Here she raised her voice to something between a shriek and a whistle. " Didn't ye see the Prince o' Wales in long clothes ? "

A galvanic shock appeared to go through the 'old bundle,' and two skinny hands were thrust forth tremblingly in the air.

" Ay, that I did ! " wheezed the weak voice again. " He wor the dearest little dear, as rosy as rosy—Lor' bless his 'art ! I seed 'im on his marriage-day, too—me an' my 'usband ; we were a'most killed in the crowd, so we was, but I seed 'im, an' he smiled at me—so did the beautiful princess from Denmark, she smiled, too—just straight at me. It's truth I'm tellin'—both on 'em smiled at me just straight an' pleasant like—it's truth I'm tellin'——"

" No one's doubtin' ye, granny," said the comely Betty, shaking out the ethereal-looking lace petticoat she had just finished, and unrolling another preparatory for further operations. " You were a fine, handsome woman still, then, worn't ye, eh ? " This with a sly wink round.

" Ah, worn't I, worn't I ? " screamed granny, now becoming wildly excited. " You ask William what I wor ! He'll tell ye ! He used to say,

‘You’ll never get old, my dear ; that’s what it is you’ll never get old.’ Where’s William ? You ask ’im—he’s the man to talk o’ my looks ; he thought a deal o’ them—he’ll tell ye. It ain’t for me to praise myself”—and here an odd chuckle and creak came from the chair, whereby it became dimly manifest that the ‘old bundle’ was laughing—“it ain’t for me—you fetch ’im an’ ask ’im—he’ll tell ye——”

“That’s poor grandfather she’s chattering about now,” said Betty very softly. “He’s been dead these twenty years.”

She went on ironing, meditatively, for a few minutes, and then said,—

“It’s queer how some folks never get quite what they want in this world. Now she”—jerking her head in the ‘old bundle’s’ direction—“she’s had a particular wish all ’er days, an’ it’s never been given to ’er—now and again she do harp on it till she wears a body out. In all ’er terrible long life she’s never seen the Queen, an’ that’s ’er craziness. She takes it awful badly. We’ve tried all we know to manage it for ’er, an’ it seems as if there was a fate against it. She could never manage it for ’erself when she was well an’ strong, an’ now it’s more ’ard than ever. We took ’er with us on Jubilee day, an’ she began to cry at the sight of the crowd, an’ got nervous like ; then we took ’er

when the Imperial Institute was opened, an' that worn't no use neither, she was too feeble to stand the pushing an' scrambling. We've done our best, but something allus comes in the way, so I expect it's no good trying any more."

At that moment granny lifted herself up with a good deal of energy and peered at the ironing-board.

"What are ye doin' with them frills?" she demanded. "You ain't 'arf a hand at them. When I was a gel, I could do frills fit for the Queen to wear. Ah! *she* must be a fine leddy, the Queen of England, with 'er gold crown on 'er head an' 'er great jewels on 'er breast; an' 'er grand robes all round an' about 'er, an' trailing yards on the ground. Eh, dearie, dearie, dearie me!"—and she shook a sort of eldritch wail out of herself—"I'll never be at peace till I see 'er—never! I've seen the Prince of Wales many a time, God bless 'im!—an' the princess—an' they've smiled at me—but Lor'! the Queen is like the Lord Almighty—we've got to believe in 'er without seein' 'er!"

Her granddaughter looked gravely shocked.

'Lor', granny, you shouldn't talk so—it sounds as blasphemous as if ye were in church," she said, with a most curious irrelevance. "I'm just surprised at you—a decent, God-fearing body

like yourself. Surely there's no such need for us to see the Queen ; it's enough to know that she's there."

"'Tain't !" shrieked the 'old bundle' vehemently. "'Tain't, I tell ye ! She's *there*, is she ? *Where ? Where* is she, ye silly gel ? Don't make me a fool nor yourself neither ! *Where* is she ?"

"Why, granny, in 'er palaces, for sure !" replied Betty soothingly.

"Don't she never come out o' them palaces ?" expostulated granny, getting shriller and shriller. "Don't she never take no air ? Then it's a shame to the country to let 'er be stifled up an' hidden away from the people who would love to see 'er with 'er robes an' crown on 'er 'ead, poor pretty dear ! I call it just disgraceful, I do ! Get 'er out of it—yes, you tell William what I say ; the country ain't got no business to keep 'er shut up, first in one prison an' then another—an' I tell ye, Betty, there's something very queer about the way they send 'er to Scotland for such a long time—'tain't right, Betty !—you mark my words, 'tain't right !—it's a plot to keep 'er away from us, you see if it ain't ! Lor ! she's a young woman yet—just lost 'er 'usband too ! it's 'ard on 'er to shut 'er up—it's powerful 'ard——"

Here granny sank back exhausted, her withered

head shaking to and fro involuntarily with the violence of her emotions.

“Lor’! bless ’er ’art!” cried Betty, running to her, and tenderly caressing what now truly appeared to be nothing but a sunken heap of clothes. “How she do mix up things, to be sure! She can’t get ’em right nohow. She ain’t forgotten nothing, an’ yet she can’t sort ’em straight. Hullo, granny! Lord love ’er! If she ain’t cryin’ now!”

“They ain’t got no right,” whimpered granny dolefully, burying her wrinkles in her granddaughter’s ample bosom, “to shut up the Queen. Let us ’ave a look at her, I say—we all loves ’er, and we’ll ’arten ’er up a bit——”

“Don’t you worrit, granny,” said the buxom Betty consolingly. “She isn’t shut up—don’t you think it! She can go out whenever she likes.”

“Can she?” And the ‘old bundle’ lifted her tear-stained, aged face, with a faint hope expressed upon it.

“Ah, well, if it’s the truth you’re speakin,’ I’m glad to ’ear it. I’m glad and thankful she can come out o’ them palaces. But I’ve never seen ’er, an’ I wish—I wish”—here came a prolonged and dismal snuffle—“I wish I could see ’er with my own eyes afore”—a long pause—“afore I die.”

The poor 'old bundle' was by this time completely done up, and meekly submitted to be put comfortably back on her pillow, where in a few minutes she was sound asleep. The kind-hearted Betty resumed her ironing, and, glancing up once wistfully at the interested visitor who had witnessed the little scene, remarked,—

“It do seem a pity that she can't 'ave what she wants! She won't last long!”

The visitor agreed sympathetically, and presently withdrew.

It was then the 'season' in town, and in due course it was announced in the papers that the Queen would visit London on a certain day to hold a special 'drawing-room,' returning to Windsor the next afternoon. Betty was told of this, and was also informed that if she got a bath-chair for her 'old bundle,' and started early, a friendly constable would see that she was properly placed outside Buckingham Palace in order to view the Queen as she drove by on her arrival from the station, and before the carriages for the Drawing-room commenced to block the thoroughfare. There would, of course, be a crowd, but the English crowd being the best-natured in the world, and invariably kind to aged persons and little children, no danger to 'Granny' need be anticipated. The joy of the old lady, when she was

told of the treat in store for her, was extreme, though her great age and frail health made her nervous, and filled her with fears lest again she should be disappointed of her one desire.

“Are you sure I shall see the Queen, Betty?” she asked, twenty times a day. “Is there no mistake about it this time? I shall really see ’er; ’er own darling self? God bless ’er!”

“Quite sure, granny!” responded the cheery Betty. “You’ll be just at the Palace gates, an’ you can’t help seeing ’er. An’ I shouldn’t wonder if she smiled at you, like the Prince o’ Wales!”

This set the ‘old bundle’ off into a fit of chuckles, and kept her happy for hours.

“Like the Prince o’ Wales!” she mumbled; then nodding to herself mysteriously: “Ah, he *do* smile kind! Everybody knows that. He *do* smile!”

The eventful morning at last arrived, ushered in by the usual ‘Queen’s weather’—bright sunshine and cloudless skies. The ‘old bundle’ was wrapped up tenderly and carried into a comfortable bath-chair, wheeled by an excessively sympathetic man, with an extremely red face, who entered *con amore* into the spirit of the thing.

“A rare fine old lady she be,” he remarked, as he fastened the leather apron across his vehicle. “Ninety-five! Lord bless me! I hope I’ll have

as merry an eye as she has when I'm her age! See the Queen? To be sure she shall; and as close as I can manage it. Come along, mother!" And off he trotted with his charge, Betty bringing up the rear, and enjoying to the full the fresh beauty of the fine sunny spring morning.

Outside Buckingham Palace a crowd had commenced to gather, and a line of mounted soldiery kept the road clear. Betty looked around anxiously. Where was the friendly constable? Ah, there he was, brisk and business-like, though wearing a slightly puzzled air. He joined her at once and shook hands with her, then bent kindly towards the aged granny.

"Lovely morning, mother," he said, patting the mittened hand that lay trembling a little on the apron of the bath-chair. "Do you a world of good."

"Yes, yes," murmured the old woman; "an' the Queen?"

"Oh, she's coming," returned the 'Bobby,' looking about him in various directions; "we expect her every minute."

"The fact is," he added, in an aside to Betty, "I can't rightly tell which gate of the palace Her Majesty will enter by. You see, both are guarded; the crowd keeps to this one principally just about where we are, so I suppose it will be this one; but

I couldn't say for certain. It is generally this one."

"Is it?" said Betty, her heart sinking a little. "Shall granny be placed here then?"

"Yes, you can wheel her as far as here;" and he designated the situation. "If the Queen drives in by this gate, she will pass quite close; if she goes by the other, well—it can't be helped."

"Oh, surely she won't!" exclaimed the sensitive Betty. "It would be such a disappointment!"

"Well, you see, Her Majesty doesn't know that——" began the constable, with an indulgent smile.

"But the crowd is *here*—outside *this* gate," persisted Betty.

"That's just why she *may* go in at the other," said the guardian of the peace thoughtfully. "You see, the Queen can't abear a crowd."

"Not of 'er own subjects?" asked Betty, "when they love 'er so?"

'Bobby' discreetly made no answer. He was busy instructing the man who wheeled the bath-chair to place it in a position where there would be no chance of its being ordered out of the way. Once installed near the Palace gates, the 'old bundle' perked her wizened head briskly out of her wrappings, and gazed about her with the most

lively interest. Her aged eyes sparkled ; her poor wrinkled face had a tinge of colour in it, and something like an air of juvenility pervaded her aspect. She was perfectly delighted with all her surroundings, and the subdued murmur of the patiently waiting crowd was music to her ears.

“Ain’t it a lovely day, Betty?” she said, in her piping, tremulous voice. “And, ain’t there a lot of nice good-looking people about?”

Betty nodded. There was no denying the fact. There *were* ‘nice good-looking’ people about—an English crowd respectfully waiting to see their Sovereign is mostly composed of such. Honest hard-workers are among them, men of toil, women of patience ; and all loyal to the backbone—loyal, loving, and large-hearted, and wishful to see their Queen and Empress, and cheer her with all the might of wholesome English lungs as she passes them by.

“It’s lucky it’s a fine day,” said a man standing close to Betty, “else we shouldn’t see the Queen at all—she’d be in a close carriage.”

“She won’t be in one to-day,” said Betty confidently.

“I don’t think so. She may. Let’s hope not!”

Again Betty’s faithful heart felt an anxious thrill, and she glanced nervously at her ‘old bundle.’ That venerable personage was sitting up quite

erectly for her, and seemed to have got some of her youth back again in the sheer excitement of hope and expectation. Presently there was a stir among the people, and the sound of horses' hoofs approaching at a rapid trot.

"Here she comes!" exclaimed the bath-chair attendant, somewhat excitedly, and Betty sprang to her grandmother's side.

"Here she comes, granny! Here comes the Queen!"

With an access of superhuman energy the old woman lifted herself in the chair, and her eyes glittered out of her head with a falcon-like eagerness. Nearer and nearer came the measured trot of the horses; a murmur of cheering rose from the outskirts of the crowd. Betty strained her eyes anxiously to catch the first glimpse of the royal equipage, then—she shut them again with a dizzy sense of utter desolation—it was a *closed* vehicle, and not the smallest glimpse could be obtained of England's Majesty. The Queen, no doubt fatigued, sat far back in the carriage, and never once looked out. The horses turned in at the very gate near which the 'old bundle' waited, alert—and in an almost breathless suspense—trotted past and were gone.

"We must go now, granny," said Betty, the tears rising in her throat. "It's all over."

The old woman turned upon her fiercely.

"What's all over?" she demanded quaveringly.

"Ain't I come here to see the Queen?"

"Well, you've seen 'er," answered Betty, with an accent of bitterness which she could not help, poor soul. "You've seen all anybody has seen. That was 'er in that carriage."

Granny stared in vague perplexity.

"In the carriage?" she faltered. "That was 'er? Who? Who? Where? There worn't nothin' to see—nobody——"

"Get home, mother; you'll get mixed up in the crowd if you don't. We'll be having all the carriages along for the Drawing-room presently," said the friendly constable kindly. "The Queen's in the palace by now."

At this, the poor old dame stretched out her trembling hands towards the palace walls.

"Shut up again!" she wailed. "Poor dear—poor dear! Lord help ye in your greatness, my lovey! God bless ye! I'd 'a' given the world to see your face just once—just once—eh, dearie, dearie, dearie me! It's a cruel day, an' I'm very cold—very cold—I shall never see—the Queen, now!"

The constable gave a startled glance at Betty, and sprang to the side of the bath-chair.

"What, what, mother! Hold up a bit!" he said. "Here, Betty—I say—be quick!"

Two or three bystanders clustered hurriedly round, while Betty caught the drooping venerable head, and, laying it against her bosom, burst out crying.

“ Oh, granny, granny dear ! ”

But ‘Granny’ was dead. Betty’s ‘old bundle’ had been suddenly moved out of her way, leaving empty desolation behind, and an empty corner never to be filled. Some of the crowd, hearing what had chanced, whispered one to another,—

“ Poor old soul ! She wanted to see the Queen just once before she died. She’d never seen her, they say. Ah well, the Queen has a rare kind heart—she’d be sorry if she knew.”

And there was many a wistful, upward glance at the windows of the palace, as the ‘old bundle’ was reverently covered and borne home, giving place to the daintier burdens of rich-robed beauty and jewels brought freely to ‘see the Queen’ on Drawing-room day.

‘MADEMOISELLE ZÉPHYR.’

A VISION of loveliness? A dream of beauty? Yes, she was all this and more. She was the very embodiment of ethereal grace and dainty delicacy. The first time I saw her she was queen of a fairy revel. Her hands grasped a sceptre so light and sparkling that it looked like a rod of moonbeams; her tiny waist was encircled by a garland of moss-rosebuds, glittering with dew, and a crown of stars encircled her fair white brow. Innocent as a snowflake she looked, with her sweet serious eyes and falling golden hair; yet she was ‘Mademoiselle Zéphyr’—a mere *danseuse* on the stage of a great and successful theatre—an actress whose gestures were simple and unaffected, and therefore perfectly fascinating, and whose trustful smile at the huge audience that nightly applauded her efforts startled sudden tears out of many a mother’s eye, and caused many a fond father’s heart to grow heavy with foreboding pity. For ‘Mademoiselle Zéphyr’ was only six years

old ! Only six summers had gilded the ‘refined gold’ of the little head that now wore its wreath of tinsel stars ; and scarcely had the delicate young limbs learned their use than they were twisted, tortured, and cramped in all those painful positions so bitterly known to students of the ‘ballet.’

“A very promising child,” the wealthy manager of the theatre had said, noticing her on one of the ‘training’ days, and observing with pleasure the grace with which ‘Mademoiselle’ lifted her tiny rounded arms above her head, and pointed her miniature foot in all the approved methods, while she smiled up into his big fat face with all the fearless confidence of her age and sex.

And so the ‘promising child’ advanced step by step in her profession, till here she was, promoted to the honour of being announced, on the great staring placards outside the theatre, as ‘Mademoiselle Zéphyr,’ the ‘Wonderful Child-Dancer !’ and, what was dearer far to her simple little soul, she was given the part of the ‘Fairy Queen’ in the grand Christmas pantomime of that year—a *rôle* in which it was her pride and pleasure to be able to summon elves, gnomes, witches, and flower-sprites with one wave of her magic wand. And she did it well too ; never could wand or

sceptre sway with prettier dignity or sweeter gravity ; never did high commands issuing from the lips of mighty potentates sound so quaintly effective as ‘Mademoiselle Zéphyr’s’ tremendous utterance—

“ You naughty elves ! begone to yon dark wood !
You’ll all be punished if you are not *dood* ! ”

This word “ *dood*,” pronounced with almost tragic emphasis in the clearest of baby voices, was perhaps one of the greatest ‘hits’ in Mademoiselle’s small repertoire of ‘effects’ ; though I think the little song she sang by herself in the third act was the culminating point of pathos after all. The scene was the ‘Fairies’ Forest by Moonlight,’ and there Mademoiselle Zéphyr danced a *pas seul* round a giant mushroom, with stage moonbeams playing upon her long fair curls in a very picturesque manner. Then came the song—the orchestra was hushed down to the utmost softness in order not to drown the little notes of the tiny voice that warbled so falteringly, yet so plaintively, the refrain—

“ I see the light of the burning day
Shine on the hill-tops far away,
And gleam on the rippling river,—
Follow me, fairies ! follow me soon,
Back to my palace behind the moon,
Where I reign for ever and ever ! ”

A burst of the heartiest applause always rewarded this vocal effort on the part of little 'Mademoiselle,' who replied to it by graciously kissing her small hands to her appreciative audience; and then she entered with due gravity on the most serious piece of professional work she had to do in the whole course of the evening. This was her grand dance—a dance she had been trained and tortured into by an active and energetic French ballet-mistress, who certainly had every reason to be proud of her tiny pupil. 'Mademoiselle Zéphyr' skimmed the boards as lightly as a swallow—she leaped and sprang from point to point like a bright rosebud tossing in the air—she performed the most wonderful evolutions, always with the utmost grace and agility; and the final attitude in which she posed her little form at the conclusion of the dance, was so artistic, and withal so winsome and fascinating, that a positive roar of admiration and wonderment greeted her as the curtain fell. Poor little mite! My heart was full of pity as I left the theatre that night, for to give a child of that age the capricious applause of the public instead of the tender nurture and fostering protection of a mother's arms, seemed to me both cruel and tragic.

Some weeks elapsed, and the flitting figure and wistful little face of 'Mademoiselle Zéphyr'

still haunted me, till at last, with the usual impetuosity that characterizes many of my sex, I wrote to the manager of the theatre that boasted the 'Wonderful Child-Dancer,' and, frankly giving my name and a few other particulars, I asked him if he could tell me anything of the 'Zéphyr's' parentage and history. I waited some days before an answer came; but at last I received a very courteous letter from the manager in question, who assured me that I was not alone in the interest the talented child had awakened, but that he had reason to fear that the promise she showed thus early would be blighted by her extreme delicacy of her constitution. He added *en passant*, that he himself was considerably out of pocket by the 'Zéphyr's' capricious health; that she had now been absent from the boards of his theatre for nearly a week; that on making inquiries, he had learned that the child was ill in bed and unable to rise, and that he had perforce stopped her salary, and provided a substitute, an older girl not nearly so talented, who gave him a great deal of trouble and vexation. He furthermore mentioned in a postscript that the 'Zéphyr's' real name was Winifred M——, that she was the daughter of a broken-down writer of *libretti*, and that her mother was dead, her only female relative being an elder sister whose character was far from

reputable. He gave me the 'Zéphyr's' address, a bad street in a bad neighbourhood; and assuring me that it was much better not to concern myself at all with the matter, he concluded his letter. His advice was sensible enough, and yet somehow I could not obey it. It is certainly a worldly-wise and safe course to follow, that of never inquiring into the fates of your unfortunate fellow-voyagers across the tempestuous sea of life; it saves trouble, it prevents your own feelings from being harrowed, and it is altogether a comfortable doctrine. But the sweet plaintive voice of the 'Zéphyr' haunted my ears; the serious child-face, with its frame of golden curls, got into my dreams at night, and at last I made up my mind to go, accompanied by a friend, to that questionable street in a still more questionable neighbourhood, and make inquiries after the 'Zéphyr's' health. After some trouble, I found the dirty lodging-house to which I had been directed, and stumbling up a very dark rickety flight of stairs, I knocked at a door, and asked if 'Miss M——' was at home. The door was flung suddenly wide open, and a pretty girl of some seventeen years of age, with a quantity of fair hair falling loosely over her shoulders, and large blue eyes that looked heavy and tear-swollen, demanded in a somewhat hardened tone of voice,

“Well ; what do you want ? ” My companion answered, “A lady has come to know how your little sister is—the one that acts at the theatre.” I then stepped forward and added as gently as I could, “I heard from Mr.—, the manager, that the child was ill—is she better ? ”

The girl looked at me steadily without replying. Then suddenly, as if with an effort, she said, “Come in.” We passed into a dark and dirty room, ill-smelling, ill-ventilated, and scarcely furnished at all ; and while I was trying to distinguish the objects in it, I heard the sound of a feeble singing. Could it be the ‘Zéphyr’s’ voice that sounded so far away, so faint and gasping ? I listened, and my eyes filled unconsciously with tears. I recognised the tune and the refrain,—

“Follow me, fairies ! follow me soon
Back to my palace behind the moon,
Where I reign for ever and ever ! ”

“Where is she ? ” I asked, turning to the fair-haired girl, who stood still regarding me, half-wistfully, half-defiantly. She nodded her head towards a corner of the room, a corner which, though very dark, was still sheltered from any draught from either window or door ; and there, on a miserable pallet bed, lay the poor little ‘Fairy Queen,’ tossing from side to side restlessly, her azure eyes wide open and glittering with feverish trouble, her lovely

silken hair tangled and lustreless, and her tiny hands clenching and unclenching themselves mechanically and almost fiercely. But as she tossed about on her miserable pillow, she sang unceasingly, if such a feeble wailing might be called singing. I turned from the heartrending sight to the elder girl, who, without waiting to be asked, said abruptly, "She has got brain-fever. The doctor says she cannot live over to-morrow. It's all been brought on through overwork, and excitement and bad food. *I* can't help it. I know she has never had enough to eat. I am often half-starved myself. Father drinks up every penny that we earn. It's a good thing, *I* think, that Winnie will get out of it all soon. I wish I were dead myself, that I do!" And here the hardened look on the pretty face suddenly melted, the defiant flash in the eyes softened, and, flinging herself down by the little pallet, she broke into a passion of sobs and tears, crying out, "Poor Winnie—poor little Winnie!"

I prefer to pass over the remainder of this scene in silence. Suffice it to say that I did what I could to alleviate the physical sufferings of poor little 'Zéphyr' and her unfortunate sister; and before leaving, I earnestly entreated the now quite softened and still sobbing elder girl to let me know whether her sister grew better or worse. This she promised to do, and, leaving my name and address, I kissed

the hot little forehead of the fallen 'Fairy Queen,' and took my departure. The next morning I heard that the child was dead. She had died in the night, and with her last fluttering breath she had tried to sing her little fairy song. And so the human 'Zéphyr' had floated away from the stage of this life, where fairy-land is only the dream of poets, to the unknown country—to the

"Island valley of Avilion,
Where never wind blows loudly."

Thinking of her as I write, I almost fancy I see a delicate sprite on rainbow pinions flitting past me ; I almost hear the sweet child-voice rendered powerful and pure by the breath of immortality, singing softly—

"Follow me soon
Back to my palace behind the moon,
Where I reign for ever and ever!"

And who shall assert that she does not reign in some distant glorified region—the little queen of a chosen court of child-angels for whom this present world was too hard and sorrowful ?

ONE OF THE WORLD'S WONDERS.

THERE is something not exactly high-class in the name of Margate. Sixpenny teas are suggested, and a vulgar flavour of shrimps floats unbidden in the air, while the looming figures of Jemima and her ever-present 'Arry obtrude themselves on the mind in spite of our best efforts to believe that Margate may be a very charming place, as its air is certainly remarkable for bracing and invigorating the system.

But there is something at Margate besides the air, the sands, and the sea ; something that calls for recognition from students, antiquarians, lovers of romance, and *savants* of all classes and nations ; something that, just because it is at plebeian Margate, has escaped the proper notice and admiration it so strongly deserves. If the curious and beautiful subterranean temple, of which I am about to speak, existed anywhere but at Margate, it would certainly be acknowledged as one of the wonders of the world, which it undoubtedly

is. Thousands of people go annually to Margate, and come away again, without knowing of its existence. I have asked residents at Margate about it, and found them perfectly ignorant of its whereabouts, and I have been instrumental in sending them to see what they may be more reasonably proud of than anything in or about their town; namely, the magnificent and wonderful piece of ancient workmanship known as the 'Shell Grotto.'

To begin with, this name is a mistake. The whole management of the place is a mistake. When a man meets you at the corner of the pier and puts a badly printed fly-leaf in your hand with the words "Go and see the Grotto" upon it, you naturally believe that it is the advertisement of a place built out of oyster-shells, where you can have tea and shrimps *ad libitum*; and you immediately set yourself against such allurements, preferring to be in the fresh salt air, and roam at your pleasure by the sea. It was the merest chance in the world that persuaded me to see this 'Grotto.' I was crumpling the fly-leaf advertisement in my hand, about to throw it away, when some words in small print caught my eye. They were, "*Two thousand square feet of shell-work.*" This aroused my curiosity, for I thought that even two thousand square feet of oyster-shells

would be worth looking at. So I turned to the man who had given me the advertisement, and said, "Where is this Grotto?"

He was a pale, hungry-looking individual, and had a monotonous way of speaking, which probably arose out of a long and bitter experience of trying to persuade people to 'go and see the Grotto' who wouldn't go.

"Up on the *Dane*," he replied.

"Where is the *Dane*?"

"Right through the town. You can't miss it." And he turned a filmy eye upon me with a show of interest. "Are you going to see it?"

"Yes, I think so. Is it something you have built up there?"

The man broke into a hoarse laugh.

"*I* built it! Lor' bless yer 'art, it's been there no one knows how long! You'd be a clever one if you could tell who built it. I don't know nothink about it, no more don't any one else that I ever heerd on."

I was now fairly interested in the matter, and lost no time in walking to the '*Dane*.' My way lay right through the town, in and out some very dirty streets, smelling strongly of fish and tar, and then up a slight eminence. This eminence was the '*Dane*,' called so for reasons that must be left to antiquarians to decide; and the third turn-

ing to the left was marked "To the Grotto." It was quite a quarter of an hour's walk from the pier, which is perhaps one of the reasons why so few excursionists seem to know anything about the place ; and those few who have seen it, have no idea of its value as an antiquity, apart from its extreme beauty. My expectations were at first somewhat disappointed when, following the way indicated 'To the Grotto,' it led me to an unpretending little house, with flowers in the front garden, and a bill in the window which said, "Tea provided." "Perhaps," thought I, "it is only a catch-penny after all," and I looked suspiciously at a hanging board on which was printed, "Visitors to the Grotto are requested to ring the bell."

I hesitated a moment, but finally rang, and prepared myself for some carefully constructed piece of humbug. The door was opened by a cheery-looking woman, to whom I said, "Can I see the Grotto ?"

"Certainly," she replied. "If you will go down those three little steps to the right, my daughter will bring you a light and show you the way."

"Is it underground ?" I asked, with some surprise.

"Oh yes," she said, smiling affably, "quite underground."

And then she disappeared, shutting her door. She evidently had no intention of proposing a shrimp tea, so I descended the steps indicated and found a closed door, which, however, was speedily opened by a fresh-faced, intelligent-looking girl, who invited me in and then proceeded to light a wax taper. The little room in which I found myself was a kind of shop, where views of Margate, shells, baskets, and other trifles were on sale ; among other things, photographs of the ' Grotto ' I had come to see. I examined one of these with increasing wonder. " Is it really like this ? " I exclaimed. " Not possible ! "

" Oh, it is much better than that," said the girl, smiling. " You see, it is difficult to take a good photograph of the place, as it is so dark. If you will come this way, please, I will light the gas as we go."

And, with lighted taper in hand, she went down a flight of rough stone steps, I following her, and in a minute we were in the subterranean temple, miscalled a Grotto, and which, as my guide lit the gas all along it, proved to be one of the most beautiful, fantastic, and interesting relics of the ancient days that exists in England or anywhere else. I had expected nothing like it. I had no idea there was such a place to be seen anywhere, least of all in Margate, and I was fairly

bewildered at the fine architecture and artistic proportions of the beautiful temple in which I stood. It is spaciouly and mathematically planned ; a long winding passage, with exquisitely designed archways here and there, leads to the culminating point, a square room with the fragments of an altar at each end. An enormous column, as thick and as handsomely rounded as the centre column in Roslin Chapel, supports the roof ; but the wonder of it all, apart from its architectural construction, is that the walls, the centre column, and the altars, are covered with shell panels, designed by the brain and worked by the hand of man, every panel different in design, and all beautifully executed. Here a sunflower, with leaves and buds, all exquisitely worked out in shells of different form and size, covers one panel ; next to it, a rising sun surrounded with triangles, stars and crescents—one particularly beautiful panel has upon it a full-blown rose with leaves, thorns and buds, all perfect. Two hearts, one within the other, a sword or dagger half drawn from its hilt, a star-fish, rings entwined, and all sorts of emblematical signs, form centres for these wonderful shell-panels, each panel having a different and more or less elaborate border. The great centre column is a perfect marvel of shell-work, some portions of it being as finely

worked as Florentine mosaic. The shells used are the usual ones found on the sea-shore, and are bedded in common clay. Utterly unprepared as I was for such a marvel of art and beauty, I said to my guide,—

“What is the history of this wonderful place? Does any one know anything about it?”

“Very little is known,” said the girl. “It was first discovered in 1834. The foundations for a school were being laid just above here, and one of the workmen let his spade fall. To his surprise it dropped through a hole and disappeared. A small boy was then let down through the hole to look after the spade, and when he got to the bottom he found himself just close to the centre column of the Grotto. Afterwards the entrance was found, and cleared of stones and rubbish, so that people could walk through. The piece of land on which it is has always been private property, and the lady to whom it now belongs allows us to live here for a small rental and make what we can by showing the Grotto, as long as we take good care of it. She had the gas laid on all through the place as it is now. A great many people who have seen it have said it ought to be written about in the papers, but no one has taken any particular notice of it yet.”

On further inquiry, I heard that Frank Buckland, the naturalist, had paid many visits to the cave, purposing to write a book about it, had not untimely death put an end to his useful labours. His theory was, that all the shells used in the ornamentation of the place must have been taken *alive*—that is, with fish in them—or they could not have remained in the wonderful state of preservation in which they now are. This is, however, a difficult question, which only profound conchologists can determine.

The square room at the end of the beautiful vaulted passage looks as if intended for a place of worship, though the Christian emblem of the cross is nowhere to be seen. The walls here are richly emblazoned with designs in shells of the sun; the sun rising, setting, and in the full splendour of all his rays; these rays exquisitely worked in the minutest shells, some of them so small that one needs a microscope to judge the amount of patience, thought, and skill bestowed on their arrangement. On some of the panels in this room too, are worked urns or vases of primitive shape, from which flames are depicted ascending. Tapping the middle panel at the end of this chamber, I found that it sounded hollow. I suggested to my guide that it might be well to make some excavations there; she

agreed, but averred that the present owner of the property would never allow it.

Wandering slowly back through the beautiful vaulted passages, I noticed at the top of one of the arches the small figure of a man in a sitting posture, carved out of one stone; the arms are tightly folded, the head is gone, but, judging from the position of the body, the head had evidently turned downwards so that the chin rested on the breast.

Full of curiosity and surprise, I turned back once more to look at the whole effect of this almost unrecognised memento of the past, and noticed how marvellously the designs harmonised together, the different colours and shapes of the shells blending so that from the foot of the steps that led into it, as far as eye could see, it looked like a miniature chapel ornamented with the finest mosaic work. It is difficult to guess for what purpose it could have been built. It is certainly not a Christian temple; nor is it Druidical, as the Druids never worshipped underground, but on hills and in forests. It is more likely to be a relic of Scandinavian mythology—it is suggestive of the sea, and may have been a burial-place of the Vikings, though it is generally believed that these bold riders of the waves preferred to let their lifeless bodies drift out to sea in ships

and sink in the 'cold, populous graves' of the ocean they loved so well, rather than be laid in the damp and wormy earth.

Whatever it be, the Shell Grotto at Margate deserves a better name and a wider fame, and so it will prove when antiquarians and scholars shall have given it proper consideration, and have freed it from its present common surroundings. Sixpence, for seeing so beautiful and extraordinary a place, seems an absurdly small sum, considering what 'guides,' as a rule, charge for showing sights not half so interesting; yet that humble silver coin is the only key required to unlock the wonders of a palace almost as beautiful as one of the scenes in Hans Christian Andersen's "Little Mermaid."

Before leaving, I asked the gentle and obliging damsel of the Grotto if many people visited the place.

"Sometimes a great many," she replied; "but they just scramble through, and never ask any questions. I don't suppose they stop to think whether it is an old relic or a modern building. Some of the roughs try to pick the shells out and destroy the panels; we have to watch very carefully to prevent mischief being done."

She showed me one place where the ruthless fingers of some particularly destructive 'Arry had

broken away the centre petals of a rose, and I was able to discern more closely than ever the exquisite beauty and fineness of the work. It would be absurd indeed to imagine such a place to be modern, for who, in these busy days, would bestow so much time, labour, and patience on the building and ornamentation of a subterranean chapel with shells? At a rough calculation, I should say that it would take a man an entire day, working hard every hour, to make one square foot of this shell-work, and there are two thousand square feet of it altogether. The trouble of collecting the shells, sorting and arranging them, the infinite patience, skill, and delicacy of finger required to bed them in the clay, apart from the knowledge of art exhibited in the plan of each design on the panels—all this taken into consideration, heightens the interest and increases the value of this Grotto as a splendid example of early artistic effort

The name of the hill in which it was excavated, 'the *Dane*,' suggests the idea that perhaps when the Danish hordes ravaged the coast in the time of the ancient Britons, the place may have been used for secret worship of some kind. It was evidently not a mere hiding-place ; it was not a dungeon, for the lavish ornamentation of the walls and the spaciousness of the

building would, in such a case, have been quite unnecessary. At any rate, it affords a field for students of early art and architecture, and I shall be glad if my description of the place induces those who are learned in the land to visit it and give public voice to their ideas respecting its origin. It is as wonderful in its way as Fingal's Cave, or the Blue Grotto at Capri, both of which magnificent natural structures are celebrated throughout the world ; while the Shell Grotto, badly named, and badly advertised, and moreover having the disadvantage of being at over-popular Margate, remains temporarily in obscurity.

All mention of it has been lately omitted from the Margate Guide-book. I hear that it was once alluded to there, *en passant*, in two or three lines, but in the new editions even that allusion has dropped out. The place should be called 'The Shell Tomb of the Vikings,' 'The Norseman's Cave,' 'The Scandinavian Shell Temple,' any taking, descriptive title—anything but the 'Grotto' ; for, say what we will, a Margate 'Grotto' cannot be divided from the idea of shrimps—yea, even horrible suggestions are presented of periwinkles and pins ! Everybody of taste and refinement will and must avoid a Margate 'Grotto,' even if they know nothing of it but its name.

If some enthusiastic worshipper of Art would but take a trip to Margate, and give the world his opinion on the design and artwork of this subterranean temple, I am sure he would tell us that we are a very dense and stupid people to be so indifferent to one of the rarest antiquities we possess. The place should be given a new and fitting title, to raise it with honour from the half-suspicious distrust and incredulity in which it is now held, and make it famous in the eyes of the public by giving us the clue to its origin ; proving perhaps, as far as proof can go, that these shining, shell-embroidered walls and arched roofs have once resounded to the shouts of the strong sea-warriors whom no terrors of wind or wave could daunt, and who swore by and sometimes defied, in the plenitude of their muscular vigour and prowess, the great gods Odin and Thor.

ANGEL'S WICKEDNESS.

“ **I** HATE God ! ” said Angel.

And having made this un-angel-like statement, she folded her short arms across her breast and surveyed her horrified audience defiantly.

It was a cold December Sunday afternoon, and the Reverend Josiah Snawley was superintending a Bible-class in a small, white-washed, damp and comfortless schoolroom in one of the worst quarters of the East End. He was assisted in his pious task by the virginal Miss Powser, a lady of uncertain age, tall and lanky of limb, with sandy locks much frizzled, and a simpering smile. The children ranged in a forlorn row before these two charitable persons were the miserable offspring of fathers and mothers whose chief business it was in life to starve uncomplainingly. And Angel—such was the odd name given her by her godfathers and godmothers in her baptism—was one of the thinnest and most ragged among all the small recipients of the Reverend Josiah's instructions, which

had that day consisted of well-worn mild platitudes respecting the love of God towards His wretched, selfish and for ever undeserving creation. She had usually figured as rather a dull, quiet child, more noticeable perhaps than others of her condition by reason of her very big dark eyes, small sensitive mouth, and untidy mass of chestnut-golden hair ; but she had never come prominently to the front, either for cleverness or right-down naughtiness till now, when she boldly uttered the amazing, blood-curdling declaration above recorded.

“Was that Angel Middleton who spoke?” inquired the Reverend Josiah, with bland austerity. “Say it again, Angel ! But no, no !”—here he shook his head solemnly—“you will not *dare* to say it again !”

“Yes, I will !” retorted Angel stubbornly. “I hate God ! There !”

A terrible pause ensued. The other children stared at their refractory companion in stupefied amazement ; they did not quite understand who ‘God’ was themselves, being but poor little weak, physically incapable creatures, who were nearly always too hungry to think much about Infinite and Unreachable splendours ; but they had a dim idea that whoever the ‘Unknown Quantity’ in Creation’s plan might be, it was very wrong to hate Him ! Dreadfully wrong ! Frightfully

wicked, and alarming from all points of view. After staring at Angel till they could stare no more, some of them put their fingers in their mouths and stared at Miss Powser. What did *she* think of it? Oh, *she* was limp with horror!—her eyes had grown paler, greener, and more watery than ever. She had clasped her hands, and was looking plaintively at the Reverend Josiah, as indeed it was her frequent custom to do. He meanwhile laid down the Testament he held, and surveyed the whole class with a glance of righteous indignation.

“I am shocked!” he said slowly, “shocked, and pained, and grieved! Here is a child—one who has been taught Bible-lessons Sunday after Sunday—who tells me she hates God! What blasphemy! What temper! Stand forward, Angel Middleton! Come out of the class!”

Whereupon Angel came out as commanded, and fully declared herself. Like a small alien on strange soil, she stood in advance of the other children, her worn, bursting shoes showing the dirty-stockinged feet within, her patched skirt clinging scantily about her meagre little figure, her arms still folded across her chest, and her lips set in a thin, obstinate line. Something in her look and attitude evidently irritated the Reverend Mr. Snawley, for he said sharply,—

"Unfold those arms of yours directly!"

She obeyed; but though the offending limbs dropped passively at her sides, the little grimy hands remained firmly clenched.

"Now!" and the clergyman drew a deep breath, and taking up his Testament gave a smart rap with it on the desk in front of him. "Explain yourself! *What* do you mean by such wicked conduct? *Why* do you hate God!"

Angel looked steadily on the floor, and her lips quivered.

"Because I *do*!" she replied resolutely.

"That's no answer!" And the reverend gentleman turned to his lady-assistant in despair: "Really, Miss Powser, you should not have admitted such a child as this into the Sunday class. She seems to me quite incorrigible; a mere insolent heathen!"

Miss Powser appeared quite crushed by the majesty of this reproach, and feebly murmured something about a 'mistaken idea of character,' adding as a bright suggestion that the child had better be dismissed.

"Dismissed? Of course, of course!" snorted the Reverend Josiah angrily. "She must never come here again. Such a bad example to the other children! Do you understand what I say, Angel Middleton? You must never come here again!"

"All right," said Angel calmly ; " I don't care."

"Oh, Angel ! Angel !" moaned Miss Powser faintly, "I am so sorry to see this. I had hoped for much better things from you. Your father——"

"That's it," interrupted the girl suddenly, her breast heaving. "That's why I hate God. You teaches us that God does everything ; well, then, God is killing father. Father never did any harm to any one ; and yet he's dying. I know he is ! He couldn't get work when he was well, and now there isn't enough to eat, and there's no fire, and we're as miserable as ever we can be, and all the time you say God is good and loves us. I don't believe it ! If God won't care for father, then I won't care for God."

The words rushed impetuously from her lips with a sort of rough eloquence that almost carried conviction ; her way of reasoning seemed for the moment surprising and unanswerable. But the Reverend Mr. Snawley was equal to the emergency.

"You are a very wicked, ignorant child," he declared sternly. "If your father can't get work, it is most probably his own fault. If he is ill and incapable there is always the workhouse. And if God doesn't take care of him as you say, it must be because he's a bad man."

Angel's big eyes flashed fire.

"Yer lie!" she said steadily. "He's worth a dozen such as you, anyway."

And with this she turned on her heel and left the schoolroom, her proud step and manner indicating that she metaphorically shook the dust of it for ever from her feet. Her departure was watched in absolute silence by her startled companions, the insulted and indignant clergyman, and the pathetic Miss Powser; but when she had fairly gone Mr. Snawley, turning to the rest of the class, said solemnly,—

"Children, you have seen to-day a terrible exhibition of the power of Satan. No one that is not possessed of a devil would dare to express any hatred of God! Now remember, never let me see any of you playing with Angel Middleton; keep away from her altogether, for she's a bad girl—thoroughly bad—and will only lead you into mischief. Do you hear?"

A murmur, which might have meant either assent or dissent, ran through the class, and the Reverend Josiah, smoothing his vexed brow, took up his Testament and was about to resume his instructions, when a little shrill, piping voice cried out,—

"Please, sir, I want to leave the class, sir!"

"*You* want to leave the class, Johnnie Coleman!" echoed the clergyman—"What for?"

"Please, sir, 'cos Angel's gone, sir!" and Johnnie stumped his way to the front and showed himself—a small, bright, elfish-looking boy of about twelve. "Yer see, sir, I can't anyways promise not to speak to Angel, sir; she's my *gal*!"

A gurgling laugh of evident delight rippled along the class at Johnnie's bold avowal, but a stern look from Mr. Snawley rapidly checked this ebullition of feeling.

"Your *gal*!" And the good clergyman repeated the words in a tone of shocked offence. "John Coleman, you surprise me!"

John Coleman, ragged, blue-eyed and dirty, seemed to care but little as to whether he surprised the Reverend Josiah or not, for he resumed the thread of his shameless argument with the most unblushing audacity.

"'Iss, sir. She's my gal, an' I'm her bloke. Lor' bless yer, sir! we've bin so fur years an' years—ivver since we wos babbies, sir. Yer see, sir, 'twouldn't do fur me to go agin Angel now—'twouldn't be gentleman-like, sir!"

Evidently John Coleman knew his code of chivalry by heart, though he was only a costermonger's apprentice, and was not to be moved by fear from any of the rules thereof, for, gathering courage instead of alarm from the amazed and

utter speechlessness of wrath with which Mr. Snawley regarded him, he proceeded to defend the cause of his absent ladye-love after the fashion of all true knights worthy of their name.

"I spec's Angel's hungry, sir. That's wot riles her wrong-like. Don't yer know, sir, what it is to 'ave a gnawin' in yer inside, sir? Oh, it's orful bad, sir! really 'tis, sir—makes yer 'ate everybody wot's got their stummicks full. An' when Angel gets a bit 'ere an' there, she gives it all to 'er father, sir, an' niver a mossul for 'erself; an' now 'e's a going to 'is long 'ome, so they sez, an' it's 'ard on Angel anyways, an'——"

"That will do!" burst out Mr. Snawley loudly, and suddenly interrupting the flow of Master Johnnie's eloquence, and glaring at him in majestic disdain; "You can go!"

"'Iss, sir. Thank-ye, sir. Much obleeged, sir." And, with many a shuffle and grin, Johnnie departed cheerfully, apparently quite unconscious of having committed any breach of good manners in the open declaration of his sentiments towards his 'gal,' and entirely unaware of the fact that, apart from the disgust his 'vulgarity' had excited in the refined mind of the Reverend Josiah, he had actually caused the pale suggestion of a blush to appear on the yellow maiden-cheek of Miss Powser! Immoral John Coleman! It

is to be feared he was totally 'unregenerate'—for once out of the schoolroom he never gave it or his pious teachers another thought, but, whooping and whistling carelessly, started off at a run, intending to join Angel and comfort her as best he might, for her private and personal griefs as well as for her expulsion from the Bible-class. For once, however, he failed to find her in any of those particular haunts they two were wont to patronise.

"S'pose she's gone home!" he muttered discontentedly. "An' she won't thank me for botherin' round w'en 'er father's so bad. Never mind! I'll wait near the alley in case she comes out an' wants me for ennythink."

And with this faithful purpose in view, he betook himself to the corner of a dirty back slum, full of low tenement houses tottering to decay, in one of which miserable abodes his 'gal' had her dwelling; and, sitting down on an inverted barrel, he began to con over a pictorial alphabet, a present from Miss Powser, which, though he knew it by heart, always entertained him mightily by reason of the strange-coloured monstrosities that adorned every separate letter.

Meanwhile, as he imagined, Angel had gone home—'home' being a sort of close cupboard, dignified in East End parlance by the name of

'room,' where, on a common truckle-bed, scantily covered, lay the sleeping figure of a man. He was not old—not more than forty at most—but Death had marked his pale, pinched features with the great Sign Ineffaceable, and the struggle of passing from hence seemed to have already begun, for as he slept his chest heaved labouringly up and down with the rapid breath that each moment was drawn in shorter gasps of pain and difficulty. Angel sat close by him, and her big soft eyes were fixed with passionate eagerness on his face—her whole little loving, ardent soul was mirrored in that watchful, yearning gaze.

"How can I?" she murmured to herself, "how can I love God, when He is so cruel to father?"

Just then the sick man stirred, and, opening his eyes, large, dark and gentle, like those of his little daughter, he smiled faintly.

"Is that you, Angel?" he asked whisperingly.

"Yes, father!" And taking his thin hand in her own, she kissed it. His glance rested on her lovingly.

"Ain't you been to class, dearie?"

"Yes, father. But——" She paused—then seeing he looked anxious and inquiring, she added—"But they don't want me there no more."

Angel's Wickedness

"Don't want yer there no more!" her father echoed, in feeble wonder. "Why, Angel——"

"Don't ye worry, father!" she burst forth eagerly, "it's all my fault; 'tain't theirs! I said I hated God, and Mr. Snawley said I was wicked, an' I s'pose I am, but I can't help it, and there's all about it! I'm sick of their preachin' an' nonsense, an' it don't make you no better nor me, an' we're all wretched, an' if it's all God's doing then I *do* hate God, an' that's the truth!"

A flickering gleam of energy came across the suffering man's face, and his large eyes shone with preternatural light.

"Don't ye, Angel! Don't ye hate God, my little gel! ye mustn't—no, no! God's good; always good, my dear! It's all right wi' Him, Angel; it's the world that forgets Him that's wrong. God does everything kind, dearie. He gave me your mother, and He only took her away when she was tired and wanted to go. All for the best, Angel! All for the best, little lass! Love God, my child, love Him with all your heart, an' all your soul, an' all your mind."

His voice died in indistinct murmuring, but he still kept his gaze fixed wistfully on his daughter's half-ashamed, half-sullen little face. She, continuing to fondle his hand, suddenly asked, "Why was I called Angel, father?"

He smiled, a very sweet and youthful smile.

"Just a fancy o' mine an' your mother's, my dear, that's all! We was young an' happy-like then, an' work was easier to get; an' such a dear sweet baby lass ye were when ye were born, with gold curls all over your head and bonnie bright eyes, that we said ye were like a little angel. An' so we named ye Angel for the sake of the pleasantness of it an' the sound of it; an' ye must *be* an angel, dearie—Angel by name and angel by nature. Yes, yes! it's all right! God gave ye to me, an' He knows all—all the trouble an' worry an' fret——"

He broke off suddenly, and sat up straight in his bed, while Angel, terrified by a strange expression in his face that she had never seen there before, cried out sharply, "Father! Father! what is it?"

He did not answer her; his eyes were full of radiance, and seemed to be looking at something his frightened child could not see.

"Angel?" he said, presently, in a faint hoarse whisper, "look! There's your mother! I knew she'd come! Don't ye hate God, my little gel! He's sent her for me. God's as good as good can be; it's the world that's wrong—the world——" He paused; his breathing almost stopped, and he still stared steadily before him.

"Father! Father!" sobbed Angel, sinking on

her knees in a passion of grief and fear. "Oh, father!"

His hand wandered feebly to her bent head, and lay coldly on her warm soft hair.

"Don't ye—hate—God—Angel," he gasped brokenly. "Love Him!—an'—an' He'll take care of ye!" Then, all at once, with a rich manly ring in his voice, such as his poor forlorn daughter had seldom heard, he exclaimed, "All right, my lass, I'm coming!"

Starting up at the sound and chilled to the heart with dread, Angel gave one wild look at him; and lo! while she yet gazed, he fell back heavily; a solemn shadow crossed his face—a shadow which, passing as swiftly as it had descended, left the features smooth and young. Every line of care and perplexity vanished as if by magic; a smile settled on the lips, and all was over. With a shriek of agony the desolate child flung herself across the bed by her father's stiffening corpse, unable to realise his death, and out of the very acuteness of her despair sank for the time being into merciful insensibility.

Late on that same evening Johnnie Coleman, sleepy and disappointed, prepared to leave the corner of the alley where he had kept faithful vigil all the afternoon, and set himself to return to the dirty piece of matting on the floor in his master

the costermonger's abode, which matting he, being an orphan, accepted as bed and lodgement. Suddenly his eyes were attracted by a bright glare in the sky, and hardly had he had time to receive the impression of this when the cry of "Fire! Fire!" resounded through the street, and set him running off at racing speed for the exciting scene of the disaster. It was some distance away, and as he ran he was quite unaware that another fleet-footed figure pursued him—no other than his 'gal,' Angel Middleton. She had crept out of her wretched dwelling, poor child, sick with hunger and stupefied with grief, and perceiving her ragged boy-friend waiting for her at the corner, had come towards him slowly and languidly, and had been just about to call him by name when off he had rushed at the pace described, not seeing her, whereupon she, in the mere nervous impulse of the moment, followed. Soon the two, running thus, were merged and lost in a great crowd of people, who stood looking up at a wreath of brilliant flames that darted from the roof and walls of a small shop and dwelling in one—the house of a general grocer and dealer in oil and household provision. Owing to the inflammable nature of the goods kept in the store, the fire grew fast and furious, and though the engines rapidly arrived it was evident that very little could be done to

save the perishing building. The owner of the place threw himself from one of the windows and escaped by a miracle without injury ; but when his wife, half-suffocated with smoke, was dragged out from the burning walls more dead than alive, she struggled frantically to rush back again into the heart of the flames.

“My children ! my baby !” she screamed and wailed. “Save them ! Oh ! save them ! Let me go !—let me die with them !”

“Steady, mother !” said one of the pitying firemen, holding her arm in a tight grip. “’Tain’t no use frettin’. Leave the little ’uns to God !”

Yes, truly to God, and—His ‘Angel’ ! For suddenly the crowd parted ; a little girl, white-faced and dark-eyed, with golden-brown hair streaming behind her like a comet, rushed through and made straight for the burning house. There was a horrified pause ; then Johnnie Coleman’s shrill voice, rendered shriller by terror, cried out,—

“It’s Angel ! Angel Middleton !”

“Angel Middleton !” roared the crowd, not knowing the name, but catching it up and echoing it forth like a cheer in responsive excitement. “Hooray for Angel ! There’s a brave gel for ye ! See ; she’s got the baby !”

And, sure enough, there at one of the burnt-out

windows, with smoke and flame eddying around her, stood Angel, holding a tiny infant in her arms, the while she looked anxiously down into the street below for some further means of rescue. Several people rushed forward, holding an extended sheet which had been hastily procured, and, fearing lest she should be stupefied into inaction by the smoke, they shouted,—

“Throw it, Angel! Never fear! Throw it down!”

Whereupon Angel threw the child; it was caught in safety, and she, the rescuer, vanished. Only to reappear again, however, at the same window with two more small children, of about two and four years of age, at sight of which such a thunder of acclamation went up as might have been heard at the furthest holes and corners of degraded Whitechapel. She meanwhile, leaning far out over the charred and smoking window-frame, demanded in clear, ringing tones,—

“Are there any more children? Are these all?”

“Yes, yes!” shrieked the frantic mother, running forward with her just-restored baby clasped to her breast—“All! You’ve saved them all! God love you, dear!”

Once more the protecting sheet was outspread, and without any haste or alarm for her own safety, Angel let one child after another drop

straightly and steadily from her hold; they were caught and saved, uninjured. Then all interest became centred on the girl-heroine herself; and as the wall on which she had her footing tottered to and fro, a great cry went up from the crowd.

“Quick, quick, Angel! Jump!”

A smile crossed her pale face for a moment; she looked to right and left, and was just about to leap from her perilous position when, with a sickening crash, the brickwork beneath her gave way and crumbled to ruins, while up roared a new and fierce pyramid of fire. Quickly and courageously all hands went to the rescue of the rescuer, and in a few minutes, which to the pitying onlookers seemed long hours, they dragged her forth, cruelly burnt, but not disfigured; crushed and dying, but not dead. Lifting her tenderly, they carried her out of the reach of the smoke, and laid her down—one gentle-hearted fireman supporting her little golden head against his arm, while the mother, whose children she had saved, fell on her knees beside her, weeping and blessing her, and kissing her poor charred hands. She was quite conscious, and very peaceful.

“Don’t ye mind,” she said placidly; “father’s gone, and ’twould ha’ bin no use for me to stay. Why, Johnnie, are you there?” And her wandering eyes rested smilingly on a small doubled-

up object close by that looked more like a bundle of rags than a boy.

"'Iss," sobbed Johnnie. "Oh, Angel! I've bin waitin' for ye all the arternoon. I wouldn't stop in class arter they wouldn't 'ave ye no more—an' I wanted to see ye an' tell ye as how it wouldn't make no change in me, an' now—now——"

Tears prevented the faithful Johnnie's further utterance; and Angel, with an effort, made a sign that she wished him to come nearer. He came, and she put up her lips to his.

"Kiss me, Johnnie," she whispered. He obeyed, the great drops rolling fast down his grimy cheeks, while the crowd, reverently conscious of the solemn approach of death, circled round these two young things and watched their parting with more passionate though unspoken sympathy than could ever have been expressed by the noblest poet in the noblest poem.

"I was wicked," said Angel softly, then. "You must tell them all, Johnnie—at class—that I was wicked, and—that I am—sorry I said I hated God; I didn't understand. It's all for the best—father's gone, and I'm goin'—an' I'm so glad, Johnnie—so happy! Bury me with father, please;—and tell everybody—everybody—that I love God—*now*."

There was a silence. The fireman supporting

the girl's head suddenly raised his hand with suggestive gravity, and those who wore hats in the crowd reverently lifted them. The smothered sobbing of tender-hearted women alone broke the stillness ; the stars seemed to tremble in the sky as the Greater Angel descended and bore away the lesser one on wings of light to heaven.

And the East End turned out from every grimy hole and squalid corner all its halt and blind, and maimed and miserable, and bad and good, to attend at Angel's funeral. The East End has a rough heart of its own, and that heart had been touched by an Angel's courage, and now ached for an Angel's loss. She and her father were buried together in the same grave on Christmas Eve ; and the Reverend Josiah Snawley, realising perhaps for the first time the meaning of the words, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven,*" read the Burial Service with more emotion than was usual with him. Poor Johnnie Coleman, wearing a bit of crape in his hat, and carrying three penny bunches of violets, to throw upon his little sweetheart's coffin, was the most sincerely doleful of all chief mourners ; desperately rubbing and doubling his dirty fists into his eyes he sobbed incessantly and refused to be comforted.

“Worn’t she my gal?” he blubbered indignantly to a would-be consoler. “An’ ain’t I to be sorry at losin’ ’er? I tell ye there ain’t no one left alive as good as she was!”

Even Miss Powser forgot for the nonce that she was a lonely spinster, whom nobody, not even Mr. Snawley, seemed disposed to marry, and, only remembering simple womanliness, shed tears unaffectedly, and spent quite a little fortune in flowers to strew over the mortal remains of the ‘mere insolent heathen’—the rebellious child who had said she ‘hated God.’ For in this one thing was the sum and substance of Angel’s wickedness; she hated what seemed to her poor unenlightened mind the wanton cruelty of the inexorable Fate that forced her father to starve and die! Forgive her!—pity her, good Christians all! You who, comfortably fed and clothed, go to church on Christmas Day and try to shut out every suggestion of misery from your thoughts, forgive her as God forgives—God who knows how often His goodness is mistaken and misrepresented by the human professed exponents of Divine Law, and how He is far more frequently portrayed to His most suffering, ignorant and helpless little ones as a God of Vengeance rather than what He is—a God of Love!

THE DISTANT VOICE.

“AFTER long sleep, to wake up in heaven to the sound of a beautiful voice, singing ! . . .”

The sick man muttered these words aloud, and, turning on his pillows, opened his eyes to meet the cold, grey, passionless ones of his physician, who bent over him, watch in hand.

“Delirious, eh?” said the doctor, observing him narrowly. “This won’t do at all. How’s the pulse?” The patient extended his wrist. “H’m ! Not so bad ! You were talking nonsense just now, Mr. Denver.”

“Was I ?” Denver smiled faintly, and sighed. “I was dreaming, I think ; a strange dream, about”—he paused a moment, then went on—“about heaven.”

The doctor put his big watch back in its pocket, and looked about for his hat and gloves.

“Ah, indeed !” he murmured abstractedly. “Very pleasant, no doubt ! Dreams are often

exceedingly agreeable. You must go on with the medicine, Mr. Denver ; it will alleviate pain, and it is all I can do for you at present. If you could pick up your strength, we might try an operation ; but it's no use just now."

Denver's sad dark eyes rested on him wistfully.

"Stop a moment, doctor," he said. "I should like to ask you a question. I'm not delirious ; I'm quite myself—at least, as much as I shall ever be. I know mine is a hopeless case ; cancer is bound to kill, sooner or later. Still, you're only mortal yourself, and the time must come when you will have to go the same way I am going. I'm on the verge of the grave, so it's not worth while deceiving me. Now, tell me honestly, do you believe in heaven?"

The doctor had found his hat and gloves by this time, and was ready for departure.

"Dear me, no !" he answered ; "certainly not ! That is, if you mean a supernatural heaven. The only heaven possible to the human being is the enjoyment of a certain set of brain sensations which elevate him into a particular mood of happiness ; hence the saying that 'heaven is not a place but a state of mind.'"

"Then," went on Denver slowly, "you do not think there is any sort of conscious or individual life after death?"

"My dear sir," replied the doctor, somewhat testily—he was a great man in his profession and had a number of distinguished patients waiting for him that morning—"these are questions for the clergyman of the parish, not for me. I really have no ability to argue on such abstruse matters. I can only say, as a man who has studied science to some extent, that I personally am convinced that death is the natural and fitting end of the diseased or superannuated human being, and that, when he dies, he is beyond all doubt absolutely dead and done for."

John Denver still looked at him earnestly.

"Thank you!" he said at last, after a pause. "You are a clever man, doctor, and you ought to know. I am an ignorant fellow,—always was ignorant, I'm afraid. But when I worked for my living as a lad down in the mines, and looked up from the darkness of that deep earth to the round bit of blue sky that shone in thick with stars above me, I used to believe heaven was there and God in the midst of it. It was nonsense, I suppose, but I wish I had the old faiths now. I think I should be able to bear my trouble better."

The doctor was slightly embarrassed and perplexed. It was the old story; he had no drug wherewith to 'minister to a mind diseased.' Patients often bored him in this way with trouble-

some questions. If John Denver had been a poor man instead of a rich one, he might not have even answered him ; but millionaires are not met with every day, and Denver was a millionaire.

“Why do you not see your clergyman?” he asked. “It is possible he might reinstate you in your beliefs——”

Denver’s brows clouded.

“My clergyman?” he echoed, a trifle sorrowfully. “My clergyman is far too much occupied with the comforts of earth to think over-deeply concerning the joys of heaven. The last time I saw him, he urgently begged me to leave something to the Church in my will. ‘I am sorry to hear your disease is hopeless,’ he said, ‘but I am sure you would wish a part of your wealth to be of some benefit to the Almighty.’ As if any man’s money could really ‘benefit’ the Creator of all things! No, doctor! My clergyman has no support to give me in the trial I am passing through. I must bear it quite alone. Don’t let me detain you any longer. Good-morning, and again thank you!”

The physician muttered a hasty response, and made his exit, glad to escape from what he considered the ‘fads’ of a fanciful invalid.

Left to himself, John Denver stared wearily into the vacancy of the great room in which he

lay. It was furnished simply, yet richly, and through the large bay window, set half open, he could see the verdant stretches of park and meadow land of which he was the owner. He thought of the years of patient toil he had endured to amass his present wealth ; of his life out in the ' far West ;' of the sudden discovery of silver ore which had made him one of the richest men in the world, and of all the glamour and glitter of slavish society which had attended him ever since his attainment to fortune. He thought of the pretty woman he had married—a fresh, lively girl when he had first met her, and one whom he had fondly fancied loved him for himself alone, but who was now no more than a frivolous *mondaine*, for whom nothing was sacred but social conventionalism, and whose heart had steadily hardened under the influence of boundless wealth till she was as soulless as a fashion-plate. He thought of his children, who had never loved him with really disinterested affection—of his son, who only looked upon him as the necessary provider of his yearly allowance ; of his daughter, who was running the rounds of society in search of some titled noodle for a husband, almost, if not utterly indifferent to the fact that her father was dying of an incurable disease : and as memory after memory chased itself through his tired brain, a sudden rush of tears

blinded him, and he groaned aloud, "O God ! what has my life been worth ! What worth has any life if death must be the end ? "

At that moment a slight tap came at his door, and before he had time to say "Come in !" the intending visitor abruptly entered.

"I thought I should find you alone, John Denver," he said, in singularly slow, musical tones. "I met your wife in the garden, and she told me the doctor had just left you."

Denver nodded a faint assent. He was weary and exhausted, and in the presence of this particular friend of his, was always strangely disinclined to speak. Truth to tell, Paul Valitsky, known to many as a great painter, and suspected by some of being a dangerous Russian Nihilist, was a rather remarkable-looking man, possessed, too, of a certain fascination which attracted some people and distinctly intimidated others. Though small of stature and somewhat bent, he was not old ; his face, pale and rather angular, was beautified by a pair of fine eyes, greenish-grey in hue, with an occasional changeful light in them like that which plays on opals. These eyes were his chief feature ; they at once captivated and held all who met their fiery iridescent glances ; and as he turned them now on Denver, a great kindness softened them—an expression of infinite tenderness

and regard, which was not lost upon the invalid, though he lay still and apparently unmoved to any responsive feeling by that gentle and searching scrutiny.

“So the fiat has gone forth, and we must die!” said Valitsky presently, in almost caressing accents. “Well, there are worse things in life than death.”

Denver was silent.

“You dislike the idea?” resumed his visitor after a slight pause. “The quiet of the tomb is not an agreeable prospect? You seem discomposed; but you are a brave man—you surely cannot be afraid!”

“No, I am not afraid,” replied Denver steadily. “I am only—sorry!”

“Sorry! And why?”

“Well, in the first place I am sorry to have made so little good use of my time. All I have done has been to amass money, and what is that?—a delusive quest and an unsatisfactory gain, for I profit nothing by my life’s work—my gold cannot cure sickness or keep back death. In some unfortunate way, too”—he paused and sighed—“I have missed love out of all my fortunes, and now, here at the last, I am left alone to meet my fate as best I can, and my ‘best’ is a bad attempt. Yes, I am sorry to die; I am sorry to leave the world, for it is beautiful; sorry to lose the sight of the

sun and the blue sky——” he broke off for a moment, then went on, “But I tell you, Paul, if I could believe in another life after this one, as you do, and if the dream I had an hour ago were a truth, then I should not be sorry, I should be glad!”

“Ay, ay!” and Valitsky nodded sympathetically. “And what was this dream?”

“I dreamed I was in heaven,” said Denver, his troubled face lighting up with an inward rapture. “But not such a heaven as the parsons preach of; it was a world somewhat resembling this one, only vaster and more beautiful. I seemed to myself to have wakened suddenly out of a deep sleep, and as I woke I heard a voice—the loveliest and tenderest voice imaginable!—singing a sweet song; and I swear to you, Paul, I thought I knew and loved the unseen singer!”

Valitsky rose from the chair he had occupied near the window, and, approaching the bed, laid his fine, nervous hand on Denver’s wrist, fixing him at the same time with his strange iridescent eyes.

“So you have heard a voice from the other world, my friend!” he said. “And yet you doubt! You know what I am—you know that for me, at times, the portals of the Unseen are set open. Men call me artist, idealist, madman,

judging me thus because I know the touch of higher things than are common to ordinary eating, drinking, breeding, perishing clay ; but let them call me what they will, at death my faith will bridge the tomb, where their materialism shrinks away in fear and horror. That voice you heard—listen and tell me—was it at all like this ? ”

He held up his hand with a warning gesture—and, through the silence, a faint, delicious sound of song came floating distinctly—clear, yet far off, as though it fell from the regions of the upper air.

“ My God ! ” cried Denver, starting up in his bed. “ It is the same—the very same ! Paul, Paul ! What does it mean ? ”

“ It means,” answered Valitsky steadily, “ that you are on the verge of the Eternal, my friend, and that I, a poor unworthy medium of communication, am bidden to assure you of the fact. The heaven you dreamed of is a real heaven ; the voice you hear is a real voice ; and the one who sings awaits your coming with all the love you have missed in your life till now. Believe me or not as you will, I speak the truth. Death, or what mortals call death, will bestow upon you such joy as is incapable of human comprehension or expression ; but at the same time it is but fair to you to say that you can have your choice—knowing what I have told you, you yet have the privilege

given to you to decide whether you will die or live on."

Denver stared amazedly. "You talk in riddles, Paul! Live on? I? My doom is sealed; I know that well enough. You can do nothing, spiritualist and idealist though you are, to hinder it."

"If you choose to live, you shall live!" said Valitsky firmly. "I will guarantee it, for so I have been commanded. Cancer shall not kill, nor any other evil cut the thread of your existence. But, were I you, I would die rather than live."

Denver had grown very pale.

"You—you will guarantee my life if I choose to live?" he asked, in low, tremulous tones. "*Can* you guarantee it?"

"I can and will. I swear it! I came here to-day on purpose to tell you so. But think well before deciding!—the barriers of the unseen world are lifted now, ready for your admission. If by your own choice they close again, the Voice you heard will sing to you no more."

With a wild, searching glance Denver scrutinised his strange friend's pale countenance. It was passionate and earnest—only the eyes sparkled with an intense, fiery gleam. Uncertain what to believe, and yet strongly impressed by Valitsky's steadfast manner,—knowing him, too,

for a man who was credited, rightly or wrongly, with singularly occult powers, he suddenly made up his mind and spoke out impetuously.

"I will live!" he said. "The next world may be a dream; the sweet voice that stole away my heart may be a delusion; but *this* world is real,—a tangible fact, a place in which to move and breathe and think in. I will stay in it while I can! If you indeed have the force you seem to possess, why, use it upon me and give me life—*this* life! I choose, not heaven but earth; I will live on!"

Slowly Valitsky withdrew from the bedside, and, standing a few paces away, surveyed Denver with an intense expression of mingled scorn and compassion.

"Be it so," he said. "Live! And try to find joy, peace, or love in what life brings you. You have chosen badly, my poor friend! You have rejected a glorious reality for a miserable delusion. When you are tired of your choice let me know. For the present, farewell!"

The door opened and closed softly—he was gone. For hours John Denver lay still with wide-open eyes, going over and over every detail of the strange conversation he had had with this strange man, and wondering whether it was true that he was granted a new lease of life, or whether it was

mere fantastic boasting on Valitsky's part. Finally he slept a sound and dreamless sleep.

The next day, on awaking, he was free from pain, and during the ensuing week he was so far recovered as to be able to leave his bed and resume his ordinary occupations. The great physician who attended him was completely taken aback; the supposed cancerous ailment appeared after all to have no existence, and for the thousandth time an apparently infallible doctor was proved wrong. John Denver lived—as Valitsky had sworn he should do. He lived to see his son in the criminal's dock for forging a friend's name; he lived to see his daughter married to a vicious 'nobleman,' whose days were passed in gambling and nights in drinking; he lived to know that his wife had been faithless to him for years, and that she had hoped for his death and was furiously disappointed at his continuance of life; he lived to entertain flatterers who fawned upon him for his wealth alone, to feed servants who robbed him at every turn, to realise to the full the cruelty, hypocrisy, meanness, and selfishness of his fellow-creatures—till, at last, after seven tedious summers and winters had passed away, a great weariness came over him and a longing for rest. Conscious of the failure and futility of his life, he sat all alone one evening in his great library, looking vaguely out on the

misty moonlit lawn, and unbidden tears rose to his eyes as he thought, "If I could only dream again that dream of heaven, and wake to hear the sound of that beloved and beautiful voice singing!"

On a sudden impulse he drew pen and paper towards him, and wrote to Paul Valitsky, whom he had only very rarely and casually seen since that strange personage had offered him the choice of life or death.

"MY FRIEND,—You told me when I was tired to let you know. I am tired now. Life offers me nothing. I made, as you said, a bad choice. If you believe in a heaven still, will you assure me of it? If that voice I once heard is real, if it is the voice of one who is pitiful, and true, and tender, may I not hear it again? Certain mysteries are unveiled to you, certain faiths are clear to you; if to your potent secret force I owe the gift of longer life, take it back I entreat you, and let me find myself where I was seven years ago, on the verge of the Eternal, with the golden gates ajar!"

Several days elapsed before he received any reply to this letter, and he was growing restless, feverish, and impatient, when at last it came, its characteristic brevity quieting him into a strange and passive peace. It ran thus: "Heaven has not altered its design or changed its place, my friend,

because blind Earth doubts its beauty. Your seven years is a little seven minutes to the dwellers in that higher sphere—a mere pause in the song you heard ! Be satisfied—on the night you receive this letter, the Song shall be continued and the Singer declared.”

Dreamily John Denver sat at his open window, with this missive in his hand ; the glory of a rosy sunset bathed all the visible country, and a thrush, swaying to and fro on a branch of pine, piped a tender little evening carol. He listened to the bird with a vague pleasure ; he was quite alone,—alone as he had been for many months since his wife had fled from him with her latest lover. He was conscious of a singular sensation, an impression of *duality*, as though he, John Denver, were the mere frame or casing for another individual and intelligent personality, a creature that until now had been pent up in clay, suffering and resentful, but that at the present moment was ready to break loose from imprisonment into a vast and joyous liberty.

“And yet,” he murmured, half aloud, “if there is a heaven, what right have I to enter it? I have done nothing to deserve it. I have honestly striven to do my best according to my poor knowledge ; but that is of no account. I have missed love on earth, it is true ; but why should

I expect to find it in another world? Valitsky declares that all God's work is founded on pure equity, and that every human soul has its mate either here or elsewhere; if that were true—if that could be true—perhaps by the very law of God which knows no changing, I may meet and love the singer of that heavenly song!"

At that very moment a sound, sweet and penetrating, pierced the silence—the full, delicious cadence of a melody more dulcet than ever came from the throat of any amorous lark or nightingale; and John Denver, the weary and world-worn man of many cares and many disappointments, stood up alert, pale and expectant, peering wistfully yet doubtfully into the gathering shadows of his room. Earth and earth's gains had proved delusions—would the hope of heaven prove equally vain?

"The Voice divine!" he whispered rapturously. "The same beloved voice I heard before! . . . it sings again! So sweet a voice could not deceive. I will accept it as assurance of the truth of God!"

With straining sight he still gazed into the deepening darkness. . . . Was it fancy? or did he see there an Angel-figure, and face fairer than that of any pictured vision?—a face luminous as a star, and full of tenderest appeal, love, and

ecstasy. He stretched out his arms blindly . . . wonderingly . . . with a supernal sense of joy.

"It is true!" he said. "God is just, and heaven exists, despite all narrow, worldly doubtings! What has been missed shall be found; what has been lost shall be gained; and even to the poorest, the most sinful, and most ignorant, shall consolation be given! For death is not death—but Life!"

He staggered a little—his breath failed him—and falling back in his chair he closed his eyes. The mystic voice sang on, flooding the silence with exquisite music; he smiled, listening.

"After long sleep, to wake up in heaven to the sound of a beautiful voice singing!" he murmured;—and then was still.

And even so John Denver slept the sleep of death; and, if all faiths are not frenzies, even so he woke!

THE WITHERING OF A ROSE.

IMMEDIATELY above the picturesque town of Lucerne there is a towering eminence clothed with pines, to the summit of which the exploring and aspiring tourist can ascend by one of those ingeniously contrived 'funicular' railways, now so common in all the mountainous districts of Switzerland.

The little passenger-car is worked by the cog-wheel-and-water system, and jogs slowly up a precipitous incline, which, surveyed from the bottom, appears to slant at about an angle of seventy degrees. But it is not so perilous as it seems. The journey is easy and safe enough; and those who are troubled with 'nervous sensations,' and who insist on closing their eyes firmly while travelling up in the strange conveyance, which, when observed from a sufficient distance, certainly somewhat resembles a squat kind of blue-bottle clinging to a wall, will have their full consolation and reward on arriving at the top.

For there one of the most glorious landscapes in the world is spread before the enraptured sight; the lovely 'Lake of the Four Cantons' glitters below in all its width of vasty blue, surrounded by kingly mountains, the peaks of which, even in the height of summer, still keep on their sparkling diadems of virginal snow; on either hand a forest of tall pine-trees stretches away for miles,—a forest where one may wander in solitude for hours, walking on a thick carpet of the softest moss, strewn with the brown and fragrant 'pine needles,' scarcely hearing one's own footsteps, and seeing nothing but the arching cathedral-like splendour of solemn green gloom, flecked through here and there by the blue of the sky and the bright rays of the sun.

At the entrance of this forest stands one of the prettiest of rustic hotels, known as the 'Pension Gutsch,' a house built in the true Swiss style, with picturesque gabled roofs and wide wooden verandahs—its charming seclusion and simplicity offering a delightful contrast to the garish glories of the 'Schweizerhof' and the other monstrous Americanised hotels of Lucerne, where the main object of every one concerned, from the *portier* down to the smallest paying guest, appears to be to forget as completely as possible the fact that Switzerland, as Switzerland, exists, and to live solely for the

enjoyment of the *table-d'hôte*, dress, flirtation, and lawn-tennis.

It is a singular fact, but true, that all the big hotels in Lucerne have their *table-d'hôte* dinner served precisely at the sunset-hour—the very time when grand old Mount Pilatus is gathering around his frowning brows strange and mystic draperies of crimson and gold and green—when the lake looks like melted jewels, and all the lovely hues of heaven are merging by delicious gradations into the cool, pearly grey of such pure twilight as is never seen save in countries where the air is rarefied by the presence of perpetual snow. For this very reason persons of a fanciful and romantic turn of mind, who prefer scenery to soup, frequently do battle with their nerves to the extent of being lifted—like little frightened children in a basket—up the precipitous ‘Gutsch’ where at the unpretentious, spotlessly clean, and fragrant hotel bearing that name, they can do pretty much as they like, and have the supreme comfort of quiet rooms and refreshing sleep, luxuries completely denied them at all the large hotels in the town.

Moreover, by making a special arrangement and paying a little extra, they can have their meals served at their own stated hours, all of which sensible management and forethought on the part

of the proprietor has the result of making his house a favourite resort of artists, poets, and dreamers generally. The frivolous and empty-headed would not care for such a place—it offers nothing but repose and beauty ; it is not a suitable abode for golfers or tomboy tennis-players—they do well to remain in Lucerne and cling to the noisy and overcrowded ‘Schweizerhof.’ But it is eminently fitted for lovers in the first stage of sentimental ardour, and it is an ideal nook wherein to spend a happy honeymoon.

When, on one dazzling afternoon in early July, a gentleman with black moustaches got out of the little ‘funicular’ car, and assisted a charmingly attired and very young lady with fair hair to alight also ; and when these twain were followed by a valet, a maid, and the porter, bearing some very new-looking luggage ;—none of the people already staying at the ‘Gutsch’ had any difficulty in classifying them. They were newly married ; their very appearance betrayed them. One of the regular *habitués* of the place, a dark-eyed young man clad in carelessly fitting tweeds, said as much to the landlord, who, having bowed the couple in, now stood on his doorstep benevolently surveying the prospect.

“On their wedding tour, I suppose ?” he observed, with a smile.

“It is possible,” replied mine host discreetly. “The lady is young. Not so young the gentleman. They have engaged the best rooms.”

“Ah! Plenty of money about, then?”

“It is to be thought so,” replied the proprietor, as he continued to smile blandly at the scenery. “The lady has a maid, the gentleman a valet. Everything”—and he spread out his hands expressively—“is *de luxe*. They are English people—evidently well bred. Perhaps you know the name—Allingham—Mr. and Mrs. Allingham, of Dunscombe Hall, Norfolk?”

The dark-eyed artist thought a moment, then said “No.” A vague idea was in his mind that he had seen a sketch or photograph somewhere of Dunscombe Hall, but he was not sure. And mine host being called away at the moment, the conversation was broken off.

The new arrivals had their meals served to them privately in their own apartments; so any curiosity felt concerning them among the *table-d'hôte* company at the ‘Pension Gutsch’ was not destined to be largely gratified. One morning, however, Mr. Francis Fane, the dark-eyed artist already mentioned, met Mrs. Allingham walking by herself in one of the lonelier and more outlying paths of the pine forest, and was quite taken aback by her extremely childish appearance. She was so small

and light on her feet, she had such a young, wistful, wondering face, and her figure was cast in such a dainty and delicate mould, that, as she passed him silently by, in her simple white morning dress, tied round the waist with a knot of blue ribbon, she looked like a little girl just fresh from school, and it seemed impossible, almost absurd, to consider her as a married woman.

“Why, she can’t be more than fifteen or sixteen!” he mentally ejaculated, staring after her bewilderedly. As a matter of fact she was twenty, and had seen two ‘seasons’ in town; but things of the ‘world worldly’ had as yet left no trace on her fair features, and her eyes still held their dreams of innocence unsullied,—hence, though a woman, she was still a child.

“Mrs. Allingham, of Dunscombe Hall, Norfolk!” repeated Frank Fane to himself, with a short gruff laugh. “By Jove! It seems preposterous!”

It did seem, if not preposterous, a little strange; and Rose Allingham herself sometimes thought so. She had been married just a fortnight, and had not yet got over the novel sensation of having a big thick wedding-ring on the tiny third finger of her little white hand. She would turn it round and round with a whimsical solemnity, and now and then she secretly polished it up with a small bit of

chamois leather kept in her jewel-case for the purpose. And as she regarded her wedding-ring even so she regarded her husband. The well-dressed gentleman with the perfectly irreproachable manner, even features, and well-groomed moustache, was Harold Brentwood Allingham, of Dunscombe Hall, Norfolk; and she was Mrs. Harold Brentwood Allingham, of Dunscombe Hall, Norfolk.

It all seemed very interesting, and new, and important. She was never tired of going over and over the events which had, in their sequence, led her up to this lofty position of matrimonial dignity. She had left school to be 'brought out' and 'presented'—oh, that presentation! Would she ever forget the misery of it? The bother of her long train—the nasty, spiteful behaviour of the ladies who pushed her, pinched her, and generally 'scrimmaged' for entrance into the Throne-room; the bitter cold of the weather, and the horrible draughts that blew all over her uncovered neck and arms; the disappointment of there being no Sovereign to receive her when she made her pretty curtsy (practised for three weeks under the tuition of one of the best mistresses of deportment in London), but only one of the Princesses; the extreme hunger and thirst from which she suffered

during the long 'wait'; then, her utter prostration and sinking into a dead faint when she got home, and having beef-tea put down her throat in hot spoonfuls by her anxious mother ;—all this was perfectly fresh in her mind.

Then came the memory of several balls and dances, at many of which she had met the good-looking and rich Mr. Harold Brentwood Allingham, and had danced with him—he was a splendid dancer ; then Henley, where the same Harold Brentwood Allingham had invited her to his house-boat, and given her flowers and bon-bons ; then, a visit to a beautiful country house in Devonshire, where she had found him installed as one of the house-party ; then, that afternoon when he had discovered her alone in the rose-garden, reading poetry, and, taking the book out of her hands, had begun to make love to her.

Such funny love ! Not at all like the love the poets write about—nothing in the least like it. There was no nonsense about 'breaking hearts' and 'wild despairs' and 'passionate tinglings' in Mr. Harold Brentwood Allingham. He was a very self-complacent man—he thought marriage a sensible and respectable institution, and was prepared to enter upon it in a sensible and respectable manner.

So, without verbiage, or what is called 'high-flown' sentiment, he had put his case kindly and practically. He had said "Rose, would you like to marry me?" And she had surveyed him in such astonishment that he was quite amused.

"I have spoken to your parents," he had then continued, taking her hand, and patting it encouragingly; "and they approve—very highly. You are a charming, unspoilt girl; and though I am some years older than you, that is just as it should be. I am sure we shall be very happy together. You know I can give you anything you want. My wife"—and here his back had stiffened slightly—"would naturally occupy an enviable position in society." And Rose had trembled all over with nervousness.

"I know!" she had faltered. "But I am not sure that I—I love you, Mr. Allingham."

He had laughed at this. "Oh, but I am sure," he had replied, "I know you better than you do yourself. There is no one else you care for, is there?"

"Oh, no," she answered earnestly, which indeed was true. She had often reflected on the fact—rather desolately. No one had shown her any special kindness or attention since she 'came out' except this Mr. Allingham.

"Then let us consider it settled," he had said,

and had kissed her, and led her out of the rose garden ; and later on in the day had given her a wonderful engagement ring of the most superb diamonds. And so things had drifted on, and the preparation of her trousseau had been a great excitement, and her marriage day another excitement ; and now, here she was, fast wedded, and on her honeymoon in Switzerland, with the irreproachable gentleman, whose black moustache would henceforth have to command her wifely admiration, year after year, till it turned grey. Somehow she had not realised the weight and seriousness of marriage till it was consummated. She had read many love-stories, many love-poems, in which all the heroes and heroines raved and swore in exquisitely choice language, and ended by killing themselves or somebody else with the dagger, pistol, or poison bowl ; but the even prosaicness of married life had not been set before her in similarly graphic style.

Now and then she was a little afraid of herself —afraid that she was not as happy as she ought to be. She could not analyse her own feelings very well, but occasionally she caught herself sighing and murmuring uneasily, “I wonder if I really love him?” The doubt made her uncomfortable, for she had a tender heart and sensitive conscience. The relations between her-

self and her husband had, up till now, been more formal than passionate; for among his other idiosyncrasies, Mr. Allingham had a nervous horror of ridicule, and, in consequence of this, had endured positive torments during their journey up the Rhine into Switzerland. He suspected every one he met of the crime of knowing he was on his honeymoon 'tour,' and the unpleasant scowl he assumed for would-be friendly strangers frequently remained on his brows for the benefit of his young wife, who was thereby rendered constrained and depressed.

Arrived at the 'Pension Gutsch,' he adopted an equally severe and distrustful demeanour towards the good-natured landlord, who made a dreadful mistake one morning by becoming too friendly, and venturing to suggest a drive, which he humbly considered would be a charming excursion for *une jeune mariée*. Mr. Allingham gave him a look which ought to have transfixed him, if looks had any such power, and told him curtly that he did not care about 'excursions,' and that 'Madame' would please herself as to a choice of walks or drives. After this, the humiliated landlord took care to avoid giving further offence by any undue exhibition of personal interest in his best-paying guests, and the days rolled slowly on in a long sunshiny stretch

of perfect calm, without any change to vary or break their peaceful monotony. Days of delicious weather they were—pure and balmy as spring, though it was full summer—happy days they might have proved to Rose Allingham if they had not also been days of ever-deepening perplexity. She was a very loving little creature—quick to respond to kindness—and she troubled herself desperately in secret as to why she could not, though she tried, be altogether loving to her husband. Something held her back from him—there was some impalpable barrier between his nature and hers that kept them singularly apart, though to all appearances united. The veriest trifles helped to emphasise this curious state of things. One evening, strolling together in the pine-woods, she began to think of all the dainty love-poems she used to read and be so fond of, and bringing to mind their dulcet teachings, she suddenly took her husband's hand, and gently slipped it round her waist, leaning her fair little head confidently back against the shelter of the arm thus encircling her. Then, looking up, with shy, sweet eyes, and a ravishing blush, she said softly,—

“There! Isn't that nice?”

He regarded her with a gentlemanly amazement.

“Certainly not! It is not ‘nice.’ It is anything but nice! I am surprised at you, Rose! I really am! Suppose any one were to meet us walking along in this ridiculous position! Why, they would take us for Cook’s tourists—a Cockney ‘Arry and ‘Arriet out for a stroll! Nothing could be more vulgar and degrading!”

He withdrew his arm in haste, and walked beside her stiffly erect, scenting the piney air in virtuous indignation. His young wife said not a word, but walked on also, with crimsoning cheeks and downcast eyes, her little feet moving somewhat wearily. Presently he glared down upon her with an air of relenting condescension.

“Surely you know that demonstrations of affection in public are very bad form?” he inquired.

She looked up, her soft eyes flashing for once with something very like scorn.

“Where is the public?” she asked. “We are quite alone; alone with the forest and the sunset—and with God! But I am sorry if my action offended you.”

“Dear me, I am not offended—why should I be?” he retorted pettishly. “You meant it well, no doubt. But wherever we are, alone or before witnesses, we must avoid even the appearance of vulgarity. And pray do not quote poetry to me;

I hate it. 'Alone with the forest and the sunset, and with God!' What rubbish that is!"

"Is it?" and she gave a little sigh. "It is not poetry at any rate. It is only me!"

"Only you!" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I said it—they are my own words; just as they came into my head. Very silly, of course."

He eyed her with dignified wonder.

"Silly!" he echoed. "I should think so, indeed. Nothing could be sillier. They remind me of the style which the newspaper critics condemn as 'forcible feeble.'"

He smiled, and stroked his black moustache. All at once she looked up at him with an expression of pathetic pleading in her young face.

"Harold," she said, in a low uncertain voice, "are you sure—I mean—do you really love me?"

At this he felt seriously vexed; she was going to be hysterical or something, he was sure—women were all alike.

"My dear Rose," he replied, with laborious politeness, "I think if you will take into consideration the fact that I have married you, you will scarcely need to ask such a very foolish question. If I had not loved you I should not have made

you my wife. That you are my wife ought to be sufficient for you—the deepest feelings, as you know, have the fewest words. I hope”—here his voice became distinctly aggrieved in tone—“I hope you are not going to cry. Nothing is more childish; but perhaps you are over-tired, and had better go indoors. Pray remember that we are living more or less under public inspection, and that an hotel is not the place to make a ‘scene’ in.”

She raised her eyes to his. They were dry and bright and cold.

“Do not be afraid,” she said. “I am not crying, and I shall make no scene.”

And, turning from him, she entered the hotel in silence. He did not follow her, but remained sauntering up and down on the turf outside, smoking a cigar.

The next morning Mr. Francis Fane was out in the woods with his easel and sketching-block, bent on finishing a rather powerful study of a tall pine-tree split through by lightning. He had been hard at work for more than an hour before he became aware that there was a small white bundle lying, apparently thrown, on the moss at some little distance off. He could not make it out very distinctly, for the shadows of the pines were so long and wide, and presently, moved by curiosity,

he got up and went to see what it was. As he approached, it resolved itself into a figure—a slight little figure clad in white with a blue ribbon round its waist—and stopping abruptly in his advance, he caught the smothered sound of low sobbing.

“By Jove!” he muttered—“Mrs. Allingham!”

Indescribably pained and uncomfortable at this discovery, he was about to step noiselessly back to his easel without uttering a word, when the girl suddenly raised her head, and perceiving him, started up, nervously trying to control herself.

“I—I beg your pardon!” he stammered. “I—I came out here to make a sketch——”

“Not of me, I hope!” she said, with a little tremulous smile; then without the least pretence or affectation, she dried her eyes with a tiny lace handkerchief and began to laugh, though a trifle forcedly.

“I came out here, not to sketch, but to cry,” she confessed naïvely. “You know it’s very nice to have a little weep all to oneself sometimes.”

“Is it?” and he reddened foolishly. “I should have thought——” But he could not devise any fitting end to the sentence; and she looked at him with a touch of wistfulness in her dewy eyes.

“May I see your sketch?” she said, picking up a large pine-cone from the ground and studying

its pretty polished divisions with intense interest. "I have often noticed you wandering about with your easel and paint-box. You are Mr. Francis Fane, are you not? and you are staying at the same hotel as we are?"

To all this he assented, walking beside her dreamily, and always thinking what a child she looked. As they drew near the spot where he had left his easel, he woke up to consciousness of prosy etiquette, and endeavoured to realise that his companion was not a woodland sylph as she seemed, but a 'married lady' of position.

"I'm afraid my poor sketch is hardly worth your looking at, Mrs. Allingham?" he began formally. She interrupted him by a little gesture.

"Oh, you know I am Mrs. Allingham?" she queried, smiling.

"Of course I do!" he answered, somewhat amused and surprised at her tone. "Everybody at the 'Pension Gutsch' knows you by sight."

She mused a little, still intent on the mathematical partitions of the pine-cone she held. Suddenly she looked up.

"And what do they say of me?" she asked.

Fane was quite taken aback by the directness of the question. Meeting her eyes, however, and noting the inquiring candour and sweet innocence of their expression, he answered manfully,—

"They say you are very young, and very pretty. You could hardly expect them to say or to think anything else, could you?"

She smiled and blushed.

"Oh, I don't know!" she said. "You see, I thought they might think me—well—funny!"

He stared.

"Funny?"

"Yes. Because it does seem funny, doesn't it, for such a little thing as I am to be a married woman? Some people must think it curious. Fancy—a married woman! Oh, I am quite old enough—I am twenty—but I don't seem to be tall enough or big enough!" and she spread out her pretty hands expressively and with a charming smile. "I don't know quite where I got all my silly ideas from, but when I was at school I used to think a married woman meant somebody fat and important-looking, who always wore a cap at breakfast, and a bow of velvet on the exact top of her head by way of full dress at dinner. I did, really!" and her eyes sparkled at the sound of Fane's joyous laughter. "Of course, I know better now, but then——" here she broke off as she saw the easel just in front of her with the unfinished sketch upon it. She looked at it long and earnestly, and Fane watched her, feeling somewhat curious to know what sort of criticism

this baby-faced creature would pass upon it. She studied it from every point with close attention, and her eyes grew soft and serious.

"It is very human!" she said, at last. "The poor split tree tells its own history. You can see it did not know anything—it grew up quite happily, always looking at the sky and believing that no harm could befall it—till all at once the lightning struck it to the heart and killed it. And in this picture of yours it seems to ask, Was it my fault that I fell? Of course, you mean it as an emblem of some noble ruined life, do you not?"

He heard her with a certain wonder and reverence—her voice was so very sweet and grave.

"I cannot say I ever thought of it in the way you see it," he answered, "but I am very glad—and proud, that you find so much poetry in my poor effort."

"Poetry?—oh, no. I am not at all poetical!" she said quickly, and almost shamefacedly. "I used to be rather fond of reading Keats and Byron, but I never do that now—my husband does not like it——"

"Indeed!" murmured Fane vaguely, wishing he could make a picture of her as she stood before him in her little white gown, with a picturesque, broad-brimmed hat resting on the sunny curls of her abundant hair.

"No," she went on confidently, "he thinks it such nonsense. You see, he is a very clever man, and very scientific. He reads all the heavy magazines, and thinks it is very silly to waste time on studying verse, when one can have so much prose."

"Yes, there certainly is a good deal of prose about," said Fane.

At that moment a shadow crossed the sunlight in which they stood, and Mr. Allingham suddenly made his appearance.

"Why, Harold!" exclaimed his wife, springing towards him, "I thought you had gone into the town!"

"I have been into the town," he replied frigidly, "but I returned a few minutes ago. Perhaps you are not aware it is nearly our lunch hour?" Then, with a stand-offish yet would-be patronising air, addressing himself to Fane, "You are an artist, sir?"

"I do a little in that way," replied the young man modestly. "Mrs. Allingham happened to pass by while I was at work, and she has been kind enough to look at my sketch."

"Ah—yes—er—yes! Very good indeed!" murmured Mr. Allingham, scarcely glancing at the picture as he spoke. "Rose, it is time we went in. You are staying at our hotel are you not, Mr.—er—Mr. ——?"

"Fane," said that gentleman mildly.

"Fane, oh! ah—yes. I think I have heard of you in London. You have exhibited, have you not?"

"Frequently."

"Oh, yes, er—I remember! Charmed—charmed to meet you! Are you coming our way now?"

"No!" said Fane, rather brusquely, "I must finish my work."

And he raised his hat courteously as husband and wife in their turn saluted him and walked away together. He looked after them for some minutes, noting with an artist's eye the swaying youthful grace of the woman's dainty figure and the stiff uncompromising squareness of the man's.

"Ill-matched in every way," he said to himself,—"She is too young; and he is too—conceited."

That same evening he was somewhat surprised when Mr. Allingham came up to him with almost an air of cordiality, and invited him to take coffee, and a smoke afterwards, in that private part of the 'Gutsch' verandah which had been specially partitioned off for the sole use and benefit of the newly-wedded pair. He went, and was shyly welcomed by Mrs. Allingham, who looked more like a small lost angel than ever, attired in a loose tea-gown of silky white,

adorned with old lace, and sleeves of delicate chiffon. She sat a little apart, looking out through the creepers which festooned the verandah at the full moon sailing slowly through white clouds over the heights of Sonnenberg.

"Mrs. Allingham does not object to smoke?" said Fane courteously, before lighting his cigar. She turned her head, surprised; her husband laughed.

"Well, I never asked her," he said. "Rose, do you hear? Do you object to smoke?"

"Object? I? Oh, no," she faltered. "Not at all!"

Her husband laughed again and passed the liqueurs to his guest, who, however, helped himself very sparingly. Allingham drank off some cognac, and began to talk, and presently brought round the conversation to the subject of his place in Norfolk—Dunscombe Hall.

"I have been looking," he said, with a pompous air, "for a competent person to make sketches of the place. Now, I believe, if I am not mistaken, that you are on the staff of one of the pictorials?"

Fane admitted the fact.

"Then you would be the very man for me. I should not at all mind giving you the job if you would care to undertake it."

It was on the tip of Fane's tongue to say that

he would see him d——d first, for the man's tone was so bumptious and patronising as to be distinctly offensive. But, glancing at the delicate profile of the girl who leaned out among the clambering vines, looking at the solemn beauty of the night, he restrained himself by an effort.

"If my engagements will allow me to accept any extra work I shall not object," he answered stiffly, "but I should have to communicate with my editor first."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," said Mr. Allingham complacently. "Only if you do it at all you must do it in October. If you can't arrange that I must get somebody else. Dunscombe Hall is a very fine subject for an artist's pencil. It used to be a monastery, and there are still some ruins of the old cloisters in the grounds. And there is a showy bit of sketching always at hand in the Haunted Mere."

"Is it haunted?"

"Well, they say so," replied Allingham, lighting his cigar. "I've never seen the ghost myself, but I am told that whenever there is to be a death in the family a lady appears in a boat on the water and beckons the departing spirit. All nonsense, of course. But I rather like a family ghost."

"And you?" asked Fane of Mrs. Allingham,

seeing that she had turned towards them and was listening attentively.

"I cannot quite tell whether I do or not," she said slowly, and he fancied he saw her tremble. "I have never been in a haunted house to my knowledge, and, of course, it will be a new experience." She forced a little smile. "I did not know Dunscombe Hall had a ghost."

"Well, you know now," said her husband cheerfully. "But it is a ghost that never comes indoors. And the Haunted Mere is a mile off from the house, so no one is likely to make its acquaintance. You will let me know in good time, Mr. Fane, as to whether you can undertake my commission or not?"

"Certainly."

The conversation then changed to other matters, and when they parted for the night Fane thought Mrs. Allingham looked very tired and sad. A great pity filled his heart for the winsome little creature who seemed made for special tenderness and care, and who, despite the fact of her married dignity, had such an air of pathetic loneliness about her.

"Poor little woman!" he murmured, as he strolled out by himself in the warm moonlight, before going to bed. "She has got a perfectly irreproachable, commonplace prig for a husband—

he will never do her any harm openly—never grudge her anything—never scandalise her in the least—and yet ——”

He did not pursue the train of his reflections—he glanced at the moon, the tall straight pine-trees, the dewy turf—then, with a sigh over what he, as a modern pessimist, was disposed to consider the ‘fairness and futility’ of creation generally, forgot everything in a sound and dreamless sleep.

During the rest of their stay at the ‘Pension Gutsch’ Mr. Fane saw a good deal of the Allinghams. Moved by the consideration that the artist was a man not unknown to fame, Mr. Allingham unbent towards him as much as so important a person could be expected to unbend, and even condescended to take a few ‘excursions,’ such as he had once declared he hated, in his new acquaintance’s company. They parted in August—Mr. and Mrs. Allingham to return to England, and the stately attractions of Dunscombe Hall, Norfolk, and Fane to make a climbing tour in the Tyrol. They left the ‘Gutsch’ all together on the same day, jogging down the steep declivity for the last time in the odd little cog-wheel car.

“It is like coming down from heaven!” said

Rose Allingham, looking wistfully up at the receding pine-trees, bending to and fro like tall plumes on the height.

"Let us hope we are not going to the 'rival region'!" laughed Fane. "You liked the 'Gutsch,' then, Mrs. Allingham?"

"Very much," she answered.

"It is a fairly pleasant place for a short sojourn," said her husband disparagingly. "Very monotonous, of course. I should never care to go there again."

"Wouldn't you?" murmured Rose timidly. "Oh, I should."

"No doubt!" retorted her husband, with a hard smile. "But then, you see, I shouldn't." And he began to read a London paper two days old, which had arrived for him that morning.

At Lucerne station they said good-bye to Fane, Mr. Allingham expressing his hope in language that savoured more of command than entreaty, that the artist would undertake his 'commission' in October to sketch the various beauties of Dunscombe Hall.

"As to terms," he said loftily, "I think we need not mention them, as nothing of that sort will stand in your way or mine. Whatever you choose to fix I shall very willingly agree to."

The young man flushed a little, but said nothing.

Shaking hands again with Mrs. Allingham, he presented her with a pretty bunch of Alpine blue gentians and edelweiss as a parting 'souvenir,' and lifting his hat, remained uncovered till the train had steamed off.

"If it were not for her," he mused, "I would see Dunscombe Hall and its priggish owner at Jericho before I'd go near either of them. As it is—well—I'll think about it."

September passed in a glorious blaze of beauty and perfect weather; and by the time October was a week old, his 'thinking about it' had resolved into a definite course of action. So that, on one solemn and shadowy evening, when the smell of falling leaves was in the air, and the indefinable melancholy of autumn darkened the landscape even as a sad thought darkens a bright face, he was driven under the frowning and picturesque gateway of Dunscombe Hall, and up the fine but rather gloomy avenue of ancient elms that led to the stately building. The carriage had been sent to meet him at the station, and when he finally arrived and got out at the door of the house, he was received by a dignified man-servant in dark livery who informed him that Mr. Allingham had been obliged to go out for an hour, but that Mrs. Allingham was 'waiting tea' for him in the drawing-room. To the drawing-room he was

therefore shown ; and such was the size and antique splendour of that vast apartment, that for a moment he could scarcely perceive his young hostess, who at the announcement of his name came forward to meet him. And when he did realise her presence, such a shock of pain went through him that he could scarcely speak. The change wrought in her during a space of barely two months was so terrible, that he could only stammer out some unintelligible words, press her small cold hand, and gaze at her wonderingly. She meanwhile met his pitying, inquiring regard with a gentle patience in her own eyes.

"I see," she said, with a faint smile, "you think I am looking ill, don't you? Yes—everybody does. It is quite true I am not well—I fancy sometimes this place"—and a light shiver ran through her—"does not agree with me. It is very, very big"—here she laughed—"and I am very small. I am sure a little woman ought to live in a little house to be comfortable. But I have a very good doctor—so kind and clever—he says it is only want of tone and a little heart-weakness—that's all. Come and have some tea—there's a fire at this end of the room."

She led the way to a sort of 'cosy corner,' where light and warmth were concentrated near a tea-table set out with Queen Anne silver and Sèvres

china, and sitting in a low chair opposite her, Fane watched her in compassionate silence.

If she had looked a child before, she seemed more than ever one now—she had grown so thin and pale and fragile, that it seemed as if the merest puff of wind would blow her out of existence altogether. Her little hands, waxen-white and delicate, were scarcely equal to the task of lifting the teapot to pour out the tea, but as she busied herself with her hospitable duties, a faint colour came into her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled more brightly.

“Isn’t this a huge room?” she said, as she passed Fane his cup. “It’s meant for hundreds of people, you know—people in powdered wigs and court suits. I don’t think it accommodates itself to modern life at all.”

“It is indeed enormous!” and Fane glanced up and down and round about him. “The ceiling appears to be frescoed.”

“Oh, yes, it is wonderful. Quite horrid, in my opinion—but Mr. Allingham says it is marvellous. Any number of fat goddesses and Cupids. You will see it much better by daylight. We have no gas in this room, because it would spoil the fresco—that is why it is always so dark. To light it up we should have to put candles in all those four big Venetian chandeliers;

and each one of them holds two hundred lights."

"No economy in candles there!" said Fane, laughing.

"No, indeed! But, of course, we never have occasion to light it up—we never give parties; there are not enough people in the neighbourhood to come to them if we did."

"How far are you from Sandringham?" he inquired.

"Oh, a long way. We are just conveniently out of the reach of everybody worth knowing, and everything that is going on."

And she laughed, a trifle bitterly.

"It must be rather dull at times," he said, studying her changed face attentively. "You should get some friends to come and stay with you—a jolly house-party."

"Oh, Mr. Allingham would never hear of such a thing," she said quickly. "He cannot bear to have a number of people about him. My mother came down for a short time in September, but she declared the house was damp and gave her rheumatism. She went back to London after about a week, and then I fell ill."

"What was the matter with you?" he asked sympathetically.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"All sorts of things—fainting-fits, weakness, nerves — disagreeableness generally. Here is Harold."

She broke off her conversation with Fane directly her husband entered the room, and seemed to shrink into herself like a sensitive plant too roughly handled. Allingham himself was the same as ever—irreproachable in dress, demeanour, and what is understood by a portion of society as 'gentlemanliness.' He greeted Fane with exactly the correctly measured air of cordiality—namely, that of the wealthy host and encouraging patron—and it was an air that galled the young artist's pride considerably, though he was careful for Mrs. Allingham's peace and comfort to show no offence. He certainly could not complain of his entertainment. He had a suite of rooms to himself, and perfect liberty of action ; he breakfasted, lunched, and dined at a table appointed with the costliest luxuries ; a carriage was at his disposal whenever he needed it ; and Mr. Allingham had, furthermore, given him the choice of any horse in his stables, should he care for riding. He had engaged to make two dozen sketches of Dunscombe Hall from all the different points of view, and when once he began his work he became almost entirely engrossed in it.

The place was undoubtedly a fine object for

any artist's study—its architecture was well-nigh perfect, and all the surroundings were eminently picturesque, though indubitably of a solitary and melancholy character. He did not see as much of Mrs. Allingham as he could have wished; she was often ailing, and though she invariably exerted herself to appear at dinner, there were times when she was not equal even to the effort, and her husband, seated in solitary state at his glittering board, would make formal excuses for her absence.†

“My wife is very young,” he would explain ponderously, “and is therefore inclined to give way to any trifling ailment. The doctor assures me she is suffering merely from a little want of tone, and the autumnal air depresses her; there is nothing at all serious the matter.”

“She looks extremely ill,” said Fane impulsively.

“You think so?” and Mr. Allingham smiled indulgently. “I expect you are not accustomed to the ways of women; they put their looks on and off as easily as their gowns. In her present nervous condition of health it quite depends on Mrs. Allingham's own humour as to whether she looks well or ill—it has nothing whatever to do with any actually real organic mischief.”

Fane swallowed a glass of wine hastily to keep down the angry remark that rose to his lips, for

the cold callousness of his host was almost more than he could bear. Reflecting quickly, however, that it was not his business to interfere, and that the less he said the better for Mrs. Allingham, he was silent.

"You have not tried your hand yet at the Haunted Mere?" inquired Mr. Allingham presently.

"No. I—er—the fact is—I have not yet had time to go and look at it."

"True—you have been very much occupied with the house itself"—and Mr. Allingham nodded approvingly—"and your work is admirable—quite admirable! But I should suggest your visiting the Mere before the foliage quite falls. I fancy you will find it well worth your study."

"I will go to-morrow," said Fane.

And on the morrow he went. He started early in the morning, one of the gardeners directing him as to which path to follow. When he came in full sight of the glittering sheet of water he could scarcely refrain from uttering a cry of rapture. It was so mystically beautiful; the deep solitude surrounding it was so intense and unbroken, that he no longer wondered at the reputation it had of being 'haunted.' Grand old willow-trees, with gnarled trunks and knotty stems bent above its glassy surface, and beyond it in the distance the

land rolled away in gentle undulations of green and brown, relieved here and there with a clump of stately elms, or a tangle of bright yellow furze. The place was so still that not even the twitter of a bird broke the breathless calm—and, powerfully impressed by the whole scene, Fane took a rapid pencil sketch in outline to begin with, his ultimate intention being to make a large picture of it, with a view to exhibition in one of the London galleries. Returning rapidly to the house, to finish what he had commenced the previous day, he met Mrs. Allingham walking slowly to and fro on the terrace.

“Have you been to the ‘Haunted Mere’?” she asked, smiling.

For a moment he could not speak. The weary pathos of her young face, the fatigue of her soft eyes, the listless expression of her very figure, all this went to his heart, and made him pity her as he had never pitied any woman. He felt her to be no more than a little tired-out child—a child longing to be taken up in tender arms and gently carried home. There was a slight tremble in his voice as he answered, with an effort at playfulness,—

“Yes, I have seen the Mere, but not the ghost. Do you know, Mrs. Allingham, I begin to think you must be the ghost—you look like one this morning.”

"Do I? I'm sorry. I hate to be ill—my husband doesn't like it. I wish I could get strong more quickly."

"Are you feeling worse, then, to-day?" asked Fane, with a touch of real anxiety in his tone, which made her look at him in grateful wonder.

"Oh, no," she said. "I am only a little 'run down,' as the doctor says, and weak. Harold declares it is all woman's nonsense, and thinks I don't exert myself to get well; but indeed I do. It is very kind of you to take so much interest——"

"Kind!" echoed Fane, almost irritably; then, glancing about him to make sure there was no one in sight, he approached her more closely. "Look here, Mrs. Allingham, do forgive me if I seem officious or impertinent, but I can't help asking you this one question—are you quite happy?"

She glanced up at him almost affrightedly, and meeting his friendly eyes, her own filled with sudden tears.

"No, I am not," she faltered. "But it is wicked of me to say so, because you see it is quite my own fault. I ought to be happy—I have everything I want."

"Except—love!" said Fane, in a half whisper, struggling mentally with the insane desire that had suddenly seized him, to take this pale little

child-woman in his arms and show her what the tenderness of love could be.

She looked at him half reproachfully.

"I think you mistake," she said gently, with a curiously sad little old-world air of dignity. "Harold loves me very much in—his own way. He is not of a demonstrative nature."

Fane was silent. Presently she resumed in the same gentle accents.

"It is not his fault ; indeed, it is nobody's fault that I do not feel as happy as I ought to do. It is something in my own temperament. I fancy that perhaps I am too young to be married ; not in years, I mean, but in feeling and education. You see, being quite small and slight as I am, I have always been treated as more or less of a child. Even when I came home from being presented at the Queen's Drawing Room, and fainted away all in a heap on the stairs, my mother called me a 'poor baby.' You remember what I told you at the 'Gutsch' ?—how I had always imagined that married women must be big and fat, and important ? Well, really they are, as a rule, and I am so different ! All the married ladies in this neighbourhood, for instance, look upon me as quite an absurdity."

"Then they are very impudent and ill-bred," said Fane hotly.

“Oh, no, they’re not,” and she laughed a little. “They come and call on regular days, and ask me if I am equal to the management of such a large house? Do I not find the servants a great trial? Have I a strong constitution? One lady always surveys me mournfully through her pince-nez, and says, ‘You are very young to have secured such a magnificent establishment.’ And that is quite true! Dunscombe Hall is magnificent—don’t you think so?”

They paused on the terrace just at a point which faced the extensive left wing of the grand old pile. Carved escutcheons, flying buttresses, and heraldic devices were all thrown up into sharp prominence by the mellow rays of the autumnal noonday sun, and immediately opposite them was the sculptured figure of a warrior-saint in a Gothic niche, festooned with clambering white roses, whose delicate blossoms surrounded and softened the statue’s frigid aspect of frozen prayer.

Fane shivered slightly. “Yes,” he said in a tone of one who makes reluctant admission. “It is a fine old place. But its character is distinctly melancholy. It is not a Beethoven ‘Sonata’ or a Mendelssohn ‘Lied’—it is one of Chopin’s most mournful ‘Nocturnes.’”

Rose Allingham gave him a quick glance of perfect comprehension, but said nothing in reply.

Moving in her light, bird-like way across the terrace, she gathered one of the roses that hung near the statue in the niche and gave it to him. He had scarcely taken it from her before its leaves fell in a white fragrant shower at his feet. She smiled a little forcedly.

"I was afraid of that," she said. "They are all on the very point of falling. I will not give you another from that tree. This afternoon—or tomorrow—I will get you one from the rosery; they are in better condition there. Now I must not detain you from your work any longer; you want all the daylight possible. Have you got this old stone saint in any of your sketches yet?"

"Not yet," he answered abstractedly, looking first at her and then at the petals of the fallen rose.

"Oh, I hope you will put him in somewhere!" she exclaimed, almost playfully. He is such a dear old thing! You seem quite melancholy over that wasted rose."

"I am," he admitted. "I hate to see any beautiful thing perish."

"But then so many beautiful things do perish," she said, with a musing regret in her eyes. "One must get accustomed to that. You recollect your picture of the great pine-tree on the 'Gutsch,' split through by lightning? That suggested to

me the ruin of a noble life. Well, all these little white roses that fall so easily at a touch, they are to me the emblems of just such a number of little lives ; quite little lives, you know, of no actual use to anybody ; only just pretty and fragrant and harmless, that at a rough touch or hasty misunderstanding drop to pieces and sink into the ground unnoticed and unmissed. I believe each little rose has its own little secret sadness."

She smiled and waved her hand to him, as she moved away slowly and re-entered the house.

When she was quite out of sight Fane, moved by some odd sentiment which he could not himself analyse, picked up every one of the fallen rose-petals and put them in his pocket-book. Then he set about sketching the ancient sculptured saint, while the sun was still bright on its weather-beaten features and piously folded hands.

The next day was the first of November, the 'Feast of All Saints.' The weather was beautifully clear and warm, and Fane went out early, without even seeing his host and patron as usual, in order to profit by the clearness of the atmosphere and get a long day's steady work. When he returned in time for the late dinner he heard that Mrs. Allingham had been seized with a succession of fainting-fits, and that the doctor had been sent for. Greatly disconcerted by this news

he entered the dining-room full of eager and sympathetic inquiries, but found his host so bland and calm, and so perfectly satisfied that there was no cause whatever for anxiety as to his young wife's condition, that he felt it would be deemed odd and out of place if he, as a visitor and 'paid artist,' had exhibited any unduly great concern.

"It is mere weakness and nervous prostration," said Mr. Allingham, drinking his champagne with relish as he spoke, "and in these cases fainting-fits are a relief rather than a danger. I am sorry Rose has allowed herself to run down in this way. I am afraid it will necessitate my going with her to the sea-side for a short time. It would be particularly inconvenient to me just now—but if it must be done it must."

Fane could not speak. He gulped his food and wine down hastily with such a sense of impotent rage as almost choked him. He could scarcely bear to look at the composed, sleek, self-satisfied man beside him, attired as was his usual evening custom in irreproachable dress-suit, starched shirt and white tie—he would have liked to knock him down and trample on him. As soon as dinner was ended, he left the room with a muttered hasty excuse about "having letters to write," and went out in the soft night air to smoke by himself and "cool down," as he inwardly expressed it, for

his feelings were in a perfect tumult. Pity and anxiety for Mrs. Allingham, and contempt for her husband, struggled for the mastery in his mind ; and he walked on and on through the grounds under the light of a full moon, not heeding where he was going to in the heat of his wrath and excitement.

“ I can’t stand it ! ” he said, half aloud, at last. “ I’ll leave the place to-morrow ! I can finish the sketches at home now—I’ve got enough material to go upon. If I stay here any longer I shall come to fisticuffs with that egotistical prig, or—or—otherwise make a fool of myself.”

A sudden shiver ran through him ; and conscious of a certain dampness and unpleasant chill in the air, he stopped abruptly to see whither he had come.

To his amazement, right in front of him stretched the ‘ Haunted Mere,’ glittering like polished steel in the silver rays of the moon. Something there was in the weird aspect of the still water and the twisted willows that impressed him with a sense of awe ; and, as though a cold hand had been laid upon his heart, his anger died away into a dull, aching pain. He stood like one hypnotised, staring vaguely at the Mere, disinclined to move, and scarcely capable of thought. And as he remained thus, waiting for he knew not what, he saw dis-

tingly a pale Shadow fall like the reflection of a cloud across the shining width of water—a shadow that darkened slowly and grew, as it were, palpably into the shape of a small boat with a curved and curiously luminous prow; straining his eyes he watched, every nerve in his body throbbing with fear. The boat began to move out of shadow into moonlight, and as it moved it showed its spectral occupant—a woman's figure veiled completely in misty white, that stood erect and waved its arms beckoningly towards the turret of Dunscombe Hall. Reaching the very middle of the Mere where the moonlight shone broadest and brightest, the ghostly skiff paused on the water motionless. Again and yet again the veiled Phantom waved its arms appealingly, commandingly; then, like a wreath of mist or smoke, it vanished!

Released from the terrible tension of his nerves, Fane uttered a loud cry; it was echoed among the dark woods and answered by the mournful hooting of owls. All at once he remembered the legend—that the ghost of Dunscombe Hall was said only to appear when death threatened some member of the family.

“My God!” he exclaimed, “can it be possible!”

And without waiting to think another moment he turned and ran, ran as though he were running a race for life straight back to the Hall. Breath-

lessly rushing through the dark antiquated porch, he jostled against a man coming out.

“Mr. Allingham ——” he began.

“I am not Mr. Allingham,” said the stranger, “I am Dr. Dean.”

“The doctor? Oh, then ——” and he leaned back against a pillar of the porch to recover breath and equanimity; “Mrs. Allingham is——”

“Dead,” said the doctor gently.

TINY TRAMPS.

THE idea of childhood is generally associated in our minds with mirth, grace, and beauty. The fair-haired, blue-eyed treasures of proud and tender mothers; the plump, rosy little ones whose fresh young hearts know no sorrow save the sometimes ungratified longing for a new toy or new game—these are the fairy blossoms of our lives, for whom childhood really exists, and for whose dear sakes we think no sacrifice too great, no pain too wearisome, no work too heavy, so long as we can keep them in health, strength, and happiness, and ward off from their lives every shadow of suffering. And as we caress our own dimpled darlings, and listen to their merry prattling voices and their delightful laughter, we find it difficult to realise that there are other children in the world, born of the same great Mother Nature, who live on without even knowing that they *are* children, and who have ‘begun life’ in the bitterest manner at a time when they can scarcely toddle ;

children to whom toys are inexplicable mysteries, and for whom the bright regions of fairyland have never been unclosed.

These poor little waifs and strays, no matter how young they are in years, are old—one might almost say they were born old—they are familiar with the dark and crooked paths of life, and the broad, shining, golden road of love, duty, wisdom, and peace, has never been pointed out to their straying little feet.

Homes for destitute children may and do exist, refuges and charities of all kinds are open to those who seek them; and yet, in spite of all that is done, or is doing, poor child-wanderers walk the earth, and meet us in streets and country roads, clothed in rags, their pinched faces begrimed with dirt and tears, and their tiny voices attuned to the beggar's whine, while too often, alas! their young hearts are already withered by the corroding influences of deceit and cunning.

The other day one of these tiny tramps came to my door, and implored in piteous accents for a crust of bread. He was a pretty little fellow of some seven or eight years old, and his blue eyes looked bright with innocence and trust. His tiny, naked feet were cracked and sore, and covered with mud, and his clothes were in so dirty and ragged a condition that it seemed a miracle how

they could hang together at all. Through the large holes in these wretched garments, however, might be seen many pretty glimpses of soft pink and white skin, and his face was as plump, and fair, and rosy, as the fondest mother could desire it to be. Nevertheless, he assured me in the most mournful manner that he was very cold and hungry, and that his feet were so very sore he could scarcely stand ; so, without more ado, we took him into the kitchen, bathed his feet for him in refreshing warm water, and provided him with a warm pair of stockings and a strong pair of boots. Then we put him on a chair by the fire, and feasted him with a large bowl of barley-broth, which he appeared to enjoy exceedingly. A piece of cake was then given to him as a concluding relish, and when he had quite finished his meal, I asked him where he was going.

My small tramp screwed his knuckles into his eyes, and mournfully replied, "Home."

"Where is home?" I inquired.

"With mother."

"And where does mother live?"

"Please, 'm, she lives on the road."

"Lives on the road!" I exclaimed; "but where does she sleep?"

"On the road, 'm, please 'm."

I looked at the small waif in silence. He met

my glance with a weird upraising of his eyes and eyebrows, which gave him an expression that was half-plaintive, half-cunning.

"What road does she live on?" I asked.

"Please, 'm, any road as comes 'andy."

I sighed involuntarily. He was such a pretty child; and what a life seemed in store for him!

"What does your mother do?" I continued.

"Please, 'm, she sells *buttings*."

"Buttings?"

"Yes, 'm, buttings, an' 'ooks an' 'ise."

Buttons, and hooks and eyes. I knew the kind of woman she must be—bold, slovenly, and dirty, most likely wearing a flashy bonnet on one side of her head, and brass rings on her fingers. A woman with a carneying voice, with which she insinuated herself into the good graces of servants, and persuaded them to purchase her trumpery goods.

"Have you a father?" I asked.

"Yes, 'm. He gits drunk, 'm."

Dismissing the idea of the father at once, I continued my catechising.

"Why doesn't your mother send you to school?"

"I dunno, 'm." Here the small knuckles were screwed into the eyes more violently than ever.

“Where is your mother now?”

“I dunno, 'm.”

“Well, then, how are you going to find her?”

“I dunno, 'm. I kin try.”

“Do you know where to try?”

“Yes, 'm. I knows her pub.”

“Do you mean the public-house?”

“Yes, 'm, please, 'm.” And as if the recollection of the ‘pub’ had suddenly aroused him to action, the little forlorn wanderer slipped off his chair by the fire, and prepared to start. I fastened an old warm cloth jacket round him, and turning his little rosy face up that I might survey it closely, I said,—

“Now, suppose you cannot find your mother, will you come back here? I'll take care of you till we can find her for you, and you shall have some more cake. Do you understand?”

“Yes, 'm.”

“Stop a minute,” I said; and seizing a scrap of paper, I hastily wrote the words—“Should you wish this child taken care of, put to school, and brought up to earn an honest livelihood, you can call at this house any day during the next three weeks;” and adding my name and address, I sealed the paper carefully. Then putting it in the pocket of the jacket I had just given him, I again addressed my small tramp,—

“Will you give that letter to your mother when you find her?”

He looked decidedly astonished, and somewhat doubtful about the propriety of acceding to this request ; but after a moment of consideration, he gave me his invariable reply,—

“Yes, ’m, please, ’m.”

Raising the child in my arms, I kissed his rosy intelligent face, my heart swelling with pity for his hard fate, and then I led him to the front door. He made a kind of attempt at a salute, by pulling one of his chestnut curls into his eyes, and then scrambled down the steps and ran away, while I rushed to my window, which commands an entire view of the street, and watched him. He looked round now and then to see if any one were near, and finding the road pretty well deserted, he finally seated himself on a door-step, and I was able to observe the whole of his proceedings, which filled me with the greatest surprise and dismay.

The first thing he did was to take off the boots and stockings with which he had been provided, and to tie them in a bunch together. He then deliberately walked into a heap of the thickest black mud he could find, and tramped and splashed about therein till the feet, which had been so nicely washed, were as black and grimy

as they could well be. This done, he took off the warm jacket, and rolling it up in as small a bundle as he could manage to make, he tucked it under his arm ; then giving himself two or three dexterous shakes which had the effect of displaying the large holes in his own tattered garments to the best advantage, he uttered a sort of wild whoop or yell, and scampering up the street as fast as he could go, he disappeared from my sight. I knew his destination as well as if it had been told to me then and there. He was going to convert that jacket and those boots and stockings into money at the nearest old-clothes shop, and then he would no doubt hasten to his mother's 'pub,' and detail to her his successful morning's adventure. She would take the money he had obtained for the clothes, and, perhaps, give the child twopence for himself as reward for his smartness, and there would be an end ; while certainly the letter I had prepared would never be thought of or even discovered unless by some old Jew salesman, who would not comprehend its meaning. Yet could I blame the poor little tramp for his behaviour ? No, indeed, I only pitied the unfortunate child more than ever.

Trained to deceive as thoroughly as happier children are trained to speak the truth, could anything

else have been reasonably expected of him? It would have been a real matter for surprise had he acted differently. Still, I was foolish enough to feel somewhat disappointed, for the boy's face had attracted me. It is curious, too, to observe how very many attractive child-faces there are among the little vagrants of the London streets. Children with beautiful eyes and hair—children whose flesh is a perfect marvel of softness and fair delicacy, in spite of the dirt that grimes them from top to toe—and children whose limbs are so gracefully and finely formed, and whose whole manner and bearing are so indescribably lofty, that one would almost deem them to have been born in the purple. An excellent type of the tramp aristocracy came to me one morning in the shape of an Italian boy of about ten or eleven years of age, who strolled under my window, twanging prettily enough the chords of a much-used, far-travelled, but still sweet-toned, mandoline. I have always an extra soft heart for these straying minstrels from the sunny land of song, and I immediately called him, and entered into conversation with him. He told me he had travelled far and earned little, and that he seldom had enough to eat, but he was merry. "Oh, yes," he said, smiling his bright southern smile, "he was always hopeful and light-hearted."

Some peculiarity in his accent impelled me to ask him if he were not from Lombardy, and never shall I forget the superb gesture of head and the proud flash of his eyes, as he drew himself up, and replied, with dignity, "No, signorina, *io son Romano*" ("I am a Roman").

If he had declared himself an emperor, he could not have asserted his position with more dignity. Many a languid dandy, dawdling through the saloons of fashion, might have envied his grace of figure and princely bearing.

There was a very interesting account once in the papers, concerning two baby tramps known as 'Sally and her Bloke.' Sally was eight, and her boy companion, the 'Bloke,' was nine. No matter how great the distances each had to traverse during the day in obedience to the will of the tyrannical parents or masters who employed them to beg, or sell matches in the streets, as surely as the evening fell these two mites were always found together. Some irresistible attraction, some inexplicable sympathy, drew them together, and the poor little things entertained for each other so harmless, and withal so true, an affection, that even the coarse companions with whom their lot was cast were touched by their behaviour, and spoke with rough good-nature akin to respect, of 'Sally and her Bloke,' and forbore to interfere

with their pretty and pathetic little romance. I wondered at the time if anything would be done for this forlorn little couple, but the matter seems to have died out in mere sentiment, and 'Sally and her Bloke' will no doubt be left to grow up as such children do grow up—in vice and misery.

It is terrible to think that we must always be doomed to see sorrow, ignorance, and vice imprinted on the tender, flower-like faces of the very young, and that there must always be, in spite of the efforts of the wisest and best men, a large majority of babes and children for whom there is and can be no hope of good. Must there be a perpetual sacrifice of the innocents to the god of all evil? One of the saddest sights to me, among all the sad sights of London, are the neglected children who have somehow eluded the kindly-meant, though occasionally stern, grasp of the Government officials, and who have literally nothing to hope for, nothing to render their lives of value to the nation; and who, as far as their wretched parents are concerned, might be better out of the world than in it. The streets swarm with such helpless little ones, and yet it seems impossible to do more than is being done every day. English men and women have tender hearts, full of pitiful gentleness for the helplessness of infancy, and the charities that are instituted for

poor and neglected children are, I believe, most generously supported ; yet, amid such a mass of distress and evil, how futile seems all the best work of statesmen and philosophers ! We must, however, continue to hope for better times, when every child that is born into the land may be recognised as the child of the Government no less than of its parents, and may be brought to realise its own responsible position and value as a servant of the state. This was the condition of things in Sparta, and, though the Spartans carried their ideas rather too far, still it must be admitted that their system had its foundation in very excellent common-sense. Whatever mistakes and shortcomings Lycurgus may have had to answer for, it is certain that he never would have tolerated baby tramps.

THE SONG OF MIRIAM.

“**H**OW she sings, poor Miriam! She is always singing.”

And the old man who murmured these words raised his head in the sunshine where he sat, and listened with an expression of pleased attention stealing over his worn features. He was very poor, very feeble, very much despised by all his neighbours, and generally known as ‘that dirty Jew,’ a designation by no means complimentary, yet happening to fit him exactly. He made no secret of being a Jew, neither did he make any attempt to be otherwise than dirty. As a matter of fact he had only one suit of clothes and was hopelessly unable to afford another; while the simple operation of washing became an involved and troublesome business in the narrow dimensions of the room he occupied, a roof attic no bigger than a medium sized store-cupboard. Indeed, few good housekeepers could have been found who would not have grumbled at it as

being much too 'stuffy' for the proper preservation of jams and pickles; but he, poor human wretch, managed to live and breathe in it resignedly enough, sharing it with the only creature he loved in the world, his grandchild Miriam. She it was whose full young voice pealed forth just now in rich round notes of music through which the words ran with the dominating force and fervour of almost operatic declamation :

“ ‘ O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever ! ’ ”

The voice came from outside the attic, for its owner had scrambled through the window and was seated at her ease on the sloping roof—a small, picturesque figure in ragged clothing, with a mass of dark hair tumbling wildly about, and falling so thickly over the face as nearly to conceal it from view. A flash of large, bright, eager eyes, a glimmer of red lips and white teeth, and the tip of a decidedly Jewish nose was all that could be discerned of Miriam as she lounged on the slanting roof slates in the full sunlight, swinging her bare feet idly to and fro, and declaiming over and over again with many roulades and brilliant cadenzas,—

“ ‘ O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Let Israel now confess that His mercy endureth for ever !

“ ‘ Let the house of Aaron now say that His mercy endureth for ever !

“ ‘ Let all that fear the Lord proclaim that His mercy endureth for ever ! ’ ”

Over the crowded chimneys of one of the worst and poorest quarters of Paris the grand words echoed in their own sonorous Hebrew tongue, and ‘ the dirty Jew,’ Reuben David, listened till a burning moisture began to gather in his half-blind eyes, and covering his face with one wrinkled hand he muttered,—

“ How long, O Lord—how long ! O that Thou would’st rend the heavens and come down, that the eye might perceive Thee in all Thy glory ! What have we done unto Thee, O God of my fathers, that we should be exiled from hope ? Thy mercy endureth for ever ! Let me believe it so, O God ! Let me believe it while faith is still possible.”

He rose tottering, and crossing to the window put his head through its square opening.

“ Miriam ! Miriam ! ”

The song ceased, the ragged figure sprang up lightly, the mass of dark hair was flung back with a quick movement, and the face of the child gleamed out like a flower from amidst her squalid surroundings.

“Grandfather ! ”

“Come in, child, come in ! ” said Reuben gently. “The neighbours will not like thy singing so loud.”

Miriam’s black eyes glistened—her lips laughed scornfully.

“The neighbours ! What do I care ! They will take me for one of the cats on the roof, that is all.”

Nevertheless, she obeyed her grandfather’s mute sign, and slipped nimbly through the window into the room, where she stood looking up wistfully at the old man’s face, while she mechanically twisted a thick strand of her black hair round and round her fingers.

“Is there nothing to eat ? ” she asked presently, in an anxious tone. “Not even a crust for you, beloved and kind one ? ”

Reuben sighed and shook his head. Then shuffling feebly across the room again, he sat down in his accustomed place on the same chair, in the same resigned and patient attitude.

“There is nothing, child,” he said, “and I am weak and faint, else I would go into the streets and beg for food. But I fear I cannot move far ; I am stricken useless with long fasting.”

While he thus spoke, Miriam had been swiftly binding up her rebellious locks, and now she

straightened herself with a gesture and look of eloquent determination. She had a curiously resolved face for a girl of her age—she was barely fourteen.

“Wait here ;” she said, and with an impulsive movement she threw her arms round the old man’s drooping figure, and kissed him tenderly.

“Wait here, and I will go ; I will find something ; all people cannot be hard-hearted and uncharitable. I will study the faces as they pass, and see where love looks through the eyes, then I will plead for help and I know I shall win my cause !—yes, dear and beloved one ! I shall come back rich.”

“Rich !” Old Reuben echoed the word faintly, with a flickering smile at the absurdity of the idea.

“One is rich with enough !” said Miriam gaily, and opening the door, she waved her hand and darted away.

Her grandfather, left to himself, let his weary head droop forward on his chest, and, closing his eyes, tried to forget the pangs of hunger in sleep. But though he partially dozed he never quite lost consciousness, and through the dream-haze of semi-somnolence he was aware of the warm breadth of afternoon sunshine that brightened his poor room, of the rumbling noise of the

passing vehicles outside, even of the humming song of a big bluebottle fly that circled about and bounced against the ceiling with buzzing pertinacity. So that the stealthy lifting of the door-latch startled him broad awake in a moment, and he half rose out of his chair to confront the intruder, a young man of shabby and slouching appearance, who paused on the threshold before entering.

"Well, Uncle Reuben! Pretending to starve, as usual?"

"Pretending to starve!" The old man pushed his chair aside and stood erect, his indignation flushing his thin features with a glow of new life.

"Worthy nephew, I do not lie," he said sternly; "I am only a Jew. I leave lies to Christians."

The new-comer strode into the room, his thin lips twitching with an evil smile.

"You insult my religion," he began.

"*Your* religion?" queried Reuben, "you mean your father's religion. You, Josef Perez, never had a religion, I think, except when as a child at the knee of your mother—the sister who used to be all in all to me—you lisped your first prayers to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one Jehovah who hath never deserted His people—until now!"

The last two words escaped his lips involuntarily and were accompanied by a heavy sigh.

Young Perez looked at him morosely.

"All this is mere cant and humbug," he said impatiently, "I don't care two sous about one religion more than another, you know that well enough. With a Jewish mother and a Christian father, I am a half-breed between a lie and a truth, I suppose, and it doesn't matter to me which is the truth and which the lie. Where is Miriam?"

"She has gone out."

"That's a good hearing at any rate. I hate to see her crawling about like a snake, and staring at me with her big eyes. You know what I've come for, well enough. I want money."

Reuben David threw up his hands with an eloquent gesture.

"Money!" he cried; "where can I get it? Should I lack food if I knew?"

"Oh that's all sham!" retorted Perez. "If you've no money yourself, you know very well how to find it. You can give me a letter to one of your hang-dog friends of usurers, and I daresay enough cash can be screwed out to keep me going. I only want a thousand francs; it's a mere trifle."

The old man stared at him for a moment as though misdoubting the evidence of his own eyes and ears.

“A thousand francs !” he exclaimed at last. “Are you mad, nephew, or am I ? What do you expect of me ? I have not a sou to buy bread, and you demand a thousand francs ! You tell me to ask my friends—I have no friends ? Would I let the child Miriam suffer the pains of hunger if I had friends ? Would I suffer myself ? I can do nothing ; nothing for my own needs or yours. I am almost destitute of clothing ; I have to beg charity in the streets to get sufficient money to pay the rent for this wretched room ; and yet, you, knowing all this, come to me for a thousand francs ! You must be dreaming !”

Perez scowled.

“Dreaming or waking, I know you are a Jew,” he said. “And Jews always have money. My father told me so. And he said of you that you could coin it if you chose. There was no love lost between you and him I remember, and between you both, I believe you worried my mother into her grave. You were always miser as well as Jew, and I daresay you’ve got a tidy hoard hidden away in this very room, under the boards or behind the grate for all I know. But I’ll get all I can out of you this time, depend upon it ! I have come prepared for that, so you may as well make the best of the business and give me what I want without any foolery about it.”

He looked around him suspiciously as he spoke, and lowered his voice to a threatening whisper. Reuben made no answer.

“Do you hear me?” continued Perez, advancing close up to him with a sudden stride. “I’m sick of all your stories about starvation and poverty; you are the best liar I ever met. Out with your hidden cash, or it will be the worse for you! I’ve no time to stand here arguing the matter; find me the money I tell you, or I’ll find it for myself.”

The old man met his fierce gaze calmly and fixedly.

“You are at liberty to do so, nephew Perez,” he said tranquilly; “if you can discover gold in this poor room you are welcome to it. God is my witness that I have spoken truth to you when I tell you I have not a penny in the world.”

As he uttered the words with uplifted eyes and an eloquent gesture of sorrow, his nephew’s face grew livid, the veins in his forehead standing out like cords in the rush of evil blood that heated his brain.

“Lying devil!” he muttered with an oath; then springing forward he lifted his hand—it grasped something sharp and glittering—there followed a brief struggle—a fiercely-dealt heavy blow—and Reuben David, with a faint choking

groan, fell dead on the floor, the blood welling from a ghastly wound in his throat where his nephew had mortally stabbed him. The afternoon sunlight poured fully on the prone figure, the white hair, and the red blood that stained the floor, and the murderer, still grasping the Spanish poniard that had wrought the wicked deed, stared at his work for a moment in sick and giddy horror. His limbs seemed paralysed ; he had no power to stir, and while he stood thus rooted to the spot he heard in the distance the notes of a full pure voice floating upwards and sounding ever nearer and clearer.

“ ‘ Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever.

“ ‘ Let all who fear the Lord confess that His mercy endureth for ever.’ ”

Seized with a panic, Perez roused himself from his apathy. The dagger dropped unheeded from his hand.

“ No time,” he muttered, looking wildly about him. “ No time to hunt for the money. Curse that Miriam ! I could twist her throat easily—but—I dare not—not so soon after——”

He stopped, shuddering, then creeping to the door he lifted the latch noiselessly and passed out into the darkness of the landing beyond—a close narrow passage which led to an unused loft ; and

here, among the shadows, he shrank out of sight, straining his ears to listen to Miriam's light step as it came bounding up from the ground floor in an almost rhythmic measure with the sound of her singing. She passed him close ; her skirt brushed his foot ; he could just see her face, which was smiling and radiant. Crouching back further into the semi-obscurity he waited, holding his breath—he heard her call out in a mirthful voice, “ Grandfather ! ”

Then a wild shriek of pitiful anguish pierced the air ; a shriek that turned the blood to ice in the wretched assassin's veins and set his nerves quivering. Only that one shriek sounded, then all was still. And in that awful silence, the murderer, creeping cautiously along like a stealthy animal, glided down the stairs without a sound, and reaching the open house-door unobserved, fled away.

* * * *

Years passed, and the murder of the Jew, Reuben David, was almost forgotten. Justice had been baffled, and the law had busied itself in vain—the murderer, though tacitly understood to be one Josef Perez, a nephew of the dead man, had never yet been found. Miriam, on the day of the murder, had been discovered lying in a swoon by the side of her slain relative, and on

recovering consciousness and being questioned, declared amid her passionate sobs and tears that she knew no possible cause for the brutal deed. Her grandfather was always poor, she said, and had been forced to beg for his livelihood, being too old and feeble to work. She was able, however, to identify the Spanish stiletto that was found in the room, as the property of her cousin, Josef Perez, son of a wine merchant in Madrid who had failed recently in business. This same wine merchant, brother-in-law of the murdered Reuben, was sought for by the police and found, but, on being interrogated, swore that he knew nothing of his son's whereabouts, adding that he was always a ne'er-do-weel, and had deserted his home some years since. Finally, after long and fruitless search, inquiries were dropped, and Miriam alone remembered the horror of that sunlit afternoon, when she had found her only protector in the world lying dead, with his white hair soaked in a pool of blood. She could never blot the awful picture from her sight; it was always before her. She remembered, too, how she had sung—"O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever!" And she had asked herself many times since,—

"Where was God *then*! Why did He permit

a dastard crime? How did He show His mercy? ”

And it was a question she was never able to answer to her own satisfaction. As a Jewess, she believed in the axiom, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” and certainly she would have added, “A life for a life.” Revenge was just and reasonable, she considered ; and for years she always carried about with her the dagger that had killed old Reuben, hoping against hope that one day she might meet the murderer and confront him with the proof of his crime.

And so time went on, and it was the full season in Paris. All the world of fashion was pouring itself in the Grand Opera, for it was the night of a new production, in which one of the most marvellous singers of the day ‘the divine Miriami,’ as she was called, had consented to ‘create’ the *title-rôle*. At the last moment a serious *contretemps* occurred ; one of the male singers, who had a small secondary part to perform, was suddenly taken ill, and the only person who could be found to replace him was an obscure individual named Manuelos, an ‘under-study’ who had never appeared before in grand opera. The manager hastened to explain the affair to the famous Miriami, who, he thought, might

justly consider herself affronted to be thus forced to sing even a few bars with an untried stranger ; but the great *prima-donna* was in a very good humour, and treated the matter lightly. After all, the part that had to be filled was a small one, its performer's chief business consisting in being stabbed by the heroine in the last act.

"Any one can sing the few bars of music necessary," she said indifferently, to the explanatory and apologetic manager. "It is scarcely more than recitative. I shall not be at all put out by this stranger, as long as he keeps in time and tune."

And with a smile of conscious power, she swept out of her dressing-room, gorgeous and superb in the rich costume and jewels of her part. She was very beautiful, was 'the divine Miriami' ; her great black eyes, her magnificent figure, her ravishing grace, had won her the admiration of kings and emperors, and her glorious voice, united to intense dramatic power, gave her undisputed pre-eminence in her profession. On this night, in particular, from the very commencement of the new opera she scored triumph after triumph, and it was not till the close of the second act that she came face to face with the unknown 'under-study,' Manuelos. As soon as she fully perceived him, a curious change came over her—she seemed

to grow taller and more majestic than ever—she looked like a goddess, and sang like an angel, and the brilliant audience almost wore itself out with enthusiastic acclamations and recalls. At last the curtain fell, and she walked slowly up to the man who had been summoned at an hour's notice to take the place of the singer who was ill.

“You rendered your few bars very well,” she said, with a gracious smile. “What is your name? I forget——”

The ‘under-study,’ a middle-aged man of handsome yet dissolute appearance, bowed low, flattered by the famous *prima-donna's* notice, and replied,—

“Josef Manuelos, Madame !”

“Ah! that is your stage-name of course! Your father's name was Manuelos, and your own is Josef. It is a pretty combination! Mine is also pretty. I am known as ‘Miriami,’ but my real name”—and she smiled again brilliantly—“is Miriam David, just as yours is Josef Perez !”

He started, and an awful pallor blanched his features. The orchestra was playing a delicious ‘intermezzo,’ and it seemed to him like the shrieking of devils.

“Miriam David !——” he gasped. “Miriam
——,”

And he stared, panic-stricken, at the magnificent woman before him, with her regal figure, her blazing eyes, her scarlet lips, parted just now in that strange, cold smile.

"Yes, I am Miriam," she said. "You would scarcely think it, would you? But children alter so much, you know! Are you not glad to see me? I am particularly pleased to find you; I have been looking for you a long while! I knew you could sing a little; but I never thought you would make it a profession. How strange it is we should meet like this!"

She spoke in the lightest and most indifferent tone possible, but conscious guilt made him quick to hear the suppressed fury in her voice, and quick to see the gathering passion in her eyes. He cowered and shrank before her; a cold perspiration bedewed his forehead and hands.

"This is your property I believe?" she said suddenly, drawing a glittering object from her belt and showing it to him. He uttered a faint exclamation,—it was the Spanish dagger with which he had murdered old Reuben. He looked wildly around him,—the stage was full of supernumeraries, carpenters and dressers, who were all busy in their respective places, preparing for the last act of the opera,—he tried to speak, but vainly,—he sought everywhere with his eyes for

some means of exit and escape, and Miriam saw it. Replacing the dagger in her girdle, she approached him closely and whispered,—

“Beware what you do! If you make the least attempt to leave the house I will have you arrested at once. I shall watch your every motion—your every look! Play your part throughout the opera as I shall play mine! We can settle our private affair afterwards!”

He lifted his eyes to hers in terrified appeal, but saw no pity in those night-black orbs, no softening touch of pardon in the expression of the beautiful face, a face such as Judith’s must have been when she went forth first to captive and then to slay the mighty Holofernes. At that moment the manager approached; he was in an excellent humour, and entirely delighted with the success of the new opera. He began to compliment the *prima-donna* on her triumph, and added, with a glance at the ‘understudy,’—

“Signor Manuelos satisfied you in his part, Madame?”

“Perfectly!” replied the great ‘Miriami’ composedly. “As I have just told him, if he continues to perform his *rôle* as well as he has begun, we shall not quarrel!”

“Ah, well! whatever his faults are, you will soon get rid of him, as you kill him in the last

act," laughed the manager. "So, for any mistakes he makes, he will be punished! The curtain goes up in two minutes, Madame."

And, bowing politely, he hurried on.

Miriam, or 'Miriami,' stood still, looking meditatively at Perez, who, despite himself, trembled in every limb.

"You had better take a glass of sherry or cognac, Signor *Manuelos*," she suggested tranquilly, emphasising his stage name somewhat sarcastically, "or I fear you will be too nervous to sing your death-song. You must present a bold front when I kill you. Stage-fright is a terrible malady."

And, moving slowly to one of the side-wings she took up a position where she could watch him wherever he went. The wretched man tried to conquer the palsy of fear that possessed him like the ague; a 'super' brought him, at his own request, some wine, which he swallowed at a gulp, while he sought to assume the jaunty manners of one perfectly at ease. But he felt the basilisk eyes of Miriam upon him, burning as it were into his very heart's core; the flash of her jewels, the rustle of her robes, the faint perfume of the priceless lace upon her breast, all these trifling things seemed to pervade the air he breathed with a ghastly chill of terror. He could not tell what he

feared, and the fear was all the greater because so vague and unspeakable. The curtain at last went up, and the opera proceeded ; the grand ‘finale,’ in which there was a magnificent piece of vocalisation for the *prima-donna*, began. Never had the famous ‘Miriami’ sung more superbly ; her voice rang out with luscious fulness, like a peal of golden bells, and in the concluding ‘cadenza’ she executed such a marvellous roulade of upward trills that the audience were fairly taken by surprise, and listened in almost breathless silence. The moment had come, when the heroine of the piece was to turn fiercely on a certain false servant who had betrayed a secret, and slay him with her own hand. This false servant was personated by Perez. Uneasy and nervous he advanced towards the footlights, and sang in a faint husky voice the brief recitative of his part, a recitative implying acknowledgment of guilt and including an appeal for pardon ; but he could scarcely enunciate either words or music, so appalled was he at the terrible look of Miriam’s eyes, as with a slow, stealthy, panther-like movement, she glided towards him across the stage. For he saw his own Spanish dagger glittering in her hand, and what was far worse, he saw vengeance—stern relentless vengeance—written on every line of her features. Fear rendered him speechless ;—rage made Miriam pitiless.

With one fierce bound she was upon him, and in a second had plunged the dagger deep in his heart! The thrust was so firm and well-aimed that he fell without a groan, the blood quickly welling up and soaking through the lace and tinsel of his stage costume;—the audience meanwhile, taking the whole scene as a splendid piece of realistic acting, rose *en masse*, waving their hats and handkerchiefs, and shouting forth thunders of applause. But Miriam stood stiff and inert by the side of the fallen man, her lips rigidly set, her eyes looking blankly away into nothingness; and the manager, seeing something was wrong, hurried anxiously up to her, while the curtain was quickly dropped.

“What is the matter? What has happened?” he exclaimed. “Get up, Manuelos!” Then, seeing the blood trickling on the floor,—“Good God!” And he turned to the silent *prima-donna*: “You have killed him!”

She made no answer. She seemed absorbed in solemn meditation, looking down at her slain victim.

“What a frightful thing! What a horrible accident!” gasped the disconcerted manager: “What is to be done?”

Then Miriam roused herself and spoke.

“It was not an accident,” she said calmly. “It was purposely done. I meant to kill him. He murdered the one I loved best in the world;

and for that dear and honoured life I have taken his. He deserved his fate. It is a just vengeance ! ”

And with a sudden wild gesture, she lifted up her voice and sang in full pure notes of majestic melody, words in a language which the astonished and fear-stricken people about her knew nothing of, but which carried in their very sound a sense of awe.

“ ‘ O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious, and His mercy endureth for ever.

“ ‘ He giveth us the victory over our enemies : for His mercy endureth for ever ! ’ ”

Then all at once her voice broke in an hysterical cry—her unnatural composure gave way, and she seemed to realise more fully the horror of the deed she had done. Turning shudderingly away from the bleeding corpse of Perez, she staggered a few steps, reeled, and fell senseless.

* * * * *

All Paris soon knew the story, and Miriam David, making no attempt to escape from justice, was tried and found guilty of the wilful murder of Josef Perez, her own relative, whom she had recognised under his stage-name of Manuelos. Plenty of proofs were, however, forthcoming, as to his identity with the criminal for whom the French police had long been searching—namely,

the murderer of the old Jew, Reuben David, grandfather of this very Miriam, who as 'Miriami,' had enchanted the whole cultured world. And after examination and consideration of all the circumstances, the French jury found for Miriam, 'extenuating circumstances'; and, while solemnly admonishing her of the enormity of her offence in thus taking the law into her own hand, and severely reprimanding her for the same, wound up the case by a panegyric on her 'superb talent,' and let her go scot-free. And her beautiful face, her beautiful voice, were from henceforth lost to Europe. The 'divine Miriami' was seen no more; it was rumoured that she was dead, and in the hurrying world of fashion and pleasure she was soon forgotten. But there is a certain retreat in Palestine where approved Jewish teachers and professors educate the children of the neighbouring Jewish poor; and among these, there is a mistress of music and singing, a grave, dark, beautiful woman, whose grand voice is the wonder of the place, and whose steadfast gentle ways have a great and lasting influence on the minds of her pupils. She is known as Madame David, and only one or two of her fellow-workers remember that she was once an artistic 'queen of song' and 'star' of opera. She is very patient with idle and refrac-

tory scholars, but also very firm and unyielding in her demands for excellence in music as in all things, and from the other teachers with whom she associates she has won both respect and admiration, not altogether unmingled with fear. Her sombre black eyes, her dark, meditative brows, have a certain imperious grandeur that impresses an observer with a sense of awe; and the few persons who know her history wonder at times whether she ever feels remorse for the murder of Perez. No one can tell; her creed is not Christian. Her sympathies are in tune with the Psalmist who thus appeals against his enemies :

“Let them fall from one wickedness to another, and let them not come into Thy righteousness.

“Let them be wiped out of the book of the living, and not be written among the righteous!”

And on great days of Jewish festival, when the whole school is assembled at solemn prayer, teachers with them, every heart is moved and every soul stirred by the pure sound of a perfect voice that floats through the stillness, singing with the triumph and sweetness of some victorious prophetess of old :

“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious, and His mercy endureth for ever!

“O give thanks unto the God of all gods, for His mercy endureth for ever.

“ ‘Who alone doeth great wonders, for His mercy endureth for ever.

“ ‘Yea, and slew mighty kings, for His mercy endureth for ever.

“ ‘Who remembered us when we were in trouble, for His mercy endureth for ever.

“ ‘And hath delivered us from our enemies, for His mercy endureth for ever !

“ ‘O give thanks unto the God of Heaven, for His mercy endureth for ever ! ’ ”

And it is much to be doubted whether there is any touch of penitence in this exulting song of Miriam. For those who follow the Mosaic Law are not bound to love or to forgive their enemies, and the God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New !

THE SOUL OF THE NEWLY BORN.

A BLACK starless night ; hard with frost and bitter cold. Long after sunset a chill silence had brooded over the dreary stretch of Yorkshire moorland that rolled away to the coast in an unbroken line as far as eye could see, the stillness at times being so intense that it seemed as if the very air were frozen. But as the hours moved on towards midnight a sudden wind arose, and, rushing out of the stormiest quarter of the heavens, gathered strength and fury as it flew. Tearing over the sea, it lashed the waves into mountainous billows ;—leaping over forests it bent tall pines like reeds and snapped sturdy oak-boughs asunder ;—sweeping across the open plains it scattered in its wake showers of stinging hail and whirling snow. Round one old red-brick manor-house that stood on a slightly rising ground, fully exposed to every gale from the sea, it roared and screamed and whistled with the noise of a thousand demons let loose ;—it shook the iron

gates on their rusty hinges ; it tore long sprays of ivy from the wall ; and in the impassive faces of two weather-beaten stone lions on either side of the doorway it cast great snowflakes which clung where they fell, congealed on the projecting eyes and foreheads of these emblematic guardians of the habitation, giving them a more quaint and grimly fabulous aspect than they were wont to wear. The house was amply provided with windows, but nearly all were shuttered closed as though some one were lying dead within, and the angry wind shrieked and battered at them in vain. Only one on the ground-floor showed a pale light for a little while, and even this disappeared at last. The big square building, looming darkly out of the darker night, might have been a prison or a madhouse for aught it looked to the contrary, yet it was known as the frequent abode of one of the wealthiest men in the county, who had purchased it for the singular reason that there was not another human habitation within six miles of it. The people of the nearest town called it 'Elverton's Folly,' for it was generally understood among them that Richard Elverton, the owner, had other objects in view besides that of mere solitude when he chose to reside there for eight months out of every twelve. One was, that there could not well be found a more retired and

convenient place to get dead drunk in without too many tell-tale witnesses ;—another, that it was a first-class dungeon in which to shut up a handsome wife, who, during a certain ‘season’ in London had revenged herself for two long years of wedded wretchedness by numerous and somewhat reckless flirtations with various well-known men.

Three miles off, the sea broke in through straggling rocks upon a rough shingly beach where not even the smallest boat could find safe mooring ; and when a storm was raging, as now, its angry voice could be heard thundering above the loudest wind. To-night the thud and rumble of the waves were appallingly distinct, and, mingling with the furious howling of the blast, made a terrific uproar, which crept gradually and with fierce persistence into the ears of a helpless human creature whose senses were only at that moment awaking to the consciousness of earthly things. Up in one of the largest and dreariest rooms of the ‘Folly’ a child had been born that afternoon,—and it now lay, not in its mother’s arms, but in a small wooden crib, near a fire which, allowed to smoulder by the carelessness of the dozing nurse, emitted more smoke than flame. The infant lay inert, but open-eyed, quiet, and apparently thoughtful. Not itself, but the

SOUL within its tiny frame was awake and wondering. Curiously wistful and vaguely aware of some great loss and mysterious doom, that SOUL looked out of the new-born child's innocent blue eyes and silently asked itself the meaning of the strange things it heard and saw. Darkness and storm!—a fulminating wrath somewhere in the unseen heavens!—and, most marvellous transformation of all, as well as most sorrowful, a complete evanishment of those broad spaces of illimitable light and ever-unfolding beauty in which It had so lately dwelt, safe and serene.

“How has this chanced to me?” mused the imprisoned SOUL, in pain; “Where and how did I lose my consciousness of joy?”

No answer was vouchsafed; no heavenly whisper solved the mystery: the wind shrieked and the rain fell; and, mournfully impressed by an increasing sense of dreariness and desolation, the strayed Immortal peered through its frail mortal casement with a keen anxiety that almost touched despair. At a little distance off, on a bed heaped with soft wrappings and pillows, lay a woman sleeping. Her face was beautiful, worn as it was by illness and exhaustion; her hand, thin and delicate, rested outside the coverlet, and the rings upon her fingers sparkled like so many small stars. Her hair, loosely knotted up, shone above her brows

like finely spun gold, and as she slept, she looked gentle and pitiful ; a creature made to be loved and caressed and sheltered in strong arms, safe from the sorrow and shame of life in a censorious world. Many women look so, and many men are thereby deceived. And the SOUL of the child, gazing yearningly at her, felt a sudden thrill of knowledge mixed with uncertain hope and fear.

“ There,” It said within Itself, “ is one who will love me. She will be called my Mother ! ”

And it trembled through all its delicate and heavenly fibres,—and the tiny human frame in which it was imprisoned instinctively stretched out appealing arms and wailed softly for the comfort of embraces, the tenderness of kisses, the blessedness of welcome. But the sleeping mother did not stir ; and another woman sitting in the further corner of the room rose slowly and came forward at the sound of the infant’s crying. Her coarse ungainly figure loomed like a black mass out of the shadows ;—with ungentle hands she snatched the child up and shook it violently, muttering under her breath, “ Be quiet, you wretched little puling brat, do ! Can’t you let a body sleep ! ” And, rolling it up afresh in its flannel wrappings, she angrily replaced it in its crib, after having rendered it nearly breathless. While she was thus occupied a voice called from the bed,—

“ Nurse ! ”

“ Ma’am ? ”

“ What is the matter ? ”

“ Nothing, Ma’am.”

“ Did the child cry ? ”

“ Yes, Ma’am. It’s a bit fretful,—will you have it with you for a little ? ”

The mother gave a shuddering movement of repulsion, and hid her face in her pillow.

“ No, no ! ” she moaned—“ I cannot ! ”

The nurse shrugged her shoulders in apparent contempt. Poking the dull fire into a brief blaze, she poured something out from a bottle that stood on the mantelpiece, and drank it off ; then setting her arms akimbo she looked round at her patient.

“ Don’t take on so, Missis Elverton,” she said fawningly—“ These things can’t be helped sometimes. It ain’t the baby’s fault you know ! Maybe it would comfort you to have it a while ; poor little thing, I daresay it feels lonesome ? ”

Mrs. Elverton raised her head,—her cheeks were flushed, and a cruel line hardened her mouth.

“ I wish it were dead ! ” she exclaimed passionately.

The nurse smiled a wicked smile, but said nothing. She poked the fire again, and again bent over the newly-born child. To all appearances it slept. Satisfied, the nurse resumed her

position in an armchair placed well out of all possibility of draughts, and, drawing a thick shawl about her shoulders, settled herself for a doze, unconscious, or pretending to be unconscious, of the fact that the patient had buried her face again in her pillows and was sobbing bitterly.

The storm howled on incessantly outside, and the clamour of the sea on the beach grew louder as the night wore on. And presently the eyes of the child opened again in the semi-gloom, and once more through their translucent windows the fluttering and perplexed SOUL peered forth into the unknown realm into which it had so strangely and involuntarily wandered. It turned its ethereal regard towards the figure on the bed,—it listened to the dreary and smothered sound of weeping,—it palpitated with pity, wonder and fear. But the words “I wish it were dead!” had pierced to the very centres of its being, and though they were to it, in a manner, inexplicable, because Death was a thing unknown, it felt a sense of banishment and loss that was colder than the night and fiercer than the storm. Nay, the very wrath of the warring elements was more familiar and friendly to its immortal nature than the unalluring proximity of its two human companions. With a quivering desire for escape thrilling through its fine essence the SOUL trembled violently within the little frame

in which it was pent up ;—such a tiny, feeble, yet beautiful and perfect organism, moved by light breathings and delicate nerve-throbbings, though as yet scarcely aware of life. Half compassionate, half pained, and wholly perplexed, the imprisoned Immortal, finding its struggles of no avail, presently became touched by a vague anxiety for the safety of its weak habitation, and ceased for the moment to rebel or complain. Withdrawing its gaze from outer things, it rested passive. And, rendered suddenly tranquil, the new-born infant slept.

With the morning the wind ceased, and a dull grey day set in, accompanied by heavy rain. The nurse awoke, and, yawning wearily, re-lit the fire which had gone out,—a servant came with breakfast for both nurse and patient. This servant was a girl of about seventeen or thereabouts, with a broad good-humoured face and lively manners.

“Well, how’s the baby?” she asked.

“As right as babies usually are at such a time of life,” responded the nurse crossly—“The less they’re wanted, the more they thrive.”

“And how’s she?” went on the servant, nodding towards the bed.

“Doing nicely. Is Mr. Elverton downstairs yet?”

“No.”

“Well, you tell him his baby’s a girl, and

that I'll bring it to him as soon as I've had my breakfast."

"Ah! you'll find him very queer;"—and the maid shook her head mysteriously. "He went on something awful last night!"

"Last night isn't this morning," said the nurse sententiously. "Muddlehead or no muddlehead, he's got to see his baby whether he likes it or not. Otherwise he'd be quite capable of saying it's some one else's."

And she smiled knowingly. The smile was reflected curiously on the young servant's face as she withdrew.

"Now, ma'am,—now, Missis Elverton," proceeded the nurse, approaching the bedside,—
"Here's your tea. Lord's sake! if you haven't been crying! You ought to know better than that. You'll get the fever if you don't learn to control yourself."

"What does that matter!"—and Mrs. Elverton moved restlessly. "I wish with all my heart I *could* die, and there would be an end of it. Oh, nurse! Do you think he will ever know? Do you think he will guess?"

The nurse, whose name was Collins, busied herself in cutting a slice of toast into strips before replying. Then she looked up with a dull sarcasm expressed in her hard eyes.

“Men are blind as bats when they’re sober,” she said. “And when they’re drunk they’re blinder still. I don’t suppose you’ve any cause for alarm, if you keep quiet. But you’re not a very clever woman, if you’ll excuse the liberty I take in saying so,—I’ve known a’many cleverer. And if the child should grow at all like its father, of course unpleasant things might be said——”

Mrs. Elverton pushed away her untasted tea, with a gesture of irritation.

“He can prove nothing,” she murmured. “There are no letters,—nobody can say anything except”—here her wild eyes turned appealingly on her attendant—“except,—*you* !”

Nurse Collins smiled coldly.

“I shall say nothing, you may be sure, ma’am,” she replied. “It’s none of my business. I know too many ladies’ secrets to mind another being added to the list. Besides, I get all my income out of knowing how to hold my tongue. Don’t you think you’d better look at the child ?”

“No !” said Mrs. Elverton vehemently—“I tell you I hate it ! I feel that it will be my curse !”

The nurse looked slightly contemptuous at this outburst, and, without replying, turned to the discussion of her own breakfast. After she had made a thoroughly substantial meal, and not before, she moved leisurely over to the baby’s

crib and sat down beside it, studying intently the features of the helpless little creature within. Its eyes were fully open, and regarded her with such a weird pathos, that, as she said to herself, it "worried her." In fact, after a little time she could not refrain from uttering her thoughts aloud.

"Upon my word, Missis Elverton," she said, with an involuntary low laugh as she spoke—"There's one thing quite positive about this child—it's got its father's eyes!"

Mrs. Elverton with an effort raised herself in bed, uttering a frightened exclamation.

"Its father's eyes!" she echoed, and her thin hands clutched the coverlet nervously.

"The very images of them!" went on Nurse Collins, evidently gloating over her discovery. "They're rather remarkable eyes you know, ma'am; you don't often see their like in a man's head. Very blue, and with black centres—for all the world like cornflowers,—and here this blessed baby has them as plain as plain can be!"

With a sort of shuddering half-sob, Mrs. Elverton sank back and covered her face, as though she strove to hide herself from the very light of day. The nurse noticed her action with more disdain than compassion.

"What cowards these fine ladies are to be sure!" she considered. "With a drunken brute

for a husband, I would tell any number of lies without turning a hair, or fretting my conscience about it either. Come here, you poor little mite,—I must do my duty by you as far as I can.”

And lifting the infant in her arms, she wrapped a thick white shawl about it many times, and prepared to leave the room.

“Where are you going, nurse?” Mrs. Elverton asked, in faint alarmed accents.

“Downstairs, ma’am. It’s best to take the bull by the horns at once. I’m sure Mr. Elverton will want to see his baby!”—and she laughed somewhat derisively. “You trust me, ma’am,—I’ll manage. Try and drink your tea while I’m gone.”

She closed the door of the room noiselessly behind her, and began to descend a broad, thickly-carpeted stair. The rain beat against the hall windows with a pattering, dreary noise, and the SOUL of the child, passively looking out on all that surrounded it, became again conscious of pain and discomfiture. Again it asked itself the reason of its strange imprisonment, its bound and tortured state. Why, in this hollow of space and time into which it had unwittingly flown like a stray moth at nightfall, was there so little light and liberty, so much close darkness and bitter thrall? No solution was as yet vouchsafed of the intricate and agonising mystery!

And now the nurse, carefully hushing her frail charge, crossed the threshold of a large and well-furnished apartment, where the blaze from a bright fire cast a cheerful glow over a table that glittered with silver and china and all the appurtenances of wealth amounting to extravagance. Here, in a deep armchair, with his slippered feet on the fender, and his bloated figure wrapped in a costly fur-lined dressing-gown, sat a repulsive-looking man of about forty-five or fifty, reading the morning's newspaper.

"Who's that?" he shouted impatiently, springing to his feet as the nurse entered. She curtsied respectfully.

"It's Nurse Collins, if you please, sir," she said in meek accents, curtseying again with a fawning leer on her dull commonplace features. "You'll be glad to hear, sir, that your dear lady's doing very well indeed; and here is the sweet baby, sir—a fine little girl ——"

He stopped her with a fierce gesture and still fiercer oath. His coarse face, swollen with excess of drink, grew purple with fury,—his eyes, protruding from his head, shone luridly with the glare of madness and wickedness. Trembling from head to foot, he advanced a step or two, dashing the newspaper behind him.

"Damn you!" he said—"And damn the

woman upstairs too ! How dare you bring that brat to me ? Take it out of my sight ! Smother it,—drown it!—go to hell with it ! What are you standing there for ? ”—and he almost foamed at the mouth in the extremity of his delirious rage. “Go, if you want to keep a whole skin ! And take that cursed *bastard* with you ! ”

The face of the nurse turned a sickly white ; but she still made an effort to hold her ground.

“Lord, Mr. Elverton, sir ! Won’t you even look at the poor little dear ? And begging your pardon, sir, it’s the very image of yourself, sir, say what you like,—and I’m sure you don’t know your own mind, sir, this morning, if I may make so bold,—and the poor baby hasn’t done you no harm ——”

He made a wild bound towards her with raised arm and clenched fist.

“Go to the devil ! ” he yelled. “Must I speak twice ? ”—and he panted heavily for breath. “By God, I’ll break every bone in your body if you stay here another instant ! ”

Thoroughly startled now, the nurse fell back from the murderous-looking figure that threatened her, and made a slinking and frightened exit, endeavouring, as she went, to soothe and quiet the infant, for it had broken out into a desolate and helpless wailing, and its tiny face was wet with

tears. A speechless misery was expressed in its wide-open eyes ;—the misery of the captive SOUL within. Memory and woeful consciousness were pouring rapidly in upon that ethereal Intelligence,—it knew, it felt the frightful hopelessness of wilful sin born and bred in the children of humanity,—it realised with sudden horror that this world was but an outer phase of some deeper and more inextricable form of banishment from its Creator,—and with all the fervour of its immortal strength it silently protested, prayed and strove to rend its narrow prison. But in vain ; for its time was not yet.

Half-way up the stairs, the nurse met a housemaid coming down.

“ Well ? ” said the girl tentatively.

“ He’s a beast ! ” returned the nurse emphatically. “ He’s as drunk this morning as he was last night.”

“ Why, of course ! ”—and the maid looked surprised that any one should imagine that her master could ever be otherwise than in a drunken condition. “ When they’re took that way it lasts them a long time. I’ve been here six weeks and I’ve never seen him really sober. It’s what the doctors call *delirium tremens*. I’d leave him to it if I were her.” And she jerked her head in the direction of her mistress’s bedroom.

“ Ah ! But if you had no money of your own,

what would you do?" inquired Nurse Collins scornfully. "You wouldn't care to beg your bread in the streets I daresay! She hasn't got a penny to bless herself with; how can she leave him?"

"She could get a divorce, couldn't she?" suggested the housemaid.

"Could she?"—and the nurse smiled a covert smile. "Well, I don't know about that. Divorce is a nasty business; no end of disagreeable questions are asked which are not always convenient to answer."

And she went on her way murmuring "Sh,—sh!" to the still wailing baby. She found Mrs. Elverton fast asleep, so she set about ministering to the poor infant's wants as well as she could, being a woman of rough manners and rougher touch. But the tiny mortal gave her no trouble. It ceased crying directly it was brought into its mother's room, and now lay on her lap passively, without moving its large blue eyes from the weirdly contemplative study of her face. Even when she put it back in its crib it still gazed at her in the same patient, wondering, pained way, much as a trapped animal might look at its captor.

"I never in all my life saw such a child!" she grumbled to herself in some perplexity—"Staring away for all the world as if it knew all about

itself and its parents too ! It doesn't sleep half enough either ; it's an unnatural sort of baby somehow. Perhaps it's just as well Mr. Elverton didn't see those big eyes ; drunk as he is from morning to night, he might have——”

“ Nurse ! ” Mrs. Elverton had awakened suddenly with a nervous start, and was trying to lift herself up in bed—“ Did you take the child to him ? ”

“ Yes, I did, ma'am.”

“ What did he say ? ”

Nurse Collins hesitated a moment.

“ Well, he's very bad this morning ; I don't think he quite knows what he says, so it isn't any use telling you——”

“ Ah ! ” Mrs. Elverton closed her eyes and heaved a deep sigh—“ I can guess.”

“ He wouldn't look at it,” went on the nurse. “ But I shouldn't worry about that if I were in your place.”

“ Worry ! ” echoed Mrs. Elverton, opening her eyes that were suddenly ablaze with scorn ; “ Worry about *him* ? I never give him a moment's thought if I can help it. He has made my life a perfect misery to me ever since we were married. Do you know what he did when my first child was born,—*his own child* ? ”—and she emphasised these words with a dreadful intensity

of meaning—"He came into my room, deliriously drunk, dragged the baby out of bed and flung it on the ground naked. There it lay for an hour, while he stamped about, raving and swearing. He had locked the door so that no one should come in, and I was afraid to ring my bell and give the alarm lest he should kill me. When at last he went away and the servants came, I was almost mad with terror; and the child, happily for itself, died three days afterwards. And you tell me not to 'worry' for such a brute as that!"

Nurse Collins had taken a chair by the bedside and was busied with some sewing.

"Well, ma'am, you've a deal to suffer and that's a fact," she said—"But you're not the only one by a long way. The drink is a curse to many gentlemen as well as to the 'poorer classes' about which the newspapers are always a-talking. And if so be it's true as I've heard say, that you married Mr. Elverton for his money, there's what you've got for it. It often happens to ladies who are on the look-out for wealth and a good position, that they get men like that, and men, too, who don't and won't give them any money to spend either. I often think myself that the old-fashioned way of marrying for love was best. Folks might have hard times, and no doubt they had, and they might have to work hard too, which

is a healthy thing in itself,—but I daresay they led happier lives and kept themselves a deal honester and cleaner.”

Mrs. Elverton’s face flushed ; and turning her head away she said no more.

All day the rain was incessant. Towards three o’clock in the afternoon there was a crunching of quick wheels on the roughly kept carriage-drive of the ‘ Folly,’ and Nurse Collins, looking out of the window, saw Mr. Elverton getting into his dog-cart, evidently bent on a journey. His groom put in a small portmanteau and several wraps, and then assisted his master (who was decidedly unsteady on his legs) to mount the seat. The light vehicle was drawn by a spirited mare who at the first touch of the whip started down the drive at a brisk canter which was almost a gallop ; the groom swung himself up behind,—the iron gates opened, and in two or three minutes the whole equipage had disappeared among the mists of drifting rain. Finding her patient dozing, the nurse slipped out of the room, and leaning over the upper banisters called softly to a servant whom she heard moving to and fro below.

“Where has the master gone?”

“Into the town to dine and sleep,” replied the girl, looking up at her. “Isn’t it a mercy ! We shall have a quiet night of it

for once. Peters, the groom, has gone with him."

Nurse Collins returned to her post, and as soon as the invalid awoke, told her of her husband's sudden departure. A great relief and joy brightened Mrs. Elverton's face, and gave it back all its own original beauty,—rousing herself, she sat up in bed, and readily partook of some nourishing broth which her attendant prepared for her; and then, with her own hands, she undid and re-twisted her beautiful hair, asking for a mirror, that she might see for herself how many flaws her sufferings had made in the delicate perfection of her charms.

"Oh, what ugly lines!" she said playfully, marking with her small forefinger the hollows of pain beneath her eyes—"But they will go away soon, won't they, nurse? They will not stay there as if I were old,—I am only six-and-twenty. My eyes are wonderfully bright, aren't they? You don't think it is fever, do you? Oh, no! They were always bright;—and I really think—yes, I really do think the lashes have grown longer since I was ill. I like long lashes; I know some women who would give anything in the world to have them as long as mine."

She laughed with conscious vanity,—then she ran one hand through her hair and raised it

slightly on one side so that the gold colour rippled and shone like a stray gleam of sunlight where it waved back from the brow. Surveying herself with meditative admiration for some minutes, she sighed as she laid down the mirror.

“Now,—you may bring me the child,” she said suddenly.

The nurse obeyed, and placed the little creature in her arms. As she met the upward look of its solemn, sad blue eyes, she trembled through and through ; the pitiful, beseeching, wistful gaze had something in it that appalled and shamed her. She had nothing of the spiritual in her nature,—she could not know or dream that it was an angelic Being that so reproachfully regarded her,—a bright thing strayed from Heaven, and yearning to return thither. For now the SOUL was fully conscious of its exile and its grief,—it realised that every day of its imprisonment in its earthly habitation would but add to its abasement and despair. Undesired, unloved, and bitterly lonely its existence would be,—sin and fraud and shame accompanying it in all the different phases of its life-experience. And no tenderness was now expressed in the infant’s clear orbs of vision as they reflected the unloving mother’s face,—only distrust and pain.

Mrs. Elverton surveyed it, noting every small

feature of the tiny visage with cold unsympathetic intentness.

“What a pity it was ever born!” she said. “Born dead it would not have mattered,—but a living child, and a girl, too!—what chance will it ever have in such a world as this! It is a most unfortunate affair;—a more unwished-for baby never breathed!”

Knitting her brows in a vexed frown, she signed to the nurse to take it away, and, when it was replaced in its crib, lay back on her pillows, not in sleep but in thought.

Slowly the afternoon wore on, and once more the night descended. The storm had now entirely ceased, though a light wind still blew in from the sea-coast, moaning softly at the cracks of the windows and doors, as though in penitence for its past fury. Stars came dimly out in the faintly clouded heavens, and the waves could be heard on the distant beach, coming in with a long solemn organ-roll of sound, very different to the wild crashing and upheaving they had made among the rocks a few hours before. Between eight and nine o'clock a tall man, wrapped close in a dark-hooded ulster, arrived at ‘Elverton’s Folly,’ and, with a few words uttered in a low tone, and a couple of sovereigns slipped into the hand of the servant who opened the door, was instantly

admitted. Once inside the hall, he asked to see Nurse Collins. Summoned, she came immediately, and held up her hands in amazement as she recognised her visitor.

"Lord, it's never you, Sir Godfrey!" she exclaimed—"What a turn you've given me to be sure! And the daring of it! Why couldn't you wait till I wrote as I'd promised! Suppose Mr. Elverton had been here?"

"I should have throttled him I daresay," was the cool reply, and the speaker, Sir Godfrey Lawrence, unfastened his coat and threw it aside, showing himself to be a distinctly handsome man of about two- or three-and-thirty—"I've been haunting this confoundedly dull neighbourhood for a week and more, and to-day by good luck I met him driving recklessly towards the town, drunk as usual, and whipping that unfortunate mare of his almost to madness. The groom was holding on to the trap behind with both hands in sheer desperation, lest he should be flung off into the road and left there. Neither master nor man saw me. But I guessed they would be absent for a few hours at any rate, so I walked on here as fast as the mud would let me. I have been nearly out of my mind with suspense;—how is she?"

"Weak enough, but doing well," replied the

nurse, eyeing him curiously as she spoke—"I make no doubt you've been anxious."

"Anxious! Good God!"—and he strode up and down agitatedly—"I have seen her in my dreams, lying stiff in her coffin, poor little soul!—I have felt myself to be worse than a murderer,—if you call that being anxious! Is she out of all danger?"

"One can never quite say that," returned Nurse Collins sedately—"Not so soon. You see, the baby was only born yesterday afternoon between five and six o'clock."

Sir Godfrey turned white, then red, and bit his lips hard.

"Dead, I hope?" he said in a harsh whisper.

The nurse looked him full in the eyes.

"No, Sir Godfrey. Living."

He made a swift step towards her.

"Why didn't you smother it? You could have done so, and no one would have been any the wiser!"

Nurse Collins smiled coldly.

"Thank you, sir, but I have a conscience, little as you seem to think it. I would rather not commit murder, if you will excuse me, Sir Godfrey,—I could not do it, even to oblige you; it would be against my principles."

"Damn your principles!" he muttered under his breath, and again he strode up and down.

“Can I see her?” he demanded suddenly, stopping abruptly.

“Well, I should think you might,” the nurse replied meditatively,—“I fancy perhaps it would rouse her a bit. She is certainly nervous and fretful. You might perhaps set her mind more at ease. But I must prepare her first. And you can see the baby too!” she added, with an unkind smile, as she left the room.

Sir Godfrey frowned, but said nothing, and during the few minutes he was kept waiting paced up and down in chafing discontent, remorse, and misery. He was a notoriously ‘fast’ man, very popular among the ‘Upper Ten,’ and he had more time and money on his hands than he knew what to do with. As a natural result of idleness and wealth combined, he was always more or less in what he called a ‘hobble,’ and the ‘hobble’ generally had a woman in the centre of it. But he was not wholly bad; and the latent manliness in him made him heartily ashamed of himself at the present moment. His so-called ‘flirtation’ with pretty Mrs. Elverton, begun lightly, had deepened into a dangerous passion and had gone too far; “much too far,” he told himself with a smarting conscience. Yet, after all, how could he help it? he queried. He was but a man,—and she,—she was so winsome and

lovely and trustful, and so ill-treated by her drunken brute of a husband, that surely it was no wonder that——

Here his unhappy musings were interrupted by the return of Nurse Collins.

“You can come upstairs, Sir Godfrey. She is quite ready to see you.”

Treading softly on tiptoe, and trembling with a nervousness quite unusual to him, the baronet, whose marked attentions to another man’s wife had provided society with scandal for a considerable period, followed his guide into the room where lay the woman he loved with all that brief madness that only comes once in a lifetime, leaving disaster and ruin in its train. She had turned round on her pillows to catch the first glimpse of him as he entered; her eyes were brilliant with joy, and she stretched out her arms to him as he approached.

“Oh, Godfrey! How good—how brave of you to come!”

“Violet! my darling!” he murmured tremulously; and drawing her tenderly to his breast, he held her there while she wept softly from sheer weakness and delight combined. Nurse Collins turned away, and bent over the crib where the lonely infant quietly reposed. It was strangely passive,—it neither moved nor cried, and when the

nurse came near it, it was not startled from its weirdly tranquil condition. Its eyes were fixed with singular tenacity on certain shadows thrown by the firelight upon the opposite wall,—the shadows of two guilty creatures, its mother and her lover, locked in each other's arms.

After about half an hour's whispered conversation, Sir Godfrey turned from the bedside, still holding one of Violet Elverton's hands within his own, and said in an anxious voice,—

"She is very weak, nurse. For God's sake take care of her!"

"I shall do my best, sir," responded Nurse Collins, somewhat frigidly.—"Will you look at the child?"

The baronet started violently, and dropped the hand he held. Mrs. Elverton grew deadly pale, and her beautiful eyes searched his face alarmedly.

"Oh, Godfrey!" she whispered with a half sob; "If it had only died!——"

"Ah! if it had!" he answered under his breath. "As it is, it must live on a lie,—it must be the unconscious witness of——" He flushed a shamed red. "Violet,—it is a bad beginning!"

She made no reply, but only clung to him. Gently disengaging himself he laid her back on her pillows, and, rising from his place at the bedside, advanced somewhat unsteadily.

“Where is it?” he asked in hoarse accents.

The nurse silently pointed to the crib. Approaching almost timidly, he bent down lower and lower, gazing in vague wonder not unmixed with fear at the small creature he beheld—so frail and feeble a morsel of humanity, so infinitely touching in its helplessness and innocence. Presently, sinking on one knee, he lightly brushed the infant’s soft little face with his lips. Its earnest eyes, the angel copies of his own, looked up at him so sorrowfully, so appealingly, that he was moved to a greater remorse and shame than he had thought possible to his nature.

“Poor little child” he murmured—“Poor little sinless child of sin!”

And with the words a new and keener comprehension of its unhappy fate swept like a sudden flare of lightning over the suffering SOUL, pent up in flesh even as a prisoner behind close dungeon bars. ‘*A child of sin!*’ Yes; and therefore doomed by mystic and eternal laws to bear the burden of sin, which meant to an immortal Spirit the utter deprivation of all its highest privileges for all that bitterest phase of troublous striving known as human life. Ah, what strange passion was that which leaped into the child’s eyes then?—what dread and horror was it that held its erring father motionless, gazing into those

eyes as though he read in them reproach and doom?

“God forgive me!” he whispered, laying his trembling hand on the tiny head—“God forgive me that I wish you were dead, my poor little one! Nothing but sorrow awaits you,—nothing but a fraud practised on your innocence all through your days; and who knows if the time may not come when both I and your mother will loathe the sight of you as the visible if unconscious witness of our sin! Poor child!—how much kinder would death be to you than life!”

A few hot tears dropped on the infant’s curled-up hand,—then, ashamed of his weakness, he again kissed the soft cheek, and rose, pale to the lips, and with a tremor running through his stalwart frame.

“It is a pretty little thing,” he said briefly to the nurse, at the same time laying a crisp ten-pound Bank of England note on the table; then, knitting his brows sternly, he added in a low tone, “You must keep your own counsel.”

Nurse Collins curtsied as she took the note and pocketed it.

“You may rely upon me, Sir Godfrey,” she replied. “But of course you know Mr. Elverton has his suspicions.”

“A drunkard’s suspicions are worthless,” he

said.—“The child is born in wedlock, and he can prove nothing. All you have to do is to hold your tongue. And don't let Mrs. Elverton worry herself ;—there is no cause for fear.”

And he moved gently again to the bedside, taking his love's pale hands in his own and kissing them tenderly.

“Where are you going now, Godfrey ?” she asked plaintively.

“I am staying at the inn on the coast,” he replied.—“You know it,—about seven miles from here. It is a fine night, and I shall walk. Don't be in the least anxious, Violet ;—sleep and get well quickly ; remember, there is no danger.”

He said these last words slowly and with emphasis.

“Have you looked at it ?” she whispered.

“The child ? Yes.”

“It's eyes——”

Sir Godfrey kissed her quivering lips.

“I know. They are tell-tales ; but do not alarm yourself needlessly now. Try not to think. Rest, and have confidence that all will go well. Nurse Collins is faithful.”

At that moment the nurse approached him.

“I think you had better be going, sir,” she said respectfully.—“I expect the doctor about eleven.”

Sir Godfrey at once accepted the warning, and, with a hurried yet tender farewell, left the room quickly, without again turning his head towards the shadowed corner where lay his love-abandoned child. Outside the door he shook hands with the nurse.

"I'm sure you will do all you can for her," he said with great earnestness.—"You know very well her husband doesn't care;—but *I* care,—and if she had died——"

"You would have soon forgotten her, sir," remarked Nurse Collins composedly—"And found another lady. It is the way with most gentlemen of your standing."

He gave her an angry glance, vexed at the coolness with which she thus estimated his character; then remembering she held his guilty secret in her hands, he forced a careless laugh.

"You think so?" he said lightly. "Perfectly natural on your part, I daresay. But you do not understand what real love is. Good-night."

And in another moment or two he had left the house.

The nurse stood for a little while on the landing from whence she had watched him disappear, thinking her own thoughts half aloud.

"Real love!" she muttered. "Ah! poor

folks have their ideas about that as well as rich. What *I* call real love is very different to what your fine gentlemen of fashion calls it. To love a woman well enough to save her from any suspicion of slander is real love if you like ; not to go dangling after her everywhere, and making people talk about her till she hasn't got a shred of reputation left. *Real* love, indeed ! ”

Yet, with all her seeming-honest notions, she found a peculiar satisfaction in fingering Sir Godfrey's crisp bank-note in her pocket, and she foresaw plenty of future opportunities for getting money out of him when matters required to be ' hushed up ' or otherwise smoothed over. Therefore she was in a very contented frame of mind with herself and things in general when she re-entered her patient's room. Finding that Mrs. Elverton had fallen peacefully asleep and that the infant in its crib was apparently sleeping too, she softly stirred the fire and sat comfortably down beside it to await the arrival of the doctor, and also to concoct a plan by which Sir Godfrey Lawrence's visit to the house during Mr. Elverton's absence should be kept a secret by the other servants as well as herself.

Meanwhile, the SOUL of the newly-born was struggling rebelliously in its narrow prison, resolved to make a desperate fight for liberty ; and up to

the throne of Eternal Love its complaint piteously ascended.

“Not in this world, O divine Creator,—not in this world let me suffer! Not here shall be found the fires which purify,—not here, where Falsehood is given the dominion over Truth! Surely, O righteous Father, in this dark corner of Thy Universe Thy creatures have forgotten Thee,—and for this cause cometh all their sin! Condemn me not, O Thou supreme Mercy, to share their dreadful banishment!—for behold, I do not forget,—Thou and Thou only art my memory and my joy! If for some flaw in my nature I must needs pass a time of exile and severance from Thee, plunge me if Thou wilt into an abyss of fiery torture, provided such torture have Truth in its centre, rather than surround me by the infinitely worse and inextricable agony of Lies which blaspheme Thy majesty and mock Thy Holy Name! Dread God, in darkest Hell they know Thee, fear Thee, and recognise Thy justice!—but on this earth it seems they know Thee not,—they doubt Thy manifest existence, and are but evil shadows of an evil time. Make me not as one of these, Father Divine!—pity me, pardon me, release me, O Thou All-Powerful! Elsewhere let me find the cleansing flames;—but not here,—not in this doomed and

desolate world, where even Thy Light is made Darkness ! ”

So prayed the prisoned SOUL, in silent musings that were in Heaven clear utterances, distinctly heard. And presently the longed-for Answer came,—an answer swift, sweet and penetrative, that filled the aerial essence of the suffering Immortal with a joy exceeding the limits even of angelic speech. Slowly expanding its hidden fibres and gathering all its winged force, the undying creature pressed towards its granted liberty. The body of the infant quivered convulsively in the throes of the impatient Spirit's eager struggles,—and once it gave a feeble cry. The nurse, however, more than half asleep, and absorbed in her own thoughts, did not hear, and the piteous sound was not repeated. Silence and peace reigned in the room, till, at the appointed hour, a quick tread upon the stairs announced the doctor, and Nurse Collins rose to receive him. He was a big, burly, good-humoured man, and entered, smiling pleasantly.

“ Well, nurse ? How are we all ? ” he inquired in cheery accents. “ Ah, Mrs. Elverton ! ” This, as his patient turned on her pillows, awake and bright-eyed—“ You are looking almost yourself again ! And your husband's away I hear ? Ah ! well, perhaps it's a good thing. You must be

kept quiet ; no worry and no excitement. Your pulse is excellent,—if you go on as well as this, you'll be about again in a couple of week's time. And how's the baby ? ”

As he spoke, he advanced, large, genial, and still smiling, towards the crib.

“It's been asleep some time, sir,” said Nurse Collins, uncomfortably conscious that she had not looked at it for at least three-quarters of an hour. “It's a quiet little thing, though, when it's awake—almost too quiet I fancy.”

“Well, well, there's no harm in its being quiet,” said the doctor amiably. “Just let me see——”

He touched the infant's forehead, gave a slight start, and bent down his ear to listen.

“Good Heavens !” he exclaimed, aghast.—“Nurse ! This child is dead !”

With a shock of alarm the nurse sprang to his side, incredulous. He lifted the little body up in his arms ; it was yet warm. The small face was very white and chill,—a pretty pathetic smile rested on the tiny mouth. The doctor made his examination tenderly, and shook his head.

“Some sudden convulsion, with contraction of the heart,” he said. “Life has been extinct quite twenty minutes.” And with kindly pity he laid the dead baby back in its crib, carefully composing

its fragile limbs. "Break it to the mother gently."

But Mrs. Elverton had heard ; and, burying her head in her pillows, was sobbing hysterically. Not in sorrow, but in joy !—joy, and such exquisite relief as she had never dared to hope for. Weeping in apparent despair, she murmured over and over again amid her tears,—

"Thank God ! Oh, thank God !"

And up through the star-strewn spaces of the night, a radiant Angel, released from brief bondage, soared higher and ever higher, like a bird, to the glory of the sun ; the SOUL of the newly-born returned to Him who made it ; and its happy Voice, echoing far into the centres of Eternal Light, sang again and again till the song was caught up in a triumphant chorus by hosts of its heavenly companions,—

"Thank God for escape from the World and its Darkness ! OH, THANK GOD !"

THE END.

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