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ST. OLAVE'S.

A Novel.

"Live for to-day! to-morrow's light
To-morrow's cares shall bring to sight,
Go, sleep like closing flowers at night,
And Heaven thy morn will bless."

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ST. OLAVE'S.

CHAPTER I.

"BROTHER!"

No reply.

"Brother Davie."

Still no reply.

Janet Bruce looked at the clock over the mantel-piece, and then went on with her knitting, a quaint, half-amused expression creeping into her face.

A quiet face it was, out of which all that the world calls joy had long ago been quenched, and upon which there rested the benediction that comes when joy has gone—even peace.

A face where passionate feeling, either of grief or gladness, would never come again. You might tell by a single glance that the soul which looked through those still eyes had passed the worst that could be passed of human sorrow—and conquered too. It was a face which expressed nothing now but a certain grave, sweet seriousness, whose very smile was full of calm, and as for laughing—but who ever saw Janet Bruce laugh?

The rest of the figure was an exact match to the face; neat—exquisitely neat, but lacking all those graces and innocent little shifts of vanity wherewith happy women love to deck themselves. There was no attempt at style about the grey Llama dress, falling in soft motionless folds to the floor; nothing piquant and "natty" in the white linen collar with its simple bow of tartan ribbon. No one could say that more than needful time had been spent in the arrangement of the black hair—crisp and glossy yet—which was gathered loosely from the forehead and fastened behind under a knot of velvet. You looked in vain, too, for jewels, in the shape of pin, brooch, or stud; anything that sparkled would clearly enough have been out of place on that sombre, grey-like background.

Miss Bruce was matter of fact,—intensely matter of fact; that was the very expression to designate her outer life in all its phases and manifestations. Of the inner one, no sign was ever given. The springiness and romance of life suddenly wrenched away from her, she buried their memory once and for ever in a grave that no resurrection could open. Instead of weeping over the past, as most do, she turned resolutely away from it, gathered up the countless little cares and duties still remaining, and out of these wove the rest of her life, making it, if not beautiful, at least useful and serviceable. Putting away as something no longer needed, all hope or longing, she did the best she could to walk worthily in the track placed before her, which was that of a quiet maiden lady.

There are many Janet Bruces in the world; God bless them wherever they may be! Jostled, smiled at, ridiculed, ignored, forgotten,—God bless them still! For there is nothing so noble,—nothing half so noble—as that a woman who has been what society calls "disappointed," should thus unselfishly shut down the memory of early grief, and take the weal of others to be henceforth her care; day by day, unacknowledged and unthanked, dropping kindly deeds and pleasant words into a world where for her there is no home, no fireside place; where none calls her dearest, none calls her best. We shall find one day that no martyr's crown is brighter than that which Jesus will give to these patient ones of whom on earth we took so little heed.

Miss Bruce was sitting in the low, old-fashioned window seat, knitting a dainty little white sock, her chief employment when she was not mending the household linen, or going leisurely about her daily domestic duties. What might be the destination of these useful articles, as pair after pair was narrowed off and completed, no one could tell, save perhaps some needy mother in the Tract district. For Miss Bruce had no nieces and nephews, no baby cousins and godchildren among whom to distribute them. Her only relative in all the wide world was this brother Davie, who sat at the table half smothered in a pile of manuscript music, and murmuring to himself in an under tone—

"The chord of the dominant seventh to be changed into the chord of the extreme sharp sixth, by changing dominant F into E sharp, so bringing the melody into F sharp major. Alto voice to commence."

Miss Bruce looked up at the timepiece again, then out into the garden, where the sunlight had already begun to make long slanting shadows upon the grass. Then she put down her knitting, and laid her hand gently upon her brother's shoulder.

Don't fancy, courteous reader, that she is going to say anything remarkable to him. Miss Bruce never said anything remarkable in her life.

"Davie, it's half-past six, and Miss Grey will be here to tea at seven. You really must go and change your coat, and put another collar on."

David shook himself, and pushed aside a quantity of tangled grey hair, thereby bringing to view a steady, set, "no surrender" sort of face. He began to consider his coat, a loose study wrap, already betraying symptoms of seediness at the elbows; certainly not the style of costume in which to receive a stranger, especially if that stranger chanced to be a young lady of graceful presence and aristocratic connections.

"Who did you say was coming, Jeanie?"

"Alice Grey, the niece of that old lady, Mistress Amiel Grey, who lives in the Cathedral Close."

"You mean that pleasant old lady who asked

you to tea a month ago; the same who comes to morning prayers sometimes, and has a face just like one of Mozart's Masses."

Miss Bruce looked puzzled. Not being given to the use of figurative language herself, she was at a loss to comprehend it from others.

"I don't know about Mrs. Amiel Grey's face looking like a Mass, Davie; but it is a very kind face, and she always wears a clear-starched widow's cap, with a plaited frill coming down under the chin, like that picture of our grandmother."

David and Janet turned involuntarily to the portrait of an old lady which hung over the piano. The clear chiselling of the face, together with the finely moulded hands and taper fingers, indicated high descent and noble blood. He looked at it until an unquiet expression came into his rugged face; but after a single glance Miss Bruce returned to the subject in hand.

"That old black tie of yours, Davie, I should like you to change it too. I have no doubt, as you say, it's gey comfortable, but it really doesn't do to receive company in. You'll find a new one that I bought you last week in your dressing-table drawer,—black corded silk with violet spots. And mind how you tie it, Davie, for you haven't had it on before; and if they get a wrong set the first time you can never make them look nice afterwards. And about the collar, don't get one of those marked 'Napoleon.' They're just a thought too wide for you, and don't fit exactly behind. I must have them sorted."

Miss Bruce gave all these directions with the same quiet, earnest gravity which she would have used in dictating her will, or giving evidence in a court of justice. There were not many points of interest in her life now, and one of them was that her brother should be well cared for in everything to which her oversight could reach.

"You're just a continual plague to me, Jeanie," but as David said the words he took the hand which still rested on his shoulder, and drawing it to him, leaned his cheek down upon it in a quiet unconscious sort of way which betrayed how natural the gesture was.

"I was getting on fine with this alto solo, and if I put it away, the thoughts will never come back in the same track. I wish you hadn't asked any one. I'll be sair weary the night if she stays long. What did you say her name is?"

"Alice Grey."

"Alice Grey; it's a bonnie name, and what like is she?"

"Well, I've only seen her once without her bonnet, for she was away when I went to the Old Lodge. But she is a pleasant girl, very lady-like. You know her aunt belongs to one of the best families in St. Olave's, and she has a nice manner."

Here Miss Bruce paused, having nothing more to say in the way of elucidation. She was by no means skilful in the art of delineating character.

"Well, it can't be helped. She is the first lady who has taken tea with us since we came here, and how long is that ago? It wasn't so in Scotland, Jeanie."

Miss Bruce ignored the latter part of the sentence.

"Three months, Davie, just. You know we left Perth at the spring cleaning time."

"And we've lived very quietly ever since. I don't think anybody cares for us here. Is that as God intended it to be, Jeanie?"

"I daresay there are a great many things in this world as God never intended them to be, Davie," and with that Miss Bruce drew her hand gently out of his, and began to clear away the scattered music sheets. Her brother took the hint, gave one more wistful look at his manuscripts, and then went away to dress for the expected visitor.

When he was gone Janet began to "sort the room." She was the very soul of neatness, not indeed one of those monstrosities of method who seem to have been born with a dusting brush in their hands, and think no perfume equal to that of yellow soap, no music so sweet as the rattle of moving furniture; yet somehow there gathered round her, wherever she went, an atmosphere of tidiness, so that quietly and without any show of effort, things seemed to fall into their right places.

She began with the table where David had been sitting, and put the loose sheets of music back into the portfolio. Then she gathered up his pencils and one or two old pens which he had thrown upon the floor. This was done with a tender, loving carefulness, her hands lingering over the work, her face wearing a contented, peaceful smile. This brother of hers was the only outlet for any home kindness she had to give, and it was given very reverently. When the table was cleared, she went round the room, giving little touches of arrangement here and there, and looking often at the timepiece, whose hands were fast approaching the stroke of seven.

It was a pleasant room, such as one sees in old-fashioned, well-built houses. The window, which was broad and low, and draperied with curtains of drab moreen, looked out upon a wide plot of grass, spotted with buttercups and daisies. In the centre of this plot was a great sun-dial, half covered with moss, the gnomon tangled over with wild convolvulus and clusters of briony. Round it wound a broad gravel walk, and beyond that a second grass plot, bounded by a belt of linden trees, whose branches shut out all view of the road, except where space was left for the gate. From this gateway the entire East front of the Cathedral, with the grand sweep of its arched window could be clearly seen.

As for the interior of the Westwood sitting-room, it was furnished simply enough, for David Bruce was only just beginning to make his way in the world, and hard work he found it. The carpet of crimson ground, interlaced with a small running pattern of black, was somewhat worn, and to judge from sundry side piecings had not originally been intended for its present place. Upon the square table, which stood near the window, was a crimson cloth, embroidered round the border with armorial bearings, in old-fashioned cross and tent stitch. The paper was very pretty, fresh and spring-like—a silvery grey background, traced over with tiny leaves and tendrils. There was no cornice to the ceiling, for it had been made before this modern device came into fashion; but to supply its place was a belt of crimson scroll pattern. A very plain looking piano stood in one corner, open now with

music—chiefly cathedral music—upon it, and a little Parian statuette of Beethoven on a bracket just above. The only costly thing in the room was an oval mirror over the fireplace, with a massive carved oak border, where leaves, fruit and flowers, twined and intertwined in rank luxuriance, and stood out in bold relief against the light background of the paper. In one corner by the piano, carefully heaped together, were piles of music, volumes of chants, old brown leather bound folios of anthems, mixed with loose sheets of manuscript and counterpoint exercises.

But over all the room there was a strange and very noticeable feeling of stillness. It spoke unconsciously, as most rooms do, the character of its occupants, and gave a distinct impression of seclusion and self-containment. It could be no busy, many-colored, painfully anxious life which was lived here. No gleam of brightness could stay very long; any shadow of sorrow would be softened too, if not entirely veiled by that unmistakable presence of repose that was felt as soon as you crossed the threshold. If the thick clustering vine and jasmine leaves which grew over the trellis outside the window kept the sunlight from coming through, except in fitful, wandering streaks, they also hid the angry storms and black thunder clouds of summer time; and these leaves but symbolized others that seemed to gather round and shelter the place from the keen light and shadow, the blinding sunshine and the brooding fog, which rest by turns on most human lives.

Scarcely had Mr. Bruce made his appearance, got up in suitable broadcloth, finished off by the abovementioned black tie, with violet spots, when there was a tread of light footsteps on the gravel walk outside, a dainty knock at the front door, and then, side by side with grey robed matter-of-fact Janet Bruce, bringing with her into that quiet room a strange waft of brightness, there stood a fair English-looking maiden of noble presence and soft, pleasant voice. And she bent half-shyly, half-serenely, as her hostess pronounced the words—

"My brother—Miss Alice Grey."

Poor Alice! if she had only known how sorry he was to see her.

CHAPTER II.

She was a frank, winsome girl of eighteen, or thereabouts. Not pretty, exactly, for her features were none of them moulded with that perfect symmetry which artists and sculptors love to copy. Still, Alice Grey's was a pleasant face. The lines of it were yet unformed, changed by every passing mood of feeling, scarcely cast into any fixed mould by the strong working of the soul within, but just reflecting the sunlight and shade that passed over it. Such a face as middle-aged people look at tenderly, almost sadly, because they know how surely before many years have passed, sorrow, that inalienable heritage of humanity, shall fashion it into higher, more perfect beauty. There was not much repose in her countenance; it was bright, quick, eager, expectant, and the glance of her wide opened eyes was full of unspoken questionings—unspoken only because life as yet had taught her no language wherein to express them.

David Bruce could not say for certain whether, confusedly waking out of that pleasant music dream which had occupied him all the time of his toilet, he took the white hand of the visitor in his own, or merely bowed in acknowledgment of Janet's precise and somewhat formal introduction. As was his wont with strangers, he gave but a slight glance towards the face uplifted to him, a glance so slight indeed that any impression which it might have produced soon faded out of his thoughts, and left them free to wander in their own track. After tea—a genuine Scottish tea it was, in which scones and oat-cake formed a prominent part of the entertainment—he betook himself to the copying of some chants that had to be ready for morning service at the Cathedral, only from time to time contributing a stray word or two to the conversation which was going on at the other side of the room.

Miss Bruce had resumed her knitting, and was working away with that steady mechanical pertinacity that had become habitual to her. But a half perceptible ruffle now and then upon her face, or a somewhat nervous twitch of her needles, indicated that she was not quite at ease in the duty of entertaining unaccustomed guests. Alice Grey, finding that the hostess was inclined to be industrious, followed her example, and produced from a little pink-lined work case, a bit of white cashmere,—it might be a pin-cushion or a watch-pocket, or some other piece of feminine handicraft,—upon which she began to weave a graceful design in braid work, not seemingly after any set pattern, but only as her own skill and fancy led. Just the sort of work that expressed herself.

Two more different types of womanhood it would have been hard to find. Janet Bruce, still, staid, self-contained, even-tinted as a landscape over which the grey twilight has come; and Alice, with her affluence of youth and hope, like that same landscape steeped in the brightening hues of sunrise. One looking forth with sure expectancy to coming joy, the other knowing it no longer but in memory.

Miss Grey was not yet, according to technical phrase, "out;" she had not emerged from the coverture of home life into the great arena of social display, and was therefore unprivileged to assume the insignia of full-blown young ladyhood. Still, though there was neither sheen of silk nor sparkle of jewels about her, she made a pretty enough picture as she sat there in the broad low window seat, the slant rays of sunshine trickling through the curls of her golden brown hair, and making the shadows of the vine leaves play softly to and fro upon her cheek and neck. She wore a dress of light blue muslin, full and flowing, that showed like a bit of Italian sky in the sombre room. Its only ornament was a gleaming coil of black jet fastening the girdle, and into which she had woven a few sprays of white heath.

Perhaps the word that best described Alice Grey was the one which suggested itself to Janet's thought as she watched her sitting there in the sunlight. She was just "bonnie." Not handsome, not fascinating, not stylish nor *distingué*, but simply "bonnie" The sort of char-

acter that strong men pet and caress, that they love to have near them, and which little by little twines round the rugged branches of their nature, covering them with beauty and fragrance. There was something so frank and fresh and girlish about her, such a fitful maiden-like freedom in her ways, such an unschooled gracefulness in her simple speech. A nature hers was that would have to be tamed down very much as years passed on; one that would have to learn much, perhaps to suffer much, before it could run smoothly along in the beaten track of life.

But whatever rank untamed luxuriance there might be about her, was not so perceptible to-night, for the indescribably quiet atmosphere that surrounded the elder lady appeared to have enveloped Alice also, and there was a sort of conscious hesitation about her manner, the faintest little tinge of shyness, which perhaps by-and-by made Mr. Bruce lift his eyes from the yellow old folio of chants to that corner where she sat, more frequently than he would have done had she been one of those carefully trimmed, admirably self-possessed specimens of young ladyhood which the cathedral city of St. Olave's usually produced.

The two ladies had the conversation mostly to themselves. It trickled pleasantly on over the commonplace subjects that rise of their own accord between women who know each other but slightly; women who are neither very intellectual nor profoundly subjective. Innocent, peaceful, home-like chit-chat it was, about the daily little cares and pleasures and belongings of life, about amusing books, the most wholesome food for canaries and gold fish, the best way of cultivating flowers, the pretty walks round St. Olave's, and so on; dropping now and then into silence, broken only by the motion of Miss Bruce's needles, and the scratching of her brother's pen over the paper.

The evening wore on. The flush of sunset that had long ago crept out of the room, died off from the lower branches of the linden trees which bounded the garden, stretching up and up until at last it rested like a golden diadem on the topmost leaves, and then faded quite away. The talk died out as it often does when twilight comes; and Alice's busy little fingers glided no longer over her braiding work, but lay folded together upon her lap, or toyed with the vase of fern leaves and harebells which stood in the window-seat near her. Miss Bruce knitted on systematically; in sunlight, twilight, or no light at all, she was equally industrious. Her brother had left his music and with folded arms stood on the other side of the wide old-fashioned window, looking out into the garden, and gathering up thoughts perhaps as he often did in quiet hours, for the Oratorio he was composing. So little by little with the deepening evening, a dead silence came down upon all three of them.

Truly they were a demure couple this brother and sister, most at home in the solitude of an undisturbed fireside, and certainly not apt at entertaining visitors, either with the feast of reason or the flow of soul. Perhaps Alice thought so, for something like a stifled yawn flitted over her face and she began to fold up her work. It had not been a brilliant evening, to say the best of it; scarcely so chatty, and certainly not so lively, as she would have spent at home with Aunt Amiel. When her silks were safely packed away in the rose-lined satchel, she said—

"Mr. Bruce, will you play me something before I go?"

David started, he was lost in the workings of a fugue; but he gave himself a shake, and then with a quiet professional sort of air, not staying to ask what style of music she liked best, he went to the piano and began to play what the publishers call a "*pièce de resistance*," a grand musical passage of arms, full of runs and shakes and thunderclaps of sound; such a composition as puts young ladies who are "passionately fond of music" into an ecstacy.

When it was over, and David was biting his lips in expectation of a hurricane of compliments, she said "Thank you," but the words were spoken in a half unsatisfied tone, covering more of disappointment than pleasure, and were not followed by any rapturous outcries of "sweetly pretty,"—"charming execution,"—"perfect love of a piece," such as he was accustomed to receive from the generality of lady auditors.

David looked at her a good while from beneath the shadow of his overhanging eyebrows. In the half darkness of the room he could do this and not be rude.

"Well, did you like it?" he asked at last.

"No," she replied quietly, "not much."

He was pleased.

"Shall I try something else?" and then without waiting for a reply, he began to play one of Mendelssohn's "Lieder," the first in the fifth book,—that still, dreamy, wavelike, rippling song that seems to go floating on through mossy banks and under green leaves, now and then flashing out into sunshine, sometimes leaping impetuously forward from note to note, widening out at last into a clear, even, unbroken deep of sound.

As he played on, Alice leaned forward, then rose to her feet and step by step came quite close to the piano, so close that her dress touched him, and he could feel her breath upon his cheek. Before he finished, Tibbie came in to say that Miss Grey's maid was waiting to take her home.

"Not yet, Miss Bruce, please, not yet," said Alice, never moving her eyes from the piano; "let me hear all this first."

"Send her back, Tibbie," David said abruptly, "and say that we will see Miss Grey safely home."

Janet looked surprised but said nothing, and Tibbie went away. David played on to where the music ended, as all those "Lieder" do, in a few short fluttering upward notes. Alice gave him no word of thanks this time, but her fast clasped hands and quick eager breath told him that it was great joy to her to listen. Then he began a slow movement full of harmonies, like the old German chorales, marching on from phrase to phrase with grave majestic stateliness, then pausing and drifting off into a quaint melody, and after awhile with a few wandering notes coming back to the old track again; music that seemed to have no set purpose or sustained thought, but was just vague, sweet, fanciful.

When David Bruce played, it seemed a pity he should ever do anything else. Each passing mood of feeling, each breeze of impulse that crossed the soul, he could reach and imprison in music. So that listening to him was like read-

ing some sweet poem in which our own thoughts, clothed for us by the poet's skill in grand and noble language, meet us with old familiar faces. Wandering on through track after track of melody, the whole aspect of his countenance began to change. As a man who knows that he stands in his own place, gains power and dignity, so David Bruce in his music-world became a prince, and no longer an odd, awkward, ungainly piece of humanity such as society in general took him for. The wrinkles smoothed out from his great forehead, his eyes grew full of love and tenderness, his face became as it were the face of an angel. The only time Janet ever dropped her work and sat with idle fingers, was when this sort of music dream came over her brother, and then she would watch him by the hour together.

But Alice standing close by him could not see this, for the twilight that had gathered so thickly over them both. She could only feel that this man, rugged, uncouth as he had seemed to her an hour ago, had access to a life far above hers, and that in his music there was a strange power which seemed to reveal her to herself.

Little by little he was lifting her out of her pleasant world of girlish fancies, into one quite new and untried. With just her own aimless way of following every passing mood of thought, she stepped into his grand, solemn track, and now she began to feel bewildered in it.

Still he played on. All in the room grew faint and shadowy, and he felt the notes rather than saw them. At last with a few bars of very sweet, hymn-like music, he paused.

"Ah," said Alice in a half-whisper, "I remember that; you played it at the Minster last Sunday after the morning service, and I staid behind to listen to it. I dreamed it all over again that same night, and tried to play it for myself. It is a great rest to listen to it."

David was pleased; it was part of an alto solo for his own Oratorio, but he did not tell her so. Just then the Cathedral bells struck ten, and Tibbie brought in the lamp. Its light showed Alice kneeling by the piano, her hands clasped over some music books, her young face full of reverence and wonder; David with shut eyes and fingers yet wandering lovingly upon the keys, Miss Bruce knitting peacefully on in her low chair by the window, the old quiet look upon her face, the little white sock nearly finished.

And then David took Alice Grey home.

"Brother," said Janet, as they sat together an hour later, when Tibbie had locked the doors and tramped up stairs to bed, and nothing was heard but the chirp of a solitary cricket on the kitchen hearth—"Brother, I think we got over the evening pretty well on the whole."

David took his sister's hand and leaned his cheek down upon it. They often used to sit in this way at night.

"We got over the evening pretty well after all, Davie."

"Yes."

"I was sorry about you being disturbed with your composing, and having to walk home with Miss Grey too, but as things turned out it could not be helped, and I daresay we need not ask any one to tea for some time."

But David said nothing.

CHAPTER III.

ST. OLAVE'S was an ancient little city, a very ancient little city. It had reached middle life before William of Normandy cut his first tooth; it was a lusty growing place in the time of the Cæsars, and as for its birthday, a Chinese historian could scarcely have lighted upon a date remote enough for that interesting event. Within its three square miles of municipal territory, it enclosed a Cathedral, an Abbey, Roman towers out of count, ruins sufficient to stock Great Britain with rookeries, besides some twelve or fourteen antiquated churches; and last, but not least, as much family pride and hereditary dignity as would have served half a dozen towns of moderate pretensions.

What the Apostle Paul might have said had he been privileged to follow his tent-making craft beneath the shadow of its grey old Minster towers, is a question which well-disposed people will not press too closely; seeing that by the starched maiden ladies and gowned ecclesiastical magnates who inhabited the Cathedral precincts, any unlucky wight whom stern necessity compelled to "labor with his own hands, working the thing that is honest,"—in modern parlance, a tradesman, artizan, or handworker of any kind, was held in profoundest contempt, excluded from the pale of genteel society, and excommunicated from all rights and privileges of the *beau monde*. But things have changed mightily since the good old times of St. Paul, whether for better or worse, we presume not to say; and doubtless many a one to whom that chiefest of the apostles would have held out the right hand of fellowship, beholding in him a child of the kingdom, and an heir of glory, was kept at arm's length by the good folk of the cathedral city of St. Olave's, and stigmatized as "an exceedingly low person—in fact, no sort of society at all."

It was a quaint, old-fashioned little city, with scarcely a street in which you could draw a straight line from one end to the other. Very rich, too, it was in winding lanes, and curious tumbledown houses, with gables sticking out in all sorts of places where, according to modern canons of taste, gables ought not to stick out. There were many alleys in which the stories of the old lath-and-plaster tenements projected one over the other, until from the topmost windows people on opposite sides of the street might shake hands with each other. In the central part of the city there was great store of courts and closes, quite ignored by genteel people, and chiefly sought into by self-denying tract distributors, and city missionaries, or more frequently still, by poor-law guardians, and police officers. Centuries ago this had been the aristocratic quarter of the place. Kings and princes once pillowed their heads beneath the roofs that now sheltered the haunts of squalid beggary. Even yet the antiquarian, coming to St. Olave's in search of materials for a paper in the "Archæological Journal," and picking his way, pocket-book in hand, through heaps of vegetable refuse, and piles of dirty children, would stumble upon grand, time-worn houses, the exuviæ of bygone generations; houses with massive sculptured doorways, broad oaken staircases, and Tudor windows, can-

opied once with many-colored arras and gleaming cloth of gold, but whose only drapery now was a string of ragged pinafores hung out to dry, watched by equally ragged mothers, who leaned their gaunt red elbows on the carved stone-work, where, a couple of hundred years ago, the jewelled hands of courtiers were wont to rest.

But besides these crumbling relics of worn-out respectability that seemed to invest with an air of romance the squalid belongings which latter years had crusted over them, there were other and dim old whispers of antiquity reaching farther back still. St. Olave's was very rich in remains—Saxon, Roman, Norman, Mediæval, all sorts of remains. Scarcely a week passed without some old-world curiosity struggling into daylight, and being immortalized in a newspaper paragraph. The city commissioners could not dig a drain in any part of the place, but they came upon shattered fragments of tesselated pavement, once belonging to some Roman citizen's house, or huge, hulking stone coffins, which farmers from the country bought, and turned into drinking troughs for horses. Every now and then, as the traveller threaded his way through the central portion of the city, he lighted on some ugly old postern, or maimed tower, or broken archway, which did not, as the poet says—

> "Charm the eye
> With hints of fair completeness,"

but quite the reverse. And if an inexperienced wretch from the country who had lately bought a house here, and settled in it, betook himself to a little harmless after-dinner diversion with spade and rake, in his garden, ten to one but he turned up some unpleasantly suggestive tooth or bone, or perhaps an entire grinning skull, that sent him helter-skelter into his parlor, with anything but an agreeable impression upon his mind.

But such untoward occurrences only took place in the old part of the city. St. Olave's was a very cheerful residence for any one who, as the phrase goes, liked a quiet life. A sort of Zoar it was for elderly maiden ladies with long pedigrees and short purses, decayed gentlewomen, retired families, unbeneficed clergymen, and widows of aristocratic descent. For there was no trade stirring in the place. Let the wind blow from what quarter it chose, it brought no vulgar thick smoke, no sooty shower of smuts from manufactory chimneys, no stifling odor of heathenish compounds from chemical works and dye-houses. The people, too, were well conducted, never did anything very much out of the way in one direction or another; never launched out into gigantic speculations, and then exploded with a crash; never held violent political meetings; never made sour faces at Government; never thought of getting up Chartist associations, or questioning the legality of Church-rates; never made demonstrations of any sort; never flaunted through the streets with banners about free trade and cheap bread, as the folks did at the neighboring manufacturing place of Millsmany; never grew rabid at election times, or made a fuss about taxation;—in short, never forgot that they lived beneath the shadow of a Cathedral, and had the episcopal benediction dispensed over them four times a year.

And yet, notwithstanding its sober, ecclesiastical tone, there was wholesome gaiety in St. Olave's for those who could be content with homœopathic doses of the same, administered sparingly, and at judicious intervals. Twice a year came the assizes, when the middle-class people bought new bonnets, and the servants got a holiday to go to Court; when the sheriff's carriage lumbered pompously through the city, preceded by a guard of honor in breeches and bag wigs, and armed with tin halberds and hired trumpets. The County ball, too, in spring, when the Broad Street shops attired themselves in silks of fabulous beauty, and brocades which, as Miss Luckie said, coaxed the sovereigns out of your purse before you knew what you were about; and the Hunt ball, later on in the year, when superbly whiskered gentlemen lounged about at the hotel doors, and women with majestic Norman faces floated down the streets. Nor was Euterpe without votaries. Now and then, when Covent Garden and the Haymarket had composed themselves for their yearly nap, a company of *artistes* who were starring it in the provinces, would spare a night for St. Olave's, and then great was the roll of county carriages and the blaze of family diamonds.

In addition to these episodes of gaiety, there was a yearly review of the barrack troops, and a very occasional regatta, and—crowning event of all—once in three years, a grand Festival in the Hall of Guild, when St. Olave's washed himself, put on his best suit, and turned out with his wife and family for a regular holiday. This triennial event served as a sort of Christianized Hegira for the inhabitants of the place, and had become an established tryst for dates and memories, "so many years come next Festival," being an authorized way of expressing any chronological occurrence.

But the place where the idiosyncracy of St. Olave's asserted itself most positively, the very nucleus and centre of aristocracy, the spot where gentility culminated, and exclusiveness attained its meridian, was the Cathedral Close, a few acres of green sward, dotted by lordly elm-trees, and intersected by winding gravel walks, which surrounded the Minster.

Here the Bishop had his episcopal palace; here the Canons Resident came and went within canonical limits; here, in cosy, warm-lined ecclesiastical tenements, flourished the Prebends, Vicars-choral and Chanters. Here the widows and maiden sisters of departed Cathedral functionaries kept up their dignity in tall, antique, grey stone houses, that looked as severe and rigidly orthodox as their occupants. The very air had an aristocratic feel about it, a sensible hush and repose, and aroma of stateliness. The old elm-trees that skirted the Close, swayed their branches with grave, measured dignity, scorning to be blown to and fro like unconsecrated timber. The colony of rooks which from time immemorial had held lodgment behind the Chapter House, and amongst the topmost pinnacle of the Broad Tower, cawed with a perceptible ecclesiastical monotone, as different as possible from the common-place provincial dialect of their country cousins in the adjacent hamlets. You felt an unmistakable waft of respectability as soon as you passed the ponderous iron gates that led into this sacred enclosure, a certain indefinable influence drifting over you

from its grey old arches and cloisters, which said as plain as any words could speak, "the place is select."

Select; yes, that is just the very word that any person of discrimination would have used in describing the Close and its inhabitants. The place seemed to have got a patent for gentility. Vulgar people never turned in here for a walk. The shoals of trippers who poured into St. Olave's at Easter time, from the neighboring manufacturing districts, ventured not to steer their flaunting draperies and apoplectic baskets of prog along its secluded walks, but contented themselves with reverent glances through the iron gates. Nursery maids and children were tabooed, school-boys were prohibited from desecrating the place with tops or marbles, or other juvenile gear, and no wheels but those which belonged to private carriages had leave to waken its slumbering echoes.

Such were the salient points of the aristocratic little city of St. Olave's, a city that had been the cradle and the grave of dynasties of kings. More anon of the tide of life which worked and worried on within it. And always as you trod the narrow winding little streets, or tracked your path by crumbling gate and ruined postern, you had but to look up, and there was the grand, grey, massive old Cathedral, keeping watch and ward over you. Like the thought of God in the heart of man, facing all his narrow, crooked aims and purposes, his crumbling vows and broken resolutions, with its front of calm eternal majesty.

CHAPTER IV.

SUCH quiet people, such exceedingly quiet people; in fact, no sort of addition to the place at all in the way of society. Now, didn't they strike you, my dear Mrs. Scrymgeour, as exceedingly quiet people?"

The speaker was Miss Luckie, a cheerful, chatty, quicksilvery little maiden lady of seventy-five; for the past fifteen years a denizen of the "Home for Decayed Gentlewomen," or as it was called by ordinary people, the "Old Maid's Hospital," situate in the Low Gardens, about half a mile from the Cathedral. The lady to whom she addressed the foregoing remark, was Mrs. Scrymgeour, relict of the late Archdeacon Scrymgeour, and daughter-in-law of the former Bishop of St. Olave's, a tall, severe, dignified-looking woman, bristling all over with ecclesiastical propriety, and bearing a remarkable family likeness to the gaunt effigies which some old monk, in a fit of ill humor, had carved, centuries ago, on the west front of the Cathedral. Mrs. Scrymgeour was Censor-general of the diocese of St. Olave's, and lady-president of the "Position Committee," a select body of ladies chosen from the Close families, assembling at stated intervals to decide the social status of strangers who came to reside in the neighborhood. Miss Luckie did not belong to the Position Committee, that conclave being exclusively confined to ladies who had connections in the Church, but she often dropped in to have a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Scrymgeour, and, as is likely enough in places where intellectual life is very stagnant, their conversation more frequently turned upon men and women than anything else.

"Miss Luckie," replied the Archdeacon's widow, gravely, "if I am called upon to give my opinion,"—Mrs. Scrymgeour usually prefaced her little orations with this phrase; she was so often "called upon" in the committee, that it had become habitual to her. "If I am called upon to give my opinion, I must say that I have always considered strangers, especially when their position is not perfectly well defined, as being much better for cultivating a spirit of silence. It shows a becoming feeling of respect to the city, and there is too much talk in the world already—a great deal too much, Miss Luckie."

"Well, for my part, Mrs. Scrymgeour," said Miss Luckie, nowise daunted by the dogmatic cast-iron tones of her companion, "I can't do with such remarkably reticent people. Retiring manners sound very nicely in books, but they're an awful bore when you have to make a morning call upon them. Really when I went to Miss Bruce, a month ago—you know she's in my district for collecting—I was fairly stuck fast for want of something to say, and I'm sure that isn't often the case with me. There's such an indescribable quiet about the place, I declare it's just like being somewhere where there's nothing to breathe. Not that I mean any disrespect, you know."

"Of course. I perfectly comprehend what you wish to convey by your mode of expression, but I am not acquainted with the parties you mention, beyond seeing Miss Bruce at the morning prayers. And as I noticed that the verger in attendance, who has great discernment in such matters, only placed her in the second tier of stalls, and brought her a prayer-book without the Cathedral arms on the back, I have quite given up the idea of leaving my card at the house. I find it needful to be select, Miss Luckie. Position with me is a matter of conscientious observation."

"Yes, exactly; and really, Mrs. Scrymgeour, with such shoals of unmaried ladies as we have in St. Olave's, you know I can say it with impunity, being one myself," and here Miss Luckie laughed that merry laugh of hers, which set her silvery grey curls all in a flutter, and made her white cap ribbons dance again; "we really have such shoals of unmarried ladies in St. Olave's, that any one who has got past the meridian of life, as Miss Bruce seems to have done, can hardly be looked upon in the light of an acquisition."

"Just my views, Miss Luckie, just my views. I always say that although we differ on many points, I seldom meet with any one who, on the whole, meets my views more satisfactorily than yourself."

"Thank you, Mrs. Scrymgeour; and now how old should you take the lady to be?"

"People carry their age so differently," said the Archdeacon's widow, stepping across the long wainscoted room, to draw the crimson curtain farther over the window, for the evening sunlight slanting through the Close elm-trees came too strongly upon her embroidery. "People carry their age so differently. Now for instance, Mrs. Amiel Grey, at the Old Lodge, just across the Close, cannot be less than eighty, at the very least, for you know she went to live

there as soon as it was relinquished by the Canons, and she was a person comparatively in years then, and the Canons have occupied their present residence for the last thirty years, to my own personal recollection, at least," and here Mrs. Scrymgeour paused; it does not answer for a lady, especially a widow lady, and one who is fast approaching the Rubicon of fifty, to be too explicit in her personal recollections.

"However, that is irrelevant to the present subject," she continued, taking a fresh supply of gold thread, and bestowing a somewhat lengthy investigation on the monogram she was copying. "I only intended to say that Mrs. Amiel Grey is a remarkably capable woman for her years. As for the other lady, I should give it as my opinion that five and thirty is somewhere near the mark."

"Thirty-five; a most uncomfortable age for an unmarried woman. You're neither one thing nor another, when you're thirty-five, I always say, though I remember it now from a distance of forty years"—

"Miss Luckie, impossible!" and Mrs. Scrymgeour, whose face was puckered about like the velvet lining inside the lid of a lady's jewel case, looked with undisguised amazement at her visitor's comely little visage, nestling so cosily within the shade of her white cap and trim curls.

"Seventy-six next birthday, Mrs. Scrymgeour, and that's the seventeenth of August. You know I've been in the Home sixteen years, and we're not allowed to turn in there until past sixty. But as I was going to tell you I feel quite sympathetic for this sister of our new organist; thirty-five is such a very uncomfortable age. Now when an unmarried person gets past forty, she gives up looking out, and brings her mind to her circumstances; matrimonial chances don't often hand out after that. At least I found it so, but you know poor dear Papa retired from the army then, and we left off barrack life, so that nothing was likely to turn up, and I was obliged to settle down to my condition."

Miss Luckie didn't look as if the settling down had been a very painful process after all. Indeed, to contrast the story which spinsterhood had written upon her face, with that which the holy estate of matrimony had left upon Mrs. Scrymgeour's, one might be tempted to say that single-blessedness had decidedly the best of it.

"Miss Bruce does not give me the impression of a marrying person, Miss Luckie. If I were asked to give my opinion, I should say she had had a disappointment, or something of that nature. There is a great deal of disappointment in the world, Miss Luckie," and Mrs. Scrymgeour sighed as she added a golden ray to the monogram.

"Oh, as for that, it's just as people take it," rejoined Miss Luckie, the grey curls frisking merrily round again. "I always say a great deal of breath, that might be more usefully employed, is spent in sighs. I never had what's called a disappointment, myself; for in barrack-life you're whisked about so from one place to another, that you haven't time to fix your affections any where to speak of. If you do try to plant a little sprig of love, the order for the route comes before it's had time to take root. And then you know when poor dear Papa dropped off, and I was obliged to turn my attention to teaching, I was so far advanced in life, being, as I said before, just on the verge of forty, that it was past the time for any one to make a fuss over me. And so you see I've just trotted on through life on my own account; and I think I'm a standing memorial of the desirableness of single life. I often say, no lady in St. Olave's carries her age better than I do, except, perhaps, Mrs. Amiel Grey; and then you know she's had such a quiet life."

"Too quiet," replied Mrs. Scrymgeour,—she had worn her robes of censorship so long, that she found it difficult to cast them. "If I were asked to give my opinion, I should say that Mrs. Grey exerts herself far too little in this locality. A person of her influence and property, Miss Luckie, ought to be more of a burning and a shining light in visiting agencies and committees. I have never been able to forget that bazaar last summer, for the restoration of the organ, when she refused to allow her niece to assist in presiding at the refreshment stall."

"But Miss Alice was such a child then, dear Mrs. Scrymgeour, scarcely seventeen; and I was told Mrs. Grey subscribed very handsomely."

"Personal effort, Miss Luckie, personal effort, in my opinion, ought never to be withheld;" and Mrs. Scrymgeour gave her left hand a dignified wave, which seemed to say plainly enough: "Silence, Miss Luckie, you don't know anything about it." The little maiden lady interpreted it in this way, and offered no further remark, whilst the Archdeacon's widow continued in a staid, systematic tone, as though addressing a visitation of the clergy—

"Position, Miss Luckie, especially in a place like this, is a talent which ought not to be buried in a napkin instead of presiding at a refreshment stall. And, indeed, I felt it incumbent upon me, as a person of some influence in this neighborhood, to call round upon Mrs. Grey, and remonstrate with her upon what I considered the impropriety of her conduct. But I could make no impression. Mrs. Grey is exceedingly firm, though she has such a quiet way with her. Indeed, if I were asked to give my opinion, I should say she is almost obstinate."

Here Mrs. Scrymgeour made a second lengthy investigation of the design she was copying upon her crimson velvet altarcloth; and then stroked down the soft rich material complacently. This altarcloth was intended as a present to the Cathedral, though whether the donor apprehended its use in connection with an ordinance which inculcates upon all partakers the necessity of being in love and charity with their neighbors, is a question admitting of discussion.

The dialogue chronicled above, took place in the dining-room of Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour's residence, a starch-and-buckram looking house at the north end of the Close, almost under the shadow of the Chapter House. It was a very stately old-fashioned room. The sunlight came in through heavily-framed, narrow windows, and rested upon massive oak wainscoting—very few of the Close houses were papered, being built before this modern shift came into vogue. The ceiling was divided in deep panels, with a border of carved oak, containing ecclesiastical devices and inscriptions in old English characters. There were a few family portraits on the walls, stiff old ladies in topknots; three or four clergymen in

gowns and bands; and over the fireplace a bishop — Mrs. Scrymgeour's father-in-law, — almost buried in a huge easy chair, out of which the old gentleman's lawn draperies boiled over in a milky froth, upon a background of crimson curtains.

Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour occupied her usual position on the outskirts of the hearth-rug, at right angles with the chimney-piece. Of course there was no fire this summer evening; but that was Mrs. Scrymgeour's place, and therefore she sat in it, being averse to change, which, as she thought, indicated a weak disposition. Miss Luckie was perched near the window, from which she could command a view of the Close, with its groups of elegantly dressed ladies, and gowned Cathedral dignitaries. But now and then, as a remarkably stylish party passed, or a carriage, crested and coronetted, swept along the gravelled sweep, she would leave her chair, and skim to the window seat, with a funny little bobbing gait, that reminded one irresistibly of the motion of a water-wagtail. Miss Luckie's habitat at the Low Gardens was very quiet, much too quiet for the merry little maiden lady, who had no more vocation for retirement than a magpie has for silence. Often had she rued the over-much carefulness of the founders of the Home, who in their anxiety to shelter its inmates from the glare and bustle of outer life, had enclosed the garden with a high wall, and beyond that a row of chestnut trees, whose bushy branches formed a screen through which not even the scarlet of an officer's uniform, nor the most magnificent feminine toilet that was ever accomplished, could penetrate. It was to snatch a stray glimpse of fashionable life, as well as to obtain a little wholesome exercise of her vocal organs, in the course of a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Scrymgeour, that Miss Luckie came so frequently to Chapter Court. Between the two ladies, on a soft crimson cushion, bolt upright, as was its custom, sat the archidiaconal cat. But that cat deserves a paragraph all to itself, and shall have it.

The last descendant of a noble line, which had flourished in the Close from a period anterior to the memory of the oldest inhabitant, she possessed a pedigree almost as illustrious as that of her mistress; and she knew it too, and evinced her appreciation of it by an unwonted dignity of deportment. Mrs. Scrymgeour's was an ecclesiastical cat, accustomed to mix in genteel society, and as such it scorned to roam the Close in company with others of less aristocratic birth and family connections, or to scour the neighboring roofs, after dark, in quest of worldly amusement. Mrs. Scrymgeour's cat had tastes far above anything of this sort, and preferred to spend its secluded leisure on the hearth-rug of the Chapter Court dining-room, listening to the edifying conversation of its mistress; just stepping to the window now and then to see how the world went on outside, but scornfully repelling the advances of feline plebeians who sought to lure it into friendly relations. Its proper benefice was the crimson cushion, where it now sat in due state and dignity, its shoulders slightly shrugged, its tail decorously folded round its forepaws, its head drawn back with a supercilious air, which had probably been acquired from the Archdeacon's lady. A model of a Cathedral cat.

"And so you don't think," said Miss Luckie, when she had resumed courage enough to get back to the original starting-part; "you don't think they're likely to be an acquisition to the place?"

"My dear Miss Luckie, I don't go so far as that. The Dean and Chapter would never have presented Mr. Bruce to the organ, if the family had not been unexceptionable, perfectly unexceptionable, I mean as to moral qualifications. But you must be aware, Miss Luckie, if you have given the subject a judicious consideration——"

"Oh, Mrs. Scrymgeour, I'm not equal to a judicious consideration; I'm not, indeed. I never got further than taking things as I find them, and letting the judiciousness alone."

"That whatever manners and customs may be in Scotland," continued Mrs. Scrymgeour, ignoring Miss Luckie's little parenthesis; "and I would not be understood to criminate them, as I have never visited the country—in St. Olave's, Miss Luckie, a person must be possessed of considerable advantages, both of birth and position, to be viewed in the light of an acquisition to the place. Now, in a manufacturing district like Millsmany"—and here Mrs. Scrymgeour's face looked as if the good lady had been suddenly called upon to swallow a dose of black draught—"in Millsmany, Miss Luckie, anybody is received; but in a Cathedral city we look for superiority—superiority, I repeat, is indispensable."

"Well now, do you know, Mrs. Scrymgeour, it struck me from the very first, that the Bruces *had* a superior air about them, as if they had been accustomed to something upper class."

"My dear Miss Luckie," replied the Archdeacon's widow with a gentle deprecatory wave of her hand, somewhat wrinkled now and parchmenty, "I should consider it quite out of my province to indulge in any personal remarks on the air of the Bruces. I never allow myself in animadversions. I have no doubt the parties to whom you refer are well conducted and respectable; but I believe you will allow, Miss Luckie, that in my position, I cannot be expected to offer the right hand of friendship to persons whose antecedents, so far as I know at present, are involved in obscurity. And as for their family——"

"Haven't got one, I suppose, since we never heard of it. But, after all, dear Mrs. Scrymgeour, a pedigree isn't everything."

"Precisely so, Miss Luckie, precisely so. But if I were asked to give my opinion, I should say it is a great deal, especially in a place like this, where, as I have often said, blood is indispensable." And Mrs. Scrymgeour looked complacently across the room to a compartment of one of the stained windows, which contained her arms, quartered with those of the late Archdeacon.

Mrs. Scrymgeour was very proud of her pedigree. She considered it a great stay to her respectability The blood which oozed within those wizened hands of hers had been imported into this country at the time of the Norman Conquest, and grew rich on English plunder for a century or two. After that a little of it was unfortunately spilt in the wars of the Roses; but the remainder replenished itself by aristocratic alliances, and flowed comfortably on until the civil wars of Charles I., when it again paid the tax of

loyalty, and poured forth one or two libations on Marston Moor and Naseby. During the Commonwealth it retired into private life, but frisked and frolicked forth again in the Merrie Monarch's Court, held on its course past the Georges, in whose times it got into an ecclesiastical channel, and fattened upon successive Rectories, Deaneries, and Bishoprics. Fifty years ago it had joined its proud current with that of the Honorable and Reverend Marmaduke Mace, of Macefield, in the county of ——. and the sole result of that union was the lady who now occupied Chapter Court.

It was this pedigree, rather than any external charms of face or manner, which won the hand —not to say the heart—of the late Archdeacon, and installed Mrs Scrymgeour in the goodly fellowship of the Close families. But to return to the two ladies, who are still nibbling with true feminine pertinacity, at that bone of contention —the social position of the Bruce's.

"I rather fancy Mrs. Amiel Grey has paid them some attention though," said Miss Luckie; "and you know," added the little virgin, by way of clenching her argument, "the Greys of Stoneby are one of the oldest families in the North."

"Kindness, my dear Miss Luckie, pure kindness. I quite appreciate Mrs. Amiel Grey's motives; she's an excellent old lady, a very excellent old lady. But we know what age is." And the Archdeacon's widow said this with a delightful waft of charity in her tones—"at least, I don't mean practically," she continued, with a glance at the lean and bony fingers which were still manipulating the crimson velvet, "not practically, Miss Luckie."

"So far as you are concerned, not in the least, dear Mrs. Scrymgeour."

"No. But you see age has its failings, and I feel it my duty to say, that since her residence at the Old Lodge, Mrs. Grey has never paid that attention to her position which the locality demands. Sometimes I have almost considered it due to the other families in the Close, to give her a gentle hint on the advisability of not calling quite so indiscriminately on new comers. But you know, poor dear lady, she is, as I said before, so sweetly amiable, that there is no getting her to understand these little matters of etiquette. I really do believe, if she thought it would give pleasure, she would not hesitate to leave a card at the door of that retired merchant, who has just come here from Millsmany to settle."

At the mention of this profoundest depth of sweet amiability, the archidiaconal cat moved its head round with a scornful sweep, shrugged its shoulders, and slightly raised its left paw, with a gesture that seemed to say—"Well, I never."

There was something very remarkable in the way that cat had of expressing its sentiments in common with its mistress. It had got a trick of turning its head half-way round, and back again, and elevating its back, as it sat bolt upright, with tail decently folded over its fore feet; and at the mention of anything remarkably disgraceful in the habits of a Cathedral city, it used to pucker its forehead, move its whiskers rapidly backward and forward, and look at the Archdeacon's widow with an affecting expression of wounded dignity.

"Well, I really must confess," said Miss Luckie, somewhat hesitatingly, as though staggered by the joint opinion of Mrs. Scrymgeour and Puss, "I never could see the precise use of keeping oneself so very much to oneself, although certainly I always give a due regard to my position as an officer's daughter, and have never seen the way clear yet to show more than distant civility to the lady in the next room to mine, because her father was connected with the sugar business; and although I have the greatest respect for her, still you see trade and the army are so very far apart. But sometimes I think the families about here carry it a little too far. I'm afraid there won't be a Cathedral Close for us in heaven, where we can keep ourselves to ourselves, and never meddle with any one else."

"Rank is a divine ordinance, which, in my opinion, will be recognized in the world to come;" and here Mrs. Scrymgeour's voice took a deeper key, suited to the utterance of such solemn realities. "I have no sympathy with those who reduce the future state to an indiscriminate amalgamation of social degrees. Position, selectness, refinement, my dear Miss Luckie, will not be entirely overlooked in another sphere of being."

There was silence for a few moments, whilst Mrs. Scrymgeour's opinions distilled into the mind of her auditor.

"Well, really now," resumed Miss Luckie, "that's quite a new view of the case. I'm sure the Dissenters about here ought to look after their manners then, for some of them are sadly behind hand. So you really think, Mrs. Scrymgeour, that the nobility, clergy, and gentry, will have separate accommodation provided for them in the heavenly Canaan."

"I don't interfere with doctrinal subjects, Miss Luckie. I left all such matters to the late Archdeacon; but if I were asked to give my opinion, I should say that birth, and rank, and breeding, and, above all, ecclesiastical connections, will be decidedly advantageous hereafter. I should consider it quite inimical, under any circumstances, to associate with such people as the merchants of Millsmany, or the Dissenters of this neighborhood."

Mrs. Scrymgeour pronounced this word "Dissenters," with a condensed acerbity, a concentrated essence of spleen, which "may be more easily imagined than described." What the locusts were to the Egyptians—what the east wind is to a valetudinarian—what those sturdy vegetarians, the snails, are to the lady florist, who finds them morning by morning munching her choicest annuals—such were the Dissenters to Mrs. Scrymgeour. She confirmed her statement by a decisive wave of her hand, a movement imitated by the cat with its left paw.

Soon after this, Miss Luckie put on her bonnet and trotted homewards, having been called for by the old woman who acted as chaperone-general to the Establishment at the Low Gardens. By-and-by the shadows of night crept round and about; the porter shut the iron gates of the Close with a reverberating clang; the families—Dean, Canons, Vicars-choral, Prebends, old maidens, widows, and Archdeacons, wrapped themselves up in their gentility, and went to sleep. As the bell in the broad tower rung out the stroke of ten o'clock, Mrs. Scrymgeour summoned her household to family prayers. She opened the silver-clasped, morocco-covered Prayer-book, which

lay on a stand at the further end of the long dining-room, and kneeling down on a soft velvet hassock, informed the Almighty that she, in common with the tasselled footmen and aproned damsels at the bottom of the apartment, was a miserable sinner. Then she asseverated that she had erred and strayed like a lost sheep, and stigmatized herself as an unworthy servant: both these statements being made in a complacent and perfectly self-satisfied tone, as though the meaning of them was rather complimentary than otherwise. Afterwards she requested, as she had been in the habit of requesting regularly every night for the last twenty years, that she and everybody else might be kept from all uncharitableness; to which the servants, doubtless, in their hearts, vouchsafed a hearty Amen. After this she dispensed over them the Apostolic benediction; and then, with a complacent consciousness that, in the performance of these duties, she had reached and compassed the bounds of Christian duty, she gathered together the ample folds of her rich black silk dress, swept up the oaken staircase, and resigned herself to dignified repose.

CHAPTER V.

In bygone times of rack and tumult, when foreign armies pillaged the ducal palaces of Italy, those who had rare and valuable paintings bethought themselves of a strange expedient by which these treasures might be secured from the hand of the spoiler. They learned to crust over the priceless canvas with some composition, upon which they painted an inferior picture, in coarse and common colors. So when generals in search of plunder ransacked the galleries, they threw these carelessly aside, finding no worth in them, knowing not how grand were the masterpieces which beneath such rude daubs lay concealed. And now, time after time, some connoisseur hunting amongst piles of art rubbish in London back-streets, or continental cities, stumbles upon one of these masked pictures, discerns beneath its rough crust other and finer touches, carries it home, and day by day, with patient, unwearying care clears off the deceitful surface, until the real painting stands confessed in its matchless beauty.

Something akin to this we find in the world of human life. Often in its rush and hurry and tumult, those of fine, sensitive natures encase themselves within a second and outer life—unseemly it may be—and having no beauty that it should be desired by those whose eyes can only see the outsides of things. Thus they live on, uncared for, unprized among their fellows, until one more skilled than the rest discerns beneath this baffling outer surface the real, true nature of the man, and sees hidden from human sight the glorious handiwork of the Divine artist. Many such veiled ones there are, walking side by side with us in this world, men of whom we are not worthy, men whose real beauty and grandeur we shall never know, until in the light of eternity God uncovers His own image, and bids us see them as they are.

It was a very shady, quiet life, such as the world calls hum-drum, that David Bruce and his sister lived in that little home of theirs. Slow even for such a slow place as St. Olave's, and one that would have been considered absolutely stagnant anywhere else. There was great silence in both of their natures; in hers the silence of rest; in his the silence of pride. Great strength and resolution for any work that needed to be done, for any effort that needed to be made; great patience, too, for the struggle of life in whatever form that struggle might come. Not exactly the sort of people to be popular anywhere, least of all in this trim little city of St. Olave's, where elegant manners and polite address were so very requisite, and whose whole superstructure of social life was reared upon the foundation stone of position.

And so after a little preparatory vibration, after a few visits paid and received, one or two wandering tendrils thrown out and withdrawn for want of anything to cling to, David and Janet Bruce drew apart from St. Olave's society, and lived on in their own self-contained, secluded life; chary even to each other of much outward demonstration, yet holding fast a love which was all the stronger because so much of it lay unseen.

Very beautiful, and a little touching, too, it was to see how Janet Bruce deferred to David in all things; how the whole of her serene, reticent nature had folded itself round "my brother;" how she seemed to look at their life with all its chances and changes and hopes, only as he might be affected. She had an unbounded confidence in him. Much of his mind she could not understand—men and women never do know each other thoroughly—but what she did know she reverenced, and the rest she believed in with woman-like trust.

Just they two living in that old-fashioned house on the outskirts of the cathedral city of St. Olave's. Only they two. Ah! what great issues of death and separation must have come to pass, what weary sorrows been grappled with, what words of long farewell said, what slow falling off and dropping away of human interests, what breaks in the once crowded fireside circle, what gradual, painful narrowing down of joy and hope, ere Janet Bruce had learned to say "my brother and I"—in that little sentence comprising her all of earthly possession and affection. But of these things they never spoke save to each other, and then only with that grave reverence which is most meet in touching all bygone sorrow.

David Bruce had come home from afternoon service, and the two were sitting in the little parlor at Westwood. Their evenings were mostly spent there in the pleasant summer time. The new anthem, in which David had been practising the choristers, lay open on the table. He was standing at the window with folded arms, looking past the sunlit trellis work of ivy and vine leaves into the still garden and away to the purple-grey Minster towers, which were set like a picture in a framework of clasping linden branches. Looking, not with the vague, idle gaze of a waking dream, but steadily, fixedly, with absorbed intensity of meditation, as though slowly working out some train of thought that had grown up in his mind.

David Bruce was not what society terms an elegant man. There was neither style nor fashion about him; nothing but grave, quiet dignity, and a certain steady resolution which could both dare and do great things, if need be. Not hand-

some either; his features were too irregular for that, and his eyes too deeply set. But he had the real musician's forehead,—full, broad, and roundly outlined,—such as one sees in the heads of Cherubini and Beethoven, shadowed by thick tangled hair, already plentifully streaked with grey. His face was the face of a man who, in passing through this world, has met with more of disappointment than hope fulfilled; one who has been tried, harassed—perhaps wronged and betrayed—for some of the lines about the mouth were very bitter, and there was a set, resolute, somewhat incredulous expression in the dark-grey eyes, which told of hardness endured and suffering conquered. But the most striking part of David Bruce's face was the perfectly straight line of the eyebrows, always a great beauty in any face, and the only thing which redeemed his from downright plainness. It gave a look of gentleness and purity to the whole countenance.

"Brother," said Janet, looking up from a fine damask table-cloth which she was darning. She always waited for his answer before she went on with any remark she had to make; it was a sort of silent tribute of respect to him.

"Well, Jeanie."

"I have been thinking it is much more expensive living here than in Scotland."

Which matter-of-fact observation, clashing as it did with the first phrases of a symphony which were weaving themselves in David's brain, did not meet with an immediate answer.

So there was silence again between them—silence whilst the light crept slowly up from branch to branch of the linden trees, and the western sunshine began to flicker in a warm red glow from the topmost windows of the great Cathedral tower. Janet darned patiently on, held the table-cloth up to the light to see if there were any more thin places in it, and then with another glance at her brother, who was still standing at the window with folded arms, she began again upon the old subject.

It was a very noticeable feature in Janet Bruce's character, this habit she had of sticking resolutely to any thought which had once worked its way into her mind. Often when sitting alone with her brother, she would make some chance remark that moved neither answer nor comment, and then perhaps an hour afterwards, when he had forgotten all about it, a second deliberate sentence would show that her ideas had all the while been quietly working on in the old track.

"And I have been thinking, Davie, it is time we began to do something to make ends meet. Your salary now is quite insufficient for the appearance which we are expected to make. I have only five pounds left of the money you gave me at the beginning of the quarter."

"And it will be—how long before I get any more?"

"Just six weeks," said Janet, referring to the little almanac which she always carried in her pocket, "and I really don't think I can manage on sixteen shillings a week until then."

"I don't see what's to be done, Jeanie. You know I have only had two applications in answer to my advertisement for pupils. St. Olave's appears to be well-stocked with music masters already, and I suppose until I am fortunate enough to get a name in the musical world, there is no other way in which we can better ourselves."

"There was a thought came into my mind this morning, Davie," and Janet went to the sideboard drawer, from which she took the supplement sheet of the "Times." "I was looking over the paper when you brought it in last night, and I found this advertisement. I wonder if we could make anything out about it."

And Janet read:—

"A lady desires to meet with board and residence in a quiet family, where there are no children. The neighborhood of a small English town preferred. Unexceptionable references given and required. Address A. B., Post Office, Keswick, Cumberland."

"Well, Jeanie," and David came and sat down in his great arm-chair with a grave, business-like expression on his face, as of a man who has got something to do and means to go through with it.

"It would not be a great deal of trouble, brother. I have been considering how things might be managed. There is the bedroom that looks towards St. Olave's; we never use it for ourselves, and as we have no visitors, it is not likely to be wanted at present. That would do very well for a lady of moderate requirements, if we had it painted, and new hangings put up. Then there is that canny little room where I keep my plants. She might have it for a sort of private sitting-room, when she did not wish to be with us."

"It would use up your time very much, Jeanie. You do not know what amount of attention she might need—at least, I mean, how much she might require; people often require a great deal when they need very little."

"As for the trouble, Davie, I don't care much about that. I would as soon work at one thing as another. You know I am not easily worried."

Any one who looked into Miss Bruce's face might have told that in a moment. She was a member of the Peace Society, in more senses than one.

"At any rate, Jeanie," said her brother, "we could meet one of the conditions specified in the advertisement. I don't think any one would question the fact of our being a 'quiet family.' We have been here four months now, and in that time we have had, let me see, how many callers—three, have we not?—the clergyman of the parish, the medical man, who only left his card because he heard you were liable to affections of the throat, and—Miss Grey."

This last name was uttered with that slight and yet perceptible fall of the voice, which people unconsciously use in speaking any name which lies far down in their thoughts. But Janet neither noticed this nor the pause which had preceded it.

"You have forgotten the tax-gatherers, Davie," and a touch of quiet humor stole into her face; "the borough rates, and the water rates, and the Church rates, and the watching, lighting, and paving rates, and the poor rates; besides the ladies who call for subscriptions. You see we are not quite deserted."

"Oh! I forgot, and that accounts for my salary melting away so. But there is another

thing, Jeanie; have you thought of the loss of position which our taking a lodger would involve? I don't care for it myself, but it would make me feel wicked rather to see Mrs. Scrymgeour pass you by with more polite scorn than she does now."

"We will try to do without a position, Davie, at least, until you can take your own, and I am sure you will do that before long. When will that Oratorio of yours be finished?"

"In November, I hope."

"Only four months. Shall you really be through with it by then?"

"That depends. Sometimes it won't go at all, and I get out of heart about it; and then again the whole plan unfolds before me, and I can see my way right on to the end. But, Jeannie——"

"Well, brother."

"One ought to be quiet and happy to compose beautiful music. You can't do anything well when you have a sense of not being in your right place whilst you are doing it."

"But still, Davie, we are very comfortable here," and Janet took a survey of the room—so dainty in its neatness—as though it held all that she cared for now. "We are very comfortable I mean so far as the house is concerned, and if we could only just manage to increase our income a little, at least for the present; you know we can do without being rich."

"Yes, Jeannie, but think of the old house and all that might have been."

David Bruce paused; he had forgotten himself. He looked quickly at his sister, as if fearing he might have grieved her by the memories his words had roused. But her face was calm as ever.

"Brother, by-and-by we shall see that it has all been for the best. You did nobly in doing what you did. It is one of the proudest things I have to think about, that you had courage to give up all and begin the world afresh. And as for the home——"

Janet looked past her brother into the still, sunlit garden. For her, quiet and peacefulness were all that any home could give now. She had overpast the time when people want something more than these. With him it was different. All the purposes and expectancies of manhood lay brooding under that firm, self-contained face, tightening it down now into a stern, almost harsh expression. Something else than peace, David Bruce wanted; he is scarcely a man who can be content with that. Name and fame, a grand, true life-work, influence and sway over other minds, a steady, immovable standing place in this world, something to labor at, and some one else to labor for—all these he wanted. But this was the side of his character which Janet could not understand.

"For the home, brother," she continued, "we have each other, and perhaps by-and-by——"

What possibilities lay folded in that "by-and-by" were not destined to come to light. A gentle knock was heard outside, and presently Alice Grey stood in the parlor, startling its quietness like a living flash of sunshine.

Wherever Alice Grey came, she brought with her a fresh, sunshiny feel. Perhaps it was the bonnie girlish frankness of her ways, or the clear unclouded brightness that shone out upon her face, or the unwritten music of every step and motion that seemed to shrine her round with this joyous presence. Be that as it might, most people felt it. So did David Bruce. It unbound the strong lines of his face, and brought back the old, kind, softened expression, steady and firm withal, that used to come there when some beautiful phrase of melody was tracking its way through his thoughts.

She skimmed across the room to the broad low window seat, and settled down there with a floating butterfly sort of grace, the rays of sunlight that flickered in through the vine leaves, dancing and playing over her as though glad at last to find something akin to themselves.

Somehow you always associated sunshine with Alice Grey; it never came into your head to ask how she would look in rain and mist.

"Won't you let me put you a more comfortable seat?" said Miss Bruce, with a grave courtesy, that seemed graver still in contrast with the buoyant flashing grace of her visitor.

"No, thank you," said Alice, "don't move. I want to stay where I am. I remember I sat here that evening I came to have tea with you, and I thought it was so nice. Besides, the look-out into this garden, helps to make one happy."

Had Alice spoken her thoughts, she might perhaps have added, that the look inward did not tend towards that desirable end; but it was one of her unconscious habits to look always on the brightness.

"This garden of yours is so quiet and pretty, but my fingers tingle to tear down some of those branches, and let more sunlight in. Don't you think it is a good thing to have as much as ever we can get, Mr. Bruce?" she said, turning round to David, who was collecting his scattered papers.

He smiled, thinking that if she would come and stay in the room, they should always have plenty, but with national reserve he kept this thought back, and only said, with a quiet double meaning in his tones—

"I am obliged to work very hard, Miss Grey, and too much sunshine would dazzle my eyes."

"Would it? It never dazzled mine yet, and I always thought you couldn't have too much of a good thing. Somehow I can't get along without it. But I'm afraid I am disturbing you. I remember when I came last time, you were very busy most of the evening until dark.

David remembered it too, that visit had been to him, though he could scarcely tell why, like a trail of brightness over the unsunned quiet of the month.

"And then you played for me. Oh! I have so often thought of it since. But I am not going to interrupt you so much to-night. I have brought a message from Aunt Amiel for Miss Bruce," and she turned towards Janet, who had resumed her work; "we want you to come and spend a long day with us, whilst this pleasant summer weather lasts. Come, will you?"

Miss Bruce thanked her, but with an undertone of hesitation in her voice. Going out to tea made a somewhat violent break in the monotony of her daily life.

Alice noticed this hesitation, and thought it was perhaps because she did not like to leave her brother alone for so long. So she went on to say in her straightforward, frank way, without any constraint or simpering—

"And Aunt Amiel told me to say that if Mr. Bruce would come, we should be very glad to see him. Only we have no gentlemen at the Old Lodge, and I don't know anybody that you would like to meet. But if you won't mind the quietness, we will do all we can to make a pleasant evening."

David smiled again, the rippling smile that came so rarely over that massive face, but once coming would never be forgotten; it was so deep, and almost womanly in its kindness. To be spoken to with this fair, frank equality, brought back the old home days at Perth. It was pleasant, too, to have that young, fresh, pure girl-face looking into his.

"Thank you, I will come if you like; but Jeanie and I have lived so long in our quiet way, that we have almost forgotten how to make ourselves agreeable."

"Then it is quite time you began to learn again. And come soon, will you, Miss Bruce? I want you to see our acacia-tree before all the blossoms are gone, and they began to fall yesterday."

Janet promised to do so, and her staid face brightened a little, as most faces did in the light of Alice Grey's. The day was fixed, and with a little more friendly chit-chat, for none of the party excelled in what could be called brilliant conversation, Alice fluttered out of the room. When she had gone, it seemed as if a flash of sunshine had suddenly died out, or some beautiful strain of music ceased; all seemed so grey and hushed.

Miss Bruce went to open the door for her. This was a piece of politeness David generally left to his sister. Standing at the window after they were gone, in his old position, his hands folded behind him, he heard Alice say, in that dainty, child-like voice of hers—

"I have very few friends, and I feel lonely sometimes. I would like to know you if you will let me."

The words, or something in the music of her voice, drifted him away into a dim, pleasant, waking dream, which lasted until long after Janet Bruce had come back, and settled down again to her knitting. She thought he would have said something about their visitor, but he never spoke, and grey evening brought its usual silence into the little room.

"Ah!" said Janet to herself, as she peered through the deepening twilight into her brother's musing, abstracted face, "Davie is so wrapped up in this Oratorio of his. He has no thought for any thing else."

She took advantage of his silence to steal away, and hold a conversation with Tibbie as to the feasibility of the lodging scheme.

Tibbie was the maid of all work. She had lived with the Bruces in the time of their prosperity; and when, two years ago, a sudden reverse of fortune compelled them to break up their establishment and dismiss their servants, the old Scotchwoman stoutly refused to turn out with the rest.

"I'll no gang awa," she said with vigorous determination. "Yer mither was aye gude to me, an' I've took tent o' ye sin ye were a wee bit lassie, an' I'll no gang awa the noo." So she staid and came with them to St. Olave's.

Tibbie was a short, stiff, strongly built woman with square shoulders, a thick waist, and ancles to match. She generally wore a linsey petticoat, with a checked short gown fastened around her sturdy figure, and a cap of snowy white sometimes tied down with a blue kerchief. The only root of bitterness which ever sprang up between Janet and her maid, was Tibbie's obstinate refusal to wear shoes and stockings when they came to Westwood. With true Scottish pertinacity she scorned to abate one iota of her nationality in favor of southern prejudices.

"But, Tibbie," said Janet meekly, for she stood rather in awe of the stout Caledonian dame, "everybody in England wears shoes and stockings."

"The mair blame tull em, Miss Janet. I'll just gang my ain gate, an' do as my forbears has done afore me;" and Tibbie cast a glance of infinite contempt at the pair of Nottingham hose which Janet held out for her acceptance.

At last a compromise was effected between them, by which it was agreed that Tibbie should go barefoot during the early part of the day, and encase her lower extremities in suitable attire when the work was done. But she grumbled sadly at the arrangement, and over and over again assured her mistress that nothing but most self-denying devotion to the interests of the family, could reconcile her to this violation of old-established customs.

Tibbie was always consulted as to the domestic arrangements of Westwood, and would have held it an unpardonable insult had any important change been made without her sanction. She took the family interests—big and little—into the keeping of her tough honest heart, watching over them to the extent of her ability, with as much vigilance and self-importance as any prime minister ever showed in guarding the affairs of a kingdom.

"Well, Tibbie," said Janet, "what do you think? Could you manage a little more work than you have now?"

"Mair wark," replied Tibbie, looking round on her well-kept pans and candlesticks. "Mair wark! 'deed an' I'm just wearyin' for the time when my twa hands couldna' grip a' the work o' the Pairth hoose. I am through wi' it the noo afore the day is done, lang lang, and then its nought but knit knit till my fingers aches. I'd be gey glad gin the wark were double."

"We were thinking, Tibbie, of taking a lady to board with us, but I thought I would ask you first if you were agreeable."

"That's like you, Miss Janet; ye were aye full o' thocht for a' body but yoursel. It isn't Tibbie as would weary if the wark were thrice mair."

So that was settled. Janet came back into the parlor looking quite satisfied, and before the household went to bed, a letter was despatched into Cumberland, stating the advantages which Westwood could offer to a lady who desired board and residence in a quiet family.

CHAPTER VI.

One entire day passed, and on the third morning the postman's scarlet cap was seen winding up Westwood lane. Davie and Janet were sitting in the back parlor or "keeping

room," as they called it, when Tibbie brought the letter in. It was addressed to Mistress Janet Bruce, and was written in a cramped, professional lawyer-like hand. It ran thus:—

"MADAM,

"We are in receipt of a communication in which you offer board and residence to a lady of moderate desires and quiet habits. Before we make any definite arrangements, you will oblige us by answering one or two questions. Is St. Olave's a place of much resort for strangers? Is it situated on or near any of the grand trunk-lines of rail? Is Westwood a village, or simply the name of your residence? If the latter, is the house situated in a public part of the town, or where there are many passers by? Lastly, in case of the lady taking up her abode in your family, would she see much society, or is your mode of living quiet and secluded? The names you mention as references are perfectly satisfactory, and we think there could be no difficulty in completing an arrangement should the questions we propose be suitably answered. We have the honor to be, Madam, your obedient servants,

"SCRUTEN & Co."

One or two references to parties in the Lake district were enclosed.

"Rather a curious letter. It seems to be written by the lady's solicitors," said David, examining the thick blue office-like paper and cramped hand-writing.

"Perhaps she is an orphan, or a ward in Chancery with a large fortune."

"Possibly, for they seem quite disposed to be liberal in money matters. The questions puzzle me rather. I cannot understand why such perfect retirement should be needed."

"The lady may be nervous," suggested Janet, "and have a dread of society."

"I hope not. Whatsoever we do, Janet, don't let us have a nervous lady to come and board with us. It would be worse than living next door to a family where the children all learned music."

"Yes, much worse, because in the case of the family you might possibly get some pupils. But if she were nervous, she would most likely have advertised for a place quite in the country."

"I don't think it. Nervous people like the possibility of society without the probability of it."

"It strikes me that she may be an authoress, brother."

David shrugged his shoulders; he had a wholesome aversion to literary women.

"Worse and worse, Janet," said he. "I should be disposed to back out of the affair altogether if she is connected with the press. I think, though, had she been an authoress, she would have conducted her own correspondence. But we must not speculate any more; these questions want answering, and the letter ought to go to-day."

"In the first place, then," continued David, taking up the lawyer-like document, "as to St. Olave's being a place of public resort."

"Well, Davie, it is a Cathedral city, and I suppose all Cathedral cities are liable to visitations from strangers. And then the ruins up at Norlands might bring people to the neighborhood."

"I rather think, though, the question refers to public amusements, lectures, concerts, balls, and such things, and we don't have many of them in St. Olave's; it is about as sleepy a place as any one could come to. Next, as to the line of rail."

"We must tell them that it is on the route from London to the West of Scotland. I would not misrepresent the case on any account."

"Nor I; but our house is three miles nearly from the station. And now about the residence. The questions are certainly explicit enough, Janet."

"Yes, the writer might be a Scotchman for precision."

"We can satisfy him on that subject. We will tell him that the house stands back in a large garden at the end of a lane about a quarter of a mile from the high road, and furthermore that the lane leads nowhere in particular. I believe that is correct."

"And as to the visitors."

"They come at the rate of three in six months, exclusive of tax-gatherers. I wonder if that will meet their wishes," and a somewhat bitter smile drew down the corners of David Bruce's mouth.

Janet saw it.

"Don't look so, Davie. We love one another, and I am sure we are very happy. But it is time you were away to the Minster now, and we will send the letter this afternoon."

David set out. It was a clear, sunny July morning. He took off his Glengarry bonnet and let the wind play through his hair. It came with an idle, sleepy sort of waft; oh, so different to the healthy life-giving breezes which used to sweep down upon him from the Perth hills. But everything about St. Olave's seemed to partake of the nature of the place. The old elm trees in the Close rocked to and fro with grave ecclesiastical dignity; the sunshine, when it came, lay in broad monotonous sweeps, too well-bred to dance or sparkle or glint as Highland sunshine does. Even the very sky remembered that it overwrapped a Cathedral city, and never suffered its clouds to grow black and foamy over the storms they occasionally found it necessary to hatch. Ah, it was a dull place, this St. Olave's—dull mentally, morally, and spiritually; the Seven Sleepers could have wished no quieter spot.

David got to his place in the organ-gallery a good while before the service began, so he parted the heavy crimson curtains which closed him in, and watched the people assemble.

The congregation was very select. Mrs. Scrymgeour was there, in her pew at the right of the reading-desk, very near to the little boy choristers, who cherished a mortal hatred towards her because she had once been the means of procuring them a terrible reproof from the Dean. The graceless juveniles had had the audacity, during the chanting of the Psalms, to carry on some private monetary transactions relative to the buying and selling of black-jack. Mrs. Scrymgeour affirmed, upon her dignity as an Archdeacon's widow, that she heard them sing, "you shall have it for twopence," "say a penny

three-farthings, and I'll take it," instead of chanting the proper words as printed by authority in their music books. Of course this was a grave offence, and the boys suffered accordingly, being confined in the vestry a whole day, and fed upon bread and water. But they never forgot it, and used to make awful faces at Mrs. Scrymgeour behind their white surplices whilst the prayers were going on.

After her, Mistress Amiel Grey came in, leaning on the arm of Alice. It was rarely now that she got to the service, for she was growing very infirm. Still, though she walked slowly, her figure was quite erect, and there was a grave sweet dignity about her, which made the old folks from the almshouses curtsey as she passed them. Alice looked very bonnie in her brown hat and simple print-dress. David fancied that once she looked up towards the organ-gallery, but he could not tell whether it was the glance of her eye he caught, or only a glint of sunshine which had got imprisoned among her light curls. Before she came in he was intending to play one of Handel's slow movements for the voluntary; when he saw her he changed his mind, and chose instead that symphony from his half-finished Oratorio which he had played to her at Westwood.

It so chanced that when David Bruce was coming down out of the organ-gallery, after prayers were over, he encountered Mrs. Amiel Grey, who generally stayed in the choir until most of the people had dispersed. A fit of shyness came over him, and he would have drawn back again, but Alice sprang forward and held out her hand to him.

"Oh, Mr. Bruce!" she said, "I was so glad to hear that music again; it has just been living on in my thoughts ever since you played it that night. I wish you would play it very often; it does me more good than all the rest of the service."

David could not think of anything to say. He felt stupid and awkward, and so, after murmuring a few words about being glad that he had given her any pleasure, he turned away, and set off down the nave to a little side door which led into the Close.

"Who is that gentleman?" said Aunt Amiel.

"It is Miss Bruce's brother, aunt. He walked home with me from Westwood, when I was there a few weeks ago. But——" continued Alice, after a pause, during which she had been tracing a labyrinth of figures with her parasol on the marble pavement.

"Well, dear, what is it?"

"He is such a quiet man, such a very quiet man, Aunt Amiel."

The Keswick letter was sent off by that night's post, and another day intervened, which was spent by Janet in vague speculations as to the expected stranger. The Friday morning on which the answer arrived, began with a regular even down-pour of rain, and a chill breeze, which made the Westwood people glad to have a fire in their little sitting-room. The letter this time was addressed in a delicate, flowing, graceful, female hand, very different to the cramped lawyer-like style of the preceding one. It was sodden with wet, having lain at the top of the postman's packet all the way from St. Olave's. Janet scanned it for a long time very carefully without opening the envelope.

"Come, Jeanie," said David, "what are you waiting for?"

"I was only thinking, brother, how very much this writing is like Alice Grey's."

"I have not seen any of Miss Grey's writing. Did you ever have a note from her?"

"Yes, once. But I remember you were out when it came. It was to ask me to go to tea that first time, about two months ago. Just a line, nothing more."

"Let me see what like it is."

Janet went to her writing desk and took out the note—a dainty little billet—with Mistress Amiel Grey's crest upon it.

David took it from her. It was pleasant to hold in his hand anything that Alice Grey had touched—anything upon which she had left the impress of her own gracefulness.

Yes, the handwriting was certainly similar. The same fine graceful lines, no crooks, no angles, no ugly tail strokes running half across the page. It bespoke a character large and free and harmonious.

David held the note a long time, certainly much longer than was needed for the mere sake of comparing it with the other letter which the postman had just brought. At last he laid it on the chimney-piece within his reach, instead of giving it back to Janet. She did not ask for it, for she was intently spelling out the important missive from Cumberland.

"This is the lady's name, then," she said, and read aloud:

"Mrs. Edenall thanks Miss Bruce for her full and explicit answers to the inquiries made by Messrs. Scruten. On the whole they are satisfactory, as are also the terms which Miss Bruce proposes, and to which Mrs. Edenall agrees. Perfect retirement, freedom from the intrusions of visitors, is all that Mrs. E. desires, and she trusts that in coming to reside at Westwood this will be gained. Mrs. Edenall proposes joining Miss Bruce on the 24th inst. The train arrives in St. Olave's about 8 P.M."

This letter bore a crest, and it had a deep black border.

"Mrs. Edenall. It is a pretty name. She is a fortunate creature, Janet, to desire nothing but retirement, and we shall not be afraid of disappointing her."

"She does not write like an authoress either, Davie."

"No, the handwriting is too pretty for that, and besides she doesn't use long words. The note is as simple as even Alice Grey could write."

"I fancy, David, she is a widow; of good family, too, from the crest on the envelope. I wonder what is the device."

Janet took it to the window, but could not decipher it. The rain had sodden the paper and blurred it, so that something like a hand was all that she could make out.

"It is no use keeping the note," she said, "papers litter about so." And Janet put both envelope and letter into the fire. "Eight o'clock on the evening of the 24th. That's a week to-day."

"You had better have kept the envelope,

Janet. When the rain dried off, you might have deciphered the crest."

"It is too late now," she said, as the paper shrivelled and crackled in the flames. "I don't think, though, it is of any consequence. But if she comes this day week, I must see about having the toilette covers sent to the wash." And Janet went out.

When she had gone, David took Alice Grey's note off the chimney-piece and read it over and over again. No one would have said that his face looked harsh or rugged then. A very gentle smile, scarcely a smile, but a sort of reflection from some inner light, swept over it, and made it look almost beautiful. Then he folded the note up and put it in his pocket-book, the first English thing that David Bruce had thought worth treasuring. Janet never asked him for it. She had either forgotten it altogether, or supposed that it had been burned with Mrs. Edenall's.

Next evening was the one which had been fixed for them to go to the Old Lodge.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Old Lodge, occupied by Mistress Amiel Grey,—widow of Dean Grey who had died thirty years ago,—what a quaint, quiet, out-of-the-world spot it was, standing back at the west corner of the Cathedral Close, past the Deanery, Bishop's Palace and Residence. The very air of eld breathed out from its red gables and carved fronts; stories of long ago days seemed nestling among the shadows which lay so silently behind the grey and mossed oriel windows. It was built in the time of the Tudors, and had been used by one of them as a Court residence when he visited St. Olave's. Even yet the Royal arms and monograms were to be seen traced over the principal entrance and upon some of the panels in the hall. The old women in the almshouses told a story, that on the thirtieth of January, King Charles used to ride up one of the long corridors with his head under his arm, but they were free to confess they had never seen the gruesome sight, and only believed it on hear-say.

The Old Lodge did not look like a haunted place at all. It had far too much cosy substantiality to suit the tastes of ghostly visitants, who seem to have a vocation for making themselves, as well as other people, uncomfortable, and for the most part confine their habitat to damp attics and mouldy passages. It was a low, rambling, irregular house, one end fronting the Cathedral Close, the rest reaching down to the river and the Monastery Gardens. Clasping masses of ivy, and, in summer time, luxuriant tresses of vine and jasmine, clothed it completely over, forming a delicate fret-work round the oriel windows and little diamond casements, or wreathing fantastically above the brazen weathercocks which surmounted some of the gables. Part of the building formed a quadrangle round a gravelled court, in the midst of which was an old-fashioned fountain spirting forth one slow, monotonous jet of water from the mouth of a stone dolphin, surrounded by little stone cherubs with dripping locks.

For the interior, the Old Lodge was just such a place as wizened antiquary or silence-loving student might wish to inhabit. No noise of bustling life, no busy work-day hum ever got through its thick walls, or had leave to waken any echoes in the long, wainscoted corridors. There were many dark, oak-panelled rooms with inscriptions carved around the open fireplaces, and heraldic devices emblazoned on the ceilings; grand old staircases, too, with massive balustrades pierced here and there with shot—Cromwell had fired upon the place during the civil wars,—and little closet-chambers, entered by secret doors, which were very silent over whatever memories they might hold.

Still around all the place there was a pleasant, sunshiny feel. Spite of its grizzled antiquity, the Old Lodge was a home-like spot. Taste and modern contrivance had made a pleasant enough retreat of the great library which looked out over the Close and the west front of the Cathedral. The oriel window was bordered with stained glass, and filled in summer and autumn-time with creeping plants—a dainty setting for the grey old Minster towers which fronted it. The room was very long, stretching the whole length of that side of the house—high, narrow, with groined roof and carved panelling. The oriel window formed one end, at the other was a stained glass door, through which the lingering sunlight came at evening in long golden sweeps that flooded the stately old room with a soft, warm glow. This door opened into the garden.

Speaking of gardens, ah! that *was* a garden. Different enough from our nineteenth century development of the idea, which seems to consist of half an acre of ground chopped up into various compartments, bedizened with mathematical diagrams of pink, yellow, blue, and red, stuck over with plaster vases and wire baskets; a place where there is no shade, no seclusion, no anything but one great glaring mass of color. The Old Lodge garden was what our grandfathers aptly termed a "*pleasaunce.*" Quaint and queer it was, full of leafy nooks where no intruder ever came with hoe and pruning-knife. There were long, sequestered alleys in which, centuries ago, Stuart princesses had wandered to and fro, where now the golden sunlight trickled through birchen boughs and thick green chestnut tresses. Beyond these were great round flower-beds, bordered with thrift and lavender, and filled with clove-pinks, damask roses, sweet williams, and all the comfortable old English flowers. Here and there, like prim duennas keeping guard over their wild floral children, were curiously-cut box-trees, preserving still the quaint forms which Elizabethan gardeners had given them. Fragments of stone columns uprose from the grass plots, for the garden came close upon the St. Olave's Monastery, and the high altar had once stood where now a great acacia tossed its feathery branches to the wind. And wherever you went, through winding walks or under the great arching trees, or along lanes of shining laurel, you could see the gables of the Lodge peering up—old red-brick gables faced with stone and tressed with greenery—withered-looking gables, like the worn features of a tried and trusty friend—more precious for his wrinkles.

Room for thought and meditation here, so quiet and restful was the whole feeling of the

place, so utterly apart from work-a-day bustle so full of grey old memories, so brooded over by the very spirit of stillness. It was quite near the cathedral. Standing under the trees by the oriel window you might catch the voices of the choristers and the rolling tones of the organ at morning and evening prayers, or in still summer evenings, hear the soft, musical, harp-like sigh of the wind through the belfry tower, swelling and dying out like the wail of some prisoned spirit.

And this was the place where Alice Grey lived—the frank, free-hearted English girl—a human ray of sunshine upon the still beauty of the spot, a strain of merry dance music flickering across its dim old-world quietness.

"Yes, it is very beautiful; we have no gardens in Scotland like this," said Miss Bruce, as they two sat on the grass under the great acacia tree, the tree that Alice was so proud of, with its drops of white bloom lying thick upon the delicate foliage, and wafting thrills of perfume down to them upon every gust of wind that swept across.

Alice was picking up the scattered flowers and trimming Miss Bruce's dress with them, then fixing them in amongst the folds of her dark, glossy hair, and laughing a light musical laugh as one after another they came tumbling down again. Janet sat very quietly under the process, just a half smile creeping into her face and back again now and then.

"Ah, you came from Perth here, did you not? I never was there, but I have heard about it. I know a family at Millsmany who have travelled in Scotland, and I have heard them speak of it as being such a pretty town. What part of it did you live in?"

"We lived in the Court-house near by the banks of the Tay."

"What, the Court-house, Miss Bruce, that grand place I have heard Miss Granger talk of; it is a little way out of the town, isn't it?"

"Yes, my brother and I and all of us used to have very happy days there a long time ago, before we grew up."

And with this there came over Janet Bruce's face a quiet light, as from the sweep of some pleasant memory, followed by a still, steady, locked-up look, not of pain, but a sort of patient hopelessness.

Alice saw it and was silent. It spoke to her of something she could not as yet understand; something she could only reverence. But it seemed to draw her nearer to this quiet woman, between whose life and hers there lay so wide a contrast. And then, looking at the unsunned face, from which all human hope and joy had quite died out, and noticing the half-weary droop of the head and the patient fold of the hands, she wondered what sort of a life Miss Bruce's had been; also whether any future could ever change her, as the past had changed this new-found friend of hers.

After this they sat for a long time speaking no word. It was one of those drowsy, sunshiny afternoons when even thought moves sleepily along, and we just dream the time away, listening, if no other memory comes between, to the gentle speech of Nature, the musical, soft flutter of leaves, whispering to each other in the sunlight, the cool swaying of the wind through branches overhead, the chirp of lazy birds.

As they sat there the bells began to chime for afternoon service at the Cathedral, and presently the low tones of the organ came creeping along through the still air. The melody was scarcely distinct; all they could hear was the faint sound drifting hither and thither, sometimes louder when the voices of the choristers joined, and then sinking into a murmur scarcely above the flutter of the ivy leaves round the oriel window.

"That is your brother playing," said Alice, "I often come and listen here in service-time; his music is very different from what we used to have in the old organist's reign. Dr. Steele scarcely ever played anything but Handel. My music-master used to be vexed with me for saying it, but I never could get to like Handel. Those immense, thundering choruses of his seem to crush one so, there is such a clamor of sound in them. I think the Titans and Cyclops would have enjoyed those choruses in the Messiah very much."

Miss Bruce only smiled. She was not acquainted with the musical tastes of the ancients.

"Your brother plays Mendelssohn's music, and I like it a great deal better; there is something tender, and graceful, and understandable about it. Handel always reminds me of that great black elm-tree yonder, where the rooks are cawing, with its rough trunk and bare brown branches standing out against the sky, and Mendelssohn is like this acacia, a fountain of green leaves sparkling in the sunshine; no majesty about it, but only a beauty that never wearies or crushes you. Do you think so?"

Janet looked mystified; these girlish fancies of Alice's were quite out of her way. She would have felt much more at home in talking about her tract district, or some little housekeeping matters. But Alice was in a dreamy mood this afternoon, and did not come down to commonalties.

"I like to find pictures for things and people that I know," she continued, "when I come here to listen to the music. I was amusing myself yesterday by picking out a tree for each of my friends; one, you know, that would describe their characters."

Here Janet almost laughed, these quaint conceits amused her so.

"That is a very new idea," she said; "and did you find one for each of them?"

"Yes. I thought that ivy yonder," and Alice pointed to one of the gables, "would do for Aunt Amiel; always the same, green in summer and winter, never much show about it, you know, but always pleasant and comforting. And then she tries to cover the faults of every one about her, just as the ivy clothes that rough old red brick, and hides all its crumbling places."

"I wish ivy grew more plentifully. I shall like to know your Aunt Amiel. And what did you fix upon for yourself?"

"Oh! I'm nothing. I don't keep the same two days together. I havn't grown into any sort of a thing yet. Well, then, I picked out that yew-tree for you—look yonder, growing beside that piece of broken column."

Janet looked. It was a tall, straight, symmetrical tree, its dark outline clearly picked out on the rising green sward behind; close by it

was a grey old column, snapped off two or three feet from the ground, with a few last year's leaves drifted into the broken crevices. As she looked, a great white butterfly poised itself for a moment on the topmost twig of the yew, and after fluttering its wings flew upward into the sunshine.

"Don't be vexed, it really does remind me of you. It is so neat, and close, and quiet, never getting into a fuss when the wind blows, or tossing itself about like the other trees. And in the rain, too, its branches don't droop or drag, or look miserable; neither showers nor sunshine make any difference to it, it is always still, and calm, and——"

Alice was going to say *sad*, but stopped; she did not want to bring back the look which had almost faded away now.

"Well, then," she continued, "I found one for your brother, too."

"Ah! what was that?"

"Yon old cedar-tree by the library. It is the only tree in our garden that the storm can never beat through. You may sit there in the midst of a pitiless rain, and never a drop will reach you. I remember standing at the library door once in a terrible thunder storm, and a very little young bird came fluttering to one of the low branches for shelter. It nestled there so comfortably, and seemed to feel quite safe. When the storm was over, it flew out again into the sunshine with not a feather ruffled."

"My brother would smile to hear that."

"Oh! but you must not tell him, it is only my nonsense."

Alice was still for awhile, and then went on.

"There is not much beauty in my old cedar-tree, only it is strong, and steady, and trusty. I don't think Mr. Bruce is very attractive, not so much so, at least, as a good many people that I know, but when the rain comes he would be a good place to shelter under."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know it, I feel it. I can tell directly whether people are to be trusted or not, and I am quite sure it would be safe to get near him in a storm."

Janet only smiled. She never talked much about this brother of hers, but it was the greatest joy she had to hear any one praise him.

"There is just one more tree that I picked out. Look at that stag's horn, with the long cornery branches; the wind always gives a squeak when it has to go through that tree, and so it reminds me of Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour, because she never opens her mouth without saying something out of tune about somebody."

"I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Scrymgeour. Is she not that tall, spare lady who sits in a stall near the prebends?"

"Yes, and she lives in that house, as tall and spare as herself, up at the north end of the Minster. Chapter Place always reminds me of a strong-minded woman who does not wear crinoline. When your antecedents are properly ascertained, she will call upon you, but not till then. I daresay if she knew you had once lived in the Court-house at Perth, she would ask you to dinner directly."

"Then I hope you will not tell her."

"I don't mean to, for you wouldn't enjoy it. I'm sure you wouldn't. But I shall turn into a stag's horn myself if I talk about Mrs. Scrymgeour, so I'll give over."

All this time the music had been coming to them at intervals. Now a louder strain of it rolled across the Cathedral Close. The anthem had begun.

"Ah!" said Alice, starting up and listening, "I know that—it is Spohr's 'Blest are the Departed.' Mr. Bruce often plays that, he must be very fond of it; but it is too grand and solemn for me."

The west doors had been opened, as they often were towards the close of afternoon service in summer-time, and the notes of the anthem could be clearly distinguished; its strange and weird-like modulations, too, and the sometimes sweet, sometimes mournful cadences. Now and then a young choiring voice would start away from the others, ringing clearly out upon the still air, then gradually sinking back and blending with the graver men's tones, all bound and held in check by the overmastering, stately peal of the organ.

Alice stood a little apart from Miss Bruce, her young face glowing with emotion, full of restless, unspoken thoughts. She looked very beautiful, standing there, half in light, half in shade, under the acacia tree, the sunshine cresting her brown hair, and shimmering on her dress, the leaf shadows playing over her face—that fair face upon which as yet no other shadows lay. Miss Bruce looked at her wistfully, as people who have suffered much do often look at young, innocent faces.

When the last notes of the organ had worn themselves away, and only the flutter of the leaves broke the stillness, Alice sat down on the grass again, her arm over Miss Bruce's knee, her fingers carelessly toying with the acacia blossoms that lay there. By-and-by she said—

"It is very noble, it is very grand to be a musician."

Janet thought she meant Handel or Mendelssohn, or that Spohr, whose strange music they had just been listening to.

But Alice was thinking of David Bruce.

Soon through the low bushes they could see little groups of people wending their way across the Close. Dr. Crumpet, the Canon in Residence, sailed away to his grey nest near the Deanery; the officiating clergy to their respective berths by the cloisters; the little singing boys scampered helter-skelter down the steps, got their tops out of their pockets, and their whips from the statue niche in which they had lain during prayers, and set to work at a fresh game. Last of all, with slow, tottering, uncertain steps, came the old men and women from the St. Olave's Almshouses.

"The service is over, and Aunt Amiel will have finished her nap. Shall we go in?"

Miss Bruce laid the white flowers out of her lap, and then, hand-in-hand, like twin sisters of Hope and Patience, she and Alice Grey went back through that sunlighted garden to the oriel room.

CHAPTER VIII.

"No, she is not awake yet," and Alice closed the door gently; "Aunt Amiel sleeps long this

afternoon. It must be the sunshine that makes her drowsy."

"I wonder if you would like to see over the house," she said, as they turned to go back into the garden; "most people are interested in it, because there are so many old stories belonging to it. This way—I will take you over the western side first, for that is the oldest part of the building."

Janet followed. Alice led her through the broad, low entrance-hall, paved with alternate bars of black and grey marble, and decorated with suits of rusty old armor, to the great staircase. Half way up this stair was a shattered balustrade, over which they paused, whilst Alice, with genuine loyalist fervor, told the story of Cromwell's ruthless assault, and the gallant defence of the Cavaliers. Then they went into what had formerly been the State apartments, which, though disused for centuries, still retained some traces of their former grandeur. There were tall, old-fashioned mirrors, all grey and mildewed now, with many a fold of cobweb drapery wreathing their tarnished frames. There was the bed with its tattered, moth-eaten, crimson velvet hangings, in which James Stuart had slept when he held his Court at St. Olave's; and the Presence Chamber, as it was called, lined with tapestry of foreign workmanship, where Margaret Tudor received an address from the burghers of the city, as she passed through it on her way to Scotland. Out of this room a secret door behind the hangings led into another and smaller one, lighted by a single arrow-slit window, so contrived that it could be slided back into the thick wall, and its place supplied by a block of stone. Here, during the civil wars of Charles the First, one of the Royalist officers lay concealed, and here, when discovered, he was slain by the Protector's men. Alice pointed to a dark spot on the floor.

"They say he was killed just here, and that his blood made that stain. I don't believe a word of it myself, but Lettice, that is one of our servants, is terribly afraid of this room, and wouldn't come into it after dark for anything you could give her."

"I have surely heard of this place before. A friend,"—Janet paused for awhile, and then went on quietly as ever. "Some one I once knew in Scotland told me of a house like this. The name, I think, was different, but from his description, the place must be the same."

"Very likely. It was not always called the Old Lodge; indeed, I think that has only been its name since the Canons left it. And we have antiquarians come from all parts of the country, especially people who are going to write histories. Was your friend an author!—what was his name?"

Janet did not answer; she was gazing down through the little narrow window into the court below, where the water was falling with idle plash into the fountain-pond, scarce moving the lilies which slept upon its surface. Alice thought she had not heard, and from the saddened look which came into her face, she concluded Janet was musing over the deeds of darkness which had been done on the spot where they stood.

"I am afraid I have troubled you with my doleful ditties," she said; "we will go down again now, and I will show you the pictures by way of change. Aunt Amiel is very proud of her Claudes and Poussins, though I don't think they are half so pretty as the engravings we see in the print-shops here. But I suppose that is my bad taste."

They went through a long corridor, lighted at one end by a stained glass window, into what was generally called the drawing-room, though it had little indeed of the airy lightness which we associate with that name, being panelled like most of the Old Lodge rooms, with dark oak. Upon the walls hung some very fine landscapes by the old masters, one or two rare engravings, and a few of those quaint-looking architectural pieces which Prout was so fond of perpetuating. The great interest of the room, however, was in its furniture, which was all of carved oak, beautifully wrought in leaves, and flowers, and mediæval work. Janet's attention was specially attracted by one piece, a cabinet, which stood in a recess near the window. It was small, but exquisitely carved, almost like a miniature cathedral, with its pinnacles, and statue niches, and queer, grotesque little heads peeping out through masses of foliage.

"I should like to open that cabinet for you," said Alice; "there are some rather curious things in it, which were sent to us from abroad. But Aunt Amiel has the key, and I don't like to disturb her for it just now."

"Stay," she continued, for she saw something white gleaming out from one of the doors; "I believe it is unlocked."

She pulled the door slightly, and it came open.

"How strange! Aunt Amiel is so very particular about keeping this cabinet locked, and she always carries the key herself. She must have forgotten it."

"Perhaps we ought not to open it," said Janet.

"Oh! yes we may. I have often shown it to people, but it is never left unlocked in this way. I suppose for fear any of the things should get lost."

There were many curious relics in it, such as accumulate in ancient families—pieces of plate, of the style in use centuries ago, old coins, some Indian jewels, articles of ivory work—fans, balls, caskets—from China, and other curiosities of more or less value. The gleam of white which had attracted Alice's notice was a cordon of pearls, with tassels of filagree work; it might be intended for a girdle, or head-dress, or necklace, for it could be untwisted to any size. Many of the pearls were discolored, and the filagree work tarnished; it had evidently not been worn for a long time.

Alice and Miss Bruce stood for some time at the cabinet, hunting over the little drawers and cupboards which it contained, and which were full of valuables of one kind and another. One of the doors was rather stiff, and as Alice was pushing it, she gave the cabinet a slight jerk, which seemed to loosen a spring somewhere, for suddenly a panel fell down, revealing two drawers. One of them was half open, it contained some old worn yellow letters tied together in a packet.

"I suppose these are Aunt Amiel's private property, so we must not meddle with them," said Alice, as she closed the drawer, and attempted to re-fasten the panel. But she could

not manage it; as often as she lifted it, it fell down again.

"There may be a secret spring," suggested Janet.

"Perhaps so. I never knew of any drawers besides those outside ones, and no one would dream of that panel opening. But we will leave it. Aunt Amiel will set it right; she must be awake by now, and I'll go and tell her about it."

Alice went, leaving Janet there by the cabinet. Mrs. Amiel Grey was sitting in the oriel room, in her usual place by the window. Opposite to her, within the shade of the crimson curtains, the elaborate folds of Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour's black moire antique rustled like November blasts among dead leaves.

"Aunt Amiel," said Alice, "we have been upsetting some of your treasures."

"What is it, dear? I did not hear you."

"Some of your treasures, aunt. You know that old cabinet in the drawing-room. I found it open, and so I showed Miss Bruce some of the foreign things. And then, as I was trying to shut one of the drawers, a panel flew back, and there were some old letters in a drawer."

Aunt Amiel's face grew pale.

"My child, you have surely not——"

"No, no, aunt, don't be afraid; we didn't hurt anything. I have left everything just as it was. Only I was surprised to find the cabinet open at all. I know you generally keep it locked. I could not get the panel to fasten again, so I thought I had better come and tell you."

"Excuse me one moment Mrs. Scrymgeour,—" and rising hastily,—much more hastily than was her wont,—Aunt Amiel left the room followed by Alice.

Janet was still standing by the cabinet. All that she had seen of the letters when Alice took them out, was that the seal which fastened the outer one bore the stamp of a crest, but what the device was she could not tell, nor, indeed, had she tried, having little or no curiosity in her composition.

Aunt Amiel looked nervously at her for a moment, then taking a small key from her watch-chain she locked the drawer, and touched with her foot a spring at the bottom of the cabinet, which sent the panel back again into its place. After that she locked the outer door, and tried it to see that it was quite safe.

"We will go back with you," said Alice, as she turned to go away; "we were just coming into the oriel-room when I brought Miss Bruce in here to show her the paintings."

They all went together, and Aunt Amiel took her place again near Mrs. Scrymgeour, only just a slight flutter upon her face ruffling its usual stillness. What a contrast there was between the two women.

A winning old lady was Mistress Amiel Grey. There was a native refinement in all her ways, a quiet music in her voice, a rare purity in her aged face, which only a worthy life could have left there. She always dressed in black satin, with a clear starched neckerchief gathered closely round her throat, and fastened by a tiny gold brooch. Her silvery hair was smoothed beneath a widow's cap that had a plaited frill coming down under the chin, as we see in old pictures. Her hands were very soft and delicate even yet, though they had thinned and wasted until the worn wedding-ring hung loosely upon her finger—the wedding-ring which she had kept there through thirty years of widowhood. And there was a certain serene, stately self-possession in her every step and motion, the courtly grace of high aristocratic breeding mingling with the bland urbanity which made the English gentlewoman of fifty years ago so superior to the starched and crinolined "lady" of the present day.

As for Mrs. Scrymgeour—but the Archdeacon's widow has already been introduced to the public, and the ceremony need not be repeated.

She called to inquire the particulars of a "case," which had been sent to her by the clergyman of the parish for relief, and after the needful information was given, she launched out into general conversation, which was interrupted by the entrance of Alice. When the three ladies returned from the drawing-room, Mrs. Scrymgeour rose with a stately sweep, which shook out the folds of her dress and made them rustle again more gustily than ever. She shook hands with Alice, and was about to resume her seat.

"My friend Miss Bruce, Mrs. Scrymgeour," said Alice.

Mrs. Scrymgeour bowed, very politely, of course. Any one whom she met in Mrs. Amiel Grey's house was entitled to a certain amount of politeness, but her look had a "shake-hands-with-me-if-you-dare" sort of defiance, which Janet did not care to meet, so she sat down at some distance and took out her work.

It was Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour's foible—peculiarity she called it—to be very particular as to antecedents.

"Descent, my dear Miss Luckie," she was accustomed to say to that good-tempered little maiden lady; "descent is my strong point. I never overlook descent. Birth and breeding in my opinion come before everything else, before everything else."

To which startling proposition Miss Luckie vaguely assented, standing too much in awe of the Archdeacon's widow to attempt a contradiction.

In addition, Mrs. Scrymgeour had a peculiar way of looking at people who were introduced to her for the first time, and of whose antecedents she was not perfectly certain,—people for instance who had brought no letters to the Close families, and did not use crests on their envelopes. There was something in her face and the tones of her voice, which seemed to say as plainly as any words could have spoken it, "Who was your father;—who was your mother?" Indeed, it is highly uncertain whether she would have thought it proper to offer the rites of hospitality to Melchisedec himself, had he come in her way, on account of the exceedingly unsatisfactory nature of that individual's parental relationships.

She and Mrs. Amiel Grey had been in the midst of an interesting subject, and resumed it as soon as the introduction was fairly out of hand.

"Unpardonable, my dear Mrs. Grey, perfectly unpardonable, and evincing an amount of moral obliquity which is in the highest degree obnoxious."

When Mrs. Scrymgeour got into a lofty censorious vein, her language expanded in proportion, until it became truly magnificent.

"It was wrong," said Aunt Amiel, "very wrong; but her early training was faulty, and therefore I pitied rather than blamed her."

"Of course, my dearest Mrs. Grey. You are so sweetly amiable," and Mrs. Scrymgeour waved her hand towards the arm chair. "Indeed, if I were asked to give my opinion, I should say that charity was the leading peculiarity in your mental idiosyncracy. But excuse me if I say that really in this case you are allowing your beautiful forgiving spirit to lead you quite beyond the limits of propriety. The indiscretion you have mentioned, is one which an individual of the female sex would never be justified in overlooking or pardoning."

"The Great Judge is very merciful, and when He can forgive, it is not for us to be inexorable. She was a girl of wild, impetuous nature, and she suffered bitterly for her fault."

"I hope she did, Mrs. Grey, I hope she did. Such conduct is an everlasting stain upon genteel society, and of double blackness when perpetrated by a young person of such exceedingly respectable family connections. Pray what became of the miserable infant, the wretched offspring of this unprincipled creature.

Mrs. Amiel Grey winced rather, and shrank back with a deprecating gesture. Mrs. Scrymgeour's expressions were at times too entirely bitter.

"It was sent—at least some friends took charge of it, and brought it up. The mother never knew what became of it."

"Of course not, such creatures are utterly destitute of parental susceptibilities. Is she living yet—the woman I mean, or rather the shameless thing, for woman I will not call her?"

"I cannot tell. Soon after the birth of the child her mind gave way, and she was placed under restraint. I have heard nothing of her for many, many years, most likely she is dead or —or still in confinement."

"A providential dispensation,—quite a providential dispensation. But, my dear Mrs. Grey, I must go. Before I return home I wish to call at the Deanery and inform Dr. Somers that Martin Speller has not been in his place at the Cathedral prayers for the last two mornings; such conduct is reprehensible, very reprehensible, and the authorities ought to look into it. I shall suggest that the Dean stops his allowance until the cause of absence is satisfactorily explained. Perfect obedience to the stipulations of the charter is the very least which can be expected from parties who are dependent upon ecclesiastical beneficence."

Mrs. Scrymgeour rose, pressed Aunt Amiel's hand, performed the same ceremony upon Alice's, and then made an elaborate cast-iron curtsey to Miss Bruce, who had not spoken a word during the conversation. Then she swept majestically out of the room, and when she was gone it seemed as if the scared gods of household peace and quietness returned.

"Come nearer to me, my dears, my sight is not so good as it used to be, and I like to have my friends where I can see them."

So Alice and Miss Bruce came at Aunt Amiel's bidding, and they all three sat in the oriel-window that looked out on the grey towers of the Minster.

A quiet trio. Alice just setting sail from the golden shores of girlhood, the whole wide range of life before her, no clouds creeping up over the blue sky of youthful promise, not the faintest murmur of a coming storm to stir the bright waters over which her little craft rocked so gaily. Janet Bruce becalmed in mid-ocean, with neither breeze of hope nor wave of tumult to move her. Aunt Amiel slowly nearing the harbor of rest, where storms come no more, where light and glory wait.

By-and-by the two elder ladies fell into a chat about their early days, and Alice slipped away from them to the other end of the long room, where she sat down to the piano and began playing little snatches of music softly, so as not to disturb their conversation. It was a way she had of talking to herself when no one else could understand her thoughts—a sort of outlet for the vague, dreamy fancies that often went floating through her soul, and for which she could find no other voice. Sometimes the music was quiet and low, then quick and sudden, like sunlight trickling through green leaves, anon mellowing down into some old familiar tune.

Presently she stopped, leaned her arms over the music desk, and looked out into the garden, where long sweeps of shadow were slowly chasing away the lingering lights of evening. Then with a smile, as though gathering up some pleasant memory, she began a strain of solemn cathedral music. Slowly, hesitatingly, with many pauses and breaks she went through it, often mistaking the cords, sometimes playing the melody with one hand only, but always keeping upon her face that same quiet, contented smile.

Just then David Bruce, who had promised to call for his sister during the evening, came past the window and heard her. It was some of his own music the child was playing—the same piece she had heard at the cathedral. He did not go in, for he was afraid that would stop her, but he stood by the glass door, under the shadow of the great cedar tree, and listened to her for long.

There was great sweetness to him in her way of playing. He smiled at the fitful, uncertain manner in which she gathered up the air, stopping now and then to correct herself, sometimes playing wrong notes or hurrying the time, or repeating a phrase over and over again. It seemed to him he would rather have heard it so, marred and broken though it was, than with all the grace and finish which a complete orchestra could have given.

After awhile he passed on to the old porch and through the long corridor that led to the library. Alice was playing still and did not hear his knock, so he went in unseen, in the half-darkness of late evening, and sat down behind the shadow of the curtains, where he could listen to her still.

The two ladies at the other end of the room talked in quiet monotone of the life that was long ago past for them. Twilight was silently gathering, and the great darkening west front of the Minster seemed to cast a deeper shadow into the room.

Miss Bruce knitted on with quiet, straightforward energy. It was just a habit she had got

into, this of always doing something. Her hands never folded together with that gentle, unconscious clasp which happy people use, but were always moving with steady mechanical activity in the purpose-like routine of long continued use. Aunt Amiel leaned back in her great arm chair, her fair pale face in the dainty setting of its muslin frill, restful and quiet as an infant's.

"Your accent," she said, "reminds me of some friends I knew a long time ago up in the North, near Perth."

Janet looked at her with a momentary, questioning glance, then the eyelids bent down again, and the face gathered up its hushed expression, in which there was neither hope nor fear.

"I think I heard some one say you came to St. Olave's from Perth," Mrs. Grey continued.

"Yes; we lived there many years."

"It is a pleasant place, the country round is so very beautiful. I remember those Inches, and the quiet walk under the foot of the brae past Kinnoul."

So did Miss Bruce remember them, too well. But when eighteen years lie between us and any sorrow, we learn to look at it calmly. Yet the eyelids drooped very low now, and the fingers faltered a little over their work. The voice only was as quiet as ever.

"Yes, we were very proud of the Perth Inches. I remember it was the first walk to which we took any stranger who came to see us."

"It is more than forty years," Aunt Amiel continued, "since I was in that part of the country, and I suppose all my friends must have died away before this. Perth is not my native place, but the Dean had friends there, and I was visiting them."

Miss Bruce made an attempt to change the conversation by enquiring how long Mrs. Amiel Grey had lived at the Old Lodge.

"Nearly thirty years, my dear." Aunt Amiel had such a way of calling people "my dear"—"nearly thirty years. It is a long time. The place was used as a residence for the Canons, and when they removed to the new house in the Close I came here. But sometimes we go down to the cottage at Norlands. Do you know Norlands?"

Janet replied that she did not.

"It is a village three or four miles away from here, where I have a little estate, and in the summer time we generally spend a few weeks there. Alice likes it better than St. Olave's. She was always so fond of the country. She generally has a young party there on her birthday in September, the 7th of September."

"Ah! is Miss Grey's birthday on the 7th of September? It is my brother's birthday too."

"Indeed; well then, my dear, I'll tell you what we will do. You and Mr. Bruce shall join Alice's next party. Norlands is a sweet spot, and he can keep his birthday there as pleasantly as anywhere. You must consider it a settled thing."

Janet smiled, the old lady's pleasant friendliness touched her heart. After that, there was silence for a little while, and then Aunt Amiel began in that slow, peaceful tone of voice, which aged people often use in talking over their long-ago memories:—

"Yes, a very pleasant walk, the Perth Inches. There used to be such splendid sunsets over the hills. We often sat and watched them from the drawing-room window at the Firs. That is right, my dear Miss Bruce, do put that knitting of yours down. I am sure you must be very tired."

"Yes."

"It was a nice home. I always said the Scottish people had more heart in them than we smooth-tongued English. But things are very much changed now. Dunnie was a curly-headed little fellow of three years old then, a frank lad, but wilful rather."

Merciful twilight, that gathering so closely round them, hid the utter paleness which crept over Janet's face, and the drawn look of the still lips. Oh! these sudden breaks in the smooth green sod of daily life, these rifts which open at our feet, and show us the graves beneath. It was *his* name, the name left unspoken for so long. But she held her peace, and Aunt Amiel continued:—

"A wilful lad, and fond of change—very fond of change. I always told his mother she spoiled him rather; but then he was an only child, and heir to a good property, and that you know is a trying position for a child, especially where there is no father to exercise authority."

"It is," said Miss Bruce, seeing that she was expected to reply. And no one would have noticed any change in her voice.

"I remember he took to me very much when first I went. He used to come and lay his head in my lap—such a bonnie, curly head—and look up in my face with his great blue eyes; Dunnie had very beautiful eyes, and he used to call me his dear, *dear* auntie. But he got tired of it in a few days. Another lady came who used to give him sweeties, and he quite forgot Aunt Amiel. Alice, dear," and Mrs. Grey raised her voice and looked towards the other end of the room, "that is a very curious thing you are singing. What is the name of it?"

"'The Three Fishers,' aunt," and Alice took it from the desk and read out the last verse:—

"'Three corpses lay out on the shining sand,
In the morning gleam as the tide went down,
And the women were weeping and wringing their hands
For those who will never come back to the town.
But men must work and women must weep,
And the sooner it's over the sooner to sleep,
And good-bye to the bar and its moaning.'"

"Very peculiar words, my dear, very peculiar, and I can't say I like them; but songs now are very different to what they used to be when I was a girl. Dear me, how strange," and Aunt Amiel dropped her voice to the old low tones, whilst Alice went on with her singing, "how strange to think that it was more than forty years ago. I have scarcely ever heard of little Dunnie since, except once, I cannot tell how long ago, I got some word of an engagement of his, which was broken off on account of—of a circumstance very disgraceful to him; in fact, I was speaking of it to Mrs. Scrymgeour when you came in, though I mentioned no names."

"I was very grieved about it," continued Aunt Amiel; "such things ought not to be; they cause great sorrow. But there was something about Dunnie which made me fear he might turn out rather wild, unless a great change came over him. Alice, dear, ring the bell for lights. I am sure Miss Bruce's fingers fidget as

if they wanted to be at that knitting of her's again. Ah! my dear, you are so industrious, but by the time you are as old as I am, your hands won't move quite so quickly."

Janet looked at Aunt Amiel, and hoped—God forgive her for it—that long ere such weight of years had rolled over *her* head, she might have done with the weariness of life, and be quietly laid to rest where none of these things ever come.

Alice turned to ring the bell, and then David Bruce was obliged to come forward from behind the shadow of the curtain. She sprang to meet him with a pleased, gay, girlish grace, that had no stiffness, no constraint about it, and led him up to the further end of the room.

"Aunt Amiel, this is Mr. Bruce."

"I am glad to see Mr. Bruce, for his sister's sake, and I bid him welcome," said the old lady, with a certain courtly tone in her voice.

David hurried forward to prevent her from rising, and she laid her hand in his with grave, sweet stateliness. Then, as if more at home with Janet, she turned to her and resumed the conversation which had been interrupted, thus leaving Mr. Bruce to the care of Alice, who skimmed away again to the piano.

"I have been trying," she said, "to remember that piece you once played for me; will you play it again?"

He began, striking with the vigor of a master-hand the grand chords which she had touched so hesitatingly. Listening to him, there came into her face the old look of wonderment and reverence.

"Ah!" she said, when he had finished, "it is very grand. Will you tell me who wrote it?"

"An unknown composer," replied David, not even the shadow of a smile changing his firm set countenance.

"Unknown; I wonder if he is living. I wish I knew him. I think I could reverence him very much. I could almost——"

He looked at her curiously, questioningly. She paused, and then said—

"Will you let me play it again now, and put me into the right way? I want to try it whilst it is fresh in my thoughts."

"You are fond of church music, then," said David: "there are not many girls of your age that care much for it. They would rather have one of Stephen Glover's songs than the grandest anthem that was ever composed."

"Yes; I always liked those old chants and choruses they have in cathedrals, except Handel's. I don't care for Handel's. Perhaps it is because I once saw his portrait, and that took all the charm out of his music. But Tallis, and Bird, and Gibbon, I do like them, and I always envy the little chorister-boys when I see them go into their places hugging those huge old service books. I long to turn over the pages too."

"If you care for that, then, you may come to me at any time, and I will take you into the organ-pew. There is an old closet there, full of church music, which has been gathering the dust for a couple of hundred years, and you could revel amongst it to your heart's content."

"Oh! Mr. Bruce," and Alice's eyes positively danced, "how good you are. I should like it so much; when may I come?"

"Any time before the morning service; next Saturday if you like, I am generally there early on a Saturday morning. But I give you warning, it is a terribly dusty place."

"I don't care for the dust if only I can see the music, and besides, I have wanted for ever so long to get into that comfortable crimson nest where you are perched up. I shall come then next Saturday morning, an hour before the service. And now will you hear me play that air, or rather try to play it?"

He gave her his seat and stood beside her. She went on steadily for a little while, choosing out the notes slowly and deliberately. Then she stopped.

"Oh! I have forgotten, what comes next?"

He bent over her, and put her fingers on the right keys,—those little white taper fingers, how tractably they obeyed the guidance of his strong ones!

"Thank you, I shall soon know it now."

She looked very bonnie, sitting there in the bright lamp-light. Spite of her young face and girlish innocent ways, there was an unmistakable atmosphere of high breeding about her, a certain royalty of look and gesture. David Bruce felt the contrast. She was the high-born English maiden, affluent in life and enjoyment; he the poor, unknown organist, struggling for a position. She, made to nestle in the warm-lined lap of luxury, he to toil for daily bread and daily comfort.

"Ah, what a discord!" he said, as she lighted on a false note, and he swept her hand off the keys, and played the chord himself. But it was not that discord which had disturbed him.

She turned quickly round, and looked into his face.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "it was a sort of professional feeling that came over me. You know I am in the habit of scolding my pupils now and then."

"Yes, I see. I was not surprised, only your voice sounded rather cross." And then she added with a touching gentleness, "I forgot; it must be very terrible to you to hear anything discordant. Will you give me the right notes?"

He guided her hand again, and then she went steadily through to the end.

"You were singing just now, but that piece did not suit your voice. Bring me your portfolio, and let me choose something for you."

"Mr. Bruce, I cannot sing when any one is listening. If I had known you were here, I should not have tried that song."

"Just do as I tell you, bring me your portfolio."

With a quiet, docile air, as if already taking her natural place of pupil, she fetched it. He chose out a translation of the German song, "Agatha," and playing over the prelude himself, told her to begin. Her voice shook a good deal at first, but he managed the accompaniment skilfully, changing it now and again, so as to help her. She gained courage soon, and began to sing with more feeling.

She had a very pure, limpid voice, a high soprano, with a silver-like ring in some of its tones. It had not been much cultivated, and there was no art or skill in its modulations, but it just seemed to flow on with an easy, unconscious sort of grace. Little by little, as he sat there listening to her untaught efforts, guiding and correcting, and sustaining her,

David Bruce felt his position readjust itself. Here, at least, she was far beneath him, here he could forget all social difference, and stand proudly enough her superior, treading firmly and regally, where she only came with trembling little footsteps.

This was a pleasant feeling. For, after all, the relation between a man and a woman is never satisfactory, unless he holds the highest place, and she, through all accidents of birth or fortune, comes to look up to him as superior to herself. And Alice seemed very easily to let him slide into this position of authority. She fell at once into her own place, resting on, and acknowledging his power.

It was Alice's nature to trust. Everywhere she seemed to feel out for something upon which to lean. It was this assurance of certain strength and steadiness, compensating for her own lack of both, that had drawn her so to Janet Bruce. It was this same want of some guiding hand which made her now look up to David, and begin, half unconsciously, to lean upon him, taking his thoughts, so far as she could comprehend them, for her own.

After that they began to speak of music. For David Bruce, unlike many others of his profession, had a great and earnest love for it, taking it not merely as one way amongst others of earning bread or fame, but looking at it as a life purpose, a great and noble talent, by which the minds of others might be purified. And Alice listened with girlish wonderment and mute reverence, whilst he, finding in her something that with far-off voice responded to himself, spoke of his own thoughts, and purposes, and longings. Again, as before, when she had heard these thoughts shaped out, not in words, but music, a strange, new world opened before her, glimpses of what she might be, of what she would be, if only such a guiding hand as his could be always near, to put her ignorant steps into the right way.

And so David Bruce gave Alice her first lesson.

"Brother," said a quiet voice, from the farther end of the room.

But neither of them heard.

"Brother Davie," and Janet came and laid her hand on his arm, "it is getting late, and I have some little matters to attend to at home. Shall we be going?"

The words brought him back into the common track of work-day life. Alice was sorry about their going home so soon, and would fain have made Janet stay another hour, but Miss Bruce said Tibbie would be wearying for their return, so she was obliged to let them go.

"My dear," said Aunt Amiel, just before the visitors took their departure, "I have been making a little arrangement with Miss Bruce this evening, which I am sure will please you very much. She and Mr. Bruce will join your birthday party to Norlands, in September. Neither of them has ever seen the place, and I know it will be a great treat to you to have the opportunity of showing them all the objects of interest in the neighborhood. Of course, that is, if Mr. Bruce's engagements will permit him to join you."

Alice's cheeks flushed with undisguised pleasure as she looked up into David's face.

"You will go, Mr. Bruce, will you not? I wonder I never thought before of asking your sister if she had seen Norlands. Say that you will go, and then I shall have the happiness of thinking about it all the time until September."

Was it something in the tones of her voice, or the clear, full glance of her sunny blue eyes, or was it a mere fancy that crept over David Bruce, and brought back to his memory as he looked at her, an old remembered face—the face of the man who had wronged his sister, and laid upon her whole life a shadow which could never pass away?

It might be only a fancy. And yet, as David turned towards Janet, her eyes, too, were fastened upon Alice Grey, and her countenance seemed drawn, as with sudden pain.

Alice opened the door for them. Holding David's hand in hers, looking straight up into his face, she said, frankly and innocently—

"I should like you to come again soon. You have done me a great deal of good."

CHAPTER IX.

DAVID BRUCE scarcely knew what reply he made to these last-spoken words of Alice Grey's. Something about professional duties at the Minster was all he could remember; then he took his sister's arm under his, and they went out together into the still Close.

They were generally very quiet, so neither wondered that the other spoke not. It was getting late. The moon had risen an hour ago, and a few stars shimmered out on the scarcely dark sky.

Like some old Titan, the Cathedral stretched its huge, irregular bulk athwart the straight lines of light and shadow which banded the green sward.

Greyly, and with a ghost-like glimmer, the moonlight crested its sharply-cut battlements, crept from tip to tip of the airy pinnacles, and pencilled out the delicate fretwork of the statue niches. Clearly, more clearly than ever in sunshine, the quaint old figures upon the gurgoyles stretched out their lean and battered faces. On the great lozenge window over the south entrance, the light flickered in faint, pearly tints, which seemed continually changing and rearranging like the shifting forms of a kaleidoscope.

The east front was in full light. It was a grand dream of architecture that east front of St. Olave's Cathedral. All the dim old fancies and conceits of monkish times, found expression there. Bravely the moonshine traced out the flowing lines of the great window, and lighted up its storied compartments. Curiously carved faces looked out from the corbels; some merry and jubilant, others stormy as with passion, others drawn in sudden pain; some grotesque and mocking, many stony with despair and hate. Strange weird faces, every human feeling pictured on them as the sculptor's fancy led. Above them, ranged round the arch of the window, with full robes falling to their feet, hands clasped in perfect rest, and brows bound with victor wreaths, were the statues of saints and martyrs, looking down with pale, passionless faces upon the strug-

gling faces below. There they stood, asking no questions, betraying no secrets of the monkish times that had fashioned them, speaking no word of the six centuries of human life upon which they had kept watch; just grand, and calm, and silent.

Was this some thought of the old monks carved in stone and speaking to the uplifted eyes of men, age after age? Would they teach us thus silently, of the soul's progress, even the same with us as with them—that only through passion, strife, and suffering, men mount to rest, and climb over wreck after wreck of human hope to the heights of eternal repose? Was that grand old Cathedral front, gleaming out in the moonlight, an allegory of life; joy, tumult, strife, passion, pain, despair; after these the crowned rest, the folded hands, the gathered robes, the wreathed brow? Perhaps it might be so. And above them all, whitely outlined on the sky, catching upon it a glory brighter than all the rest, uprose the Cross, symbol of the faith, through which alone all victory is won.

So David and Janet came home together. For a long time the tread of their own footsteps was the only sound they heard, except the whirr of a bat's wing swooping round in the shadow behind the Chapter House, or the eerie, harp-like wail that floated down from the belfry tower. As they reached the north boundary the bell struck ten, and the old porter came out to shut up the Close, rattling his keys and clashing the great gates with a clang that resounded again and again from the old grey houses. After that all was still.

St. Olave's was a quiet little city—a very quiet little city. At the hour of ten scarcely any one was about, for in the summer time no lectures or amusements were afloat. Now and then from some public-house a man would skulk out and make his way along the shady side of the street, or some caped and belted policeman flashed the light of his lantern across a dark passage, and broke the silence with his heavy tramp. Once only, as they neared the outskirts of the city, David and his sister overtook and passed a young couple walking arm-in-arm, walking slowly, lingeringly, looking often into each other's faces and speaking in those low, soft tones which lovers use for a little while and then generally lay aside.

Passing them, Janet thought of a long-ago time when, over the green and pleasant Inches of Perth, beneath such tranquil sky as this, she had walked not alone, lingering as they did, speaking as they did. And with the thought a slow, dull sense of pain crept through her. But she had learned to cover up all these things under an uncomplaining silence, and she spoke no word.

Soon they reached home, passed up the laurel walk, tipped now with thousand sparkles of moonlight, and into the quiet little parlor where Tibbie had lighted the lamp, and placed the books ready for worship. The psalm which David read for that night had this verse in it, a verse which has brought its message of healing to many a heart, since, in his wilderness solitude, old David meditated it—

"Oh, tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong and He shall comfort thine heart, and put thou thy trust in the Lord."

It came over Janet's heart like some sweet tune, charming down discordant thoughts, staying all questionings. Yes, she could wait.

"Davie!" she said, when prayer was over, and she was going to bid him good-night.

He looked at her dreamily, as one who peers through some pleasant veil of thought to far reality.

"Davie, I have heard of him to-night."

No need to say the name—no need to add anything to that vague, indefinite word, which, for any one else, might serve for half creation. There was but one for them in all the world who needed to be so spoken of. The dreamy look passed quickly off from David's face, and one fixed, almost angry, came in its place.

"Jeanie, how could she?—how dare she?"

"Hush, Davie, she knows nothing. She only remembers him as a little child."

"Cast him off, Jeanie," and David made an impetuous movement with the arm on which his sister's hand was resting. She kept it there though. "I wish you had never seen him. He has maimed all our life, he——"

"Was once very kind to us—very kind to both of us; we must not forget everything."

David looked down upon her reverently, now for the first time, in the new light that had dawned upon him, thinking how very bitter the past must have been, which forced her to speak of any human love with that word "once."

"Jeanie, you are very good." Then he stooped down and kissed her lips—the quiet, folded lips that would never know any warmer kiss than his, and, bidding her good-night, they parted.

After she had gone he sat for a long time at the table by the window, leaning his head upon his hands. When, at last, he lifted it, the still, peaceful look had come back to his face. Then he took his alto solo from the music desk, where he had left it in the afternoon, and re-arranged it for a soprano voice. Before this was done the small morning hours had struck, but he felt no weariness. Was it the music itself—its grand, sweet chords and luring melodies—which brought that pleasant smile, and smoothed out the heavy folds of thought from his great forehead? Or was it a voice—Alice Grey's voice—that sang on still in his memory, and wiled the night away with its sweetness?

CHAPTER X.

And Alice—what of Alice Grey?

For, that same night, long after David and his sister were gone—after the lights had been put out, one by one, in the grey old houses round about the Close, and not the tramp of a solitary footstep was to be heard any more in the quiet streets, she sat up in her own room, in the shadow of the white curtains, her hands clasped upon the broad, old-fashioned window-seat, her forehead leaning against the heavy carved oak framework. And over her young face, as she sat there looking out into the moonlighted Cathedral Close, there lay a pleasant smile, an innocent girlish smile, half wonder, half hope.

Alice's was one of those unformed, impressible natures which take the stamp of every passing

influence. There was much in her that responded to the noble and beautiful, much thought music, which, like that slumbering in the Memnon statue, only needed the dawn to awaken it. She had the longing, native to every girl's nature, for some firm stay to rest upon—some mind stronger than her own, on which she might lean and be safe. Responsive, as a finely-tuned instrument, to every touch of harmony or discord, trembling to every waft of kindness, living upon it as flowers do upon air and sunshine, she was and would always be very much the creature of circumstances, taking on every passing mood of feeling, and reflecting unconsciously the tone of mind of those among whom she lived.

And now, in the music of her young life, playful hitherto, and tripping, as some merry dance tune, a new chord had been struck, to which she listened wonderingly, thinking it passing sweet, yet scarcely able the while to fathom all its meaning. Dimly stealing over her, with the memory of that evening, there came the pleasant sense of rest in superior strength; of a certain control which, however some people may laugh at it, is always very sweet to a true woman, no matter how strong or weak her nature. It was the thought of this rest, this sense of protection and strength, surrounding her in David Bruce's presence, that brought the smile to her face as she sat there, in the half dark. And it was the strange, new feeling of life which he had given her—life full of thoughts dim as yet, and shapeless, that gave to that smile its wonderment and almost awe.

Bright, sunshiny Alice Grey! Flower born to bloom through the light of a summer day; must night ever come to you, as it comes to all things? Must that unwrinkled brow ever wear the crown of suffering, and those hands, clasped very restfully now, grasp the pilgrim staff so rough often, and heavy? How far for you, after this passing girlhood of yours, must that Cathedral allegory come true? Jubilant and gay-hearted now, have you to toil through pain, passion, weariness, despair, to the sceptred rest which is above them all?

Bonnie Alice Grey!

The Minster bell chimed twelve, every stroke smiting with a heavy crash upon the air. After the last, the sound drifted slowly up and down the Close for a long time, beaten back by the high walls of the Deanery, and getting entangled among the Cloister arches. When finally it died away, there was just one long, sharp, eerie sigh from the haunted belfry-tower.

Then Alice drew the curtains and lay down to sleep, the winsome smile still brooding on her face, and the chords of that music which David Bruce had played floating dreamily through her thoughts.

CHAPTER XI.

THE yellow sunlight of a July afternoon flooded the old elm-trees at the west corner of the Cathedral Close of St. Olave's. It trickled down in a golden shower, from leaf to leaf; it glinted through in little sparkles to the gnarled black branches underneath, and then it rested sleepily on the moss-covered roofs of a row of almshouses, built from the Close boundary down to the gate of the old Lodge. They were quaint, picturesque old houses. Many-colored lichens, brown, russet, golden and grey, dappled the overhanging eaves; patches of house-leek, and even whole plants of wall-flowers, sprung up between the interstices of the stone coping, and fattened bravely in the sunshine. The high-pointed gables at each end afforded shelter to a colony of swallows, who twittered pleasantly through the dreamy summer afternoons, or, when conversationally inclined, perched themselves in detachments of threes and fours on the open casement-window of the middle house, to have a friendly colloquy with Mrs. Marris's magpie, who was taking the air in his wicker-cage.

Over the centre doorway was a crumbling coat of arms, surmounted by the statue of an old lady in ruff and farthingale, the foundress of the institution. In her left hand she held a distaff; the right was lifted, and pointed to an inscription over her head, wherein it was stated that these houses were built by Dame Margery Grey, in loving remembrance of her husband, Roger Grey, who departed this life in the year of our Lord, 1670, having been Bishop of St. Olave's for twenty years. Round the doorway was a scroll, bearing this inscription in almost illegible characters—

"Thine · O · Lord · are · all · things,
And · of · thine · own · have · we · given · thee."

Scarce fifty yards away, St. Olave's Cathedral towered in grey, majestic stillness. A flood of unclouded sunshine poured down now upon the west front. Sculptured saints and apostles, martyrs with clasped hands, and robes folded closely round their feet; grotesque looking gurgoyles, traceried windows, canopied niches—all were clearly pencilled out in the warm afternoon glow. But far away in the east, behind the pinnacles of the Chapter House, were heavy, blue-grey thunder-clouds, slowly piling up and betokening a storm ere long—a storm which would send the gossipping swallows home, and awe the almshouse magpie into unwonted gravity.

As yet, however, the sunshine had its own way. It lay in a soft, warm glow upon the green sward of the Close; it came and went in golden flashes upon the stained Cathedral windows; it crept in and out through the battlemented turrets of the Bishop's palace; it peered mischievously into the grey aisles of the cloisters, and drifted to and fro upon the massive columns of the Deanery porch; and over all there lay a strange hush, the hush of a waking dream, as though the tide of busy-working life, which surged so closely up to the very gates of the Close, had turned back there and left for ever in the place an old-world air of unbroken stillness and repose.

"Well, them may gainsay it as will, but facks is facks, whether folks gives heed to 'em or not. I've lived i' this here nigh hand upon thirty year, comin' and goin', and I never heer'd tell o' nobody yet who could match wi' Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour. L but she's a

par'lous talker, she is. Why, she giv'd me t' length of a sermon this morning, 'cause I weren't i' my place at prayers last twice; an' that didn't do for her, but she mun set t' Dean on, an' I had him at me thick end of an hour, tellin' of me I'd broke through t' Charter, an' goodness knows what. Bless us, if t' Charter ain't to be broke through nohow, it ought to ha' made an agreement wi' Providence as poor folks shouldn't never have no rheumatiz nor pains i' their inside, nor nought as quality has." And Martin Speller whiffed out a cloud of fragrant incense into the sunshiny air, following it with that other and not so silent operation, which is the invariable accompaniment of tobacco-smoking.

Martin Speller was a pensioner of the St. Olave's Almshouses. A shattered, tumble-down old man, built in the irregular Gothic style, no shape in particular, and the general effect nothing to boast of. He was a rabid free-thinker in theology and politics, but discreet enough to smother his sentiments when any personal benefit could be gained by such a proceeding. Being disabled by the loss of his right arm—which had been snapped off in the Staffordshire Iron Works—from active work, he had got a living by running messages and posting bills at public times, and, during the last election, served the winning side so well that the honorable member used his influence to get Martin a settlement in the St. Olave's Almshouses. True, the old man's opinions were not quite up to the mark, but the wording of the Charter was not explicit on that head. It only stipulated that the alms-folk should attend prayers at the Minster twice a day, and receive the sacrament four times a year, both which duties Martin duly performed, and the parish authorities could take cognizance of nothing farther.

"Look ye," said Mrs. Marris, a stout, comfortable widow of sixty, or somewhere near it, to whom Martin had confided his private sentiments touching the Archdeacon's widow, "it's here; she does it genteel, cool and aisy like. Born folks hereabouts never shouts, they does their scoldin' same pattern as they does everything else, quiet and spry, wi'out puttin' themselves out o't way. Their tongues is allers droppin' n' droppin' n' droppin' like a barrel as hasn't got tap clean turned, an' ye never know when thy're goin' to be done."

"Them's my opinions exact, Mrs. Marris. But I likes them as does their scoldin' quick sharp, and knows when to stop."

"Well, it don't make much difference to me, Mr. Speller, as I looks at things, whether folks draws it out length of a pennorth o' tape, or lets it come tumblin' and splashin', so long as t' words gets said. But I'm free to confess she worries me, does t' Archdeacon's widdy. I oft think she were born wi' a scoldin' rattle betwixt her teeth, an' she's never dropped it yet."

"Ay marry," said Martin, "an' it's my opinion as she'll set on and scold t' nuss as comes to lay her out to bury. And law, won't she vex the blessed angels up yonder, when she gets near hand 'em? She'll sure to tell 'em their harps is out o' tune, or their feathers isn't white enough, or summut."

"Whisht, Mr. Speller. If she heered ye say that, she'll bring t' Dean about yer ears again, and ye'd loss yer 'lowance i' no time. Folks had ought to be civil to them as hold the bread and cheese."

"Deans aint no 'count wi' me," rejoined Martin, whose veneration was in inverse proportion to his self-esteem. "They can't do no more nor other folks has a mind to let 'em to. Mistress Amiel Grey, bless her, has say o' these here houses, an' she'll none turn a body out for speakin truth, let alone bein 'lected in wi' a parish meetin' an' gettin' votes and things as is reglar.

"Bless ye, Mrs. Marris," continued the old man, puffing out a fresh cloud of tobacco smoke, "do you think I'm the sort as'll go down of my knees and do my reverence to a man cause he wears linen enough outside his coat to find a parish wi' shirts? I nobbut humbles myself to them as has intellect'l 'bilities," and Martin dispread himself in his arm-chair with the air of a man who has uttered a sublime moral sentiment.

"Hould yer whisht, Mr. Speller. Bible tells us we're to order werselves reverent to wer speritle pasture masters, an I allers goes in to do as t' Bible says."

"That there aint int' Bible," said Martin, condescendingly, "it's nobbut catechise says that."

"Well and aint that every bit as good? I puts in for t' catechise same as I puts in for t' Bible, an takes em' both alike."

"Folks'll print ought now-a-days. I uses my intellects, and don't believe nothin. They're a poor set as swallers just what folks has a mind to stuff 'em wi'. Natur's my book, Bible and catechise an' all."

"Then, savin yer presence, Mr. Speller, ye're a bigger simpleton nor ever I thought ye was. An' if yer intellects as ye call 'em, has landed ye in such a mud heap as that, ye ought to think shame to say it, and you goin' to prayers night an' mornin' and doin' yer obedience to t' 'I believe,' an scrapin' to Mrs. Scrymgeour for odd sixpences."

"Bad luck to Mrs. Scrymgeour, an all t' rest of 'em; they're a set o' whited sepulchres," and Mr. Speller flung a fresh libation from his lips to the green grass.

"There ye go again," said Mrs. Marris, who, although she liked to have an occasional fling at individual character, cherished, nevertheless, a profound reverence for the whole body corporate of ecclesiastical dignitaries, and would have plucked out her right eye rather than omitted to curtsey until the top tuck of her lilac gown touched the ground, when the Dean or Canon resident passed within a hundred yards of her. "There ye go again; if I was you I'd tie my tongue up wi' a bit o' blue worsted afore I'd let it talk such heathenish stuff."

"Begging yer pardon, Mrs. Marris, didn't ye say yerself she was a scoldin' rattle."

"Happen I did," replied the repentant reviler of Archdeacons' widows, "but it were you set me on. When one fool says snip, there's allers another to say snap. But I aint a goin' to speak evil of dignities no more, neither for you nor for nobody else. An she's kin to t' ould Bishop, let alone havin' a nevy in t' church, and I aint tongued my catechise this fifty year, besides

prayers twice a day, an' my Colic reglar of a mornin' for nothin'."

To what dire extent this ecclesiastical controversy might have raged, is uncertain. It was put a stop to by a stranger, who came slowly up the lane leading to the almshouses, balancing a huge clothes-basket on her head.

She was a tall, well-built, noble-looking woman, with a tawny complexion and grand, strongly-marked features,—too strongly marked perhaps, but for a strange, inner spiritual light which shone through and softened their outline. In her whole attitude and bearing there was that unmistakable dignity which real religion, taking up its abode within however humble a shrine, does always give. Mrs. Cromarty was a Primitive Methodist, and worshipped in the little meeting house in Norlands Lane, just on the outskirts of St. Olave's.

As her tall figure darkened the doorway of Mrs. Marris's cottage, Mr. Speller took his armchair and went farther up the lane, under the shadow of one of the elm trees, muttering to himself as he limped along—

"Women folks haven't got no intellects. Can't find out what God Almighty makes such a sight of em for. They're allers comin, n' comin, n' comin, an t' world'll be clean smothered wi' 'em afore long."

"Come your ways in and rest a bit, Mrs. Cromarty," said Mrs. Marris, cheerily, when Martin was fairly out of the way. "I'll warrant yer back aches some. It's a weary way fra' Norlands, and the sun blazin fit to frizzle a body, let alone midges as seems to think ye was made for nowt' but to eat."

"I ain't tired, they're nobbut starch things," and Mrs. Cromarty whisked the basket down to the ground as lightly as if it had been a bird cage. "But I'll come in an sit a bit, all the same obliged to you."

"Happen ye'd like to take a look at 'em," she continued, seeing that Mrs. Marris was peering curiously, and with professional interest, at a tempting little bit of color which peeped out from under the white cloth; "I've gotten a new sort o' starch as makes things look better n' new."

And Mrs. Cromarty withdrew the covering from her basket with as much pride as if she had been unveiling a masterpiece of modern painting. Justifiable pride too. Why should not the *artiste* in starch and powder-blue claim that merit for her handiwork, which, without question we yield to him who dabbles in oils and pigments of divers hue. And never did the far-famed "hanging committee" of the Royal Academy gaze upon their squares of painted canvas with more critical acumen than that which filled Mrs. Marris's shrewd, common-sense face as she bent over Mrs. Cromarty's clothes-basket and scanned its snowy treasures. Mrs. Marris was a washerwoman too, though she exercised her calling chiefly in the ecclesiastical line, being employed by the proper authorities to get up the choristers' surplices and other Cathedral vestments.

"Talk o' things new out o' the shop, why what these here beats 'em to nothin'; ironed wi'out a crease, and not a speck or a smut, and law, Mrs. Cromarty, what a beautiful stiffness!"

"Yes, Mrs. Marris, they aint to be ashamed of, nohow. Says I to myself when I'd done 'em, Mrs. Cromarty, says I, them there's well done. But I allers puts my best foot foremost for Miss Alice, she's so tender and bonnie, and seems sort o' kin to ought that's pure like these here."

They were two dresses of light, zephyry, transparent muslin. One was pure white, sprinkled over with tiny leaves, softly tinted as the green heart of a snow-drop. The other was a warm bloomy peach color, perhaps in these days it would be called *mauve*, but that word had not been invented at the time of which I write. It was trimmed with a profusion of little frills, ruffled and crimped like the inside petals of a purple iris, and the sunlight shining through it seemed to stain all the room with a soft warm mist.

"Pretty things allers does me good to look at 'em," said Mrs. Marris; "I don't know if folks as wears 'em thinks same as them as washes 'em, but 'pears like to me if I could get a gown like them there, clean on once a week I should come a long sight nearer being a Christian nor what I is."

"Mrs. Marris, get the spotless robe o' Christ's righteousness, an then it won't be no 'count how often ye get a clean gown to yer back. Them as He clothes is well covered. Not but what I likes to have things viewly, mind ye, but them as can't be Christians in linsey-wolsey, wouldn't do no better if they tried it on wi' silks an' satins."

"Well, well, Mrs. Cromarty, mebby ye're right; but I allers thinks prayers sounds better when I goes to hear 'em in a clean cap an' my best black silk bonnet. I lay them's for Miss Alice."

"Yes. I mostly does four or five of 'em every week for her."

"She'd ought to wed a soap-boiler then. Why she'd cost anybody a fortin wi' jest nowt but washin'."

"Oh! for that matter, Mrs. Marris, it isn't that she sullies 'em any to speak on; but ye see Miss Alice, bless her, is that dainty and sweet-like, that if ought about her's got so much as a spreckle or a streak upon it, it ain't good enough for her. She can't abear nowt as isn't just as bonnie and pure as herself."

"Folks as has white hearts wants white clothes to match 'em, that's it, an' I say nought agin it. But I can't help it comin' into my head, odd times about, why you and me wasn't let to wear such as these here," and Mrs. Marris glanced from the woven air and moonshine draperies to her own lilac-print gown, which having been in wear a week, was variegated with sublunary spots not a few.

"Never heed them sort o' questions, Mrs. Marris, never heed 'em. God Almighty made some folks to wear pretty things, and other folks to wash 'em, and it ain't our track to be a turnin of His reg'lations down-side up. I'm thankful He's made me so as I like pretty things when I see 'em. It's nigh hand as good as a sermon when Miss Alice comes trippin' up the garden at Norlands, wi' her sweet-bit face, all 'broidered over wi' smiles, an' bonnie sparkles o' light glintin' through her blue eyes, like stars shimmerin' i' the sky."

"That face of her's, though," continued Mrs.

Cromarty, "gives me a sort o' achin' feel whiles. It kind o' minds me of a leddy as I lived maid wi' a sight o' years ago, an' she came to no good 'cause of her bein' so beautiful."

"Ay, that's it; beauty n' misery, beauty n' misery, that's way things goes i' this here world. It clean passes my wits why God makes women so fair-like, an' then lets 'em get trailed i' the mire, so as decent folks can't touch 'em. But tell us about it, Mrs. Cromarty. I ain't had nothin' to listen to, let alone prayers n' sermons, this good bit past, an' though I don't go to say nowt agen 'em, they sort o' lie heavy on my stomach, now and then, like Christmas beef when you've been eatin' over much. I mean no disrespect to the prayers, 'cause I were allers brought up to tongue 'em proper, and do my reverences when t' times comed. But summut tasty makes a change." And Mrs. Marris settled herself in her arm-chair, and opened mouth and ears for a spiced morsel.

Mrs. Cromarty stood by the casement-window, leaning her tawny face upon her hands, gazing half dreamily, half sadly, at the leaf shadows which were flickering to and fro upon the grass.

"It were a young leddy," she said, "far away, to the south. I forget t' name o't' place, but they don't have no winter there to speak on. Vilets comes peepin' out at Christmas time, an' folks sits wi' their windy open i' March, same as we do now."

"Bless me," said Mrs. Marris, whose turn of mind was practical, "but what a sight o' money folks might save there in coal 'n chips."

"It were a long time back," continued Mrs. Cromarty, not heeding her companion's matter-of-fact observation, "but I can tell of it just same as if it was last week. She were rare and beautiful, that sort as 'ud make a man's heart run down into his shoes to look at her. She'd long shinin' curls hanging down her back, an' the color came an' went in her cheeks like red i' the sky when the sun's rising, and the beautifulest eyes——"

"Lor, Mrs. Cromarty, she must ha' been picture o' Miss Alice, she's just that way."

"No, she warn't neither. Miss Alice is soft and winsome-like—that kind as makes you pet and cuddle 'em up, but my leddy had nought o' that sort about her. Not as she wasn't kind, I never had nought to say agen her for pretty behavior, but she'd a look as could ha' turned ye to stone if ye vexed her."

"Ay, that's way wi' some folks. Now there's Mrs. Scrymgeour," and Mrs. Marris made a wry face as if at some invisible elf or goblin.

"Whisht! don't let us hear nought o' Mrs. Scrymgeour; her name allers minds o' salts, as you must ha' summut to take taste out after it. There was a vast o' gentleman used to come about after my young leddy, but she couldn't fancy none of 'em. Her pa and ma was beat to find out the t' reason, poor things, for she was all the child they had, and they would fain ha' seen her comfortably wed afore they was took. But it cleared itself by-'n-by, it did."

"I lay she was a pinin' after somebody else. Dandelions and roses is all the same to them as hasn't eyes to look," remarked Mrs. Marris, who had had an "experience" in her own youth.

"You're near right. About half a year afore I left, there were a young man started comin' as no one knew what he was or where he comed from. He were fair to look upon, gainliest young man's ever I seed, summut that sort as King Saul might ha' been. But his heart was as dark as coal, and as dirty as pitch. I seed that from the first. Mrs. Marris, there's some men's faces—ay, and women's too, more shame to 'em, as the devil makes sign-boards of 'em to show who lives inside. He paints them up beautiful wi' pretty shapes and colors, but his name's printed in all the while for them as has eyes to see it."

"Mrs. Cromarty, that's a queer way o' puttin' things. An' he stole away her heart and then left her, did he? They're a graceless set, is t' men."

"Better if he had, Mrs. Marris, better if he had. A lost heart doesn't smart like one that's broke. I knew she were set upon him from t' first, she allers fluttered so when he came nigh hand her, and her eyes had a beautiful melt inside of 'em if she looked him in the face. Well, as I were tellin' ye——"

"Bless us, Mrs. Cromarty, yon's bell putting in for prayers. I mun go and get my bonnet on, an' ye'll ha' to tell me t' rest when I've got 'em sided out and back again. I think we're never clean shut o' prayers i' this here place; you're well off, Mrs. Cromarty, as doesn't need to go to 'em all. First lot of a mornin' hasn't got fairly settled afore t' bells puts in for t' afternoon set, an' ye're forced to get agate again. I oft wishes we could say 'em wi' a machine same as folks does such a sight o' things now-a-days, it 'ud put off a vast o' trouble," and Mrs. Marris trotted upstairs in search of her bonnet, with a disappointed look upon her face, leaving Mrs. Cromarty and her basket of clothes at the kitchen door. Just as the old lady got out of sight, Martin Speller passed the door on his way to prayers, and paused for a friendly crack with Mrs. Cromarty. He appeared to have overheard Mrs. Marris's closing remark, for he started on the same track as soon as he had got over his opening salutation.

"It's here, Mrs. Cromarty," he said, with a contemptuous sort of glance towards the old grey towers of the Cathedral, "I don't make much count o' prayers myself nohow. I sits up i' my place an' hears t' parson go through 'em twice a day reg'lar, 'cause ye see it's in the agreement, and we'd lose our 'lowance if we didn't go. An' as for the sermon twice a week, I mostly shuts up when that gets agate. I nobbut bargained to go to t' prayers reg'lar, wi' no word of a sermon on the back on 'em. Religion ain't no yield's ever I see, I don't believe nothin' as I can't understand."

"Don't ye?" said Mrs. Cromarty, drily; "well, I heered a bit since as how ye didn't believe nought at all, and mebby as ye say that's t' reason. Some folks' intellects can't take in much."

This unexpected turn rather baffled Martin, so he gave the conversation a twist in another direction.

"Yon's Mrs. Archdeacon a comin' up the Close, wi' his reverence the Bishop alongside of her; my word on it but she's awful stiff upright the day, s'pose it's cause she's gotten him to set her to the prayers. Some women's as proud as peacocks if they can get a pair o' coat tails to

walk with 'em," and Martin, who had great notions of the superiority of his own sex, took his pipe out of his mouth in readiness to make a bow as the quality passed.

Mrs. Scrymgeour and the Bishop came slowly along, her ample draperies puffing out behind like the sails of a merchant vessel under a stiff breeze. As they neared the cottage door, Mr. Speller did his "obedience" by doffing his hat and performing a rheumatic bow; but Mrs. Cromarty, who had a share of the genuine north country independence about her, stood upright as a queen, gazing calmly at the aristocrats out of her great, deep, dark eyes.

"It's a queer world, it is," said Martin, when he had put his hat on again, and resumed the perpendicular position, "it's a queer world. I oft wonder if we'll all ha' to set on the same bench up yonder in heaven, s'posin' there is such'n a place, and s'posin' any on us gets landed at it, which one thing's as onsartain as t'other, as I looks at 'em. But, lor, it ud feel mighty strange if the kingdom o' glory's a real place, to be settin' nigh hand the Archdeacon's widdy, an' hev her morry-antic dress—that's what women folks calls it—a rubbin' agen one's worsted stockin's," and Martin's face grew slightly perplexed as he endeavored to realize this possibility of millennial bliss.

"Hould yer whisht, Mr. Speller," said Mrs. Marris, who had just landed down stairs with her bonnet on and a black leather-covered prayer-book under her shawl, "ye were allers as blind as an owl about doctrines. Haven't ye heard 'em readin' at prayers about degrees o' glory and different sorts o' stars. Such an unseemly thing as it 'ud be for the likes of us to be sittin' nigh hand the quality. I look out for it as there'll be a place for us somewhere comfortable in the back seats, an' the Archdeacon's widdy an' them sort'll have front stalls an' prayer-books wi' lots o' gilt."

"Nobbut," resumed the old lady after a pause, during which she had locked the door and put the key safely in her pocket, "nobbut I hope we'll only ha' prayers once a day up in heaven, an' them in the afternoon when t' Litany don't want to be said. They're good enough is the prayers, but one gets tired bein' allers tewing at em."

CHAPTER XII.

"MISS BRUCE, I presume."

Janet bowed assent, being too much taken by surprise to attempt any other mode of address. What mistress of a household, called upon to receive a stranger just three hours before the appointed time, and whilst clean towels and pending culinary arrangements are yet uppermost in the strata of thought, will not sympathize with her feelings? The lady was announced to arrive at half-past eight, and the little clock on the mantel-piece at Westwood had not yet chimed the hour of six when a carriage drove up to the front door, and Tibbie's services were put in requisition to marshal boxes and count packages.

"I am Mrs. Edenall; I fear I have inconvenienced you by coming so much in advance of the appointed time, but I found there was no need to wait at Manchester as my solicitor informed me, and I preferred travelling in the daytime."

These words were spoken with that indiscribably rich and aristocratic ring, which, apart from all other test of dress or appearance, at once stamps the speaker as belonging to the upper classes; also with that high-bred indifference and hauteur which said plainly enough, "and if I have inconvenienced you, it is not of the slightest consequence."

She was a tall, elegant woman, dressed in deep mourning of very rich material. Her veil was drawn down and tied closely under her chin, so that Janet could only judge of the new comer by her voice and gesture, both of which were exceedingly proud.

"You have not inconvenienced me at all," she said at last, in reply to Mrs. Edenall's explanation. "You will find everything quite ready for you, and I am glad you have got through with your journey so much sooner than you thought for."

It would be impossible to describe the effect which these words, spoken in Janet's quiet, placid voice, produced upon Mrs. Edenall. Her eyes flashed eagerly through her thick veil; she turned abruptly round, and her hands trembled so that the purse she held fell to the ground, scattering its contents upon the hall floor. It was as if she had been suddenly shaken by some bitter, stinging recollection. But she soon recovered her self-possession. The momentary surprise passed, she picked up the purse and money before Janet could come forward to her help; and then, having seen all her luggage placed in the hall, she requested to be shown to her own room.

"Would you not like to come into the parlor and rest?" said Janet.

"Thank you," she replied, "you are kind, but I prefer resting in my own room."

Janet led the way. The room, which had been set apart for Mrs. Edenall's use, was indeed a very pretty little spot, one in which a lover of sunshine and fresh air might spend many pleasant hours. It was at the corner of the house, and had two windows looking east and south. One commanded a fine prospect across the rich level pasture lands of Broadshire away to the Wold hills stretching in a faint undulating purple line round the horizon. The other looked towards St. Olave's with its upreaching spires, antique-gabled houses and grey postern. It had besides, a full view of the north side of the Cathedral and a glimpse of the Deanery and Residence.

As for the fitting up of the room, Janet had made it as pretty as small means could afford. The furniture was of maple, simple, but tasteful and exquisitely clean. The walls were painted a soft French grey; the hangings of the bed and windows were of white muslin, and the carpet—a deep rich crimson—gave warmth and color to the whole room. Janet had hung one or two engravings on the walls; she also arranged a few flowers in a little Parian vase upon the chimney-piece; and as she had a notion that English people spent a great deal of time in their bed-rooms, she had brought a small round table out of her own room and set it before the window with a supply of books and writing materials. There was an air of indiscribable neatness

and refinement over everything, and that hushed feeling, which followed wherever Janet Bruce came.

She naturally paused for a moment to note the impression which the room appeared to make. Mrs. Edenall, however, took not the slightest notice of anything. Completely ignoring Janet's presence, and without a word of complaint or satisfaction, she began to take off her bonnet and cloak.

"Can I assist you at all? Shall I send the servant up to unpack your portmanteau?"

"Thank you, no. I prefer to be alone."

Janet took the hint and withdrew, closing the door softly after her with a feeling of disappointment. She had expected a little approbation at the very least, after all the pains of preparation, and Mrs. Edenall's cold manner completely chilled her.

"What a stiff, proud woman," she said to herself, as she went down-stairs to help Tibbie with tea. "I was in hopes she might be a sort of companion for us; but that can never be."

"Have you the scones baked nicely, Tibbie? Mrs. Edenall has had a long travel, and she'll be sair weary the night."

"They're just fine, Miss Janet. Sax of 'em an' mair for the morrow. And wad the leddie be for a bit bannock forbye?"

"Oh, Tibbie, English folks will no thank you for bannock, we must have buttered toast and some marmalade."

"The English folks are a' daft then," said Tibbie, who had a wholesale contempt for everything that was not Scotch. "But I'll do e'en as ye tell me, and gie the leddie her ain likings."

David Bruce had not got home from the Minster yet. He was training the choristers in a new anthem, and generally kept them an hour after service. Janet had just got tea arranged, and the fireside cleaned up—the evening, though in July, had fallen damp and cold—when Mrs. Edenall came sweeping into the room.

"You have a fire, ah, that is pleasant; people in this part of the country are generally so unwilling to give themselves the trouble of lighting a fire," and she threw herself carelessly down in the great arm-chair which stood on the hearth-rug.

As Janet sat at the table "sorting" the tea, she had an opportunity of scanning her new guest more carefully. Mrs. Edenall might be five and thirty, perhaps more—certainly not less. Had she been a trifle stouter, people would have called her "majestic," but being slender as well as tall, perhaps *stately* was the word which best described her. She was lithe and graceful in figure, dignified almost to stiffness in her manner; and her voice, when she did speak, which was seldom enough, had a cold, haughty accent—musical very, but full of pride. Her face was pale and worn as if with much suffering—but mental, not physical suffering. Her short, curling upper lip, the uneven eyebrows, the quivering, dilating nostril, told of a dauntless spirit that would both dare and do when the need came. Her hair was of a dull grey-brown, very thick and waving. It was put plainly back from her face, and knotted low down upon her neck, showing the exquisite shape of the head and the fine aristocratic curves of the slender throat.

She was dressed in deep mourning. There was nothing white about her but the cambric handkerchief with which she shaded her face from the fire. She held it in her left hand. Janet noticed a wedding-ring on her finger, and above that a diamond hoop which flashed and glittered in the firelight. Everything about her betokened high, almost noble breeding—and pride, intense, unconquerable pride.

"My brother will be home from the Cathedral soon; but we will not wait for him," said Janet. "I am sure you will need a cup of tea to refresh you after your long journey"

Again that quick, eager, burning look, as Janet's Scottish birth betrayed itself in the ringing "r's" and the peculiar musical rhythm of her words. It was a look of keen, intense interest, bursting for one moment over the proud face, and then leaving it pale and passionless as before.

"Do not let me disturb any of your customary arrangements," she said, stiffly. "I am not at all faint, and I would much prefer that you should wait until Mr. Bruce comes in."

So Janet sent Tibbie back with the hot scones, and put the cosie over the tea-pot. Then they sat in perfect silence for about a quarter of an hour longer, Mrs. Edenall still leaning carelessly back in the arm-chair, and musing on the carved oak frame above the mantel-piece. As the clock struck half-past seven, David Bruce came into the room with his music-books under his arm. There was a flush of pleasure on his face; he had met Alice on the road, and walked nearly the length of Westwood lane with her.

"My brother, Mrs. Edenall."

Mrs. Edenall rose, drew herself up to her full height, and bowed with grave, stately courtesy. Then she offered her hand to Mr. Bruce. It was a very soft white hand, almost the softest and whitest, except Alice Grey's, that had ever lain within his. Indeed there was something in its light clinging grasp which reminded him of Alice's.

They sat down to tea. A very quiet opportunity it proved. David addressed himself once or twice to Mrs. Edenall, and she replied in a careless, indifferent tone, not scornful—there was nothing in Mrs. Edenall's bearing to which that disagreeable word could be applied—but with a sort of half-unconscious weariness which implied that she would rather be let alone. So David, at last, let her alone. It was seldom, indeed, that he talked more than was absolutely needful.

After tea, she went back again to her old seat by the fire, while Janet helped David to arrange his music, talking, the while, of their visit to the Old Lodge. Their tones were low and quiet and restful. Mrs. Edenall closed her eyes, and there came over her face a dreamy look as of one who is listening to old but well-remembered music. Janet, turning suddenly round once, was startled by the strange beauty of its expression, and, glancing towards her brother, saw that his gaze was fixed in the same direction.

One of the old Italian galleries contains a painting of Hero looking out from her watch-tower on the dark, quivering waves of the Hellespont, waiting for Leander. Hope and memory give their light and shadow to her pale face. The remembrance of passion past, the hope of joy to come, meet and blend upon it. It was such a look that stole over Mrs. Edenall's face,

as she listened to the low, measured tones of this brother and sister. They had brought both some far-away memory, and wakened some sleeping hope.

David saw that their guest was not likely to be much of an acquisition in the way of companionship for that evening, at any rate, so he fetched the manuscript of his oratorio and began to work at it.

"Shall I disturb you if I try over this movement? there is only a page or two of it," he said, after a pause of nearly an hour, in which nothing had been heard but the click of Janet's needles and the regular beat of the timepiece pendulum.

"Not in the least," Mrs. Edenall replied. "I am never distubed by anything."

"She is not nervous, at any rate," thought Janet.

"And I hope you will not allow me to feel that I am in the slightest degree interfering with your usual plans." And, having said this, she turned her head away from them both, as if glad to have the opportunity of escaping from the need of further conversation.

David began. It was part of the overture to Jael. He soon forgot that any one else was in the room, and appeared to be talking to himself in the music. His face grew bright—it always did whilst he was playing—as if from some light that was slowly kindling within. After a while he paused to note down a new phrase that had struck him.

"You play very beautifully," said Mrs. Edenall, without turning her head. "It is a great rest to listen to you."

David was accustomed to have his musical performances patronizingly approved by fashionable amateurs, both ladies and gentlemen, who called his style "charming," "sweetly pretty," "soul-subduing," "so impressive," and then praised his wonderful facility of touch in very much the same words which the antics of a dancing bear would have called forth. But there was something different in Mrs. Edenall's manner. It was the appreciation of one who could feel and think with himself, and not the idle criticism of an amateur.

"You love music, then?" he said.

"Yes. I used to enjoy it very much once; but that is many years ago."

"Many years ago." How strange it is that people in middle life can never say those three words without a certain sadness in their tones. Mrs. Edenall could not.

"I have not played now," she continued, "for some time; never indeed, since——"

She paused for a moment.

"Since I lost my husband."

This was the first time she had in any way alluded to her own affairs, and even now she seemed to think the mention of them had been needless, for she drew herself up very proudly, and then begged Mr. Bruce to go on with his music. She evidently did not wish the chance remark to produce either sympathy or questioning. And it did not.

At half past nine Tibbie brought in the Bibles for worship. Mrs. Edenall looked bewildered for a moment, and then guessing at what was to follow, she rose hastily.

"Excuse me, I am tired. Be so kind as to let me have a light. I would like to leave you now."

Tibbie brought the little lamp. Mrs. Edenall bowed somewhat haughtily and was turning to leave the room, when, as though suddenly remembering something she turned back and shook hands with both of them. This was done in a grave, silent sort of way; not with any pleasant farewell smile, but with the half-humble, half-defiant air of a very high-spirited child who has done something wrong, and is too proud to acknowledge it. Then she went away.

"Oh! Davie," said Janet, when worship was over, "what will we do with her, she is so proud."

"I don't think it is pride, Jeanie. She seems very shy, and when she is more at home with us it will wear off."

"I am afraid not, Davie. I can't tell how it is, but she seems to magnetize me. The touch of her hand just now had a strange uncanny feel. I would like to have dropped it again directly. I wish she had never come"

"Nonsense, Jeanie, you are getting superstitious. We shall manage well enough together by-and-by. She is a thorough lady, you can tell that by the tones of her voice and every movement."

"She is a widow, it seems; you remember she spoke of having lost her husband."

"Yes, Jeanie, and what a sad weary look came over her face when she said the words. She has had some great trouble, Jeanie, and we must be very gentle with her. She has come here for rest and quiet. I think all that she wants of us is just to be let alone."

"Well, brother, she shall not need to complain of any interference of mine. For my part I shall be quite willing, as Tibbie says, to let her 'gang her ain gate.'" And with these words the brother and sister parted for the night.

Janet had great faith in Tibbie's perception of character, and so before she went upstairs she stepped into the kitchen to have a consultation with the knowing Scotchwoman.

"Well, Tibbie, and what do you think of the new lodger?"

"A gey braw leddy, Miss Janet," said Tibbie, taking off her blue check apron, and folding it carefully up. "A gey braw leddy, but ower muckle o' the pride."

And in her heart Janet thought that Tibbie was quite right.

It was scarcely dark—just a grey dim twilight—when Mrs. Edenall went into her own room. The first employment to which people betake themselves when they have completed a long journey is generally that of writing home. But although pen, ink, and paper had been placed ready for her on the little table by the window, Mrs. Edenall did not use them. Perhaps there were no friends in the place she had left, who would care to hear of her safe arrival at St. Olave's. Perhaps in all the world there was no fireside by which that night loving voices spoke of her; no home where the thought of her, the absent one, nestled into any faithful heart, or breathed itself forth in a prayer for her welfare.

One might have thought that she was accustomed to a very warm climate, for she shivered once or twice when she went into the room, and then wrapped her crimson cashmere dressing-

gown round her as if it had been mid-winter. The first thing she did was to examine the lock of the door, trying it once or twice to see if it was quite secure. Then she looked into the closet; it contained nothing but pegs for dresses, and one or two drawers, which were empty. After this, she sat down on a low seat by the dressing-table and began to unbind her hair, letting it fall in heavy grey brown masses on her shoulders. It was only part, just the outside, which time or sorrow, or both, had bleached. Underneath, and at the ends of the long, waving tresses, it was of a rich golden brown, that glorious tint which poets love to sing and artists to paint. Years ago, when her hair was all like that, Mrs. Edenall must have been a magnificent woman.

She took up one of the shining locks and smoothed it over her finger, looking at it long and earnestly. Then she buried her face in her hands, and soon the quick tears came dropping one after another upon her lap; sometimes with great, bitter sobs that shook her whole frame, sometimes with low, mournful sighs, tender and regretful, full of passionate longing and weariness. And she was still sitting there rocking to and fro in her grief, long after the Cathedral bells had struck eleven, and the quiet little Westwood household had packed up for the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE hours wore away. Daylight crept slowly on, disturbing the lazy grey shadows that lay sleeping in the city. One by one the battlements of the Broad Tower gleamed out into the sunshine, then glints of light stole down to the pinnacles of the east front and flickered from the topmost compartments of the great window, deepening and brightening until the whole looked like one mass of many-colored gems, set in a framework of foliated tracery and cunning broidery work of stone.

All sound of human life and motion was hushed, unawakened yet from the deep sleep which the midnight chime of the bell had left unbroken. But Nature was up and busy at her handiwork. She roused the nodding flowers from their night's rest by slant rays of sunshine peeping in under their dewy petals. She stirred with fresh, playful breezes the motionless leaves of the Close elm-trees, and bid them begin their pleasant whispering talk again. She reminded the drowsy birds in the vine and jasmine branches that whatever time the Minster service began, their morning hymn was already due, and forthwith the little minstrels tuned up and gave it rather feebly and huskily at first, but breaking out by and by into a loud jubilant chorus, which rang through the latticed window at the east end of the Lodge, and roused Alice Grey from her sleep.

She woke with a pleasant sense of coming joy. How or when it was to come she could not tell, until she shook herself out of the dreamland in which she had been wandering, and remembered this was the morning for her to meet David Bruce at the Minster, and look over that old music of his.

She liked to be with him now. She had unconsciously crept up to him, and wound herself round about his strong, true nature, as the little wild convolvulus will clasp the gnarled, knotted trunk of some old forest tree. Something to lean upon and rest against, was what she wanted when she first met David Bruce, and that support—steady, firm, strong—he had become to her. What she was to him, Alice did not know.

She was to be at the Minster at half past nine. The time wore heavily on, until the bells began to chime. Then she tied on her straw hat and wrapping a black lace scarf over her dress, she ran across the Close, and entered the great west-door which was standing open, as it always did in summer-time. There was nobody in the place that she could see, but an old verger, who was whistling a psalm-tune to himself as he rubbed down a fine monumental brass which had recently been erected to the memory of a Cathedral dignitary.

When she crossed the transept into the south aisle, she found David Bruce waiting for her at the door of the narrow stair which opened into his little sanctum. He led the way, and she followed. The organ of St. Olave's Cathedral was built over the entrance to the choir, nearly under the great centre tower. From the little gallery at each side of it, there was a splendid view of the whole building; eastward, over the choir, with its long ranges of richly-canopied stalls, its crimson cushions and draperies, its pure white marble altar-screen, stained now with the many-colored light that poured through the great east window—westward, down a dim prospective of clustered columns to the massive carved oak doors, which let out into the Close. The organist's place was covered with a canopy of oak, wrought like the stalls in elaborate tabernacle work. It was enclosed within crimson curtains, and furnished with seats for the use of the amateur musicians and *dilettanti*, who in the late organist's time, often came to listen and look on during the performance of the service.

On one side there were shelves piled up with volumes of music, old and worn and moth-eaten. There were manuscript fugues too by English and German composers, original scores of anthems, almost dropping to pieces, but worth their weight in gold, and carefully treasured in chests of which David Bruce kept the key. These last were what Alice had come to see. She pored over them with eager interest and such reverence as only those can feel who have been bred under the shadow of a Cathedral, and listened from their babyhood to the grand stately march of the old church music.

While she was looking at them, David chose out the anthem for the morning service and wrote the names of the different chants which were to be given to the choristers.

"Ah," said Alice, as she lighted upon a yellow moth-eaten piece of antiquity, "here is that beautiful canon of Bird's, 'Non nobis Domine,' will you play it for me, Mr. Bruce?"

"I would do so gladly, but we poor organists are dependent upon the bellows-blower, and he has not made his appearance yet."

"I forgot that; cannot I blow them for you? Is it very hard work?"

"Too hard for you to manage, I am afraid," and David smiled at the notion of those slender arms working up and down at the bellows.

Alice looked disappointed.

"But I can play it for you if you like during the service, instead of the voluntary I had chosen; give me it and I will put it aside with the rest of my music for this morning."

Soon the second bell began to chime, and the old almshouse people came to their places in the choir. Martin Speller first, with his leather-covered prayer-book tucked under his arm, next to him Mrs. Marris with the blind woman Ruth Cane leaning on her shoulder, then Betsy Dowlie and Anne Kirk. They filled one of the forms near the reading-desk, a position selected by the Dean with a view to keeping the old folks awake during the service. After them the Close families came dropping in one by one.

David rose and opened the door for Alice.

"You will go in to the service I suppose," he said, "it will soon begin now."

Alice hesitated a little while. Then she replied, "If you don't mind, I would a great deal rather stay here with you than go down into the choir."

He could scarcely help smiling at her frank, girlish simplicity; but he was glad enough for her to stay, and come back again to his seat at the organ.

She held the curtain aside and watched the people come in. Mrs. Scrymgeour rustled up the broad centre aisle in a severe-looking black dress. She carried a parasol, which she handled somewhat after the fashion of a beadle's staff, and as she stepped along she cast petrifying glances at the little chorister boys who were privately making faces at her behind their music-books.

If our happiness in this world depends upon the amount of kindly feeling we can draw out of it, then Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour's life was not passing sweet. After her came Dr. Hewlett, head-master of St. Olave's Grammar School, and one of the sub-canons of the Cathedral. He was a beautiful old man, grand and scholarly-looking, yet gentle withal and benignant, as we picture to ourselves the Prophet Simeon.

"There is Miss Bruce," said Alice. "She is always so quiet and still, just like a piece of music that has no accidental flats and sharps in it, and—— oh, Mr. Bruce! who is that magnificent looking woman walking behind her?"

"Don't pull the curtain so far back, Miss Grey, the people below will see us," and David laid his hand on hers to draw it away.

"I beg pardon, I forgot. But tell me who the lady is?"

"Her name is Edenall. She is a lady who has come——" For a moment David was tempted to ignore that part of the Church Catechism which inculcates the speaking of the whole truth. However, conscientiousness came to the rescue, and he said boldly—

"She is a lady out of Cumberland, who has come to lodge with us."

Alice did not say anything, but watched the stranger as she came up the aisle. Mrs. Edenall followed Janet with the step and bearing of a princess, her rich dress glancing in the sunshine and setting itself into fresh folds with every movement of her lithe, graceful figure. The Close people scanned her very curiously, but she seemed quite unconscious of their polite scrutiny. One of the vergers came forward, and conducted her to a seat in the stalls, near the place Mistress Amiel Grey usually occupied, and then, without pausing to ascertain whether her dress was serge or satin, he brought her a gilded Prayer-book with the St. Olave's arms emblazoned on the cover; a fact whereof Mrs. Scrymgeour took notice.

The service began. It was a stranger who read the prayers. Alice could not tell who he was, for he sat nearly under the organ. But he had the finest voice she had ever heard. It was distinct and clearly modulated as the tones of a perfectly tuned instrument. Alice turned to ask Mr. Bruce who the reader could be, but his head was bowed and his eyes closed, and she did not dare to interrupt him. Then she pressed her face against the open fretwork, and tried to look down into that part of the choir; all that she could distinguish, however, was a little bit of white surplice and a gleam of crimson silk, which told her that the stranger belonged to Oxford.

She listened and listened. It seemed to her she had never heard any music like that voice. Alice had a very correct ear; few things gave her greater pleasure than a clear, well managed voice. And certainly those old arches, and that groined roof had never echoed to sweeter tones than those which rang upon them now. Sometimes the words came very soft and low, as in the opening sentences of confession and supplication. When he read the Absolution, they were clear, ringing, and authoritative; and then in the Lord's Prayer that followed, they fell into a tender sustained monotone, blending with the chanted response of the choristers.

Alice loved to build castles in the air. Like most other young girls, she spent the half of her life in that fascinating but profitless employment. And so she began, as she sat there leaning her face against the oaken canopy, to weave a little romance about the owner of this wondrous voice. She pictured him to herself an Apollo of beauty, grand and tall and strong, with a face tender, and perhaps holy as those of the saints who stood in silent majesty within their marble niches in this old Cathedral. He must be very noble, so Alice thought in her own mind, and the soul must needs be good that spoke through a voice so sweet. So she dreamed on through all the opening prayers of the service, and the angel who kept watch over that morning's worship, recorded no petition of hers on his open page.

Then the music began, and Alice's thoughts fluttered back again to waking life. David Bruce was her hero once more. What a king he looked as he sat there in his place at the organ. How, obedient to the slightest touch of his fingers, the great tones rolled and surged and tumbled, now pouring out in a full overmastering torrent of sound, now tender as the mother's whispered prayer for her sleeping child, then thrilling into a long wail that made her heart grow still, it was so wild and sad, or rising into a bright joyous jubilant strain which almost woke a smile upon the quaint sculptured faces peering out from the capitals of the clustered columns. And he did *it* so easily. There was no straining, no show of effort. Like Moses of old he had but to touch the rock and the flood poured forth.

Alice knelt on one of the cushions by his side

and looked up at him with child-like reverent awe. He took no notice of her; he had gone where she could not follow him. His uplifted face grew nobler and grander. It seemed to her fancy that a strange light beamed from it, transfiguring the rugged features into such beauty as she had never seen before. She trembled, the tears came into her eyes, and then she turned her face away and buried it in the crimson curtains. He touched her soul through the music, and made it respond to him in unspoken wonder and fear. She dared not speak any more, and when David turned by chance, and saw her kneeling there with bowed head, he thought she was joining in the service. But there was no prayer in the breast of Alice, only a dim vague wondering respect for the man whose power she had never known until now, this man who had been so kind to her.

Then came the lesson, read, not by the stranger but by another clergyman, a little man with a shrill piping voice, which sounded like the scraping of a street fiddle after the full rich tones of a Cremona. So Alice did not care to listen to him, and amused herself instead by watching the sunlight as it strayed through the tangled grey masses of David's hair, and admiring the grand outline of his head pictured upon the background of the crimson curtains. She heard the stranger's voice no more until he began to intone the Creed and the versicles which follow it. Then came the music again, and then more prayers, and so Alice's thoughts fluttered backwards and forwards from her hero in the reading desk to her hero in the organ pew, until the service was over.

The last tones of the chanted Amen died slowly out, and then the people began to disperse. Alice leaned forward to catch a glimpse of the mysterious clergyman amongst the surpliced dignitaries who were marching in solemn procession to the vestry. But she was too late. The passing sheen of a crimson silk hood and a momentary glint of sunshine on some crisp brown curls were all that she saw. Soon the choir was empty, the little choristers whisked off their snowy vestments, and appeared once more as sublunary youngsters, with very dirty collars and hands to match; the bellows man came out of his little den, and set off to his shop in the back College Yard, where he carried on the occupation of a tailor. Only a few amateur musicians loitered about in the nave and criticized the anthem which had just been performed.

"Can you inform me," said Mrs. Scrymgeour to the old verger as he held the door open for her to pass, "can you inform me who the stranger is who came into the stalls this morning, and to whom you gave the Prayer-book?"

"A lady, Ma'am, who is staying with Miss Bruce."

"You did not catch the name, I suppose."

"No, Ma'am."

Mrs. Scrymgeour swept down the steps, and into the sunshiny Close.

"A visitor," she murmured, "and most certainly that was a crest upon the corner of her handkerchief. I must ask Mrs. Marris about it; I believe she washes for the Bruces."

David locked the organ and began to pack up his books. It had been a very pleasant hour, and now it was over.

"Where does that lead?" said Alice, pointing to a little doorway at the further end of the organ pew.

"To the gallery round the broad tower, and then through a narrow passage over the choir arches to the arcade above the east window. Strangers are not allowed to go, but the Dean lets me have the key, and I often walk up and down there when I want to be quiet."

"Oh, Mr. Bruce, do take me! Ever since I can remember anything, I have wanted so much to find out where those queer winding passages lead. May we go now?"

"I am not sure that it would be safe for you. In some parts the pathway is narrow and very slightly protected. You might turn giddy with looking from such a height."

"But you know, Mr. Bruce, you would be with me, and so I could not be afraid."

David's eyes smiled; all the rest of his face kept its wonted gravity. He opened the little door. As he did so, a gust of damp mouldy air swept down upon them. Alice shrank back from it.

"Ah, Miss Grey, your courage soon fails; we had better turn back."

"No. I don't think I am very much afraid; only——"

"Take hold of my hand."

Without a word she put her hand in his, and they began slowly and carefully to climb the narrow stair. After mounting some sixty feet, they reached the gallery round the tower. Here they rested for awhile, and then made their way along the corridor above the choir, at the end of which was a second stair, winding up the interior of one of the columns. It was hard work mounting this, though David led the way and helped her over the rough places. Once only in all the steep ascent did the faintest glimmer of light come to them. It was from an arched opening in the outer wall. Through this opening a huge battered gurgoyle leered mockingly upon them with a malicious grin. Alice shivered back. Almost she expected the gaunt thing to spring forward and grip her in its shapeless jaws. Only Mr. Bruce was there, and where he stood no harm could come. After a little more climbing, he opened a heavily barred door, and they entered the arcade above the east window, from which the whole building, with its vast ranges of clustered columns, flecked now and then with alternate bands of sunlight and shadow, was visible at a single glance.

David Bruce stood apart, with head reverently bowed. Familiar as the sight had grown, he could never look without awe at the majestic form into which the human life of bygone centuries had shaped itself. Not chiefly, or indeed in anywise as a mere masterpiece of cunning handicraft, did that grand old cathedral impress him. Rather it was the spirit-history of those mediæval monks, their hope, joy, reverence, aspiration, graven for ever in the stone. Their sins and their penitence, too. For as children who have unwittingly hurt you, bring flowers to lay upon and cover the wound, so these men, in the childhood of Christian belief, sought to hide with sculptured marble the scars of evil memories and deeds that would not be forgotten.

From the height where David Bruce and Alice stood, the choir with its gorgeous array of eccle-

siastical furniture, seemed diminished to a hand's-breath. Dim enough now was the gold embroidered velvet of the Episcopal throne; quite blurred and indistinct the dainty fretwork of the carved and canopied stalls. The massive brazen lectern appeared like a child's toy flashing in the sunshine; the splendid altar-cloth, a crimson stain upon the pure white marble pavement. The whole place, from which scarce an hour ago the sheen of priestly garments and the pomp of chanted worship had vanished, showed now but as a speck hardly noticed amidst the matchless symmetry that surrounded it.

Was there in this a shadowing forth of the truth, that as human souls climb the dark stair of life, compassed with gloom, beset with the spectral forms of doubt and superstition, from all which they emerge at length into the royal sunlight of pure religious faith,—these time-worn forms and ceremonies, grand though they be, do fade into insignificance, and there flows in upon the spirit ever more and more the beauty of that temple made without hands, whose best service is not the chanted prayer, but the holy life.

Alice perplexed herself with no such thoughts as these. The first gush of wonder spent, she began to spell out the designs upon the bosses of the groined roof, those quaint devices which had so often perplexed her as she sat in the choir below. Surely those monkish sculptors must have wrought for love and not for fame, or they would never have placed such cunning workmanship where few could scan its beauty. Here was a medallion of exquisite diaper pattern, chiselled as carefully as the ivory work of a jewel-casket; there a cross, wreathed round with clasping foliage; next a cluster of vine leaves; then a trefoil, a rose, a marigold. Alice wearied her eyes with tracing out the infinite variety of design; and then for change she bent down over the marble floor a hundred feet below.

"Look," she said, by-and-by, "how easy it would be to reach that pavement; a single step would do it."

Involuntarily, David drew nearer to her, and put his arm over her to hold her safely.

She did not offer to move, but still kept looking steadily down. And then, after a pause, she began again upon the same subject, showing that her thoughts had all the while been busy with it.

"I have heard that this sort of feeling—I mean this impulse to throw oneself down from a great height—is hereditary."

"In that case, Alice," replied David, "I hope your parents were very steady-headed people. If not, this is no place for you," and he turned as if wanting to go away; still, however, keeping hold of her dress. But she lingered.

"I don't know, I can't remember my papa and mamma at all. I believe I have lived with Aunt Amiel ever since I was a little baby. See, now, Mr. Bruce," and she let fall a tiny shred of paper, "how gently it falls! It would be very easy for me to go, too."

David did not like the look on her face; it was deepening into a sort of fascination, and her eyes were fixed keenly and intently on the little white fragment that was falling like a snow-flake beneath them. Something in those eyes reminded him of Mrs. Edenall; how, or why, he could not tell; but certainly there was a resemblance.

"Come away," he said. "It grows late, and Mrs. Grey will wonder what makes you so long."

"Must we go, then? it is so pleasant standing here. Aunt Amiel will not wonder about me, but if you say so I will go;" and she turned away, docile and meek as a little child. She never thought of disobeying anything that David Bruce said.

He made her go before him, keeping her always within arm's length, and in places where the parapet was very low, holding her dress or her hand that she might be quite safe. For a long time as they came through the damp musty passages, neither of them spoke. At last she said very softly—

"Mr. Bruce."

"Well."

"You called me 'Alice' just now."

"So I did. It was a mistake. I did not think of what I was doing. In Scotland we use people's names more freely than you do here. But I am glad you have told me of it, I shall not do it again."

"Oh! no, no," and she looked troubled. "I did not mean that. I was glad for you to call me so, I was really. Only you know you are the very first person, except Aunt Amiel, who has called me anything but 'Miss Grey.' But I like it."

And then, after a moment's pause, she repeated, "I like it very much."

They had now got to the little door which led into the organ-pew, and a flash of sunshine, streaming upon them as they entered it, showed all the mischief which the morning's ramble had worked on Alice's toilette. Her pink dress, which had looked as dainty and fresh as a new-blown rose when she left the Old Lodge that morning, was discolored with mildew from the damp mouldy walls; in many places her black lace scarf showed evident traces of contact with lime dust; and as for her sunny brown curls—over and over again her straw hat had been knocked off by a projecting beam or unexpectedly low archway—the less said about their smoothness the better.

It is a popular delusion that hair out of curl adds to the beauty, or at least the interest of a lady's personal appearance. Public opinion on this matter is wofully misled. Poets and novelists have sung the praises of untidy coiffures with most unprincipled eloquence. To depict a romantic heroine, according to the present accepted canons of taste, her head must look as if it had been trailed through a bramble bush. Without the shadow of a doubt, the heroines of Ossian's poems owe much of their popularity to their contempt for combs and brushes. The Malvinas and Leonoras and Cath-Lodas, whose streamy locks were spread upon their snowy bosoms, and whose white hands gathered up their loose tresses from the rolling winds, would not have been a tithe so bewitching if they had worn their hair in chenille nets, or had it nicely rolled over frizettes, and smoothed with bandoline, like well-conducted girls of the present day. And because untidy hair has made Ossian's women famous, damsels of the nineteenth century are apt to think it will suit them too. There could not be

a greater mistake. Dishevelled locks look well in a picture, and don't read badly in a cleverly written tale, but in actual life the case is widely different. For a single young lady who looks well with her hair in a state of chaos, there are nine hundred and ninety-nine for whom the experiment is most hazardous, and one which they will be wise not to try.

It must be confessed, however, that Alice Grey bore the test remarkably well. Her straying curls only caught and entangled extra sunbeams, and the consciousness of her somewhat disorderly appearance brought a flush to her young cheek, which made her look, in David Bruce's eyes, prettier far than the most elaborately got up ball-room belle that ever stepped out of a carriage.

"I ought to have told you what dirty places those passages are before I took you through them," he said. "It hasn't been worth all the trouble, has it now?"

"I don't care a bit for the trouble," Alice replied, laughing merrily and shaking the dust out of her dress. "I didn't know there were half so many queer places in this old Cathedral. It is like finding fresh ins and outs in the character of some one you have known a long while. I dare say I do look something of a fright though, but you must not look at me."

David did look at her nevertheless; although he said nothing.

And so they came back again into the cushioned organ-pew. It was in terrible confusion; all the chant and anthem books lying just as they had been left an hour ago, and the precious old manuscript fugues scattered some on the floor and others on the music desk. David began to re-arrange a little.

"Let me help you," said Alice, "I can put those books away for you at any rate."

He told her the shelves to which they belonged. It pleased her to be useful, and she set to work with the happy, contented, half-important look of a little child that is allowed to help its mother in some trifling household duty. David could not help smiling at her as she tugged away at the great unwieldy folios, and covered her little fingers with the dust that had been accumulating for scores of years. When she had done, she seemed quite out of breath with the unwonted exertion.

"You are tired. I am afraid you are not accustomed to such hard work."

"Oh, no," she said, eagerly, "I am so glad to do it for you. I always like to do anything for people that have been—for people that I care for."

David Bruce moved forward a little, so as to stand in front of her, and taking the two dusty little hands into his, looked steadily down into her flushed face.

"So then, Alice,—you see I am going to do as you told me, and call you by your name—you do care for me a little?"

She returned his glance with one frank, free, innocent—one in which all her soul looked through to his.

"Yes; I care for you very much. You have been very kind to me, and I have been a great deal happier since I knew you."

He let her hands go again. He would have been as well pleased had she not looked him so fearlessly in the face, had the sunny curls drooped closely over the flushed cheek, instead of being shaden back with such a frank, fearless gesture. Still he smiled quietly, and made that smile serve instead of any words.

For, indeed, as Alice had said not long ago to her Aunt Amiel, Mr. Bruce was such a quiet man—such a very quiet man.

He stood back for her to pass him, and they went down the narrow organ stair into the north aisle, through which there was a private door that led into the Close. Here Alice shook hands with him.

"You have given me a great treat this morning. Thank you very much for it."

Then she darted away from him across the Close, and almost before he could realize that she had left his side, the last gleam of her pink dress was disappearing behind the low bushes of the Lodge garden.

He stood there for a while as one in a dream, looking towards the place where she had flitted out of sight. And then, with slow footsteps and thoughtful face, turned into the little lane that led down to the Westwood Road.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE summer wore on, and St. Olave's began to manifest the usual symptoms of the season. Young collegians, with elaborate neckties and miraculous whiskers, sauntered round the Cathedral Close, and ogled the young ladies at morning and afternoon prayers. The shooting season commenced. The quiet little railway station, quiet at least for most part of the year, was overrun with *blasé*-looking men of fashion, who returned at intervals of ten days or a fortnight, with sprigs of heather in their wide-awake hats, and a general air of having seen the world about them. Besides these great guns of gentility, who were solicitously waited upon by the porters, and before whom hotel waiters stood cap in hand, there were others, not a few, of rougher social ordnance, who came into the place, some by parliamentary trains, and some by cattle trucks, in search of hay-making or harvest work. Bronze-faced, brawny-chested, hard-handed men they were; the workers of the community, who form the pavement, stout and well-trodden down—in more senses than one—of that national platform whereon we of the upper classes perform our graceful steps. And night after night these might be seen trooping down the country roads which led into St. Olave's, and drafting off into dingy back alleys, where they kept the police constantly at work quieting their small broils and disturbances.

Then the purple sunsets of early autumn came, steeping the Cathedral front in soft warm haze, and studding, as with many-colored jewels, the famous old west window; and in early morning the hedge-rows were spangled with dew-drops, and thin gossamer films, the embroidery work of fashionable lady spiders, who had nothing else to employ their time, floated from branch to branch of the reddening bramble brushes.

But Janet Bruce and Mrs. Edenall made little or no headway with each other. They "got on," as the saying is, well enough. Mrs. Edenall set-

tled down very patiently into the quiet ways of the Westwood people, made no complaint of the dullness and utter inanity of the place, never gave Tibbie needless trouble in fetching or carrying for her, and took things as they came with a grand, quiet, lofty sort of indifference, that would neither be pleased nor pained by anything. Holding each other's hand night by night in a friendly parting clasp—they always kept up this fiction of good fellowship—meeting each other morning by morning with words of pleasant greeting, sitting by the same fireside, and exchanging every day the customary courtesies of life, these two women were as utter strangers to each other's real self, as when, eight weeks ago, fate or fortune had first thrown them together.

One reason for this might be that Janet Bruce was singularly wanting in the element of curiosity. That quality which in great minds strikes out new tracks of thought and reaches after fresh discoveries, in medium minds stores up information about facts and things, and in little minds busies itself with the pitiful peddlings of gossip, was in her wholly lacking. She had not the art, which some women use to such advantage, of asking little innocent side questions seemingly vague and unimportant, and then from the answers to them deducing conclusions by no means so unimportant. She was not expert in gathering up chance remarks, or inadvertent expressions, and weaving from them an hypothesis of history or character. Janet Bruce was purely simple and truthful. What information she required she asked for straightforwardly without shifts or excuses, but it was little that she cared to know about any one.

Also, except where her affections were concerned, and these now were almost entirely gathered round her brother, Janet had little perception, little of what society calls *tact*. She was not very observant, not very sympathizing. Perhaps this was just the reason why she and Mrs. Edenall got on so well together. Neither made any very great demands upon the affection of the other. Neither felt herself wounded or grieved by the absence of those little caressing attentions which seem to make up the entire happiness of many.

Some women are like grape vines, always throwing out little tendrils of love and longing, yearning for expressed sympathy, for the touch of a human hand and the warmth of a human heart; restless until something is found round which they may cling, and when found covering it with rich luxuriance of affection and friendliness. And others are like reeds,—straight, even, upright. Weak enough truly, yet ever condemned to stand alone, having not even the power to cling to anything. All that they can do is to stretch upwards, to keep erect as long as they can; then when the time comes, break and fall and die.

Such, at least so far as any outward observer could judge of her, was Mrs. Edenall. She lived within herself. All of intensity and passion that stirred beneath the surface, all hope and longing, all kindness even and gentle womanly love, had never leave to pass the portal of speech or action. She was one of those for whom,

> "Being observed,
> When observation is not sympathy,
> Is just being tortured."

Janet Bruce's quietness of mind and manner, her dullness of comprehension, was a positive rest to Mrs. Edenall. It was pleasant to her to feel that she could do as she liked without fear of observation or remark. She liked to know that she might crouch down for hours on that low window seat in the Westwood parlor, gazing dreamily out into the still garden, or lie on the sofa, evening after evening, with shut eyes and clasped hands; and the quiet woman at her side would think nothing about it, know nothing about it; would never inquire if she had a headache, and offer smelling salts; never look "sympathizing," or ask if anything was preying on her mind; never even, by a closer clasp of the hand, a tenderer glance of the deep limpid dark eye, betray any knowledge of the struggle within.

Yes; as David Bruce had told his sister that first evening, all that Mrs. Edenall wanted was the luxury of being let alone. And in truth, when one comes to think about it, how rarely does any human being enjoy this luxury.

It was only at Westwood that Mrs. Edenall got it. The good people of St. Olave's, especially the Close families, had no notion of letting alone anyone who came into their select midst. Non-interference was no article of their creed. The least, according to their opinion, that any new resident in the place ought to do, was either to give, or allow to be taken by a committee of ladies appointed for that purpose, a full, perfect and complete account of his or her antecedents, including birth, parentage, family connexions and previous manner of life. Until this preliminary ceremony had been gone through, matriculation in the College of social status was impracticable, and the diploma of position unattainable.

The architectural fabric of society in a Cathedral city, has this peculiarity. A definite place is assigned to every stone that is carted to the building, and into that place, or none at all, must it find its way.

Now in a heterogeneous, carelessly put together edifice like a manufacturing town for instance, things are very different. If a stone is fractious, and won't fit into one position, the master mason finds another for it. If it refuses to form the pediment of a doorway, it may help to support the framework of a window; or failing this, it may be made useful in blocking up an aperture, or finishing off a stack of chimneys. Or come the worst that may, it can but be quietly hustled into some back corner where no one hears anything more about it.

Not so in an ecclesiastical city; not so in St. Olave's. No loose stones must be left littering around to mar the propriety of the social edifice. From the topmost pinnacle of the building, the Lord Bishop himself, the pride and glory of the place, down to the washerwoman who "did up" the choristers' surplices at eighteenpence per dozen, starching them for Easter Sunday and Christmas Day included, every stone had its own place and did its own duty. Where, then, was Mrs. Edenall to be put?

So far as the outer woman went, she was unexceptionable. This the ladies of the Close families had decided in solemn conclave. Her moire-antiques were of the softest and richest fabrics, her shawls of veritable Cashmere. The cloak that sailed so majestically up the Cathedral

aisle morning after morning, was of Spanish lace, not a doubt about it; so said Mrs. Crumpet, the Canon's lady, who had moved her seat two or three stalls nearer Mrs. Edenall's place one fine morning, in order that she might get a good view of it during the reading of the lessons. Her bonnets were such as could not be had for love or money, except from the costly warerooms of Regent Street milliners. Gloves, handkerchiefs, boots—those little straws which, as every lady knows, tell how the current of good taste goes—were exquisitely neat and fitting. So far then Mrs. Edenall was eligible for admission into the guild of polite society.

As to intelligence, if that might be permitted to put a weight into the balance, she had enough of it and to spare. More than once she had been seen poring over the musty tomes of the Latin Fathers, or reading in their original tongue, the numbers of Virgil and Homer. The Minster Library was open three times a week, and visitors going there, generally found her at work on some of its dusty old treasures. Moreover the librarian of the St. Olave's Athenæum affirmed that she was well-up in the literature of the day, and could hold arguments on social and scientific subjects as well as any of the masculine loungers in that temple of the muses.

But the ladies of the Close families scorned to give the right-hand of fellowship to such mere externals as these. They did not guage gentility by Genoa velvet paletots, or throw open their reception rooms to the potent charms of a twelve guinea moire-antique. The richest shawl that Indian looms ever wove was of small value in their eyes, unless the heart over which it was folded beat with the pulse of blood three centuries old at the very least. Intellect too, except so much of it as came by descent, was nothing cared for. The granite of mental and moral worth, which, by its own unaided force, heaves up from beneath and pushes up stratum after stratum of social degree, until at last it proudly overtops them all, won for its possessor neither place nor favor in the aristocratic circles of St. Olave's. The veriest shallowpate with a title on his back and a crest on his teaspoons, was of more standing there than the kingliest king that science ever crowned. Blood; this was what the St. Olave's people cared for; this they would have or nothing at all.

"Birth and breeding, my dear friends," said Mrs. Scrymgeour—the Archdeacon's widow was generally Lady-president of these "Position" committee meetings. "Let us assure ourselves of these indispensable requisites, and the rest can be easily adjusted."

But by-and-by, report, which is always busy in a small Cathedral city, began to whisper that, in these "indispensable requisites," Mrs. Edenall could stand an examination. Her linen was marked with a crest; so said Mrs. Marris, the washerwoman, who told it to the parlor-maid at Chapter Court, one morning when she came for the tea leaves; and the parlor-maid took advantage of a good-tempered interval to tell it to the Archdeacon's widow herself.

She had a courtly tread, a regal bearing, which not even the Bishop's lady could match. Her face was fine, clear, exquisitely chiselled of that grand calm contour which blossoms out from centuries of unblemished pedigree. Her accent —they had occasionally heard her speak to the librarian, or to the old vergers at the Minster—was proud and dainty; the H, that *pons asinorum* of plebeian conversationalists, honestly dealt with, and the intonation perfect.

These things the Close families could comprehend, and they took out their card-cases in readiness for a call at Westwood. But still there were a few little matters which they could not so well comprehend. Mrs. Edenall had been known to set the laws of etiquette at shameless defiance by walking out alone after dusk. She was also accustomed to sit in the Minster Library reading, meditating, or sometimes writing for hours together, a thing which no lady, except, indeed, one or two professed blue stockings who thought themselves great in dead languages or wished others to think them so—had ever done. Indeed the Canon's lady had almost persuaded her husband to promise that he would take an early opportunity of hinting to the stranger that in St. Olave's, at any rate, it was not customary for unprotected females to perform such assiduous public devotions at the shrine of literature. Mrs. Scrymgeour, too, proposed, and another member of the committee seconded the motion, that Mrs. Edenall's behavior at the Cathedral service was not such as suited the dignity of the place. She was in the habit of leaning back within her canopied stall, and either staring up to the bossed roof—it was very beautiful certainly, but the reading of the First Lesson was not the time to admire it,—or eagerly criticizing, as if she expected to recognize a face amongst them, the groups of loungers who strolled in to listen to the music. And as for finding the places in her prayer-book, Mrs. Scrymgeour was quite sure she never attempted to do such a thing. Indeed that feminine censor of public behavior thought she should not be going too far if she asserted that the gold embroidered marker in the book which Mrs. Edenall used had not moved forward a single page since the first Sunday after Trinity. Such conduct Mrs. Scrymgeour thought was reprehensible—to say the least of it—and ought to be inquired into before the lady who practised it was admitted to the rights and privileges of fellowship with the Close families.

So the result was that after the Position Committee meeting had sat once or twice upon Mrs. Edenall—they found the case a rather difficult one, the *pros* and *cons* being so nicely balanced —she was placed along with Janet and David Bruce in an out-building of the great social edifice, there to remain until further notice; and the pearl card-cases were replaced in the pockets of the owners.

The fact was, that for once in their lives the Close people were obliged to own themselves baffled. They really could not tell what to make of the new comer. They felt somewhat as a brood of ancient, well-connected, highly respectable hens may be supposed to feel, when a stray moor-fowl, with its keen eye, its unaccustomed note, and alien plumage lights in their midst.

So Mrs. Scrymgeour and her committee contented themselves with talking Mrs. Edenall over at their tea-tables and luncheon-trays. They darted inquisitive glances from the corners of their eyes when she passed them in the Close —to turn bravely round and satisfy their curiosity by an honest stare was an enormity of

which no St. Olave's lady would have been guilty—they criticized her with might and main as she walked morning by morning, pale, passionless, stately to her place in the Cathedral choir; but until they were well assured that she was "respectable" not a step further would they go.

Poor folks! Well, they had their little foibles, but so have other people. Manufacturing towns want wealth. Cathedral cities ask for pedigree. St. Olave's would allow its daughters to dance with the vilest *roué* in Christendom if he had the reversion of a baronetcy or was brother to a Countess. Millsmany forces its young ladies into the arms of cotton lords whose brains are as shallow as their coffers are deep. In St. Olave's, pedigree was a lever which could raise the most worthless to social rank and distinction. In Millsmany, gold does the same kind office for those who can scatter it broadcast through the streets: the devotees of Mammon bow down to the man who owns acres of machinery, while they despise the poor fellow whose imagination is his manufactory and whose only warehouse is his brain. The good folks of St. Olave's would gladly have paved Mrs. Edenall's sitting-room with visiting cards had she been the daughter of a Knight, or possessed connections in the Church, but they would never, no never, call upon a lonely woman who went out unattended after dark, and came to the place without any letters of introduction.

And so the world goes.

CHAPTER XV.

ALICE GREY was the first to break through this *chevaux de frise* of conventionality. As Janet's friend she had often called at Westwood, but it always chanced that Mrs. Edenall was out, or secluded in her own room, so that they never saw each other except at the Cathedral service. About a week before the picnic, Alice set off to Westwood purposely to see her, and get her to join their party.

It was early, quite too early for a call of ceremony, but Alice came to Janet Bruce now at all hours of the day, sometimes before the dew had dried up from the little grass plot, sometimes when the evening shadows were creeping round and about the quiet garden.

This morning Tibbie had got the front door wide open, and with a huge harden apron tied down over her blue petticoat, was on her hands and knees scouring the stone entrance. It was a roomy, old-fashioned hall, rather wide for so small a house. It was paved with alternate squares of grey and white marble, similar to the floor of the Cathedral, and perhaps like it too, made of old gravestones, for here and there were tracings which looked as if they might once have formed parts of monumental inscriptions.

"Ye be speerin' for Miss Janet then," was the old woman's greeting, as she heard Alice's step on the gravel walk; "she's awa the noo wi' her tracs, but she'll no be lang, I'm thinkin'."

"And," added Tibbie, after a pause, pointing with her scrubbing-brush to the best parlor door, "t'other leddy's ben, an' ye can go in an' crack tull her a wee. I'm feared she's awfu' lonesome whiles."

"Thank you, Tibbie, I'll come in and rest, if you think Miss Bruce won't be long."

Tibbie led the way, passing with Amazonian strides from mat to mat, a feat which Alice tried to imitate, knowing that the canny Scotchwoman was particular about not having her wet floors trodden upon. She was fain, however, to jump instead of stride.

"It's marry to yersel' is that Miss Grey," said Tibbie; "ye're sae thochtfu'; it ain't mony a young leddy as'll save an auld wife's back that way. Go your ways in, she's all her lane."

Alice knocked at the door and entered, bringing with her, as she always did, into that quiet room, a waft of air and sunshine.

Mrs. Edenall was sitting in the window seat, looking out into the garden; not the front part of it, across which Alice had come, but that little plot of grass bordered with lilac and linden trees, which opened out towards the east front of the Minster. She rose as the young girl came in, drawing herself up with that half-defiant, touch-me-not sort of stateliness which seemed to be her wont when addressing strangers.

"Excuse me, I have not the pleasure of knowing you."

She said this in a rich, musical voice, which thrilled down into Alice's soul, and a slight gesture of recognition, whose exquisite grace a queen might have tried in vain to imitate.

"I am Alice Grey, a friend of Miss Bruce's," and Alice, loving as she was, shrank somewhat from asking this icicle of a woman to join the merry little birthday party. However, the thing had got to be done.

"Miss Grey. Yes, I have heard that name before. Miss Bruce has spoken of you sometimes."

She came forward and took Alice's hand. For a full moment the two looked at each other with that first questioning, intercommuning look, which sometimes finds out more than years of after intercourse.

Have you never had a curious, inexplicable feel when holding the hand of a stranger in yours, and searching his or her face? A most clear and unmistakable consciousness that you have clasped that hand before, that somewhere, in this or another world you have seen that face? Have you not felt that indeed the stranger is no stranger, but familiar to you as the faces of your own fireside? Nay, even the voice has a ring in it that has fallen on your ears in dreams a hundred times, and comes to you like the music of an old song, that dimly works its way back again through the winding tracks of memory.

With just such a clear, and yet undefinable consciousness, these two now held each other's hands, and looked into each other's faces, and listened to each other's voices. Alice standing there with her innocent, happy past; Mrs. Edenall with——

Well, who shall say that her past was other than innocent? Certainly there was no acknowledgment of guilt in the regal port and gesture, in the proudly lifted head and clear, steady glance. That the past had not been happy, Mrs. Edenall's face, with its deep worn lines,

told beyond question; but who, as yet, should put the brand of sin upon it?

She dropped Alice's hand at last, and went back to her seat in the window, a little sadder looking perhaps, but grand and quiet still. And then there fell a silence between them.

Mrs. Edenall did not seem inclined to break it, and Alice knew not how. She twined and untwined the long fringes of her parasol, studied more closely than ever before the carved oaken frame of the mirror over the fireplace, and longed for Miss Bruce to come back. She was thankful for the sound of Tibbie's floorcloth and scrubbing brush to break the dead stillness which grew more and more wearisome.

At last she made a desperate effort and said, "I hope you find it pleasant and comfortable here."

Mrs. Edenall started. The words had evidently roused her from a reverie.

"Oh, yes, I manage well enough. I don't want anything but quietness, and I get plenty of that. The Bruces are thoroughly steady people."

"But I was not thinking of Westwood only. I mean how do you like St. Olave's."

"St. Olave's appears to me to be an elaboration of Westwood. It is like a pool of stagnant water."

"Perhaps if you had a microscope you might find plenty of life in the stagnant pool," suggested Alice.

Mrs. Edenall smiled, no, it was scarcely a smile, just a momentary softening of the quiet, almost stony face.

"I daresay the St. Olave's animalculæ have a life of their own, such as it is. I have not cared yet to examine it minutely. The place seems to me hopelessly dull and stupid."

"Well, so it is, except at certain times." Alice was getting into quite a conversational vein now. "For instance, at the Festival, strangers come from all parts of the country."

"Ha, do they?"

Sometimes there came a strange change over Mrs. Edenall's countenance, which showed that its habitual quietness was but like the grey ashen film of burning charcoal, beneath which the red heat ever and anon strikes out in fierce quivering flashes. She turned quickly round.

"From all parts of the country, did you say?"

"Oh yes, Ireland and Scotland too. I believe very many come out of Scotland."

There was no repose in Mrs. Edenall's face now, none of the careless pride which queened it there a moment ago. A keen, restless look came into her eyes, the same look as when she had first heard Janet Bruce's voice; and the hands which were clasped together in her lap almost trembled. Alice went on, glad enough to find something to talk about.

"In the height of summer the place is certainly dull, but just about now, when the shooting season has commenced, a great number of strangers come to St. Olave's. You know the railway station is on the route from London to the West of Scotland, and the express stops three-quarters of an hour, just long enough for people to see the Minster."

"Indeed, that accounts for the groups of people I have seen lately strolling in about service time—upper class people, too.

"Yes, I suppose half the nobility in the kingdom get strained through our little station from August to October. Dressmakers go there on purpose to see the fashions, and milliners get the new shapes for hats. I saw such a pretty one there the other day when I went to meet a lady."

But Mrs. Edenall did not want to hear about hat-shapes, pretty or the reverse.

"And about the Festival which you mentioned, when is it?"

"It comes once in three years. The place is turned upside down for about a week, and then things go back to their old quietness. It is a great time for the painters and paperers."

"And when will the next take place?"

"About the middle of February. I expect it will be very grand, more so than the last one. They say the Hall of Guild is to be entirely refitted for the occasion."

Here Miss Bruce came in, and the subject was discontinued. Mrs. Edenall looked slightly disappointed, but she made no effort to keep it up. Janet began to tell them about a case of distress which she had met with in the district.

"A poor woman," she said, laying down her tracts and a little satchel from which she had been ministering to the temporal wants of the people; for Janet wisely thought that tracts alone, however beautifully written, were not sufficient to keep body and soul together. "A poor woman, who has been deserted by her husband. I'm sure it is quite disheartening the number of such instances one meets with now. There must be a great amount of wretchedness in married life amongst the lower classes."

"Did you do anything for her, Miss Bruce?" said Alice.

"I gave her a little relief, and promised to call again. I scarcely liked to say much until I knew more about her. One of the neighbors told me the man was not her husband. If it is so, of course it is very sad, but still the poor thing's distress is the same. Don't you think so, Mrs. Edenall? You know some people judge these cases very severely, but I scarcely know what to think."

Mrs. Edenall answered not a word. She had turned her face away from them both, and was looking out into the garden. Her hands were fast clenched together, her lips compressed into a narrow crimson streak. She often used to stand in this way.

Janet did not ask her again, but went on talking to Alice about the woman, and devising some scheme for her relief. By-and-by Alice explained the errand on which she came to Westwood.

"I want to arrange," she said, "about our going to Norlands on Thursday if the day is fine—and if it is not we shan't go at all. It would be much pleasanter walking than riding. The cottage is scarcely three miles away, and the road is so shady we could manage it nicely. You will join us, Mrs. Edenall, will you not?" and Alice turned towards the window. "Indeed it was my chief object in coming this morning, to ask you. I am sure you will be pleased with the place."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Edenall in tones to which all their old coldness and *hauteur* had come back. "I shall much prefer remaining

quietly here. I rarely go into society, and never enjoy it."

Truly she was a strange woman, this lodger of Miss Bruce's; one moment eager and interested, the next chill and gelid as an iceberg. She offered no further apology for declining the invitation, and did not even smooth the abruptness of the refusal with any of those graces of speech by which people of tact make the waiving of a favor as pleasant as its acceptance.

Alice looked pained. It was seldom any kindness of hers was so completely thrown back in her face; but she did not press the matter, and went on making her arrangements with Miss Bruce.

"I don't think you will care for staying in the grounds all the forenoon. We generally play games, or dance, or have music, and that sort of thing, which would not be much in your way. And so I thought after dinner you and Mr. Bruce and I would walk to the village of Norlands. It is about a mile and a half further on. There are some interesting Roman remains and an old tower. The country round about there too is rather wild and beautiful, I think you would like it."

"Yes, your aunt was telling me, the evening I came to take tea with you," said Janet, counting over her tracts and noting down in her visiting book the number of bread tickets she had given away. "Indeed I had heard of those Roman remains before I came to St. Olave's."

"You mean in Scotland. I dare say you would. You know the Scotch people are rather partial to Norlands; they say it is the scene of part of one of Sir Walter Scott's novels. And then the scenery round being so fine too, makes it a favorite place with them. Aunt Amiel thinks it is almost equal to some parts of the Highlands. Perhaps you don't know Scotland, Mrs. Edenall," and Alice turned once more to the stately figure, draped in black, which still stood by the window.

"I have been in the country *once*."

"Ah, then, you won't care for anything in the way of landscape scenery that we can offer you here. But I think, Miss Bruce," and Alice turned back to Janet, "we can make a pleasant day of it, and at any rate the little change will do you good."

"You are very kind," said Janet. "Then shall we call for you at the Old Lodge?"

"Yes, please, about ten o'clock. The rest of the people will not come till later on in the morning, but I must be there to see that Mrs. Cromarty has made everything ready. Miss Luckie has promised to help me this year, as Aunt Amiel can't go, and so we shall make a nice little party. But I must go now."

She went forward to shake hands with Mrs. Edenall.

"I am so sorry you cannot join us, but I do not like to press it upon you. Still we should have been very glad of your company."

Alice said this in her frank, kind-hearted, genial way, with no show of stiffness or offence. Was it just a sudden fit of caprice, or regret for having wounded the feelings of another, or had Alice unconsciously touched some old sleeping memory in her heart, that Mrs. Edenall, as she held out her hand, said gently, almost humbly—

"If Miss Grey will allow me to change my mind, it would give me pleasure to join the party on Thursday. And I hope she will not think I am quite insensible to her kindness in asking me."

And so it was settled that they were all to go together.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE birthday pic-nic passed off very successfully. It was one of those luscious, full-ripe, early autumn days, with a dash of crisp frostiness mingling with the golden warmth of its sunshine, and making it all the more piquant and racy; like the spice of pepper in a well-seasoned dish, or the tiniest ruffle of ill-temper on the face of a very beautiful woman.

Mistress Amiel Grey's cottage at Norlands was a primitive-looking spot—something after the pattern of the Old Lodge itself, only on a smaller scale. The outside still remained, as some sturdy squire of Queen Anne's time had left it, quaint and queer, and irregular. Three tall gables fronted the west, trailed over with ivy, green and luxuriant in some parts, in others showing nothing but gnarled, rugged, grey stumps, round which, in summer-time, yellow jasmin and Virginian creeper wound their tinted sprays. A huge jargonelle pear-tree monopolized the whole of the south wall, and paid for the sunshine which it consumed in annual bushel-baskets full of juicy, golden fruit. The inside of the house had been changed, from time to time, to suit the tastes of different occupiers; but still there was an air of eld about the place which no modern improvements could charm away. Most of the rooms were low, with oaken beams running across the ceiling, and small lattice windows, whose diamond-shaped panes were traced over, here and there, with the names of former tenants. Uncouth, old-fashioned names most of them were, written in careful text-hand, finished off with elaborate flourishes that must have cost many an hour of patient labor. And bits of carving still lingered about, here and there, over doorways and round chimney-pieces and panels, which hinted of bygone wealth and grandeur; just as, sometimes, a single flower will bloom up amongst the brown and withered leaves of autumn-time to tell of the glory that is past. Across the window of the front parlor a huge old elm-tree flung its straggling black branches, casting fanciful shadows into the room, and making a famous resting-place for the rooks, who cawed in undisturbed peace through the long, still, dreamy summer days.

The garden of the cottage at Norlands was just a pleasant untrimmed wilderness of old English herbs and flowers. Rank, seldom-mown grass plots wandered about and lost their way amongst bushes of lilac, white and purple, or struck up against thick beech-tree hedges into sunny banks, where violets and primroses bloomed all through the flowery spring-time.

Scarcely had the last of these died out, when the lilies of the valley, under the south gable, unclosing their green sheaths, shook out thousands of fluttering perfumed bells; and the wild hyacinths bloomed up like a soft blue-

grey mist on the grassy path that led to the orchard.

Later on, when the sunshine grew hot and weary, pansies, with golden cheeks and purple eyes, peered out from among their nestling leaves; and roses, red, white, and damask, lifted up their royal heads upon a background of dark Portugal laurels, which had been fattening in the rich soil for a hundred years and more. And, branching off from these untamed masses of color, cool, sheltered alleys of honeysuckle and lilac led you away to some pleasant seat under cedar or drooping beech, where you might sit for hours listening to the caw of the rooks in the elm-tree by the parlor window, or watch the idle bees go floating through the air.

"Idle bees!" says some one, and then comes a quotation from the "Moral Songs for Children."

Yes, spite of Dr. Watts' poetical wisdom, I believe in the idleness of bees. Don't talk of their being always on the look-out for work as they buzz past in the sunshine, or poise themselves on the petals of the nodding flowers. They love play as well as kittens and children do. There would speedily be a revolution in the bee-hive if its queen enforced amongst her subjects the unmitigated industry for which naturalists give them credit, and not a ten but a five hours' bill would be brought into the Apiarian Parliament by some sturdy member whose constituents had only returned him on condition that he should beefully resist any encroachment on their recreative rights and privileges. No, bees love idleness as well as we do, and, depend upon it, they laugh in their sleeves—speaking figuratively, of course—at us for thinking otherwise.

In front of the cottage the garden sloped down to a deep ravine, which cleft its way through the uplands north of St. Olave's, and stretched to the Wold hills ten or twelve miles away. Great heavy masses of foliage, waving clusters of fern, and tall spikes of purple foxglove clothed the sides of this ravine, and at the bottom flowed the little river Luthen. Further up, amongst the hills where it had its rise, the Luthen was a brawling, troublesome, ill-behaved stream, often falling into a terrible passion, and using very rough language to the rocks that reined it in, pouring out its ill-temper in sheets of white speckled foam, and almost tearing itself to pieces in its fury. Before it reached Norlands, however, these corrupt inclinations gradually subsided, and it only murmured forth an occasional grumble as a vexing boulder got into its way, or some rude overhanging bush kept the sunshine from it. After passing the cottage it tamed down wonderfully, gradually widening and deepening, until at last it flowed past the old houses of St. Olave's, as quiet and well-conducted a little river as even a Cathedral city need wish to overshadow.

The real village of Norlands—if village it might be called, where village there was none save half-a-dozen tumbledown houses, and a dilapidated pump—was about two miles farther on. Its ancient name was Moncaster, and it had been a Roman settlement.

Part of their handiwork still remained in the shape of a multangular tower, built on the ledge of the ravine, and numerous fragments of red pottery, which, from time to time, stray travellers, or inquisitive antiquarians dug out from masses of superincumbent rubbish. Any other interest which the place had was derived from a tradition that Sir Walter Scott had chosen it as the scene of one of his most celebrated novels. This notion, whether correct or not, brought many Scottish tourists to the place. But to return to the pic-nic.

Of course there was a great turn-out of undress uniforms on the part of the ladies. Muslins were displayed of every tint and fashion, none so pretty, however, as Alice Grey's—that white one sprinkled with tiny green leaves, which has already been introduced to the reader in Mrs. Cromarty's clothes-basket—and hats varying in magnitude from the slightly elongated black velvet button, which surmounted the flaxen locks of Elene Somers, the Dean's youngest daughter, to Miss Luckie's huge brown cover-all, beneath whose spreading shade the merry little maiden-lady's grey curls frisked and fluttered like young swallows under a pent-house thatch.

Mistress Amiel Grey's health had been failing for the last year, and she was no longer able to bear the excitement of many fresh faces, so Miss Luckie had come to lend a helping hand, and look after things in a general way. She was the handiest little body imaginable at a pic-nic. She knew everything that ought to be done, and the best way of doing it. She found out, as if by instinct, what people would like to sit next each other at dinner, and then, without anyone suspecting the device, contrived to bring them together. Also she carried under her brown tweed cloak, a courier bag, which seemed as productive as the wizard's inexhaustible bottle, and out of its close green lined depths, she was continually bringing a supply of those indispensable trifles which most people make a point of forgetting at pic-nics. Was there a lamentable outcry for missing salt just as the cold chicken was carved round?—Miss Luckie was sure to have a little box-full at hand. Was there a frantic outcry for knives and forks?—"Oh! I put two or three at the bottom of my satchel in case they might be wanted," and forthwith things grew calm again. Did some unfortunate young lady rend her dress half across the skirt?—Miss Luckie had the daintiest little needle-book, with thimble, scissors, and thread, all complete, and her nimble fingers repaired the mischief. She had no end of funny stories if the conversation flagged; reminiscences of barrack life which made people laugh until the tears ran down their cheeks; innocent little jests and repartees wherewith to set the craft of conversation free again, when it was in danger of being stranded on the sands of dulness, or choked in the mud-banks of gossip. Added to this, she was purely unselfish, cared nothing about her own convenience, so long as other people were comfortable; would sh here and there, sit anywhere or nowhere, turn out of her place at a moment's notice to give a pair of young lovers the chance of a *tête-à-tête*, and was tender as the most anxious mamma in the world in picking out sheltered sunshiny spots for delicate ladies who were "so apt to take cold." So no wonder that Miss Luckie was in great request at pic-nics.

The male sex was well represented on this occasion, remarkably so, in fact, for a place like St

Olave's, where whiskers were by no means so plentiful as crinoline, and the givers of evening entertainments were sorely perplexed in finding dress-coats to match the pyramids of tulle and tarlatan which floated through their sumptuous reception rooms. There were several undergraduates from Oxford and Cambridge, one or two young curates reading for orders, a sprinkling of professional men who were glad to get a turn out into the fresh air and sunshine, and a few officers from the barracks.

As for the ladies, Elene Somers, the Dean's daughter, was there, and the Bishop's niece, a pleasant girl of eighteen. She was an object of great interest to the feminine part of the company, on account of her face, which was universally pronounced beautiful, and to the gentlemen, by reason of her figure, she being heiress to a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. The Close families also contributed their quota of guests, and some of the officers' wives were there; bright, pleasant, intelligent women who acted as carbonate of soda to the exceedingly small beer of St. Olave's society, frothing it up now and then into a state of wholesome effervescence, without which it would have become hopelessly flat, or possibly degenerated into irretrievable vinegar.

Amongst this gay assemblage, the Westwood people felt ill at ease. Except by Miss Luckie, who had a bright smile and a pleasant word for every one, Janet and David Bruce were almost entirely unnoticed. It was one of Mrs. Edenall's quiet days, and she held herself apart from the rest, sometimes wandering alone up and down the shady alleys of the cottage garden, sometimes sitting on the edge of the ravine and gazing away to the little murmuring Luthen, which tracked its course over the rocks below. One or two of the military men, struck by the exceeding dignity and queenly bearing of the stranger, endeavored to play the agreeable to her, but she met their advances with a cool unconscious sort of indifference which speedily quenched the feeble spark of gallantry. It was a question whether any of the Bruce party enjoyed the day very much.

Alice noticed this, and after dinner, when most of the company had sauntered away by twos and threes into the woods, with the understanding that they were to return at six for coffee and a dance, she set off with Janet and David and Mrs. Edenall to the ruins.

The road to Norlands—at least the usual foot-road—lay close along the edge of the ravine which bounded the cottage-garden. It was passable for horse and foot travellers only, for about half-way there had been a land-slip, and the earth had fallen away until only a few feet of road remained. The City Commissioners had often talked of having a rail put up, for the place was rather dangerous, even for horsemen, but up to the present time their councils had ended in talk and nothing more. When Alice and her companion reached this spot, they sat down to rest.

The view from the land-slip at Norlands was very beautiful. Close behind the bank which they had chosen for their resting-place was a plantation of fir trees, stretching for nearly a mile in close, compact phalanx, and then scattering over a rough heathy common.

The sunlight was peering through it now, lying in golden patches amongst the fern and ivy, and toying playfully with the flowers that trailed their white blossoms over the moss. Just at their feet the ravine sloped down with many a rift and break, many a chasm filled with bracken and golden gorse, many an outreaching hazel bush and miniature forest of purple foxglove, to the babbling Luthen hundreds of feet below. Westward and northward the Wold hills girded the horizon with a belt of undulating grey, and to the right framed in by the overhanging boughs of a great ash tree, the three towers of St. Olave's Cathedral showed their faint outline upon the clear sky.

It might be something in the quiet beauty of the scene, or it might be in Alice's frank, winning way, but certainly Janet and David Bruce brightened up. Mrs. Edenall only remained cold as ever, with just the same fixed, proud look that had neither pain nor passion in it.

"Davie," said Janet, "you will work better at your Oratorio now. I can fancy the memory of this picture finding its way out into a symphony or an overture."

"Or weaving itself into one of those quiet restful chorales that come like a still small voice after the clash and tumult of the choruses. But Mr. Bruce," said Alice, "I can't think why you should have chosen that wrathful cold-blooded creature Jael, for your heroine. Surely you don't intend to accept her as your ideal of womanhood."

"Jael was a grand woman, Miss Grey. She was the Joan of Arc of the Old Testament, and you have no business to say anything against her! 'Blessed above women shall Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, be!' But I chose her more for the times in which she lived, than for herself; the history of the country just then was so grand and stirring. Besides Deborah is the more leading character in the Oratorio, though it bears Jael's name, and I hope you have nothing to say against Deborah."

"No, I suppose she was the type of a strong-minded female. I remember our Dean preached a sermon not long ago about her, in which he held her up as a model for Englishwomen."

"And a noble model too; just contrast her with the flounced and crinolined women of the present day."

"She was an epitome of feminine virtue, no doubt," said Alice, mischievously. "But how would you have liked her for a wife? Try to fancy that now."

David did fancy it, at least he attempted to do so, and was constrained to admit that the Hebrew prophetess would have been a serious undertaking, viewed matrimonially.

"As we seem to have got into the subject, let us each choose our favorite woman character out of the Bible," said Janet. "Miss Grey, you shall begin."

Alice was not long in making up her mind.

"Ruth is the most lovable creature I know in all the Bible. There was not a bit of what people call greatness about her; she was just true-hearted, faithful, and affectionate, and tried to make those about her as happy as she could. And it is my ideal of a real woman that there should be an influence of pleasantness and graciousness about her, a something which

makes you feel comfortable and glad to have her near you. I would like very much to have had Ruth for a friend, but I can't say the same for Jael or Deborah."

"Bravo," said Mrs. Edenall, half scornfully, "and now will you let us have your ideal of a man?"

There was great bitterness, a sort of veiled sarcasm in the manner of her speech, but Alice did not notice it, and spoke out frankly and freely.

"Yes, I can tell you that, too. A man should be grave, and steady, and trusty. I wouldn't care for his being very handsome, at least"—Alice paused awhile—"at least I think not, but he should be firm and quiet, and have a way about him that would make you feel it safe to get near him in a storm. Not very attractive either, something like——"

"Like the cedar tree by the library window at the Old Lodge," said Miss Bruce, quietly.

Alice's face grew red all over, and to hide her confusion she claimed Mrs. Edenall's description of her favorite character.

Mrs. Edenall was sitting just at the edge of the ravine, idly moving the loose pieces of gravel with her foot, and watching them as they rolled down the precipice. And her face all the while had a cold, weary, passionless look, like a picture from which the sunlight has faded out. She kept on loosening the stones and pushing them down, as she said in a low tone—

"There is no woman so noble as Rizpah. There is nothing in the Old Testament grander than the picture of that lonely, scathed, desolate creature, keeping her solitary watch over those bleaching bones. I love the still, undying intensity of her grief; it is very sublime. Destiny was too cruel to her, and she is so strong in her silence and her patience."

Janet was the first to speak.

"I am not sure whether to sit out on those rocks was the best thing she could have done. I don't think God ever sends any sorrow to crush us entirely. So long as life lasts at all, there must be some sort of value in it not to be wasted."

It was so like Janet Bruce to say this. Long ago in her heart, duty had battled with regret, and conquered it. She had let the grass grow over memory's old graves, and spoke of them never. How much wiser should we be if all could do the same.

"Very correct," said Mrs. Edenall, with a mocking ring in her voice which startled Alice, it was so harsh and untuneful. "I have no doubt you would have recommended Rizpah to pack away her bit of sackcloth and take a tract district, or help in the kitchen on baking morning. Some people think there is nothing so good for a wounded spirit as minding the oven and going to see sick people. But forgive me, Miss Bruce," she said in a softened tone, "I had forgotten; will you tell us your character now?"

Janet was very slow to take offence. She never winced at Mrs. Edenall's words, and scarcely perceived the satire they contained. This quietness of spirit saved her many a wound. She replied in her usual gentle, deliberate way,

"I don't think any of you will quarrel with me for the possession of my heroine. It is only for one trait in her character that I love Vashti so much."

"Vashti, Vashti!" said Mrs. Edenall, her stock of Scripture lore was evidently not profound. "Ah! I remember; she was the Persian queen who turned obstinate and refused to obey her lord's behests. Miss Bruce, you are the last person in the world I should have suspected of encouraging matrimonial rebellion."

"I love her," said Janet, "for her true dignity and modesty. I think the memory of that night, when at the risk of losing all, she refused to comply with the drunken curiosity of a set of libertine courtiers, would be such a grand thing for her to look back upon all her life. Ahasuerus might take away her crown of gold, but he could never rob her of that other crown of pure, stainless womanhood, so much nobler and brighter. I think—"

"Stay, Miss Bruce," said Alice, springing from her seat on the bank by Janet's side, "Look at Mrs. Edenall!"

There was need to look. Her face was deathly pale, as one in a swoon. She had fallen helplessly forward, and only the slender stem of a birch tree which every moment kept swaying lower and lower with her weight, prevented her from falling down the ravine and being dashed to pieces on the rocks below. David Bruce started up, and leaning over the edge of the slope, lifted her from her perilous position. She seemed quite unconscious. He laid her down upon the grass, and they fanned her face. By-and-by she revived; a vague gleam of returning intelligence passed across her face, and slowly she raised herself.

"Thank you," she said calmly, as soon as she was able to speak. "I am sorry to have given you so much trouble. Most likely I turned faint with looking down that precipice; it was foolish of me to have sat so long upon the brink."

"Rest awhile on this bank," said Alice, "whilst I run back to the cottage and fetch you some wine. You look very white yet. I shall be back in a few minutes."

"Not for the world. Indeed there is not the slightest need. If you will let us walk on now, the air will do me more good than anything else." And she began to tie on her bonnet and arrange her dress, with hands that scarcely trembled at all. The little weakness passed, all her rigid self-control returned, and she was Mrs. Edenall again, cold and still and stately.

So they set forward. She and Janet walked on first, Janet taking care to keep her on that side of the path farthest away from the precipice. But a few yards after they passed the landslip, the road turned off into a lane which led them to the bleak common where the Tower stood.

"We have not had your favorite character, Mr. Bruce," said Alice, when they had gone a little way; "we don't want to be disappointed, so you must get it ready."

"I have my ideal," David replied, "and some of these days I will tell you it."

"But now," persisted Alice, "now, why not tell us it just now?"

Instead of answering her, he turned the conversation into another channel, and kept her talking about different matters until they reached Norlands.

The Roman Tower, though famous, was not exactly to be called beautiful. It was very unlike those picturesque old abbeys and monasteries whose ruins give such distinctiveness to many an English landscape. No green and clasping ivy twined it round; no fragments of tracery, no clustered columns, no richly-pierced and mullioned windows told their story of glory past, or brought back the olden times of cloistered piety. Moncaster Tower was just an empty shell of mason work, without the slightest attempt at ornament, built partly of concrete, and partly of those flat red tile-like bricks which the old Romans used in the erection of their forts. It was just on the verge of the ravine, and from one side of it southwards stretched a thick solid wall, parts of which had been traced for at least half a mile.

The inside was overgrown with grass and weeds. A few stone coffins, that had been dug up in the neighborhood, were lying about near the entrance, forming water-troughs, to which the cattle from the common came and slaked their thirst. In the loopholes, and all amongst the crevices of the stone, moss and grey lichen had sprung up, with here and there a yellow wall-flower or a tuft of stunted foxglove. A ledge, about two feet wide, ran round the top, reached by a wooden stair, built about a hundred years ago. From this ledge, for those who were venturesome enough to climb it, a splendid out-look might be obtained over the city of St. Olave's and the richly wooded vale of the Luthen.

For awhile, the party sauntered about inside the tower, and then Alice proposed that they should climb the stair.

"Leave me behind, then," said Mrs. Edenall, "and I will wait for you down here. I don't think I could bear to stand on that ledge just now." So they left her.

"We won't be more than a quarter of an hour," said Alice, as she gathered up her dress and prepared to ascend the black, mildewed old steps. "I hope the Roman ghosts won't come out of their graves and do you any harm. But if you want us to come down, you have only to call, and we shall hear you; there is such a splendid echo here. Listen now, what is your name?"

"Marian."

Alice called it out loud. A moment passed. Then, from far away over the ravine it came back in a soft, tender, whispered sound — "Marian."

Mrs. Edenall started as though some one had indeed called her. For so long that old familiar name had been left unspoken. When and where had she heard it last? She shivered, and then passed it off with a light laugh.

"Don't let me keep you any longer now," she said, "I am not afraid of ghosts, at least these Roman ghosts of yours. And there is no need for you to hurry. I can bear to be left alone."

When they were gone, she walked listlessly round the inside of the tower, sometimes striking off with her parasol the heads of the great yellow dandelions that shot up amongst the grass, sometimes gathering daisies and pulling off one by one their crimson-tipped leaves, while she repeated the words, "He loves me, he loves me not," and as blossom after blossom gave with its last leaflet the words "he loves me," there came into her face a glad quiet look, the far-off reflection of a sunshine that was not yet quite gone. When she was tired of this, she sat down on a stone coffin, and leaning her elbows on her knees and her head on her hands, she seemed to fall into a reverie.

Close by her side was another coffin, a very tiny one, scarce three feet long. It was a baby's coffin. Over it, hundreds and hundreds of years ago, some Roman matron had wept bitter burning tears as she laid away her darling into its stony grasp. Only the dews of heaven fell upon it now, and a few withered last year's leaves had drifted into the hollow where once the baby had lain. Mrs. Edenall stooped over it with tender woman-like pitifulness. Did any child's face, wearing her own look upon it and smiling once with the life that she had given it, rest now beneath the sod? For, as she measured the little death-cradle with her long thin fingers, she murmured very gently,

"Dead, long ago, dead! But it is better so. There could have been no rest for her. He would never have loved her, never at all."

She was yet musing over the life that had been quenched hundreds of years gone by, or that for which the tears were scarcely yet dry and whose memory was still warm and fresh, when Alice's merry laugh came rippling down with the wind that swirled through the arrow slits of the old tower. The soft light died off from Mrs. Edenall's face, into it there came again the cold steady expression which overlaid her real soul like a mask.

"It's a rare outlook," said Janet, who came down first. "The country side looks so rich and golden in this autumn light. I was just vexed you did not come with us. But some day when you are quite strong again, we will come and see it. You have not wearied for us, have you? We staid longer than I expected, but it was so beautiful."

"No; this is not a wearisome place to wait in. You might have stayed much longer if you wished. These old ruins give one a restful feel; they seem to have done with life and all its toil."

"Ah, then you are fond of ruins," said Alice. "I am glad I thought of bringing you here, and the old Roman ghosts that they say haunt this place have not meddled with you whilst we have been away?"

Pain and pleasure mingled on Mrs. Edenall's face as she said:—

"No spirits have come to me this afternoon, but those I could wish to meet again."

"Some people don't like to come here," Alice continued, wiping from her muslin dress some of the dust and mildew which it had gathered upon the broken stair, "the place has such an eerie feel, and often towards evening the owls hoot so that we can hear them almost as far as the Cottage. I suppose such things don't frighten you, though. I should like to take you to another tower about a mile further on; but it grows late and Miss Luckie will think us long. We won't go home by the landslip this time though."

"No, not there again," and Janet Bruce shuddered. But Mrs. Edenall's face never changed. Still with a sort of fascination it was turned towards the little baby coffin.

"There are two other roads that will take us home," said Alice, "one along the turnpike, but we shall meet all the harvest people coming home by it, for it is the shortest; the other leads through the corn fields about a quarter of a mile round; which way would you like best, Mrs. Edenall?"

"The corn-fields by all means," said Mrs. Edenall, with something like a curl on her lip, "and then we can meditate by the way on your model of womanhood."

They went down a little lane, out of which a barred gate led them into the fields. After that they had nothing to do but follow the track through the corn that stretched over field after field until it reached the high-road, only a few yards from Norland's cottage.

Janet and Mrs. Edenall walked on first, Alice and David Bruce followed, gradually falling further and further back, for she loitered often to pluck the wild flowers and weave them into a posy. David employed himself in the apostolic fashion, plucking the ears of corn and rubbing them in his hands as he went. Alice was in one of her lively moods. The shy feeling that used sometimes to come over her in Mr. Bruce's presence had quite passed away, and she chatted to him in her frank graceful way, just talking out as it were the chance thoughts which went floating through her mind. Innocent thoughts they were, like the young girl herself, not brilliant, not remarkably original, and certainly not characterized by unusual profundity or strength.

And yet it pleased David Bruce to listen to them; pleased him more perhaps than if they had been profound in catechisms and encyclopædic lore or sparkling with poetic grace, or lit with the fire of grand enthusiasm. That talk with Alice Grey in the corn-fields lingered longer in his memory, and left a pleasanter fragrance there, than many a one which in after years, when he became a man of note, he was privileged to hold with the wits and queens of London drawing-rooms.

After all, girls mistake when they think that elaborate conversation enhances their charms, and recommends them to those whose favor they seek. For the most part men care little for genius, or poetry, or enthusiasm; still less for feminine epitomes of science, and walking manuals of useful information. What they want in a woman is rest and quietness, perhaps also a never-failing willingness to acknowledge their own superiority. She must be content to glow, not sparkle. She must cover the flame of her intellect, if she have any, with the ground-glass of humility and modesty; otherwise, like the glare of an unshaded lamp, it will first dazzle and then weary. Far more than any genius, or powerful range of thought, they value in a woman friend what Alice described as an "influence of pleasantness and graciousness, a something which makes you glad to have her near you." And she is the truest woman, not she who has amassed the most knowledge or cultivated the most enthusiasm, not she who can hold the toughest argument and wield the weapons of logic most deftly, but she who has won this God-given grace of meekness and quietness, who has put on over all other virtues this calm, sweet loving-kindness which makes her presence a benediction, and her influence an unspoken prayer. If only there were more such women.

Perhaps it was from a reverie in which he had been thinking some such thoughts as these that Alice roused David Bruce, by saying to him:—

"Your favorite character, Mr. Bruce. Come tell me it now; perhaps I shall forget to ask you again, and I want very much to know. Is it Jael or Deborah?"

David paused and smiled, that strange, quiet smile which came so seldom over his rugged face. It was like the rare flush of sunset on the old Cathedral front, gone in a moment, but unforgotten for a life-time. All around them was the yellow corn, swaying hither and thither as the evening wind swept over it. He plucked a few ears, and taking off Alice's hat, wove them in and out among her curls.

Truly she made a very pretty Ruth, a very modest one too, as she stood there with downcast eyes, and the rosy color flitting over her face. When David had crowned the sunny ringlets with this garland, he looked at her long and earnestly, and then said:—

"This is my ideal."

With one quick upward glance she understood his meaning, and then her head drooped lower and lower; but she said nothing, she could only play nervously with the wild flowers she held in her hand. He said nothing either, and so for some minutes they stood in perfect silence.

Alice Grey was accustomed to pretty speeches. Ever since she could know their worth or worthlessness, they had been scattered round her thickly as the red leaves in autumn time. But she felt that this had a deeper meaning than the idle compliments she was used to hear. It woke a strange, new feeling in her heart, a feeling for which she could find no name. She could not prattle on now in her gay, careless way. Almost she wished he had not spoken to her so. And yet that she had pleased him at all, that there was anything in her which he, this rock-like David Bruce—this man whom she reverenced so much, could admire and care for, made her feel very glad. Alice just lived for the affection of those she loved, and any praise from them was passing sweet.

"Let us go," she said, shyly; "Miss Bruce is such a long way before us now."

"Yes," he said, and led the way, without speaking another word. She thought he looked grander and nobler than ever, pacing along before her, and a sort of dim childish fear of him stole into her heart. She dare not walk by his side any longer, and crept behind him, just glancing up to him now and then, and watching the majestic sway of his figure as he strode through the corn track.

They came to the little gate which led out into the high road. David Bruce turned round, and with a face utterly grave and quiet, took out the wheat ears from her hair. He was going to throw them back into the field, but she asked for them.

Without a word, he gave them to her, and she kept them carefully in her hand. After a while, she put them under her cloak—somehow, she did not want him to see that she was taking care of them. But he seemed to take no notice of her as he walked along, with folded arms and face towards the ground. Those wheat ears

were the first relics Alice had ever possessed. They were the wavesheaf of a harvest of joy or sorrow, which?—that should come to her ere long. They were the first of the little beads that cluster so fast with the thickening years on memory's rosary, and over which, perhaps, in time to come, she might say Aves of remembrance as pitiful and as profitless as those which sorrow-laden devotees murmur before the shrines of patron saints.

CHAPTER XVII.

But, of this latter contingency, Alice never thought. It was her way to take the joy that came to her without an onward glance. She had not yet reached that stage when life becomes a composite thing, and doubt for the future or regret for the past, mingles largely with any scheme of present gladness.

Almost as soon as they turned into the high road, the sound of merry music came floating to them from the distance; and when they reached the cottage garden, the groups of dancers were already busy over their graceful sports.

"Oh, I must go and join them," said Alice, "I promised Captain Madden a quadrille before we went out, and I have never thought of it once since. You and Miss Bruce and Mrs. Edenall shall go in and rest, for," she added, with a roguish glance towards the stranger lady, "I know Mrs. Edenall does not care for watching the evolutions of the St. Olave's animalculæ."

So the Westwood people went into the old-fashioned little front parlor, where Miss Luckie, who was sitting in the window-seat with her knitting, soon engaged them in a vigorous conversation. And Alice, who had no more conscience of weariness than an India-rubber ball, and to whom, after the slight restraint of David's presence was removed, all her old gay-heartedness had come back, fluttered away to fulfil her engagement with Captain Madden.

The dancing was to be the *finale* of the entertainment, and it did not continue long. The dew was already falling, and the wind whistling coldly through the fir-tree wood, when the last quadrille came to a conclusion. Then there was a call for plaids, carriage-rugs, and mantles, and the party broke up. Some of the romantic ones walked down the river side to a little boat-house about a mile away, and did the rest of the journey by water to the accompaniment of flutes and concertinas, which had been brought for that purpose. One or two of the couples, anxious to prolong the sweet pleasure of what, to them, had been a red-letter day, returned to St. Olave's by Norland's lane, and through the plantation; and those of the Close families who had honored the assembly with their presence, were driven home discreetly in private carriages. Before seven o'clock all the visitors, except the Bruces and Mrs. Edenall, had taken their departure.

It had been arranged that they were to walk home, and then Miss Luckie, who stayed to straighten things up a little, was to drive Alice home in the basket carriage, which would only hold two. But Miss Luckie had got into an interesting disquisition with Janet about the best modes of managing their respective tract districts, and when the time for parting came, she was so unwilling to discontinue the argument, that she proposed to walk home with Janet and turn over her office of charioteer to David Bruce, who was quite ready to accept it. So things were arranged to the complete satisfaction of all parties.

"He's frisky, sir, to-night, is Benjie," said Colin, the little stable-boy, as he gave David the whip and reins. "He's allers sort o' marraclous when he's been havin' a good feed 'n a long rest. You mun keep a tight hand on him, sir, or he'll spill you."

"Not as it would be much matter, sir," continued the lad, "'cause you see t' carriage is nobbut low, and he's spilled it so often, while it knows all about it. Now then, Benjie, whoop, boy, and mind your manners," and with this parting injunction to the obstreperous little pony, Colin led the carriage out into the yard and then stood at the gate watching them down the road.

The beauty of the day was gone. The grey mist from the river came creeping slowly up the sides of the ravine, and curling over the garden and meadows beyond. The wind cut with a sharp whistling sound through the black pine-trees that skirted the Norlands road. The sky was yet clear, but the sun was setting behind a bank of yellow, watery-looking clouds, which betokened rain ere long, and heavy rain, too.

As soon as they were on the broad high road, Benjie set to work and went through his evolutions. Very deftly he did them, too. One might have thought that he had been accustomed to perform at circuses and country fairs, and received his equine training from clowns and mountebanks instead of having been brought up in a sober, well-conducted Cathedral city like St. Olave's. He commenced by standing on his hind legs and waving the two others with vigorous declamatory motion as if addressing a company of electors from the hustings. Then he reversed the attitude, to the imminent risk of the fore-part of the carriage; next he went through a very graceful *pas-de-seul* on the smooth, well-kept road, and concluded the performance by careering frantically onward for about a quarter of a mile, and then running up a grassy bank, where he verified Colin's prediction, and "spilt" his load. This done, he stood quietly enough, evidently quite satisfied with the result of his proceedings.

Alice was neither hurt nor frightened. She only shook herself, and began to laugh heartily at the ludicrous termination of their ride. She stopped, however, when she saw David Bruce leaning against the bank with a face somewhat paler than its wont.

"Oh, Mr. Bruce, you are hurt! I am so sorry. What is the matter?" and she sprang to his side.

"Nothing very much. I have sprained my right wrist, and something is amiss with my shoulder. But I was thinking how we are to get home. I can't hold the reins myself now, and I am afraid it wouldn't be safe for you to attempt to drive Benjie in his frisky humor."

"Oh, no, I couldn't drive him even if he were as quiet as a lamb. I never learned to manage a pony."

"How far are we from the cottage? scarcely half a mile, I suppose?"

"About that, I should think; not more at any rate."

"Then perhaps the best thing we can do will be to lead Benjie back. I can manage to do that with my left hand. Then Colin will drive you home, and I will walk."

"No, Mr. Bruce, indeed you shall not do that. And yet I am sure I don't know how we can manage."

"If Miss Grey will allow me, I shall consider it a great pleasure to escort her home to the Old Lodge."

Alice started; she recognized that voice. Few indeed who had once heard its tones soon forgot them. It was the same voice she had heard at the Minster a few weeks ago. Turning quickly round, she found that the speaker was a stylish, elegant-looking young man. Not in clerical costume though. Except on Sundays, it was fashionable for the more ambitious sprigs of the church to don their canonicals over fancy vests and cut-away coats, instead of the orthodox black raiment and cravat of spotless white to which the older clergy adhered.

"I have not had the honor of a formal introduction to Miss Grey," he continued, as Alice turned her fair young face, somewhat flushed now, towards him. "But you may possibly have heard my aunt at Chapter Court speak of her nephew, Cuthbert Scrymgeour," and as he said this he presented his card.

Alice received it very courteously. She had that natural politeness that always enables its possessor to say the right thing in the right place; and mingling with all her girlish frankness, was that grace of quiet self-possession that makes the genuine lady. Then perceiving that all this time the new-comer had taken no notice of her companion, she introduced Mr. Bruce.

The Rev. Cuthbert Scrymgeour performed his part of the ceremony prescribed by etiquette as stiffly as possible, and with that air of manifest patronage which was usually assumed by the scions of the Close families when extending the tites of politeness to undistinguished persons. As soon as the introduction was over, he walked away to examine the carriage.

"What must I do, Mr. Bruce?" said Alice when he was gone. I do not want to leave you."

David thanked her with a single look, but his voice was quiet and business-like, perhaps a shade colder than before the stranger turned up.

"Never mind me, Alice; perhaps you had better ride with Mr. Scrymgeour, as your aunt will begin to be anxious about you."

"But you, Mr. Bruce, I am sure that arm of yours is very painful, and the road is so long for you to walk to St. Olave's. Will you go back to the cottage? Mrs. Cromarty will soon make a room ready for you, and I will send a message down to Westwood to say that you cannot return to-night. Do stay, will you?"

That half-wistful, half-anxious expression stealing up into her face, made her look so good and kind, David Bruce hesitated. It was hard to let her leave him and go away with this stranger. But there was no other way.

"You are very good, Alice," he said at last, "but Janet will think something terrible has happened if I do not get home. A message would scarcely satisfy her. Don't trouble yourself about me, I shall manage somehow."

And yet the thought that she *had* troubled herself about him was worth a good deal of pain. But whilst she yet lingered, as if unwilling to go away from him, Mr. Scrymgeour came up to them again.

"Allow me to hand you into the carriage. The pony appears very quiet now, and I do not think you need be in the slightest degree alarmed."

Was ever any music like that voice? Who could listen to the melody of its tones and refuse compliance to anything it requested? Not Alice Grey.

"This—this person will follow on foot, I presume, Miss Grey; we need not wait any longer."

Alice colored. "Yes, I suppose we may start now." She turned and whispered a good-bye to the "person;" then Mr. Scrymgeour put her arm in his and led her to the carriage. He assisted her to her seat with all the grace of an accomplished cavalier, and off they drove, leaving David Bruce still very pale and weary leaning against the bank.

Benjie had had enough of play for that night at anyrate, and performed the remainder of the journey with a sobriety which would have done credit to the woolsack. At first Alice often turned back to look at David. He was following them now with slow uncertain steps, very different to that steady tramp with which he had gone through the corn-fields an hour ago. Alice's kind little heart was grieved for him, but it was too late to make any alteration, or she would gladly have walked by his side. At last a sudden turn in the road quite hid him from her sight, and then she began to take a more leisurely survey of the new protector upon whose gallant offices she had been so unexpectedly thrown.

At first she only stole shy little glances at him, as was her wont with strangers, but by-and-by, as she got into more familiar conversation, she dared to look him full in the face; and when she had once looked she looked again and again, as indeed most people did who had the chance of sitting side by side with Cuthbert Scrymgeour.

He was the sort of man whose portrait would make young ladies cry out in ecstasy—"Oh, how handsome! how very fascinating! what a noble bearing! what a distinguished presence!" He had a well-shaped head, over which the dark brown locks curled as gracefully as acanthus leaves round a Greek capital. His features were regular, perfectly so, and very beautifully chiselled, of that clear, well-defined type familiar to the frequenters of Rotten Row and Belgravia. It was a face which a photographer in these days would covet for a *carte de visite*, or an artist for an Academy picture. The only element it lacked was power. It was not the index of a character that would either do or endure any great thing. You might expect from the man exquisite taste, love of everything dainty or pretty, exactness in all that he did—from the buying of a neck-tie to the choosing of a wife. A physiognomist would guess too that in either case beauty and elegance would sway his selection; perhaps in the latter bargain something more solid than either of these, for Cuthbert had the hooked nose, and

somewhat keen hawk-like glance of the eye, which is usually supposed to accompany a judicious respect for the circulating medium.

But unexceptionable as was Mr. Scrymgeour's face, his glory resided without question in the hirsute appendages which decorated the lower portion of it. These certainly were very beautiful, quite as "marraclous," only in a different line, as Benjie's recent exploits. They were of a little lighter shade than the rest of his hair, and descended in a soft, waving, glossy cataract of at least six inches perpendicular fall on each side of the well-formed, though somewhat diminutive chin.

Those whiskers were fascinating; they were more, they were irresistible, at least to any one of ordinary human susceptibilities. They had been the envy of half his fellow-students at College, and had hopelessly entangled in their golden meshes the wandering affections of, we are afraid to say how many forlorn maidens. Possibly also their exceeding luxuriance might compensate for the lack of internal qualifications, for surely the upper stories of the brain needed but little furniture when the basement was so sumptuously adorned.

Alice soon found a great difference between her new cavalier and Mr. Bruce, in the matter of those polite little attentions which some men offer with such exquisite grace and tact. David made small show of solicitude in his manner towards her. When they first got into the carriage he had just fastened his cloak around her with one decisive wrap, and taken care that her feet were well folded up in the fur lined rug; and then cautioning her that the air was damp and she must keep her mouth shut, he had left her almost entirely to her own meditations.

Mr. Scrymgeour was full of tender little assiduities. Was Miss Grey quite comfortable? Were the cushions properly adjusted? Did the cloak protect her throat sufficiently, and would she allow him to wrap it more closely round her? which operation he performed with elaborate politeness. Were her feet quite warm, or might he have the pleasure of getting another rug from the bottom of the carriage? Was he driving the pony at the pace most exactly suited to her convenience?—and so on, and so forth.

Most young ladies—the pretty ones especially, perhaps others cannot speak from experience—are very fond of these and similar little attentions. They find it pleasant to be waited on hand and foot, to have all their dainty wants forestalled, all their pretty little whims and fancies attended to with solicitous deference. At home they like their attendant squires to be very alert and watchful in opening doors, picking up handkerchiefs, filling tea-pots, handling books, and helping them in all sorts of needless ways. Abroad, they exact unremitting gallantry, and delight to receive from those who escort them to promenades and concerts as much care as a nursery-maid would need to bestow on a detachment of babies It is just what they feed upon, this idle, empty homage; it stands to them in the place of real true affection, and they never look onward to the surely coming time when it will altogether cease to be offered, or be offered only with constraint and weariness.

There are others again who feel themselves annoyed and pestered by this small coin of love. It worries them to be "pottered after," and waited on. It is by no means essential to their happiness that the fortunate possessors of their affections should be always at hand to open doors and pick up thimbles and attend with dutiful devotion to all their feminine behests. Strong, quiet, steady love given, all the rest may go. This to rely upon and look up to, they are content to wait upon themselves like ordinary mortals, and give up the charming dependence that, at the first, was so fascinating, but which, by-and-by, to those who have to support it, becomes a slight bore.

Alice was not *exigeante* in her demands upon the courtesy of others. She had certainly been accustomed to flattery and compliment, but if need be she could do very well without either. David Bruce's calm, undemonstrative, almost careless manner, had not offended her in the least, but still Mr. Scrymgeour's graceful and winning politeness contrasted favorably with it. It pleased her to know that she was cared for and looked after. His countless little attentions did not worry her; on the contrary, she rather enjoyed them, and they were received with that half shy, pleased sort of consciousness, which was the best compliment she could have paid to the giver. So that, on the whole, the ride home from Norlands, after David Bruce had so unexpectedly slipped off the scene, was much more successful than might have been expected.

Alice and Mr. Scrymgeour soon glided into a harmless little babble of conversation. He was an adept in the art of making himself agreeable. He had that rare indescribable tact which perceives at once little weaknesses of character and adapts itself to them. He never failed to make people pleased with themselves, and then it followed as a natural consequence that they were pleased with him. It was this almost womanlike perception, seizing at once and availing itself of every varying shade of character, that made Cuthbert Scrymgeour such a charming companion, and forced almost every man and woman upon whom he exerted his conversational powers to yield to their irresistible fascination.

"I remember you very well," said Alice, after they had driven about half a mile, "I remember you very well, though I have never seen you before. I heard you read morning prayers at the Cathedral a few weeks ago."

Mr. Scrymgeour turned and looked down into her face with real honest pleasure. A different expression, very different from the shallow phosphorescent smile which habitually gleamed over his fine features, came into them now. It was a bit of the real man peering through the blinding veil of conventionality. There was flattered vanity in the countenance that bent over Alice, and pleased surprise in the rich tones of his voice, as he said—

"Ah! do you indeed remember me? It is very pleasant to be remembered."

Yes, it is. Without doubt, there is something very enjoyable in being told by a young and interesting girl whom you have never seen before, that she remembers you, especially if that remembrance rests upon some superiority, real or fancied. The wisest man in Christendom would be pleased if the stranger lady whom he is escorting to supper should chance to inform him that she had seen him, perhaps years and years

ago, and that he had had a place in her memory ever since, the mention of the fact would doubtless produce a pleasant sensation in that brain district where the bump of Approbativeness is located. Now Cuthbert Scrymgeour was not the wisest man in Christendom, very far from it; but still the phrenological organ, No. 12, was largely developed in his cerebral anatomy, and produced corresponding results in his character. If there was one personal qualification more than another—except, of course, the whiskers—upon which Mr. Scrymgeour prided himself, and concerning which he was open to a little judicious admiration, it was this voice of his, this fine, rich exquisitely modulated voice, that had been trained under the best professors of elocution which Oxford could produce, and cultivated with an industry far exceeding in patience any which its possessor had thought fit to bestow on Latin Fathers and Greek Testaments. Alice had unconsciously touched the right chord; she could not have done it more effectually had she been a veritable Talleyrand in her discernment of character.

"You have the advantage of me," he said. "I don't recollect having seen you before; and," he added, with a graceful bow, "I should surely not forget so sweet a face."

Except for a slight blush, Alice ignored this passing compliment.

"You would not see me. I was sitting"—she was going to say in the organ gallery with David Bruce; but checked herself, and said, instead—"I was where you could not see me."

"Oh, yes, I understand. In some of those seats behind the Episcopal throne most likely. I sometimes go there myself, and then I can slip out when the anthem is over. It's such a nuisance, you know, having to stay all the service, when the music is the only thing you care for."

Alice was so accustomed to hear the Cathedral prayers spoken of as merely subsidiary to the music, that the remark did not appear irreverent. After this propitious commencement, the conversation prospered exceedingly. Alice told her companion all about the pic-nic, the walk to Norlands, the dance in the evening. She wished that she had known he was staying in Chapter Court, and then Aunt Amiel would have asked him to join their party, and it would have been so nice.

To which piece of information, given in Alice's fresh innocent manner, so different from the deportment of most of the St. Olave's young ladies, who invariably spoke to a member of the opposite sex as if they were addressing a gorilla, Mr. Scrymgeour could not help replying that a day at Norlands with Miss Grey and her friends would indeed have been a sunny spot in memory's landscape; but he hoped another year the Fates would be more propitious, and not debar him from so rare a felicity;—with a great deal more to the same effect. Mr. Scrymgeour had such exquisite grace in expressing the airy nothings of politeness.

And so the time wore on, not heavily at all. Indeed Alice was quite surprised when, looking up, the grey west front of the Minster was close upon them, and the gables of the Old Lodge peering through the twilight. It had seemed such a short hour. Of course it was only the most natural thing in the world that after he had given the pony and carriage into the care of the man who had come to meet them, Mr. Scrymgeour should walk to the front door with Alice, and see her safely in. And then as they were waiting in the porch, the rain, which had been dropping at intervals for the last half-hour, began to come down in right good earnest, and it seemed nothing more than kind that Alice should ask him to wait until the storm was over.

Mr. Scrymgeour readily accepted the invitation; he was well practised in that part of the code of etiquette which forbids bashfulness and *mauvaise honte*. Indeed; apart from any hospitality that it might furnish, most strangers were glad to get a glimpse of the interior of the storied old mansion. Alice took him through the wide hall, with its black oak panellings and carved ceilings, into the oriel room, where a pleasant fire was burning. They scarcely ever gave up fires at the Old Lodge.

"Aunt Amiel," she said, "this is Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour, the nephew of Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour."

Mistress Amiel Grey rose to receive him with that grave courtly dignity which, spite of age and infirmity, still lingered in every movement of hers. Alice might have noticed, had she been so disposed, that he did not hurry forward as David Bruce once did, to prevent the aged gentlewoman from standing in his presence. But she did not notice it.

"Mr. Scrymgeour was kind enough to bring me home from Norlands," she continued. "You know I was to have come with Miss Luckie, but she walked on with Mrs. Edenall, and Mr. Bruce and I set off together. Before we got half way, Benjie turned frisky and upset us both on a grassy bank."

"But it didn't do us any harm, though," said Alice, seeing that Aunt Amiel was looking anxious; and then, in her straightforward, frank way, she told the whole story of Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour's timely appearance, and the ride home

They seated themselves round the blazing fire, and seemed likely to spend a long evening there, for the rain splashed furiously down the wide open chimney, and the wind had risen to a tempest, beating the branches of the trees against the window, and driving with keen eerie wail through the belfry tower of the Cathedral. Strange, that Alice never wondered how David Bruce fared amidst it all. But girls so soon forget.

It is well for our love, though not always safe for our happiness, that we only know our friends as they are seen by us, and not as others see them. Could David Bruce have watched Alice as she sat there in the flashing firelight, shaking the meaningless rattle of chit-chat, and exchanging merry jests and repartees with her new companion, he would have been sorely grieved. The sight of her would have marred the beautiful ideal of womanhood, into which, for him, she was passing, and perhaps broken the spell that she was slowly weaving around him.

Yet Alice Grey was neither false nor fickle. She was simply impressible, very impressible. She just reflected, as in a mirror, the characters of those with whom she came in contact. She was just what others made her. With the light-hearted she was gay and thoughtless; in

the companionship of noble minds, she was quiet and subdued. She drifted along with the mental air-currents which overpast her. She had as yet no settled anchorage, no spiritual stand-point upon which she could rest and be quiet.

Some people have an intense, steady unchangeable individuality about them. Once having seen them, you always know where to find them again, and what to expect from them. Such people mould circumstances, instead of being moulded by them. Underlying the infinite variety and richness of their characters, there is one true, firm, rock-like principle, which supports the whole life of thought and action. God seems to have fashioned them as He fashions rose and jasmin flowers, which, whether planted in the fresh air and unclouded sunshine of Italian gardens, or pent up in the stifled atmosphere, and compelled to live in the foul miasma of London garrets, do still gather out from these diverse influences the same result of rich color and fragrance. Put some characters where you will, bring them under any conditions, let them live in the clear sunshine of truth, or amid the pestilential vapors of error and ignorance, and the life that is in them, the real God-given life, will always blossom out into beauty and fragrance. There is an individuality about them which will assert itself, which no external circumstances, no accidents of birth or fortune, can destroy.

Other people, again, are like musical instruments, totally dependent for harmony or discord on the finger that touches them. To a master-hand they will yield the grand sweet chords of faith and reverence, the pealing anthem, or the psalm of praise. Let another play upon the keys, and the idle song, the rattling dance tune, is all that he brings forth. You do not know what to expect from them. They will give just what you have the power to take, and no more. You may make them what you please, and gather from them what you will of harmony or discord.

Such, to a great extent, was Alice Grey. There was that in her which responded to the beautiful and the noble, but only so far as the master-hand brought it out. When David Bruce played, the music was sweet and solemn, and listening to it, he forgot that the instrument could yield tones less worthy. Now another had the keys in his power, and it was well that David was not by to hear, for the tune was babbling and meaningless. Graceful still, though, and not without a certain sweetness, even as a well-strung harp cannot answer to the idlest touch without some hint of the melody that is latent in it.

"I see the days of Ruth are not yet quite gone," said Mr. Scrymgeour, playfully, as he touched a single wheat ear, which had clung to Alice's dress. "You have been busy with the gleaners to-day."

Alice took it up and played with it, turning it carelessly round her fingers. Ah! how far back that walk through the corn-fields seemed now! How long ago and almost forgotten that steady, earnest look which David Bruce had bent upon her as they stood side by side in the narrow track. How the whole scene had dwindled down into a mere speck on the disc of Memory. And yet it was scarce three hours ago.

Alice colored a little, just a very little; but it was getting dusk in the oriel room, and neither Aunt Amiel nor Mr. Scrymgeour noticed it.

"Yes," she said, carelessly, "I picked up one or two ears of corn as we came along the fields from Norlands tower. How pretty the country begins to look now that the reapers are at work, and there seems to be such a good harvest."

"That is well," said Aunt Amiel, "I hear it is very abundant. The Dean was speaking only the other day of having the Thanksgiving read in the St. Olave's churches next Sunday. I hope he will see the Bishop about it."

So the conversation got into a different track, and whilst Aunt Amiel and Mr. Scrymgeour talked about ecclesiastical regulations and the possibility of the order for Thanksgiving being issued throughout the diocese before next Sunday, Alice slipped the wheat ears quietly into her pocket. They were not quite so precious now as they had been three hours ago; still she would take care of them, for, after all, that walk through the corn-fields had been pleasant. It must not be quite forgotten, though she did not care to dwell upon it at present.

Strange, how many half-open doors lead out into the corridor of a single quiet evening's talk; but the merest accident, the turn of a sentence, the speaking of a word closes them again, and we never know the great secrets of pain or pleasure which they have shut away from us.

The rain kept on, not very greatly to Alice's disappointment, for she enjoyed the merry chat with which the hours were passing. It was not until after supper that Aunt Amiel would allow Mr. Scrymgeour to take his departure. Alice went into the hall to open the door for him. As they stood in the lamp-light, he shook hands with her, and said in those musical tones of his—

"May I come and inquire after you in the morning? it will be pleasant to know that we have not forgotten each other."

Alice held down her head and murmured out some sort of reply, which, whether Mr. Scrymgeour heard it or not, he interpreted as favorable to his request. Then after coming back for one good-night kiss from Aunt Amiel, she ran away to her own room, where neither the pelting of the pitiless storm, nor any thought for David Bruce, nor the memory of all that had happened during the day, prevented her from sleeping soundly and comfortably until morning light.

Ah, Alice Grey! your young heart will not break yet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE day after the pic-nic was hot and drowsy. Grey in the sunshine stood the old Cathedral, idle shadows creeping round about within its lichened buttresses and over the carved work of the battlements and statue niches. The great west doors were flung wide open, revealing long shadowy ranges of clustered columns over which stray gleams of light from the many-colored windows wandered to and fro. And often some passer-by, weary of the heat and sunshine outside, turned into the dim half-dark nave; just as at other times, when tired of life's glare and

beating heat, he might turn for shelter into the cool haunted aisles of Memory.

Not a breath of wind stirred the goldening elm-trees. The prisoned spirit, whoever he might be, that wailed so often from the belfry tower, was silent this afternoon. The rooks swooped idly round and round the crocketed spires, or clustered high up on the battlements of the broad tower, cawing in sedate ecclesiastical monotone as though they were performing a cathedral service for their own special edification. Sometimes a misanthropic member of the company would wheel away by himself to the elm trees, and then, shaken off by the touch of his black wing, leaf after leaf fluttered noiselessly down, and nestled in the tall rank grass beneath. A group of little chorister boys, with very dirty collars and no wristbands to speak of, were playing marbles under the west door, one of their number being placed by turns as sentinel to give notice if the Dean or Canon-Resident should pass that way; for games of all sorts, especially marbles and hop-scotch, were strictly forbidden in the Close.

The warm pleasant day had brought out most of the almsfolk. Martin Speller looked blander than usual. He was sitting in his arm-chair outside his own cottage door, smoking his pipe and meditating sometimes on the blue-grey Minster towers, whose shadows stretched quite out to the almshouses, sometimes on the stray flies which were buzzing about on a voyage of discovery over his worsted stockings. Mrs. Marris could not indulge herself in the luxury of meditation this afternoon, for she was busy over a batch of short-cakes, whose fragrant memorial wafted now and then from her oven door quite up to Martin Speller's chair, and made the old man snuff the air in an inquiring manner.

Mrs. Marris was anxious to get her cakes baked and eaten too, before the bell put in for afternoon prayers. She was free to confess those prayers put her sadly out of the way sometimes. They were very good, certainly, but she thought somehow folks needn't say them quite so often.

"'Pears like to me," she remarked to Mrs. Cromarty, who was standing outside the doorway with a basket of clean clothes for the Old Lodge, "'pears like to me, if folks say their Colic, and 'I believe,' reglar of a mornin, an' then uses their best endeavors to keep theirselves decent and not do no harm to no one, such a sight o' prayers ain't no yield much. Prayers is all right for them as hasn't got no cooking to do, but it don't stand to reason as folks can give their intellects to t' Litany, and do their reverences proper when they're wondering all t' while if t' pot's boilin' over, and if t' loaf wants turnin'. Leastways, that's my experience."

"But come yer ways in, Mrs. Cromarty, and sit ye down. I lay ye're pretty nigh beat out wi' this pec-nic."

"Ay, marry," said Mrs. Cromarty, roughly, and yet good-naturedly, "what wi' worretin' about to see as things didn't get broke—it 'ud go to my heart if yon white chaney of Mistress Grey's came to harm—an' then wi' washin' and fettlin' up afterwards, I reckon I'm pretty nigh sold up this time, anyhow."

"That's just it," and Mrs. Marris took the cake tin out of the oven with her apron, and turned over the rich brown cakes, "big folks does the pleasurin', and middle sized folks look at 'em an' little folks, like you an' me, has to tew about and fend for 'em both. That's way things goes i' this here world, Mrs. Cromarty."

"Why, as for pleasurin', pic-nics aint no great yield accordin' to my line o' thinkin'. It beats me, it does, Mrs. Marris, the trouble quality takes to make theirselves uncomfortable."

"Law, Mrs. Cromarty, what d'ye mean?" said Mrs. Marris, who was at a loss to comprehend this bold statement.

"Why, look here," and Mrs. Cromarty untied her bonnet strings, for she was getting warm, "when folks might hev' their dinner like Christians, off a decent meogny table, wi' reg'lar chairs, n' napkins, n' knives n' forks, n' things enough to set up a shop, besides glass n' chaney, and them as fetches an' carries, I don't see no manner o' sense in squattin' round a table-cloth as ain't got nothin' under it but grass and spiders, n' sich things. An' then, i'stead o' velvet cushions, same as they're used to at home, they'll sit 'em down wi' nowt but a bit o' shawl betwixt them an' t' grass, or mebby leanin' up agin an ould tree stump as gives 'em rheumatiz its so damp, let alone ants an' earwigs, an' beetles, an' things as lives in it, creepin' round an' crawlin' up ye."

Mrs. Marris shrugged her shoulders and shook out her lilac print gown.

"And then if it's a fine day, t' midges flies about and tumbles into t' chicken sass; an' if it's wet, rain splashes into t' open tarts and mashes 'em all to nothin', an' happen if it's been a bit damp the night afore, frogs starts hoppin' about and makin' t' young ladies skree out like mad. And then the waste, law, Mrs. Marris, the waste, why it 'ud make a heathen cry shame on 'em, to think o' the pies as gets upset, and fowls wi' white sass as tumbles promiscus among tarts an' cheescakes, an' spoils 'em all; an' then, as likely as not, when you've got things put out as decent and christian as ye can, t' wind sets on—it's allers windy at a pic-nic—and mustard pot rolls right away into t' middle o' the custards, wi' the salt after it. It's unreasonable, Mrs. Marris, it is," and Mrs. Cromarty looked disgusted.

"'Tisn't vittles as lies on my mind," replied Mrs. Marris, "them as pays for 'em has a right to waste 'em if they've a likin' to, and t' money's into shopkeeper's pockets if it's out o' some one else's. But it's the way the dresses gets abused as riles *me*, Mrs. Cromarty. Now there's yon beautiful muslin as took me nigh upon half a day nobbut last week to do up for Miss Somers, and she's sent it back this mornin' wi' no more shape nor if you'd taken a yellow butterfly's wing and crunched it up i' yer hand. It's that sort o' waste as isn't seemly for folks as calls theirselves Christians; but I lay it 'ud be a viewly sight, Mrs. Cromarty, to see t' young leddies."

"Ay, they were rare an' menseful. It were kind o' witchin' to see 'em dancing afore they went off, they minded me o' nothing but bits o' cloud wi' sunlight shinin' on 'em, a flickerin' up an' down. Miss Alice was bonniest of 'em all though, she was i' white muslin wi' green spots."

"Ay, she's that sweet is Miss Alice, I could go down of my knees and say my prayers tull her a'most. I lay she'll no be Miss Alice long, there's over many young men comes spryin' round

after her, and walkin' her out; but, law, there's my cakes burnin; folks had ought to live wi' their heads inside t' oven door when they're bakin', or things is sure to catch."

"I'se seed our new trac' lady's brother," continued Mrs. Marris, as she overhauled her cake tin again, and turned its contents, "him, you know, as plays music at Minster, back'ards and for'ards this good bit past. Folks as goes to the Old Lodge allers has to come by my door, and I've took heed of him pretty oft. D'ye think he's looking sweet upon her?"

"She'll none marry him, Mrs. Marris, she'll none marry him. She kind o' looks up tull him and he has t' rule over her just as if she were a baby. I've heerd him take her up right sharp sometimes, an' she never gives him so much as a word back; but she'll none marry him. She's that dainty, is Miss Alice, as she must hev' somebody that's gaily lookin' and pickish to match her. She'll none wed grey hairs and stoopin' shoulders."

"An' she's in t' right on it, Mrs. Cromarty. Viewly men and viewly women does best together. I ain't patience when a young lady what's as neat and jimp as a canary bird, goes an' weds herself to a man as looks like nowt but a sack o' flour wi' a string tied round its middle."

"Good looks is nobbut skin deep, and a fair face covers a false 'eart, and rosy cheeks turns to dust and ashes," ejaculated Betsie Dowlie, an almswoman from the other end of the row, who had come out to feel the sun, and was drawn towards Mrs. Marris's door by the increasing odor of the hot cakes.

Betsey Dowlie was a spare-looking woman of sixty-five or thereabouts. There was nothing remarkable about her appearance, save that her unstarched cap borders flimped up and down in a loose, purposeless sort of way, and the reverse aspect of her gown was generally unprepossessing, in consequence of a chronic disarrangement amongst its fastenings. She belonged to the same denomination as Mrs. Cromarty; but the two women had little in common except the bench on which they sat at the meeting-house, and were as unlike each other as the rosy-cheeked October apple is to its lean and shrivelled relative which has been gathered six months and kept through the frost and blight of winter-time.

From her seventh until her fourteenth year, Mistress Dowlie had been "taken in and done for" at the St. Olave's charity-school. At the completion of her educational curriculum, she was placed out with a batch of other girls in respectable service, and, being a quiet, washed-out, well-conducted sort of young person, she had given general satisfaction to her employers. Some ten or twelve years ago, the Dean and Chapter put her into one of the almshouses, with full possession of all the rights and privileges pertaining thereunto. A few of the families with whom she had lived, kept her in green tea, lump sugar, and sundry other spinster luxuries, so that, on the whole, pensioner No. 8 might be said to make a pleasant thing of life.

Most people would have contrived to erect a little edifice of thanksgiving on this solid foundation of creature comforts; but, unfortunately, Mistress Dowlie had a natural inaptitude for looking on the bright side of things. She was, like many other people, born into the world with drab spectacles on her nose, and had never been able to cast them. She was much given to abusing the present estate of life. According to her representation, it was a vale of tears, a waste howling wilderness, a thorny path which neither green tea at six shillings a pound, nor lump sugar *ad infinitum*, nor an allowance of nine shillings a week, could in any degree smooth or lighten. Listening to her description of it, one might have concluded that the world was a huge house of correction, and human bodies divinely appointed tread-mills for the unfortunate souls who were destined to inhabit them. A theological writer would have described her religious character as vehemently "*subjective*," that is, she was more inclined to the inward grace of silence and meditation than to the outward one of keeping herself and her cottage bright and clean and trim.

"Hould your whisht, Missis Dowlie," said Mrs. Cromarty, it always made her feel as she expressed it, "kind o' aggravated," when her fellow-member began to launch out into animadversions on people and things in general. "Where's the need o' runnin' down God's good gifts and revilin' things as He's seen good to bless?"

"I aint sayin' nothin' but what's in t' Book, Mrs. Cromarty. What does Solomon say about favor and beauty? Ye're wise enough if ye know more nor he did."

"I don't go for to say but what Solomon hisself liked a pretty woman better nor a plain un, nobbut she had discretion along with it. An' look at Queen Esther, warn't she fair 'n beautiful, an' didn't she put on her royal apparel when she went in to 't king, which, as I take it, means that she made herself look as menseful as she could, same as Miss Alice, bless her, does when she gets her white muslin and blue ribbons. I ain't patience wi' folks as can't let other folks be pretty, just 'cause their own faces is as ungainly as a black crow. I ain't to call comely mysel', but I allers likes to look at them as is."

Mistress Dowlie, beaten out of this line of thought, betook herself to another.

"Is yer experience prosperin', Mrs. Cromarty? It's a tryin' thing for folk's souls is livin' in t' midst o' so much gaiety. I mind when I were sittiwated ladies' maid wi' the Bishop's daughters, afore I came here, my sperittle feelins got awful thin an' weak wi' bein' so much agate over pomps and vanities."

"An they'll never be now't else but thin and weak, Mistress Dowlie, if ye're allers a tewin' an' scrattin' at 'em, to see how they're comin' on. Sperittle feelins is like starch things, less ye finger 'em an' better."

"Bless me, Mrs. Cromarty, you allers put things so queer-like. But surely folks had ought to know the state o' their minds, and whether they're in t' enjoyment o' grace or not?"

"In course; but spryin' into yer feelins won't help ye on a bit. 'Tain't no yield axin' yerself how do ye feel, and what's state o' yer mind—it's what are ye *doin'*, I allers axes. That settles t' question. When yer i' danger o' settlin' down into a low key, just start on an' ax the Almighty to show ye yer duty, an' what He's

got for ye to do: an' when ye once get agate o' duty in His name, yer experience 'll spin along first-rate, without yer ever stoppin' to fix it up in t' right track."

"Well, I allers thought it were t' best way to get yourself cut off fra' outward things, an' shut yourself up an' meditate."

"Livin' out o' doors is healthier, Mistress Dowlie—livin' out o' doors is healthier. Bless ye, doin' yer duty's better nor a clothes-basketful o' t' best sperritle feelin's as was ever made."

"I ain't got no duties as I knows on," twittered Mistress Dowlie. "What mun I do?"

"Do, why do onything. Go down of yer knees and scrub that there floor of yours, while it shines again, and then brighten up yer pots and things, and then, if you've a bit o' time to spare, go an' read a psalm to yon poor ould blind woman as sits i' th' sunshine wi' sich a kind-like smile on her poor bit face. Bless ye, when yer sperittle experience starts o' runnin' thin an' weak, its allers a sign yer missin' summut as God Almighty's laid upo' yer conscience to mind."

Mistress Dowlie did not much relish this allusion to the state of her floor, and made no further effort towards keeping up the conversation.

"Come now, both on ye," said Mrs. Marris, who never ventured into theological subjects, and had therefore been silent for the last few minutes, "You've been at it long enough, and prayers has got to come. Draw yer chairs up and have a bit o' tea. I allers likes to see folks comfortable."

Whilst the conversation had been going on, Mrs. Marris had brewed the tea and spread a cloth on the table. She now proceeded to cut up the cake. Very tempting they looked—crisp, richly browned, and well furnished with butter—for when Mrs. Marris did give herself a bit of a treat, she had no notion of doing things by halves. Then she filled up the little black teapot, and called upon Mrs. Cromarty to say grace.

"I allers likes my tea," she said, after she had got through the first piece of short-cake; "it kind o' clears my intellects. Nobbut I'se forced to get it over soon, cause of the prayers. All t' summer time they goes in at half-past four, and there ain't time to hev' it comfortable. I've oft thought I'd get 'em sided out first, and hev' a cup o' tea afterwards, but laws! I should get impatient afore they was over. Them two or three as comes towards back end, 'ud be awful long if I were a waitin' for my tea all t' time they was agate, an' so I just keeps along in t' ould track."

"I'm feared yer prayers don't do ye much good, Mrs. Marris, if ye ain't no more enjoyment nor that in 'em."

"Good, Mrs. Cromarty! bless ye no. I never look to get no good from 'em; we has wa 'lowance ye see by account o' goin' reglar; but it ain't no sperittle good in no shape or way whatever as I sees. They're awful stiff, such a sight o' bowin' and scrapin' and flittin' up and down as beats me to find out what it means."

"I'm sometimes thinkin', Mrs. Marris, though I don't go for to say nowt agin' other folks' ways, we gets nearer t' throne o' grace at our little room down yonder at t' Low Gardens. Its beautiful and sweet whiles is the influence as seems to come about us there, though the singin' ain't nothin' partic'lar to speak on."

"Nearer, yes, I reckon ye do, a pretty sight nearer. I were there a week or two back, and it seemed like to me, Mrs. Cromarty, them folks was in t' right track if any was. It were awful solemn while t' address were on, an' I could ha' fretted, if there hadn't been such a sight o' people. But law, Mrs. Cromarty! I were sort o' skeered when they started prayin'; they bawled that loud while I was feared them outside 'ud think summut was up."

"Folks can't allers trim their voices when they're in airnest, Mrs. Marris. They'd better bawl their prayers wi' a feelin' heart nor chant 'em to a tune without thinking what it is they're sayin'."

"Ye're in t' right on it, Mrs. Cromarty. Nobbut folks is sincere I don't matter ways and means; but it goes agin' me the way they does things at yon place of ours," and Mrs. Marris pointed with her cup in her hand to the Minster. She always spoke as if she had a personal and vested interest in St. Olave's Cathedral and its appurtenances.

"Them there little singin' lads has all manner of unproper freaks when t' prayers is agate. It were nobbut a bit since I seed two of 'em countin' out a bag o' marbles while they was on wi' the 'Lettest thou depart.' Now I don't put in to hev a great sight o' religion myself, but I was allers brought up to know what's proper, and I just gived 'em a look, but it warn't no yield, not a bit. Now, Mrs. Cromarty, it's that sort o' thing oft trips me up and sets me thinkin' whether God Almighty makes an account o' such like prayin' an' praisin'."

"I lets these here things alone, Mrs. Marris; there's a vast o' things i' this world as the best you can do with 'em is to let 'em alone. They'll smother ye i' no time if ye start tewin' with 'em. Maybe the Lord sees good where poor mortals like us doesn't. Tain't clear to me as the blessed Apostles singed their prayers, but if book-larned folks thinks it's the gainest way, why it ain't my track to find fault. Ye'll need to go and sort yourself, Mistress Dowlie; yon's bell puttin' in for prayers."

"I ain't goin' to t' prayers," said Mistress Dowlie, stretching herself, "I'se got a pain i' my inside. These cakes o' yourn is over rich, Mrs. Marris."

"Take a bit o' ginger, honey," and Mrs. Marris went to the corner cupboard, from which she took out a little bottle and put some of the contents into a cup. "Here's some, best sort, as Miss Bruce, bless her, gived me when I was badly fore-end o' t' year. There's nowt so good as a bit o' ginger for a pain i' the inside: it clears it off i' no time."

"Ay," said Mrs. Cromarty, with a glance at Mistress Dowlie's somewhat cadaverous looking physiognomy, "an' it'll do yer sperittle feelin's a vast o' good, too, see if it wont; folks oft gets into a low key, and their experience clean runs to nothin', and they think they're goin' to be cast out straight away, when it's nothin' but colic, and a bit o' ginger 'ud fix 'em upright and make 'em like giants refreshed wi' new wine."

Mistress Dowlie groaned, but took the ginger, and then set off slowly towards her own door,

her cap borders flapping about in a vague, undecided sort of way.

"It's nowt but meditatin' and meditatin' and meditatin'; there ain't no yield in that sort o' thing," said Mrs. Cromarty, when the subjective spinster was out of sight. "David said while he was agate o' musin' the fire burned, but I'se warrant it 'ud ha' gone out again sharp enough, if he hadn't tuned up and sung that blessed psalm to keep it in."

"Poor body," said Mrs. Marris, taking her black silk bonnet from the peg behind the door, "I allers pities them as can't get their talkin' done for want o' folks to listen to 'em. There's yon poor Mrs. Edenall, as lives wi' Miss Bruce, I clean wearies for her, she looks so corked up like. She's as full o' trouble as she can hold, and she ain't got nobody to tell it to."

"Mrs. Edenall's a born queen," said Mrs. Cromarty. "She minds me o' that young leddy I telled ye of—ye rec'lect, don't ye?"

"Ay, marry, I shan't let that story slip. Her as got beguiled away and never came back no more; image of Miss Alice you said she was."

"Whisht, Mrs. Marris, whisht. It goes agen' me to hear ye liken bonnie Miss Alice to yon poor lorn creetur' as ruined herself body and soul for him as didn't care the toss of a penny for her. But it's the make o' Mrs. Edenall as minds me o' my poor leddy. She'd just that way with her like a princess, prideful and yet so sorrowful whiles, as if she'd gotten a look at things as had to come."

"Talk o' some folks an' you're sure to see 'em. There's Mrs. Edenall comin' up t' road; she passes here as reg'lar as clockwork of an afternoon to go to prayers. Law now, Mrs. Cromarty, isn't she a pictur' o' pride?" And the two women stood within the doorway to watch her.

She came along with a firm, deliberate tread, Cleopatra-like, slow and stately. Martin Speller took his pipe out of his mouth, uncrossed his legs, rose, and made a low creaky bow as she passed. She saw him preparing to accomplish this act of reverence, and put out her hand with a deprecating gesture,—who was she that any human creature should cringe to her? But it was too late; he was on his feet and the deed done before she could prevent it.

"I'd as soon do my obedience tull her as any of 'em," said Martin as he sat down, recrossed his worsted stockings, and put his pipe in his mouth. "She's a born leddy, she is. I knows real quality when I sees 'em, same as I tells good bacca, and she's got the make of a queen in her, though folks hereabouts hasn't found it out."

Mrs. Marris and Mrs. Cromarty dropped a rustic curtsey as she passed them. Mrs. Edenall returned it gravely, quietly, almost humbly, with far more grace than she would have tendered to the Dean's lady or even the Bishop himself. Mrs. Cromarty stood at the door watching her until she disappeared behind the west front of the Cathedral. Then, taking her clothes basket, she walked slowly away up the narrow lane that led to the Old Lodge garden.

CHAPTER XIX.

JANET BRUCE sat in the little parlor at Westwood waiting for David to come home.

The wind crept with a low sigh round and round the garden, sometimes sharpening almost into a scream, anon dying off into a dismal hopeless wail, and the rain-drops plashed heavily with slow monotonous drip, drip, from the vine leaves round the trellis.

Within, however, all was bright and pleasant. That parlor at Westwood always looked best when daylight was gone. Janet might keep out the sunlight with lattice-work of leaves and creeping plants, but she could not prevent the firelight from frisking merrily round as it did now, making quaint, flickering, changeable Chinese shadows on the white window blind, and gleaming with a soft, warm glow over the glazed paper, and bringing out into still bolder relief the fine old carved oak frame with its wild wealth of buds and flowers and winding arabesque work. The unlighted lamp stood on the table, and by it a vase of wild flowers,—forget-me-not, pimpernel, harebell,—with one or two golden wheat ears and a few feathery plumes of grass which Janet had gathered by the roadside as they came home from Norlands.

The timepiece was on the stroke of nine o'clock. Miss Bruce was not surprised at her brother being late. She took it for granted that Mistress Amiel Grey would ask him to go in and stay supper at the Old Lodge; and, once seated there, the rain would be likely enough to detain him, even if nothing else did.

To wile away the time, she had taken out her knitting work—the little white sock which, like Penelope's web, seemed destined to perpetual unfinishedness. She looked just as tidy and peaceful and patient as ever, as she sat there, rocking to and fro in the great easy chair by the fire. Judging from the dainty neatness of her grey Llama dress, and the smooth, unwrinkled whiteness of her linen collar and cuffs—which might have been turned off Mrs. Cromarty's ironing-board scarce ten minutes before—no one would have thought that Janet had been all day pleasuring at a pic-nic. There was not even a touch of more than ordinary weariness on her face, nor a tinge of that dim twilight *ennui* that comes after the sunshine of pleasure. Few things stirred her spirit now out of that utter quietness which had become its settled habit.

Meanwhile David Bruce was making headway as best he could against rain and pain and—what is sometimes harder to bear than either—disappointment.

Indeed, the walk home from Norlands was not likely to be a pleasant one. It is, to say the least of it, wounding to a man's *amour propre*, to have his place at a lady's side usurped by one younger, handsomer, perhaps more agreeable than himself, and to be dropped half-way on the road as a useless worn-out thing of no further service or convenience. It requires a fair amount of dignity to go through such an experience with any sort of credit, or to look back upon it without a great smart of wounded vanity.

But David Bruce had that dignity. Deep down in the heart of him there was a quiet,

unwavering self-appreciation—not self-esteem, though often confounded with it—which neither rose nor fell with passing circumstances. He knew himself for what he was, and could therefore afford that other people should sometimes mistake him. He had no vanity to be ruffled by failure, no self-conceit to be nipped and crushed by Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour's indifference or scorn. To a fussy little man, the humiliation of such an accident would have been intense, the mortification very keen. He would have fretted and pined over it all the rest of the way, and been in a bad temper for at least a month David Bruce just walked on quietly and bravely, as if nothing had happened. All he lacked was that pleasant hopeful feeling which had made the beginning of the ride home so bright.

Before he had got half way, for he could not walk fast on account of his sprained wrist, that was becoming very painful, the rain came plashing down in great sullen drops, and black clouds rolled up from behind the Norlands hills. The first thought that came into David Bruce's mind when he saw them, was that Alice would be safely sheltered before the storm could break in its fury. He could bear it for himself, so only it did not reach her. And indeed, she had been sitting for a full hour in the crimson-curtained Oriel room of the Old Lodge, before he arrived, chilled, drenched, and shivering, in the narrow lane which led up to Westwood.

Janet came to meet him in the hall, and looked amazed to see him standing there dripping like a diver.

"Oh, Davie, how wet you are! Surely Mrs. Grey could not have known how fast it is raining, or she would never have let you walk from the Old Lodge without an umbrella; she is always so thoughtful and kind."

Then her brother had to explain all; Benjie's miraculous performances, the upset against the bank, Mr. Scrymgeour's timely, or untimely appearance, and the story of his accident. But indeed the arm began to tell its own story, for it had swollen frightfully, and there would be no more organ-playing for David Bruce just yet at any rate.

Janet took off his dripping coat, and fetched the warm dressing-gown and slippers which had been waiting for him at the fire. Then she got him some hot coffee, and made him drink it whilst she bathed and bound his arm. If tender nursing could have supplied his need, David would lack nothing, so long as that quiet-hearted sister was near him.

There was such pleasant soothing leisureliness in all Janet's household ways. What she did was done so quietly, so tenderly. She never fussed over anything or anybody, never sympathized loudly whilst she forgot to help. All the deep-lying goodness of her nature came out at the sight of pain. When things went brightly and merrily, Janet might be, and very likely was, rather a dull companion. She had no wit to enliven, no ripple of jest or anecdote to freshen the tide of talk, no sparkling laugh to kindle its reflection in the face of those it met. She was still, almost too still, for the happy time. But when sunshine was over and gone, when need, sorrow, sickness, or any other adversity came, then those who had to do with Janet Bruce felt the value of her patient, true-hearted kindness.

"You're very good, Jeanie. I wearied 'sair for ye the night," said David, as he leaned back on the sofa, and his sister sat by him with her knitting work. Often when these two were alone at home, they fell into their own tender old Scottish phrases, those phrases which seem to have so much more warmth and friendliness than our slippery English idioms.

Janet's face brightened as she heard him say this; it grew nearly beautiful. Her brother was all she had to live for, and his words of love were very precious. To feel that she could do him good, to feel that he looked to her in any way for comfort and tenderness, was all the happiness she had now, and it was all she needed. She laid down her work and put her hand into his.

"I think after all, Davie, home is the best place for us. The proud faces about here don't look kindly on us. I would not be ill-pleased never to see them again."

"We must e'en be content with ane anither for the noo, Jeanie," said David, quietly keeping her hand in his; but his voice did not sound quite so wearily as Janet's, though his face was very pale. The most of love and hope lay before him yet; for her it was all passed by, and the best she could do with life was to be patient with it.

"Jeanie," he said, after a long pause, in which the silence had been so deep that his voice falling upon it made her start. "Jeanie, how still the room feels."

"It's because Mrs. Edenall is away," Janet replied. "I don't know how it is, but wherever she is, there seems to be a sort of tumult. She gives me the feeling of a crowd, of being pressed upon and crushed. As soon as she is gone, the quietness comes back. This room has never been quite like its old self since that first night she came into it."

"You are growing fanciful, Jeanie. Where is she now?"

"Oh, she took her lamp and went to bed more than an hour ago. She was very still after we came home from Norlands; at least I mean she did not speak at all, though she seemed to be in a sort of restless flutter."

"She would be tired, perhaps; you know she is not accustomed to much exercise, and you must have walked eight or nine miles to-day at the least."

"No, Davie, she wasn't tired, I'm quite sure of that. She was walking up and down the room the whole of the time after we came home, until she made me dazed and bewildered with the continual motion. Then she bade me good-night and said she was going to bed; but Tibbie says she's not gone to bed, for she's heard her walking the room this hour past almost. Davie, she is a very strange woman."

"We will let her alone, Jeanie, and be tender to her. Her life has had some great wrench that she keeps from us. What she wants is rest, and we will try to give it her."

There was another long pause. This time Janet broke it.

"Brother, Alice Grey would like fine to ride home with Mr. Scrymgeour. She would be pleased with him."

David winced. There came over him that creeping, magnetic chill which we feel when we find that the thoughts of others, especially if they be sad and uncanny thoughts, have been going along in the same track as our own. He said, somewhat sharply—

"Why? what makes you think that?"

Janet did not notice the sharpness; at any rate she did not heed it. She still kept David's hand in hers, and said in just her quiet matter-of-fact tones—

"Alice loves anything that is dainty and beautiful. It is in her nature; she cannot help it. You remember what she said this afternoon at Norlands about her ideal of a man."

David did remember it. But Janet unconsciously cleared off any purple haze of hope which the memory of those words of Alice's might have left, by putting the matter in the light of sober common-place reason.

"Girls, and especially warm-hearted, impulsive girls, like Miss Grey, mostly fix upon those who are very opposite to the ideal they have set up in their own minds. She says she does not care for beauty and gracefulness. Now, brother, I think that those two things are the things above all others that will really most sway her choice. It is always so. If you notice you will find it every day of your life. When a young girl professes a preference for one style of character, it is more than likely she will fix upon its very opposite."

David Bruce loosed his hold of Janet's hand, and finding it at liberty, she went on with her knitting work. He looked across to the mirror. It revealed a shock of shaggy grey-black hair, falling untidily over a face very deeply furrowed with the hard lines of thought and endurance. In contrast with his sister's, quiet and placid and peaceful as a lake in the summer-time, there was still less of what people generally call beauty in it. Janet's eyes were bent down over her work, so that she did not see the almost defiant look that came into his.

He said no more just then. The straight, even brows tightened into a rugged line, and the lips took a sterner bend. Janet thought once or twice she heard a sharp, quick-drawn breath, but it might be only his arm that was paining him. By-and-by he murmured, as if tired and sleepy—

"Jeanie, after all, the best part of a pic-nic is the coming home again."

And though the voice this time was not so bright, his sister was pleased to hear him say it.

CHAPTER XX.

TIBBIE was quite right. That night had been no resting time for Mrs. Edenall.

When she went into her room she locked and bolted the door, and looked into the cupboards, pressing together the empty dresses that hung there to make sure that no one lurked behind them. This custom had grown into a habit with her during the long years of a life in which she had no friend to care for or protect her. Then she wrapped herself in her scarlet dressing gown, and, drawing out an easy chair, sat down by the little table that stood in the window.

The sky was black with rain clouds, save in the east, where they tore into ragged fringes through which the harvest moon peered with a faint uncertain glimmer, just serving to reveal the outline of the chestnut trees that bounded the garden, and beyond them the gabled roofs of the tall old-fashioned houses on the outskirts of the city. Mrs. Edenall turned away from these, and looked towards Norlands, thinking perhaps of the little coffin and the baby soul which had found sure rest so soon.

She must have sat there for nearly half an hour; then with a sigh she roused herself and drew towards her a desk that stood on the table. When she had unlocked this she took out of it a worn-out pocket-book, carefully wrapped in many folds of paper.

It was an unsightly looking thing, out of date for the last twenty years at least. On the faded morocco cover was a silver plate in the form of a shield, bearing the initials "D. R." It opened with two clasps, both very rusty now, and the inside was lined with rich silk of the Ramsay tartan, which, though dimmed and frayed, still showed the red stripes and checkers of black and white. There were but few leaves remaining in the book, and the entries that had once been made there seemed long ago blotted out by tears that had fallen upon them. These leaves were confined in their place by a silken band, so that year by year they might be taken out and supplied by fresh ones. Pressed between them were a few foreign flowers, a cluster of Alpine rose, two or three fern sprays, a single linden leaf—such trifles as young lovers cherish, and which, short-lived though they be, often last longer than the happy time that first made them precious.

She turned these over tenderly, as a mother might handle the playthings of her dead baby. Sometimes a low, rippling laugh, ending in a sigh, broke through her parted lips, and as she pressed her lips to the withered things, a loving, human-natural look softened the keen outlines of her face. After these mildewed pages came a little pocket, fastened with a second silver clasp, bearing the same initials as the outer one. From this she took a folded paper. Opening it, there fell out upon her lap a single curl of strong bright flaxen hair, entwined with a long tress of golden brown. Inside the paper were these words, written in a man's hand:—

"Marian and Douglass. Under the linden trees of Bulach. August, 18—"

She unbound her own hair, and let it fall over her shoulders in great, massy waves. Then, taking up the silken tress, she matched it with those fast greying locks from which the golden sheen had long ago faded. What memories were they that the idle task brought back? For as she did it, her face grew hard and stern, and pale with the shadow of unforgotten wrongs. By-and-by she flung the paper from her lap, and began to pace the room, slowly at first, then quickly, impatiently; her hands sometimes tightly clenched together, sometimes outstretched as though to bid away some loathsome thing.

The Cathedral clock struck eleven. The Westwood people were late to-night, on account of the pic-nic. Soon after the bells had finished chiming, Tibbie's heavy tramp was heard on the stairs. Then the door of Miss Bruce's room closed, and all was quiet for the night.

Still Mrs. Edenall paced up and down, wildly, fiercely. At last she stopped, picked up the paper which she had awhile ago flung upon the floor, and bending over the lamp, held in its clear flame the two locks of hair, until they were burned to a cinder. With a strange, sardonic smile, she watched how they writhed and crackled and struggled in the heat, then dropped fragment by fragment, until nothing remained of them but a little heap of grey ash.

Nothing but that. No power of hers could bring back the golden lock now, either to speak of any wrong whose remembrance it had been, or to tell of dead joys, once as bright as its own sunny beauty. Perhaps she thought of this, for with the eagerness of a hasty, impulsive nature, she caught up the slip of paper which held the two names, and pressed it passionately to her lips. Over and over again she kissed it, leaning her cheek down upon the yellow faded writing, as if any love given now could charm back the treasure it once had kept for her.

Weary at last, she folded her arms on the table and buried her head in them. Once and again a deep sob broke the stillness of the room; once a solitary tear rolled down her cheek, and glistened over the great heavy waves of hair that lay loosely round her.

One after another the quarters struck from the bell tower of St. Olave's, but still she crouched there mute and moveless, as though carved in stone. The stroke of one o'clock rang out, falling with a heavy resonant clang upon the hushed air. The rain poured fiercely upon the windows; the wind moaned round and round, blowing often in sudden, impatient gusts through the window-frames, and scattering over that prostrate form the grey ashes that still lay beneath the lamp.

When at last, after that dreary vigil, Mrs. Edenall rose, her face was very pale, but there was no longer any pride or passion in it,—any hope or human tenderness. It was the face of one for whom all outlook of earthly joy is passed away, before whom past and future are alike stretched as one flat, arid, ungreened wilderness. It was the face of one who bends no longer over the dying, but the dead; who has no longer any life to cherish, or any spark of hope to keep from fading out.

She had not the look of one who has prayed, and so, even in the utter darkness, won strength to grapple with despair; or of one who, treading the valley of death and feeling the chill wind blowing up its steeps, sees beyond them a rest that may hereafter be reached. No ray, not even the faintest, of that peace which God gives, glimmered from those weary eyes, or softened the rigid lines of the lips which were folded down in such passionless despair.

Good, happy, fireside women never see such faces, even in their dreams. But now and then the gleam of a policeman's lantern flashes upon them as they peer out livid and ghastly from the slime of Adelphi arches, after the poor souls that once looked through them have shivered into eternity. And it may be that Sabbath after Sabbath, when beneath cathedral roofs, and from softly cushioned pews, the prayer goes up for "all who are desolate and oppressed," Christ, the Pitiful, the Merciful One, remembers such as these, and prays the Father for them.

And all the time, close to this silent suffering woman, so near that they could almost hear each other's breath, Janet Bruce slept quietly on, knowing none of these things.

CHAPTER XXI.

LITTLE by little grey morning crept up above the eastern sky. Wave after wave began to curl and ripple over the infinite ocean of sleep, and as it broke upon the shore of waking life, tossed itself into those wreaths of foamy fantastic spray which we call dreams.

Alice Grey woke in the midst of a rambling vision. She was in a beautiful Highland glen, whose sides were clothed with tall pine trees, and tangled with clasping fern and long tresses of white-veined ivy. From the rocks at one end gushed out a little cascade, widening as it descended until it flowed through the valley beyond in a broad stream. She was on one side of this stream and David Bruce on the other. He wanted to join her, but the water was too deep, and they both walked on separately to the source of the stream, where it narrowed into a little runnel which a child might ford. He came to her then, and was just going to clasp her hand, when the waterfall suddenly shrunk into two tiny cataracts of wavy light-brown hair, over which the rocks and trees shaped themselves into the chiselled face and crisp curly locks of Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour. Here David vanished away, and with that Alice woke.

The sun was shining bravely in through the window. The first thing that it showed her was her muslin dress, crumpled up in a heap on one of the chairs, and doing its best to bear out the correctness of the simile which Mrs. Marris had used. One or two wheat ears were still clinging to it. The sight of them brought back the whole affair of the pic-nic, and then for the first time since she came home, Alice thought of David Bruce, and wondered how he was getting on—whether his arm had really been much hurt, and whether he had got very wet in walking home from Norlands after she had left him.

She got up and laid the wheat ears carefully away in a drawer. Her heart smote her rather for having been so forgetful. She would go the first thing when breakfast was over, and ask how he was. Or stay, not so; she would go to the Minster first, and hear if he played the organ; she should know his touch she was quite sure. If he did play all would be right, and she need not trouble herself, if he did not, she would go straight away to Westwood and see him. Possibly, though Alice did not ask herself the question, the chance of Mr. Scrymgeour reading prayers at the Minster had something to do with this determination.

Aunt Amiel did not come down to breakfast. She scarcely ever left her room now until ten or eleven o'clock, for she was growing very infirm. Alice took her a cup of coffee upstairs and sat by her whilst she drank it, amusing the old lady meanwhile by a full account of the pic-nic, the walk to Norlands, the climb to the top of the tower, the dance in the garden; and then, for the second time, the adventure which befel them on the road home. Whilst she was relating it

the bells began to chime for morning service, and before she had got as far as Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour's sudden apparition, she had to run away and put on her hat and scarf.

Mistress Amiel Grey's seat was at the organ end of the choir, next to the Deanery pew and the stall of the resident Canon. It commanded a first-rate view of the congregation, if that was any advantage, being somewhat elevated and facing the whole range of seats away down to the altar-screen. Most of the people had come in when Alice got there, and she walked up the aisle with a pleased fluttering consciousness that perhaps Mr. Scrymgeour might be watching her from his aunt's pew. She was mistaken though, for when she rose from her preliminary devotions and glanced shyly in that direction, the crimson curtained enclosure just beneath the Bishop's seat of state was unoccupied save by the rustling black draperies of the Archdeacon's widow.

The almshouse people were in their places on one of the front forms near the reading-desk, close under the vigilant eye of the Canon, who checked any incipient signs of sleepiness by a look that spoke unutterable things. Mrs. Maris's lilac gown was beginning to stand in need of the kindly offices of the wash-tub; it had been put clean on last Sunday morning, and the week was now wearing to a close. Perhaps, according to her own philosophy, this fact might account for her not enjoying the prayers so much this morning, for she evidently found it difficult to keep awake, and her leather-covered Prayer-book tottered suspiciously before the Litany was half over. Next to her sat Martin Speller, a *cui bono* sort of look on his shrewd hard-lined face, as if he were perpetually saying to himself "Prayin' aint no yield as ever I see." Betsy Dowlie was there too, with her flapping cap borders and coal-scuttle bonnet, and at the end of the bench sat Ruth Cane, her sightless face turned towards the organ, that face whose sunshine never died out and whose calm no storm had leave to break.

By-and-by the crimson curtains parted and a milky river of surplices flowed into the choir, dividing into two smaller streams which poured into the choristers' pews on each side. Then came the Dean, a tall stately man with scarlet hood and tasselled cap, and Dr. Hewlett, one of the sub-Canons, whose grand, peaceful face seemed like—

> "the benediction
> That follows after prayer."

Next entered the officiating clergymen. Alice glanced furtively at them under her long eyelashes, hoping that one might be Cuthbert Scrymgeour; but again she was destined to be disappointed. One was young Mr. Grace, the vicar-choral; the other Dr. Stern, a short stout man with an extensive tract of stubby hair shooting down into a peninsula of whisker on each side his rubicund cheeks.

When all had reached their places they knelt down. The little singing-boys covered their heads with their surplices and were understood to go through a prayer, but judging from a stray waft of peppermint and black-jack that came from that locality, it is to be presumed they were regaling themselves with something more earthly and sensual. The great Cathedral bell struck ten, and when the last stroke had died away, the service began.

Alice looked up into the organ gallery; the curtain was closely drawn this morning, and she could not tell whether the piece of head which now and then rose above it, belonged to Mr. Bruce or not. The first notes of the organ, however, in the "Venite," convinced her that he was not there. That grand old instrument was like a high-mettled steed, docile as a child under the guidance of a powerful hand, obedient to the slightest touch which came with the ring of authority; but utterly fractious and unmanageable for the venturesome fingers of an amateur. The notes came tumbling out in glorious confusion, now rolling along in magnificent defiance of the unpractised hand that vainly attempted to guide them, and now breaking off into spasmodic squeaks and jerks which ruined the gravity of the little singing-boys, and made the grown-up choristers look profoundly disgusted. The discord grew worse and worse; at last, the Dean signed to the verger, who took a message into the organ-gallery, whereupon the instrumental part of the performance came to an untimely conclusion.

Alice wearied for the service to be over. The prayers and lessons had never seemed so long before. There was no melody in the voice that read them, and she had not yet learned to find any music in the words beyond that which the speaker could give. When the last Amen was over she slipped away through a little side door at the north end, and past the trim, high, old-fashioned Close houses into the secluded road that led to Westwood.

She found them all at home. Mrs. Edenall was sitting in the window-seat, a little paler than usual, perhaps, but with that same drawn, rigid look about her face which it always wore when she was not alone. She had a piece of netting in her hand, the first work of any kind Alice had ever seen her do. She labored on at it mechanically, scarcely ever looking at it though, but peering out into the garden with the same far-off unconscious gaze that Alice remembered the first time she had met her. She returned the young girl's greeting with a vague sort of stateliness, that had neither recognition nor friendship in it, and then went back to her seat.

Alice's better self was always in the ascendant when she entered the parlor at Westwood. Some rooms appear to have a perpetual consecration belonging to them. Crossing their thresholds it seems as natural to pray as though the lofty aisles of a cathedral bent over our heads, and the solemn tones of its worshippers were sounding in our ears. There is a feeling of sacredness in the air, a silent indefinable presence of something which wakens from our sleeping hearts that which is best and holiest. There are homes in this land of ours, more hallowed by the lofty, unconscious, ever-present influence of Christian character, more enshrined by the benediction of Him whose altar is the faithful heart, more instinct with unspoken prayers, more fragrant with the incense of charity, than many a church whose marble pavement and fretted roof have been made holy ground by a bishop's outstretched hands.

Alice's vain thoughts fell away from her. Quick to take on every passing influence, she be-

came grave, silent, subdued. The shy, reverent look stole into her face which always came there in the presence of those she could honor and trust. It made her seem very beautiful.

Mr. Bruce was sitting by the table before a pile of manuscripts. The music of his Oratorio was finished now, and for the last week or two he had been writing out the separate voice parts for the singers in London who had undertaken its first performance. Janet was kneeling by his side; he was trying to instruct her how to copy out the parts. She had no taste for music; but if loving patience could accomplish the task, she had enough of that and to spare. She looked very bewildered though, as her brother explained to her the various terms, the unmeaning signs and foreign expressions which had to be used.

Alice saw at a glance what was needed, and, without waiting to get through any previous hand-shakings or inquiries, proffered assistance.

"Ah, Mr. Bruce, let me take some of these, and copy them out for you. I have nothing to do now, and I should be so glad to help you."

David looked up. Just the frank, eager girlish face met him which had bent over those musty old folios in the organ pew, and the little hands were outstretched as if restless for something to do.

"You never heard me come in, did you? you and Miss Bruce were so busy over your papers, and I didn't have to ring the bell because Tibbie was in the hall. How is that arm of yours?" she continued, as she fluttered down to a footstool beside him and laid her hand with a gentle clinging touch upon his, which was in a sling. Her fingers felt cool, and soft, and velvety, like young geranium leaves which children rub against their cheeks, and there was that pretty half-pitying, half-wistful look in her face.

"It's only a sprain," David replied, "and I suppose it is going on well enough, but the surgeon says I must not go near the organ again for a month at the least, so I had to send to the Deanery and ask them to provide a substitute. Have you been at the prayers this morning?"

"Yes, indeed, and a marvellous performance it was. I assure you Benjie's antics were nothing in comparison," and Alice laughed outright at the remembrance of it.

"Ah," said David, playing with the little fingers that still rested on his arm, "my organ is frisky with any one who does not know how to manage it. It wants humoring, and likes to have its own way very much."

"It got its own way this morning, at any rate. The music reminded me of a kitten walking over the keys of a piano. But they only got so far as the 'Venite,' and then the Dean sent up a message, and we had no more of it."

"A good riddance. I wonder who it was that played."

"Some conceited elf no doubt—but William Tell's bow was too much for him. It will make the Dean and Chapter value your services all the more, Mr. Bruce; and now tell me what I can do with this music?" And Alice got up and began to turn over the loose sheets which were lying in confusion upon the table.

"Are you sure you understand copying? you know a few false notes may blast my reputation and drift me away into the waste howling wilderness of oblivion," said David merrily. Alice's presence made him feel gay-hearted again.

"I think you may trust me," she answered. "I used sometimes to copy for the organist we had before your time; he was my music master, and he told me a professional could not have done it better. You know," she added, "there is no one here to sing my praises for me, so I am obliged to sound them myself."

David set her to work upon a solo for a soprano voice. He did not tell her so, but it had been composed for her, and her own clear, pure, silvery tones had been ringing in his ear whilst he wrote it. He soon perceived from her manner of setting about the copy, that she was quite up to the mark in what she had undertaken. There was a beautiful daintiness and neatness in all that Alice did, together with a sort of fairy-like precision and dexterity.

"I knew very well you didn't think I could do it," she said, in reply to some remark David Bruce made as he bent over her, and watched her deft fingers gliding along the page. "But I am cleverer than you thought. I learned how to copy music a long time ago."

"Who taught you?"

"An old Scotchman who lived in the College Yard here, and got a living by doing the copying for the Minster. He was a queer funny old stick of a man, and had once been precenter of the Kirk of Auchterarder."

"Where?" said David, looking at her curiously.

"At Auchterarder, a town in Scotland. Don't you know it, it is on the road from Edinburgh to Perth?"

"Yes, I know it well enough," David replied. "I suppose most Scotch folks ken Auchterarder; but I asked you to repeat it because I wanted to hear your pronunciation of the word. Say it again."

She said it again, giving with complete northern accent the unspellable, German-like click of the "ch," and the rich, round, ringing sound of the "r's."

"Miss Grey has the genuine Caledonian speech, hasn't she, Janet? A veritable citizen of Auld Reekie could not say that word better."

Mrs. Edenall turned sharply round from her work, and looked Alice full in the face, but said nothing.

"I'm sure you must have Scottish blood in your veins," David continued. "I never met with an English person yet who was able to pronounce the name of that place. Let Mrs. Edenall try and you will soon see the difference."

Mrs. Edenall tried. She pronounced the "ch" as all English people do, as if it had been a "k." She made one or two more attempts, and then said impatiently, almost angrily—

"No, no, your unmeaning jargon breaks my throat. I will not try again."

Then Alice said the word, and the difference was perceptible enough. She turned round with a merry laugh to triumph over Mrs. Edenall.

But Mrs. Edenall had left the room.

"I don't know, I am sure, that I have any Scottish blood in my veins. I'll ask Aunt Amiel about it. I remember though, when I was learning German, my master told me I managed the gutturals better than most of his pupils, but I thought he only told me it to please me. He

was such a flatterer. He would tell people almost anything to make them like him."

And then they got into a discussion as to the truth of the oft-asserted fact that Scottish people pronounce the French and German languages better than their Southern neighbors. Whilst they were in the midst of the argument, Alice remembered that possibly Mr. Scrymgeour might be calling at the Old Lodge that morning, according to promise, and she did not want to be away when he came.

"I must go now," she said, gathering up the sheets of music which lay scattered on the table, and a roll of manuscript paper. She held out her hand to David Bruce to shake hands with him, and then remembering that his right hand was crippled, she took the other and retained it for a while in both of hers.

"When I have finished copying these, I shall come again and again for more until your wrist is quite well. I am so glad that I can help you at all."

With these words she fluttered away out of the room. When she was gone, all was still and quiet again. It was as if from some web of sombre texture, one solitary shining streak of gold had been suddenly removed.

David Bruce turned round to the fire, and shaded his face with his left hand. Janet, freed now from the incubus of the music copying, took up her knitting and set to work with quiet energy.

"What a sunshiny little creature Alice Grey is," she said after a while. "I should miss her so much if she were to go away from us now. Shouldn't you, brother Davie?"

No reply. She thought he had gone to sleep, for she knew he was very tired.

CHAPTER XXII.

"HAS anyone called, Masters, whilst I have been away?" said Alice to the servant when she returned to the Old Lodge.

"No, Miss; only Captain Madden and Mr. Fleetwood have left cards. Oh yes, I beg pardon, Miss, Major Conway and Miss Somers called, but they did not come in."

"Anyone else?"

"No, Miss, that is all."

Alice left the music on the hall table and went through into the garden, for she wanted some flowers to fill the dining-room vases. She had been busy all that week thinking about and preparing for the pic-nic, and they had got into rather a disordered state.

She found plenty of choice amongst the rich full-tinted autumn blossoms. Most of the roses were gone, except a few clusters of white ones, but there were tall fuchsias with their long pendant coral-like bells, some of rich deep crimson, some almost white, some pink, with "petticoats," as Mrs. Marris oddly enough named the under petals, of soft bloomy violet. There were spikes of iris and clumps of heather, yellow, purple and red; and from the hothouse—into which, however, the gardener was loth to admit her, for he knew well how ruthlessly she spoiled its fragrant treasures—from the hothouse, clusters of regal geraniums and the pale pink wax-like bloom of American hydrangea, with tresses of maiden hair, and long green fronds of the antlered fern. From the gables of the Old Lodge she gathered broad, clear-cut vine leaves and trailing bands of ivy, to make a background for the brighter tints of the flowers.

She soon filled her hat, and then carrying them into the oriel room, tumbled them out in a promiscuous heap at the feet of Aunt Amiel, who was sitting in her great easy chair by the window.

Mistress Amiel Grey was failing very fast. No one could help noting a perceptible change in her appearance between this September morning and that warm, drowsy July afternoon eight weeks ago, when she welcomed Janet Bruce in this same oriel room. Her face was getting thinner and paler but that was not all. Very often now in talking, especially to strangers, she would pause, hesitate, forget what she was going to say, and then, after a moment or two, start afresh on quite a different subject. Once too—it was after she had had a severe attack of headache—she began to talk to Alice in a vague, rambling way about a little child that had been sent to her to be brought up. She described it minutely, its looks, its pretty winning ways, its sweet temper. Alice saw that she was wandering, but humored her, and listened, until at last Aunt Amiel dropped off to sleep, and the next day she remembered nothing about it.

This was nearly a fortnight ago. Generally, however she was quite collected, and the physician who attended her said that with care and quietness she might yet live some years. Alice was of a happy temperament, not prone to mix the troubles of to-morrow with the pleasures of to-day, so whilst she tended her aunt with gentle, loving care, she put far away from her the thought of the time when those tender offices must cease, and the kind, sweet old face be seen no more.

She fetched a great Parian marble vase out of the window, and when she had emptied out its faded contents, and put in fresh water, she sat down on the carpet by her aunt's side, and began to arrange her fragrant treasures.

It was an employment after Alice's own heart. She had a very accurate eye for form and color, that might be seen by a glance at her own dress, which was always so graceful and artistically arranged, the colors so well placed and skilfully blended. She would spend hours sometimes in summer and early autumn time turning her own little sitting-room into a perfect bower of greenerie. There was a natural grace about her which sorted well with flowers, and she was always happiest when busy among them.

With practised skill, such as no artist could have taught her, she blended and contrasted the tints, and placed each leaf in its natural fall. Every now and then she would bend her pretty head on one side, to take in the general effect, then make some little alteration in the arrangement; moving a crimson fuchsia when it came too near a scarlet geranium, putting in a deep purple iris to tone down the bright coloring of a japonica, parting brilliant shades with a sober tinted leaf or two, relieving here and there a mass of green with a single pure white rose.

Round the outside she wove a cornice of vine and ivy leaves, with delicate sprays of jasmine to break their sharply-pencilled outline, and drooping over the sides she hung long tendrils of binweed and plumy clusters of fern. Mistress Amiel Grey sat in the arm-chair, watching with a pleased, caressing sort of smile, how the light fingers glided in and out through the brilliant mass of color.

"Aunt Amiel," she said, plucking out a head of scarlet verbena, and putting a white rose in its place, "what do you think Mr. Bruce told me this morning?—he said he was quite sure I had some Scottish blood in my veins, I pronounced the names of the places so well. I was telling him you know, about that old man from Auchterarder, who taught me how to copy music."

Aunt Amiel looked disturbed; a shade of anxiety passed over her smooth, placid face, and she said, with the slightest touch of hauteur in her voice:—

"I had rather Mr. Bruce had not mentioned anything of the sort to you. It was quite needless to have suggested such an idea,—quite needless. Perhaps some day when you are older——"

Aunt Amiel paused; there was a loud, fashionable knock at the door. The color came into Alice's face; she knew who it was, and she began to think with dismay of the appearance she must present, surrounded by bits of stalk and leaves, her hat off, her hair in wild untidiness, her dress disarranged, for she had pressed through a perfect thicket of lilac bushes to get to some roses that grew over the arbor, and her hands not over clean with fingering the gnarled ivy stumps. However, it was too late to beat a retreat. The visitor, whoever he might be, would have got into the hall before she could dash across it and fly upstairs into her own room. So there she stood in the midst of her horticultural remains, a very pretty picture certainly of innocent confusion and perplexity.

Masters threw open the door, and Mr. Scrymgeour walked in. Alice's eyes were bent upon the floor, but she got a sidelong glance at the clearly-chiselled face, and saw that it was turned towards herself. Mr. Scrymgeour paid his respects with grave courtly deference to Aunt Amiel first, and then insisted on shaking hands with Alice, who was vainly endeavoring to keep her dirty fingers out of sight behind the folds of her dress.

"We have been transported from Palestine to Olympus," he whispered in the daintiest and most silver tones of that magic voice, which had already won the hearts of half the Close young ladies. "It is no longer Ruth but Flora herself who has left the gods and come down to men."

Alice understood the allusion to Palestine, but her classic lore was quite at fault in the matter of Olympus; it might be one of the Sandwich islands for anything she knew to the contrary. She could find no words to answer him, and just stood silent beneath the amused critical glance of his cold eyes, pulling to pieces an unfortunate spray of fuchsia, and growing rosier and rosier, until at last he made some further allusion to Aurora and the blushes of the morn, which completely mystified her, and with the bright tears sparkling in her eyes she dashed past him and flew away to her own room.

When she was gone, Mr. Scrymgeour took Mistress Amiel Grey in hand, and played off his fascinating conversational powers upon her. He had a very winning manner towards elderly people, it was so full of courtesy, and a certain high-bred respectfulness. Mrs. Grey was not the first old lady by very many who had remarked what a charming companion Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour was, and how highly favored the Archdeacon's widow might consider herself in having her declining years sustained by a young man of such perfect amiability and considerateness.

"My aunt would have accompanied me this morning," he said, placing her card in Mrs. Grey's hand, "but visitors detained her at home, and I could not delay any longer to inquire after Miss Grey. I trust the slight misfortune of last evening has produced no ill effects. Indeed, I need scarcely ask the question, her blooming countenance speaks for itself."

"Alice is quite well, thank you, Mr. Scrymgeour. I don't think she is easily frightened by anything. Indeed she appears to have enjoyed the ride home exceedingly, and I must express my thanks to you again for taking charge of her. I am indebted to you very much."

There was a quiet courtliness in Mistress Amiel Grey's manner as she said this, a touch of that measured precision that characterized the gentlewoman of fifty years ago, and which is now completely swamped in the free and easy intercourse of social life.

"Pleasant old lady," thought Mr. Cuthbert to himself; "seems to belong to the last century school of manners. Suppose she'll be churchy, like most of the Close folks; we'll try that track." And upon this hypothesis, Mrs. Grey's visitor drew her out into a conversation touching the ordination which was to be held at the Cathedral in the course of a few weeks; and from that point to priest's orders and church preferment, and so on.

Mr. Scrymgeour was correct in his supposition. Mistress Amiel Grey was "churchy," that is, she had a friendly, home-like feeling towards all ecclesiastical matters; most people have such a feeling whose whole life has been spent beneath the shadow of Minster towers. The wives and widows of Deans or other church dignitaries talk of chapters and confirmations, vestments and rubrics, conclaves and convocations, as naturally as a farmer's wife discusses her baskets of butter, or a cantatrice her sensation songs.

Mr. Scrymgeour found that he had got upon the right track, and talked of Cathedral matters with as much gravity as if, like one of the St. Olave's rooks, he had lived all his life beneath the battered gurgoyles that peered out from the Chapter House buttresses. They were in the midst of a very interesting discussion respecting the proper method of intoning the Litany, Mrs. Grey preferring the monotone used by the late Dean,—in which preference Mr. Scrymgeour perfectly agreed,—when Alice returned.

Unlike some young ladies who, when caught in their morning dishabille, rush off promiscuously and return in the full splendor of afternoon toilette, Alice had too much good taste to change the simple dress in which Mr. Scrymgeour had found her. But she had smoothed her wealth

of sunny curls, and got the flower stains from her fingers, and looked as bright and fresh as a daisy when she made her appearance again. The pretty color was warm as ever in her cheeks too, when Cuthbert rose to bring a chair and asked her where she would like to sit.

"Not anywhere, thank you. I don't want to sit down at all. I must clear away these leaves," she said, looking towards the scattered carpet. Any employment which did not oblige her to raise her eyes suited Alice best just then.

"I am afraid you will think me sadly untidy, Mr. Scrymgeour, but I've been so busy all the week, I could not arrange my flowers before, and really those roses looked as if they were asking some one to rob them."

"Like some other roses that I know," he replied with a meaning glance that quite put to flight all poor Alice's little stock of composure, and made her glad to stoop down and begin to gather up the leaves and stalks, to the great detriment of her newly-washed hands. She scarcely knew what had come to her; she never felt in this nervous, fluttering, all-overish way when David Bruce spoke to her. And yet it was a feeling not entirely disagreeable. Nay, perhaps she would not have cared how long she knelt there, listening to the gay banter of that musical voice, and stealing sidelong glances through her thick eyelashes at the splendid face which bent over her.

"I shall not let you do that now," said Mr. Scrymgeour. "I will gather them up for you. Ah!" he continued, picking out a perfumed twig from the heap that lay on the carpet, "here is a bit of lemon-scented verbena. My aunt has been sighing for one all this summer; do let me take it home for her, will you?"

"No, not that one, Mr. Scrymgeour," said Aunt Amiel. "It has been gathered too near the top of the tree, and will not grow. Slips should always be taken off as near the root as possible, and cut just above a joint; look, this way," and Mrs. Grey showed him what she meant with a bit of myrtle that lay near her.

It was all the same to Mr. Scrymgeour whether he talked about the intoning of litanies or the propagation of slips. Nothing in the conversational line came amiss to him. With an air of profound interest he turned to Mrs. Grey and received from her a long lesson in the setting of verbena plants. One might have imagined, from the earnestness with which he listened, that he looked forward to obtaining his livelihood as a nursery gardener.

It was Cuthbert Scrymgeour's way to exhibit the semblance of deep interest in any subject that was brought before him. Much of his popularity he doubtless owed to this elastic power of accommodation. People like to feel that they are being listened to and attended to with manifest deference. It pleases their vanity, or if, like Mistress Amiel Grey, they have no vanity, it pleases their benevolence to think that they are imparting instruction and amusement. Cuthbert knew this, and acted accordingly. Like an India-rubber band he expanded and contracted himself to suit all sizes and circumstances.

Some men have a fixed, unalterable purpose in their characters. They are like Crown Imperials, shooting up erect, skywards, putting out a leaf now and then by the way, which is fair and pleasant to look upon; but the main life and energy of the plant climbs steadily upwards, until at last it blooms out into one glorious coronal of golden flowers, the pride and splendor of the garden. And some men are like annuals which come to perfection in a week or two, and die when a shower of rain or over much sunshine beats upon them;—trim, dainty, compact little plants, blossoming in the carefully-sheltered flower-beds of society, bristling all over with leaves and buds, ready to put out a flower here and there and everywhere just as may be most convenient, and collapsing at last, when the little bit of root has withered, into a shapeless tissue of dry fibre. Yet, ask any lady florist which she likes best, and the tiny annual is sure to have the preference. The imperial flower, with its crown royal and affluence of vitality, is quite out of her line.

Cuthbert Scrymgeour, B. A., belonged to the "early July annual" tribe of human plants. Like certain vegetable productions in the garden of Eden, he was pleasant to the eye, and also, in a figurative sense, good for food, so long as the tickling of the palate and not the sustentation of life was the end to be answered by partaking. He could be all things to all men. He was quick to discern character, and as quick to adapt himself to it if need be. With a young girl he could discuss songs and fancy-work; with a learned divine the doctrines of predestination and free-will. His fellow-students at Oxford found him *au fait* on the subject of fancy ties; the professors found him equally accessible in Latin roots and equations. He could talk by the half hour to a country squire of hounds and harriers, and then go and gossip with my lady on the beauties of a new Berlin wool pattern. He would quote sonnets—dozens of them—to a sighing nymph who thought herself misunderstood and unappreciated, sympathize with her yearnings and aspirations until she was ready to throw herself into his arms in an ecstacy of gratitude, and before an hour had passed he would be arranging bets with a fast young lady who voted him a "perfect brick of a fellow."

What he proposed this morning was to make himself agreeable to Mistress Amiel Grey, and he did it so effectually that when, after sitting nearly an hour with the old lady, he rose to depart, she was quite loth to let him go, and pressed him kindly to repeat his call.

"Alice," she continued, as he left the room, "you will take Mr. Scrymgeour into the garden and gather him two or three slips of that lemon-scented verbena, and then, perhaps, he would like to go through the greenhouses; the geraniums and heaths are very fine just now, Frank tells me."

Of course Mr. Scrymgeour would be delighted. He had a perfect passion for flowers, they had been his delight ever since he was a boy; indeed, nothing was such a treat to him as a walk through a garden, especially such a garden as that which surrounded the Old Lodge—together with a great deal more to the same effect.

Alice led the way. Whether the verbena slips were fractious and refused with due filial affection to part from the parent stem, or whether the hothouse, with its endless variety of tints and perfumes, beguiled them into oblivion of time and tide, or whether they loitered to handle and

taste the purple clusters of the vinery, or whether Alice lost herself and her companion too in the tangled beech-bound alleys of the Old Lodge garden, this chronicle sayeth not; but certainly a full hour passed after they had bidden farewell to Aunt Amiel, before Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour got fairly started home, or Alice found her way back again to the scattered leaves and the oriel room.

David Bruce's music remained *in statu quo* all that day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I SUPPOSE she can line a fellow's pockets nicely, Aunt."

"My dear Cuthbert, I am not acquainted with Miss Grey's capabilities as a sempstress. I have no doubt, however, that in addition to the usual accomplishments imparted to her sex, Mrs. Amiel Grey would devote special attention to the more useful branches of feminine education; and if I were asked to give my opinion, I should say that a due amount of proficiency in needlework, both fancy and plain, is an indispensable requisite in every young lady of birth and breeding."

Mrs. Scrymgeour always talked in paragraphs, as if her utterances were intended to be set up in type and handed down to posterity by means of the printing press.

Cuthbert Scrymgeour tweaked his whiskers impatiently, and then to atone for his rudeness, stroked them down with his ringed fingers.

"Now Aunt," he said, "what's the use of pretending you don't understand what a fellow means; you can't expect me to clip my words when I'm talking to you, as if the Dean and Chapter were at my elbow. About the young lady's figure, that's what I mean."

"I suppose," continued the Archdeacon's widow in the same precise measured tones, "I suppose you have already had sufficient opportunity of satisfying yourself as regards that matter. Miss Grey, you are aware, is not tall, but she is exceedingly well-made and very graceful in her carriage. I might add that a slight accession of dignity would, in my opinion, be considered an improvement."

Cuthbert flung himself out of his seat and strode up and down the long dining-room of Chapter Court several times before he vouchsafed an answer. At last he drew up abruptly in front of his aunt.

"Take care," she said quietly, "you are treading on my work;" and she gathered away the crimson velvet altar-cloth—it was nearly finished now—from the tip of the Wellington boot which had come into alarming proximity to it.

"Confound your work," answered the amiable Cuthbert, "and you too," he added in a whisper. "I want to know how much money the young lady is likely to have. There now, can you understand that? I believe it is what people call plain English."

"Mrs. Amiel Grey has a very handsome annuity from an assurance effected by the late Dean, which ceases upon her death. What her own private property amounts to, I am not in a position to say. The Old Lodge, together with the estate at Norlands belongs to herself, as also one or two houses in the High Street. Mrs. Grey is reserved in discussing her pecuniary matters, especially in so far as her neice is connected with them, and, therefore, I have not been able to arrive at a perfectly accurate conclusion respecting Alice Grey's prospects. I have every reason to believe, however, I think I may authorize you in acting according to that supposition, that Miss Grey will be her aunt's sole heiress."

Mrs. Scrymgeour paused to collect her thoughts after this lengthy compository effort. Most authors would have done the same.

"Good gracious, aunt," said Cuthbert, "your sentences are like the streets of St. Olave's, it always takes two people to see from one end to the other of them."

Mrs. Scrymgeour took no notice of this compliment, but went on counting the threads of the monogram she was copying. Under certain circumstances she was not easily provoked. Cuthbert Scrymgeour, B. A., graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford, and nephew of the late Archdeacon Scrymgeour, was the sole remaining prop round which the creepers of her ambition found room to twine. Hereafter she hoped to shine in the beams of his reflected dignity, as she had formerly expanded in those of her late husband. Cuthbert was getting on well in his profession. Already he was ordained to a curacy —not anything very magnificent certainly, but from that she hoped ere long to see him emerge into a vicar-choral at the Cathedral, then he would become a minor canon, next a canon-resident, then a prebend, then an archdeacon: nay, the far-reaching vision of fond ecclesiastical hope overleaped time and distance, and beheld this latest scion of the Scrymgeour family in all the glory of satin cassock and lawn sleeves, dispensing the benediction from beneath the richly-carved and fretted canopy of the Bishop's chair of state.

These ambitious views had recently received new impetus from an idea which had suggested itself to the mind of Mrs. Scrymgeour of bringing about a matrimonial alliance between her nephew and Alice Grey. The late Dean had had considerable political influence. Mistress Amiel Grey herself had connections in the Government, whose interest might be vastly beneficial in an ecclesiastical point of view; and if the co-operation of these could be secured, Mr. Scrymgeour's speedy preferment was a matter of certainty. She watched, therefore, with quite maternal interest, and facilitated as much as possible her nephew's attentions at the Old Lodge.

Her statement with regard to Miss Grey's pecuniary affairs produced a soothing effect. Cuthbert subsided into his chair, and meditated blandly on his polished boots. The Scrymgeours had always been remarkable for such exquisite hands and feet, and all the physical excellences of his race appeared to have reached their perfection in the person of this its last representative.

"She's a neat girl," he said, after a pause, "a very neat girl, and, to tell you the truth, Aunt, I have a notion she doesn't dislike me."

"Of course not," replied his aunt; "your personal appearance, together with numerous social

advantages which it is needless to specify, altogether preclude the possibility of such a state of mind on the part of any young lady towards whom you think it advisable to manifest a preference; and I am convinced that you have only to be more marked in your attentions towards Miss Grey, who is, as you remark, exceedingly prepossessing, to ensure a favorable result."

Mrs. Scrymgeour paused to take a fresh needleful of gold thread, and then continued—

"Still, however, Cuthbert, I should be guilty of an unpardonable oversight of those principles that have influenced my conduct during the whole of my residence in St. Olave's, and in which I am proud to say I was always supported by your late esteemed uncle, did I neglect to remind you that there are other qualities, apart from the evanescent charms of figure and complexion, that are indispensable to any matrimonial alliance; and without which wealth and beauty would entirely fail to win my cordial acquiescence."

Of course, anyone might have expected that after this promising prologue, Mrs. Scrymgeour would at once launch forth into a neat little exhortation on moral character, purity of thought and life, diligence, courtesy, charity, and other mental qualifications which are usually deemed desirable in the help-meet of one who has the cure of souls committed to him. But Mrs. Scrymgeour did nothing of the sort.

"Descent, my dear Cuthbert," she continued, in the tone of one who is enunciating a weighty axiom, "aristocratic descent, good blood and high-breeding, are indispensable to a clergyman's wife. Without these your position would be nothing, absolutely nothing. Remember, Cuthbert, that the clergy, especially in and about St. Olave's, mix with the highest ranks of society, and it would wound me more than I can express, were I to see you united with one who would not by her own family connections and unblemished pedigree, fully sustain herself amongst that circle in which your wife will be placed."

"I fancy the little girl is tolerably well connected, isn't she? I always understood the Greys came of a good stock."

"Exactly so; and that is why your views with regard to her meet with my cordial approbation. There is also one other subject that I may mention as investing the proposed alliance with additional eligibility. You are aware that the late Dean Grey had connections in the Government, and Mrs. Amiel Grey still retains the interest which he possessed in that direction. You will perceive, without further explanation on my part, to what I refer." And then Mrs. Scrymgeour entered into the ecclesiastical bearings of the subject.

"Hold hard there, Aunt," said Cuthbert, interrupting her in the midst of an elaborate period, and looking out through the tall, narrow window into the sunshiny Close, "who is that splendid woman just going past the Residence, that one, I mean, in the black cloak?"

"If you refer to the tall lady in the silk dress, her name is Edenall."

"Jove, what a majestic creature! Zenobia herself couldn't match that tread—it is perfectly imperial; and what a stately carriage! I didn't think the St. Olave's workshops could turn out such a first-rate article. What is she, aunt?"

"I am not acquainted with her. She brought no introductions when she came to the place, and therefore none of the Close families have called upon her. She lives with the Bruces at Westwood,—lodges with them, in fact. I should not have minded leaving a card, as I fancy from her manners she is a person of family, but such an attention would have involved me with the Bruces, and I have set my face against visiting them until their antecedents are more satisfactorily ascertained. Indiscriminate politeness is my abhorrence."

"I suppose that was the male Bruce I took the shine out of the other night—a shaggy sort of animal that looked as if he might have gone to a dancing-school with the bear in the Zoological Gardens. Miss Grey introduced him to me as if he was quite up to the mark, but I didn't feel exactly disposed to do the polite."

"Of course not. I am very glad, Cuthbert, you have a proper sense of what is due to your position. That is the great drawback to Miss Grey's character. She is so exceedingly kind-hearted, not to use a harsher expression, that she quite loses sight of the respect due to her station. Indeed I believe I am correct in saying that she is on intimate terms with the Westwood people, goes in at all hours of the day, and allows them to feel quite at home with her."

"We must get her cured of that failing. What kind of a specimen is the female Bruce?—stout elderly individual, I presume, with curl-papers and no crinoline, goes in for consistency and sick visiting; that style of thing you know, eh?"

"My dear Cuthbert," said Mrs. Scrymgeour quietly; she was determined to preserve her equanimity this morning at any rate: "I wish I could impress upon you the advisability of adopting a more judicious style of phraseology. It is really not respectful, the manner in which you express yourself, and I am convinced will seriously mar your chances of preferment."

"Gently, gently, Aunt," and Cuthbert balanced himself on the hind-legs of his chair to get a parting glance at Mrs. Edenall, who was disappearing behind the porch of the Residence, "don't be so hard upon a fellow. Staring patterns are all the rage now you know, and there's no harm in clothing one's ideas in plaids and stripes by way of a change. You really mustn't expect me to hold out like a manuscript homily."

"I don't expect you to do anything unreasonable, my dear Cuthbert. I desire your best interests, and I feel assured in my own mind that Mistress Amiel Grey will not approve that style of conversation. Do be more clerical."

"Trust me, Aunt. I can fit the old lady like a glove, and the young one too, bless her sweet little apple-blossom face. And by the way, to come back to the old subject again, suppose you ask her down here some of these days, and get a few people to meet her; something of a crush in a small way, you know. I should like uncommonly to see how she manages at a quadrille party; fancy she isn't quite got up enough for that style of thing—too much in the innocent blue sash and white pinafore line."

"You have expressed my own sentiments,

Cuthbert, though not in the language I should have chosen. Miss Grey, I must confess, is at present slightly wanting in tone and that dignity of manner which is so indispensable to the maintenance of a position amongst the Close families. But you are aware that she has not yet been introduced into society, and therefore labors under disadvantages; I have no doubt, when she has gone through a few parties here and at the Deanery and Residence, she will quite drop that school-girl freedom of speech and deportment, and become all that we could desire. I approve your idea, Cuthbert, and will see that it is carried out when a suitable opportunity offers."

"That's right, Aunt, and now I'm off. I promised Madden I would stroll to the barracks with him and see the men on parade this morning. Grace sent a message to know if I would do the prayers for him at the Minster, but one can't be always at it, so I declined."

Mr. Scrymgeour brought his chair down again on all-fours, with a thump that made the archidiaconal cat put herself into a posture of defiance, and then he sauntered away, whistling the first stave of "Rosa Lee."

His aunt looked aggrieved.

"Oh, confound it, I forgot. It was a *lapsus lingua*, aunt, you know; I really can't get into the way of whistling psalm tunes. By-the-bye," he said, turning back again, after he had got nearly half-way across the hall, "don't you let it out to Miss Grey that I played the organ at the Cathedral last Friday. Between you and me, aunt, I made a bit of a hash of it; the bellows man didn't work properly, or something, and the Dean sent up a message for me to stop. Of course, she'll never know who it was if you don't tell her."

His aunt promised, and then Cuthbert Scrymgeour lighted his cigar and strolled down the barrack road.

Don't follow him, courteous reader, with over bitter animadversions, as he goes crushing the red chestnut leaves under his patent-leather boots, his felt hat poised gracefully on the summit of his Hyperion locks, his silken whiskers floating gently to and fro, like plumes of river weed under an ebbing tide. It is the misfortune of story-books that they admit us into the private life of our heroes and heroines, and betray, now and then, the creaking of the machinery which moves this complex social system. Every home cannot, like that of Westwood, bear the light of truth to flash bravely and clearly upon it. All his friends thought the Rev. Cuthbert Scrymgeour a charming young man—a very charming young man. You are expected to endorse that opinion, and it will be a great pity if any little chance expressions which have fallen from his lips during the course of this chapter, should tilt him from the pinnacle of your esteem.

Let us trust human nature whilst we can; when we can trust no longer, let us pity; but, until we are absolutely driven to it, don't let us despise those with whom we have been made to share a common brotherhood.

Cuthbert Scrymgeour is the type of a class which will be found in the Church so long as its pulpits are open to men who enter them for the sake of the social rank and status that holy orders give—a class which lessens not, but rather increases, with that frantic rage for "respectability" which characterizes the present day. So long as shallowness and frivolity, garbed in a silken cassock and white cravat, take rank in the best circles of society, men like Cuthbert Scrymgeour will be found, marring less by their doctrines than their manner of life, that standard of national character which the Church seeks to teach. Most cathedral cities—for it is in these that social status finds its reverent worshippers—furnish one or more of these *dilettanti* divines; men more at home in the drawing-room than the pulpit, the boudoir than the reading-desk. And if this delineation of the amiable Cuthbert's character appears harsh and uncharitable, let it be remembered that he comes here, not as a specimen of his brotherhood—than whom there exists not a nobler class of men—but rather as a type of the excrescences which may grow out from even the most perfectly-organized institutions.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE reapers were binding their sheaves, and the heavily-laden corn wagons slowly creeping along over the brown stubble fields, when David Bruce set out from Norlands that seventh of September evening. The grey fogs of November had rotted away the last withered leaf, and early winter frosts crisped all the meadows round St. Olave's, before, wrapped in his plaid and leaning wearily on Janet's shoulder, he was able to pace up and down Westwood lane.

His arm had soon got strong again, much sooner than the doctor expected, but the chill which he had taken in coming home through that drenching rain, settled into a slow fever which lasted many weeks, and had well nigh worn the life out of him. As soon as Janet knew the nature of his illness, she told Mrs. Edenall, expecting that she would either leave them at once or go to temporary lodgings in St. Olave's. But to her surprise, Mrs. Edenhall preferred remaining at Westwood.

"Let me stay," she said quietly, and with more tenderness in her voice than Janet had ever heard before; "there is nothing for me to be afraid of, and I may be of use to you;" and then she added half shyly, and as if ashamed of the friendly feeling which the words implied—

"You have always been very kind to me, although sometimes I have not treated you well. I should not like to leave you now that you are in trouble."

And, indeed, since the time of that pic-nic, there had come a change over Mrs. Edenall. She was no longer so exceedingly cold and careless and haughty. She had lost, except just now and then, that fitful impetuous way, that almost imperious bearing, which, although they never told her so, had often sorely tried the Westwood people. There had come into her face a sort of restful look, which, even though it might be the rest of hopelessness, was better than the icy pride that used to reign there.

So she stayed. For many weeks Janet scarcely left her brother's bedside except for intervals of rest and refreshment. All that was needed she did for him. The doctor said his life depended entirely upon careful nursing, so day by day and

night by night she tended him until her face became almost as pale and wan as his.

It was not to be idle that Mrs. Edenall remained at Westwood. Of her own accord she took up the little household duties that Miss Bruce had been accustomed to manage, and labored through them patiently and unweariedly, with such skill as she could command. And it was easy to see that the work was strange enough to her. Except for thinking of the need which prompted her, it would have been almost amusing to watch this proud creature, with her regal step and empress-like ways, meekly learning of the old Scotch servant how to make herself useful; and with the humility of a little child putting her hand to anything that might help to take the burden of daily care from Janet's mind. Her human love seemed to have in it the element of that other and diviner love, that sees neither meanness nor insignificance in any duty taken up and hallowed by the incense of pure motive with which it is offered.

So little by little these two women came nearer to each other, drawn by that sorrow which in its great bitterness reached only one. The morning greeting became more kind, the nightly farewell, once so formal, tender and faithful. Sometimes when Janet was utterly overborne with weariness, Mrs. Edenall would soothe her in a quiet motherlike way, unconsciously betraying, by chance look or gesture, the infinite depth of feeling which lay beneath that outward crust of habit. Or she would make her lie down on the sofa, and then murmur in that rich voice of hers, snatches of sweet strengthening poetry, the long-ago speech of those who had suffered and been strong, or perchance the grand calm words of Him who spake as never man spake, until the weary look died off from Janet's face, and she fell into peaceful sleep.

In time of happiness people may sunder far and wide, but it cannot be so when death's shadow falls upon the home. Hands that never met before, grope for each other in the dark, and their clasp is strangely comforting. In sorrow we must stand together, or we cannot stand at all. Often it is to teach us this, only this, that the angel comes.

Day by day the household at Westwood grew quieter and quieter. Tibbie no longer crooned through the lilting Scotch ballads with which she had been used to beguile her long spells of scouring and sweeping, but crept stealthily about with unshod feet over the stone floors, and a dree, saddening look on her honest brown face. There was no more any music to wile away the lengthening autumn evenings; for the dust had gathered thickly on the chant books and organ voluntaries which lay heaped up against the piano, and all David's oratorio manuscripts remained untouched on the little corner table where he had laid them that morning when Alice Grey called.

"It is impossible yet to say how the case will end, we must wait patiently," was Dr. Greenwood's reply, as day after day Janet's pale face was lifted to him for one ray of hope or comfort. "The crisis will soon be here; then a few hours will decide it all." And so the time wore on.

It was not until about a week after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, that Alice bethought herself of the promise she had made to David Bruce, and set to work in good earnest upon his music. Once begun, she kept steadily on until it was finished, and then set off to Westwood for a fresh supply.

Of late, hopes brighter and more dazzling than those which belonged to the quiet home of the Bruces, had been crowding her life. Still, beneath them all the old friendship lived on, for Alice was one who, though she might for a while forget, could not easily forsake those who cared for her. The thought of seeing David Bruce again, and having a long talk with him in that quiet parlor, he sitting in his great arm-chair, she on a cushion at his feet, as her custom was, seemed very pleasant. Ever since that evening, five months ago now, when she had knelt by his side, and felt him speak to her through the might of his grand music, he had been to her what no one else could ever be. When they were together, strength seemed to pass from his soul to hers. It was as if the richness of his nature overflowing, filled her own, and lifted her to a brighter standing-place. Alice, perhaps, like most other impulsive people, had a good deal of magnetism in her composition, and a character of great *verve* and power swayed her irresistibly. Had this influence been exercised by a bad man it would have cursed her life; she would have been like those ill-fated creatures of whom we read, whose will is absorbed, and whose whole power of action is controlled by the absolute despotism of some one between whom and themselves a subtle magnetic current is continually passing. Exercised, however, by a noble true man, it became to her a benediction, the one great rest and stay of her life. His influence for the present stood to her in place of that other Eternal Power which is the only sure strength of human souls. And far away down in her heart, past all its little weaknesses and frivolities, and idle girlish fancies, there lay, as a strong foundation on which something worthier might hereafter be raised, a never-wavering faith in the truth and goodness of this friend, this David Bruce who had been so kind to her. So long as this faith lasted, Alice could not sink into utter weakness and inanity.

It was the thought of pleasant meeting and still pleasanter heart to heart talk, that brightened Alice's face, and brought up the deep quiet light which shone in her eyes as she went tripping along Westwood Lane in the sunshine of that autumn afternoon. Robins chirped merrily in the hedges, those great unclipped bramble hedges whose misshapen branches held such purple store of wealth for the little blackberry gatherers from St. Olave's. The golden sunlight came sidling and twinkling through the thinning branches of the chestnut trees, and then its rays played hide-and-seek among the piles of browning leaves that lay on the road. And these same leaves, as Alice danced over them, crackled under her feet with a crisp, merry sound, pleasant enough for one to whom as yet the autumn time brought no dim and worn-out memories.

"Is Mr. Bruce in?" said Alice, as Tibbie opened the door.

"Ou, ay, lassie, an' gin he'll ever gang oot mair until they carry him intill the auld kirk yard yonder, is mair than I can tell."

Alice's bright face faded, and the roll of music which she held in her hand fell to the ground.

Tibbie picked it up with a whispered "Hush, ye mun aye be still the noo."

"Oh, Tibbie, what is the matter? Is Mr. Bruce ill? No one ever told me about it."

"And wha 'd be like to tell ye when there's naebody in a' the toon cares for him gin he lives or dees? He's just wearin' awa' in the sickness, and lassie ye'ere the first that's come to speer for him. Come yer ways ben, ye'll no mak' a blatter i' the hoose," and Tibbie, to whom the sight of Alice's face, even in its paleness, was as a beam of sunshine, led the way into the keeping room.

Mrs. Edenall was there, mending some linen which had come home from the wash. Was it a dim, misty notion working up in her mind of penance, as well as the wish to help Janet—penance not only for that lately passed coldness and indifference, but for some long-ago and deeper wrong, which made her choose the very employment of all others most distasteful? The room had a dreary look. It was exquisitely neat,—nothing at Westwood was ever otherwise than neat; but there was an eerie stillness about it, a sort of shadow from the darkening wing of death that made Alice's heart beat faster as she crossed the threshold.

She walked straight to Mrs. Edenall, and, stooping down, took her two hands in hers, and looked eagerly into that passionless face, over which at last some faint warmth of human love and sympathy had passed.

"Tell me about Mr. Bruce."

That was all she said. No pause for measured greeting; no time for the pleasant conventions of sociality; no room for anything but that short, sharp question. What a different meeting it was from the last that had chanced between the two in that same room.

"Mr. Bruce is very ill—very ill indeed."

"And nobody told me, and I thought he was getting well all the time," sobbed the young girl, hiding her face in the folds of Mrs. Edenall's dress. "But he won't die—tell me, you are quite sure he won't die. Only say that." And Alice trembled from head to foot, trembled so that Mrs. Edenall put her arm over her, or she would have fallen to the ground.

Some women—ay, and some young girls, too—have the warrior's mail and the hero's heart beneath the flowing robes of their calm, gracious womanliness. They can stand firmly at the cannon mouth of some pending, inevitable doom, and wait with a certain grave stillness the fatal ball which parts asunder soul and body, life and hope. No quiver, not even the moving of a muscle or the tremor of an eyelid, has leave to break their girded peace. And, if death comes, is it not an old story that dying is ofttimes easier than living?

But Alice Grey could do none of this. All that was in her of joy or passion, pain or fear, came to the surface, and her whole heart gushed out in that one speech—"Tell me, you are quite sure he won't die."

"God knows, Alice." Mrs. Edenall had soon learned to drop the formal Miss Grey, and take hold of Alice's simple Christian name. "God knows; we don't. We must hope for the best. But he is very ill."

"What is the matter with him?"

"The doctor says it is a slow fever. He tells us no more than that."

Alice shivered.

"You are afraid," said Mrs. Edenall; "some people are very nervous about illness. Tibbie ought not to have asked you to come in. You must not stay."

"I don't think I am afraid, only I'm so sorry. Something aches very much. And what does Miss Bruce do?"

"She is with him always—she never leaves him at all."

"Do you mean she sits by him all day, never any one else but her?"

"Yes, and all the night, too. Dr. Greenwood says he must have uninterrupted attention."

"Oh, Mrs. Edenall, how tired she must be!"

It was a simple remark, and very natural for one who had not felt as yet that which every woman, be she queen or peasant, must sooner or later learn, the bitter-sweet of love's anxiety. Mrs. Edenall looked through and through that fair young face, which held no *remembrance* of sorrow; nothing but the shade of grief which her own words had brought into it.

"Alice," she said, "you don't know what it is to have any one you love very ill—so ill that death may come at any time."

Few people have need to pause for thought ere they answer such a question. Most home gardens have given a flower to the great reaper, and he has left in its place a memory which can never die. But Alice's flowers were ungathered yet, and so she answered without pause,

"No. I have nobody but Aunt Amiel, and I don't know that she has ever been ill at all. I have never had anything to do with ill people, nor seen any one die."

"Neither have I, Alice. God never let me comfort any one. Perhaps I have not deserved it. But you will know some day that it can never tire us to do anything for those we love."

Alice sat still for a while, the slow tears dropping one by one to the floor. At last she lifted her face and threw back the long curls which covered it.

"I brought back Mr. Bruce's music, and I must take some more. I know he wants to have it done."

She went to the little table in the corner, and began with grave reverent care to turn over the sheets of music which lay in the portfolio.

"When these separate voice parts are done, it will be all ready. I will make haste and finish them. He will be pleased, then. He will want to look over them as soon as he gets better, and if—if——"

Here Alice broke down into a passionate fit of crying. The sight of David Bruce's music, his unfinished scores, the pens that he used lying just as he was wont to leave them, brought back the remembrance of him too strongly; and thinking of the pleasant times they had spent together, that little "if" seemed linked to such a fearful possibility of blank disappointment.

Mrs. Edenall came and stood by her, holding her hand firmly and tenderly until the passion of her grief had spent itself. It did not last long.

"There, I shall not let you stay now. You are nervous and overwrought. Walk quietly home, and I think you ought not to come again;

it is not safe for you. You will hear as soon—as any change takes place."

Oh! how unwilling we are to frame in our own thoughts, or speak into the unconscious air, that grim word, *Death*. How vainly we strive to shroud it in speech which may not smite the ear with such an icy sound. And even when the sharp glitter of the scythe is blinding our eyes, and there is no longer any hope for the saving of our treasures, still we will not talk of the great, unalterable, fatal Thing which comes so near, but mutter vaguely of a "change."

Alice gathered up the music and went slowly into the garden. Everything looked very different now. If the birds sang in the trees, she did not hear them. There was no beauty for her in the golden sunlight streaking down through the chestnut branches and lying in soft quivering flakes on the grass at her feet. There was no need either, coming home, to break off now and again from a measured walk to a gay tripping dance, that should better match the music in her heart. In truth, the knowledge of David Bruce's danger coming so suddenly upon her, had been a great blow. For the first time, when the stay was near being removed, she felt how strongly she had grasped it. Other people might court and flatter her, but somehow, for real rest, for strong, thorough confidence, she always turned to David Bruce. And whenever she thought of him, spite of his rugged manner and rough stern voice, there would come into her mind the burden of an old song she once read—

"Douglas, Douglas, tender and true!"

The walk from Westwood was a very dreary one. And then when she got home to the Old Lodge she had to tell Aunt Amiel all about Mr. Bruce's illness, and that brought the sad feeling back again. It was because of these thoughts working up in her mind that there came over Alice's face as she looked away through the clasping ivy of the oriel window into the dim, quiet Close, a softening overtone of pensiveness, a half perceptible haze of sadness, which, like the finishing touches put by artists on too bright pictures, seem to blend the whole into a quieter, more winning beauty.

Mr. Scrymgeour came that night to bid them good-bye. He was going down into the South for a week or two to do duty for a clergyman, whose health had failed. He soon perceived Alice's altered mood, and with ready tact adapted himself to it. Before, he had been piquant and lively, full of jest and anecdote; now he was subdued, quiet and grave. There was an added tenderness in all his ways, a sort of half-concealed sympathy which seemed to hint of some great deep of feeling beneath. No one knew better than Cuthbert Scrymgeour how to assume this beguiling solicitude, nor how to offer those graceful little attentions which to one saddened by trouble or the shadow of it, comes so gratefully. Alice's vanity, at least so much as she had, had been flattered by Mr. Scrymgeour's manner towards her during that first drive home from Norlands, it had pleased her to be praised and complimented, smiled upon and caressed. Now, he reached a deeper, subtler feeling. Then, her fancy only was pleased; now, her heart, more tender and susceptible through this new grief, was touched; and quick as she always was to respond to the slightest breath of kindness, Mr. Scrymgeour's tender manner was infinitely restful and refreshing. So that perhaps it would be hard to say whether a certain girlish grief for David Bruce, or a feeling of pleasure and confidence in this new-found affection which that grief had called forth, swayed her heart most strongly.

The week wore on. The last laden wagon disappeared from the Norlands corn-fields, and the people taking their walks about St. Olave's no longer encountered troops of Irish laborers, with clouted shoes and bronzed faces, wending home from harvest work. September passed; October came in with its hazy mornings, its soft, dreamy noontides, its red sunsets; and with its later weeks a little sunshine came back to the Westwood home. David Bruce began to improve. At first, he sat up for an hour or two; then, wrapped in shawls and carriage-rugs, he crept across the landing, and got into the west room—the room which had been fitted up for Mrs. Edenall, but which now she scarcely ever occupied. At last, one very bright morning at the end of the month, he astonished them all by coming downstairs and taking possession of his own place at the fireside. True, he looked very worn and weak, and had shrunk into scarce half his former broad bulk; but the getting down at all was a great triumph, and made them feel as if the old times were coming back again.

After Mrs. Grey had heard that he was ill, presents of fruit and flowers often came from the Old Lodge, with kind inquiries and loving messages for Janet. And sometimes, at noon-day, when the sun was bright and warm, Aunt Amiel would send the carriage for David to take a drive; but Alice herself never came for many weeks.

One day, however—it was about a month after he had passed the worst of his illness—she brought back the music which she had taken home to copy. Janet and Mrs. Edenall had gone out; it was the first time they had ever left him alone, but he seemed very quiet and easy; and so, giving Tibbie strict orders that no one was to be admitted during their absence, they left him to his own meditations, and went for a walk down the quiet road that led to Norlands Cottage.

It was Saturday morning. Tibbie had scoured the front passage, and then set the door wide open, as she always did, to facilitate the process of drying. After this, she went into the back kitchen to "sort" the vegetables for dinner, and was giving her whole soul to the paring of some potatoes, when Alice came up the garden walk. The old Scotchwoman was dull of hearing, so she missed the young girl's noiseless tread, and Alice stood for some time in the entry, debating with herself whether or not to ring. Seeing no one about, she crept quietly to the parlor-door and opened it expecting to find Mrs. Edenall and Janet in the room.

David Bruce was lying on a sofa, his face half buried in the cushions, so that she could only see its profile. He seemed to be sleeping, and moved not a muscle as she came forward with hushed, careful step, scarce daring to breathe, for fear she should wake him. Surely the dreams that stole under those shut eyelids must have been pleasant,

for there was such a look of peacefulness upon his face, such utter contentment and repose; just such an expression as she had met there often and often before, while sitting by his side in this same room, and hearing him rehearse that grand music of his.

Alice stole up to him, and crouched down on a little footstool close by the sofa. After all, it was pleasant to be near him again; it brought back just the old strong restful feel—as if, feeble though he was, his very presence could keep harm away from her. She bent forward and leaned her head upon her hands, gazing earnestly into his face, while a look of tender thoughtfulness came into her own—a look of mingled wonder, and reverence, and affection. It was there still when David opened his eyes and saw her.

He did not start nor seem surprised. Why should it be strange to wake from a dream, through which, like some angel presence, she had passed, and find her really there, so near that he could clasp her hands and look straight into her honest, truthful eyes. He raised himself a little from the cushion, turning his face towards her, and then she saw how wan and worn it was; like the face of a man who stands yet in the valley of the shadow of death, who has not loosed his hold of the hand which could guide him with a few very short steps back again into its darkest place.

Alice was the first to speak. Whatever else Mr. Bruce had lost, he had certainly not lost any of his old quietness. There was still that steady, bolted look about the lips, that peculiar expression of self-containment and reticence.

"I have thought so much about you. I have been so sorry for you." Alice's voice trembled as she said this, and the tears came into her eyes, but she made a brave effort and forced them back again.

He said nothing, only just held out his hand to her; the poor, thin hand, that had scarcely strength to clasp her own. Alice kept it very fast between both of hers, laying down her warm, rosy cheek upon it. She would have done just the same with a little canary bird, if it had chanced to flutter into her bosom.

"And I have wanted so often to see you, but they would not let me come."

Still no answer, but that steady, earnest look, which seemed to hold more than any words could speak.

"I will come now though, and get a long talk with you soon. I have wearied for you very much."

David was pleased, it was one of his own country words Alice had learned from him, and it sounded so pleasantly from her young, girlish voice. He drew her a little nearer to him, and said in just the old way, that Alice remembered so well:—

"I have been sair weary for you too, little Alice."

"Wha's the maister crackin' till?" said Tibbie, appearing in the doorway with her linsey apron tucked up round her ample waist, and half a yard of paring dangling from the potato in her left hand. "Miss Janet telled me naebody ava was to get speech of him. Ye'd no ha' come ben the day, lassie, gin my auld lugs had been as licht as yer ain wee bit footies."

Tibbie lacked the *sauviter in modo*, but she possessed to a remarkable extent the *fortiter in re*, which, upon occasion, is quite as serviceable. Tramping into the room with her sturdy, stockingless feet, she laid her brown hand upon Alice's arm.

"Ye maun come awa the noo, lassie," she said, and then, without further word or speech, she conducted the young girl out of the room, never relaxing her hold until she had seen her safely *en route* for the garden gate; after which she returned to the back kitchen, and proceeded with the peeling of the potatoes.

A valuable servant, very, was Tibbie Inverarity.

CHAPTER XXV

Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour did not forget her promise touching the party which had been proposed with a view to facilitating the matrimonial speculations of her nephew. Cuthbert was to come home early in December, and the party ought to take place soon after his return. Mrs. Scrymgeour was anxious that it should be the opening event of the St. Olave's season, in order that Alice might have frequent after-opportunities of seeing society. Of course during this, her first introduction to fashionable life, the young girl would naturally be dazzled by the novelty of the scene, and view it rather as a means of enjoyment than a new and serious phase in the curriculum of social education; but on subsequent occasions, Mrs. Scrymgeour took it for granted she would exercise her powers of observation, and study to mould her deportment after the most approved models of the aristocratic circle in which she was intended to move.

This being Alice's *debût*, Mistress Amiel Grey had to be consulted about it. Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour therefore took an early opportunity of calling at the Lodge, and informing the dear, unworldly old lady, of the pressing necessity that existed for her niece's being introduced to the pomps and vanities of polite life, and of the plan which she had devised of meeting that necessity; keeping out of sight, of course, the little personal arrangement that was to follow. It was one grey morning towards the close of November, when she had seen Alice cross the Close to morning prayers at the Cathedral, and was therefore confident of a clear course, that she opened her commission.

Aunt Amiel was sitting by the fire. On a little oaken stand beside her lay a Prayer-book, opened upon the Psalms for the day. She had been reading, and was now thinking over them with a very calm, quiet, contented expression on her face; such a look as those have whose warfare is ended, and whose remaining little span of life is brightened by coming glory. All the tumult and unrest which those grand old poems breathe, had been overpast by her; all the weariness too and sorrow. As she read them now, she gathered up only the praise.

Mrs. Scrymgeour felt that it would scarcely be seemly to break in at once upon Mistress Grey's train of thought with the subject she had in hand. She therefore introduced a few preparatory remarks, "churchy" at first, but gradually relaxing in their tone, until at last they reached a point where the mention of downright mun-

dane topics would not produce too violent a contrast.

"And now, my dear Mrs. Grey," said the Archdeacon's widow, when at last the little bark of conversation had got fairly launched into open waters, "let me mention a subject that has been pressing upon my mind somewhat frequently of late. Our charming little friend"—they had been talking of Alice previously,—"has already completed her eighteenth year, and I am sure you will agree with me in thinking that she ought to be placed in the possession of those advantages to which by birth and position she is entitled."

At the words "birth and position" Mrs. Grey seemed perplexed.

"I had scarcely thought of it," she said, after a long pause, during which Mrs. Scrymgeour supposed she had been mentally discussing the most eligible way in which the *debût* could be accomplished. "I have always endeavored to preserve Alice from having too exalted views of her own position, and any consideration to which she may be entitled. There are difficulties connected with her that increase as she grows older. They press upon me sometimes, and I almost think——"

"Yes, yes, my dearest Mrs. Grey, I assure you I quite comprehend the circumstances to which you refer. A young orphan girl, connected with one of the most influential Close families, possessed of such great beauty too, and of considerable pecuniary expectations——"

Mrs. Scrymgeour threw out this last clause as a feeler, being well assured that if the expectations were not considerable, Mrs. Grey would speak up at once and say so. Aunt Amiel, however, let it pass without any attempt at contradiction, and the Archdeacon's widow continued:

"Pecuniary expectations to a considerable amount, always, my dear Mrs. Grey, render the guardianship of a young lady a serious responsibility, and I sympathize with you, I most sincerely sympathize with you, in the anxieties that your trust involves. But Alice must enter into society sooner or later, and I am sure you will agree with me that her first introduction to it could not be accomplished more favorably than at a select party, quite select, dear Mrs. Grey, which I think of giving in the course of a few weeks, and at which I assure you I shall watch over her interests with a truly maternal solicitude."

Mrs. Grey yielded—how could she do otherwise, to a proposal made so generously, and combining so many advantages? The matter was settled, therefore, and in due time a dainty little note, bearing Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour's crest, arrived at the Old Lodge, requesting the pleasure of Miss Grey's company at Chapter Court on the 20th, with the magic word "dancing" introduced in the corner.

To say that Alice did not look forward to the event with eager fluttering expectancy, would be gifting her with an amount of mental solidity and fortitude to which she had not the slightest claim. What young girl does not anticipate her first party with longings akin to those the little boys and girls of wandering Israel—supposing their gastronomic tastes similar to ours—would cast towards the land that flowed with milk and honey?

Is not her eighteenth birthday welcomed by every school-girl as the magic gate through which she is to pass into the enchanted circle of society, with its balls and parties, its fêtes and flower shows, its dazzling drawing-rooms and elegant suppers, its tulle and tarlatane, jewels, feathers, and wreaths, its successive flirtations, conquests, and engagements, terminating at last in that climax of magnificent display, where beneath a canopy of Brussels lace and orange blossom, and with *éclat* greater than that which once surrounded the far-famed triumphs of Scipio, she achieves the sublime destiny of matrimony? I repeat, does not every girl, trained as most girls now are to view marriage as the ultimatum of social politics, long for the time when she shall be permitted to enter the arena and strive for its wreath of victory? Well, Alice had the common frivolities of girlhood, and if her seclusion from indiscriminate companionship had saved her from much of its hollowness, its precocious worldly wisdom, its shallow schemes of flirtation and conquest, still there was that in her which owned affinity with the charms of social life, and made her count the days with scarcely restrained impatience until the twentieth of December should arrive.

But to return to Westwood. After that last visit of Alice Grey's, David grew rapidly better and was soon able to work at his Oratorio with renewed energy.

Indeed there was need for him to do so. The Oratorio was announced for performance in London on the 20th of December, the same evening as Mrs. Scrymgeour's party. The singers had been for some weeks past rehearsing their parts, and Mr. Bruce was to go up to London early in December to superintend the first performance of it in person.

Only once more before leaving Westwood, he and Alice Grey met; and their meeting was on this wise.

It was the day before he went away. She had come partly to call upon Miss Bruce, but more for the sake of putting off the weariness and *ennui* which often came over her now that Mr. Scrymgeour was no longer at hand to amuse her with his pleasant idle talk, or charm her with those pretty compliments of his. Alice found it hard to turn from the nectar of flattery and caresses to the plain food of common life; and perhaps it was this scarcely acknowledged weariness, this tinge of disappointment and emptiness, that made her seem quieter than usual, and brought into her face a wistful look which David had seldom seen there before.

Mrs. Edenall was out, for it was a crisp, bright, sunshiny day, and Janet was somewhere in the upper regions, busy preparing her brother's things for his journey next morning.

David Bruce had not got back all his old energy, and a long day's work at altering one of the chorusses in "Jael" had somewhat paled his cheek, and made him glad to rest in the great arm-chair by the fire. Alice saw that he was weary, and offered to help him by copying out into separate voice parts the music which he had hastily jotted down on a few loose sheets of paper. The work was good for her, it filled her mind and beguiled her thoughts. As she bent patiently over it, the weary look smoothed out of her face, and there came instead, one peace-

ful, contented. Besides she was always pleased to do anything for David Bruce.

He watched her from beneath the hand which shaded his eyes. She sat at the music table by the window. The slanting December sunlight coming in through the lattice—there were no vine leaves now to keep it out—stole brightly through and through the golden tendrils of her hair, and flickered upon the rounded outlines of her cheek and throat. Even in her plain, close-fitting winter dress of dark blue wincey, she made a pretty picture; there was something so fresh and flower-like about her.

By-and-by the last sheet was finished, and she brought it to the fire to dry.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Bruce?" she said, as she gathered up the loose papers and laid them tidily together.

How humbly Alice always spoke to this man; how docile as a little child she became in his presence. With other people she was wilful, and showed a certain dash of spoiled pettishness sometimes; but with him she was always tender and subdued. It was with very different tones from those she had already learned to use to Mr. Scrymgeour that she asked—

"Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"No, thank you, Alice; come and sit down by me now. It will be a long time before we get a talk with each other again."

Alice came and sat on the hassock at David Bruce's feet, resting herself against the arm of his chair. She did not speak, but looked steadily down into the red firelight. By-and-by she leaned her head upon his knee, and began crooning to herself one of the solos from "Jael."

As she sat there her face half turned from him, David took up one of her long curls and played with it, twining it round his fingers, then loosing it and watching it fall in a long waving rippling tress to the ground. While he did so, he thought for the first time how like her hair was to Mrs. Edenall's,—the same rich, changeful tint, golden in the sunshine and tawny in the shade, the same playful ripple and soft silky flow. And then he wondered if by the time these locks were grey like Mrs. Edenall's, they would shadow a face so worn as hers.

"No, never, my darling," he murmured, half aloud, as the thought came over him.

Alice lifted her head.

"What did you say? Were you speaking to me?"

"No, I was not speaking to you."

Her head went down again to its old resting-place.

David Bruce was not in a talking mood that afternoon; neither was Alice. They sat there in unbroken silence until the sun crept away behind the grey towers of the Minster, and the firelight began to have its own way in the quiet little room, dancing with pleasant fitful flicker over the old-fashioned furniture, and making strange shadows amongst the leaves and flowers of the mirror's oaken frame.

"It is late; I must go home," said Alice at last, making a move to raise herself.

"No, not yet," and David laid his hand upon her shoulder—just a touch, yet it kept her there. She obeyed every motion of his will as completely as that petulant, imperious organ yonder, at the Cathedral.

"I shall think of you very often, Alice, when I am away. You have been a great help to me."

She looked up to him with a face so bright in its gladness. To be praised by those she cared for was more than meat and drink to Alice Grey. Did he know it was only because he praised her, or did he think that another and deeper feeling made the clear music of her voice as she said—

"It has been my joy to help you. I wish I could have done it over and over again for you."

"Little Alice!"

The words were very low, scarcely more than a whisper; but surely she might have heard the thrill of feeling in them: surely she might have known that tones like those are never used by any man save to the woman he chooses from all others to be his own—his wife. She sat for a little while longer, looking silently into the clear red firelight. Then she moved his hand away from her shoulder.

"There, I must go. Do not stop me again, Mr. Bruce, please. Aunt Amiel will wonder why I don't go home. And now, good-bye!"

She held out her hand to him in just her own frank, girlish way. He rose, wearily rather, for he was far from strong yet, and held it fast in his, looking down earnestly into her face, as if searching for an unspoken answer to an unspoken question.

Alice returned his gaze for awhile, and then her eyes fell, first to the firelight again, and from that to the ground.

Why did he not tell her that he loved her? Why did he not break away the dusty old conventions, the cobwebs of rank and position, among which she had been bred, and speak out bravely, honestly, as one human being may always speak to another. She stood there in her affluence of hope, and youth, and beauty—he in his poverty and obscurity, bare enough of money and position, rich only in the coin of earnest purpose, a coin, alas! not current in St. Olave's. And David Bruce was very proud. He would have waited patiently, and wearied on through years of toil, rather than the woman he loved should step down one inch of social caste to place her hand in his.

Yet he hesitated. It was so hard to let her go from him. She looked so humble, so gentle, as she stood before him with downcast eyes and cheeks flushing in the dim light.

His hand was upon the latch of action; one moment more and the fateful question would have been asked and answered—that answer which, spoken in truth, angels hush their song to hear. But just then another hand was upon another latch. The door opened and Janet came in with half a dozen collars whose buttons needed moving the eighth of an inch farther back.

Their hands unclasped. When and where should they clasp again?

Alice smiled a farewell and a greeting both in one, to Miss Bruce, and then slipped away. Presently she was walking down Westwood lane as cheerfully as though there were no such words in the dictionary as pain and parting.

"Davie, I have got all your things ready for you, except these collars, which have been

rather too wide since you were so ill. And do be careful now, not to forget that chest-preserver of yours; you know so much depends on guarding against cold. Your study coat is in the portmanteau too, but don't wear it except just at night when you are by yourself; it is not fit to put on out of doors any more."

"And," continued Janet, getting out her needle and thread and setting to work upon the buttons, "I should like you to wear that black necktie with the violet spots in a general way, it fits you so nicely; and be very particular about your handkerchiefs, will you? You know the London washer-women are so deceitful, and will change them for imitation cambric if you don't mind."

All which directions David listened to very patiently.

Next morning he set off to London.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was the night of Mrs. Scrymgeour's party, and lights began to flicker from the upper windows of certain of the Close houses, whose young lady occupants had received notes of invitation to the spread. It would be stating a profound untruth to say that Alice Grey did not spend more than usual time before her looking-glass that night. The poet's axiom—

"Beauty when unadorned 's adorned the most,"

quoted so frequently by people who fancy they know all about it, is a fallacy, a complete fallacy, as the experience of daily life abundantly proves. Is it not a fact patent to any one of ordinary powers of observation, a fact about which there lingers not the shadow of a doubt, that the women whom Nature has most richly dowered with personal attractions, are just the women who spend most time in elaborating their toilettes and laboring to produce a pleasing effect? Is it the plain "young person" who sits for an hour before her mirror, adjusting the fall of a ringlet or coaxing a bandeau into its most effective position? Is it the virgin of freckled skin and dumpy figure who can't sleep at nights for thinking what color her next new ball-dress shall be, and whether she shall wear blue flowers or pink in her stubby hair? No; these and similar anxieties are confined to the acknowledged *belles* of society, who suffer them cheerfully as the income-tax of beauty. Nor would they risk so large a capital of time and trouble in personal adornment, did not the investment yield a profitable dividend in the shape of compliments and pretty speeches.

A beautiful woman is in the right of it to make the most of the talent she holds. It is no light thing to have a form so lovely that every one who looks upon it is unconsciously made happier. She would be scarcely a woman who did not more than simply care for, who did not reverence and cherish a gift which is as much God-bestowed as the intellect that directs or the eloquence which sways the passions of men.

And, indeed, to look no further than the mere utilitarian aspect of the matter—we have come back now to the length of time a woman may reasonably spend over dressing herself—it is well to be leisurely and careful in the performance of a duty in which trifling neglect may lead to disastrous results. Take, for instance, your violently well-informed young lady, your feminine compendium of scientific knowledge, who bristles all over with 'ologies, who cannot open her mouth without, not a diamond, but a *fact*, dropping from it. She is invited to a party, and accepts the invitation; not that she cares for balls and suppers, of course, but society has claims upon intelligent people; her presence will check frivolity, her conversation will ensure respect, &c. She is elbow deep in mathematics to the last moment, telegraphs through her toilette, "fixes up" her hair in a trice, jumps into her dress and is walking through a quadrille within half an hour of the time when she was solving a problem in cube root. The evening is not far advanced before a carelessly-adjusted hair-pin begins to sport itself in the back settlements of her *coiffure*. It presses painfully, more painfully—as only hair-pins know how to press when they are badly put in—it becomes positively aggravating; but the arrangements of the party will not admit of her slipping out to set it right, and she is forced to endure the martyrdom in silent patience. She begins to look cross—how can she help it, poor girl, with that vicious pin sticking into her scalp? And people give over asking her to dance. By-and-by a headache ensues; she can't converse, her ideas collapse, her amiability dissolves like jelly on Midsummer-day, her store of information—with which she was to have accomplished so much—is locked up in a box of which she has lost the key. People wonder at her disagreeableness—of course they do not know the misery under which she labors—and, as likely as not, attribute it to intellectual repletion. The gentleman who escorts her in to supper is disgusted with the cross-grained specimen of womanhood he has taken under his protection, and the poor girl goes home at last weary, out of sorts, splenetic, disappointed, and vixenish. All the fault of that misplaced hair-pin.

I don't blame Alice Grey, then, and I hope you will not, that although it was scarcely six o'clock when she went into her room to dress for the party, the Cathedral bells were just on the stroke of half-past seven before Lettice, the good-tempered little waiting-maid, had adjusted the last curl and fastened the white cashmere wrap round her mistress's snowy shoulders. Then Alice fluttered down the oaken staircase into the empty drawing-room, and lighted a chandelier in order that she might take a leisurely survey of herself in the mirror that stood between the windows. The inspection must have been attended with a favorable result, judging from the smile which overspread Alice's face when it was concluded—a smile, not of conceit or vanity, but simple, innocent pleasure at finding herself so fair. You might as well call a forget-me-not vain when it bends to look at its own loveliness in the stream that waters it, or chide the lily for pride because it stoops its regal head over the fountain mirror.

"Don't I look nice, auntie?" she said, as she came floating into the oriel room where Aunt

Amiel was sitting in her usual place by the fire; "I never felt so pretty before," and then she turned slowly round, that the old lady might get a prospect of her on all sides, while Lettice, peeping in at the half-opened door, smiled at the pleasant sight.

Was it a presentiment of what that night might bring, that made Mistress Amiel Grey open her arms and fold Alice to her bosom, closely, more closely than the girl ever remembered being folded there before? Would she keep her back as long as she could from that hollow false world in which she would find perhaps a little of floating pleasure, but surely a great deep of disappointment? Would she keep her darling yet a little longer in that peaceful, innocent, unconscious child-life out of which this night would snatch her?

There was a ring at the bell. It was Mrs. Somers, who had called for Alice. Aunt Amiel was too infirm to go into company, and therefore the Dean's lady was to act as Alice's chaperone.

She gave Aunt Amiel a good-night kiss, and with a passing "Thank you, Lettice, for spending so much time over me," was whirled away to her first round on the great social treadmill.

"Our pet looks quite charming to-night, she is really a sweet little creature," said the Dean's lady, a couple of hours later, as Alice passed them in a quadrille with her partner, Cuthbert Scrymgeour.

And, indeed, she did look very lovely. She wore a full-skirted white dress of India muslin, soft and cloudlike, looped up here and there with clusters of frosted green leaves and pearls. For a head-dress she had that Venetian cordon of pearls, which the jeweller's skill had converted into a very tasteful ornament. It was twisted carelessly round her head and fastened over the left ear in a loose knot, from which the silver tassels drooped and mingled with her brown curls. There was a deeper color than usual on her cheeks, and a bright glancing light in her eyes. She was thoroughly enjoying the scene so new and strange to her, and, in this respect, she differed from several of the other young ladies, belles of six or eight seasons standing, who had a hacked, worn-out look, and went through the whole affair as if it was a sort of bore.

"Yes, she is a very passable girl," rejoined Mrs. Scrymgeour, "but if I were asked to give my opinion I should say she would be improved by a little more *tone*. She is just a shade too impulsive. You see, my dear Mrs. Somers, dignified manners are so very essential to young ladies, in a Cathedral city especially; and for a person of Miss Grey's position, destined to be the wife of——"

"What, engaged already!" exclaimed the Dean's lady.

"Oh no, no, nothing of the sort," and Mrs. Scrymgeour stooped down to arrange a refractory fold in her black velvet dress, "nothing of the sort; but you see, Mrs. Somers, she is sure to marry into some of the Close families, and she will never get on without dignity. She has quite the air of the nursery about her."

"That is because she has never been to school. It's a thousand pities Mrs. Grey didn't give her two or three years at Madame Bresiatellie's in London, it would have been the making of her. My eldest girl was a terrible hoyden before she went there, but really the change when she came home for the first holidays was marvellous; such exceedingly finished manners, and her tone everything that could be wished."

"Ah, but you see Mrs. Grey has such peculiar notions; it is a perfect mystery to me the way she has brought up that niece of hers. Would you believe it, I had quite a struggle to get Alice to-night, the poor old lady seemed so afraid of letting her be introduced into society. Age, you see, the infirmities of age."

"We were discussing Miss Grey," continued the Archdeacon's widow, as Mrs. Colonel Spurge, a stout dowager of fifty-five, deposited herself on the lounge beside them. "You know this is her *début*."

"Pretty little thing, very pretty little thing," said Mrs. Spurge, carelessly quizzing Alice through her gold-mounted eye-glass, "but decidedly too *petite* for my fancy. I prefer girls of more build and presence," and the Colonel's lady looked complacently down to the far end of the room, where her daughters, the Misses Spurge, two extensive, good-tempered, unbetrothed damsels, were disporting themselves in the dance.

"Tastes differ. Now I believe most gentlemen are fond of little women. Cuthbert dotes upon a *petite* figure, and you know his taste is universally considered unexceptionable. But Canon Wilkes is coming; excuse me, I must go and introduce him to a few of the gentlemen;" and Mrs. Scrymgeour moved away, leaving the two ladies to finish their conversation.

Generally speaking there was not much interest in the Close parties. St. Olave's was very different to Belgravia, which rejoices in a vast floating population of fresh faces, so that the giver of entertainments can get together every night twenty or thirty distinguished strangers as easily as she orders her supper or bespeaks her decorations. In the circumscribed fellowship of the Close families everybody knew who everybody else was. The faces which one by one bloomed into young ladyhood, or shot forth the masculine adornment of whiskers, were as familiar as the Close elm trees and the rooks which colonized the Deanery chimneys. The advent of a downright stranger into the select midst of the St. Olave's inner circle created almost as much curiosity as if a fresh gurgoyle had struggled out beneath the Cathedral eaves, or a supernumerary martyr, with palm crown and flowing robes, taken his place amongst the worthies who kept watch upon the east front.

But though the faces of the people were not new to Alice, their ways were quite strange. Brought up as she had been in the old world stillness of Aunt Amiel's home, even this sombre exhibition of gaiety at Chapter Court appeared a whirl of excitement. The *début* was quite a success so far as popularity went. The unspoiled freshness of her manner had a charm about it which fascinated the starched cavaliers of the Close. She floated through dance after dance, much to the secret annoyance of certain last year's belles, who were condemned to wallflowerism most of the evening; and it was not until her little feet were completely tired that she came and sat down on a velvet lounge by the side of Miss

Fullerton, the daughter of the county member, a fashionable young lady, fresh from town.

"This is your first turn out, I suppose," said Miss Fullerton, as she drew aside half an acre of pink silk flounces to make room for Alice's white draperies.

"Yes. I was never at a real party before. I never saw so much gaiety in all my life."

Miss Fullerton's aquiline nose uplifted itself slightly, and she replied with the air of a young lady who has seen the world—

"Oh this is nothing, positively nothing. It's just like going to sea in a washing-tub. You must get your aunt to let you have a few weeks in town. We think nothing there of dropping into half-a-dozen balls in a night."

"But your shoes," said Alice, looking down at the little white satin tips peeping out from her dress, "I'm sure mine are beginning to wear already. I don't think I could dance another set in them."

"Oh," laughed the experienced belle, "you would ruin the shoe shops if you capered away at the rate you have been doing this evening. Three or four quadrilles are as many as any young lady thinks of going through at one spread, and the rest of the time is spent in flirting, which is much pleasanter. But then, you know, St. Olave's is so awfully slow; one scarcely sees a fresh face—I mean one under a hat—from Christmas to Lent."

"Here's Captain Madden coming this way," said Alice; "he is going to ask you to dance."

"Then he won't get me, that's all. My performances in that line are concluded for to-night. No, he is not coming, though; he has weighed anchor alongside of Miss Spurge. I wonder how it is that small men have such a partiality for high latitudes in women. He looks like a little steam-tug beside a man-of-war in full sail. But here is Mr. Scrymgeour making his way in our direction. What a splendid fellow he is!" And Miss Fullerton began to smooth her bands and manipulate her ivory fan, in anticipation of a flirting opportunity with the B. A.

But Mr. Scrymgeour's errand was not to the London belle; he had business of another kind to be got through with to-night, and a favorable opportunity for transacting it had just offered. He bowed gracefully to Miss Fullerton, and then gave his arm to Alice.

"I believe there is music going on in the small drawing-room, and I know you enjoy singing. May I have the pleasure?" He laid his hand upon hers with a gentle touch, which Alice had felt more than once that evening, and which, every time she felt it, made her little heart flutter with a strange, new tremble of pleasure.

Miss Fullerton shook out her pink flounces, and looked round for a fresh quarry. It presented itself in the shape of Mr. Lewis Thorpe, a rising barrister on the northern circuit; a brilliant young man, with a considerable flow of talk and an aptitude for flirtation, which made him a charming companion to the ladies.

When Alice and Mr. Scrymgeour reached the music-room, Miss Somers was sitting at the piano with Blanche Egerton, a tall, dreamy-eyed, stylish-looking brunette, in lemon-colored cashmere and black lace by her side.

"Oh, Mr. Scrymgeour," said the Dean's daughter, "you are the very person we want. We have been trying to get a pass voice for the 'Wreath.' Now, you will sing it, won't you? I know you can do it so splendidly."

"Mr. Scrymgeour's harp is always in tune," said Blanche Egerton, giving him a soft glance from beneath her long black eyelashes, and placing herself so that the Spanish beauty of her complexion should appear in favorable contrast with Alice's blonde face and sunny curls.

As Cuthbert frequently informed his college friends, he "rather liked a dark girl," but he had reasons for preferring the rosebud style of beauty this evening. They arranged themselves at the piano. Miss Somers played, Blanche Egerton stood beside her, and Mr. Scrymgeour a little behind, with Alice at his left hand. She would have slipped away from them, but Cuthbert, unseen by the other two ladies, placed his foot on the hem of her dress, and kept her near him.

Long ago, I heard of a lady who won her husband by the singing of that song. Euterpe and Erato both must have presided with special care over its composition, for its bewitching notes helped to gain Cuthbert Scrymgeour his betrothed. Alice felt rather than saw that his eyes were upon her as he sang those lines, which have doubtless opened the way to many a flirtation, ending in a chaplet even more fragrant than the one they so glowingly describe:—

"The beauteous wreath that decks her head,
Forms her description, her description true;
Hands lily white, lips crimson red,
And cheeks, and cheeks of rosy hue."

"Now let us have 'Juanita;'" and Mr. Scrymgeour took that song of Spain from a quantity of music which was thrown carelessly on the piano. "Miss Egerton, I am sure, will oblige us."

Miss Egerton smiled; she was quite agreeable. "Juanita" was her sensation song; it suited both her face and her voice. She dispread her lemon cashmere gracefully over the music-stool, tucked her gloves and handkerchief behind the desk, and was just commencing, in a dulcet contralto voice, to inform her audience that

"Soft o'er the fountain,
Lingering falls the southern moon,"

when the door opened.

"Miss Somers and Miss Egerton are wanted for a charade," said Captain Madden, bringing in a list of ladies' names. "Pardon me, Mr. Scrymgeour, for depriving you of two of the graces," continued the gallant little officer, as he gave an arm to each of the ladies and 'squired them away to the great drawing-room.

"He has left me the fairest of the three," murmured Cuthbert in a whisper, which reached only Alice's ears; and then taking the place that Blanche Egerton had just left, he went through her unfinished song in that deep rich voice of his, which, whether it intoned Cathedral services or pattered the airy nothings of drawing-room chit-chat, was full of music passing sweet.

Do the composers of these fashionable ballads ever dream of the mischief which their glowing numbers may work in susceptible hearts? Does it enter their minds that such very demonstrative sentiments put into the lips of musical ladies and gentlemen may slide unconsciously into real feelings, and produce most unlooked-for consequences? Every one knows how that tenderest of tender songs doth end:—

"Nita, Juanita! let me linger by thy side,
Nita, Juanita! be my own fair bride."

How, Alice could not tell for certain, but in some form or other she gave the permission so musically pleaded for. Waking out of a dim, confused, and yet pleasant dream, she felt her hand clasped in Mr. Scrymgeour's, and his eyes bent down on her face.

"May I ask Aunt Amiel?" were the first words she could remember, and Alice's answer, whether looked or spoken, gave no denial to the request.

She was yet standing before him silent and trembling, with flushed face and downcast eyes, when voices were heard in the corridor. She darted away through a side door; Cuthbert turned to the piano again, and when a party of ladies and gentlemen came into the room to study their *rôles* for the charade, he was playing a quadrille with the most perfect *insouciance*.

He was claimed to perform Victorian to Miss Egerton's Preciosa in the Spanish Student. He was all polite acquiescence, would do anything in the world to oblige the ladies, and so scarce ten minutes after he had taken Alice's hand in his and murmured over her his pretty words of love, he was on his knees reciting tender speeches to the dreamy-eyed brunette, and rehearsing serenades to be sung beneath her chamber window.

When the charade was over he sought Alice, who had slipped away into a quiet corner of the room, and was sitting in one of the deep recessed window-seats, half hidden by the heavy curtains. There was a flush upon her cheeks and a flickering light in her eyes which deepened as she looked up and saw Cuthbert coming towards her.

"Alice, you look so sweet to-night."

It was the first tme he had called her by her name. She looked up shyly into his face, and said in just her innocent way:—

"I am glad you like me. Aunt Amiel said before I came, she had not seen me look so pretty before."

Cuthbert Scrymgeour scarcely knew whether to laugh outright at the child's unbounded simplicity, or to set etiquette at defiance and press a kiss on the lips which had just uttered such a bewitching little piece of *naiveté*. However, his sense of propriety forbid the first, and the second he reserved for a future opportunity. He contented himself with looking into the fair face until it blushed again.

"Miss Grey, Miss Grey, where is Miss Grey? the carriage is waiting;" and the indefatigable captain, who seemed to be the courier-general for evening parties, came up with Alice's mantle on his arm. He was going to assist her in putting it on, but went away somewhat crest-fallen as Mr. Scrymgeour took it from him and signified his intention of acting as Miss Grey's cavalier.

"I suppose the thing is settled," said Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour to herself, as she took leave of the Dean's lady, and watched her nephew assisting Alice into the carriage. "Well, she will make him a pretty wife, and her position is unexceptionable, perfectly unexceptionable. All things considered, the affair is quite satisfactory."

And so ended Alice Grey's first introduction to the fashionable world of St. Olave's.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"To-MORROW morning I shall come," said Cuthbert Scrymgeour, as he stood by Alice's side in the entrance-hall whilst the footman assisted the Dean's lady and Elene Somers into the carriage, and compressed their turbulent draperies into something like moderate dimensions. And then with a few whispered compliments, which those practised lips of his let fall as easily as cherry-trees shed their blossoms to the May breezes, he shook hands with her, bowed to the other ladies, and the carriage drove away.

Cuthbert did not linger at the hall door to watch it out of sight, as some men would have done under similar circumstances. Mr. Scrymgeour was not one of the subjective class. At all times he preferred action to contemplation, and so as soon as the wheels which bore Alice away began to crunch on the gravel sweep in front of Chapter Court, he went back to the drawing-room and finished the evening by a dance with Blanche Egerton.

When Alice got home, everyone had gone to bed but Lettice, the little waiting-maid. The house had a strange, hushed, deserted feel. The fire in the oriel room was nearly out, only just giving light enough to show deep shadows in the corners of the room, over which, to Alice's excited fancy, weird shapes seemed to be flitting hither and thither. She shuddered, and wrapped her mantle more closely round her as she bent over the flickering embers.

"There's a nice fire in your room, Miss, and Mrs. Grey said you must have some chocolate when you came home, so I've got the water boiling. You're very tired I'm sure," and the kind-hearted little maiden looked sympathizingly into Alice's face, which was already beginning to pale.

"Yes, I'm tired enough, Lettice, but I can't take any chocolate to-night, thank you. Go and make my room ready, please, and I'll come by-and-by."

Never since Alice could remember, had she gone to bed without wishing Aunt Amiel good-night. She could not do so now. As she passed the door of her aunt's room she opened it very softly and went in, shading the lamp with her hand that its glare might not fall upon the sleeper. She parted the curtains and looked lovingly into the old face. Aunt Amiel's sleep was not quiet to-night. She moved restlessly every now and then, as if some painful dream was oppressing her, and Alice bending over her, fancied she heard snatches of broken incoherent sentences.

She pressed a kiss on the old lady's forehead, and then went away. There was a bright cheery fire in her own room. Lettice had drawn up the great easy chair, and put her quilted dressing-gown ready. She was waiting now to take away her mistress's gay dress and ornaments.

"Thank you, Lettice, you need not stay. I don't want anything more. I daresay you are tired too with sitting up so late. Leave me now."

As soon as Alice was alone, she began to think over all the story of the evening. At first it seemed like a vivid, by-past dream, which indeed might be nothing but a dream. As

she sat there in the gleaming firelight, surrounded by the familiar books and pictures, and the quaint black oak furniture, which she remembered ever since she was a child, just the old child feeling came over her again; the fresh, unspoiled unthinking carelessness of girlhood. Until she chanced to look at the flowers lying in her lap, crushed and broken now, all but one little spray of myrtle which he had slipped into her hand as they stood together in the hall at Chapter Court, —that was green and glossy yet. Taking it up she remembered all, and with the remembrance, there came into her face a look half of wonder, half of womanly dignity; no, scare dignity, more a gentle, innocent sort of vanity, such vanity as might flush the cheek of a little child who toys with a bright choice plaything.

Two hours ago Miss Fullerton had envied her when Cuthbert Scrymgeour gave her his arm and sauntered with her through those gaily lighted rooms. What would the London belle say when she heard that this same Cuthbert, this winning, fascinating man, the cynosure of half the St. Olave's young ladies, had chosen her, the little girl Alice, to be his wife. Then she recalled his tender looks, his pretty speeches, his pleasant caressing ways. She remembered how proud she had felt to walk by his side all down that long drawing-room, and hear whispered remarks about his noble presence, his aristocratic bearing, his handsome face, and so on.

On the strength of this, Alice began to feel pleased and happy. It was so nice to know that somebody loved her, to feel that she had the power to make somebody happy—for had not Cuthbert whispered in her ear that life would be a blank without her gentle presence to cheer and brighten it?—to feel that she would always have some one now to pet and fondle her, some one who would never cross or scold, but just caress her all the day through. The thought of this filled Alice's heart with new trembling delight It was very pleasant. But she never thought of him as one on whom she could stay and trust. Her dreams were of happiness, not of rest.

Alice cared little to speculate on the temporal aspects and possibilities of her new position. Perhaps had the event which now filled her little heart with such store of innocent joy, taken place half a dozen seasons later, when she was more cultured by the example of other young ladies, and more experienced in their ways, it might have produced a very different train of meditation. Then possibly that sprig of myrtle might have been not so much a pretty love-token as an earnest of future orange blossom and social dignity. She might have turned it over in her white-gloved fingers, working out, meanwhile, not a pretty vision of kisses and caresses, but a process of mental arithmetic in the rules of interest and fellowship, or profit and loss viewed matrimonially. She might, instead of dreaming over Mr. Scrymgeour's tender looks, have calculated the probable amount of his income; how many servants it would allow her to keep, and whether a pony carriage or a brougham could be maintained upon it. She might have arranged in her own mind the furniture of her future home, rosewood, mahogany, or maple; also the color of the drawing-room hangings, and the pattern of the carpet, besides sundry little matters concerning dessert services and table linen, not to mention the wedding breakfast and *trousseau*. For with girls who have been in genteel society for eight or ten years, feeding upon its false maxims and nurtured in its hollow conventions, these considerations are very weighty.

But if the outside shows of her new position found no lodgment in Alice's heart, neither did its infinite seriousness waken any new thrill there. The very unschooled girlishness which sheltered her from the one, made her incapable of appreciating the other. True, she had no brilliant visions of added social position, no ambitious anticipations of married importance and household status, of which that myrtle spray had been the guerdon; but neither did she reck of the treasure she had given, nor of all to which that gift had bound her. She was like a little child playing on the sea-shore, clapping her hands with joy for its curling ripple and the music of its waves, thinking not of the storms that crouch beneath; saying only, as its sunlit spray flashes in her eyes, "Oh! how pretty!" never "Oh! how grand!"

The Minster bell had struck two before Alice put off her gay robes, and crept to bed. Soon the room grew dark. The fire burned down until only one single ember remained, which shone like a vengeful eye in the midst of the gloom. Alice could not endure its fixed, unblenching glare, and she covered her face that she might see it no more. But the memory of it would not go away, and the last image which sleep dimmed, was that red, unchanging eye, looking out upon her from the blackness all around.

That same night David Bruce sat by his solitary London fireside, the plaudits of thousands ringing in his ears, his hand still warm with the grasp of peers and nobles who had pressed forward to congratulate him on his brilliant success. Yet it was not the memory of their praise which, as he sat there listening to the small morning hours chiming one by one from the belfry of St. Paul's, brought the grand, quiet light to his face, and the triumph to his eye. It was the thought that now, no longer mean and obscure, but free and equal, a noble man, and a worthy too, he might reach out his hand to Alice Grey and claim her for his own.

Ah, how strangely storms come swooping down upon this ocean over which we drift so blindly and helplessly! Hopes it had taken a life to build up, strike in a moment on the rocks of fate or fortune, and straightway nothing but a wreck remains. *We* would not have it so. Were the winds in our hands, no storm should ever smite the sails, no blast of lightning shiver the tall masts and strip down the pennon which floats so gaily upon the blue sky. All should go calmly, peacefully on, until the vessel anchored —where?

Yes, where? And then we begin to feel the rest, the unutterable rest, of knowing that this whole life of ours, whether we will it so or not, is a plan of God; that the tidal wave of human destiny ebbs and flows in obedience to laws as benign as those that gird the earth's blue waters and fix their bounds. And above all these shifting aims and purposes of ours, these longings and vain outreaching desires, is a voice loving as it is omnipotent, which says to each one of them, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

How shall I get Aunt Amiel told? was Alice's first thought the morning after the party, when the events of the past night, which had seemed at first confused and dreamlike, began to resolve themselves into sober reality.

Mrs. Grey came down in the middle of the morning. She never rose to breakfast now. This was the first symptom that Alice noticed of her aunt's slowly-increasing weakness. This winter, though scarcely begun, had already been very trying to her. The cold seemed to benumb her completely both in mind and body, and she often was unable to collect her faculties either to converse with others or listen to them. Still, however, she retained the calm placid demeanor, the sweet dignity and courtly bearing that had made Mistress Amiel Grey one of the most distinguished gentlewomen of her day.

"Now, auntie," said Alice, as the old lady settled herself in the great arm chair by the fire, with "Bogatzky's Treasury"—the usual companion of her morning meditations,—lying open on her knee, "I am not going to let you pore over that old book all day. Shut it up, and I will tell you about the party."

"The party," and Aunt Amiel's eyes had a dim, far-away sort of look. "Ah, yes, tell me. The Dean was so sorry I could not go; you see I had never seen little Dunnie for such a long time, and I was anxious to hear about that poor girl. Dunnie must be quite a middle-aged man now. I always thought he would turn out wild."

Alice looked up into her aunt's face, now for the first time fearing, she scarcely knew what.

"No, auntie dear; the party at Mrs. Scrymgeour's, you know, that I was to go to last night. I want to tell you about it all. Miss Somers was there, and the Canon, and—and Mr. Scrymgeour."

Mrs. Grey paused, as if trying to remember something that was long ago past. By-and-by the vague look faded from her face, and its usual intelligence returned. She was herself again, kind and interested and sympathizing.

"Yes, I know now. I suppose my memory is failing. I get very confused sometimes. Tell me all about it," and Aunt Amiel made room for Alice to come and sit on the footstool close beside her.

"It was very pleasant," said Alice, as she nestled up to the old lady's side, and laid her head down in her lap. "The people were all very kind to me, and it was just as nice as ever it could be. We danced, and had charades and music."

Alice waited, in hopes that some extempore current of ideas would come to float her over the sandbank of that awkward confession. There was not much time to lose; the morning was wearing on, and ere long the expected visitor would arrive to press his suit.

"It was very nice," she faltered out; "I danced with a great many people, and then I had a long talk with Miss Fullerton, and after that Mr. Scrymgeour took me into the music-room to hear some part-songs. By-and-by we were left alone, and then, Aunt Amiel, Mr. Scrymgeour—I could not help it—I don't know what I said——"

Here Alice came to a dead standstill, and her face told the rest of the story. Aunt Amiel put her arms round the young girl, and then rocked gently backwards and forwards in her chair for some time without speaking.

"Already!" she said at last, "I did not think of this. And do you love him, Alice?"

"I—I don't know, Aunt," said Alice, dropping her face lower and lower. "I think I like him very much, and he has been very kind to me."

Just then some one passed the window. Alice knew who it was, and shot away like an arrow, getting safely across the hall before the servant admitted Mr. Scrymgeour. She took refuge in the study, a cosy little room on the west side of the house. This study was set apart for Alice's use. Here she often came to do leather work, or make wax flowers, or dabble in water colors; oftener still to sit in her little low chair by the window and build all manner of pleasant castles in the air, as she looked out into the old-fashioned garden with its boundary of lilac bushes, beyond which rose the crumbling arches of the Monastery. She found her way to that seat now, and folding herself up in the green damask window curtain, tried to catch, through the deep stillness of the house, the tones of Mr. Scrymgeour's voice from the oriel room.

Mistress Amiel Grey received her visitor with a grave demeanor, somewhat more stately perhaps than was her wont, and then waited for him to open his commission, which delicate task he performed with exquisite tact and skill. No ambassador negotiating for the hand of a princess could have done it more adroitly.

"Alice is so young," said Mrs. Grey, after a long silence.

"That, my dear madam, is an objection which every day renders less insurmountable." And Mr. Scrymgeour caressed his whiskers, while a dainty, well-bred smile glanced over his handsome countenance. He had assumed a sweetly gentle air during the whole of the interview, as though graciously accepting and making allowance for the inevitable infirmities of declining years.

"She is also very inexperienced," continued Aunt Amiel, "indeed, a mere child in all matters relating to active life. I think as yet she would try your patience very much, she has not even the experience of most girls of eighteen."

"Pray do not let that influence you, my dear Mrs. Grey. I assure you my profound regard for your charming niece disposes me to overlook all possible faults of youth and inexperience. Indeed, the innocent freshness of her mind and heart is in my estimation her greatest charm."

Oh, Mr. Scrymgeour! how could you say such a thing, when at that very moment you were speculating on the probable amount of Mrs. Grey's life-assurance, and wondering whether those massive candelabra on the sideboard were solid silver or only electro-plate?

But Mrs. Grey was not gifted with ability to discern Mr. Scrymgeour's mental processes. She smiled. Alice was very dear to her, and she had all a mother's vanity in hearing the young girl praised.

"Do not distress yourself for one moment,

dear Madam," continued Cuthbert, "by supposing that a thought of your niece's youthful inexperience could weigh with me against the truly estimable qualities of her character. Her disposition is so exceedingly lovable that it leaves nothing to be desired in any other direction."

"Thank you, Mr. Scrymgeour. Alice has been a great comfort to me, and I hope she will be the same to any one who has the charge of her."

After this there was a long pause, during which Cuthbert twirled his watch chain, and Mrs. Grey gazed out of the window, watching the falling snow flakes. There was a perplexed look on her face, a very perplexed look. Sometimes it deepened almost into pain. At last she said—

"There are one or two explanations which I think it right to give, and which are due to any one who——"

"Certainly, dear Mrs. Grey, certainly," said Mr. Scrymgeour briskly, supposing of course that Mrs. Grey referred to Alice's pecuniary expectations. "I quite understand that."

Aunt Amiel scrutinized him through her spectacles.

"Of course," he continued, "I shall leave the arrangement of Miss Grey's property entirely to your own discretion; believe me, dear Madam," and then Cuthbert went through a little piece of self-laudation not needing to be repeated here, in which he put the diameter of the world between himself and any mercenary designs whatever.

"It is not Alice's fortune to which I refer," said Mrs. Grey, "that, at my decease, will be left in the care of persons appointed for the purpose, and, with the exception of a due marriage settlement, will be at the disposal of her husband. There are other matters upon which an understanding is desirable. But," and here Mrs. Grey rose from her seat, "pardon me, Mr. Scrimgeour, I find myself confused and somewhat agitated. The suddenness of your proposal has startled me. I was unprepared for it. Let me have time to consider. I will give you a final answer to-morrow morning."

"I am entirely at your service," said Mr. Scrymgeour, with a profound bow. "But, Mrs. Grey, before I go, let me, at least, have this encouragement—your hesitation does not arise from any doubt as to my perfect good faith and sincerity?"

"Certainly not," and Mrs. Grey held out her hand to him. "As the near relative of one of my oldest friends, I should have perfect confidence in committing Alice to your care."

Mr. Scrymgeour made a second reverence over the small aristocratic hand which he held in his.

"You will allow me to see Miss Grey before I go, will you not?"

"Certainly, I believe you will find her in the little room on the other side of the hall." Cuthbert Scrymgeour bowed himself out, and so the important interview ended.

The other *tête-à-tête* which took place in the little study did not come to so speedy a termination. There is no need to chronicle the conversation which passed between the parties interested. Suffice it to say that for a full hour Cuthbert's deep-toned voice, mingled with Alice's soft cooing accents, might have been heard in that room if any one had cared to listen. And when at last, he took his leave of her, she remained for another hour just as he had left her, her pretty head pressed against the curtains, and a dreamy look coming and going upon her face.

After Mr. Scrymgeour had quitted the oriel room, Mistress Amiel Grey leaned back in her chair very wearily.

For a long time she sat there, gazing anxiously out into the Close. She appeared to be striving to solve some difficult problem, or to work her way through some tangled and vexing labyrinth of doubt. Once or twice she looked anxiously towards the door, as if listening for the sound of footsteps in the hall, and murmured to herself, "He should not have seen her; it can do no good, it can do no good."

About half an hour passed in this way. Then she rang the bell.

"Lettice, I want you to bring me that cabinet that stands in the drawing-room window."

Lettice brought it, the quaint, old-fashioned thing that Alice had ransacked the night Janet Bruce came to see them.

"Close to my chair, Lettice; there, that is right. Now my writing portfolio, and the inkstand from the secretary."

"Yes, Ma'am, and let me bring you a cushion for your back. I'm sure you look awful tired. We mustn't have Miss Alice going out to no more parties if she makes you lie awake of nights, and seem so weary all day."

"That will do, Lettice," said Aunt Amiel, as the kind-hearted girl brought the cushion and placed a hassock for her feet. But who would not be kind to Aunt Amiel, who would not serve with heart and soul that sweet, gentle, patient old lady who had never been known to speak a cross word to any of her dependents since they came into her service?

When Lettice had gone, she put on her spectacles and opened the cabinet. Everything was in its place, except the cordon of pearls which Alice had worn at Mrs. Scrymgeour's party. There were the curiously-carved balls from China, the fan wrought in delicate lace-work of ivory, the old coins, the pieces of family plate, the jewels and trinkets from India. But Mrs. Grey lingered over none of these. She pressed the secret spring which opened that carved panel, and disclosed the two drawers. Then she took from her watch-chain a tiny key, and opened the upper one. There was nothing in it but the letters which Alice had found, gathered together in a packet, and tied with a piece of faded ribbon. There were seven or eight of them, all written in the same hand and bearing the same crest, an outstretched hand holding a branch of mulberry.

Mrs. Grey read them through, and chose out one. Then she put the rest into the drawer, locked it, and pressed the spring which replaced the panel. After this she closed the cabinet and began to write.

Mistress Amiel Grey had long ago given up general correspondence, and handed over all duties of this kind to Alice. Still, however, her writing retained all its old daintiness and neatness. It was very fine, very compact, quite free from the spidery strokes and fly-away terminals of modern feminine calligraphy. Not a hand of great firmness or decision though, still less of

vigor and originality; it rather indicated a character graceful, gentle, orderly.

Writing was slower work with her now than it used to be, and this letter appeared to be one of more than ordinary importance, judging from the frequent pauses she made and the expression of serious, almost painful thought, into which her usually placid features had fixed themselves. She had not written a page when the door opened.

"Luncheon is on the table, Ma'am."

"Tell Miss Alice not to wait for me. I shall not come in to-day. And, Masters, if anyone calls, say that I am particularly engaged."

"Yes, Ma'am."

During a residence of fifty years in St. Olave's, Mistress Amiel Grey had not learned to avail herself of its conventional fiction, "not at home." After the servant had gone she wrote on steadily for more than an hour, only resting now and then to collect her thoughts, or find words to express them. When the letter was finished, she read it carefully through, enclosed in it the old yellow note she had taken out of the packet, and wrapped them both in two or three sheets of blank paper, which she sealed in several places and addressed thus—

"To my foster child Alice, from Mrs. Amiel Grey. To be read after my death."

She placed this letter in the cabinet, murmuring to herself, "If he loves her very much it will make no difference; it cannot make any difference."

This done, she seemed completely worn out. She sunk heavily back on the cushions which Lettice had placed for her, and fell into a profound sleep. The afternoon passed on. By-and-by Alice stole into the room with a shy frightened glance at her aunt, and then seeing that the old lady slumbered, she crept noiselessly to the oriel window, and amused herself by watching the falling snow. Already it had whitened all the Close, and played strange pranks with the grim old gurgoyles that struggled out beneath the Cathedral eaves, drifting into their contorted jaws and filling the hollow eyes with white balls that glared coldly, stonily down. It covered as with a filmy lace-work the flowing tracery of the great West window; it tipped each leaf and flower of the fretted canopies; it wreathed itself in fantastic draperies round the uplifted cross which stood out against the dim and dreary sky, and folded as if with burial shrouds the saints and apostles who kept their silent watch around the belfry towers. Alice gazed until her eyes grew weary with the purposeless whirl of the falling flakes, and it was a relief when at last Aunt Amiel aroused herself.

"Oh, Auntie," she said, "what an immense sleep you have had. I have been here more than an hour and you have not opened your eyes all the time."

"Is it so long, Alice! I did not know. I am very tired," and then she closed her eyes as if composing herself to rest again. Alice did not notice their vacant, groping sort of look.

"Now, Auntie, I really shan't let you go to sleep again. Let me fetch you a cup of tea; that will freshen you up. Miss Bruce says she always gets one when she feels weary."

"No, Alice, not now. Come and sit by me, I want to feel you near me."

She stretched out her hands vaguely, as if feeling for something in the air. Alice brought a low cushion and sat by her, leaning her head upon the old lady's knee.

"You have been a great comfort to me, Alice," said Aunt Amiel, drawing the young girl closer to her. "I shall miss you very much, my darling."

Alice lifted her bright young face to the aged one that bent over her. Could any love of Cuthbert Scrymgeour's be so true as the tender unwearying affection, which ever since she could remember, had beamed upon her from those faithful old eyes, so dim and weary now?

"Oh, Aunt Amiel, I cannot leave you! I will stay with you as long as ever you like. Tell him I can never love anybody like you."

"Alice, my child, my lost one that came to me so many years ago, why did he leave her? He should not have sent her away, poor girl."

"Auntie, what are you saying? I do not believe you are wide awake yet."

"I am tired, Alice, and the bells make such a noise. .Say they must stop ringing, it was not a proper marriage. He knew it was not a proper marriage. They have no business to ring; they must stop ringing, ringing; stop—stop——"

Alice felt a shiver run through the arm that embraced her. Then it fell heavily down. The tender words died away in a few broken inarticulate murmurs. Aunt Amiel had had a paralytic stroke.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE Old Lodge was soon all hurry and confusion. The servants ran hither and thither, scarcely knowing what they did. A messenger was despatched to Dr. Greenwood, and Mrs. Grey was carried up stairs into her own bedroom.

Alice, who had never had any experience of illness, would not believe at first that her aunt's seizure was more than an ordinary fainting fit, and vainly strove to chafe back warmth and animation to the poor nerveless hands that would never have power to clasp her own any more. Dr. Greenwood came, but did not give them much hope. It was too soon, he said, to pronounce decidedly on the nature of the mischief. He staid long with them, giving them directions about the management of the invalid, and promised to return early in the morning, when he should be able to form a more reliable opinion.

The first thought that entered Alice's mind, in the midst of her confusion and distress, was to send for David Bruce; and the remembrance that he was too far away to give her any help brought with it a feeling of weary, sickening disappointment. Then she would have asked Janet to come; that placid face, those quiet, restful ways, would have made almost any sorrow less hard to bear. But they were very early people at Westwood, and, before any messenger could have time to reach them, the house would most likely be closed for the night. Then, in her extremity, she turned to Miss Luckie, the good, kind, unceremonious little maiden lady, whose heart was as open as her lips, and whose

very presence, wherever it came, was as warm and wholesome as a beam of sunshine. Strange that the name of Cuthbert Scrymgeour, as one to whom at such a time as this she might turn for help and comfort, was the last that suggested itself to Alice.

So Miss Luckie was sent for. She made no delay in coming. When Dr. Greenwood arrived, he found her by his patient's bed-side; prompt, calm, self-possessed, ready to receive his instructions and give any help that was needed. Miss Luckie was just a never-failing fountain of tenderness and good-will. Perhaps on the whole, it was more congenial to the general bent of her nature to rejoice with those that rejoiced; but that never prevented her from being ready to weep with those that wept, and—which is quite as needful—to help them to the extent of her ability. She had had much experience of illness. Most of her own family were already dead, and for years she had tended her mother through successive strokes of paralysis. All this, whilst it had not been able to quench her natural buoyancy of temperament, had made her very valuable at the bed-side of the sick. She had great presence of mind too, never got nervous or excited, still less depressed and out of sorts at the sight of suffering. Added to this, she was swift and nimble as a little bird in all her ways, and there was a certain brisk gentleness about her which, while it soothed, insensibly brightened those with whom she worked.

Alice would fain have remained all night by her aunt's side, but Miss Luckie would not let her. She knew too well that succeeding months, perhaps years, of patient, unceasing ministration would tax all the young girl's perseverance, and she must not overwear herself on the very threshold of her new duties. So at the usual time she sent her away to her own room. It was close to Aunt Amiel's, only divided by a slight wainscotting, so that she was within reach at a moment's notice, if her presence should be needed.

Alice went without a word of opposition. She was docile as a child now, and did whatever they told her with a mild, unquestioning obedience which was very touching to behold. Indeed, she seemed stunned and bewildered by the blow that had fallen so suddenly upon them. It had swept away both will and resolution. She was one of those who in sorrow cling helplessly to any, even the frailest support, instead of being roused by it to intense, active exertion.

She shivered as she entered the lonely room. In the excitement and hurry of that evening, Lettice had forgotten to light the fire as usual, or draw the curtains; and the moonbeams streaked whitely in through the mullioned window, and flitted, like ghosts, upon the black oak-panelled walls. Alice crept into bed, leaving the lamp still burning on the table, for she was afraid of being alone in the dark. Alone in the dark! Poor child! she was only just beginning to grope in the outer shadow of that darkness that comes so surely to us all, and in which, unless God be with us, we can never be anything else but alone.

She heard the Cathedral clock strike ten, then eleven, then twelve, as she lay awake, listening nervously for every passing footfall, and magnifying into terrible meaning every chance sound which broke the stillness of the house. Over and over again she woke out of troubled sleep with a stifling, undefined sense of something wrong, something very dreadful that had happened; and then back again, in all its startling vividness, came the picture of Aunt Amiel lying in the next room, stiff, motionless, unconscious. And in gay contrast to this, as if to mock her with its glare and gaiety, flashed over her memory the remembrance of the night before, its dance, and music, and song; the soft, burning words of love to which she had listened, the clasp of Cuthbert Scrymgeour's hand, scarce cold upon her own. Then, weary and bewildered, she would drop into another short, unquiet slumber, only to wake again with the same haunting fear as before.

The night wore itself away; morning came at last, and with the first dawn of its grey light, Alice dressed and went softly to her aunt's room. It was with almost a sickening dread that she opened the door. What if the Angel of Death should have come and borne away the poor silent sleeper,—what if that tender benignant old face should already have stiffened down into the rigid marble pallor which no kiss of hers could ever warm or loosen? Her hands trembled so that she could scarcely lift the latch, and her whole frame shook with a vgue, shapeless fear.

But she need not have been so afraid. There was nothing in the aspect of the room to remind any one of sickness or death. A bright fire was burning cheerily in the wide fire-place, dancing at its own reflection in the polished wainscotting. Miss Luckie sat by it with her knitting work, just as neat and compact as ever, her white satin cap ribbons shining in the warm light, her bright little face as fresh as if she were beginning and not ending, a ten hours' vigil of silence and solitude. The curtains of the bed were closed; Alice scarcely breathed as she drew them back and gazed eagerly upon the unconscious sleeper.

Aunt Amiel lay quite still, as if in pleasant slumber. There was no expression of pain upon her face, the mouth kept its old peaceful smile, not a wrinkle marred the smoothness of the forehead beneath its bands of shining silvery hair. She looked as if she might wake at any moment, just her own dear self again.

Whilst Alice was bending over her, she opened her eyes. Ah! something was wanting there. It was the calm, unthinking, vacant gaze of a new-born infant, who looks but sees nothing. As her glance wandered slowly round the room, it fixed on Alice, and then a very, very faint gleam of recognition seemed to pass across her face, and she tried to speak, but it was only an inarticulate murmur. Alice bent over her and kissed her many times, but the eyelids closed again, and that changeless calm came back to the pale face.

Dr. Greenwood returned very early in the morning. Aunt Amiel lay just as he had left her the night before.

"Mrs. Grey has had a very quiet night," said Miss Luckie.

"Ah!" and the doctor looked grave; "no restlessness at all?"

"No, not the slightest. She has lain quite still, just as you see her now, ever since she was brought up."

"And has no pain?"

"We think not; her face has scarcely moved a muscle."

Dr. Greenwood shook his head. "I had rather," said he, "that she had been more restless." And then in a grave professional sort of way he began to examine his patient.

He staid a long time; then told them faithfully the best and worst of the case. The whole of Mrs. Grey's left side was paralysed; the right partially so. She would never be able to speak again, or to move about from place to place, except as she was carried. And with this suspension of physical powers, there seemed to have fallen upon her mind a profound sleep, which neither grief nor pain could disturb, and which would never pass away until the grand and final change. She might live for years in this state, suffering nothing, enjoying nothing, cut off from all communication with the outer world; just eating, breathing, sleeping,—and no more.

Alice listened quietly whilst Dr. Greenwood told her all this. She bore it better than they expected. The one great overpowering dread was passed; Aunt Amiel would not die. Anything else seemed easy to be endured, if only she could look upon the dear remembered face, and fondle in her own the passive helpless hands. She would not be alone, and to be alone was the very thing which of all others, Alice most dreaded. Life could not be quite dark, nay, it could never be aught but quiet and almost happy, so long as no churchyard grass covered Aunt Amiel's head, and no grave-stone bore her name upon its marble front.

It is well for us that we cannot at once apprehend the full bitterness and sting of any sorrow which God in His infinite mercy suffers to come upon us. Just so much of it as we can understand we take and suffer, sometimes patiently, sometimes with tears and sharp unavailing murmurs. But not until months and it may be years have passed, can we look back and see how dark has been the road over which our weary steps have journeyed. Alice's first gush of sadness was over, and she thought the bitterness of death was past. It was well for her she did not know that her feet were but just passing the boundary line that divided her young unthinking girlhood from the great wide untried track of life, with all its possible shadows and unrest.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE news of Mistress Amiel Grey's illness soon spread amongst the Close families. The doctor's carriage seldom stopped at one of the tall old-fashioned houses without all the rest speedily becoming acquainted with the why and wherefore of such a proceeding. The Dean's lady was first to hear of the event, and she at once sent a message across to Chapter Court, which reached the Archdeacon's widow just as that lady and her nephew were sitting down to breakfast.

Cuthbert's heart was very shallow, but it was not hard. His first impulse was to set off at once to the Old Lodge and offer Alice such consolation as lay within his reach. But Mrs. Scrymgeour objected.

"My dear Cuthbert, I beg you will do no such thing. In cases of this kind a family is always besieged by inquirers whose well-meant but ill-timed attentions are anything but acceptable. Any sympathy which you may have it in your power to offer to Miss Grey will be more suitable when the first excitement of her aunt's illness has passed over. I will send the servant across with cards and condolences the first thing, and nothing further is needful to-day."

Thus Mrs. Scrymgeour, with cast-iron accents and a decisive wave of her hand. Cuthbert allowed himself to be convinced, and the two sat down to a sumptuously appointed breakfast table, whilst Alice was keeping her watch beside the bed of Aunt Amiel.

The dining room at Chapter Court never looked remarkably cosy, and this morning it seemed less so than usual. The snow that had been falling steadily all night, lay in heavy drifts upon the frames and deep cornices of the windows. The sky was grey and leaden, and behind the white undulating pall which overspread the Close, trodden yet by scarce a solitary footstep, the Minster reared its huge irregular bulk, looking terribly grim and swarthy. There was no sunlight to play through the heavy crimson curtains, or glance upon the carved oak panelling, or lighten up the stiff old family portraits which were marshalled in solemn rank and file down the long narrow room; all looked grey and cold and irregular. Even the archidiaconal cat seemed to have a vague perception of the prevailing uncomfortableness of things, and from time to time, turned towards her mistress with a ludicrously disgusted expression of face. Mrs. Scrymgeour was attired to match the morning, in a severely strong-minded dressing gown of brown serge, unsustained by crinoline, and her grey curls, very frizzly from having just been released from their papers, bristled fiercely on each side of her spare colorless cheeks.

"Poor little Alice!" said Cuthbert, helping himself to another egg. "She'll be terribly cut up about this affair. I believe she thought all the world about that old aunt of hers."

"I have no doubt that the event will ultimately be of considerable benefit to Miss Grey," replied the Archdeacon's widow, in her usual measured tones, a little stiffer perhaps by reason of the state of the atmosphere, "but don't distress yourself, Cuthbert. I assure you I have fully met the requirements of the occasion. The parlor-maid has gone across this moment with cards."

If one of her dearest friends had suddenly been plunged into the depths of adversity, Mrs. Scrymgeour would have forwarded cards and condolences, and on no account thought of offering the balm of personal sympathy until the stipulated period for a morning call.

"If I were asked to give my opinion," she continued, quietly stirring her coffee, "I should say that Mrs. Grey has always been foolishly indulgent in the personal management of her niece, and the event which we are called upon to deplore, though exceedingly painful, will, I am convinced, issue in the material improvement of Alice's character."

"She's such a child too, poor little thing," said Cuthbert in a softened tone; the thought of Alice bathed in tears, as he had no doubt she

would be, touched his heart. "I wonder how she bears it."

"I think I have told you before, Cuthbert," and Mrs. Scrymgeour paused to button the sleeves of her dressing gown, "I think I have hinted to you before that Alice's great defect is want of self-reliance. She has been thought for, and cared for, and petted, until her character has become quite deteriorated; but I anticipate that her general deportment will be greatly improved by this dispensation."

Cuthbert thought that her deportment would do very well as it was, but he went on buttering his eggs in silence. The event had not affected his appetite materially.

"Understand me, Cuthbert, I feel the profoundest sympathy for Alice, and I intend to avail myself of the earliest suitable opportunity of expressing my entire commiseration with her in the calamity which has befallen her respected aunt. But," and here the strings of Mrs. Scrymgeour's voice relaxed and took on a decidedly buoyant tone, "how exceedingly fortunate, my dear Cuthbert, that you called upon the old lady yesterday and got a favorable reply. I suppose the matter may now be considered definitely arranged."

"I don't know, aunt; it doesn't answer to count one's chickens before they're hatched."

Mrs. Scrymgeour winced. She had a deep-rooted aversion to proverbial expressions; she considered them essentially vulgar. But the solecism was allowed to pass unrebuked.

"The old lady didn't give me a decided answer," continued Cuthbert. "She wanted a day or two to consider before coming up to the scratch."

"Of course her hesitation did not arise from the faintest possible doubt as to your eligibility?"

"Oh, no," and the B.A. stroked his whiskers complacently; "she allowed, of course, that I was quite up to the mark; in fact, the last words she said to me were about having perfect confidence in committing the young lady, &c., &c.—that style of thing, you know, Aunt."

"And I think I understood you that she mentioned money matters in a way that was perfectly satisfactory."

"All right. Whole of the property to come to Alice, with suitable settlements. A nice little penny too; why that oak furniture is worth a mint of money, and the estate at Norlands, if it's unencumbered——"

"Of course it is, Cuthbert; Mrs. Grey's property is entirely in her own hands."

"Would make a man independent. Blanche Egerton's fortune is a mere pepper-corn to it."

"Miss Egerton has expectations from her grandfather, Cuthbert, which, if reports are correct, are very considerable. But the old man might marry, and then of course she would have nothing but her mother's marriage settlement, which is trifling, and not more than a couple of hundreds a year, and that is not worth your attention."

"I rather like a dark girl, though," said Cuthbert, balancing the silver spoon on his forefinger.

Mrs. Scrymgeour ignored this little piece of confidence on the part of the nephew, and continued, in a business like matter-of-fact sort of way—

"Ample means are indispensable for a clergyman. I should be dreadfully annoyed, Cuthbert, were I to see you hampered with a wife who would not be able to advance your interests in a pecuniary point of view. I consider it the duty of every young man to exercise a proper amount of discretion in selecting both birth and fortune, especially a young man in the Church. Indeed, if I were asked to give my opinion, I should say that I am perfectly disgusted with the blindness evinced by multitudes of young men of the present day, who surrender themselves to a pretty face or an agreeable temper or a pleasing disposition, as if these merely natural external qualifications could assist in housekeeping or sustain a position. Your uncle, Cuthbert, the late Archdeacon, was entirely superior to these paltry, and as I may add, perfectly immaterial, qualities."

Mrs. Scrymgeour need scarcely have troubled herself to make this last statement. Any one who looked at the Archdeacon's widow as she sat at the fore-front of the breakfast-table, in her brown serge dressing-gown and rampant grey curls, would have arrived unaided at the conclusion that the "immaterial qualities" of good temper, pleasant disposition, and personal attraction, had not swayed the discreet Dr. Scrymgeour in his choice of a partner for life.

"I am astonished, Cuthbert," she continued, "I am dismayed at the moral obliquity which leads young men of birth and family to bestow the honor of their heart and hand so indiscriminately. It violates all my feelings of—were you speaking to me?"

"A little more sugar, Aunt, if you please."

It is doubtful whether, in preferring this request, Cuthbert had reference to the expressed juice of a certain West Indian vegetable, or whether he suggested the increased cultivation of that saccharine portion of human nature which, in his aunt's development, was not, to say the least of it, redundant. Mrs. Scrymgeour, however, understood that he wished for another lump of sugar in his coffee, and therefore supplied him with one. She then returned to the subject in hand.

"Therefore, as there was an understanding between you on both these subjects, I infer that Mrs. Grey's hesitation arose from the natural indecision of her character. You are aware, Cuthbert, that she is not a woman of great strength of mind; and a proposal so advantageous in every respect to the position and happiness of her niece, would naturally disturb the equilibrium of her thoughts, and cause her to request time for reflection."

"Fact, Aunt; you're about right. Indeed, she seemed quite come down upon when I mentioned it to her."

"Of course, it was perfectly natural; and, on the whole, I respect her for not appearing too anxious to get her niece comfortably settled. It annoys me to see those who have the care of young people so unwarrantably eager to get them off their hands. Mrs. Colonel Spurge, now, has really done everything with those daughters of hers, but put them up to auction; and Mrs. Crumpet too, though I have the greatest respect for her; still, if I were asked to give my opinion, I should feel it my duty to say that she brings her daughter forward in a manner that is not in accordance with my views. You will go across to the Old Lodge to-day, I suppose?"

"Well, Aunt, yes," replied Cuthbert, whose affection seemed to have cooled down during the course of the conversation, until it reached the Archidiaconal level. "Of course she'll expect me to turn up before long, only I hope I shan't be expected to pay a pastoral visit to the old lady. That sort of thing isn't in my line, it really isn't."

"Of course, Cuthbert, if you are requested to do so, the least that can be expected from you as a clergyman, is that you should address a few remarks to her."

"But I'm so confoundedly stupid at doing the proper thing to sick people. If one could just get off now with a piece or two out of the Burial Service."

"Cuthbert! Cuthbert!" cried the Archdeaconess, in a state of agitation, "what are you saying—the Burial Service to a sick person?"

"Oh, did I say the Burial Service?—well, if I did, I meant the Visitation for the Sick, which comes to pretty much the same thing; but you know it's such a bore having to sympathize and all that sort of thing, when really you don't know a fraction about it. And then ill people always think they must begin and go through the whole story, and you're forced to sit still and listen."

"That will not be the case at the Old Lodge," said Mrs. Scrymgeour. "Mrs. Grey has, if I understand correctly, lost the power of speech, and is unable even to reply to anything that is said to her."

"Ah, indeed," and Mr. Scrymgeour seemed a little bit touched; "well, in that case, it's no use my saying anything at all. But here comes the postman. Good-bye, aunt, I'm off now. I expect to be back to dinner; but if I don't come, you needn't wait for me."

He called at the Old Lodge in the afternoon of that day. The servant showed him into the oriel room, which remained just as he had left it the morning before. There was even yet a little damp place on the carpet where the snow had melted from his boots whilst he sat talking to Aunt Amiel. Her great easy chair was in its usual place, the loose cushion at the back still retaining the impression her head had made while it lay there in that last, heavy, forewarning slumber. Her oaken cabinet stood by the chair with all her writing materials upon it undisturbed, the blotting-paper bearing the reversed print of that supersciption to Alice, and the pen as it had been laid with the ink yet wet in it upon the silver standish. There were a few grey, burnt-out ashes in the grate, and the room had an unkempt, comfortless sort of look.

These things, speaking as they did to Cuthbert of the great grief which had fallen upon that house, brought over him a strange hush and solemnity. He seemed to be standing within the shadow of death, and no one standing there can be other than thoughtful.

Alice came to him. The first violence of her grief had passed away and she looked quite calm, but there was still a quiver in her voice as if the tears lay very near, and a single word might bring them gushing down. As she glanced at the empty chair standing by the fire-place, she shuddered.

"Do not let us stay here, Mr. Scrymgeour. I will take you into the study."

He followed her into the pleasant little room on the other side of the hall. Here, everything looked warm and comfortable and homelike. Its belongings did not speak to him so painfully of death and danger. By degrees the awe which had come over him wore off. Still he felt ill at ease. He did not know what to say. He wished Alice would burst into tears, that he might kiss them away, and begin to pet and fondle her as it seemed most natural to do. But she sat in her low chair by the fire looking so hushed and calm, her head bent down, her eyelids drooping until their long lashes almost touched her cheek. He thought she would have thrown herself into his arms, and wept away her grief there. Perhaps, had he come to her in its first bitterness, she might have done so, and then their hearts would have been drawn more closely together; but all that was passed now.

How strangely any great trouble seems to part our friends from us. In joy and gladness they were our equals, we could walk side by side with them; but when the angel of sorrow stretches out his hand, it is to lift them where we cannot reach. Henceforth they walk above us in a world whose air is too pure for us to breathe.

This, or something like this, Cuthbert Scrymgeour felt as he watched Alice sitting there by the firelight. Such a distance in one little day seemed to have come between them. She was the first to speak.

"You have heard of our great grief, then."

Her voice was very low, but Cuthbert thought it had never sounded so sweet before. He could find no way to answer her. The commonplace words of comfort which he had framed, died upon his lips; they seemed too utterly vain and idle. All that he could do was to draw his chair a little nearer to her, and take her hand in his.

She let him take it, but it lay moveless in his grasp, not nestling lovingly down as if glad to be there. She went on with a sad quiet sort of self-possession:—

"We think Aunt Amiel doesn't suffer much. She lies quite still, but she can't speak to us at all, and I don't think she understands anything we say to her. Dr. Greenwood says it will never be different until she dies. It is so sad."

Cuthbert vainly strove to think of something that would do to say to her, but nothing came. If she had been gay he could have laughed with her, if petulant he could have humored her, if sentimental he could have quoted poetry by the half-hour; but in this great sorrow which had come down upon her, he was dumb.

He put his arm round her at last, and said tenderly,—"Poor little Alice, poor little Alice!"

She looked up in his face. It was kind and gentle, for indeed he was very sorry for her. Something in its expression seemed to unlock her heart, for she laid her head down upon the hand that held hers, and presently he felt the hot tears dropping one by one upon his fingers.

"You will let me come and see you very often, will you not?" he said, in that luring musical voice of his.

She only answered by pressing her face closer to him and laying her other hand in his. Just then Dr. Greenwood's carriage drove to the door, and Alice started up to meet him. Cuthbert held her in his arms for a moment or two

and kissed her very tenderly. Then he left her, and when he got out into the Close once more, and tramped the snow under his feet, he felt like a man who has got through a somewhat troublesome ordeal, and, all things considered, acquitted himself as well as could be expected.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It is strange how soon the sharp edge of any grief wears off—any grief, at least, which is sent from God, and not brought on by our own blind self-will and obstinacy.

Household trials that seemed at first so very bitter and unendurable, by degrees sink quietly into the current of daily home life, and at last make scarce a ripple on its still waters. By-and-by Aunt Amiel's room became a bright spot in the house. Alice learned to look without tears, nay, with a certain thankfulness, at the poor patient face, with its never-changing smile of unconscious peace. The tumult passed away, the alarm, the suspense, and things came back again to their former quiet track. Only a few necessary changes were made in the establishment at the Old Lodge. A trusty servant was sent to take charge of Norlands, and Mrs. Cromarty came to the Lodge to attend upon Mistress Amiel Grey. She was a large, strongly-built, powerful woman, able to lift the invalid in and out of bed, and wheel her from room to room in her large couch chair.

Miss Luckie never returned to her maiden nest in the Low Gardens. Day after day Alice begged her to stay "just a little longer." Even after the home sunshine had come back, and that which the estimable little lady supplied was no longer needful, Alice seemed to require some sort of stay and protection. No change except for death was likely to take place in Mistress Amiel Grey, and she had no near connections who could come and occupy her position in the Old Lodge. So after some consideration it was arranged that Miss Luckie should take up her permanent residence there, partly to overlook the general management of the house, and partly to be a companion and protector for Alice.

On the same floor as Aunt Amiel's bed-room, was a pleasant little apartment looking towards the south. It had a wide lattice casement, round which vines and ivy climbed; indeed there was scarce a window in all the Lodge which was not thus adorned. This little room was fitted up for Mrs. Grey. Alice had it repainted and hung with choice pictures—not that the poor invalid could derive any gratification from them, but it cheered her own loving heart to feel that even in their unconscious gaze, those eyes should only rest on things lovely and pleasant. Here Mrs. Grey was brought morning by morning, and here Alice began to pass the chief part of her time, gathering round her the little belongings of her daily life, and learning patiently to calm her young spirit down to its new, untried track.

Any one going into the Old Lodge three weeks after that first terrible night, would scarcely have known that a shadow had so recently passed over it. When once the astonishment and perplexity had worn away, it seemed no longer painful even to watch Aunt Amiel; for, waking and sleeping, the same deep, unbroken peace ever brooded upon her face. He who had caused to come down upon her that strange soul-slumber, mercifully ordered that no thought of pain or weariness should ever find leave to mar it.

People tell us that in death the last image which fell upon the eye is retained, and that, could we lift the unconscious lids, the picture would be there. So in this living death of Mistress Amiel Grey, it seemed as if the last impression left upon the mind had lingered there, and graven its memorial in the still face that changed not from that look of calm, benignant, trustful love which met Alice's upturned gaze just before the stroke came that so completely severed her aunt from all human sympathy or intercourse. Was it so that this human intercourse being sealed up, that other door was opened which bars Heaven from mortal sight, and so the soul lived Godwards only, and never earthwards, having no more any voice, or look, or gesture, that human skill might interpret?

And thus Alice Grey's life, though somewhat clouded from its first sunny freshness, was yet full of a certain quiet happiness. Or even had her home been less peaceable, what life can be anything but happy so long as it is sunned by the promise of human love, and so long as that love is steadily trusted?

Alice's engagement with Mr. Scrymgeour was accepted as a matter of course. Aunt Amiel's last expression respecting it had been one of approval and acquiescence. None had any right to step in between them now. The slight hesitation which she had manifested on the morning of their interview had passed away from Cuthbert's mind. Alice had beauty, family, and fortune, these were quite enough for him; and Mistress Amiel Grey's present mental incapacity secured him from the loss of the prize.

As for Alice, she was a warm-hearted, affectionate little creature. She gave him all she had to give.

It was just her happiness to be petted and caressed and made much of; all this Cuthbert did, and she asked nothing else. Then she was very proud of him. He was so handsome, so noble; he looked so nice as he stood up in the crimson-lined reading-desk of the Cathedral, chanting out in that grand, deep voice of his, the church prayers; his white robes flowing round him, the light from the stained windows tipping and goldening his glossy hair. And it made the little thing feel quite important to think that he, this handsome, accomplished, fascinating Cuthbert Scrymgeour, this hero for whom half the Close young ladies had sighed their hearts away, should have turned from them all and chosen her, the little girl Alice, to be his wife.

And to tell the truth, Cuthbert was really very fond of her. Her pure, unschooled, innocent ways could not but be very refreshing to one so steeped in the shows and frivolities of fashionable life. He loved her as much as he could love anything. It pleased him to be looked up to, admired, and wondered at. He liked to display to her his knowledge of life, his talents—what he had of them—his accomplish-

ments, noting the while her smile of innocent surprise. It made him feel very big and very important; and how many men in a thousand are there to whom the consciousness of their own superiority is not a balm most sweet and precious? Besides, she was something to play with—one of those gentle, fondling little creatures, who just seem made to be kissed and flattered and caressed, and then, when they grow old—but who ever thought of bright-haired Alice Grey growing old?

But for the exercise which Aunt Amiel's perfectly dependent state gave to the higher, nobler part of Alice's nature, she might have grown vain and frivolous. She was very much the creature of circumstances—just what others made her. David Bruce's influence was withdrawn now; his skilful touch no longer woke from the chords of her heart the music which had promised to be so sweet. There was no one to make her feel as he had done, how little she was, how noble she might be. Only in Aunt Amiel's presence her soul found room to grow. The slight, and sometimes almost unconscious shadow, which that living death cast upon the house, kept Alice Grey from a death more mournful still, even the death of all noble and heavenward thought.

Soon after Miss Luckie was located at the Old Lodge, and things had once more got into a smooth track under her brisk, active management, Dr. Greenwood sent Alice away to the sea-side for change of air. She had tended her aunt very unweariedly, and the close confinement had begun to tell upon her health. A place on the southern coast was recommended, and Mrs. Scrymgeour—who since Aunt Amiel's illness, had installed herself as chaperone to Miss Grey—selected Brighton, taking into account with admirable prudence and foresight its vicinity to the small town where her nephew was just then fixed.

They went in the middle of January, intending to remain a fortnight or three weeks, if Aunt Amiel did not appear to feel Alice's absence too much, and return in time for the Festival, which was to take place some time during the month of February. Cuthbert had again been summoned southwards to be a substitute for his clerical friend. He would be in the neighborhood during most of their stay, and Mrs. Scrymgeour trusted to his frequent intercourse with Alice so to cement the attachment between them, that it might speedily ripen into the union on which she had fixed her mind.

CHAPTER XXXII.

And how was David Bruce faring through all this winter?

The long strife was over now. Fortune had been tardy in opening her golden doors, but she gave him entrance at last. His Oratorio was well received in London. The leading journals spoke of it as a complete success a brilliant and unquestioned triumph. The best musical circles received him into their midst; titled people, not a few, found their way to those quiet little chambers of his in St. Clement's Inn: from many a silken-curtained boudoir and gilded saloon aristocratic voices warbled forth the exquisite solos and chorales of "Jael," and its composer, had he so chosen, might have been night after night the idol of Belgravian drawing-rooms, or the star of fashionable *soirées musicales*. His fame reached Alice amidst the brilliance and glare of her Brighton life. With a shy, proud sort of pleasure, she read his praise in the public prints, and filled her little pocket-book with admiring "notices" cut from the principal musical papers. But she never spoke of him to Cuthbert Scrymgeeur. Ever since that September evening when the "person" had been ignominiously dropped on the Norlands road, Cuthbert had avoided any mention of David Bruce; nor was it likely now, when the St. Olave's organist was a man no longer to be ignored, but envied, that the subject should be renewed. So Alice thought her own thoughts, and pondered over her own little memories, and held fast in her child heart the remembrance of this man, whose influence had been unconsciously the awakener of her life.

Over and over again the Oratorio of "Jael" was performed before crowded London audiences, under the conductorship of its composer; and then came applications for its performance in the "provinces," as the metropolitans call that geographical district which has the misfortune to lie outside their own centre of civilization. Requests came, too, from some of the great musical cities on the Continent, but these, for the present, David Bruce declined. After the first great success, one thought ever lay in his heart, one desire shaped itself steadily out above all ambitious schemes or longings; and this thought, this desire was, that at the Festival of St. Olave's, Alice Grey might listen to his Oratorio. And so, indeed, it was.

The good folks of the little Cathedral city of St. Olave's were somewhat scandalized at the sudden and brilliant success of the Scottish alien who had come and settled himself down amongst them. They had rather his laurels had been won more quietly, with more judicious decorum. They had no notion of people, especially strangers, leaping at one bound to the top of the social ladder; or, indeed, presuming to set foot there at all, unless born to the position. The rank and status of the Bruce family had long ago been decided in solemn conclave by the Position Committee, and, to say the least, it was annoying, if not humiliating, to be constrained to reconsider the verdict, and, after all, leave cards at Westwood. Still, on the other hand, St. Olave's had a reputation for good taste in the fine art line, and it would never do to ignore a production upon which London audiences had set the seal of their approval. If only the metropolis had received "Jael" coolly, or with a judicious amount of moderated approbation, then the Cathedral city might have preserved its dignity intact, nor been constrained to do homage to a man who owned neither descent nor position. But the teeming thousands of Exeter Hall and St. James's, had given the key-note of public opinion, and the provinces must follow in their train.

St. Olave's was slow, very slow, in awarding honor on its own responsibility. Deliberateness came next to descent in its social creed. If a man came down from town with the ticket of

merit sewed to his coat, and printed withal in clear, unmistakable characters, well and good. St. Olave's was quite ready to endorse the opinions of the metropolis in matters of art, and could trot along with wondrous correctness over a ready-made tramway. But the brightest genius in the world, who came to it unknown and unrecommended, might wait at the doors of its respectability long enough before his talents procured him either fame or five-pound notes. Most likely, had this much-talked-of oratorio been performed for the first time before a select assembly of the Close families, it would have fallen quietly to the ground, never to rise again; but, having won its own place and gained its own renown, the St. Olave's people decided, after much deliberation, to rally round the composer, and say to the world at large, "See how we appreciate genius! See how we recognize the glorious birthright of intellect." Well done, Cathedral city of St. Olave's!

And so, one chill January morning, as David Bruce sat over his solitary breakfast in those dim little Clement's Inn chambers, a document was handed to him bearing the St. Olave's Cathedral crest—a padlock and golden key—and signed by the proper authorities. In which document Mr. Bruce was requested to do the city of St. Olave's the honor of conducting his Oratorio of "Jael" at the approaching Musical Festival. Moreover, he was informed that, as a mark of the honor which the city wished to confer upon so distinguished a composer, the fourth day—the great day of the Festival, the day sacred to aristocracy and the county families—would be reserved for his convenience.

David Bruce would have been something more, or perhaps something less than a man, if, as he read this important missive, stiff as it was with civic and ecclesiastical dignity, a flush of pardonable pride had not passed over his rugged face. But the pride soon faded out, and there came in its place the quiet light of content, the grand, sweet consciousness of hope fulfilled; not ambitious hope, not the greed of name, or fame, or gain, but the hope that lies nearer the heart of a true man than any of these—the hope which nestles upon the altar of hearth and home, and seeks neither gold nor glory, but only love, to keep it ever warm and bright.

So it was arranged that "Jael" should be performed in the Hall of Guild at the approaching grand Musical Festival; and if the spirits of the departed are permitted to revisit the earth, that majestic piece of Hebrew womanhood might have walked the streets of St. Olave's, and seen her name, in letters as long as a man's arm, at every corner and turning of the old city.

David Bruce went to London, that grey December morning, an unknown man—nothing but a man. No hand save Janet's was stretched out for a farewell clasp. As he leaned back on the hard and not over-clean panels of the railway carriage, and wrapped his well-worn Highland tartan over his wasted form, no voice but hers cheered him; and her face, in its pale, quiet patience, was the only one which had any smile for him. He came back one of the great composers of his time, a man whom the world delighted to honor; before him, fame, wealth, success; behind him, the memory of toil overpast and triumph achieved; behind him, too, and far enough away now, all the scorn, and quiet contempt, and misappreciation against which he had battled so long.

Yes; it was very amusing to note how the worthy denizens of the Position Committee readjusted the social relations of David Bruce and his sister. Alice Grey's card had lain like a solitary nest-egg, lonely and unprotected in the little *papier-maché* tray on the table in the centre of the Westwood parlor. Now others, not a few, were deposited around it, promising at no distant period to hatch a goodly brood of acquaintance. Those of the Dean's lady and Elene Somers were the first to make their appearance; next came Mrs. Scrymgeour's, sent in an envelope all the way from Brighton; then that of the Canon-in-Residence; and ere a month of David's fame had elapsed, each of the Close families had left a pasteboard representative of its extreme friendliness. Mr. Bruce and his quiet sister no longer walked the Cathedral Close unrecognized—nay more, avoided. Aristocratic hands were held out to clasp theirs, and even the Bishop himself thought it not scorn to traverse the smooth green sward of that sacred enclosure, side by side with a man who had lunched with dukes and dined with gartered peers.

It was astonishing, too, the different construction which the polite world began to put upon Mr. Bruce's habits and general demeanor. What used to be "such insufferable brusquerie," was now only manly indifference; that rare gift of silence, so fast inwrought into his nature, and erewhile stigmatized as "boorish awkwardness and stupidity," turned out to be nothing but dignified reserve, perfectly natural in a man of such exalted talent, and on the whole rather fascinating than otherwise. Success in life is a wonderful help towards making manifest the latent excellencies of a man's character. It is like the translucent wave, which, washing over some dry bit of agate, brings out its rosy tints and azure veinings. By-and-by it even seemed that this ungainly Scotch pebble, so long stranded high and dry upon the barren sands, might be counted not unmeet to wear a golden setting, and take its place amongst the polished gems of the social collection; for prudent Close mammas no longer forbade their marriageable daughters to promenade the vicinity of Westwood Cottage, or cautioned them against the slightest approach to friendly relations with the staid, quiet, exceedingly unstylish looking lady who crossed the Close weekly on her way to the almshouses.

It was the night of David Bruce's return from London.

Ah, what a pleasant coming home that was! How cosy the little parlor looked, bathed in the warm red fire light; how tempting the genuine Scottish array of scones and crisp brown oatcake which Tibbie had spread out on the damask covered table; and the old Scotchwoman herself, so different to the draggled London housemaid,—with her snow-white frilled cap, tied down with black ribbon, her kerchief of checkered gingham, her grey linsey Sabbath gown, put on in honor of the "Maister,"—how she seemed to link the household with those long-ago Perth days, whose memory was so green and fragrant still.

David Bruce did not come back from London

empty-handed as he went. The little portmanteau, capacious enough for all his worldly goods on the southern journey, was accompanied homewards by a stout portly trunk, which was dragged in and unpacked by Janet on the hearth-rug after tea, whilst David sat in his great arm-chair and watched the process. Only before she began, he took out and laid carefully away in his own desk, a tiny little morocco case, such as jewellers keep their treasures in.

There was a great burnous cloak of their own clan-tartan for his sister; he had ransacked half the shops in Oxford Street to find it, for amongst the few things Janet ever longed after, was a skreed of the Bruce plaid, just to wear for the sake of Auld Lang Syne. Once only since they came to St. Olave's, had she seen any of it; and that was a magnificent silk dress in a shop in the High Street, six months ago. She went in and asked the price, but came out again unsatisfied; seven guineas was too much to pay for the privilege of wearing the colors of her "ain countree." Her face brightened now, then saddened with the thought of dead friendships, as she shook out the cloak's long sweeping folds, and recognized the old colors that they used to wear when they were children scampering over the Perth Inches,—deep red, crossed with bands of green and white, and a single checker of yellow, the royal color which a clansman is so proud to claim for his own. David wrapped it round her, and made her walk up and down the room.

"You shall be a braw leddie yet, Jean," he said, smiling, but the smile and the thoughts that brought it were not all for his sister.

Besides the cloak there was a beautifully-wrought terra-cotta vase for the bow window, some little Parian statuettes to match the one of Beethoven that stood upon the piano and a few household belongings which careful Janet had commissioned him to purchase; for they found St. Olave's a terribly dear place as regarded housekeeping. Tibbie was not forgotten either. The sturdy old serving-woman well nigh melted into tears when she was summoned "ben" to receive the plaidie, which her master had brought all the way "fra the big toun."

"Ye were aye a gude thochtfu' laddie for them as wanted the siller, Maister Davit," she said, curtseying in the doorway, "and the Lord send that ye sall wed a bonnie wee wifie, for ye're over leal an' true to live yer lane i' the world."

Janet did not hear the last words, for she was still bending over the memorial tartan, with a face full of thoughts; but they brought a color deep as any maiden's blush to David's brow.

And then when all was cleared away, the brother and sister sat down side by side in the pleasant fire twilight. Mrs. Edenall was away to-night; she had gone to some public meeting that was being held in St. Olave's, because, as she said, the continued stillness of the cottage wearied her.

But Janet knew she had slipped away that they might have a quiet time to themselves after their long parting. Her absence was just one of those little bits of true-hearted tenderness which gleamed out now and then like winter flowers through the frost and snow of that unchangeable reserve of hers.

They said but little. David and his sister were always very undemonstrative in their household ways. It was a great rest to them, though, to be together again. In the long intervals of silence, Janet looked lovingly into her brother's face, pleased to note how the sharp worn lines of illness had faded out, and the grey eyes won back their own dear quietness. Nay, more than their own quietness, for to-night they seemed to shine with a deep inner light which she had never seen there before.

"How well he looks," she thought. "This visit to London has done him so much good; he will soon be quite strong again." And then she pictured to herself years and years of quiet home life with him, none but just they two together,—"my brother and I."

The January wind was crooning through the trees in Westwood Lane, sometimes rising into a blast that shook the ivy leaves against the trellised window, sometimes dying off into a low eerie wail, almost like the dirge that moaned in stormy nights from the Cathedral belfry.

"Alice Grey has a dree time for her journey," Janet said at last.

David turned sharply round.

"You never told me she was away."

"No, for I had so many things to say; but she only set off this morning. Wasn't it strange, Davie, that you should pass each other on the road and never know it? You look sorry, brother, but she'll not be away at the Festival. Miss Luckie told me that Alice quite intended being home the night before "Jael" was to be performed. She has gone to Brighton."

"To Brighton; surely she was not ill?"

"No, only a wee bit pale, and not quite so springy as she used to be before you went away. She was aye tending Mrs. Grey, and it wearied her, Davie; she's a tender-hearted little thing." And then Janet began to speak of "poor Aunt Amiel," and told David all about her illness and Alice's loving, patient care.

He did not say anything. It seemed as if all the sunlight had faded suddenly from his thoughts. So many pleasant fancies had clustered round that expected meeting time. Over and over again he had pictured her bright smile of greeting, and her fresh, frank, girlish ways as she spoke to him of the triumph he had won. He turned his head away, shading his face with one hand. Janet thought he was tired, and so let him rest.

Still, after all, he remembered, it was only for a little while, just a week or two, no more, and they should stand face to face once again, even as they had stood in that room three months ago. Except that now they should stand free and equal; he a noble man and faithful, not uncrowned with that laurel wreath of honor, which he had only striven to win because, wearing it, the world would count him more worthy of her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE Festival drew rapidly on, and the good folks of St. Olave's began to set themselves in right earnest to the various rites that preceded its advent. The people—meaning by these the working bees of the community, between whom and the "Close families" there yawned a gulf as im-

passable as that which the Roman Curtius gave his life to close—got their houses "done up," and put out notices of "Apartments to let" in the front windows. Careful housewives, who longed to turn an honest penny of pinmoney, counted over their stores of sheets and blankets, and speculated on the number of beds that could be made available for lodgers. Every habitable tenement in the place, from the magnificent Royal Hotel itself, at which the Queen and Royal family had once partaken of biscuits and wine, thereby lifting the place into undying fame, down, or rather up, to the meanest little attic that could by possibility be coaxed into accommodating a stray tripper, was put into its best attire, thoroughly scoured, whitewashed, and purified.

Looked at in a sanitary point of view, a Festival is quite equal to a visitation of cholera, besides having this advantage, that it combines pleasure with utility, which thing cannot be affirmed of the other epidemic. Once in three years, at any rate, the city of St. Olave's underwent a complete visitation, from which it emerged fresh and sunshiny as a New York little boy on Thanksgiving-day morning. And, on this occasion, possibly because the citizens had just touched extreme high-water mark of the tide of progress, or because they wished to do special honor to the composer of the new Oratorio, the preliminaries were carried on with an unprecedented vehemence. The star of the charwoman was in the ascendant; grocers noticed a brisk demand for soda and fuller's earth, and if all England had only had the good sense to follow the example of St. Olave's, the soap market would no longer have been chronicled in the daily papers as "flat."

Votive clouds of dust—sweet incense offered at the shrine of the goddess of cleanliness—rose morning by morning from the Northgate Stray, a large field appropriated by civic grant to the beating of the city carpets. Paperers and whitewashers were almost run off their feet, and as for chimney-sweeps, those sooty invaders of matutinal naps, they became positively coquettish, and treated their old customers with as much caprice as the reigning belle of the season thinks fit to lavish on her beseeching cavaliers. Washerwomen's back yards presented a scene of bustling activity. Muslin window-curtains and bed-hangings of every conceivable shape and variety, fluttered from the lines and spread their snowy pinions to the passing breeze. Mrs. Marris was "pretty nigh beat out," as she expressed it, with nothing but blinds and counterpanes, although that ecclesiastical laundress proudly ignored the claims of "people," and restricted herself to the purification of Close family linen.

As the great event drew on, the fashionable drapery establishments in the upper quarter of the city, blossomed into unwonted splendor. Satins, rich, soft, and downy, displayed their blooming tints behind the plate-glass windows of the High Street; self-supporting moire antiques, from dowager brown to bridal white, bristled beside them; and silks, flounced, figured, and plain, shamed the rainbow for lustre. These were for the married aristocracy, the leading courses, so to speak, of the great social entertainment. Then, mingling with them, like the *entremêts* and fancy dishes, were floating ærial gauzes and tarlatanes, silver-starred muslins and filmy tulle illusions which seemed woven of air and moonshine, or cut in twenty-yard lengths from the webs of rose-tinted clouds, out of which the wardrobe of Aurora is popularly supposed to be replenished. And for the milliners' shops—ah! but it would need a pen steeped in Castalian dews to describe those temples of Flora, with their wreaths and knots and bouquets, their scarlet holly-berries and luscious damask roses for the brunette's tawny brow, their blue-eyed forget-me-nots, lilies and snowdrops for the sunny tresses of the blonde, their starry jasmine flowers for the young maiden's first ball, their wreaths of pouting orange blossom for the bride, the circlets of golden wheat and crimson cornflower waiting to bind the tempies of some placid, dark-eyed matron, and vine leaves with their purple clusters and silver tendrils for bland, middle-aged dignity.

The all-important week arrived. The Festival placards increased in size and magnificence. "Jael," "Eli," and "Solomon," in golden letters a yard long, figured side by side with the names of the distinguished London *artistes* who were to sing their praises in the Hall of Guild. Early in the week the county families arrived. Fashionable-looking men, with retreating chins and finely-chiselled noses, lounged in the Cathedral stalls at service-time, or smoked their cigars at the doors of the Royal Hotel. Imperial women floated slowly down the narrow old-fashioned streets, women whose every step and gesture proclaimed the centuries of Norman blood that coursed their veins, and whose voices had that fine, clear, musical ring which betokens the old English nobility. Mingling with them, too—for the railway companies would persist in getting up cheap trips from the manufacturing districts—tramped frowsy-faced, freckled, honest-eyed mill girls, with astounding bonnets and yellow cotton gloves; dependable girls, nevertheless, who albeit they brought not much beauty into it, might do as much good in the world as their clear-skinned Norman sisters. And, to those long steeped in the reticence and *nil admirari* repose of the little Cathedral city, it was somewhat refreshing to mark the gusto with which these unschooled children of machinery blurted out their astonishment at the grand old Minster, or relieved their excited feelings by frantic nudges of delight administered to the protruding elbows of the broad-shouldered swains who accompanied them.

Amongst this motley throng, the professionals were easily to be recognized. They came from all parts, for the St. Olave's Festival held no mean place in the musical world. There were Germans, light-haired, pale-faced, with volumes of philosophical speculations brooding beneath their sleepy eyelids; dapper, white-handed little Frenchmen, who broke the hearts of the barmaids at the Royal Hotel with their roguish smiles and curled imperials; and stealing through the dim Cathedral aisles, or curiously peering round the crumbling arches of the Monastery, were swarthy Italians with fathomless glittering eyes which made one shiver to look into them, so eloquently did they speak of midnight and stilettoes.

As the city filled, and the quiet little streets grew noisy with the tramp of stranger feet and the clatter of foreign tongues, Mrs. Edenall became nervous, almost excited, at times. Reg-

ularly, morning by morning, she went to the Minister and looked eagerly at the lengthening list of visitors' names in the book which was kept at the entrance of the north aisle, and then she would pace up and down the nave, peering restlessly into one and another of the hundreds of strange faces which met her. There was one very quiet seat, behind the canopied monument of Alfric, the first Bishop of St. Olave's. It was out of sight of passers-by, but overlooked the whole length of the nave and south transept. Here she would sit for hours, watching patiently for the one face that never came, until her own grew weary and hopeless; and then, as the great bell sounded for the closing of the doors, she turned away with hands tightly clenched, and a step that grew daily more feeble. Every afternoon, too, as the up-train from Edinburgh passed through the station, she might be seen at the window of the ladies' waiting-room, anxiously gazing through the thick wire-blinds at the groups of stalwart men and noble women who turned out upon the platform.

And so the week wore on until Thursday, the third day of the Festival. On Tuesday and Wednesday there had been grand Oratorio performances in the Hall of Guild, but this evening the programme was varied by a full dress miscellaneous concert, at which the prima donna of Covent Garden was to make her first appearance in St. Olave's, sustained by a cluster of musical celebrities, such as had never been gathered together before on any but a London orchestra.

Janet Bruce sat by the fire in the parlor at Westwood, knitting away at her little white socks, just as quietly and patiently as ever. Perhaps her face might be a shade brighter now, for she was proud of her brother's success, and she was looking forward rather eagerly to his triumph—for she knew it would be a triumph—at the performance of "Jael" next evening. David had been hard at work all day preparing the choristers for their parts, and after coming home for a hasty dinner, had set off again to evening service at the Minster.

The room looked very peaceful in the deepening twilight of that early February evening. Not a change had been made in the simplicity, almost frugality of its furniture. Everything remained as it had been in the time of their poverty and obscurity. The well-worn crimson carpet, the old embroidered table-cover, with its border of armorial bearings, so dim and faded now, the drab moreen curtains edged with a quaker-like binding of black velvet, such as one sees in century-old country houses; there was nothing grand or artistic in the room, but that carved oak frame with its fanciful clusters of leaves and flowers heaped over arabesques of quaint device. But there were no flame shadows now to play hide-and-seek upon it, for the fire had burned down to a deep steady, red glow, which made the room seem stiller than ever.

Mrs. Edenall was there. She seemed restless and excited. She paced rapidly up and down the room like some caged animal that is longing for space and liberty. It was a habit she had brought with her to Westwood, but of late she had almost given it up, much to Janet's secret satisfaction. Whenever an irritable or nervous mood came upon her, she took to it again, and for the last few days the little time that she staid indoors, had been almost entirely spent in this restless wandering to and fro. Her hands were clasped, her teeth set together, and when at every turn she reached the wall, she looked fiercely at it, as though she longed to shatter it down and dash out into the free, open air. It grieved Janet to see how the lull which once seemed to have come over this strange woman's spirit had entirely passed away, and all the old fever and weariness come back. But she bore with it patiently, never asking the why or wherefore.

At length Mrs. Edenall paused with an angry, impatient gesture.

"Miss Bruce," she said, "I cannot stay here any longer; the stillness of this room wearies me—it kills me. I shall go to the Cathedral prayers, the music will not be over yet."

"What, this wretched afternoon?" said Janet, and not without cause, for the sleet was driving against the windows, and the wind screamed wildly at intervals through the leafless branches of the old elm trees in Westwood Lane.

"Oh!" replied Mrs. Edenall, with a touch of the old careless scorn, "you know I am not given to indulging in colds; the weather has no effect upon me."

And that was true, She seemed to have a charm against chills and agues. She would go out amid drenching rain and driving snow, which would have sown the seeds of consumption in any but an iron-strong frame; but it seemed as if disease, physical disease, at least, had no work to do for her.

"And," she continued, "I shall most likely look into the concert afterwards, so do not wonder if I am late."

"But surely, Mrs. Edenall, you will not go to the concert alone, and David said he should not be there to-night, he will be so tired when he comes home from the service."

"Thank you; I don't care about Mr. Bruce's company. I shall be quite safe. No one ever does me any harm, and as for looking strange, I have given over thinking about that."

And as she said this she shook her head back with that wild, careless sort of grace, which reminded Janet so unaccountably of Alice Grey's manner sometimes; except that in Alice the gesture only betrayed a certain girlish thoughtlessness, and in Mrs. Edenall it conveyed the impression of such utter pride and scorn.

Janet made no further remark, and Mrs. Edenall went out of the room. She wrapped herself in a long grey frieze cloak, which reached nearly to her feet, tied a thick Shetland veil over her crape bonnet, and then sallied forth into the chill February gloom.

The wind swirled wildly down the narrow streets, drifting the sleet into her face, and almost blinding her. But she did not seem to heed it. She walked quickly, impetuously on, as though striving to outstrip or conquer some evil influence that had come down upon her. It was quite dark before she reached the Minster. The light from the brilliantly illuminated choir flickered faintly through the clerestory windows, half hiding, half revealing the sculptured figures and the highly-wrought fret-work of the stone mouldings above. It was long past six o'clock and the service was more than half over, so instead of going into the choir to her usual seat

near the prebendary stalls, she went into the side aisle and sat down on the base of an old monument near the little stair that led to the organ. It was a grotesque old piece of sculpture to the memory of Sir Roger de Botolph, a knight of the sixteenth century, and Dame Dorothy, his spouse. The worthy folks were kneeling face to face beneath an elaborate canopy, apparently saying their prayers to each other. Between them was a death's head and cross bones; above, a lengthy Latin inscription recorded their respective almsdeeds and benefactions to the Church. Three little girls in starched ruffs, and as many little boys in hose and doublets, the "infantry," as the inscription stated, of Sir Roger and Dame Dorothy, were ranged in a line behind their father and mother, having their hands clasped, and wearing a solemn aspect of countenance.

A happy family doubtless they had been in their time; all dead now, and gone to heaven let us hope. And it was beside this stone memento of peaceful domestic unity that Mrs. Edenall, the lonely, friendless woman, sat and listened in a sort of waking dream to the pealing tones of the organ.

The Cathedral music was always very choice during the Festival, for strangers came from all parts to hear it. This afternoon it was a selection from Mozart's Twelfth Mass, adapted to English words. People came in and out during the whole service; some just strolling into the choir for a few minutes to listen to the music and out again; some examining and copying the monumental brasses; some with guide-book and spectacles, viewing the architectural beauties of the place; some—very few though—standing with bowed head and reverent aspect as in the presence of Him to whom that grand temple belonged.

Just as the chanting of the Psalms was over, Cuthbert Scrymgeour and a military looking gentleman strolled up the aisle and paused near to where Mrs. Edenall sat. She did not know who they were, indeed she knew scarcely anybody in St. Olave's. She could hear distinctly, however, all they said, for the conversation was not carried on in the most subdued of tones. The Reverend Cuthbert was evidently of opinion that the fact of standing a few inches outside the choir screen, completely absolved him from all need of partaking in, or even recognizing the service which was going on within its sacred enclosure.

"You'll be at the concert to-night, Scrymgeour, of course," said the military friend.

"Why, no, Madden. I'm afraid not. I should like uncommonly to drop in for half-an-hour or so, but you see my charmer is coming home from Brighton to-night, and I must do the polite at the Old Lodge."

"Quite right. It will never do for Euterpe to put Erato's nose out of joint, we all know that. You're a lucky fellow, Scrymgeour; the little Grey girl is as pretty a piece of feminine witchery as I've seen for a good while. By the way, when are you going to be turned off?"

"Oh, not just yet," and Cuthbert stroked his whiskers. "A fellow can't be expected to give up his freedom, and turn into a Benedict all at once, eh?"

"Exactly. I was rather surprised when I heard you had been and gone and done the preliminaries in such a bustle. Afraid of some one else stepping in before you, I suppose. Half thought of making a try myself once, after that pic-nic, but you see married life doesn't do for the army.

Just then the clergyman began to intone the Creed. Had Cuthbert Scrymgeour been standing at his place in the choir, he would have salaamed until his Grecian nose scraped the ledge of the reading desk. Under present circumstances he did not consider such a mark of respect binding upon his conscience, and as the rustle of priestly vestments in the choir marked the utterance of the Name at which every knee shall bow, he stood idly quizzing the groups of loungers and tapping his polished boots with a silver-mounted ebony cane.

Their vacant gossip jarred upon Mrs. Edenall. She moved away from her seat and went into the nave, quite away down to the west end where scarce a footstep was stirring save her own. There, at least, all was solemn and calm and still. People rave over the majesty of continental Cathedral interiors, but travellers who had "done" all the architectural wonders of Europe, came home and confessed that none of them surpassed, or even equalled St. Olave's Cathedral in the twilight of winter time. She stood beneath the statue niches which supported the arch of the great west window. From the lofty clustered columns which spanned the entrance to the choir, a flood of light poured over the transepts and the eastern end of the nave, growing fainter and fainter as it passed column after column, until at last it spent itself in a feeble flicker upon the richly foliated tracery of the west window. The side aisles were in deep gloom, only a stray light here and there suggesting, but not outlining, the grand clustered pillars whose flowered capitals were hidden in complete darkness. Here and there a gleam of light from the choir revealed a fragment of some majestic arch, or pencilled out upon the marble walls the shadows of the curiously wrought bosses that hung from the groined roof. But all seemed vast and disjointed and fragmentary, like the human soul itself, unlit by the daylight of truth.

For some time Mrs. Edenall was alone. Then she heard footsteps, and by-and-by a tall figure wrapped in a plaid, crossed and re-crossed the aisle not far away from where she stood. In the deep shadow she could scarcely distinguish his form, much less the contour of his face, but the step was that of a large, heavily-made man. As he came nearer to her, the choir lights were extinguished, leaving the building in complete darkness, except where a single lamp burned over the south entrance. Then the voice of the verger was heard echoing through the building—"Strangers out." She made her way across the aisle, and to avoid the jostling crowd who thronged the great doors, stole out through a little narrow entry which led into the Close from the west end.

Sleet and wind had it all their own way in the Close to-night. It wanted half an hour yet to the opening of the Concert Hall doors, and the carriages had not yet begun to draw up at the tall, old-fashioned houses that loomed so grey and ghostly in the evening gloom. A pleasant rosy glow came from the crimson curtained windows of the Old Lodge, and gleamed through the

leafless branches of the trees that skirted the garden. It spoke of home, and rest, and comfort, and Mrs. Edenall turned passionately away from it—the very thought seemed to mock her. She could not return to Westwood. Its never-changing stillness was insufferable. She was in that state of mind when quiet produces almost madness. She gathered her cloak round her and walked fiercely up and down the Close, until she was quite exhausted; and then leaning against one of the projecting buttresses of the west tower, she watched the sleet go drifting by.

Its incessant motion, quick, aimless, uncertain, and yet so silent, seemed to soothe her. She looked at it until a sort of magnetic quietness came over her. As the Minster bells struck half-past seven she turned away towards the Concert Hall. A crowd was already thickening around it, and a long line of carriages drawing up at the private door which conducted to the reserved seats. Groups of dirty little children and haggard pale-face girls were huddled together near the canvas awning that had been erected over the pavement, giving vent to pent-up whispers of envious amazement as some fair-haired belle, in silver-sprigged tulle, alighted from her carriage and floated up the brilliantly-lighted staircase, or a stout old dowager bristling in moire antique and family diamonds, sailed majestically out of sight.

Mrs. Edenall passed this door and went to the promenade entrance. She had some difficulty in making her way through the thickening mass of people that blocked up the lobbies and corridors, and by the time she reached the hall, all the best seats were already taken. But she did not care for hearing. All she wanted was to see. After long patient waiting, she forced a passage to the side seats, and got a place behind one of the massive columns that supported the gallery, from which, almost unseen herself, she could look out over the whole room; from the reserved seats, already blossoming into a perfect parterre of wreaths and bouquets, past the sedater splendors of the middle floor, chiefly filled by retired tradespeople in somewhat seedy half-dress, to the moving groups of the promenade; a confused mass of strangers, foreigners, and aliens, chiefly men, with here and there a shabbily dressed woman or two, all elbowing, jostling, and pushing their way towards the low, crimson-covered barricade, which protected the upper and second rate sociality of St. Olave's from the *ignobile vulgus* of the five shilling seats.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE room began to fill. Carriage after carriage poured its dazzling contribution into the full-dress seats; like a distant sound of waves the thickening footsteps echoed and re-echoed along the wide corridors. By-and-by the whole place was packed. From her sheltered nook, Mrs Edenall peered eagerly out, but the face she sought never came. Sometimes amidst the surging mass beneath and around her, one like it would appear, and then she leaned forward with keen hungry gaze, but only to fall back more wearily again as the fancied resemblance resolved itself into the blank features of some stranger countenance.

The musicians came on the orchestra, stealing with slow noiseless steps to their places, their sombre costumes contrasting vividly with the banners emblazoned with heraldic devices, the draperies of crimson velvet, the wreaths and festoons of shining evergreens. Then came the tuning of instruments, twang after twang of violin strings mingled now and then with the deep sound of a violoncello or a clear solitary pianoforte note. Presently a round of applause announced the debut of the professionals who were to commence the performance—four dark quiet gentlemanly-looking men, with that set, everlasting smile and cool nonchalance of deportment which becomes so habitual to public characters, especially musicians.

The first piece was a quartett for stringed instruments. Mrs. Edenall scarcely listened to it. That long, long gaze of mute inquiry over and disappointed, she had drawn her veil tightly over her face, and leaned her head against the marble column at her side, with the utterly weary, spiritless air of one who can neither suffer nor enjoy anything. After the quartett came a pianoforte solo, a grand frothy fly-away sort of thing, introduced like the "padding" in a popular magazine to make a setting for the more talented contributions. When this was over, the leading article, the Covent Garden prima donna, made her appearance.

She was a grand, queenly woman, standing like a white-robed statue, pure and passionless, amidst the admiring multitude. There was no flattered vanity, scarce even the semblance of recognition, in the slight and graceful gesture with which she acknowledged the peals of tumultuous greeting that rang through the Hall of Guild. She seemed to stand apart from the gaping fashionable throng in some thought world of her own, from which upon the deep silence that followed the first welcome, she let fall, calmly and almost unconsciously drops of music, tender, soft, and peaceful as those we hear in dreams.

Mrs. Edenall could not but listen now. All Europe had hushed its play to hear that voice. Sometimes its tones were passionate and pleading as though born from infinite deeps of sorrow; sometimes they trickled merrily along with no more measured art than that which guides the ripples of a mountain stream; sometimes they flashed out into sudden brilliance, like a fountain springing skywards and tossing the sunlight from each of its myriad drops; then trembling away down into a low sweet murmur that was rather heard than felt, so gently, so patiently it stole into the listening heart.

She ceased. They called her back with shouts of rapture. Calmly, proudly she came, and then without any accompaniment, without a single shake, or grace, or artistic flourish, she sang the English ballad, "Home, sweet Home."

That familiar song, the national anthem of every English heart, the psalm of every English fireside! The song that mothers croon to their sleeping babes; that falls like a benediction on the soldier's ear as he lies in snow-covered hut or hospital ward. The song that brings tears, soft and child-like, to the prodigal's eye when its music smites him in the land of strangers, and makes the poor street cast-away crouch pale and repentant before the memories it brings. The

song that fills every husband's heart with honest pride; the first song we learn to love, the last we learn to forget. "Home, sweet Home." Alas! for those who, listening to its strains, find in them only the stinging remembrance of joys that can never, never come again!

"Allow me to pass. I did not know it was so late," said a deep-toned voice a few benches behind where Mrs. Edenall was sitting.

The speaker was a tall, finely-made man. His garb and aspect would have betrayed his nationality, even had not the steady Scottish accent with which he spoke done it for him. He wore a tartan plaid, chiefly red, checkered with black and white, wrapped round him after that negligent fashion which only born Highlanders know how to manage, and dangling from his ungloved right hand was a Glengarry bonnet of the same tartan. He was very broad and stalwart, of the genuine Caledonian build, with great tangling masses of curling flaxen hair swept back from a high, well-shaped forehead. He might be forty-five, perhaps more, perhaps less, but men with light hair look young so long. It is only the strong dark-locked nature that betrays the iron-grey grasp of time. His face was meant to be a noble one. He had the majestic leonine features, the aquiline nose, the keen piercing blue eyes of the thorough-born Scot. But the lower part of the face spoilt them all. Its expression was low and earthly. The lips, large and shapeless, were those of a man enslaved by pleasure, a man never wakened by any noble impulse or lofty purpose. That mouth gave the lie boldly and decidedly to the upper part of the face, and he did well to hide it by the crisp curls of a golden-red beard and moustache. Still, in consideration of his face and figure altogether, he was what most people would call a very fine man.

"Allow me to pass," he repeated; and this time there was a touch of quick impatience in his voice.

Mrs. Edenall caught it. She turned wildly round, as though smitten by some unexpected blow. A cry of smothered excitement rose to her lips, but she had self-control enough to force it back. For a while she trembled violently, and but for the pillar at her side would have fallen to the ground. After pausing a moment or two, she rose, and, with very tottering steps, tried to make her way through the people.

The stranger was far ahead of her. He pushed vigorously on, not sparing hard words, or even blows, when either would facilitate his passage. She followed as best she could. The corridors were completely wedged with people waiting to come in at reduced prices to the second part of the concert. Often, in the crowd, she lost sight of him; now a marble statue came between them, anon the blinding glare of a chandelier fell full upon her straining eyes, or he disappeared behind the folds of some crimson drapery. He had nearly reached the carriage road outside before she got to the door. She heard him hail a cab and shout to the driver—

"To the Royal Hotel—quick!"

She followed, pressing with desperate energy through the masses of low, loose, shabbily-dressed people that loitered within the railed yard, waiting to catch sight of the full-dress company.

"Laws! Missus, do be steady now, can't ye?" said one towering Irishwoman, whose red shawl she accidentally caught and almost tore it from the stout matron's shoulders. "Ain't there no pleecemen hereabouts to give an eye to drunken folks sich as the likes of ye?"

"Lost her beau! Take yer home for sixpence, Ma'am;" and a sidelong, leering-looking fellow pushed his greasy coat-sleeve in her face.

But she heeded neither jest nor insult, as she pressed frantically forward, threading her way through the network of carriages which blocked the street. Over and over again, the cabmen had to rein up their horses, or she would have been trodden to death. By-and-by the road became clearer, and nothing hindered her but the driving sleet. At last she reached the hotel. Two or three waiters were loitering about in the entrance, reading the newspapers and gossiping with each other. Carpet bags and portmanteaus were heaped up near the door, in readiness for visitors who had to leave after the concert was over.

"Well, Ma'am, what may we have the honor of doing for you?" said one of the waiters in a pert, confident tone. It was not a common thing for ladies to come alone to the Royal Hotel at that time of night, without luggage either, and no signs of travel about them.

"I wish to see Mr. Douglas Ramsay. I understand he is staying here."

She had thrown back her veil. Her face was ashen pale, but it had all the innate majesty which no sorrow or anxiety could outwear. And something in her voice or gesture awed the man, for he answered, quite respectfully—

"Mr. Douglas Ramsay, Ma'am? I don't recollect the name, but I'll inquire. Take a seat, Ma'am;" and he showed her into a little room on the right-hand side of the door.

One or two gentlemen were chatting at the further end, but they took no notice of her. She heard the waiter loudly calling the name she had given him, from landing to landing of the great staircase—the name which for years she had never heard—the name which she scarce had power to whisper to her own heart, save in the stillness of night and solitude. Presently the man came back.

"Mr. Ramsay left, Ma'am, about five minutes ago. He was going off by the north train." And then, perhaps noticing the stony, despairing look that came into Mrs. Edenall's face, he added, glancing up at the great clock which stood on the staircase—

"You would soon catch him in a cab, Ma'am; only there's none to be got to-night, because of the concert. But I shouldn't wonder, if you was to walk fast, you might be at the station afore the train was away. They're always behind-hand busy nights like these. It's not far, Ma'am: up to the top of the High Street, and then take the first turning to the right; that'll lead you——"

The rest of his direction was given to the empty chair. Without waiting to thank him, Mrs. Edenall flew through the hall, down the wide flight of steps, and into the dark winding streets. On she went, with almost the speed of madness, past alley and postern, through crowded courts and deserted bye-lanes. Once only, under a crumbling archway of the old monastery, she paused for breath, just a moment, no more, and then on again, more wildly than be-

fore. The station was a little way out of the city. Ere she reached it, the bell rang; and when, at last, panting and weary, she sped through the iron gateway, the sharp sound of the railway whistle smote upon the air, and the north train wound slowly away from the platform, the fiery eyes of its two red signals glaring fiercely through the gloom.

With one more desperate effort she gathered up all her remaining energy and rushed after it. As yet it moved leisurely, with a long, slow, snake-like trail. She ran past carriage after carriage, unperceived in the thickening darkness of night. Some were quite empty; in some was a single sleeper, muffled in great coat and comforter; some were crowded with jolly looking men, laughing and smoking.

It was in the last carriage of all—a padded and cushioned first class—that the flickering lamplight fell upon that grand Highland head, with its coronal of waving flaxen hair.

No one else was in the compartment. Mr. Ramsay was wrapped in his plaid; on the vacant seat beside him lay his Glengarry bonnet and a flask of spirits. The *Times* lay on his knee; he seemed to be settling himself down to a comfortable study of it, just as any well-to-do gentleman might, with a full purse and a night's uninterrupted leisure.

With frenzied determination Mrs. Edenall sprang on the step and clung to the handle of the carriage.

"Douglas! Douglas Ramsay!" she muttered in a low, hoarse, sepulchral voice; she was too spent with wild excitement to shriek or cry.

The paper fell from his hands; he sprang to his feet. His countenance kindled into surprise, then into alarm, then into angry horror. Was that white ashen thing indeed a woman's face, or had it come from the land of ghosts, to call back his sin to his remembrance? Like a buried corpse, indeed, it looked, save for those great passionate grey eyes, with the mingled love and fury burning through them, and scorching into his very soul. He started back, stretching out his hands with a gesture of fear. She thrust hers into the carriage. A moment more and their fingers would have met—Ah, then in that wild frantic clasp, he would have felt no ghostly visitant had sought him out.

"Passengers not allowed to stand on the steps," said the guard, in a cool, collected, business-like voice; and with as much ease as if she had been a child, he unloosed her cold fingers from the carriage door, and lifted her to the ground.

And Douglas Ramsay's last look upon her was full of horror, and dread, and loathing; nothing but this. She had not even had time to curse him, or hurl one kiss of her pent-up love upon his lips.

With a low cry of despair, drowned as soon as it passed her lips by the sharp whistle of the now rapidly moving train, she crawled to the hedgeside, and fell down there, utterly spent and overworn; out of all that heaven and earth could give longing only for death, nothing but death.

CHAPTER XXXV.

How long she lay there beneath the driving sleet, she could not tell. When she came to herself again the moonlight was whitening the ragged edge of a great dim cloud that lay piled up against the horizon. The red and green lights of the station were gleaming a quarter of a mile away, and she could hear the heavy tramp of the engineers at work in the forges. She rose, aching in every limb, and went slowly homewards. When she had got about half way, she remembered a little lane that led past the Low Gardens into the Westwood Road. She turned into this to avoid going through the brightly lighted streets of St. Olave's. She walked on as if in a brooding dream, too worn and desolate to feel anything acutely. All that she remembered of the past was a dim, aching sense of wrong and disappointment. Bodily weakness had mercifully dulled her mental powers, and held in abeyance the bitter pain that must come sooner or later to a nature like hers after the strain through which it had just passed.

About a hundred yards down the lane was the little meeting-house used by the Primitive Methodists. She had once passed it with Janet Bruce, and they had gone in to look round. It was lighted up now, as if for some service. The warm glow shining through the half-open door into the chill, dark night, lured her to the threshold.

"May I come in?" she said to the man who kept the door.

He seemed surprised that she should ask, and directed her into the room where the service was to be held. She crept behind the people to a form against the wall, partly screened by an open door which led to a little vestry beyond. There she sank down half fainting upon the low seat. She seemed to herself in a sort of vague, dead stupor; she had endured to the very verge of endurance; nothing worse could come now. The night could grow no darker, the next change must be the morning dawn.

By-and-by she woke from the swoon into which the sudden warmth of the room had thrown her, and began to look around this new restingplace that she had so unexpectedly found.

It was a square room, neither large nor lofty, but well-lighted, and exquisitely clean. The walls were colored with a pleasant grey tint, soft and refreshing to the eye. White blinds were drawn over the square windows. The only decoration in the room was a narrow cornice of scroll pattern which bordered the flat panelled ceiling. On one side of the room was a platform raised about a foot from the floor; upon it stood a plain deal desk, with a bible and hymn-book for the use of the minister who conducted the service.

Facing this desk were two long rows of benches, divided by an aisle up the middle. The men sat on the right hand, the women on the left. By the time the service began, there might be about a hundred present.

The women were chiefly aged, many of them in widow's weeds, most of them wearing mourning. Mrs. Cromarty sat on one of the front benches. She seemed to be wrapped in medita-

tion, for her eyes were closed and a strange light shone out from her grand still face. The men evidently belonged to the working classes. Some of them were old and grey-headed, with bent shoulders and faces deeply scarred with the marks of care. Some were middle-aged, grave, thoughtful looking men, with resolute faces and stalwart muscular frames; the sort of men who, if they had been sailors, would have perilled their lives to save a sinking ship; if firemen, would have walked calmly into the rack of a burning house so only duty sent them there; if colliers, would have braved fire-damp and foul air to fetch out a buried comrade. Still, steady men they were, with the make of a hero in every one of them. And some were stripling lads, apprentices who had dressed themselves after a day's work and come here for rest, body rest and soul rest. Looking round upon them all, noting their reverent demeanor, the hushed, girded expression of most of the countenances, you could not but have the impression that the religion of these people was very earnest and deep-seated; not a garb to be put on and off like Sunday clothing, but an influence that informed and nerved and intensified the whole life.

As the little clock over the platform struck nine, the minister took his place at the desk.

"Let us worship God."

All knelt down, and he offered a short, simple, fervent prayer, to which most of the men and some of the women responded from time to time with a vigor and heartiness that would have secured their immediate ejection from any other place of worship in St. Olave's.

After they rose from their knees, the minister read the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and then commenced his address. He leaned with folded arms over the desk, looking at one and another of his congregation, and sometimes smiling, as their eyes met his, with a beaming glance of recognition. He used neither pomp of words nor flow of oratory; he seemed like a man speaking to his companions in the quiet intercourse of home life.

"My friends," he said, "we have been brought to the close of another working day. We have come to this little meeting, some from our workshops, some from our counters, some from our firesides, and some—many I trust—from our places of prayer. God will not send us empty away. He has a blessing for each one of us, and He giveth liberally, upbraiding not. It may be that some of you have come here cast down and afflicted; if so, remember there is One standing in the midst of us who says, 'Come unto Me and I will give you rest.' He is very pitiful and of tender mercy, and He will lay no more upon you than you are able to bear. Others there may be who are toiling hard amidst the cares and anxieties of this life; sore wounded by the archers, yet striving to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man. To such the Great Master says—'I know thy works.' Do not be afraid of duty. Make your daily duties part of your religion, and God will make them means of grace to your souls. Perhaps there are others who have come with the stain of unforgiven sin upon their consciences. You, my friends, are heartsick and weary, but Jesus is not far from any one of you. He has borne your sins and carried your sorrows; why, then, should you be burdened with them?

'Cast on Jesus all thy care,
'Tis enough that He is nigh;
He will all thy burden bear,
He will all thy wants supply.

'He thy soul will safely lead,
In His tender care confide;
Call on Him in time of need,
He will be thy guard and guide.'"

Then he spoke of the beauty and seriousness of life. "God," he said, "has a purpose for each one of us, and it should be the great aim of our lives to find out what this purpose is, and then in right earnest set ourselves to the realizing of it. We are often told that it is a serious thing to die; it would be well if we remembered that it is a far more serious thing to live. We will now sing a hymn, and afterwards those of you who feel drawn out to do so, will tell us of the dealings of God with your souls. Say what you have to say shortly and simply. God does not care for your much speaking; only see to it that you say it truly."

He then read out this hymn :—

"I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees t
From the accurséd load.

"I bring my griefs to Jesus,
My sorrows and my fears
He from them all releases,
He every burden bears.

"I rest my soul on Jesus,
This weary soul of mine;
His right hand me embraces,
I on His breast recline.

"I love the name of Jesus,
Emanuel, Christ, the Lord;
Like fragrance on the breezes,
His name abroad is poured."

After he had read the entire hymn, the minister gave it out by two lines at a time. One of the men near the desk started a tune and the others followed, joined presently by the tremulous treble voices of the women.

Mrs. Edenall's head drooped lower and lower; soon the tears trickled slowly, one by one, from beneath her thick veil. But people often wept at that service, and the woman by her side did not notice her, except by a single glance of quiet respectful sympathy with what she took to be a soul in communion with its Maker.

And so indeed it was.

After the hymn was over, there followed a long pause.

Then Mrs. Cromarty rose. Her hands were clasped together over her little hymn-book, her eyes uplifted, her whole face seemed brightened by an indwelling presence of steadfast joy.

"I'm very happy," she said. "I just feel I'm doing what Jesus wants me to do, and as I take it that's the most o' what folks need to carry them straight along through this world. He's got all my heart, inside an' out, it all belongs to Him, and He fills it with such a peace as I can't tell of. There's nothing in the world like loving the Lord Jesus. He's a good Master, and never keeps back a penny of the wages promised to them as serves Him faithful. It was the best day's work I ever did when I got 'listed in among His people. He's been doing me good ever since. I can tell of it as well as if it was nobbut yesterday—first time I

ever got a sight o' true religion. It's five-an'-thirty year come next Martinmas hiring, and I were tramping along London streets wi' scarce a rag to my back, just picking up a penny in selling bits o' shoe-laces and matches. I see'd a room lighted up, and, thinks I, it looks warm and comfortable like, I'll go in and sit me down. Mebby there's some poor body comed in here to-night because the room looks warm and comfortable. May the Lord Almighty meet 'em and do 'em a bit o' good to their precious souls."

In the hearty Amens which sealed this wish, that which sighed out from Mrs. Edenall's lips was unheard—unheard, at least, by the visible worshippers in that little shrine. Mrs. Cromarty went on.

"I slipped my basket under t' seat, and started listening. Minister was agate with that beautiful parable about the Prodigal Son. He read it sort o' sweet and tender, summut as the Lord Jesus might ha' spoken it, an' it came over me like rain i' the summer-time, when things is withered wi' overmuch sunshine. Thinks I to myself, Honor Grant—it was afore I were married, a good bit—Honor Grant, if ever there's a prodigal in this world it's you. And then I kind o' heard a whisper in my heart—'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.' *And I came.*"

She paused awhile, for her voice was quivering with emotion, and the unshed tears were glistening in her great dark eyes. Then she began again—

"I gets tempted sometimes. I suppose people ain't never clear shut o' temptation i' this world. As long as there's a bit o' tinder left in the soul, Satan 'll try hard to strike a spark at it. But, bless the Lord, He brings me off conqueror, He does. 'Tisn't my strength as does it. I'm just nothing but a bruised reed, and I should clean snap in two if I hadn't His strength to hold on to. But He does keep me. He says to me, 'Fear not, I am with thee,' and then I get so happy I burst out singing. I was once a poor lone woman, with never a friend to look to, and a heart so full of wickedness, that the blessed angels might have shuddered at it. Now the light's shone in upon me, and this is all my song—

> 'My God is reconciled,
> His pardoning voice I hear,
> He owns me for His child,
> I can no longer fear.
> With confidence I now draw nigh,
> And Father! Abba Father! cry.'"

Mrs. Cromarty ceased, and there was deep, utter silence whilst the recording angel took that poor woman's hymn of praise and laid it on the steps of the great white throne.

The next speaker was an old man, feeble and palsied. He rose very slowly, steadying himself on a stout oaken staff which he held in both hands. His voice had a tone of unconscious, patient grief, such as those use to whom sorrow has become not an accident but a habit, the prevailing key-note of their lives. He had to tell of bereavement. During that week his wife had died and been buried, and the old man was left alone. He spoke of her death, her last words, his great loneliness. The women sobbed as they heard his touching story, and one or two of the men wiped away a stray tear with their coat-sleeves.

"I have no one to care for me now," he said, "my lass is gone; we'd lived and tewed together five-and-fifty years. Mebby I used to speak a bit sharp tull her sometimes; but I wouldn't do it now nobbut she could come back to me. Hard words turns into bitter stings when them we spoke 'em to is gone. And my childer's all dead too. My lass and me buried the last of 'em two years gone. I sit by my bit o' fire all alone, and I'm oft tempted to say the Lord has dealt very bitterly with me. Then I ask for grace to be patient, and when I can nayther praise nor pray, I just tries to murmur out—'Thy will be done.' But it's a bitter cup."

He sat down. At that moment, quite suddenly, a woman from the far corner of the room began to sing in a low, sweet voice, soon joined by the other women and some of the men—

> "My rest is in heaven, my rest is not here,
> Then why should I murmur when trials are near?
> Be hushed, my dark spirit, the worst that can come,
> But shortens my journey, and hastens me home.
> Home! home! sweet home!
> There's no place like heaven, there's no place like home."

They sang it to the tune of "Home, sweet Home," the same tune to which Mrs. Edenall had listened scarce more than an hour ago, amidst the glare and glitter of the Concert Hall. *Then*, the music had brought back only stinging memories; it had spoken to her of the joy that was gone for ever, of the peace and hope which could never come again. Now, it seemed to whisper of another home, even a heavenly; of a quiet soul rest, of a new and precious life where the past might be pardoned and the present calmed, and the future made, if not bright, at least peaceful and free from fear. As she listened, her heart grew still.

For awhile no one seemed inclined to break the holy silence which that music had left. Then a tall, sturdy, middle-aged man rose. He might be a carpenter, for he had a stoop in his shoulders and wore an apron tucked away round his waist under his coat. He was fresh and happy-looking. He had a jovial face, lips that seemed to be always trying to hide a smile, and light, sunny, hazel eyes, with a certain twinkle of humor lurking in their clear, honest glance. He held his head well up, shaking back the hair, somewhat touched with grey, from his forehead. His accent was provincial in the extreme, but he spoke with an evident sense of enjoyment and hearty earnestness.

"Satan were tempting me as I came along," he began, "and says he to me, Luke Ryan, says he, you won't have nought to say when you get among all the folk. Ye'll be shamed while ye can't lift yer head up. Hould yer whisht, says I, I warn't ashamed to speak up right well i' your cause when I lived servant wi' you, an' it's a poor story if I can't say a word for the Master what's done so much for me. It's a sorry sort o' shame, sir," and here he turned his face to the minister, "it's a sorry sort o' shame when folks can tongue away like mad i' the world's talk, and havn't a word to say for Him

as bled for 'em. So I comed, though he tried hard, did the old fellow, to keep me back.

"Well, I'm always learnin'. I were an ould scholar when I came into t' blessed Master's school, and says I to myself, Luke Ryan, says I, you mun be right sharp, 'cause the time is short, and death 'll be coming afore ye can spell out a chapter; and now things as I never looked to afore teaches me blessed lessons. If ye'd like to hear one or two on 'em I'll tell ye. T'other day I were off in t' country, puttin' up a barn door for a farmer as lives at Grassthorpe, an' afore I got there I took thirsty; it's a pretty far step to Grassthorpe, and though I don't go for to say nothin' agen the weather God Almighty sees fit to send—t' worst on it's better nor we deserve—it was one o' those reeky fixed up days as seems to take all a man's spring and spirit out on him. So I seed a pump nigh hand the toll-gate cottage, and off I set, and began o' pumping. But t' pump nozzle were low, not over a span off t' ground, and I were forced to go down of my knees and stoop my head afore I could get a drop. Well, sir, that teached me a lesson. Says I to myself, Luke Ryan, says I, that there pump is like the Gospel of t' Lord Jesus Christ. We must go down on our knees to it. It's when we're bowed in prayer and humility that the water of salvation comes pouring out and freshens the thirsty soul. But mind ye, if ye're over proud to stoop and put your lips to the pump nozzle, ye mun just go dry, an' serve ye right too. And I'm thinking, sir, this is the reason why babes and sucklings is oft more learned in the ways of God than us as thinks werselves summut great. They havn't so far to stoop. It don't go agen their nat'ral pride to kneel 'em down and drink. Bless us, what a glorious thing it 'ud be if we could all on us get the child-heart, and trust God Almighty, as a little bairn looks tull its father an' mother, never askin' no questions, but just goin' where He tells us to. I know the time when I wouldn't ha' said a prayer to save my soul. I glorified human natur over much, an' all t' time I was lean and dry, and withered as a bit o' kindlin'. A proud spirit and a poor heart, a proud spirit and a poor heart, that's the way it goes."

Luke's racy way of describing the dealings of God with his soul, seemed to cheer the people. It was as if a breeze of clear, fresh, healthy mountain air had swept over and chased away all of doubt and sadness that any one might have brought into that little meeting. Even Mrs. Edenall raised her head, and a look of infinite longing and tenderness came stealing into her erewhile despairing face. The minister stood leaning over the desk, his arms folded upon it, a smile, which he did not attempt to restrain, coming and going upon his lips.

"And then, sir," continued Luke, "there's another thing I should like to say. I always look to get a good meal of speritle meat and drink first thing of a mornin', it makes me as fresh as a lark all the day. Folks as works hard, wants a good breakfast, and it ain't no yield trying to get on without it. And it's same with God Almighty's laborers, they mun get a good feed o' speritle meat and drink afore they set to work. I always gets up thick end of an hour afore the rest wakes, and has a clear still time readin' and meditatin', and bless ye, the good it does me, I can't tell. Mebby ye think it's time I were sittin' down now, but there's just one more thing strikes me, and when I've got it said, I won't talk no longer. Ye see I'm finding my tongue, friends, though Satan telled me I shouldn't ha' nought to say; but sometimes thoughts nestles in my mind as thick as sparrows in a cherry-tree, and I'm clean beat to find words to match 'em. Some folks has a gift o' thinkin' without talkin', and other folks has a gift o' talkin' without thinkin'. Now them's best off as gets a little o' both, and I believe that's way wi' me. Christian people now-a-days has got dainty appetites, plain food don't suit 'em no longer, they must have cakes and candy, and all manner o' things as ain't got no support in 'em. Now when I was a 'prentice lad, I ate plain food, lots o' meat and lots o' potaties, and lots o' good brown bread, but nowt else to speak on. And I throve well and pushed up'ards, and pushed out'ards, like yon elm trees i' the Close, till I got as big as ye see me now."

And Luke threw out his broad chest, and tossed back the hair from his sunburnt forehead—a veritable specimen of the best sort of muscular Christianity.

"Well, friends," he continued, "that rule works both ways. Plain food's best for Christians. There's a vast o' what I call goody shops i' these times—high edicated men as preaches nought but fine learnin' an' pretty bits o' poetry an' sentences as finishes up with a flourish, as always reminds me of the city bellman, when he's gived out a notice, and tucks his bell under his arm wi' such an air as if there warn't another bell in England to match it. Well, folks listens to this sort o' preaching, and listens and listens and gets their mouths so full o' sugar, while they can't relish things as has proper nutriment in 'em, the solid food o' the Gospel. Now I don't go to say nothing against fine preachers, them as sells goodies, ye know. I like a lozenge myself now and then for a change, but it won't do to keep to 'em, friends, it won't do to keep to 'em. We must come back to the old shop after all, and feed on the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. And now I don't know that I've got anything else to say. God has been blessing my soul this week. As sister Cromarty says, He fills me often with such a holy joy, while I can't find words to tell it. And I love to work for Him, I never lets a day pass without speakin' a word for the Saviour, and trying to bring poor sinners to Him. May He bless us all, and keep us going right straight on to the end, and then say to us, 'Well done, good and faithful servants.' Amen!"

Before Luke Ryan had finished, the hour-hand of the clock pointed to ten. Again the minister rose and gave out a hymn, which was sung to one of those hearty, energetic, inspiring tunes the Primitive Methodists love so well. Everyone joined in it. Even the old man who had that week buried his dead out of his sight, tuned up, and in a faint, quavering voice tried to swell the chorus.

"Let us pray," said the minister, when the hymn was over. Again they knelt, and he offered another short prayer, to which the people responded as before. He asked that God would bless the word spoken that night; that He would help those present to go through their

work with fresh energy, doing all they did as unto God, and not unto man; seeing in every duty a means of grace, and brightening every trial with the hope of glory which lay beyond. He asked that wherever Christ's people saw the print of their Master's footsteps, they might be willing to place their own, even though thorns were in the track. He asked that the weary and heavy-laden might go away from that meeting refreshed, that the tempted might be strengthened, that the brother on whom God had laid His afflicting hand might have the oil and wine of heavenly grace richly poured into his heart; and that all sorrow, wherever sent, might yield hereafter the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Listening to him, Mrs. Edenall felt, for the first time in her life, how strongly through such prayers as these—

> "The whole round world is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

The people seemed in no hurry to leave after the service was over. Some of them clustered together, talking over the words that had been said. The minister went about amongst them, speaking good words, pleasant words too they seemed to be, from the bright looks which they called forth. He stayed long by the side of the old man, holding his withered hand, and speaking to him in gentle, tender tones.

Mrs. Edenall lingered until nearly the last. She would have stolen away unperceived if she could, but the preacher saw her just as she was going out.

"Madam," he said, laying his hand on hers, which were clasped so tightly beneath the folds of her cloak. "Madam, you are a stranger to me, but I trust we are both members of that family which shall one day meet unbroken before the throne of God."

The words were very simple, but they went to her heart. He said them with a grave, sweet tenderness, smiling all the while. She could not reply, for his kindness had brought the tears to her eyes. She glided silently past him into the quiet, dimly-lighted street, and he saw her no more. It was the last service he ever held in that room. The next Thursday evening a stranger was in his place, the next he was worshipping in the temple not made with hands.

This was one of those chance meetings, burdened sometimes with the issues of life or death, wherein for one brief moment heart touches heart beneath the shadow of God's presence, and in that touch finds healing.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ALL this time Janet and David sat quietly together in the parlor at Westwood. For once she had laid aside the little white sock, and was hemming a fine cambric pocket-handkerchief for her brother. A pair of white gloves lay on the work-table by her side, she had been stitching the buttons more securely on—Janet had an almost idolatrous reverence for her brother's comfort in the matter of buttons—and beside the gloves was a black silk tie which required an inch of its length curtailing.

Janet Bruce looked peaceful, almost happy, as she stitched away with the regularity and precision of a sewing machine. This sisterly love, in all its patient and sometimes scarcely noticed ministrations, was the only earthly interest left to fill and quiet her life.

David Bruce had been working hard through the day, and seemed weary enough when Janet took away his overcoat and helped him on with the loose study wrap of fine tartan which had been warming at the fire for an hour past. But it was only bodily weakness; his voice was cheery and genial, even breaking forth now and then into a low pleasant laugh, as by-and-by they began to talk of the old life with its cares and struggles over-past,—of the coming life, too, brightened in Janet's thoughts by the stillness of unbroken home-peace, in David's by hopes too bright to be steadily gazed upon until now.

Janet never dreamed of her brother marrying. He was so silent and reserved, so completely unlike the trim, dapper, finely polished men, who prove most successful in matrimonial speculations. Even in the days of their prosperity at Perth, when, had he been so disposed, he might have "settled advantageously," as the phrase is, he had led a quiet, shut-up life, never entangled in anything that had the remotest tinge of romance or love-making; and since the sudden stroke which swept away their fortune and compelled them to begin the world afresh, the struggle for daily bread had been so uncertain, that she was quite sure he would be far too proud to ask any woman to share it with him. She never asked herself how she should feel if another chanced to come in between them, and take from her hands those loving little duties which it had so long been the sweetness of her life to offer; nor how her lips would learn to fashion another phrase than the one so habitual to them now—"My brother and I."

The sleet drove heavily against the windows, and the leafless branches of the linden trees creaked as the wind chafed upon them; but the brother and sister by their cozy fireside heard neither. They did not often get a quiet evening together now. Ever since David's return from London, three weeks ago, the strange nervous excitability which had come over Mrs. Edenall had sadly marred their household peace. Janet was utterly perplexed to account for this change. Mrs. Edenall had received no letters that could have troubled her, for it was months now since any bearing her name had been left at Westwood; nor did she seem to be fretting herself over their non-arrival, for the postman's knock never startled her, she never wearied for his coming, nor seemed disappointed as morning after morning he passed by the garden gate. She would own to no illness, indeed she seemed to scorn all bodily fatigue and exposure, and would tramp through the wildest storms, or over miles of snow-covered moorland, with a proud, angry sort of defiance. It could not be either that she was chafed by any seeming neglect of her comfort, for all the household arrangements were carried on in the old way, and never by the slightest hint was she made aware that her presence was less needed than heretofore. Yet day by day she became more incomprehensible. She was her old self again, nay, worse than her old self, for the Mrs. Edenall of eight months ago

was only cold and haughtily indifferent, and the Mrs. Edenall of the last few weeks had been like a perpetual presence of evil in the quiet little household.

As the time of the Festival drew on, she seemed to be possessed with an uncontrollable spirit of restlessness. When she was not pacing rapidly up and down the room, her fingers would twitch nervously, and anything that she took into her hands was soon pulled to pieces. Sometimes she used to sit for hours together, tearing up paper into small fragments with the desperate sort of industry of a person who puts her whole soul into the work, her lips trembling all the while, and her forehead gathered into frowns. Then she would lay them on the hot bars of the fireplace, and watch with a sardonic smile how they withered and curled and shrivelled before the hissing flames leaped forth upon them.

A chilling fear came into Janet's mind sometimes that the woman was really becoming mad; only that her thoughts when she did converse were always quite collected, and when she argued on any subject with Mr. Bruce—which she often did, for it seemed to afford a vent for the latent combativeness of her nature—there was a clear, forceful energy and foresightedness in all she said. Still Janet seemed more and more to shrink from her. Only the incident of Mrs. Edenall's great kindness during those dreary weeks of illness lingered on, and could not be forgotten.

But though neither of them made any complaint, both felt that it was pleasant to have the little spell of quiet which her absence afforded. It seemed when she was gone as if some strange inexplicable bond had suddenly been lifted away from them, as if the passes of some invisible hand had ceased, and its magnetic current stayed.

David Bruce's prosperity so far had made no difference to the establishment at Westwood.

Everything went on in the old-fashioned track under Tibbie's active management. At the time prescribed by etiquette, Miss Bruce put on her seldom-worn black silk dress and made a round of calls; but the dinner, supper, and quadrille party invitations which speedily followed were all declined, and so the sudden explosion of friendliness on the part of the Close families seemed likely to end in smoke. Looking in upon the two as they sat there so easily and quietly, he in his great arm chair, she in a low Devonshire seat by his side, it seemed likely enough to remain "my brother and I" to the end of the chapter.

"There, then, Davie, it is finished," said Janet, holding up the silken-fine handkerchief between her eyes and the lamplight. "Now I'll mark it in commemoration of the occasion."

She fetched a little bottle of marking ink from the closet and began very slowly to write upon the corner. Then she held it to the fire, which brought out in small dainty characters the inscription—

"David Bruce. Westwood parlor. The night before the Oratorio."

"Now, Davie," she said, as she flung it playfully over his face—Janet was quite in an exalted state of merriment to-night—"there won't be a finer handkerchief than that in the Hall of Guild to-morrow night, and so if your feelings overcome you, you needn't be ashamed of giving way to them, and letting it have a baptism of tears. I believe everything is quite ready now. I have fastened those buttons of yours securely—it's so disagreeable, you know, when they come off just at the last moment—and that necktie is exactly the length you want. And Davie, now, do mind when you go to dress what collar you get out of the box. I should be so concerned if I saw you come on the orchestra with one of those untidy Napoleons, like what you are wearing now."

"Never mind, Jeanie, they're very comfortable, but I'll do as you tell me if I can remember."

David Bruce said no more. Just then a gleam of firelight wandering over his study wrap, shone upon a single golden hair, a long, waving, rippling golden hair, which had lain undisturbed ever since that November afternoon when Alice Grey came to say good-bye to him before he went to London. Then, such a weary distance seemed to part them. Heart to heart though they stood, the iron barriers of caste gloomed grimly up between them and kept the hands asunder which belonged to each other. Now they stood free and equal, and those fingers of hers would not soil their high-born whiteness within the clasp of his. It was this thought that made the rare smile flash like sunlight over his face.

Janet noted the smile, but nothing more. Seeing that he did not seem inclined to talk, she took up the knitting work that lay upon the table, and presently fell into a train of meditation which blossomed out after the lapse of a full half-hour into speech.

"Davie, I have been thinking that now money matters are so much easier with us than they used to be, I can make you a set of real fine linen shirts. I have been wanting you to have them so long, all linen you know, like what you used to wear in the old times. And, Davie, perhaps after this Oratorio, you'll be obliged to go a little more into company, and I thought a couple of them had better be made with a tiny little cambric frill and a strip of embroidery down the fronts, for full dress you know."

No answer, not even a smile from those still shut-up lips.

The mention of visiting seemed to lead Janet's thoughts to the Old Lodge, the only home whose hospitality they had shared since their residence in St. Olave's, for by and by she said—

"Alice Grey comes home to-night."

David turned round with a questioning look.

"Alice Grey comes home to-night, Davie," and then Janet paused to pick up a stitch that had slipped from the needle.

It was almost the only time Alice's name had been mentioned since that evening of David's return from London. Somehow she had not been to Westwood so frequently of late. Mr. Bruce's long illness necessarily slacked their intercourse; then close upon it came Aunt Amiel's affliction and Alice's visit to Brighton, not to mention that new interest which had sprung up in her life and made other friendships less needful. As for David, the thought of her lay too far away down in his heart ever to come up with the stray drift that sometimes floated to the surface.

"Yes, she was to arrive about eight o'clock. Miss Luckie told me. And, brother, it has been on my mind a long time to ask her to tea. You know we ought to have done so after the pic-nic last September, but your going to London interfered, and I thought she might not care so much to come when you were away, for she likes to hear you talk and listen to your music. She told me once she liked your music better than any other."

Still, no answer but the smile, the deepening smile which Janet loved so well to see upon her brother's face, for it seemed to speak to her of rest after the hard toil and struggle of the past few years. David had been so grave since they came to St. Olave's. She went on.

"I know Alice is very fond of coming here, but Mrs. Edenall is so strange just now that she might not enjoy it so much. You might play to her though in the front parlor, and I could keep Mrs. Edenall here. I am sure she would be glad to come. She told me a long time ago that she was looking forward to this Festival very much, and I believe it was because she thought your Oratorio would likely be performed."

Janet said all this, knitting on in her quiet, peaceful, unconscious way, looking sometimes into the clear firelight, sometimes into her brother's face, with that staid unquestioning expression that had become so habitual to her.

What a comfort it is sometimes to be talked to by people of slow comprehension, people who don't have "intuitions" or "impressions" or "presentiments,"—people who have not learned to use that magic elixir which, poured over the tablets of the heart, brings out the hidden writing upon them. Janet Bruce was singularly unperceptive. She never found out a truth for herself, and even when one was presented to her, she rarely received it except after very patient investigation. Her processes of thought were slow, deliberate, lengthy.

And yet she was a great comfort to her brother, more so perhaps than if she had been one of those inventive geniuses who can divine the destinies of a lifetime from the glance of an eye or the lightning of a momentary smile.

When Alice made that little speech about the Festival, it was with an innocent hope that the remark might produce further questioning, and so give her an opportunity of disclosing the secret with which her young heart was burdened. But Janet had not perceived this, and so as yet she remained in ignorance of Alice Grey's engagement.

She was not likely to hear of it in any other way.

The etiquette of courtship, especially in its earlier stages, was somewhat rigid amongst the Close families.

Those arm-in-arm strolls and moonlight *tête-a-têtes*, whereby young people of the middle classes proclaim their mutual attachment, were frowned upon by the St. Olave's upper ten, and monopolized by scullery girls or maids of all work. Not until the marriage-day was fixed and the bridal outfit prepared was it considered correct for affianced aristocrats to make a public appearance in each other's company. So that as yet gossip had not laid its smutty finger on Alice's name to link it with that of her future husband; nor, had Miss Bruce possessed the *entrée* of all the St. Olave's tea-circles, would she have been enlightened as to the matrimonial prospects of her young friend. Perhaps the closeness of the Close people in this respect was very wise.

Janet was still talking to her brother when the garden gate opened, and footsteps were heard on the gravel walk. Their pleasant evening was at an end. No, not quite, for Mrs. Edenall passed the parlor and went up-stairs to her own room, not even coming in to say the good-night and give the parting hand-clasp which had been exchanged so often between them.

Janet heaved a little sigh of relief and settled down to the knitting work again, as the door of Mrs. Edenall's room closed and the grating of the key in the lock sounded through the wide passage.

"Surely the concert cannot be through yet, Davie; but she's been aye restless the day, and perhaps she was wearying for home."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was the last day of the Festival. Since Monday the excitement had been thickening; and indeed it was time the great affair came to a crisis, for St. Olave's had been turned wrong side out, upside down, and downside up, until the poor little city scarce knew itself for the same. The Cathedral bells had rung themselves hoarse. Morning, noon, and night their clamor smote upon the air. The rooks in the belfry tower were well nigh distracted, and after bearing the nuisance for a day or two had retired in disgust to temporary lodgings within the Westwood elms. Indeed, had the hubbub continued much longer, they must have presented themselves in a body to the Dean and Chapter to pray for a restoration of peace.

For the first three days, multitudes of cheap-trippers had flaunted through the streets, brandishing cotton umbrellas and carrying huge baskets of prog with bottle necks protruding through the lids. Even the Cathedral pavement itself had been defaced by remains of penny pies and wrappings of ham sandwiches, for the Millsmany folk turned the nave into a temporary symposium, and gratified their organs of admiration and alimentiveness simultaneously.

Friday, however, the great day of the Festival, was set apart for the exclusive benefit of the county families. The last of the cheap trips had cleared away out of the station. The vulgar tones of the mill people no longer mingled like a muddy torrent with the clear silvery ringing accents of the "quality." The lower stratum of the social compact had had its share of enjoyment, and this closing evening was sacred to "Jael" and gentility.

Alice Grey and Mrs. Scrymgeour arrived from Brighton on Thursday. She was to go to the Oratorio with the party from Chapter Court; Mrs. Cromarty promised to take exclusive charge of Aunt Amiel for one evening, in order that Miss Luckie might chaperon Janet Bruce, for David expected to be hard at work up to the very last moment.

The St. Olave's Hall of Guild, where the musical festivals were held, was a noble old place, in thorough keeping with the rest of the city. It

was erected by the burghers in the sixteenth century, and its massy walls had looked upon many a jovial banquet in the merry days of yore. Since the completion of the new Mansion-house it had been disused for civic purposes, and the Corporation fitted it up as a public room for concerts, assemblies, and the like. It was a long lofty building, with a richly-carved and groined roof. Formerly the space between the groining was left plain, but after its appropriation as a Music Hall, it was decorated with rich arabesque tracery of crimson, blue, and gold, and lit by innumerable tiny jets of gas that threw out into fine relief its quaint old bosses and finely wrought medallions. The windows were mullioned, filled with stained glass, which in the day time gave the room quite an ecclesiastical appearance. On full-dress occasions, however, they were draped by heavy crimson velvet curtains, which formed an effective background for the ladies' brightly tinted costumes. The spaces between the windows were filled in with a diaper pattern of blue and gold, with heraldic devices belonging to the different families of St. Olave's. Here and there a scarred and tattered banner, relic of some long-past battle, fluttered from the groined roof, strangely out of character with the present appearance of the place, but telling its own story of rack and tumult.

The orchestra was very beautiful, occupying one entire end of the room. It was enclosed by three lofty arches springing from clustered columns, and rising to the roof. Within these arches, high up out of sight were placed rows of lights pouring down a rich glow upon the organ, which with its elaborately decorated pipes looked like some gorgeous Eastern shrine or Moorish mosque.

Round the back of this orchestra, in deep stone niches with canopies carved and fretted like those of the Cathedral, were ranged the statues of Europe's great composers. Handel, the melodious Titan, massive and majestic as one of his own choruses; Beethoven, the Michael Angelo of music, with his sublime brow and tangled elf locks; Weber, pale, passionless, and still, pure as an iceberg, and as cold; Mendelssohn, with that uplifted heaven-lighted face of his,—living so near to the angels what wonder he caught their likeness? Mozart, upon whose calm front, fame and death so early set their seal, was there too; and Haydn, with clasped hands and lips folded down in stately repose. Pergolesi bent forward his rapt face as though listening to far-off choirs; Rossini, bright and jubilant as a strain of Italian song, smiled his everlasting smile; and next him came Bellini, quiet and self-contained as his own Norma, yet not lacking the mingled grace and sweetness which could conceive the wondrous melodies of Somnambula. Nor in that guild of fame-crowned heads were wanting those whom England has nurtured, and whose names have helped to make her famous. Tallis, Bird, Purcell, Gibbon, Farrant, staunch venerable old patron saints of music, whose grand thoughts, breathed forth day by day from many a Cathedral choir, keep their name and memory green, uplifted their heads side by side with the great continental *maestros;* the quaint, trim nationality of their aspect contrasting oddly, and yet not unpleasantly, with the laurel-wreathed brows and flowing robes of their foreign compeers.

The hall filled; group after group of gaily-dressed people came sailing in. Stout old squiresses in purple velvet and diamonds; blonde beauties in clouds of floating tulle; here and there a bride—there had been some weddings lately amongst the county families—half-hidden in a snow-drift of white *glacé;* then a brunette, resplendent in crimson draperies, or magnificently flashing in amber satin and black lace. One by one, the military people, always a great feature in St. Olave's on public occasions, came dropping in, their laced and braided uniforms flashing back the glare of light from the roof.

Amongst the earliest arrivals came Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour, in a strong-minded looking dress of some dead black material, over which a transparent scarf of greyish-white gauze meandered, like puffs of steam from an unpolished tea-kettle. Cuthbert Scrymgeour and Alice accompanied her—I speak advisedly; the Archdeacon's widow never, in the social sense of the word, condescended to *accompany* her friends; she was always *the* circumstance of any group in which she formed a part, the active inflection of the verb. Alice wore a white dress to-night, the same as that in which she had appeared at the eventful Chapter Court party, only that now her delicate beauty was heightened by an opera mantle of light blue, edged with miniver, and, instead of the pearl cordon, one single half-blown white rose was placed in her hair, nestling lovingly amongst the brown curls, as though glad to find so pleasant a resting place.

Blanche Egerton, the dreamy-eyed brunette, came in next, bland, regal, composed, leaning on the arm of the county member. His other convenience for escorting ladies was occupied by Miss Fullerton, who seemed to view the whole concern from a metropolitan point of view, and despised it accordingly. After them, Captain Madden brought in the two Misses Spurge, with their mamma in the background—a turbulent mass of satin, pearls, and flounces. Next came Janet Bruce and Miss Luckie; but, as their appearance did not add to the brilliance of the scene, it is needless to particularize them. There was a very gay party from the Palace; the Bishop himself could not be present on account of his duties at the House; but the Honorable Mrs. Standish, with half a dozen guests, more than supplied his place. The Deanery contributed its quota of beauty, in the shape of Elene Somers and her cousin, blonde nymphs in blue and silver, attended by a major from the barracks. After them came Canon Crumpet and his lady, bringing up the rear of the Close phalanx ecclesiastical.

As the Cathedral bells struck eight, the band and chorus took their places, to the number of nearly a hundred. For the most part, they were a noble-looking set, with the frank, open expression of countenance which men, whose life employment is a joy to them, generally wear. Following them, were the little chorister boys from the Cathedral, with carefully-polished faces and well-brushed hair. The little fellows looked very solemn, and were evidently perplexed about the management of their hands—a perplexity which ended by the unruly members being pocketed.

When all was arranged, David Bruce, holding his roll of music and conductor's baton, came up

the narrow stair that led from the private room. A tumultuous sound of applause greeted him as he stood for a moment or two in front of the orchestra, before taking his place at the desk. He received it very calmly, not appearing either pleased or flattered by it. There was a sort of rock-like firmness about his character, against which the waves of praise and blame alike might beat as long as they chose, and move it not a hair's-breadth.

Janet Bruce was very humble. There was not a particle of what the world calls vanity or conceit in her composition; but a flush of pleasure eddied up to her forehead, as she saw her brother receiving the homage and admiration of a set of people who, six months ago, would have scorned to give him even the honor of a passing smile. She thought he looked very noble, kingly as any king might look, as he acknowledged, with a certain grave, sedate majesty, the greetings flung upon him. The light shone bravely down over his grand face, so calm, so almost proud in its stillness, and threw out, in bold relief against the crimson draperies of the orchestra, his great massive head, with its crown of tangled hair.

For one brief moment he scanned that sea of upturned faces, searching for the one which day and night lay ever in his thoughts. He found it; their eyes met, and a bright smile of recognition flashed from hers. David Bruce bent his head to hide the eager flush of pleasure which that look had brought, then turned away to his place at the conductor's desk.

By the rules of the Festival Committee, applause of any kind during the performance of sacred music was strictly forbidden; and, when the first peals of welcome had subsided, the Oratorio proceeded in the midst of profound silence. But there needed neither waving of handkerchiefs nor clapping of hands to show how surely it was winning its way to the hearts of the people. It was strange to notice how, even before the overture came to a close, the professionals, who were in the room, bent forward with keen interest, and then one by one moved, as if drawn by some invisible magnet, to the front of the orchestra, where they stood with clasped hands and rapt, wondering faces. Again and again, as the last notes of some exquisite chorale or solo died away, a sigh of intense excitement thrilled through the room, and a low murmur of delight, stifled as soon as it broke forth by the quick, impatient "Hush! hush!" of eager listeners.

Smiles chased over Alice's face, as she recognized phrase after phrase of music that she had copied for him, or which David had played to her in the little parlor at Westwood. On the music swept; sometimes grand and stately, with a strong, over-mastering force, beneath which the whole concourse of people swayed hither and thither, like reeds shaken by the wind; sometimes plaintive and weird-like, waking hearts that had long time slept, and raising them, as all true music does, to a purer life. Many bowed their faces and wept; some with shut eyes listened, not to the music, but to the memories it had stirred within them; and a few men and women, whom the angel Gabriel might have tried in vain to move, just sat through it all with vacant, unsmiling faces.

David Bruce, standing with his back to the people, saw nothing of all this. His whole mind was intent on the work he had to do; and very nobly he did it. His countenance reflected each shade of feeling in the music; its spirit seemed to have entered into him, making his every gesture instinct with matchless grace and dignity. The performers, watching him eagerly, caught his enthusiasm, and obeyed, with deft skill, each motion of the magic baton, which, now uplifted, now depressed, swelled or curbed their harmonies.

After the close of the first part of the Oratorio, there was an interval of twenty minutes. The band and chorus speedily emptied themselves into the large ante-room below, where they fell to work upon the cold collation that had been provided there. For musicians, like other men, have "internal motives," and musical exertion, whether it be of throat or arms, appears to have an invigorating effect upon the appetite.

After the orchestra was cleared, the hall converted itself into a promenade. Gentlemen got up and sauntered about to stretch themselves after two hours' spell of unwonted excitement. The connoisseurs clustered into little groups here and there, eagerly discussing the merits of the music.

Miss Luckie, to whom even a silence of ten minutes seemed interminable, broke out into a pleasant little trickle of conversation as soon as the restraint was removed.

"So happy to congratulate you, my dear Miss Bruce, so very happy. It really must be such a triumph to you. To think, you know, that Mr. Bruce, poor man—at least—oh dear, I beg pardon! I'm always saying things I don't mean to, but Mr. Bruce was such a quiet man, such an exceedingly quiet man, I remarked that from the very first, that no one ever supposed he would be likely to stand in such a position as he occupies to-night, and I'm sure if he were my own brother I couldn't be more glad for him, and for you too, dear Miss Bruce. But I do believe the Bishop's lady is coming this way to offer her congratulations; yes, she is indeed. I declare it has put me quite into a flutter. Don't introduce me, dear Miss Bruce, pray don't; my heart beats so I don't know what to do." And Miss Luckie's Nottingham lace lappets—she had got a new head dress for the occasion—whisked round in a perfect tremor of nervous agitation.

Yes, the Honorable Mrs. Standish's black velvet dress was actually sweeping the floor just in front of them, and her ostrich plumes swayed in the scented air as she reached out her gloved hand with calm cathedralesque dignity. She was proud to have the honor of felicitating Miss Bruce on the brilliant success of the evening; the name of David Bruce would henceforth confer new honor on St. Olave's; she hoped this was only the commencement of a series of triumphs which should ere long elevate the illustrious composer to the highest pinnacle of musical fame, &c., &c. Ere Mrs. Standish had concluded her flowery address, she made way for the Dean's lady and Sir Harry Monbello, who had come on the same errand; and they were followed by Canon Crumpet and the county member and his daughter. Indeed Miss Bruce held quite a miniature levee during that space of twenty minutes.

"Thank you, you are kind," was the only an-

swer she could make to the compliments and congratulations which poured down upon her. Poor Janet, she had a very limited stock of the sugared bon-bons of social intercourse. She never said anything that she did not mean, and people who make much of sincerity soon get stranded in their conversational cruises.

By-and-by Alice came.

"I could not press my way through the fence of aristocracy before," she said, nestling her hand in Janet's whilst her eyes sparkled and her face flushed with pleasure, "but I'm glad for you, Miss Bruce, I'm very glad."

It was all she said; a half quiver in her voice told the rest.

"How sweet Miss Grey is looking to-night," said Janet as Alice floated away to her seat beside Mrs. Scrymgeour, Cuthbert was in another part of the room talking to some gentlemen friends; "I think she grows prettier and prettier."

"Yes, yes," replied Miss Luckie with a series of pleasant mysterious little nods, "won't it be a very delightful sight now to see her in her veil and orange blossom?"

"Well I suppose it will. Is there a possibility of her appearing in that costume before long?"

"Why you know," and Miss Luckie dropped her voice and went through another series of nods, "it isn't talked about yet, but I don't mind telling you because I know you live so very retired and won't mention it again; I do believe Miss Bruce, if I were to get married myself, the wedding dress would have been dyed and turned bottom to the top before you would hear of the affair. Yes, I am happy to say Alice has achieved her destiny; at least she has taken the preliminary steps. You know I'm always so glad when young people get engaged, it's so much better than hanging on the bough until they get quite out of season and then drop off into irretrievable old maidenhood."

"And may I ask who the gentleman is?" said Janet, with that faintest little tinge of curiosity which creeps unawares into every woman's heart at the mention of a wedding.

"Dear me, how stupid not to have told you that at first, but I never could get into the way of saying the right thing at the right time. The fortunate individual is Mr. Scrymgeour, the nephew of the Archdeacon's widow, you know. There he is, look, sitting beside her,—no, he isn't, either; really now where can he have got to, I'm sure he was there not ten minutes ago—Oh! yonder he is, standing just under the second window, you see him, don't you, with curly hair and long whiskers?"

"Yes. I'm not surprised, Mr. Scrymgeour is very handsome," and Janet's thoughts went back to the evening of the pic-nic, when she and David had touched upon that same subject. It had always seemed to her likely enough that Alice should take a fancy to Mr. Scrymgeour.

"You think he is handsome, don't you? I said, when first he began to come about the house, that he was a perfect—dear me, what do they call that good-looking god?—Apollo, ah that's it. I always said he was a perfect Apollo, just the sort of young man, you know, to fascinate a girl of good taste, and such perfect manners. The wedding is to be this summer."

"I do not know him at all, except by sight. But they will be a striking pair."

"You're quite right. It isn't often that beautiful women are equally matched in that respect. A very pretty girl I once knew, fixed her affections on the oddest piece of humanity that was ever invented, and turned him into a husband. A very good one he made too—everybody said the match was a perfectly happy one; but I always think it's a pity for such things to happen."

"The only thing that troubles me," continued Miss Luckie, who seemed loth to quit her subject, "the only thing that troubles me is, that I am afraid we can't have anything much of a spread at the wedding. You see poor dear old Mrs. Grey's terrible state of health quite precludes any attempt at splendor. And I do so dote on a pretty wedding. From such a magnificent old house too. Do you know there hasn't been a wedding from the Lodge for ninety years, and it would have rejoiced my heart to have seen everything in first-rate style. I expect Mrs. Scrymgeour will have the management, and I shall feel quite distressed if the occasion passes off with anything less than eight bridesmaids and a moire antique. But, dear me, I declare the band is coming back again; how soon the time slips away when one is chatting."

The orchestra filed into their places, and the music was resumed. The people listened with unabated, or, if possible, intenser interest. There was more of dramatic excitement in the second part of the Oratorio. Jael's deed of desperate daring, Deborah's triumphant ode, the dirge of the childless mother, and the jubilant chorus of a freed nation—these were grand subjects for a musician, and David had dealt nobly with them.

Scarcely were the last lingering tones of the concluding chorus hushed, when the pent-up enthusiasm of the people burst forth in acclamations, which seemed as if they would shake the building down. Surely never before had the good folks of St. Olave's allowed themselves to be so carried away by their feelings. Hats and handkerchiefs were waved, bouquets were thrown upon the orchestra—even staid old Cathedral dignitaries shared in the general excitement, and helped forward the applause with feet, hands, and voices. Thrice that night was David Bruce recalled upon the orchestra; and thrice, as he obeyed the summons, peals of greeting made the echoes of the old room ring again, and shook the air until the shot-torn banners that had hung motionless for centuries, quivered in every fold.

David Bruce stood very calmly amidst it all.

They had but given him his own place, and crowned him with the laurels his own toil had won. And those laurels were only dear to him because, wearing them, he might stand worthily side by side with Alice Grey.

When the tumult had somewhat ceased, he made his way down into the little private room behind the orchestra. Not private now though, for it was thronged with *dilettanti* noblemen and connoisseurs, who had come to congratulate the composer on his brilliant success. And dainty, white-gloved hands were held out for a touch of his, and there was a sheen of satin and flutter of lace as one courtly dame after another pressed forwards to solicit an introduction; and eyes that had erewhile turned scornfully away looked brightly into his, and lips once curled in contempt wore a smile most sweet and humble.

It was David Bruce's coronation night—he stood a king amongst them at last.

An hour later, he and Janet sat quietly together in the little parlor at Westwood. He was very pale and worn, but there was a happy smile upon his face—the smile of one who has toiled and triumphed, and rests now in the consciousness of victory. Janet sat by him, still in the dress she had worn at the Hall of Guild—black silk, with a single deep red rose that David had given her, fastened into the velvet knot which covered her hair behind. The most fastidious critic would scarcely have called Janet Bruce plain to-night, for the pride of a loving heart shone through her face, and that makes any one beautiful.

David would not have the lamp lighted, so they sat there in the clear red fire-light, he leaning back wearily in his great arm-chair. They were talking of his long waiting time, and the success which had crowned it at last. And, as very often when they were alone, they journeyed back again to the long-ago Perth days, to the old, old life which, behind this sudden sunshine of prosperity, seemed slipping farther and farther away. At last the talk wore itself out. Janet folded her hands on her knees and bent forward, gazing dreamily into the fire. David turned his head away from her, dreaming too.

Was it dreamlight or firelight that brightened all his face? Let him dream on, the waking will come in its own time and its own way.

The Minster bell struck one—a solitary sharp sound falling heavily upon the silence that had grown so deep between them. Janet heard it, and roused herself as if suddenly remembering something.

"Brother Davie, wake up."

"I was no asleep, Jean—only thinking."

"Well, then, I have got a piece of news to tell you."

"A piece of news! It is not often you happen on such a precious commodity. What is it about?"

"I suppose you mean *who* is it about. Our little friend Alice Grey is going to be married."

David Bruce said nothing. His head drooped a little lower, that was all.

"Now, Davie, don't go to sleep again, until I get it all told. You know Mr. Scrymgeour—Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour—that very handsome gentleman with the long whiskers—the same, indeed, who brought Alice home from the pic-nic that night—well, she is going to marry him, and the wedding is to be this summer. I told you once that I thought as much: but you did not believe me. Won't she make a bonnie bride?"

"*Janet!*"

The voice startled her, it was so changed. He turned his face; its utter paleness, and the awful cramp of agony which had come into it, told her all.

"Davie, brother Davie; I did not know. I never thought of this."

"Hush, Janet—don't speak."

He leaned his cheek down upon her hand in the old tender way as she drew closer to him. Presently, she bent her head softly over his, and put her arm round him. But she spoke no word, for she knew that it was the valley of the shadow of death through which he was passing.

So, for another hour they sat, not a sigh, not a movement, breaking the stillness of that terrible vigil. At last, he raised his face; his sister could scarcely bear to look upon it.

"Janet," he said, "I never told her anything. She has done me no wrong. I am sair weary now. Good night."

He stooped down and kissed her. His hands were damp and trembling, and the lips which touched her own quite cold. So they parted, and that was the last time for many and many a day that the name of Alice Grey was spoken between them.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE Festival was over. The springtide of excitement rolled slowly back, only a bit of tangled drift here and there betokening how high it had risen. The morning after the triumphant performance of "Jael," a detachment of charwomen took possession of the Hall of Guild and restored it to pristine neatness. They swept away the withered bouquets with which the orchestra was strewed; they tore down the evergreen wreaths which decorated the gallery front—reserving a few leaves, perhaps, for the flavoring of custards—and swathed the statuary in white canvas shrouds until they looked like so many uncoffined corpses waiting for the rites of burial.

Any one going down the street of St. Olave's a week after the last great day of the Festival, would not have suspected that anything remarkable had occurred in the place. Except the newly-painted houses—and even these were beginning to lose their freshness—nothing remained to tell the story of departed splendor. The bristling rainbow-tinted brocades, the flounced silks, the zephyry muslins, disappeared from the High Street shops, and their places were supplied by bales of huckaback toweling, or webs of linen, stout and strong for family use. Careful housekeepers put their best china away for a three years' nap, locked up the seldom-used linen which had been put into requisition for chance lodgers, and betook themselves to the reckoning of their profits.

The Westwood people, too, went back to the old track.

There is a supreme moment in every human life; a grand crisis of suffering, which comes once and no more, a fateful conflict, in which the whole nerve and vigor of our being is put to the test, wherein, for a while, we struggle madly, ineffectually; then, blinded, baffled, overwhelmed, lie down and say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" After this there comes to us a new life. The open vision is granted, the scales fall from our eyes; hand in hand with God, companied by angels, guarded by the unseen presence of spiritual ministrants, the rest of the way is travelled.

To such a crisis as this, David Bruce had come, and the scar of it staid with him all through life. To him, though, came the rest; the open vision was given, and room made for him in the grand company of those who have become perfect through suffering. After that terrible night all went on quietly as ever at Westwood, none but Janet knowing the great struggle which had been over-past.

The relationship between David and Janet Bruce was a singular one. It showed how two human souls may dwell together in calm, quiet, unchanging friendliness, yet without the slightest interpenetration—always touching but never mingling. There is a chemistry of mind as well as of matter. Like rushes towards like in the world of spirit. Some minds may touch for years—for a lifetime—but parting at last each is as perfect and self-existent as the different colored grains of sand that have been tossing together side by side for centuries on the ocean shore. Others, by some sort of heavenly alchemy, blend at once and for ever. No time nor chance can sunder them, nor even death itself break, except for a little season, the eternal bond that girds them. David and Janet were, or, through the education of circumstances, had become, types of two natures, which, though they may blend in perfect tenderness and charity, can never interpenetrate each other.

But in this great sorrow that had come upon him, Janet clung to David Bruce with grave, sweet sisterliness; and though, after that bitter night in which one single lightning flash of emotion revealed the great deep that lay beneath, no word of sympathy was ever spoken between them, though over all the past there lay the veil of sacred, unbroken silence, still the thousand little tendernesses of home life were exchanged more reverently; and if they lacked communion of thought, the communion of kind deeds never failed. Little by little, when the first bewilderment of the blow had passed away, outward life for those two became again almost what it used to be—like one of those clear, deep, rock-girt mountain tarns, which sleep on dark and calm alike beneath July sunshine or the rack and storm of winter.

Janet thought her brother might forget. Fame, success, hard work, the new interests that added social position gathered round him—these she hoped would scatter away the ashes of the old love and leave the altar of his heart empty again, if not for new flames to kindle there, at least for the steady glow of home peace to burn on unquenched. So that, although for both of them the brightness of life had been dimmed, some of its quietness might still remain, and by-and-by more than a little of its peace.

But she misunderstood him. St. Olave's could be no home to David Bruce so long as Alice Grey was there. Whilst in his sorrow there was no sting of wounded pride, no bitterness of the chafed vanity over which little natures fret and worry, still it was hard to weary through day after day of a life from which all the sunlight had died out; to toil through old accustomed duties that had no longer any spring or freshness in them; to remember only, where once he had hoped. And so, when a week or two after the St. Olave's Festival, there came an invitation for him to go over and conduct his Oratorio at the approaching grand Musical Commemoration of Munich, he accepted it. From Munich he determined to go to Berlin, Leipsic, Cologne, and then to Italy and Switzerland, not returning to England until autumn, when St. Olave's would be Alice Grey's home no longer. He thought, if his present success continued, of leaving Westwood entirely and going back to Scotland. He knew, though Janet never said so, her heart was with the heather and the blue-bell still. A few months' hard work at his profession would enable him to reclaim the Court House from the stranger hands into which it had fallen. Then he might give back to his sister their old home with all its memories and belongings; and whilst he devoted himself more completely than ever to his life work, that solitary year at St. Olave's, with its brilliant lights and blasting shadows, might be quietly laid away.

Not forgotten. God forbid that any true man should ever forget, or wish to forget, the love which, though it has left him nothing but sorrow, was once sent by God to bind its golden tendrils round his soul and lift him nearer heaven.

Alice could never be forgotten. Lost, parted from him by a gulf wider far than death, still her name could never die out from his heart, nor be in it other than a thought of purity and tenderness.

So David Bruce's coronation-day passed away, giving him, besides the laurel wreath of glory, that other and sometimes nobler crown of thorns which is never wanting in the regalia of God's royal children. He wore it very calmly, and the world, looking only at the shining leaves above, never knew that it was there.

Many a one, with beating heart and kindling eye, sets off in life's bright morning time to climb the mountain-top of some lofty purpose or great hope, thinking from its height to gain vast outlooks of delight. But even whilst he climbs, the shadows of evening fall, and when at last he gains the summit, there lies all round and above him nothing but the darkness of night, through which one by one the holy stars come out and shine. Yet let him not turn back in utter hopelessness. Better far that he should wait patiently for the sun that shall rise ere long. For the morning comes to us all, even as the night does.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DAVID BRUCE could not put the German Ocean between him and the old life so speedily as he wished. A few days after the Festival, he resigned his post as organist of St. Olave's, greatly to the concern of the Dean and Chapter, who were building much on the *éclat* their Cathedral services would win from the superintendence of so distinguished a musician. His engagement was binding, however, for a year, and there wanted several weeks yet to the expiration of this term of agreement. So, morning after morning, while the choir was thronged with strangers who came from all parts to hear his wonderful music, Mr. Bruce still took his accustomed place in the little oaken carved organ-pew which Alice's presence had consecrated evermore. And as he turned over the musty old manuscripts and brown, worm-eaten folios of chants, there came before him her sweet girl face with its upward look of reverence and wonder; just as he remembered it months and months ago in the sunshine of that early July morning.

But they never met. He looked seldom, and only by chance, into Mistress Amiel Grey's curtained pew, and took care never to quit his place until the last lingering listener had left the choir. Often after service was over he would pace the long echoing galleries for hours together, gatheiring up thoughts for new music, or reading over page after page of old cathedral anthems whose grand harmonies were to him what books are to the learned. And so he tried to lull for a little while the memories that would not sleep.

At home he was tender and kind as ever. No one in that little household was chilled by any shadow which had come over his sunshine. None found his words less friendly, or missed in his presence the charm of the old strong protecting faithfulness. Only weak natures are marred and maimed by sorrow. Disappointment is to a noble soul what cold water is to burning metal; it strengthens, tempers, intensifies, but never destroys. He was still the home-stay, the true-hearted brother, the gentle master, the trusty friend. And day by day the home at Westwood, utterly shorn as it was of happiness or joy, became more and more sheltered by deepening peace, the balm which sinless sorrow always leaves. Janet had won that peace long ago; over David's heart it was rising too; and even Mrs. Edenall, out of sorrow not sinless but conquered, now seemed to be slowly passing into rest.

David Bruce would scarcely have left his sister but for the great change that had come over Mrs. Edenall. She wearied them no longer by her restless, excited ways. The mainspring of passion seemed to have run itself down at last, and the emotional part of her nature lay still. She was quiet, docile as a child. Silent as ever, though, and speaking no word of the great deep past, with all its possible grief and guilt; but it was only the silence of penitence now, not of pride. One could scarcely have known her for the same, but that, at rare intervals, there flashed forth from her eyes a gleam of the old wild light, showing that far away down, the volcanic intensity of her nature was still smouldering, and might once more break forth again.

Janet offered no opposition to her brother's departure. Her meek patient face just grew a shade paler when he told her, a few days after the Festival, what he had determined to do.

"I shall be sair vexed to lose you, brother Davie," she said, in their old tender-hearted country speech, to which even yet Mrs. Edenall always listened with a sort of reverent sadness, "but I'll no keep ye back;" and then with one close hand-clasp she stole away from him, to bear her sorrow as best she might, alone.

Janet was very self-forgetting. Sacrifice had long ago become, not the accident but the rule of her life. All that she had to give was given to this brother of hers, and all of pain that the giving compelled was borne in silence. Weary as any future without him must be, she was glad, and even thankful, for a change which might sever the present from the past, and set him in the midst of a new life, unblemished by the haunting remembrances that could never be quite blotted out from Westwood. And so, when the crush and excitement of the Festival had passed away, instead of settling down to the years of unbroken home peace to which she had once looked, she bravely gathered together her brother's belongings, and prepared for a parting that might last through both their lives.

Alice waited day by day, wondering that Mr. Bruce never came to the Old Lodge. Perhaps six months ago her impatience might have overstepped the limits of St. Olave's etiquette, and setting its maxims at defiance she might have gone to Westwood on her own account. But under the able tuition of Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour, Alice had taken on a little of the Close family tone. There was gathering round her a slight crust of hauteur, the commencement of that social petrifaction, which any one living long enough beneath the dropping-well of St. Olave's conventions, could not fail to experience.

The Archdeacon's widow saw this, and rejoiced in it. It was, to her, the earnest of that serene self-possession and full rounded dignity which would sit so well on the future Bishop's lady. And as little by little she noted how the young figure drew itself up with more queenly grace, and the girlish head learned to wear its cornet of brown curls with more of womanly pride, she congratulated herself on the rare penetration Cuthbert had evinced by selecting a partner in whom beauty, breeding, birth and fortune were so admirably united.

And so the time wore on. Shortly after his return from Brighton, Mr. Scrymgeour was presented to the living of Grassthorpe, a little village about five miles from St. Olave's, and for the last month Mrs. Scrymgeour had been flitting backwards and forwards from Chapter Court to her nephew's Rectory, superintending workmen, purchasing furniture, unpacking plate, linen, and china, and initiating Cuthbert into the art of independent housekeeping.

She was very anxious now to expedite his marriage. True, the income of the Rectory was only two hundred, rather a small share for a gentleman to contribute whose bride was to bring him a dowry of fifty thousand at the least. But Cuthbert was not proud, at least he had not that pride which keeps a man from living on his wife's money, and enjoying it too. He would give her position, and she would supply the means of sustaining that position; a very fair exchange, as Mrs. Scrymgeour decided, and we hope no one will question the perfect justice of the decision.

Besides, she had other reasons for pushing on the match. Alice was growing very charming. Her unformed nursery ways once worn off by contact with society, she had ripened into an elegant and fascinating woman, the object of much admiration—sometimes more than admiration. A swarm of butterfly cavaliers hovered about her wherever she went, some attracted by her beauty, some by her graceful manners, all by her wealth; and the sooner Cuthbert caged his pet-bird the better. Alice was only young, not very stable, quite open to the delicate compliments of men who knew how to offer them as elegantly as Mr. Scrymgeour himself. Mrs. Scrymgeour had discrimination enough to see that Alice's love for Cuthbert was not of that quiet, deep, overmastering sort which scorns rivalry, and holds faithful even to the death.

She was very fond of him, and just lived on his caresses, and so long as no one pleased her fancy better, she would cling to him; but would it not be safer to have the thing settled?—very much safer.

The only obstruction was Mistress Amiel Grey, and Miss Luckie had learned to adapt herself so skilfully to the old lady's needs, that there was no longer any pressing necessity for Alice to sacrifice her prospects to home duties. Aunt Amiel still lived on in that unconscious soul slumber which had come over her five months ago. No gleam of returning intelligence had ever broken through it. Dr. Greenwood told them she might live for years and years before the great and final change came, or it might overtake her at any moment. At all events, there was not the remotest possibility of her ever recovering so far as to perceive any alteration that might be made in the arrangements of the household, or to suffer from the absence of her niece.

Alice's loving care had removed all traces of sickness from the cheerful little room where Aunt Amiel passed the chief part of her time. She would not even have any change made in the dress or appearance of her aunt that might suggest ill-health. Mrs. Grey still wore the loose robe of soft, glossy, black satin, and kerchief of clear starched muslin, which used to be her costume when she was able to move about. Morning by morning, Alice used to smooth down the silvery hair under the old-fashioned widow's cap, and adjust the cambric ruffles over the white hands that clasped each other so patiently. One might have thought, to see Aunt Amiel reclining in her large crimson-cushioned couch chair, that she had but fallen into some pleasant reverie—that by-and-by the hands would drop from their peaceful clasp, and the eyes lose that dim vacant look, and the set, never changing smile fade back again into an ordinary work-a-day expression.

And, indeed, the waking was near, much nearer than any of them thought.

CHAPTER XL.

THE time was towards the end of April. There had been sunshine for several days, and the lilac buds in the Lodge garden, eager to escape from their long wintry prison, had burst forth into a flush of dainty green. But the Close elm trees, sturdy old veterans who knew by experience how surely April sunshine is followed by April frost, still kept their leafy treasures under watch and ward, only putting out here and there a tiny little bud, which contrasted brightly enough with their gnarled and rugged black trunks.

Alice sat by the oriel window alone, for Miss Luckie had got a week's reprieve from household duties to visit some friends at a distance. But the young girl's thoughts were far enough away from the garden or its greenery. Her head was bent down over a piece of work she held in her hand, and smiles came and went like gleams of sunshine upon her face. The work told its own story. It was a pair of clergyman's bands, of the finest silkiest cambric. Cuthbert Scrymgeour was to wear them when he preached his first sermon at Grassthorpe on the next Sunday. He had promised to come over very early in the morning, and drive Alice and Mrs. Scrymgeour out to the rectory for the day.

It was Alice's first visit to her future home, and many were the wondering thoughts that thronged over her as she pictured what it would be like. But no thought of the duties that belonged to her life, no prayer for strength to do them, mingled with the gushing smile that as she worked grew deeper on her face. She neared the portals of coming womanhood as most young women do, thinking only of the flowers which hang upon its threshold, never of the beaten track, very unflowery often, that stretches out beyond. She had a dim, misty sort of notion about clothing clubs and flannel petticoats, as in some way connected with the more prominent responsibilities of the female pastorate; and behind these loomed others quite as misty, touching the preparation of jelly and broth. These had been suggested to her by a little manual, very excellent in its way, entitled, "Hints to the Wives of Clergymen," which Mrs. Scrymgeour had given to her with a great deal of sound and judicious advice soon after her engagement with Cuthbert. Alice blushed down to her finger ends when the book was presented, and as soon as she had the chance, darted away to her own room to dip into its contents.

One chapter treated of sick visitation and the making of jelly. Alice's education in both these branches had been considerably neglected, and feeling that she was quite incompetent to undertake the duties of a pastor's wife until she could make tempting dishes for ill people, she determined to set to work at once. She put her curls behind her ears, tied a coquettish little pink apron over her silk dress, and went to consult with Simmons, who generously placed the still-room and its contents at her disposal. The result was, that after slopping away nearly half a bottle of sherry and using up a whole packet of the best isinglass, the bewitching young amateur was fain to retire from the contest; the pink apron found its way, in a somewhat advanced stage of stickiness, to the wash-tub, and the jelly was consigned to a receptable for miscellaneous odds and ends. So ended Alice's curriculum in the culinary department; but she consoled herself by a vague idea that when matrimonial duties did come to her share, a capacity for their fulfilment would somehow be vouchsafed.

She was still sitting there at the oriel window—not working though, for her hands were crossed upon her lap and her eyelids bent down until their long lashes just skimmed her rosy cheeks—when the door opened and Mrs. Cromarty came in.

"Miss Alice."

But that waking dream was too pleasant for words so low spoken as Mrs. Cromarty's to disturb it. She came slowly across the long room and laid her hand on Alice's shoulder.

"Miss Alice, I think you'll need to come with me. There's a change upon the mistress."

There was no tremor in the voice, its tones were very calm and low. Alice started, but not with fear. Unconsciously holding the work in her fingers, and with that pleasant smile still lingering on her lips, she followed Mrs. Cromarty up the wide oaken staircase to Mrs. Grey's room.

Aunt Amiel's face was deadly pale; the hands, so long motionless, twitched nervously at the crimson wrap which was thrown round her; her eyes had lost that placid, vacant gaze, and wandered restlessly round. Alice dropped her work and sprang across the room to her aunt's side.

"Oh, Aunt Amiel, what is it? Do you want anything; can I help you?"

No answer, but only that searching bewildered gaze. By-and-by the features became fearfully distorted, and the whole frame quivered as if convulsed. Alice could not bear the sight, and crouching on the floor, hid her face in the folds of Aunt Amiel's dress. Poor child, she knew little as yet of suffering or death.

"It was that warned me first," said Mrs. Cromarty, who stood by the couch, supporting her Mistress with one arm, whilst the other was held round the half fainting girl. "I've sent for Dr. Greenwood, Miss Alice; he'll soon be here, and then, please God, he'll be able to do something to ease her."

He came, but was powerless to help them in that time of need. He prescribed a few simple alleviations, and then—very gently, for he feared alarming Alice—told them that the end had come, that a few hours more or less was all of life that remained to Mistress Amiel Grey. Alice, stunned and bewildered, scarcely seemed to hear his words, certainly she did not heed them. As Dr. Greenwood was leaving the room he beckoned to Mrs. Cromarty to follow him.

"You have been in Mrs. Grey's service some time, and know more of her affairs perhaps than Miss Alice. Has she any friends who are empowered to act as guardians to her niece—relatives, you understand?"

"I can't say, Sir, for certain. Mistress was always shy of speaking about Miss Alice, but I've heard her say as much as that she meant to leave her the property; and indeed you know, Sir, there's none nearer kin to her than Miss Alice."

"That is what I wished to know. Frequently in cases of this kind the faculties revive for a short time before death, and it is important that in case Mrs. Grey should be able to converse intelligibly, her friends may be at hand to receive any instructions respecting her niece."

Mrs. Cromarty thought awhile.

"The Mistress has overlived most of her people, Sir, and I never heard her speak of no kith or kin, let alone a cousin who serves with the army in foreign parts. He's a captain, Sir, I don't recollect his name, but now that you mention it I do remember her saying afore she was took with the stroke, that he would be back again soon."

"Miss Grey has no brothers, I suppose, no parents who can act for her."

"Not as I know on. She came here a baby a bit after I engaged housekeeper to the Mistress, and I never heard no word of nobody belonging to her that I can tell of. Mistress Grey was shy, very, about her relations, but I take it she's a orphan!"

"Most likely. Of course Mrs. Grey's affairs will be properly settled; she was always a woman of method and prudence. The Scrymgeours should be informed of this attack."

"I've sent to 'em, Sir."

"Then all has been done that can be done. I will come again in an hour."

Mrs. Cromarty came back. She threw a light silk handkerchief over Mrs. Grey's face, that when Alice looked again she might not be startled by the fearful contortions which from time to time passed over it.

"What does Mr. Greenwood say, Mrs. Cromarty?"

"The end's nigh at hand, darling. It's the Master's will, and we can't go agen it. Let us ask Him to send her a peaceful rest, for it's hard struggling with her now."

Mrs. Cromarty knelt and prayed. Many a time her prayers had companied departing souls to heaven's gate and fallen like a benediction on the lonely watchers who were left behind. But the dying one heard them not now. The last death struggle had seized her. She sprang forward with a convulsive start, and the handkerchief fell from her face, revealing her features cramped and contorted as if in violent agony. Then the spasm passed away, and she fell back again upon the couch, breathing heavily and at long intervals.

Alice still knelt by her. It was pitiable to see her helpless sorrow. For one moment, in that death throe, she caught a glimpse of her aunt's face. Its memory staid with her to her dying day. Then amidst the tumult and distraction of her thoughts, came the remembrance of him whose name, though it might be forgotten in time of joy, rose always as a presence of comfort in time of need, and she sobbed out:—

"Send for Mr. Bruce."

So they sent for him. Cuthbert Scrymgeour was no favorite of Mrs. Cromarty's. With the clairvoyance of a purely simple and religious nature, she pierced through the outer wrappings of elegance and refinement to the deep selfishness which lay beneath. She was glad for him not to be there, glad that in this deep sorrow Alice's thoughts should turn to David Bruce for rest and solace.

Lettice was despatched to the Cathedral to meet him as he came out from afternoon service. She took her place by the little door which led to the organ stair, and then remembering that he often staid behind and played after the choristers had dispersed, she went up into his pew. He was just accompanying the versicles that follow the Creed. He did not notice her; amateur musicians used often to come into the organ pew whilst the service was going on, and then steal quietly out again, without speaking to him. When the last response was finished, she went up to him. He was standing to make some alteration in the organ stops, and did not see her until she was close upon him.

"Please sir, Mistress Amiel Grey is dying, and Miss Alice has sent for you."

David Bruce staggered, as if a sudden blow had come upon him; the place seemed to reel round and round, and he clutched nervously at the low projecting bosses of the oaken work to keep himself from falling. Ah! people may talk of forgetting, but for some men memory never dies. Lettice's words showed him how slight as yet was the little film of quiet which had gathered over his life. He could answer not a word.

"Yes, sir," said Lettice, seeing the look of pain upon his face, "she was took for death

about half-an-hour ago, and seems to suffer awful. Poor Miss Alice is dreadful scared, she's never been used to see illness, and she's got no one to look to but you, for Miss Luckie is away, and the folks from Chapter Court is all out at Grassthorpe."

That name gave David strength to speak.

"Tell Miss Grey I will come; and stay, Lettice, perhaps you had better go on to Westwood; my sister might be of use."

That was all he said, and it was spoken in a short, quick, abrupt way, with the harsh, rasping tone of one who speaks in great suffering. Not a word of sympathy or sorrow, not even a single question.

"Laws what a quiet man!" said Lettice to herself, as she threaded her way down the narrow stair. "I never seed such a quiet man in all my life. He don't look to have got no feelings in him at all. He ain't half so sweet as the gentleman young missis is going to get."

When she had gone, David pressed his hands tightly over his face for a moment or two. Then he locked the organ, and leaving the choristers to perform the remainder of the Amens on their own responsibility, he stole away down the silent nave, darkening now in the April twilight, and across the Close to the secluded garden of the Old Lodge. He had never entered it since that evening nine months ago, when he stood beneath the window listening to Alice Grey, as she played the solo music of "Jael." But there was no time to think of that now. Mrs. Cromarty met him at the door. There were tears glistening in her dark deep eyes, and womanly tenderness, the tenderness which can both sustain and sympathize, softened the lines of her rugged face.

"I'm glad you're come, Sir. She's wearied sadly for you. I don't mean Mistress Amiel Grey, but poor Miss Alice. She's just done nothing but moan, when will Mr. Bruce come? since I sent Lettice. Him as ought to comfort her is away, but if he was here, I don't think he'd be much hand. It's only them as has met sorrow theirselves, Sir, as can teach others to bear it. This way, please."

She left him in the doorway of the room where Mistress Amiel Grey lay. Alice was kneeling by her aunt's side, her head resting wearily on the cushions, her whole figure sunk into the abandonment of hopelessness.

At the sight of her, pale and suffering, a rush of tenderness almost overpowered David Bruce. His first impulse was to spring forward and take her to her own place, his faithful, unchanging heart. And well would it have been for Alice could he have done so. But before the impulse had time to shape itself into action, his eye fell upon her piece of work, the cambric bands which she had dropped on the carpet. They spoke of all that lay between him and Alice Grey. He was himself again, calm, quiet, self-possessed. But he could not be cold. Alice had done him no wrong, even though she had shadowed all his life. There can be no bitterness in a true and noble heart. He went up to her and took in his own the hand that hung down so listlessly.

"Alice, you sent for me. I have come."

She turned and nestled her cold white cheek to his shoulder as he stooped over her; there was rest in his presence. She kept his hand held fast in hers, as though the very touch brought comfort, and for long they stood together, keeping silent watch over the dying.

"Alice!"

The young girl started, and bent eagerly forward. It was the voice, the kind, well-remembered voice, hushed so long. The angel of death had come, but, ere he bid the soul away, he suffered it to look once more through the window of its earthly tenement.

"Alice, my little Alice; my little child that came to me so long ago."

The suffering had all passed away. Aunt Amiel's face was still, quite still, and an answering glance of affection—deep, yearning, unchanging affection, repaid Alice's fond kiss.

Just then the Cathedral bells began to ring. It was Wednesday, the practising evening. Very harshly their clangor smote upon the stillness and peace of that room. As she caught the sound of them, Aunt Amiel looked perplexed, then pained; then, as if taking up the train of thought which had been upon her mind ere it fell into that long slumber, she said, quite clearly and distinctly—

"Those are the bells of Brandon Church. They must not ring; it was not a legal marriage. Douglas Ramsay knew it was not a proper marriage—he deceived her; poor Marian!"

David set his lips together, and a mingled look of anger and sorrow came into his face, but he said nothing. Mrs. Grey paused, then began again—

"My poor child, why did they send her away? Tell the bells to stop ringing. Is that Mr. Ramsay? Will he take care of her? The bells, the bells, stop ringing——"

She leaned back as if quite exhausted.

"What is she saying, Alice?" asked David Bruce.

"I believe she is wandering. Just before the stroke came she was saying something about bells ringing; it must be the same thought working in her mind now."

David went out to speak to Mrs. Cromarty, who was in the next room, and presently the bells ceased. One of the ringers remained behind, though. There was no need for merry peals that night, but a dirge would be wanted ere long, and he stayed to toll it.

A messenger had been despatched to Grassthorpe, but ere he arrived, that other messenger, who loiters never on any errand of his, reached the Old Lodge. Aunt Amiel died very calmly. She spoke no more after those few wandering sentences. By-and-by a look of strange, startled awe passed over her face; she opened her eyes, bright as with glory shining down upon them, then there were a few shortening breaths, and all was over.

"Aunt Amiel! oh, Aunt Amiel!" sobbed Alice, but there was neither voice nor answer; only the steadfast calm of death sealing the pale features.

She tried to lift herself up, and then fell weeping into David Bruce's arms. He held her there quietly for awhile, then half led, half carried her to the oriel room, and laid her upon the sofa. There he would have left her, but she clung to him.

"Stay, Mr. Bruce, do stay! I have no one

but you—don't leave me," and she clasped his hands tightly in hers.

It was a sad thing to do, but he stayed.

Sitting down by her, he soothed her with good words, kind words, tender, brotherly words, that had never come near the fire at his heart. Listening to them, Alice grew still. She drooped her head upon his arm, and, presently, spent with excitement and grief, fell into a troubled sleep, her hand still clinging to his.

They were together thus, when his sister came into the room. Janet started; she had not thought to find them so, but one look at the stern, almost awful fixedness of David Bruce's face, told her the truth. No content was there, but only the calm of desperate endurance. He called her; his voice sounded so strange.

"Janet, come here."

She came.

"Take my place, sister—it is no place for me. Stay with her; she is very lonely. They—the people from Grassthorpe—have not come."

He drew his hand from Alice's clasp, and Janet placed hers there. Just then the tramp of horses' feet was heard upon the gravel sweep of the Close, and soon Cuthbert Scrymgeour's rich musical tones rang through the hall. With one long, wistful, yearning look at Alice, which Janet, bending over her, did not notice, David Bruce left the Old Lodge, never to enter it any more.

Three days later he was on his way to Munich.

CHAPTER XLI.

Mistress Amiel Grey was buried with great state and solemnity. The Archdeacon's widow, who charged herself with the ordering of the proceedings, determined that everything should comport with the high position of the deceased. The great Cathedral bell tolled at intervals throughout the day, the blinds of the grey, grim-looking old houses were drawn as the procession wound slowly through the Close, and by order of the Dean a special funeral service was performed at the Cathedral. The cortège, though made as imposing as possible, was of necessity small. Mrs. Grey had outlived nearly all her own family, and for the last few years, since Alice grew up into girlhood, she had kept herself in such strict seclusion that most of her friends had lost sight of her.

Cuthbert Scrymgeour acted as chief mourner, thus confirming the report which had been afloat for some time concerning his engagement to Alice. After this, it was understood as a matter of course, and commented upon accordingly.

Mistress Amiel Grey had left no will, at least none could be found. Shortly before her seizure she sent for the solicitor who usually transacted her business, but he was from home at the time, and when he returned she was unable to attend to the disposition of her affairs. Neither was anyone appointed to act in behalf of Alice until she came of age.

Mrs. Grey's only surviving relative was an elderly gentleman of high position, who had been for the last twenty years serving with his regiment in India. The families had never held any intercourse with each other, and it was by the merest accident that Miss Luckie, a few weeks before, had seen in the "*Times*" a notice of the embarkation of Captain Clay's regiment for England. It was to land in July. Until then, Mrs. Scrymgeour decided that Alice should remain at the Old Lodge, under the guardianship of Miss Luckie. Immediately upon Captain Clay's return, pecuniary matters could be arranged, settlements could be made, trustees appointed, and then the long-wished for marriage solemnized with such splendor as was consistent with circumstances. She had even determed in her own mind the disposition of matters at the Old Lodge after the wedding; which servants were to be retained, which dismissed; what articles of furniture removed to Grassthorpe and what disposed of. She and Cuthbert had also agreed between themselves that the Old Lodge should be let for a few years, until he obtained minor Cathedral preferment, when it would make a convenient home for them previous to going into the Residence, which was at present the ante-penultimate stage of Mrs. Scrymgeour's ecclesiastical ambition.

Alice got over the shock of her aunt's death much better than anyone expected. Hers was one of those slender, fragile natures, which though they bend to every passing breeze of sorrow soon regain their elasticity. As yet the real depths of her being had never been stirred; she had neither enjoyed nor suffered with her whole soul. And indeed, when the first shock of Mrs. Grey's death was over, the change in the household was not very apparent. Miss Luckie continued her post of comptroller-general, Mrs. Cromarty remained as under-housekeeper, the whole establishment was kept up in the old style, not one of the servants being dismissed, or any new arrangements introduced.

As the warm weather drew on, Lettice and Colin were sent to Norlands to prepare the cottage for summer visits. Alice loved the country, and now that no one claimed her presence at the Old Lodge, she began to spend much of her time there. Occasionally too, her betrothed, with the Archdeacon's widow to play propriety, would drive over for the evening, or she beguiled Miss Bruce away from the quiet little Westwood home to ramble with her to the Norlands tower, and follow the windings of the ravine up to the Lynne waterfall, a couple of miles away. Here they would sit for hours together, talking—it was always Alice who began the conversation—about David Bruce. Sometimes Janet used to read her one of his letters, describing continental life and manners, or she would bring some of the musical journals, and show Alice the notices of David Bruce the "distinguished Scottish composer," as he was called, and Alice listened with shy, wondering delight to his praise. But Janet passed over the pages where he spoke of dreariness and longing, of the memories which no change could lull, of the loneliness which all the world's praise could not break, but only strengthen.

Since that sorrowful night of Aunt Amiel's death, when Alice waking in the oriel room, met Miss Bruce's patient face bending over her, the two had been drawn closer together. Janet sometimes unconsciously shrunk from her friends in their prosperity, but if need of any kind overtook them, her heart unburdened all its

wealth of tender loving-kindness. So as the year wore on, and spring evenings lengthened out, Alice came often to Westwood, not indeed bringing with her now, as once she did, the sunshine of unclouded gladness, yet somehow brightening that quiet household with a certain balmy cheerfulness which seemed to shrine her round wherever she went.

Mrs. Edenall scarcely ever joined in their conversations. Since the time of the Festival she had been gradually drooping. Her regal queenlike bearing was quite gone. When sometimes she slowly paced up and down the room, her tall figure bent and swayed like a reed. But she never complained. She would own to neither ache nor pain. Dr. Greenwood was consulted. He said it was simply a depressed state of the nervous system, arising from excitement or over-anxiety, and recommended change of air.

Leamington was suggested; Madeira; the South of France; but Mrs. Edenall with a touch of her old iron-strong firmness refused to go away.

"If I must die," she said, "I will die here at St. Olave's. I will leave you if you wish it, but not the old city. And Janet, when I do die, let them bury me near the tower at Norlands, you once told me it was a churchyard. I could lie very quietly there."

So she staid with them, for Janet was not the one to let a stranger pass from her threshold to die.

Mrs. Edenall did not suffer much. It seemed as if God, having sent peace to the poor weary spirit, was very gently loosening it from a world in which it had been so worn and tempest-tossed. Often Janet would gaze upon her face until its strange beauty almost melted her to tears. It had such a wan patient look now, strangely like that other face over which she had seen her brother bending on Mistress Amiel Grey's death night.

Ever since she heard of Mrs. Grey's death, Mrs. Edenall had been very tender towards Alice Grey. As she lay on the sofa during the long half-dark evenings of spring, she used silently to take the young girl's hand in hers and hold it for hours together, sometimes caressing it as it lay like a snow-flake on her black dress.

They were together there one evening in early May; Janet had left them for half an hour whilst she went to see a poor person in the neighborhood. It was not a very brilliant conversational opportunity. Just a stray word or two now and again they spoke, and then in the long intervals of silence watched how the grey evening fell and the shadows of firelight grew stronger in the little room.

Alice had drawn a foot-stool close up to the sofa and was leaning her head upon Mrs. Edenall's breast. The child had such pretty caressing ways; people who rarely betrayed any outward show of tenderness, used unconsciously to fondle her. She was a pleasant contrast to those violently self-sustained young ladies whom you would as soon think of caressing as of putting your arms round the neck of a cast-iron pillar and giving it a loving kiss. She never seemed quite content unless she was nestling close up to some one, and finding a resting-place for her little fingers in some friendly clasp.

"Alice," said Mrs. Edenall, as she stroked the soft curls that lay upon her dress, "you have such pretty hair. I noticed it the first time I ever saw you."

"Yes," and a bright flush flitted over Alice's face.

"Cuth—people generally tell me it is very nice. Mr. Bruce said once that those little bits peeping out under your comb were just the same color."

"Did he? Ah well, a long time ago I used to glory in my hair too. It was all like this," and Mrs. Edenall drew out one of the little golden brown tendrils which remained of her bygone treasures. Alice took hold of it and wound it over her fingers. As she did so, a strange shiver passed over her. She dropped it and began to smooth down the grey bands that shaded Mrs. Edenall's forehead.

"Did you have a great trouble, Mrs. Edenall, to make your hair go like that?"

"Yes, my child,"—once or twice Mrs. Edenall had called Alice, "my child." "I have had much trouble in my life, more I trust than ever you will have."

Their eyes met, with a wistful, searching, inter-communing gaze. Alice's, innocent and guileless, Mrs. Edenall's, heavy with long past memories, perhaps of sorrow, perhaps of sin. Alice was the first to break the after silence that fell between them.

"Miss Bruce told me once, that suffering was not so very bad if only we didn't do wrong too; and you know I think she has had a great deal of suffering."

Mrs. Edenall turned her head wearily away, and hid her face in the cushion to hide the tears which would force their way through the shut eyelids. Alice leaning upon her, felt a quiver run through the whole frame.

"Oh, Mrs. Edenall, are you ill?"

"No, Alice, not ill, but my head aches very much."

"Give me your handkerchief and I will get you some Eau de Cologne. Janet has some that Mr. Bruce brought from London. I know it will do you good."

Without waiting for a reply, she took up the little embroidered handkerchief which lay on the sofa, and ran away upstairs; presently she returned, laying it cool and damp and fragrant on Mrs. Edenall's heated forehead. As she did so, she noticed the device in the corner. It was a shield, embroidered in satin stitch, with a motto, and beneath, the name, "Marion Brandon." Alice read it out loud.

"Marion Brandon. Was that your name, Mrs. Edenall, before you were married?"

Mrs. Edenall lifted her hand quickly as though to seize the handkerchief away, then dropped it again. It mattered little now. The end was very near; a few weeks more and her maiden name, with all the shame she had brought upon it, would be forgotten for ever.

"Yes, my name was Marion Brandon. It is a good name." And as she said the words, something like a flash of pride lighted up her pale face, but only for a moment.

"Brandon, Brandon," said Alice, "surely I have heard that name before. Ah! I remember, poor Aunt Amiel said something about Brandon church just before she died. But you know she was wandering, because directly after that she

said something else about a little child, and some marriage that was not legal. Then her voice failed, and in a little while she died."

Alice paused for some time, trying to keep back the tears that came with the thought of that evening.

"Did you know my Aunt Amiel?" she said, by-and-by.

There was no answer. She asked the question again. But Mrs. Edenall had fainted.

CHAPTER XLII.

ALICE had as little notion of the management of fainting-fits as of the responsibilities of the female pastorate. But she did in her ignorance the best thing that could have been done. She ran out into the garden to seek Tibbie, leaving both parlor and hall doors wide open. The rush of cool air sweeping into the room revived Mrs. Edenall, and as Alice came back bringing Tibbie, she opened her eyes with a long, dreamy look of returning consciousness.

"It's just a dwamm," said Tibbie, pouring out a glass of cold water from the little ewer that stood on the window-seat. "Puir leddie, she's terrible frail the noo. Just sit by her and crack tull her a wee, Miss Alice, while the Mistress comes hame, and she'll no be lang."

Tibbie trotted back into the garden to finish weeding the lettuces. Mrs. Edenall did not seem inclined to talk any more; she just turned her face away, breathing heavily, as if in pain. In a few minutes Janet returned, and then Alice went home.

As soon as Mrs. Edenall was left alone, she took the handkerchief from her forehead and dropped it upon the fire. She watched it until every thread was consumed. The thick embroidery stitch in which the device was worked, withstood the flames longest, and for some seconds after the rest was crumbled to ash, the letters forming the name of Brandon smouldered upon the red embers. At last, letter by letter they shrivelled and fell into the flame, and then Mrs. Edenall stirred the fire together that no vestige of the ashes might remain.

The next morning Alice came again, partly to inquire after Mrs. Edenall, and partly to tell them of a pleasant plan which had formed itself in her kind little heart. She could scarcely wait to get through the customary greetings before she began to tell them about it.

"Janet," she said, "I have been thinking how nice it would be if you and Mrs. Edenall would come and stop at Norlands for a month or two. Just now the country looks so pretty, and I am sure it would do Mrs. Edenall a world of good to get away from here. You know Westwood is low rather. Do come, will you?"

But Janet did not answer directly. A good many domestic contingencies had to be taken into consideration. Alice went on, pressing her suit more earnestly. That she was sincere, her bright smile and eager look told plainly enough.

"You were saying you remember, not very long ago, that Tibbie wanted to go into Scotland, but you could not spare her away. Now she can go whilst you come to Norlands, and Lettice shall come down here now and then to see that the house is all right. Now, you will come, I'm sure."

Janet smiled. She did not wonder how those frank, girlish ways, that bright look, those soft guileless tones had sunk far down into her brother's heart. Truly Alice Grey was made to be loved, as flowers are made to bathe their fragrant cups in sunshine and dew.

"I would like fine to come to Norlands, Alice; it is a bonnie nook, and minds me of my own country. But I must not leave Mrs. Edenall, you know, and I am afraid she would be loth to move. I will go and ask her, though."

Mrs. Edenall came in. To Janet's surprise, she accepted the invitation at once. She even seemed eager to go, and the thought of it brought a faint tinge of color to her sunken cheeks. How different from the cold, haughty indifference with which, little more than six months ago, she had dropped her last invitation to Norlands.

Alice was all animation and eagerness. She would not leave until the arrangements were completed, and that day week fixed as the time for their visit to begin. And if matters could not be settled for Tibbie to get away into Scotland so soon, she was to come to Norlands too, and shut up the Westwood house altogether.

Alice's frank kindness had done them much good. Something of cheerfulness and then of bright anticipation came over them both as they prepared to leave their quiet, sombre little cottage, for the home in which such a hearty welcome waited them. Ah, had they known that Norlands held a grave for one of them, and that the living one should leave her all of earthly hope and longing there, how different it would have been!

Spring deepened into summer. There came evening skies of purple, and floods of yellow sunlight rolled over the wold hills, deepening as the day declined into crimson and grey. Janet and Mrs. Edenall had been at Norlands nearly six weeks. The wild hyacinths were blooming up in the orchard path when they went, the hedges were whitened over with snowflakes of scented hawthorn, and every passing breeze showered down upon the cottage garden a windfall of tiny little sycamore buds, or the feathery rose-tipped blossoms of the horse-chestnut. But now it was summer time, the weary, dusty summer, when flowers begin to look like gay ball dresses that have been over long worn, and thirsty leaves pant and flutter in the hot air.

As yet, no time was fixed for their departure. Janet often mentioned the subject, but Alice would never listen, and pressed them week after week to stay a little longer. The change was doing Mrs. Edenall much good. She scarcely seemed like the same woman who had come there so wan and worn and weary in the early spring time. Her step was firmer now, and with that had come back her erect queenly bearing. She could walk for hours together without failing; indeed sometimes she would spend the entire day in sauntering about the old tower and tracking out the different paths which led to it. Perhaps it might be that health would come back to her after all, and that the future might redeem the past, whatever that past had been. For with returning health there returned

none of the old pride. The light that shone through her eyes was quiet, like lamps gleaming from cathedral windows while hymns are chanted within. It seemed as if the wild fierce flames of those long ago memories were burning themselves out at last, and a new life, pure and holy, rising from their ashes.

The bond between her and Janet Bruce was a strange one. Each knew that the other had known great sorrow, a sorrow whose scar could never be healed or forgotten; but what that sorrow was, when and how it had come, was as yet untold. All through their long intercourse the past had been left untouched. They had never seen each other heart to heart. They were like two blind people walking the same road, holding each other's hands, listening to each other's voices, but never able to look into each other's eyes with that conscious communing glance wherein the whole soul reveals itself.

Alice often came to Norlands whilst they were there. She was very fond of bringing her bits of embroidery work, and making believe to be wonderfully industrious, as she sat by Janet's side in the little front room, or on the rustic seat under the elm tree. For awhile she would stitch away diligently enough, but long before a single leaf or bud was finished, the work dropped from her fingers, she would lay her head down in Janet's lap and begin to murmur out her innocent day dreams of happiness, looking up now and then for an answering smile, which Janet gave kindly, though not without a certain bitter feeling at her heart for the absent brother whose life these dreams had crossed.

David Bruce wrote no word yet about coming home. He had conducted his Oratorio with great success at Munich, Leipsic, Berlin and Cologne. His name stood side by side with those of the first musicians on the continent, and wealth seemed likely to follow in the wake of fame. He was in Italy now, visiting some of the great musical cities there. After spending some time in Rome and Venice, he intended to go to Switzerland and then return to Germany, where he would remain perhaps until far into the winter.

Alice's wedding was fixed to take place in August, as soon as possible after Captain Clay's return. Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour had the entire management of it, and she found Alice a most docile bride-elect. On account of the short time which had elapsed since Aunt Amiel's death, the wedding could not be so magnificent as Mrs. Scrymgeour wished; still everything was to be in first-rate style, as befitted the nuptials of two distinguished members of the Close families.

Alice had fixed upon her wedding dress, white glacé with trimmings of tulle and green frosted leaves. The bridesmaids, six in number, were to be in white tarlatan with violet sprigs, and wreaths to match. The ceremony was to be performed in St. Olave's Chapel of Ease by the Dean, and the bride given away by Dr. Hewlett, the present Canon-in-Residence. The young couple had not yet decided where to spend their honeymoon. Mrs. Scrymgeour leaned to Rome, as being *distingué* and suitable to ecclesiastical unions, but at that time of the year malaria stood in the way. Cuthbert would have enjoyed a spell of Paris pomp and gaiety, and Alice longed to spend the first bright days of her wedded life amidst the heathery mountains and ferny dells of Scotland.

"You know, Janet," she said, during one of these sunshiny summer afternoon talks, "I don't want gaiety or anything of that sort, but just to be quietly happy. And ever since you came here I have wanted to see those beautiful places you talk to me about. I should like to saunter over the Perth Inches and climb the hills of Kinnoul, and look for the shady lanes where the bluebells grow, that you and Mr. Bruce used to gather when you were children. Would not that be pleasanter now than Rome or Paris?"

Janet toyed mechanically with the curls that lay in her lap, and answered with half a sigh, half a smile. The smile was for Alice, the sigh for herself.

"And then, you know, we might go to the top of one of those great purple mountains; and I should ride on a little Shetland pony, and Cuthbert would hold the bridle, and we would have such pleasant talks. Oh, Janet, I hope we may go to Scotland!" And then the picture got too beautiful for words, and Alice finished it in a waking dream.

So the time wore on, until the middle of July. It was a sultry summer afternoon. The haymakers ceased their work and rested under the spreading trees, or beneath the blackberry hedges that grew so thick all round the Norlands meadows. Alice was spending the day at Chapter Court, with Cuthbert, who had come over from Grassthorpe. Mrs. Edenall had gone to the Roman tower; she often set off there quite early in the morning, taking books and work, and not returning until dusk. So Janet was left alone, with the exception of Lettice and Colin, who were having a cozy chat in the back yard.

There were only two sitting-rooms in Norlands Cottage. These both pointed to the west. One of them, which Mrs. Cromarty called the best parlor, was painted light blue, and hung with home-made curtains of fine netting, wrought by Mistress Amiel Grey in her younger days. It was furnished in the quaint, old-fashioned style one sees in country houses; corner cupboards, full of china; bowls of rose and lavender leaves; marvellous specimens of fancy work, in the shape of Rebeccas, and Elijahs, and Hagars; porcelain shepherdesses on the chimney-piece, and little round tables covered with shells or curious pebbles. The other room, where Janet sat now, was wainscotted, and had been furnished within the last few years, very simply, but in a more modern style than the best parlor. There was a pure, fresh, wholesome, country feel about both the rooms, an atmosphere of goodness and quietness. One might fancy that the house had no memories of evil about it, that those old walls, could they speak, would tell only of quiet domestic happiness and home peace.

There had been a gentle rain in the night, which freshened the worn-out flowers, and the scent of lavender, clove, pink, and honeysuckle came in now through the open window. For sound the far-off murmur of the little Luthen mingled with the flutter of leaves, or the solitary chirp of an idle sparrow answered the grave, measured monotone that came from the rookery in the elm tree at the corner of the cottage.

For more than an hour Janet had been reading in that room; then she began to knit, and, when she was tired of that too, she drew the white curtains over the lattice, and leaned back in her easy chair, thinking of the life that was and the life that might have been.

Who is it says that we all learn, sooner or later, to be thankful for our *might have beens?* It may be so, it must be so, but not always in this life. Some vexing problems find their solution even here, and of a few bitter griefs we learn to say, in earthly speech, "It is well." But the great *might have beens* wear their robes of mystery all through life, and not until eternity clears away the clouds of time shall we learn to thank God for them.

Very rarely did Janet Bruce think of her "*might have beens.*" It was her wisdom, as it is the wisdom of most people, to put them quietly away, waiting for clearer light to shine upon them. Only now and then, in the loneliness of unemployed leisure, their ghostly faces peered out from the past, and seemed to mock her as she looked upon them. She was roused from one of these sad-colored reveries by the distant tramp of footsteps on the narrow winding path that led up from the ravine. As she listened, the sound came nearer and nearer, and then she could hear several voices speaking in low, muffled tones.

She drew aside the window curtain to look into the garden. Four tall, strong, stalwart men, who seemed as if they might be haymakers, were just entering the little gate. They had made a sort of hammock of their fustian coats, and upon this they were carrying a man, who, from the care and tenderness with which they bore him, must have been very greatly injured.

Most women, sitting alone in their peaceful homes, would have trembled at such a sight, thinking surely that woe had chanced to some one near and dear to them. Janet, in her great loneliness, had none to tremble for. There was only one person in all the world whose death could pain her now, and David was far away. So she waited, with a face perhaps a little paler, but calm as ever.

Presently Lettice came tottering into the room, white and almost fainting.

"Oh! Miss Bruce," she said, "they've been and gone and brought a gentleman what's tumbled down the Norlands landslip and killed himself right out; leastways, he lies as if he was took for death, but the men says the breath's in him yet. Do tell them to take him on to St. Olave's, Ma'am; I'm clean beat out with fright, I am, Ma'am. I can't abear being nigh hand a dead body, and he'll be a corpse as sure as sure afore morning. Do let 'em take him back, Ma'am." And Lettice, who was a good-hearted girl, in a general way, but helpless as a baby in any time of real need, threw her apron over her head and burst into a fit of nervous crying.

"Hush, Lettice," Janet said, as she made the trembling girl sit down on the sofa, "we must do what we can for him. Wait here until I call you," and she went out.

The four men were standing with their burden in the little square entry. He lay perfectly motionless. A white handkerchief which they had taken out of his pocket was thrown over the face. The foremost of the men, a sturdy, honest-looking fellow, acted as spokesman for the rest.

"Very sorry, Ma'am, to trouble you, but we thought he'd die straight out if we trailed him to St. Olave's i' the drouth an' sunshine, an' we knowed Mistress Amiel Grey, bless her, were allers willing to help them as needed it, so we made bold to bring him here, being nigh hand."

"You did quite right. I will do what I can for him. Has he met with an accident?"

"'Deed, Ma'am, and he has, and an ugly one, too; this here's the way it happened, Ma'am. Me an' these here," the man jerked an below towards his companions, "was loadin' hay i' the meadow just t' other side the river, and I were forkin' a load up t' wagon, when we see'd a gentleman on horseback galloppin' as hard as he could go along the bridle road fra Norlands here. We called out to him to hold hard, for yon landslip's a mighty awk'ard place for them as isn't used to it. But he didn't take no heed, and afore we could any on us get across to stop him, it were all done. T' poor beast just gived a sort o' lollop an' slithered right away down wi' t' gentleman a holdin' on to him."

"It were a awful sight, Ma'am," continued the man; "but God Almighty knows we'd ha saved him if we could. Bill an' me came across and picked him up, and t' others fastened t' hoss up and comed after us, and we lugged him up the rocks best way we could."

"You had better bring him in here," said Janet, opening the door which led into the best parlor. "Stay, though, I will fetch something to put him upon."

Lettice was still sobbing hysterically into her apron, so Janet went up stairs herself and dragged down one after the other a couple of mattresses, which she placed on the middle of the floor with some blankets upon them. Then she fetched a pillow, and the injured man was laid carefully down.

He lay quite still, as if dead, and gave not the slightest sign of suffering. From his dress he appeared to be a gentleman. His coat, a dark grey tweed, was of the stylish cut which fashionable men wear; his linen was beautifully fine, though torn and soiled by the briars over which he had fallen. His neck was bare, as if the scarf or tie had been dragged off. One hand was gloved, on the other was a splendid seal ring of white stone. He was tall, and broad, and finely proportioned.

"I ax yer pardon, Ma'am," said one of the men, as Janet stooped to lift the handkerchief from the face, and he looked down upon her slight figure with a pitying sort of tenderness. "I'm feared he ain't much of a sight for ye to look at. He were mighty grewsome when we picked him up, and his face sort o' clicked and drawed itself. It won't do ye no good, Ma'am, to look at him, and we just covered him wi' this, 'cause we were feared if anybody catched sight on him they'd get a sort of turn. He was a awful weight to haul up. Bill an' me was almost beat out afore we'd got him half-way. I thought Bill would ha' gone into a swound."

"The doctor must be sent for first thing," said Janet. "Come into the kitchen and rest, and the boy shall go down to St. Olave's for him."

The men followed her out into the clean, old-fashioned kitchen, whilst Miss Bruce directed

Lettice, whose wits were slowly coming back again, to get some refreshment ready. Then she hunted up Colin, and told him to saddle Benjie and set off at once to St. Olave's to fetch Dr. Greenwood, or the nearest doctor that could be got. The four men were soon back again to their work. One of them kindly offered to stay with Miss Bruce until the doctor came.

"*She* don't seem to be no good nohow," he said, pointing towards the kitchen; "and ye're nobbut small yourself, ma'am, and it's sort o' fearsome like being nigh hand a man as may turn a corpus any moment. I ain't afeared o' accidents, ma'am, 'cause I've see'd a sight of 'em i' my time, and I'll sit by him an' welcome if ye like."

"You are very kind," Janet said, quietly, "but I am not afraid." So the men left.

Janet went back again for awhile to her old seat by the window, from which, half an hour ago, she had seen the sufferer brought in. But it seemed kinder, even though it could do him no good, to keep watch beside the stranger who had been so unexpectedly thrown upon her for help and protection. He was lying quite still, evidently insensible or dead. Not a movement stirred the white coverlid which she had spread over him; not a breath, that she could perceive, heaved the broad chest; his hands,—the ungloved one very white and smooth—hung listlessly down, not clenched or drawn as if in pain. Perhaps, even now, it might be only a body—nothing but a body—over which she was keeping watch.

She knelt down by him. Lettice was moving about the room, picking up some stalks of meadow grass which the men had trodden in with them; from time to time stealing terrified glances at the figure stretched prostrate on the floor.

After a few moments, Janet stooped down and slowly lifted the handkerchief from the pale face. There was a long pause.

"Lettice you can go away."

And awed by something in the tone of her mistress's voice, Lettice crept noiselessly out of the room.

So Janet Bruce and the man whose faithlessness had blighted all her life, met again.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Of that lonely watching time Janet never spoke to any one. It was lived between God and her own soul. But when it was over there was a strange light upon her face, as if from some angel presence which had but just departed.

The doctor came. Not Dr. Greenwood, but a stranger, a sharp dapper man, with a fussy address, a head that seemed to be somehow loose on his neck, and was always jerking about on invisible springs, twinkling little brown green eyes, and a voice that made its exit through his nose instead of travelling by the orthodox highway for the transmission of that organ.

Janet went into the entry to meet him. "Miss Bruce, I presume, Ma'am," said he, with a wave of the hand and a succession of spasmodic bows, "sister of the eminent composer of that name, formerly organist of the Cathedral; servant, Ma'am, with the greatest of satisfaction. Do not recognize me, perhaps, my name is Piflet; Marmaduke Piflet, medical practitioner, number Twenty-one, Little Back Priory Street, St. Olave's. I have come to undertake the management of a case which has taken place in your neighborhood. Serious case, Ma'am?—fit—accident—stroke? please introduce me to the patient, Ma'am."

Janet took him into the room where the injured man was lying, and related as briefly as she could the particulars of the accident as they were given to her by the laborer.

"Awkward spot that Norlands landslip, very awkward spot; ought to have been walled up by the Corporation years ago; shall write a letter about it to the '*St. Olave's Chronicle*' this week myself. Culpable neglect of the public safety, very culpable neglect. And now, Ma'am, with your permission we will consider what means can be put in requisition for the treatment of the case."

"Humph," continued the little man as he knelt on the mattress, and carefully scanned the patient's face, already settling into a ghastlier hue. "Not got to the terminus yet, but seems to be travelling that way by express train. Case of concussion of the brain, not apparently attended with severe external injuries except this," and Mr. Piflet pushed back the hair, revealing a wound on the temples from which the blood welled slowly out drop by drop.

"Don't recognize the face, Ma'am; lived in and about St. Olave's all my life and never saw it before to my personal recollection. Haven't thought, perhaps, of examining the dress to see if anything will clear up his identity?"

Janet replied that she had not.

"Of course, Ma'am, wouldn't like to disturb him. But you needn't have been afraid; he's got no more feeling about him than a dead sheep."

Mr. Piflet thrust his hand into one of the pockets of the coat; it contained nothing but a cigar case and the fellow glove to that which the injured man wore. Next he felt in the waistcoat pocket and brought out two or three cards which he scanned eagerly through his blue spectacles.

"New name this—Ramsay, Douglas Ramsay. Don't know any such person in this locality;—stranger most likely, Ma'am; tourist, I should say, coming down perhaps from the moors up above Norlands."

Mr. Piflet waited for an answer. Janet replied with a slight falter in her voice, that such was very likely to be the case.

"Turning faint, Ma'am, I perceive," said Mr. Piflet, looking up into Miss Bruce's pale face. "It's an unpleasant occurrence, and I'm sorry there didn't happen to be a public-house in the neighborhood, or anything of that sort to take him to. But he won't trouble you long, Ma'am, he won't trouble you long." And then Mr. Piflet proceeded to examine his patient.

"You will find me in the room opposite if anything should be wanted," said Janet, as she went out.

"All right, Ma'am. And if you allow me to recommend you a little stimulant, just a thimble full of brandy to exhilarate the nervous system.

Some ladies object to the use of alcoholic beverages, Ma'am," and there was a sly twinkle in the doctor's eye which contradicted his words, "but I assure you in the present emergency a very slight quantity, for instance——"

Janet did not wait to hear the exact dose prescribed. Her strength was failing and she hurried away that she might be alone. She went into the sunshiny little room on the other side the entry. All remained as she had left it an hour ago, except that the flickering shadows of the elm tree leaves had shifted from the blind, and a tame raven that belonged to the cottage had hopped in through the open window, and was balancing himself on the arm of the chair which she had occupied. As she stood upon the threshold now, the bird did not stir from his place, but only glowered solemnly at her out of his dim unblinking eyes.

She sat down, covering her face with her hands, and tried to think. Scarce half an hour had passed when Mr. Piflet's little quick rap was heard at the door.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Ma'am, but I don't see any one else about. Some scraps of linen if you please, rather worn will be all the better, and a few strips, stout and strong, for bandages."

Janet fetched them. In about a quarter of an hour he came back again.

"A basin of water, Ma'am, and a sponge, and one or two towels. And if you think your nervous system equal to such a strain upon it, I should be able to complete my operations more expeditiously with a little of your assistance."

Without a single word, Janet brought the water, and calmly took her place with Mr. Piflet beside the mattress. He was just beginning to bind up the wound in the temples.

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to cut me off a few strips of linen first, Ma'am, about this width," and the doctor made a notch with his penknife. "Yes, that is quite correct; and now I'll trouble you to support his head. Look, so, just raise it a little with your right arm; there. I see you are perfectly equal to everything I require."

Janet put back with a steady hand the heavy locks of curling yellow hair—the hair she was once so proud of. It was clotted and dabbled with blood now, and in some places whole locks were torn away as if they had been caught by outreaching brambles or fragments of rock, in that terrible fall.

"Is he very much injured?" she said, calmly pressing the sponge upon the wound, whilst Mr. Piflet prepared some lint.

"Pretty tolerable, Ma'am, pretty tolerable," and Mr. Piflet ran over his list of casualties, as if it had been an inventory of goods at an auction sale.

"Two or three ribs broken, ancle dislocated with flesh rent, shoulder put out, severe internal injuries, and a few bruises and contusions; no exterior wound except this in the head."

"But he does not appear to suffer much."

"Bless you, no, Ma'am, no more consciousness of pain, as I said before, than a dead sheep. And it's a great mercy, too. Why, if he had the use of his faculties, he'd be shrieking out like mad—such a hash as he's made himself. Just a little higher, Ma'am, if you please; your arm is giving way; but perhaps you find his head too heavy. We might get a couple of books. I think that would hold it up."

"No, I will hold it myself. I am not tired," and Janet drew the poor dying head closer to her bosom—the resting place she once hoped it would have all through life. But she betrayed no sign of feeling.

Mr. Piflet finished binding up the wound, then gave his hands a vigorous shake and rubbed them briskly together. Then he scanned Janet keenly through his blue spectacles.

"I must do you the credit, Ma'am, of saying that you've the most astonishing nerve for a lady that I ever met with. Dear me, half the women in England would have fainted fifty times over before they'd got through what you've done this afternoon. You're a credit to your sex, Ma'am, you're a credit to your sex. But then you see, Ma'am," and the little man waved his hands, "circumstances alter cases. Now, if the unfortunate individual had been a relative, for instance, a husband, or some one you felt very personal to, no doubt your fortitude would have failed, and you would have succumbed to the ordinary weakness of your sex. But you see strangers make a more limited demand upon one's sympathies. I would thank you to hold that head quite firmly for a moment or two longer, until the bandages have had time to settle, and then we will lay it on the pillow. I don't see that you need be troubled with it any more."

Janet was glad that the doctor had talk enough for them both. He did not wait for any reply, but went on in a brisk nasal twang—

"Strangers, Ma'am, do not excite our sensibilities to a painful extent, and we are generally able to discharge the duties which devolve upon us in relation to them with fortitude. I must confess, however, Miss Bruce, that your conduct on the present emergency is beyond praise—altogether beyond praise."

Mr. Piflet emphasized this eulogistic little essay by sundry vigorous flourishes of the sponge which he held in his hand.

"And now," continued he, gathering together the bits of hair which he had cut off, "I don't see any good in prolonging my attendance at present, especially as I have one or two other urgent cases that are demanding my professional services. I will leave the patient under your charge, Miss Bruce; he cannot be in better keeping; and in the course of an hour or so I will look in again."

"And if he should revive?" said Janet.

"Oh, bless you, Ma'am, but he won't revive; nothing of the sort. He'll die in the course of the evening as sure as I'm a medical practitioner. My only wonder is that the breath has kept in him so long. I assure you, my dear madam, I shouldn't have thought it worth while to attend to him at all, so far as his own personal advantage is concerned; but you see there will of course be a lengthened account of the accident in the '*St. Olave's Chronicle*,' and it's more creditable to the medical man who is called in, if the case is done up just a little for appearance sake. If you don't mind having the trouble, you can give him a spoonful of brandy now and then; it won't make any difference one way or another, and you'll feel as if you were doing something."

"You can let his head go now; it will do just as well on the pillow as in your hands," continued Mr. Piflet, drawing on his gloves and freshening himself up in a general way previous to his departure. "It's just possible that consciousness may return, and in that case you must watch him, for fear he should get restless and unloose the bandages. If that wound begins to bleed again, he'll be a dead man in no time. Good afternoon, Miss Bruce, good afternoon. I'll look in again before long," and with a second succession of little bows, Mr. Piflet bustled away to look after his horse.

Douglas Ramsay lay quite still. His eyelids were half open, and through the thick golden lashes his blue eyes gleamed with a cold, glassy stare. But there was no sign of pain yet upon the face, that was growing paler and paler, nor the faintest motion to tell whether life was waxing or waning in that prostrate form which had once been Janet's pride and joy.

And sitting down, she watched him there.

CHAPTER XLIV.

SURELY there is nothing on this earth more God-like in its forgiveness than love. Nothing so slow to resent, so ready to forgive, the blackest ill; so full of that divine spirit, which thinketh no evil, and endureth all things. Keeping her lonely watch by the side of this unconscious, dying man, Janet Bruce forgave him all the wrong he had done. Memory overpassed years of separation and faithlessness, to rest on the old long ago time, when those eyes, so dim and vacant now, had bent over hers with the glorious look of tender, and, as she hoped, undying love; and that arm, so heavy and nerveless, held her in its strong, protecting clasp.

In his prosperity he had forgotten her, but dying, God had brought him back to her again, that his head might find its last resting-place on her breast, and his farewell breath spend itself upon her faithful lips. She had but one wish now, that ere he died they might once more look into each other's eyes with the long, loving look of perfect trust, a look wherein all the past might be forgiven. This granted, she could go through the rest of life that remained to her peacefully, and even with a glad, quiet thankfulness. It was not much to ask. That heart is surely humble enough which prays for nothing on this side of eternity, but the memory of gladness—only its memory. Praying for this, Janet grew calm, and there came into her face a happy look that had not rested there for years.

The day wore on. First the flickering shadows of the vine and ivy leaves died off from the lattice window; the sunshine crept up and up until at last it just crested with a golden rim the topmost twigs of the great elm tree. Then the sun dipped down beneath the Norlands hills, leaving upon everything the quiet, pleasant even tint of early summer twilight. Just the sort of gloaming that Janet fancied her future might be.

At the prospect of having a death in the house, Lettice had begged so piteously to be allowed to go back to the Old Lodge, that Miss Bruce had not the heart to refuse; and when Colin went for the doctor, she sent a message by him to Miss Luckie, asking that one of the older servants might be allowed to come to Norlands, in her place.

Early in the afternoon Mrs. Cromarty came. None so trusty as she was in time of sorrow or sickness. As soon as she crossed the threshold, her very presence seemed a stay in the house. There was a certain steady, rock-like firmness about her, to which, in their time of need, weaker natures unconsciously clung, and never found it fail.

Lettice was not a model of neatness at the best of times, and in the bustle of her hurried flight, had left everything in mid-day disorder. Mrs. Cromarty laid away her bonnet and shawl, and began to set things to rights, as soon as she got into the kitchen. Whilst doing so, she came upon the locks of hair, some of them clotted with blood, which Mr. Piflet had brought out of the room after dressing Douglas Ramsay's wound. They were lying together in a little heap on a table in the corner of the room. Mrs. Cromarty took up one of them, and began to smooth it over her finger. By-and-by an expression, not of womanly pity or tenderness, but of sternness, almost of wrath, came into her dark face.

"Surely I know that yellow hair again," she said to herself in an undertone. "Isn't it the devil's own color that shone so bright on the false head of him as lured my young mistress away from kith and kin, and cast her out to perish?"

She dropped the hair. It fell amongst the rest, coiling and uncoiling like a living thing. She watched it for a long time, her countenance darkening with bitter memories.

"I wouldn't say for certain it's him, though. Maybe it belongs to some poor bruised creature as has the golden hair without the grewsome heart; and the woman he loves may be waiting for him now, and wondering why he stays so long. God bless 'em, and have mercy on 'em both. It's a weary world, it is, and them's well done to that leaves it afore the sorrow comes."

Mrs. Cromarty did not invent any excuse for going into the room where the dying man lay. She knew that Janet was there, and there was a sort of native refinement about her that prevented her from intruding unasked into the presence of others. When she had done all that could be done in the way of making the house look comfortable, she took out the little Testament which she always carried in her pocket, and sitting down in the open doorway, began to read. Presently Miss Bruce tapped on the wall; there were no bells in the cottage at Norlands.

Mrs. Cromarty laid her book down and obeyed the summons. Janet was bending over Douglas Ramsay, so that his face was hidden. Only those heavy masses of golden hair seemed to make a sunshine in the room.

"Mrs. Cromarty, I would thank you to bring me fresh water and a sponge, in case these bandages should give way."

Mrs. Cromarty fetched them.

"And can I watch him, ma'am, while you rest? You're looking weary, and it's sort o' lonesome tending strange folk. It's none like sitting by one's own kin."

Janet looked wistfully at the poor helpless form lying before her. Ah! if he had only given her the right, years and years ago, to take

the place she held by him now! But God had given it to her at last, and none should keep her from it.

"You are very good, Mrs. Cromarty, but I will stay with him. It is not wearisome to me. You see he does not suffer much; he lies quite still." And Janet moved slightly to one side, so as to let the pale face be seen.

Mrs. Cromarty looked steadfastly upon it, but spoke no word, and then left the room, closing the door quietly after her.

"It's him," she whispered, as she went back into the kitchen. "I could have told that face among a thousand. And so his proud deeds have come back upon him. Verily the Lord plentifully rewardeth the evil doer!"

By-and-by Mrs. Edenall came in, and without staying to speak to any one, went upstairs into her own room. Janet pondered how best to tell her of the startling change which had come over that peaceful little household since she left it. Mrs. Edenall was easily unnerved. Even to listen to any story of suffering made her shiver and turn pale; and since her health failed, she had been more susceptible to any sudden shock. This room, too, where Douglas Ramsay lay, was the one where she generally passed her time in an evening. It was farther away from household sounds than the other, and had a pleasanter outlook into the garden. She must be told at once; there was no time to lose.

Janet listened to Mrs. Edenall's footstep on the stairs, and then came out, taking care to shut the door after her.

"No, we will not pass our time there to-night," she said, as Mrs. Edenall laid her hand upon the latch, to go in as usual; "come and let us sit in the other parlor."

Mrs. Edenall followed her, and they sat down side by side in the old-fashioned window-seat, looking out into the garden. The flowers were all closed up now, and not a sound was to be heard but the far away babble of the Luthen on the rocks below. Janet shivered as she heard it.

"You are cold," said Mrs. Edenall, "and the night air blows sharp; let us have a fire lighted in the blue room, and finish our evening there."

"No, I am not cold, indeed I am not cold; it was only the chill from this open window. Have you had a pleasant day?"

"Pleasant, yes, it has been pleasant," and there came up a sunshiny smile over Mrs. Edenall's face; "and what do you think, Janet, I do believe I went to sleep for nearly all the afternoon, sitting on one of those stone coffins. I had taken 'Joan of Arc' with me, and was reading that beautiful farewell to her native valleys—you remember it, don't you? I once heard you say you had read it."

And Mrs. Edenall began to repeat in her low, rich voice, those tender, passionate, yearning verses:—

"Lebwohl ihr Berge, ihr geliebten Triften,
Ihr traulich stillen Thaler, lebet wohl!
Johanna wird nun nicht mehr auf euch wandeln,
Johanna sagt euch ewig Lebewohl."

"I read them over many times, and then I must have fallen asleep, for I had the dearest, peacefullest dream."

Surely it had been a dear dream, if only the memory of it brought that smile to Mrs. Edenall's face.

"It was about a friend, a very dear friend, whom I lost many years ago, nearly twenty years ago. I thought we were together again, and all the dreary time between was forgotten; all the pain and weariness. It was a very beautiful dream. I think of it now as we do of perfect music. I think some one came past and woke me for when I opened my eyes the grass was trampled down just before me, and some of the wild flowers were broken."

Then they were silent for awhile, Janet trying to think of some words in which to tell her of that other thing, which seemed scarce more than a dream in its strange suddenness.

"Miss Bruce," said Mrs. Edenall, by-and-by, "I think you must have been having a nap this afternoon."

"No, indeed," said Janet, wearily; "but why?"

"Well, if you had, I should say that while you slept the enemy came and—not exactly sowed tares, but tore down those beautiful sweet peas which climb over the garden gate; not the large gate, you know, but the little wooden stile which leads down to the ravine path. The blossoms were scattered far into the garden when I came in, as if some one had got his feet entangled in them and dragged them along. Alice Grey will be so grieved, for those flowers were quite her pets."

Janet remembered that was the gate at which the men who carried Douglas Ramsay came in.

"Some people have been here this afternoon, Mrs. Edenall; you will have to hear it, and I may as well tell you now; something fearful has happened since you went away this morning."

"Indeed, it cannot be very dreadful, for you look so calm. Have some thieves been about?"

"No. You remember the Norlands landslip."

"The landslip. Ah, I cannot forget that."

"A gentleman was riding past there this afternoon, and his horse took fright, and both were thrown down together.

"Oh! how shocking. And did the men bring him through the garden, then, on their way to St. Olave's?"

"No, they have left him here. He is lying in the room opposite, now."

"Oh! Janet, and you have been alone all day with no one to help you. How cruel. Has anyone been sent for?"

"Yes. Colin went for the nearest doctor, and a person from Little Priory Street came; a Mr. Piflet. He did what he could for him, and promised to come again soon."

"And the poor fellow will have to stay here until he recovers so far as to be able to be removed."

"He will never recover. Mr. Piflet says he will in all probability die before morning. I am very sorry for you," added Janet, seeing that Mrs. Edenall trembled and could scarcely keep her seat. "I was afraid it would be a great shock to you. If only the house at Westwood had been ready for you to go there. But you could not do that, it has been shut up so long."

"I don't want to go anywhere, Janet. I will stay with you. I am not so frightened as you

think. Where is he? let me try if I can help him; is he very much hurt?"

Internally, very much, but there is no wound that you can perceive except on the temples, and Mr. Piflet has bound it up. He has never spoken at all since they brought him in, and I don't think he suffers."

"And have none of his friends come? Is there no one who cares anything about him?"

For the first time Janet's voice faltered. She said very faintly—

"He has no friend that we know of. He appears to be a stranger."

"And can you not ascertain his name?"

Janet could not trust herself to speak those two words which had once held for her such a world of happiness. She murmured out something about a card with a strange name upon it, not known in St. Olave's.

"But I must go back to him," she said, "I have been a long time away now. Mr. Piflet said he might revive a little just at the last; we must not leave him alone."

She left the room, but turned faint and was obliged to go into the garden for a moment. The cool night air revived her, and then she went back to the room where Douglas Ramsay lay. As she passed the little sitting-room she noticed that it was empty, and the door of the other parlor, that she had closed carefully after her, was standing wide open. The sight which met her as she stood upon its threshold first startled, and then as all its meaning slowly dawned, benumbed her into a cold, dull stupor of grief and horror.

Mrs. Edenall had thrown herself upon the mattress beside the dying man. His unconsciousness seemed to have passed away; he moved now and then as if in pain; the linen which bound his wounds had given way, and blood was slowly oozing out again upon the pillow. Mrs. Edenall's head was on his breast, her arms clasped round his neck. She was weeping passionately, and as from time to time she raised her face to kiss the cold whitening lips, she murmured through her tears—

"Douglas, Douglas! speak to me, speak to me once more before you die! Oh! Douglas, my own, my only one!"

Janet understood it all; dimly at first, and then with cruel, vivid, intense pain. This was the woman for whose love her own had been cast away. This Mrs. Edenall, whom she had cherished as a sister, who had sat by her fireside and slept beneath the shadow of her roof, was the stranger whose fair face had beguiled him from his truth, and quenched out of her life all its hope and joy. Janet comprehended now the fitful restlessness, the proud reserve which never spoke of the past, the long intervals of gloomy silence, or wild, impetuous excitement. For one moment all the pride and purity of her nature revolted from this guilty creature who lay prostrate before her; this woman who was a sinner.

But only for a moment. It was no time for upbraiding. With one quick prayer for help, she pressed out of sight the bitterness of the past. Without a word of reproach or surprise she went quietly round to her own place by Douglas Ramsay's pillow, and began to replace the bandages which had fallen off. Her hands were very steady, her face gave no sign of the agony within. She washed away the blood which was trickling over his forehead, and smoothed back the heavy tangled hair. As she did so, he muttered very faintly—they were the first words he had spoken—

'Soft and cool like Janet's hand—Poor Janet Bruce. I ought not——"

And then his voice died out in a fluttering gasp. Mrs. Edenall's face had been hidden on his breast all the while; now she sprang to her feet like a wild creature. As with a lightning flash of intelligence, she, too, understood it all. Her whole frame shook and trembled with excitement; her face grew stormy in its fury. Drawing herself up to her full height, she glared fiercely down upon Janet.

Janet returned the glance with one calm, pure, unblenching—one before which guilt might cower and soiled memory blush. But Mrs. Edenall did neither.

For a long time those two women stood looking into each other's faces, through the moments of a silence, broken only by the low breathing of the dying man, which was growing feebler and more fluttering at every gasp.

He muttered something, and moved restlessly.

Janet bent over him; but Mrs. Edenall pushed her fiercely away.

"He is mine, only mine; he is my husband. You never loved him as I did; your northern blood is cold, cold. He deceived me and forsook me, but I love him still; he belonged to no one but me. Douglas, speak to me, my darling, and tell me you are mine, only mine."

She pressed her face close to his, raining down upon it a flood of hot passionate tears. Then there was silence. By-and-by a faint light flickered over the ashen countenance; a beam of intelligence broke feebly from the glazing half-open eyes, which had wandered to Mrs. Edenall's face. Janet's was turned away that she might not look upon its paleness.

"Marian."

"Douglas, you know me, you love me, you speak to me! Say it again, Douglas, my own, my own!"

"Marian! Marian!"

And so, with her warm lips brooding over his, and her great, deep, passionate eyes pouring out their flood of tenderness upon him, Douglas Ramsay died.

It was Janet's hand which closed his eyes and straightened those stalwart limbs for their death rest. Then she would have led Mrs. Edenall away, but Marian shook her off with a wild imperious gesture, and clung more closely to the corpse, covering with tears and caresses the wan face that could feel neither any more.

Very patiently Janet rose, and left the room. It was no place for her now, the unloved, the forsaken one. She might not even watch over the last sleep of him whom living she had loved so well. She dragged her slow, weary steps into the little sitting-room, and crouched down on the window-seat, looking out into the greying twilight. Then she clasped her hands over her face, and tears, the bitterest Janet Bruce had ever shed, came slowly trickling through the thin fingers. All was utterly dreary and hopeless. Nothing in the present of her life, nothing in the future, but only dim, patient endurance. God forgive her that, in the first bitterness of that sorrow, she

prayed as a greater than she once did, "Oh, that I now might die!"

So often, groping through clouds and thick darkness, we stretch our feeble hands to heaven and cry for light; only one gleam to lighten the shadows of the road—only one ray to show where we may plant our feet without treading upon thorns. And then comes to us that solemn voice, sounding across the gulf of ages and centuries, clear as when first it stilled the Patriarch's questionings, "He giveth no account of any of His matters." Listening to this voice, we learn to wait patiently, until heaven shall bring the open vision.

Janet learned to wait, too. In that hour the bitterness of death passed; the bitterness of life, too, which is sometimes keener than any death can give.

The room grew dark—so dark that she could not see the tall, drooping figure that came gliding towards her, until Mrs. Edenall knelt at her side. Her hands sought Janet's in the darkness, and held them tight. By-and-by there was a voice. It was low, humble as a little child's—

"Janet, forgive me, I loved him very much."

And, because in the calm, majestic presence of death, all human wrongs fade away, Janet pressed her lips on the poor worn face, and the past was blotted out.

CHAPTER XLV.

THEY had been sitting there for nearly an hour, when Mrs. Cromarty came up the long stone passage which led from the kitchen into the front of the house. Some white linen hung over her arm; in one hand she held a small oil-lamp, in the other a basin and towels. She paused as she passed the open parlor door, and, flashing the light of her lamp into the little room, she said, in a calm, deliberate voice—

"I am going to attend to the body, Ma'am."

"The body," nothing but "the body." Oh, the chill that steals into our hearts when any human form that we have caressed and fondled, over which we have poured smiles of loving tenderness or tears of sympathy, comes to be spoken of as only "the body." Oh, the loneliness—far worse than death—which those must feel whose faith looks no farther than this—whose creed leaves nothing of departed friends but "the body!"

Janet shivered, but said nothing, and Mrs. Cromarty passed on.

By-and-by, Janet, utterly over-worn and weary, went away to her own room for such rest as sleep could give. Mrs. Edenall stayed behind. In the dark and stillness, she could hear distinctly the sounds that came from the other side of the passage; the plash of water, the muffle of the linen wrappings, the fall of something, now and then, as Mrs. Cromarty moved about the dead man.

She had been sitting there for a long time, when Mrs. Cromarty passed again and went into the kitchen. Mrs. Edenall fancied she heard her bolting the outer doors, and thinking that all was quiet for the night, she stole noiselessly into the death-chamber.

Douglas Ramsay was still lying on the mattress in the middle of the floor, where the men had first laid him; but everything about him now was pure snowy white. The large sheet which was thrown over him revealed the grand outline of his figure, unworn by sickness, and unmarred even by the fearful accident that had befallen him. The feeble glimmer of the lamp-light flickered upon the golden hair, which, like a glory, fell around his brow. There was just a gleam of glassy blue through the thick eyelashes, and the lips had stiffened into the still rigid lines that no human passion could have leave to break. His hands—those great strong nervy hands which, last time she saw him, were thrust out in horror, as if to bid her away—clasped each other peacefully upon his breast, just as his mother might have placed them years and years ago, when he lay an innocent baby on her knee.

She threw herself down beside him once more, and laid her white cheek to his; the lamp scarce showed which wore most of death's hue. Ah! he had been very cruel and very wicked; he had wronged and deceived her, but that was over now. All the old wild passionate love came surging back again to her heart.

"Douglas! Douglas Ramsay!" she moaned forth, clasping the poor dead head to her breast. "I gave up all for the love of you; speak to me once more, Douglas, my own, my only one! And then she kissed his lips, his eyelids, the hands which lay folded in the icy stillness of death.

Mrs. Cromarty had been into the kitchen to fetch a fresh supply of oil for the lamp. She stood in the open doorway now. For awhile she paused, her eyes fixed on the two prostrate figures before her. She gazed intently from one to the other. The golden hair she knew but too well, not the grey tresses that were mingling with it. While she looked in wonderment and perplexity, Mrs. Edenall rose and knelt by the side of the mattress, her hands clasped upon the pillow where Douglas Ramsay's head lay.

"But," she said, at last, "he did love me. Mine was the last name he spoke—'Marian, Marian!' Oh! if I could hear it once more, only once more!"

Mrs. Cromarty's swarthy face grew pale; a look of infinite compassion, not unmixed with a certain stern indignation, came over it. She stepped a few paces forward, set down the little phial of oil she had brought with her, and laid a hand on Mrs. Edenall's shoulder.

"My lady, Miss Marian Brandon!"

The name silent now for nearly twenty years; the maiden name, buried with the innocence of maidenhood. Mrs. Edenall looked up. One quick glance of recognition passed between them; then she crouched at Mrs. Cromarty's feet and buried her face in her dress.

"Honor Grant! you have come back to call my sin to my remembrance. Do not despise me. I erred, but I have suffered very much."

"God forbid, Miss Marian!" and Mrs. Cromarty bent wistfully down over the worn features, pale and sharpened now, yet retaining still the faint impress of their girlish beauty. "Ye have enough to bear, and I'll no make the burden heavier. It's small call one poor human sinner has to despise another! The Lord knows I've prayed for ye night and day, that if ye were living, He would send peace to your poor heart;

for ye did it ignorantly, I aye believed that. Come away, my lady, now. This is not the place for you."

Mrs. Cromarty raised her tenderly and carried her away to her own room—just as, more than thirty years ago, she had carried her, a fair-haired, sleeping little girl, to the lace-curtained cot, in the stately manor of Brandon.

Next morning Alice Grey came. She had heard of the accident, not the death which followed so closely upon it. She only saw Miss Bruce, for Mrs. Edenall was too ill to leave her room.

Janet received her very calmly. To strangers, or even to such a friend as Alice Grey, the death-stroke which had come must be spoken of as "a sudden shock," "a very painful accident." Nothing more than this; no word of the hopes it had stricken down, nor of the bitter waters into which forgiveness had cast the branch of healing.

"And for you to have had the trouble of it, oh, Miss Bruce, I was sorry!" said Alice, feeling as if her kindness in bringing Janet and Mrs. Edenall to Norlands had been somehow at fault. "If only more of the servants had been here, I should not have minded so much; but it was such a terrible thing for you to be left alone with him, except Mrs. Cromarty. I almost wonder you did not go away."

"That would not have been kind, Alice. I don't think you would have done so yourself. I was glad—I was very thankful to be able to watch over him."

"Ah! but you are so good; even strangers are sure to be cared for by you."

Even strangers! Janet clutched the white curtains in her hand as Alice said this. They were sitting in the broad, low window-seat of the little parlor, looking out into the garden, where a few withered sweet-pea blossoms, torn off by the men as they brought Douglas Ramsay through the gate, were still scattered about. *Even strangers!* She was very thankful that no one, not even Alice Grey, knew what Douglas had been to her.

"Does he suffer very much, Miss Bruce?" said Alice, toying carelessly with the ivy leaves that straggled in through the open window.

"Not now. He died last night."

Alice let the ivy branch drop from her hands and her face grew a shade paler. Death was more a real thing to her now than it had been six months ago. She was quiet for a little while, and then said with the slightest possible fall in her voice—

"He would not be able to see any of his friends. I wonder if he had a wife, or—anyone he loved very much. It is hard to die quite alone. Do you know if he was a stranger here?"

"I believe he was."

"And did he tell you anything about how the accident happened; was he able to speak before his death? Oh, Miss Bruce, I beg your pardon, I ought not to have talked so much about him," Alice said hurriedly, seeing Janet's utter pallor and the trembling that had seized her. "It was such a terrible thing, I am sure it must have shaken you very much. Don't tell me any more now, we will talk about something else."

Janet was glad of the release. She leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. Yes, it was indeed painful to recal those last words of his, or speak them.

"You must not stay here," said Alice, as if anxious to change the subject. "Westwood is not ready for you to go to, but you can come to the Old Lodge. You know he was nothing to either of you, and you can do him no more good. Go back with me this morning. I told Miss Luckie I should bring you."

Much to her surprise, Janet declined.

"You are very kind, Alice, but for myself I would rather stay here until after he is buried. It will do me no harm."

"That is just like you, Miss Bruce. If you had loved him," a faint blush dyed Alice's cheek —"If you had loved him as much as I love Cuthbert you could not have done more for him."

Janet almost felt the shadow of a smile come to her lips as Alice said this. Was that young girl's fancy, the plaything of a passing hour, fed on caresses and sweet words, to be placed side by side with the overmastering love, strong through disappointment and holy through suffering, which had bound her to Douglas Ramsay?

But she said nothing more about it, and quietly turned the conversation into a different direction until it was time for Alice to go away.

"If you won't come with me I suppose I must leave you. But Janet you bear trouble so quietly. If it hadn't been for just that one little tremble in your voice, I should scarcely have known that anything was the matter. I wonder if it is the manner of your country to be so still and staid. I'm sure if it is, Mr. Bruce was quite wrong when he said I had Scottish blood in my veins." And with that Alice left the room.

"Who said you had Scottish blood in your veins, darling?" said Mrs. Cromarty, who was coming out of the blue room and met Alice in the long stone passage.

"Only Mr. Bruce, nearly a year ago. I remember it very well," and there came a pleased, softened look over Alice's face, "I was copying out some music for him, and I happened to say the name of a place in Scotland which English people can never pronounce. And I did it so well he said I must belong to the country in some way. May I come through your kitchen, Mrs. Cromarty, I want to give a message to Colin before I go?"

"Yes, and welcome, Miss Alice; you'll leave a streak o' sunshine in it where you pass, and we want it sadly the day."

Alice followed her. As she passed through, she caught sight of the little table in the corner where the locks of Douglas Ramsay's hair was still lying. From a sort of superstitious feeling Mrs. Cromarty forbore to burn them, and intended that they should be buried in the coffin. Alice went up to the table.

"Is that some of his hair, Mrs. Cromarty? I mean does it belong to the person, the gentleman who was killed?"

"'Deed and it does, Miss Alice. Yon's Douglas Ramsay's hair."

"Douglas Ramsay"—Alice mused a while. "Mrs. Cromarty, do you know if Dunnie is the pet name for Douglas in Scotland?"

"Maybe it is, honey. Scotch folks handles their christened names so queer, while ye never know

what's what. They call Isabella, *Isy*, an' that beautiful name Margaret, as is fit for a born Queen in England, is never nought but *Maggie* when ye get t'other side o' t' Tweed."

"Because poor Aunt Amiel used to talk about a little boy called Dunnie, that she knew a long long time ago, before Uncle Grey died. And he had beautiful curling golden hair, that must have been just like this."

"Happen it might, Miss Alice. Scotch folk mostly has golden hair, I've heerd tell."

"Mr. Bruce hasn't, and I'm glad of it, for Mrs. Edenall says golden hair is false; she would never trust golden hair, and you know Mr. Bruce is as true as the sun."

"He is, honey, that's the right word ye've said; Mr. Bruce is as true as the sun. It'll be good luck to her as he weds, for where he loves once he loves forever. It 'ud be a better world nor it is if folks all did the same."

There was a long pause, during which Alice wound and unwound the yellow lock upon her finger, thinking the while of Cuthbert. She was quite sure he would be always true. At last she said,

"Mrs. Cromarty, may I go and see him, this gentleman who is dead? You know, since poor Aunt Amiel died I have not been afraid. I should like to look at him."

Mrs. Cromarty had something of the notion so common amongst poor people, that strangers pay a sort of respect to the dead by asking to see them. So she made no objection, but took the key out of her pocket and preceded Alice to the room where Douglas Ramsay lay. She waited, standing upon the threshold whilst Alice went in alone.

The young girl removed the linen sheet, and bending down her face, gazed earnestly upon his. No sleeping face need have been calmer. Alice laid her hand upon his cheek, she wound her fingers in and out amongst his golden hair. At last—it was a strange thing for her to do—she stooped over him and without a shudder pressed her lips to his forehead, once, twice, and yet again.

Mrs. Cromarty stood at the door watching her. As she did so, she noted a faint resemblance between the two faces. There was the same broad, round, open brow, the same clearly pencilled eyebrow, and full drooping lid. When the sunlight fell on Alice's hair too, it was of the same tint as that which lay upon the death pillow. As Mrs. Cromarty watched the two, a vague thought crept into her mind, gradually shaping itself into clearness. Was it indeed so, that this young girl, this Alice, was no niece of Mistress Amiel Grey's, but the child, the base-born child of Marian Brandon; and was she now bending over her father's corpse? She looked keenly at Alice from beneath the shade of her dark overhanging brows. Alice glancing up, saw the look and its mute questioning.

"You are thinking it is very strange that I should kiss him, but he looks so quiet, I am not at all afraid. I have such a feeling as if I had seen that face before."

She replaced the linen cloth, and without another word they both left the room. Mrs. Cromarty locked the door. She never mentioned to anyone the suspicion which had crossed her mind. She possessed in an eminent degree, when needful, the rare gift of silence; but like Mary she kept this thing, and pondered it in her heart.

When Alice got out into the Norlands road, the sunlight flashed upon something entangled in the fringes of her parasol. It was a tress of that golden hair which had lain on the little table in the kitchen. Alice would not throw it away. She wove it, as she walked along, into a little knot, a true lover's knot, like the one Cuthbert had given her in a locket, not long ago. So for the second time that day, love and death came together in her thoughts. Then she folded it up in a broad leaf that she gathered from a sycamore-tree by the road-side, and put it into her pocket-book. It was such beautiful hair.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THEY buried Douglas Ramsay in the deserted churchyard of Upper Norlands, near by the Roman tower where the little coffin lay. The day after his death, Janet wrote to the housekeeper of Glen Ramsay, informing her of the accident. In the course of a few days the family solicitor came down from Perth. He had an interview with Miss Bruce and Mr. Piflet, visited the grave, and then returned into Scotland, carrying back with him the few valuables which were found on the body. The Glen Ramsay estate, which was entailed, passed to a distant member of the family.

No one attended the funeral officially, except Mr. Piflet and the undertaker. There was the usual string, however, of ragged little children, slatternly women, and idle out-of-work men who had strayed down from St. Olave's to see the sight. From the narrow parapet of Norlands tower, two sad-hearted women in mourning watched it all; and when the last lingering by-stander had sauntered off, and the sexton shouldering his spade, was whistling homewards through the cornfields, they came down and stood for a long time side by side over the mound which was now the only memorial of him who had blasted both their lives.

The veil was rent from between them that once so thickly covered all the past. No need now to shrink from the mention of it, lest a chance word should betray its sins or sorrows. Nay, more, each had now a right to know what that past had been. Janet only had to tell of trust dishonored, of promises broken, of a life shattered by grief, in which no fault of hers had been. For Mrs. Edenall, the story was darker.

As they came home in the dreamy sunshine of that July afternoon, she spoke of the old time, of her maiden home—she kept back its name though, and her own, too—of the first meeting with Douglas Ramsay, their wild, passionate love, his vows and promises, that midnight flight into Scotland, followed by the mock marriage.

"I did not known it was false then. He gave me this," and she pointed to the ring which hung so loosely on her shrunk finger, "He gave me this, and I thought all was well. I had never been deceived before, Janet, I did not know what it meant," and something like a flash of scorn lighted up those great grey eyes,

melting down into yearning tenderness as she turned and saw the black mould of Douglas Ramsay's grave darkening the greensward of Norlands churchyard. "I love him still, though," she said quickly, as if even to remember his sin were a wrong, "I love him still. I never gave over loving him. I never take back what I give once."

Then she told of those few brief stormy weeks of alternate love and jealousy at Bulach; his desertion, and her loneliness. After that, the birth of her child, and the dreary journey back to the home she had disgraced.

"Oh," said Janet, "I did not know you were a mother," and she recalled Mrs. Edenall's face as she had once bent over that little coffin in the Norlands tower.

"I am not, now; my child is dead, and I shall not dare to look upon its face in heaven. Janet, we can never forget our sins, neither in this world nor the next. The stain of them may pass away, but their memory, never."

"Tell me more," said Janet.

"I could not bear to look upon my child, its baby fingers burned me, its innocent eyes killed me; I tried to destroy it, and they put me into an asylum. I suppose I was mad, but I don't know. I think I was there a long time, and when I came out they told me my child was gone, dead; Janet, I was so glad. I could not endure to look upon her. I hope she will not know me in heaven. I laughed and said it was better so. They thought I was mad still; but it was only because I loved her so much! Can you understand that, Janet? Think what it is for a mother to give a child a life that is worse than death, a life that can never be anything else than a stain to her. Think if that girl, Alice, with her golden brown hair and her guileless face, wore a brand of shame that her mother had given her, that kept her back from love and home, and all that woman care for—had she not better die?"

But Janet said nothing, and Mrs. Edenall went on—

"My father and mother died too. They had no child but me, and I broke their hearts—a pleasant memory, is it not? I could not stay in the house where I had been an innocent girl, so I wandered far off and lived where no one knew me, away amongst the Lakes. But visitors came there, and I was afraid; so my solicitors advertised for a quiet home for a lady—a *lady*, Janet—and you took me in.

"That is all. You see I have been a great sinner. Cast me from you if you choose; it is no more than other people have done."

Janet looked at her. Her face was very wan, but a mocking light gleamed and glittered in her strange eyes, the light of flickering reason. Yes, the poor brain had been all too rudely shaken. That death in life which is worse than death itself, was surely nearing; it was even now upon her.

Suddenly she started forward with a fierce gesture, as though she would have sprung down the ravine.

"This is the place!" she cried.

It was, indeed. They went to Norlands by the fields, to avoid passing the landslip, but coming home again, Janet's thought were preoccupied, and she had taken the turning which led to the ravine path. Just now the precipice gaped beneath them. All around, the earth was torn up by the tramp of horses' hoofs. Here and there branches were broken from the trees, and great clusters of bracken were rooted out and scattered along the rocks.

Just that one smothered shriek, such as Douglas Ramsay might have uttered when his horse took that fearful leap, and Mrs. Edenall was calm again.

"Don't go away," she said. "This is the spot where he fell. Let us sit down and feel it all."

She sat down on the bank where they had all rested, the afternoon of the pic-nic, and leaned against the same tree which had kept her from death there. But neither of them spoke of that. She smoothed the torn earth with her hands, from time to time loosening a pebble and watching it roll gently down the steep incline.

"You see it is not very terrible," she said, "they go down so quietly. Janet, I would like to be there too and slip gently away to that river and to death. If only the good God would let us die when dying is easier than living."

By-and-by she took a little book out of her pocket and laid it on the sloping edge of the ravine. It began to glide down, but more slowly than the stone had done, for now and then a fern spray stopped it, or a tuft of blue-bells tangled it amongst their slender stems. She leaned forwards, far forwards over the ravine to watch it down, so far that Janet feared some sudden fancy might win her to follow it. She held her dress tightly with both hands.

"Janet," Mrs. Edenall muttered in a hoarse voice.

"What is it?" said Miss Bruce.

"Look there," and she pointed to a ledge of rock some fifty feet below them.

A stunted ash tree, gnarled and knotted, grew out from a rift in the rock. It was leafless as though blasted by some lightning flash. On one of its grey branches a curl of golden hair, *his* hair, gleamed in the sunshine; and with every stray breeze that passed, a silken scarf of the Ramsay tartan fluttered to and fro.

The sight of them turned Janet faint. "Come away," she said, feebly. "This is no place for us."

But Mrs. Edenall looked steadily down.

"I must have them," she said, as the ashen pale lips drew farther and farther back from her clenched teeth. "I will have them," and she set her feet down to climb the sharp rocks that jutted out beneath.

Janet held her back by main force. Only to certain death could any, even the most sure-footed, descend that gaping chasm. Mrs. Edenall struggled to get free, but she was very weak now; Janet soothed her by promising that they should come again some time; and then keeping fast hold of her arm, they set off towards the cottage.

Mrs. Edenall spoke no more after that. Unresistingly enough she suffered Janet to lead her homewards. But as she paused again and again, and turned towards the spot where that tress of golden hair shimmered in the sunshine, there was a set, determinate look in her face which thrilled Miss Bruce with a new and nameless fear. Janet resolved as soon as they got back

to Norlands to send for Dr. Greenwood, and see if something could not be done to remove those dismal death trophies, not alone for the sickening horror which they had struck into her own heart, but because she knew that whilst they remained there, Mrs Edenall's life was scarce worth an hour's purchase.

She reached home weary and anxious, filled with a new dread that was not altogether unhealthy for her, since it kept her from brooding upon the memories of the past few days. Poor Janet, it seemed as if her life were only given her to care for others, as if all of love and kindness that lay within her soul could only prove itself by suffering; suffering and patience, never anything else but these.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE terrible accident at Norlands caused a great commotion in St. Olave's. The local papers were full of it, and loud were the encomiums bestowed on Janet and Mrs. Edenall for the disinterested kindness with which they had tended the unfortunate sufferer. The old Cathedral city could afford to recognize the existence of Miss Bruce now. In a few days, however, the excitement died away. People no longer came over from St. Olave's to visit the scene of the accident. The gossip which had been so rife about the dead man's name, his position, his probable wealth, and so forth, wore itself out, and in less than a fortnight the whole affair had ceased to be mentioned, except as a landmark for some other event which it kept in remembrance.

But the curl of golden hair and the Ramsay scarf fluttered still from the withered ash tree branch.

Over and over again, attempts had been made to reach and bring them down. To descend from the Norlands side of the landslip was simply impossible; to climb up from the brink of the river below, equally so. Some had tried to sling them with a noose; the deftest marksmen among the St. Olave's officers had fired at them from boats on the river or from stations along the edge of the ravine, but no shot had leave to reach its aim. Through hail and lightning storms, through beating rain and driving wind they fluttered on still. It seemed as if some invisible Rispah kept watch over them and suffered neither heaven nor earth to blast these ghastly relics of the dead.

Day after day wore on. Janet longed to be back again at Westwood, both for her own sake and that Mrs. Edenall might be sheltered from the terrible memories that belonged to Norlands. Tibbie was written to, and a time fixed for her return. As soon as she had got all ready, they would go back to the quiet little home, where, if they could not forget the past, its remembrance might not press so bitterly upon them. Janet grew more and more anxious about Mrs. Edenall. The terrible excitement of the last week or two, following so closely upon long weakness and ill-health, had been too much for her, and her mind was evidently giving way. Sometimes she was irritable and restless. For hours together she would pace up and down the long stone passage that led from the kitchen to the sitting-rooms, muttering to herself in low impatient whispers. At such times, Janet never left her for a moment. More than once, before they had learned to understand her ways, she had slipped out through the garden and got far away on the ravine path without being missed.

Once she had quite reached the landslip, and Mrs. Cromarty going in search of her had found her stooping far over its edge, her eyes fixed with keen, hungry, quivering gaze on the scarf that was floating to and fro far away beneath.

At other times she was patient and passive, quiet as a little child. It seemed then as if all action or energy was quenched out of her nature. Hour after hour she would lie on the sofa in the room where Douglas Ramsay died, twining one of her own long tresses of hair round and round her wan fingers, stroking it with a peaceful, patient smile, her lips moving all the while with unspoken words.

Dr. Greenwood came to see her, and advised her speedy return to Westwood. If she could be kept perfectly quiet for a few weeks the malady might be warded off, but every day at Norlands, he said, was hastening the crisis and rendering it less likely that the balance of reason could be preserved.

At last, it was towards the end of July—Tibbie came home again, and the Westwood house was prepared for their return. It was the closing day of their visit to Norlands. For more than a week Mrs. Edenall had been very quiet, quiet and passive. It seemed as if her excitement was gradually wearing away, and they hoped that years of peace might even yet be in store for her. Janet had been very busy most of the day, packing up their things ready for the return to Westwood next morning, and when all the preparations were completed she came down in her bonnet and cloak to accompany Mrs. Edenall to the little churchyard at Norlands. One more visit they were to pay, before that place, with all its memories and associations, came to be laid away amongst the things of the past.

To her surprise the parlor was empty, so was Mrs. Edenall's bedroom. Then she went into the kitchen. Mrs. Cromarty was sitting reading in the trellised doorway that led out into the yard behind the house. She had seen Mrs. Edenall scarce half-an-hour before, walking quietly backwards and forwards in the orchard path. Janet sought her there, but no one answered to her call. She went back again into the parlor and waited for nearly an hour, listening for the tread of footsteps upon the gravel walk. None came. Then, with a chill sickening sense of danger at hand, she set off down the ravine path to Norlands.

She reached the landslip without meeting a creature. All was very still and peaceful. The sunlight lay in golden strips upon the yellowing corn-fields and crept in and out through the darkening glades of the fir-tree plantation which stretched away to the northern uplands. Very greyly upon the deepening eastern sky rose the rugged-outline of the Roman tower; with a soft musical ripple the river Luthen gushed below, swaying the tall flag leaves as it went, and singing the white water-lilies to sleep upon its breast.

For awhile Janet paused, lulled into forgetfulness by the quiet beauty of the place. Ere she turned to go away, she leaned over the ravine for

a last look at the death relics below. Perhaps it might be long before she saw them again. Steadying herself against the birch stem that grew upon the brink, she bent carefully forward.

There were the rifted rocks jutting out amongst the fern and brushwood, there the smooth earthy slope that shelved away down to the river below and browned the whiteness of its foam, there the lightning-blasted ash tree stretching out its lean and wrinkled arms; but the curl of hair and the tartan scarf were gone, both gone. And clinging to a tuft of gorse close by, fluttered a tiny shred of black crape, which as Janet watched it was seized by the wind and borne aloft out of sight.

Chilled by a suspicion no longer vague or formless, she turned back towards the cottage, not even pausing as she passed the lonely spot where Douglas Ramsay's grave was greening in the sunshine. As she neared the narrow path which led to the cottage garden, the clamor of voices smote upon her ear, and she noticed how the long meadow-grass by the hedge-side was bruised by the tramping of many feet. She pressed on half paralyzed with dread. A crowd of people had gathered round the parlor window, trying to peer through the crevices of the closed blinds. More were clustering round the entrance, some with vaguely curious, some with awe-struck faces. As Janet came forwards, they hushed their whispering and made a way for her to pass. The parlor door was closed and Mrs. Cromarty stood by it as if to prevent any one from entering unawares.

"I'm feared you'll be very much shocked, Miss Bruce," she began as Janet came forward.

"I know it all," said Janet, "let me go in."

Mrs. Cromarty opened the door and went in with her, locking it inside to keep out the more curious of the bystanders who were making their way into the house.

Once more the mattresses which gave Douglas Ramsay his death-couch had been brought down, and upon these lay Mrs. Edenall, dead, quite dead; one glance at the ashy stiffening face told that. There was not a wound or a bruise upon her that they could see, but the position of the head, violently twisted back on one ride, showed how and where she had found her death. The right hand was clenched over the lock of hair and the scarf, so tightly clenched that no force of theirs could open it. No cramp of pain distorted her face. Instead, there was a grand sweet smile of triumph just parting the lips, and smoothing into child-like calmness the low broad forehead. She could not have suffered much. Even as she grasped those coveted treasures the death-stroke must have come and fixed for ever upon her features the smile which the prize had given.

Mrs. Cromarty stood at the foot of the mattress, her bosom heaving with suppressed emotion; shadows now of sorrow and now of stern pitiless indignation, darkening her swarthy face.

"Poor lady," she said, "it's a rough carrying on she's had this long time past. The Lord send that she shall have rest and quiet at last, for she was more sinned against than sinning."

Janet looked sharply up. Their eyes met, Mrs. Cromarty's veiled with unshed tears.

"I knew her, Ma'am; I wouldn't say it while she was living, for it's small need there is to cast a poor body's sins in her face so long as she's a chance to mend; but she's gone now, and Ma'am, if I don't tell you, there's other folks'll find it out afore long. I lived maid with her when she was a young leddy as bright and stainless as Miss Alice, and indeed, Ma'am, them two mind me of each other."

Mrs. Cromarty waited for Miss Bruce to notice this last remark; she did so.

"Ah! Alice reminded you of Mrs. Edenall. I have been struck sometimes by a resemblance. Of course it is nothing. Alice has never hinted that Mistress Amiel Grey was even distantly connected with the family of Mrs. Edenall."

"No, Ma'am, she has not. I was telling you I had lived maid with this lady. Her name was Brandon, Marian Brandon. Him as lies up yonder," and Mrs. Cromarty pointed towards Norlands, "ruined her, and she broke her father's heart."

"You had better not mention this, Mrs. Cromarty. It is not suspected in St. Olave's."

"No Ma'am, and if I can help it, it never shall. I've often matched Mrs. Edenall and Marian Brandon in my own mind, but I never knowed 'em for the same till that day when I seed her bending over Mr. Ramsay and pouring out her kisses on his false face. He was one of the devil's own men, Ma'am, was Douglas Ramsay, for all his face was fair to look upon."

"Hush, Mrs. Cromarty, we will not speak ill of the dead. He is gone now, and has carried all his sins into the presence of One who is sometimes more merciful than we are."

"You're in the right of it, Ma'am, and I hope the Lord will forgive me if I've been more bitter on him than I ought to. But it freezes the charity out of one's soul, Ma'am, to see a man deceive a young innocent girl, and turn her into a poor lorn creature like this here; and he walks God Almighty's earth with never a smirch on his brow, or a blush on his cheek. Ma'am, I were sore pressed to feel ought but glad when I was tending Mr. Ramsay's corpse, and knew him for the same as had ruined my young mistress."

Just then Colin opened the door and said that Dr. Greenwood was waiting.

He could do nothing but examine the body, and pronounce with certainty upon the nature of the injury. An inquest was held next day, and a verdict of "accidental death" returned. The jury were of opinion that Mrs. Edenall had been walking too near the verge of the landslip, and losing her balance had fallen over. Also, that in her terror she had caught at the scarf to save herself from sliding down, and so loosened it and the tress of hair from the tree. Appended to this verdict was a recommendation that the City Commissioners should wall up the landslip, and prohibit the ravine path from public use.

Janet had other thoughts, though she never mentioned them. She guessed only too surely how the poor heart-broken creature had wandered there, and with the desperate daring of madness scaled the rocks step by step until the coveted prize was snatched; then, yielding to the mania which was at times so strong upon her, she had suffered herself to slide down the smooth, unbroken slope to certain death. But the reading public of St. Olave's endorsed the verdict of the jury, and nothing further was said.

This accident, following so closely upon the other, caused great commotion amongst the people, that is, the middle and lower classes of the community. But another event, much more noteworthy than the death of a comparative stranger, was just now transpiring in the midst of the goodly fellowship of the Close families, and to this we must turn.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Since Mistress Amiel Grey's death, everything at the Old Lodge had been conducted in its usual style. Indeed she had been so long withdrawn from the superintendence of her own household, that her removal could make but little real difference. Miss Luckie conducted the establishment with admirable energy and precision, whilst Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour acted as chaperone in general to Alice, who was rapidly growing into a very charming woman, quite equal, Mrs. Scrymgeour proudly affirmed, to the exalted position she would so soon be called to assume.

The wedding was drawing very near. Cuthbert became daily more assiduous in his attentions. He loaded her with trifling little presents, offered with such exquisite tact and gracefulness, that Alice felt overpowered with gratitude; and had her dowry been counted by millions instead of thousands, it would have seemed to her innocent heart all too small to bring in exchange for the unfailing caresses and honeyed compliments which her betrothed lavished upon her with such open-handed profusion.

Already coming events cast their shadows before, in the shape of elaborate pieces of fancy work, which arrived at the Old Lodge from such of the Close families as were sufficiently intimate to offer wedding presents. The Bishop's lady had prepared a service of plate as a nuptual gift, and the costly articles were already reposing in that lady's boudoir, prior to being sent to the Old Lodge the night before the marriage. Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour was just completing a magnificent banner screen of white satin, as her contribution to Grassthorpe Rectory, but as this article of furniture will make its appearance before the reader on a future occasion, it shall not be minutely described at present. For three weeks past, the head milliner's rooms in High Street had been strewn with white tulle, dress lengths of silk, bouquets, wreaths and ribbons; and day after day added fresh treasures to the store of exquisitely embroidered linen and silken-fine damask which was accumulating on Alice's behalf in the carved oak presses of the Old Lodge.

All was in readiness now for the arrival of Captain Clay, who was expected to act as guardian to the bride-elect. As soon as he came, the settlements were to be made, and the wedding-day fixed, and a few other little outstanding matters finally arranged.

Captain Clay had been abroad with his regiment nearly twenty years. During the whole of that time he had held no communication with Mistress Amiel Grey, beyond an occasional newspaper which had passed between them. He had seen the intelligence of her death in the "*Times*," and that hastened his journey home. He came by the overland route, for greater speed, and embarked at Marseilles in the "Erebus," which anchored off Southampton on the twenty-fifth of July, the day of Mrs. Edenall's death. He started at once to St. Olave's, and in the evening of the succeeding day, Lettice ushered into the oriel room of the Old Lodge a sunburnt stranger, tall, and of soldier-like aspect.

He presented his card to Miss Luckie, who generally took the initiative in matters of hospitality. Her prettly little white satin cap ribbons fluttered with pleasurable excitement as she laid down her knitting and rose to receive him.

"Captain Clay of the Lancers, lately serving in India, I presume."

The Captain bowed assent.

"We are most happy to see you. Independently of the auspicious event which your arrival heralds, any connection of Mistress Amiel Grey's is sure of a hearty welcome to the Old Lodge. Allow me to introduce you to Miss Alice Grey, niece of the late Mrs. Grey."

Captain Clay acknowledged the introduction with a somewhat perplexed expression of countenance, and withheld the cousinly greeting which Miss Luckie imagined he would have offered to the blushing girl before him. But then they had never met before, and he might not be prepared for such a vision of beauty. Alice had lost but little of her old shyness in the presence of strangers, and slipped quietly out of the room as soon as the formidable introduction was fairly over.

"Did I understand you rightly, that the young lady who has left the room is the niece of Mrs. Amiel Grey?" said the Captain, seating himself on one of the softly-cushioned lounges.

"Perfectly so," replied Miss Luckie. "You have been absent many years and are not aware, I suppose, that from infancy Miss Alice has been brought up by her aunt, to whom she was most devotedly attached. Indeed, she was Mrs. Grey's only comfort during the later years of her life."

"It is twenty years since I set foot in England, and I imagine many changes must have taken place in the interval. Am I correct in supposing that this is the Old Lodge, formerly used as a residence by the Canons of St. Olave's Cathedral, and that the lady recently deceased is the widow of the late Dean Grey?"

"Certainly, sir; you are quite correct in all the particulars you have named," said Miss Luckie, who began to think that the visitor had left his intellects in the Punjaub, and was not likely to prove much of an acquisition to poor Alice. He was so exceedingly cold and unsympathetic in his manner.

"Then, Madam," he continued stiffly, "there must be a mistake somewhere. My cousin, Mrs. Amiel Grey, was the only child of Sir Ralph Grisby, of Runnington, in Kent, and the late Dean Grey, her husband, was also an only child. I am perplexed, therefore, as to the relationship assumed by the young lady to whom you have done me the honor of introducing me."

So was Miss Luckie, now. It was an awkward circumstance, a very awkward circumstance. Still she had no doubt it would be properly cleared up. Alice's relationship to Mrs. Grey was an undoubted fact; of that there could be no question. Had it not been patent

to the world for the last eighteen years, during which time not a whisper had been breathed to the contrary? But whilst she was turning the affair over in her own mind, the Captain continued—

"In fact, Madam—excuse me, but I have not the pleasure of knowing your name."

"I am Miss Luckie, only surviving daughter of the late Major Luckie of the Forty-seventh."

Captain Clay bowed with military precision.

"In fact, Miss Luckie, when I read the account of my cousin's death in the '*Times*,' I hastened my journey from India, in order that before any difficulties should have arisen, I might lay before the legal advisers of Mrs. Grey, my claims as heir-at-law. I have brought certain documents with me," here Captain Clay produced from the breast of his coat a packet of suspicious-looking blue papers, "and my solicitor in town holds himself in readiness to support my claims should any dispute arise. Such dispute, however, is not likely to take place, since I believe I am correct in representing myself as the sole surviving relative of Mistress Amiel Grey."

Miss Luckie twitched nervously at her knitting-needles. The affair was growing serious. Still the worst result that suggested itself to her imagination, was, that this unwelcome interloper might secure to himself a small portion of the estate. The bare idea of his claiming the whole of it was too enormous to be entertained for a moment. At last, she thought it would be better to turn the stranger over to Cuthbert Scrymgeour's management. He would hold his own at any rate, no fear of that. So, after a little consideration, during which Captain Clay had been criticizing the fine oak furniture and choice paintings of the oriel room, she began again—

"I am not in a position to enter upon this subject with you, at present, having only lately become a resident in the family. Since the stroke which preceded Mrs. Grey's death, and which entirely precluded her from the active management of her own affairs, I have resided with Miss Alice as companion and protector. Of all private family affairs connected with the Old Lodge, I am quite ignorant. Perhaps you are not aware that Miss Alice contemplates marriage?"

Captain Clay was not, and signified the same.

"She has been engaged for some months to a clergyman in this neighborhood. Indeed, the ceremony has only been delayed until such time as you could arrive and agree upon the settlements to be made."

"I am happy to congratulate Miss Alice upon her prospects," replied the Captain. "My claims as Mrs. Grey's heir-at-law may possibly interfere with the proposed settlements, but I trust they will in no other way affect the young lady's happiness."

Miss Luckie was not quite so sure of that, but she preferred not venturing upon the subject, and recommended an interview with Mr. Scrymgeour, who was expected from Grassthorpe that evening.

"In the meantime, Captain Clay, I trust you will remain with us for the night."

He smiled inwardly at the notion of being invited to take a bed in his own house, but accepted the offer as it was made, in perfect politeness. And so the ominous *tête-à-tête* terminated.

Meanwhile Alice had strolled into the drawing-room, her little heart all in a flutter at the sudden arrival of Captain Clay, and the important event of which that arrival was the harbinger. The *ormolu* clock on the marble bracket was just upon the stroke of seven. Cuthbert could not possibly arrive before eight, and the time until he came appeared so long. She sat down at the window that looked into the Close, and amused herself for some time by watching the groups of smartly-dressed tradesmen's wives that were sauntering about after their day's work was over. By-and-by the bells began to ring, jangling out with confused resonant clang from the old grey belfry tower. It was the weekly practising night. The sound of them turned her thoughts back to that evening, now nearly five months ago, when she and David Bruce had watched Aunt Amiel die. Then, farther and farther back they drifted to that other evening, when Janet had come to tea and they had beguiled the time by turning over the contents of the old cabinet that stood in the deep recess between the windows.

It stood there yet, just in the same place. Things were rarely shifted out of their places at the Old Lodge.

To wile away a little more of the time until Cuthbert came, she bethought herself of turning it out again. She went upstairs to get the key from the jewel case, and then drawing the quaint old-fashioned piece of furniture in front of the sofa, she opened it. Just within the lid lay the manuscript which Aunt Amiel had placed there the day of her illness. It bore the superscription:—

"To my foster child, Alice. To be read after my death."

That brought the quick tears to Alice's eyes; and for awhile she buried her face in her hands, whilst a rush of tender memories swept over her. But she soon recovered herself, and breaking the many seals which secured the outer cover, she began to read. As she opened the packet, a little old yellow note fell out; this she put back again into the cabinet, thinking it had got in by mistake.

She read it slowly, pausing often with the perplexed look of one who is working out some difficult problem. But, however perplexed she might be, no shade of sadness came over her fair young face. Not a thought crossed her mind that anything written there could shake *his* truth, or dim his love for her. She had never learned yet to doubt the faith of any human being.

She was yet reading, when the door opened, and Cuthbert Scrymgeour stole quietly in. His footfall was very gentle, and she did not hear him until he came behind her and laid his hand upon her shoulder. Then she turned quickly round. He pressed a kiss, another and yet another, upon the flushed face upturned in glad surprise to him.

"Sit by me, will you," she said, nestling up to him in her pretty caressing way; and she made room for him on the sofa.

He passed his fingers—those beautiful white fingers—lightly over her forehead.

"What is my little pet knitting her brow over?

Is she beginning to study mathematics or the square root, or is it a new crotchet pattern, a cover for my study chair at Grassthorpe, Alice!"

Oh, how musical that voice was; how far above singing its dainty love-modulated tones! Alice blushed to the tips of her little fingers.

"No, Cuthbert, it is a letter from Aunt Amiel that I've just found in this old cabinet, and I can't make it out, it seems so strange."

"Does it? Well, I'll try if I can help you to make sense of it. Alice, there's a portmanteau in the hall; who does it belong to?"

"Captain Clay," Alice faltered out. "He has just come."

Cuthbert bent his head over her. Their eyes met, and once more the rosy flood mounted to cheek and brow. She was going to start away from him, but he put his arm round her and kept her there.

"No, little lady-bird, I shall not let you fly away just yet. Fold up those pretty wings now, and let us see what we can bring out of this ugly old letter."

He made her sit down again beside him, his arm still round her; and they began to read the letter. Perhaps we had better do so too.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MY DEAR ALICE,—The time has now come when it is needful for you to be put in possession of certain facts which have hitherto been carefully concealed from you.

"Whilst you were a child, it was useless to give you information which could then have no meaning for you. But now that womanhood is bringing with it graver responsibilities, and you may soon become a wife——"

Alice glanced shyly up to Cuthbert, and nestled her little hand into his. He held it in a clasp—well, somewhat slighter than might have been given five minutes ago, and a thought crossed his mind that it would have been much better if Mistress Amiel Grey had made her will before that unlucky stroke came. But the Scrymgeours were always remarkable for caution. They went on reading:—

"It is my duty to tell you somewhat of your previous history and parentage. You may have heard me say that the late Dean Grey had connections in Scotland. A few years after our marriage, which is now more than fifty years ago, I accompanied him on a visit to his friends, and remained some months in the neighborhood of Perth. Part of the time was spent with the Ramsays, of Glen Ramsay, between whom and my late husband a strong attachment existed. Their eldest son, then a little fellow of five years old, was a great favorite of mine. He was a beautiful little boy with sparkling blue eyes, and the peculiar golden hair which is rarely found except in Scotland. But he was very much spoilt, and I discerned in him, even then, seeds of passions which might afterwards ripen into very bitter results, not only for himself, but those in any way connected with him. And so it afterwards proved."

"Stay, Alice, you are pressing on my arm." She leaned forward for a moment, and Cuthbert took his arm away. He did not give her the support of it any more that night. But her hand was in his still.

"I lost sight of him for many years, and when next I heard of him he had formed an engagement with a most estimable young lady whose name I forget. I remember, however, that she resided near Perth. I believe also that she belonged to a good but not very wealthy family.

"Some years after—it is about eighteen years ago now—I was staying in my native county, Kent, at Brandon Hall. At that time Colonel and Mrs. Brandon were in deep affliction. Their only child, a lovely and most elegant girl, had just been inveigled into a clandestine flight with a stranger to whom Colonel Brandon had shown hospitality. She had then been absent from them nearly six months, during which time they had heard no tidings of her. I found to my inexpressible grief and indignation that the wretch for whom she had thus quitted the shelter of her parents' roof was this Douglas Ramsay, my former little child friend. I was the more grieved for the great sorrow which I knew his conduct must have caused to the young lady in Scotland, with whose affections he had so basely trifled.

"Mrs. Brandon was in very delicate health at the time I visited them. The conduct of her child had greatly distressed her, and shortly after I left she died. Colonel Brandon never recovered her loss. They were most devotedly attached, and this was the first blight that had fallen upon their domestic happiness. I never saw Marian Brandon, but I have heard that she was a splendid girl, tall, distinguished, most regal in her bearing, but of an imperious disposition and passionate to a fault. Not many weeks after my return to the Old Lodge, she came home, deserted by the man for whom she had given up name and fame and all that a woman holds dear. Mr. Ramsay deceived her by a mock marriage. At least I believe the marriage was legal, but he purposely destroyed the lines, and so rendered it impossible for her to prove herself his wife, there being no witnesses of the ceremony except the party who performed it, and he is long since dead.

"Marian Brandon found her father at the point of death. She returned home in time to close his eyes, but not to receive his forgiveness; for the Colonel, though kind, was a stern man and firm to obstinacy in his prejudices. After his death, she gave birth to a child. Then, worn out with the grief and anxiety through which she had passed, her mind gave way, and for some months she was under restraint. On her recovery, feeling that she had too far disgraced herself ever to return to the society in which she had once moved, and being utterly disowned by her relatives, she left the neighborhood and has never been heard of since. I imagine she is dead, or possibly living a life of shame.

"My heart was touched for the child thus left friendless and dependent, and having no family of my own, I offered to adopt it, on condition that it should be given into my sole charge, and that its parents should at no future time claim any control over it. These conditions were complied with, and a little more than seventeen years ago, the helpless infant came under my roof.

"Alice, you are that child. Since then, I have cared for and tended you as my own. I have endeavored to give you all the advantages of my own position, and to remove as far as possible the stain which was fixed upon your birth. From the first, it was understood in St. Olave's, and I have suffered the impression to exist, that you were a niece of mine, left orphaned and unprotected. Hitherto it has been of no moment that this idea should be removed. It is now due, however, to the individual who may afterwards become your husband, that the circumstances of your parentage should be revealed.

"I have just had an interview with Mr. Cuthbert Scrymgeour, in which he seeks you as his wife.

"I was not prepared to lose you so soon after your entrance into society. I have no right, however, to retain you longer with me, nor would my affection permit me for one moment to prevent you from forming a connection which is likely to advance your real happiness. Mr. Scrymgeour's proposal has taken me by surprise. I cannot at once decide on the best course to pursue. He will come to me again to-morrow to receive my final answer. Then I shall explain to him the circumstances which I have now detailed to you. Should they influence him against the marriage, I have no doubt that as a man of honor he will hold them strictly private. Should he, as I believe he will, prize his love more dearly than any scruples of rank or position, you will learn the particulars of your history from his own lips at some future time.

"Knowing, however, how uncertain life is, and feeling the infirmities of age stealing rapidly upon me, I have judged it well to write this explanation. I shall also send for my solicitor again to-morrow—I summoned him last week, but he was from home—to make arrangements as regards my property, of which I intend to leave you sole heiress. The circumstances of your birth render you void in law, and, therefore, without this precaution you might be left at my decease entirely unprovided for."

"And this will hasn't turned up, Alice?"

"No, Cuthbert," said Alice, in her unsuspecting innocence. "You know poor Aunt Amiel was taken with the stroke the very day she wrote this, and she was never able to attend to anything again."

"Confound it! so she was. What a fool I have been! Well, go on, Alice."

Alice looked quietly up into his face.

"You are not angry with me, are you, Cuthbert? Have I said anything wrong?"

"No, no, child; just go on as I tell you. It's desperately hot in this room; I declare I'm half smothered. Don't sit quite so close to me."

He edged himself away from her, and dropped the hand which until then he had held in his.

"Let us get the thing finished," he said, impatiently.

"By placing my property in your hands, I shall do no wrong to any of my own family. I have outlived all my relatives save one—my cousin, Captain Clay. We never held much intercourse with each other, and, for the last twenty years, he has been serving with his regiment in India. He is, besides, a man of considerable private fortune, and therefore not dependent on anything he might receive from me.

"When you were sent to me, seventeen years ago, there came, with the rest of your clothing, a Venetian head ornament, a cordon of pearls, brought from Italy by one of the Brandon family, who was formerly Consul at Venice. You wore it at Chapter Court last night. It is the only memento you possess of your mother, and I should like you to take care of it. She erred very deeply, but she is your mother still.

"I do not know that I need add anything further to this letter. I may have been mistaken in keeping you and my St. Olave's friends so long ignorant of the circumstances it discloses. However that may be, it is too late to remedy the evil, except as I have now done. May God bless you, Alice! You have always been tender and true to me. Great has been my delight in you. Should Cuthbert Scrymgeour become your husband, I trust he will find the wife bear out the character of the child. Should the facts I shall relate to him in the morning influence him to withdraw from his proposal, I shall still rejoice that Providence spares you to me a little longer.

"Your affectionate foster-mother,

"AMIEL GREY."

CHAPTER L.

"WHAT does it mean, Cuthbert?" said Alice, when the letter was finished. "I don't seem to understand it at all."

"It means this, Alice, that you are no niece of Mistress Amiel Grey's, but an illegitimate child of a woman named Marian Brandon; and that, in consequence of your aunt having died intestate——"

"Died in what, Cuthbert?"

"Died without a will; the whole of the property goes to the heir-at-law, this Captain Clay, who, it seems, has come to put in his claim to it."

"You are not going, Cuthbert, are you?" said Alice, as he threw the paper on the table and began to pace the room impatiently. Her face was full of bewilderment, but there was no fear in it.

"Going! why, I suppose I can't do anything else much. I don't exactly see how I can stop here philandering, when that fellow Clay is walking off with the house and all it contains."

"But Cuthbert, he is not going to walk off with me.

"You're a little goose, Alice," said the B.A., coming up to her in spite of himself, and pressing a hasty kiss on her cheek. "But I must be off, and see what the man's after."

"Come back to me soon, then; don't be long, Cuthbert; it is so dull without you."

Alice could not catch his answer, as he strode hastily out of the room. But she was content. He was not vexed with her; he had called her a little goose, and she was quite sure he would not have done that if he had been angry. So she sat down on the sofa again, and waited patiently until such time as it should please her lord and master elect to return.

"A pretty mess!" said Cuthbert Scrymgeour

to himself, as he crossed the hall to the oriel room. "What a lucky chance it is the affair didn't happen a month later! I suppose I couldn't have backed out of it then, and it won't be the pleasantest thing in the world having it to do now."

He knocked at the door; there was no answer. Then he went in; the room was empty. Miss Luckie had gone out to give orders about supper and sleeping accommodation, and, as he strolled through the room to the half-open glass door, Cuthbert saw Captain Clay sauntering up and down the garden, smoking a cigar with the easy, self-possessed air of a man who knows the world is going the right way for him.

"Insufferable fellow!" muttered the amiable divine; and then, instead of going back to Alice, he took up his hat and set off to Chapter Court, for the purpose of consulting his aunt on the awkward aspect of affairs.

Cuthbert Scrymgeour's affections were made to match his mind—of the delicate spring annual kind, planted or pulled up at a moment's notice. Perhaps, also, the frequent falling of their leaves enriched the ground after a fashion, and prepared it for a fresh crop. The halo of fascination which had shrined Alice Grey, cleared off in a twinkling; she was a very ordinary mortal now. And then he began to condole with himself. He had been grossly deceived, no one could deny that; made the dupe of a pretty face and false expectations, very nearly inveigled into uniting himself—his splendid person, his unblemished pedigree, his social status, his melodious voice—with a penniless dependent, a girl who had not even a name to call her own. How providential that the *éclaircissement* happened just when it did! that the Scrymgeour family had escaped such a bar-sinister on its quartering. Mr. Scrymgeour was lost in thanksgiving.

He was awakened from this mental reverie of praise by stumbling suddenly upon the iron palisadings of Chapter Court. He opened the heavy oaken door with his latch key, and went into the dining-room. No one was there, so he rang the bell, and desired the waiting-maid to inform her mistress of his presence. As he paced the long stately room in silence and alone, the thought of Blanche Egerton floated through his mind. Blanche, with her millionaire grandsire, her dreamy eyes, her bland, delicious dignity, her centuries of Norman blood, her well attested baptismal register and armorial bearings. Cuthbert's mind was made up.

The Archdeacon's widow counseled prudence.

"Prudence, my dear Cuthbert, prudence. Do nothing rashly. Beware of committing yourself before the claims of this Captain Clay are recognized by law. At all events a legal consultation must be held before any steps can be taken towards dispossessing Alice of her property. If it is satisfactorily ascertained that such a stain as you have mentioned rests upon her parentage, withdraw from the connection. I give you my fullest sanction to such a step. I waive pecuniary considerations, Cuthbert; my mind rises superior to them, but the Scrymgeour name shall never be tarnished by contact with ignoble blood."

And then the Archdeacon's widow, who disapproved of excitability, smoothed down the folds of her moire antique, and leaned back in her velvet cushioned chair, the incarnation of ecclesiastical dignity.

Captain Clay was prepared for opposition. He despatched a telegraphic message to town, and by ten o'clock next morning his legal adviser arrived at the Old Lodge, bringing the necessary documents. Mrs. Grey's man of business was also summoned. A lengthy consultation took place between them in the presence of Miss Luckie and Cuthbert Scrymgeour. The claims of Captain Clay were proved to be correct. He was indeed the heir-at-law, and, as such, entitled to the sole possession of the Old Lodge, the estate at Norlands, with the property in High Street, held by leasehold from the Dean and Chapter. The close of the all important conference left Alice a beggar, absolutely penniless, and dependent for bread and lodging on a man upon whom she had not the slightest claim.

When all was over, Cuthbert, without waiting for an interview with his betrothed, went off to communicate the result to Mrs. Scrymgeour, at Chapter Court. Miss Luckie undertook to inform Alice of her altered position.

And indeed the kind-hearted little maiden-lady herself shared in the general wreck, for she had relinquished her claim upon the apartments in the Low Gardens, together with the little annuity pertaining thereto; and her sole subsistence now was derived from her stipened as manager-general at the Old Lodge. So that her future was almost as dark as Alice's, except that she had influential friends in the city, who would exert themselves to place her in a position of comfort equal to that which she had given up to attend upon Mrs. Grey.

As for Alice, she scarcely seemed as yet to realize her situation. She had not seen Cuthbert since the previous evening, when he had quitted her so abruptly. She had a vague notion of some money loss connected with the sudden appearance of Captain Clay, but that this loss, even if it did come to pass, could in any way affect Cuthbert's feelings towards her, was a result which she never for one moment suspected. Had Mr. Scrymgeour been dislodged from his preferment at a moment's notice, Alice would have loved him all the same. It would not have entered her mind that in doing this she was acting the heroine, or displaying any extraordinary amount of affection. And so, in the calm consciousness of a faithful heart, she waited patiently for him to come and tell her that all was well.

A little goose, was she not?—just as Cuthbert had said, when he gave her that farewell kiss last night. But remember, she was not yet nineteen, and had lived all her life with a guileless, unsuspecting old lady, who had tried very hard to teach her the golden rule of doing as she would be done by. And succeeded too; nay, more than this, the little goose—I am afraid, as the world goes now, we cannot call her anything but a goose—had got the notion that every one else acted on the same principle, and would mete into her bosom the same overflowing measure which she was so ready to give. Poor little Alice!

The oriel room had been monopolized all day for the legal consultation, so after luncheon she

stole away to her own little sanctum, the cozy study on the west side of the hall, where that first memorable interview with Cuthbert Scrymgeour had been held.

Thither in due time Miss Luckie came, bearing tidings of the poverty that had overtaken them.

"My dear child," said the compassionate little lady, "all is lost. The house, furniture, property, everything belongs to Captain Clay. He is proved to be the heir-at-law, and we cannot hinder him from taking possession at once."

She expected Alice would have screamed, or burst into tears, or gone into a fainting fit. Indeed, by way of being prepared for the last emergency, she had put a fresh supply of pungent salts into her smelling-bottle before she came into the room. But to her surprise, the young girl was quite calm. She simply appeared to be in a maze of bewilderment.

"Then it isn't true, Miss Luckie; I am not Aunt Amiel's niece, and I don't belong to her at all!"

"Not at all, my dear."

"Then do tell me how it is, for I can't understand it."

"The fact is simply this, Alice. You are the daughter of a lady—at least, I mean a person who was betrayed into an elopement with a wicked and abandoned man. Mrs. Grey took you when you were quite a little baby, and has brought you up ever since. The people about here always thought that you were her niece, and there seemed no need to correct the report, especially as the real facts were so very unpleasant."

"And the person, my mamma, Miss Luckie?"

"No one knows anything about her, Alice; she disgraced herself beyond recovery."

"But she is my mamma still. It doesn't make any difference about her not being good. If I could find her, I should like to be kind to her. Wouldn't it be right?"

"My dear, I don't venture an opinion. I wouldn't for the world say anything that is not scriptural; but at any rate she has never acted as a parent to you, and all your obligations are centred upon Mrs. Grey."

"Yes; dear Aunt Amiel! But I suppose I must not call her Aunt Amiel now. How strange it seems! And so the Old Lodge doesn't belong to me, and I have nothing to live upon, nothing at all. But you, Miss Luckie, what will you do? Oh! I am so sorry! You gave up your pleasant home to be kind to me, and now we have both of us lost everything." And at the thought of Miss Luckie's destitution, Alice, for the first time, began to look seriously troubled.

"Don't distress yourself about me, darling," said Miss Luckie, drawing Alice nearer to her, "I have a great many influential friends in the army, and I have no doubt they will do their best to get me back my settlement at the Low Gardens."

"Or, you know," and Alice's face brightened, "you could come and live with us at Grassthorpe. Cuthbert cares for me still and it won't make a bit of difference to him, my losing the money. You know I should love him just the same if he hadn't anything at all."

Miss Luckie could not help kissing the rosy lips which were wreathed into a smile so faithful and loving; but she was not sure, after all, that the rule would work both ways. Just then, Lettice brought in a somewhat bulky looking letter.

"Please, Ma'am, this has come for Miss Grey."

Alice's eyes glistened as she recognized the familiar handwriting.

"Ah, it is from Cuthbert! How kind of him to write so soon! He thought I should be troubled, and so he wants to comfort me, but I wish he had come instead; it is so pleasant to see him."

She opened the cover. Miss Luckie caught sight of two or three dainty little pink-edged envelopes within, and divining too truly what they meant, slipped quietly out of the room that Alice might be alone.

They were the child's own letters and the bands she had worked for him, sent back with a polite note by Cuthbert Scrymgeour.

CHAPTER LI.

WHILST the oriel room was the scene of grave consultation between the lawyers, a second colloquy, quite as animated, if not so portentous, had been going on in the culinary regions. Colin, in his striped waistcoat and shiny buttons, was seated on the table, alternately haranguing the assembled maids, and excavating the tasty recesses of a plum-pie set before him by Symons, the cook, in return for the still more tasty intelligence which he had rushed from Norlands to communicate. Mrs. Marris was there too, in her black silk bonnet and octogenarian shawl. She often stepped down in an afternoon, after returning from the Minster prayers, to have a "crack," as she termed it, with the servants, or pick up stray bits of gossip which found their way into the culinary department.

A pleasant, roomy old spot was the front kitchen at the Lodge. A huge open fire-place stretched across one end, with a seat in the chimney corner, the cosiest place in the whole house on winter nights. There was no fire now though, and in its place an earthenware jar of asparagus leaves, mint, sweet-peas, and snapdragons, filled the wide grate. The low roof was panelled with oak, dark and cool in summer time, but rare for flashing back December firelight from its deep groovings. A lattice window, almost every pane written over with names or devices, looked out into the back garden, and past that to the Monastery ruins and the river Luthen. A few scraps of fanciful carving still lingered here and there round the wainscotting and doorposts; old coats of arms, mottoes, groups of flowers, or queer grotesque faces, half-brute, half-human, such as one sees beneath cathedral gurgoyles. In the open doorway, nicely placed to catch the sunlight that crept through flickering elm tree leaves, lay a sedate, matronly tortoise-shell cat, winking peacefully at the gambols of her kittens on the little bit of grass plot before the door.

It was late in the afternoon. The work—what little there was of it, for they kept no company at the Old Lodge—had been finished an hour ago, and since then, the maids in their neat

gowns of lilac print and white linen aprons, had been chattering over their sewing. Colin was telling them about Mrs. Edenall; it was only the day after her death. With a few vigorous strokes he had dashed off the leading features of the catastrophe, and was now filling in the particulars with a few additions from imagination.

"Did you see her, Colin? was she smashed awful?" said the kitchen-maid, who had a taste for horrors.

"Not a bit. She just lay white and still, as if she'd been cut out o' marble, nobbut her head hung queer like, and she'd got them things in her hand as tight as tight. I seed Miss Bruce a trying to pull 'em out, but it warn't no yield."

"What things, Colin?"

"Why, yon screed of hair and the scarf t'other poor gentleman left hangin' upo' the ash tree branch; them as the barrack officers tried to fire at and couldn't hit 'em."

"Poor thing!" and Symons wiped her eyes with her white apron. "I lay it gave her a sickening feel to see 'em hanging out there, and so she thought she'd climb down and fetch 'em off; my, she didn't know what the Norlands landslip was though, or she wouldn't ha' tried! I reckon it would ha' gived me a turn to see 'em myself. I pities folks as has tender feelin's."

"I lay Miss Bruce will be glad to be clean shut on her, though," said the kitchen-maid, "I've heerd tell she has been awful flighty of late; hasn't she, Colin?"

"I don't go to say what she used to be, but she's just as gentle as a lamb since she came to Norlands. She was allers giving of me sixpences and shillings to keep yon poor gentleman's grave tidy; it cut her up his gettin' killed, it did; but I never seed as Miss Bruce made much count on it. She used to be a deal tenderer though to Mrs. Edenall sin' it happened."

"She's good to everybody, is Miss Bruce; but law, Colin, she must be awful skeered now."

"She is that. I clean pities for her, I does. If she was to lay her down side by side wi' Mrs. Edenall, you couldn't tell which was which, she looks so white and cold like."

There was a pause; the maids went on with their sewing, and Colin helped himself to a fresh wedge of pie. By-and-by he said demurely—

"Her name ain't Mrs. Edenall. It never were."

"Bless us!" said the women in a breath, "what did they call her then? Did you ever? Do tell."

Colin winked mischievously. "Now, the cur'osity of female people," was all the reply he vouchsafed to this unanimous request.

"Take that for your impereuce, sir," and the cook darted forward and gave him a ringing box on the ear. Colin, in nowise daunted, returned it by another which tore off half her cap border.

"Never heed, Mrs. Symons," said Lettice, "you'll get a new one at the wedding. I lay we'll all be smart enough, then. Are you looking to get aught, Mrs. Marris?"

"Why, I don't misdoubt but Miss Alice 'll behave handsome to the alms-people—happen a gownpiece or summut to make a cloak on. Marry, she's the money, and she don't care to spare it, bless her! When is it to be?"

"Miss Luckie telled me they was nobbut waiting for this here gentleman as comed yesterday, so I reckon we shall soon get agate. Mrs. Cromarty's had the muslin curtains done up this good bit past, and the best linen bleached, what Mrs. Amiel kept i' the great oak chest."

"I don't much matter yon gentleman, Captain what do they call him. He goes about with over much of a swing," continued Lettice. "He couldn't stick himself up more if all t' place was his own. He sent for me in a bit since to take 'em some wine yonder into t' room, an' ordered t' best sort. He's no gentleman, he isn't, to help himself to other folk's things that way."

"What were they doing of, Lettice?" said Mrs. Symons, "they've been agate ever since noon, and they're at it yet; is it settlements or summut?"

"It's summut Mr. Scrymgeour don't like, I'll warrant; he looked reg'lar savage. I always said he were a viewly young man, but my, I wouldn't care to sit nigh hand him if that's the way he's going to look when he gets bonnie Miss Alice."

"Maybe they're tying him over fast, so as he can't lay his hands on the money. I kind o' misdoubted Mr. Cuthbert had an eye to Miss Alice's fortune. She's a awful screw is the Archdeacon's widdy, and she's put him up to that wedding as sure as I'm a living woman."

"I believe you're right," said Mrs. Marris. "I think if I was a man I should sort o' shame to let a woman put the meat into my pie, that way; but some folks thinks one way and some thinks another, and them as hasn't money does well to creep up other folks sleeves as has. And so you say the weddin's nigh hand, Lettice."

"You'd say same yourself, Mrs. Marris, if you seed what a sight o' frilled linen and worked petticoats and things Miss Alice has got ready. A poor widdy woman as lives in the back College yard made 'em all. I telled Miss Alice—you see she sets great store by me, cause I've waited of her so long—I telled her there was a grand shop in the High Street kept them sort o' things, and had the beautifullest patterns. My sister as lives maid with the Bishop's lady, said Miss Standish got all hers there when she were married; but nothing would serve Miss Alice but letting the widdy make 'em, cause she had seen better days, and was hard set to get victuals."

"That's just marry to everything else that Miss Alice does, bless her! And do you know what she's goin' to be in?"

"Of course I do. Miss Alice talks to me like anything about her wedding; she says to me, Lettice, we must do this and we must do that, before I get married, and she smiles and looks so bonnie while I wish I was a follower too. But St. Olave's isn't much of a place for followers; it's over scarce of men. She's to be in white silk, with puffings of tulle and little sprigs of green leaves laid in betwixt 'em, sprinkled over with summut as looks like dewdrops. And she's to have her hair in ringlets, with a wreath of green leaves, and a tulle veil; not lace, you know, that's over common for quality since Miss Baker at the cheese shop was married in a Brussels lace square, but a beautiful clear white silk net, gathered round her head and floating about like a cloud. And then the bridesmaids is to be in white muslin wi' little purple flowers."

"They'll look just like heavenly angels then," said the kitchen-maid, who had listened with

open mouth to Lettice's voluminous description. "Mrs. Amiel Grey once gived me a ticket to see a picture of the New Jerusalem comin' down from heaven, which was bein' showed here, and she was in white muslin, with purple spots; leastways, that was what it looked like. But I ax yer pardon, Mrs. Symons, you was a-goin' to say summut."

"I were only wanting Colin to tell us what they called that there lady up at Norlands, if her name isn't Mrs. Edenall."

But Colin chose to stand upon his dignity.

"I don't go to gratify female folk's curiosity as skelps me on my ears."

"Whisht, whisht, lad, it ain't no yield for youngsters like you to quarrel with their bread an' cheese;" Mrs. Symons's hand was upon the plum pie, a moment more and it would have disappeared from his longing eyes into the shadowy recesses of the larder. Colin wisely resolved to put his dignity into his pocket.

"Hold hard, missis, just hand that pie back again and I'll tell ye all I know."

Mrs. Symons replaced the pie with a triumphant smile, and Colin opened his budget.

"I heered it onawares when I went to tell 'em Dr. Greenwood was come. Miss Bruce telled Mrs. Cromarty she wasn't to let on about it, 'cause nobody in St. Olave's knew, but if folks real names isn't to be spoke, I don't see what is. Miss Bruce was a bendin' over her, over Mrs. Edenall I mean, it were just after she'd gotten killed, and Mrs. Cromarty was standin' stiff upright like a statty, nigh hand her, and she said, did Mrs. Cromarty, as how she'd seed her afore; she'd lived maid with her when she were a young leddy, and her name wasn't Mrs. Edenall at all, but Marian Brandon."

"Marian what?" said Mrs. Marris.

"Marian Brandon, granny, what's got yer ears?"

Mrs. Marris was too much absorbed in her own reflections to resent this juvenile impertinence.

"Marian Brandon?" she exclaimed, bringing down her hand upon her knee with a resonant thump, which startled puss and made her spring right into the middle of the grass plot, much to the astonishment of the kittens, who were disporting thereon. "Marian Brandon, yes, that was the name. I mind it now as clear as owt. Mrs. Cromarty was tellin' me about it a good bit past, but I just let it slip o' my intellects 'cause it warn't a name as I'd heered afore. A rare beautiful young lady Mrs. Cromarty said she was, wi' curlin' hair and a glint in her een just for all the world like Miss Alice; and she came to shame wi' nought but her fair looks. Beauty an' misery beauty an' misery, that's the way in this here world. I won't go to say it certain, but it lies strong upo' my mind as a baby comed afterwards."

Mrs. Symons put on a look of virtuous asperity, and told Colin to go and finish his pie in the back kitchen.

"No wonder, indeed," she said, "that Miss Bruce didn't wish the facts to expire in St. Olave's, but for my part I think folks as disgraces themselves that way ought to be publicly transposed, for a warning to their sex. Babies is plentiful enough in the world without more comin' as hasn't a name to their backs, and nothin' but shame to get a livin' with."

"Ay, marry, but to think of Mrs. Edenall, with her proud, stiff ways, belonging to that sort! I mind once, it's nigh half a year ago now, she came to my place in such a flusterment—you know I used to get her things up for her—about a handkercihef as had got sent in a mistake. Laws, I never seed anybody so flustered i' my life. 'Mrs. Marris,' says she—she spoke dainty and soft-like, but her face was as white as a chorister's surplice—'I believe you've got a handkerchief that has been put in unawares with my clothes.' Well, Ma'am, I said, I an't looked in among 'em yet, but they're all there,' and I pointed to a basket nigh hand the copper, 'you can see for yourself. Well, Mrs. Symons, she flew to that basket like mad, and mercy on us if you'd seen how she tewed among t' things, clawing 'em over wi' such a vengeance. At last she gived a sort o' little squeak, and then hushed it up sharp, and turned to me just as cold and stiff-like as ever. 'Mrs. Marris,' says she, I've found it, thank you,' and I just seed it in her hand afore she got it crammed into her pocket. It was rare and viewly, the beautifullest thing ever I seed, all broidered round, and a grand fandanglement in the corner, with a name Marian Brandon, put on wi' satin stitch, same pattern as Mitsress Amiel Grey, you know, used to work. I ain't thought of it since then; I didn't misdoubt it was one she'd gotten lent and was feared o' losin' it; but I sees it clear now. It was her own name as she'd brought shame upon."

"It's obnoxious," said Mrs. Symons, "it's perfectly obnoxious; and to think of a quiet harmless lady like Miss Bruce harboring such vermin!"

Miss Luckie was passing the open door, and caught the last sentence.

"What is that, Symons?"

"It's Mrs. Edenall, Ma'am," cried Lettice, whose tongue was generally in advance of her discretion. "She's been and gone and tumbled down the Norlands landslip, and smashed herself all to nothing."

"Hould yer whisht, ye clattering magpie," said Mrs. Marris, rising and curtseying until the top tuck of her lilac gown touched the floor; "it's here, Ma'am, she's turned out to be a imposter; she's not Mrs. Edenall at all, but a woman as hasn't been no better than she ought. Mrs. Cromarty found it out, Ma'am; she used to live maid with her when she was a young leddy, but you see with it being so many years back, she never know'd her for the same while she see'd her a-bending over that gentleman, that Mr. Ramsay that got killed. I mind of Mrs. Cromarty telling me summut a good bit past, but I didn't give much heed. And there was a baby come, Ma'am, if you'll excuse me mentioning such a circumstance, and you a virtuous maiden lady as you've always been. And her name was Marian Brandon, Ma'am, Colin heerd Mrs. Cromarty say so; but she's dead and gone, poor body, now, and I won't rake up her sins agin her."

Marian Brandon! Miss Luckie remembered that letter of Mrs. Amiel Grey's which Alice had just shown to her. She tottered, pale and trembling, to the nearest seat.

"Mercy on us, she's going to faint; born leddies isn't used to hear tell o' such things!" and Lettice rushed to the fireplace and tore out a great bunch of mint, which she held under her mistress's nose.

As Miss Luckie revived, the truth broke slowly in upon her. Mrs. Edenall was Alice's mother. And then she remembered that other name which, in the midst of so much excitement and confusion, she had not yet linked with him who was now lying in Norlands Churchyard. Was Douglas Ramsay the father of Alice?

"Lettice, give me your hand to my room, I am very much startled."

The kind-hearted girl sprang forward, and supported Miss Luckie out of the kitchen. When they were gone, Mrs. Marris tied on her bonnet.

"It isn't late, I'll slip down and tell my niece as lives maid at Chapter Court. Law, what a tasty bit of news it is, and won't the Archdeacon's widdy open her eyes when she hears tell on it? She was allers dead set agin Mrs. Edenall, cause she held up her head so high. It's a queer world, it is."

CHAPTER LII.

THE day after Mrs. Edenall's death, Janet wrote to her solicitor in Cumberland, informing him of the accident, and inquiring where the clothes, jewels, and other articles of value belonging to the unfortunate woman, should be forwarded. She received the following reply:—

"MADAM,—We are in receipt of the letter in which you announce the particulars of Mrs. Edenall's untimely death. Perhaps you are not aware that both Mrs. Edenall's parents are dead, and that, some years ago, her conduct was such as to alienate her completely from the other members of her family, with whom, since that time, she has held no communication. We are authorized to say that any articles left by Mrs. Edenall at Westwood are at your own disposal; and if you have incurred any expenses on her account, they will be defrayed on application to us. We are, Madam, your obedient servants,

Messrs. SCRUTEM AND CO."

Mrs. Edenall was buried by the side of Douglas Ramsay. There chanced to be a vacant space, and it seemed fitting to the parish authorities that, as a similar accident had caused the death of both, they should rest together. Janet and Mrs. Cromarty attended the funeral, which was very simple.

As soon as it was over, Miss Bruce returned to Westwood. After the weary struggle and restlessness of the past month, the stillness of the old home seemed very restful. Tibbie had been there for two or three days' getting all in order, airing the rooms, arranging furniture, putting up curtains. There was no love of change in the old woman's disposition, and so she put everything back into its former place, even to Mrs. Edenall's crystal letter-weight, which used to stand on the chimney-piece, and David's pens and rolls of manuscript music, which had lain on the little table in the corner ever since he went away.

"It looks still, still and peacefu' like," said Tibbie to herself, as she stood in the doorway of the parlor when all was arranged, "and the puir leddy 'll no ruffle it mair the noo. She aye put a glamour over it wi' her uncanny ways. The Lord send that she sall ha' quiet rest aboon, for it was far fra her i' this warld."

Janet arrived in the evening. Her first occupation, when she returned, was to gather up with reverent care all Mrs. Edenall's belongings and lay them away in the room which she had occupied. The letters and papers were left untouched, also that desk where the purse lay. Janet was the soul of honor, and she kept the secrets of the dead as faithfully as those of the living. Then she sat down and wrote to her brother.

She was no great correspondent. A letter once a month or so was the most that passed between them; neither, when exchanged, did they abound in sentiments or violent manifestations of affection. Just a quiet, unimpassioned record of the everyday life of each; her little cares, little duties, little pleasures,—his toils, triumphs, successes won and difficulties overpast—these formed the chief materials of their correspondence. The inner life of each never came to the surface; no word was spoken now of the hopes which had once brightened the future, or the memories which lay like a cloud on the past.

Janet had not written to her brother since the day before Douglas Ramsay's death. She told him all of that now, of the first lonely watch, and the death scene with its strange revelations. She passed silently over her own griefs, and then went on to that second death, Mrs. Edenall's. All the particulars of both were given with clear, businesslike accuracy, no comments, no moralising, nothing but the straightforward simple facts. From the dead she passed to the living. David had wished that she should not shrink from mentioning Alice's affairs to him, and especially the wedding, whenever that should take place. So she told him of the preparations which were being made, said that the Highlands had been chosen for their marriage jaunt, and closed her letter by stating that Captain Clay, Alice's only surviving relative, had come from India, and was now at the Old Lodge, superintending the drawing-up of settlements for the bride.

As soon as this letter was finished, she sent it by Tibbie to the post, and then gave herself over to a long, long spell of meditation.

It was very rarely that Janet Bruce suffered herself to picture what might have been. This lack of imagination was of incalculable benefit to her. It enabled her to take each day patiently, and make the best she could of it. The quiet, unvarying track of common work-day duty was not dimmed for her, as it would have been for others of more ardent natures, by the haunting memory of sunshine overpast, or the still more wearying hope deferred of joy that might come. Life for her now, was just a straight, even, well-defined track, with a beaten footpath opening out from day to day; but no shady by-paths, no flowery dingles, no sunlighted landscapes luring her away to wander over their brightness. She had conquered the past, and for her there was no future except that of heaven.

We talk of the heroism of those who battle hard in the thick of life against the mailed ranks of worldly passions and cares; who toil to the death with head, heart and hand, for standing-room and victory. But it is more heroic to strive silently with a grim array of memories which marshal ghostlike on the soul's battle-field;

and slaying them one by one, trample over their dead corpses to the life that lies beyond, the life of patient unwearying duty. This is what many an unknown Joan of Arc has to do, this is what Janet Bruce did, though no one ever praised her for it.

She was still sitting there, thinking over all these things, when some one came along the gravel walk. Janet lifted her head; it was Mrs. Cromarty. Something unusual had excited her. She crushed the stones beneath her feet with an impetuous tread, very unlike her usual calm, stately bearing. Her swarthy brow was pale; the rich curves of her lips were compressed into a thin, quivering red line, and fires of mingled womanly indignation and pity burned through her dark eyes. Janet beckoned her to come in, and she stood in the doorway of the quiet little room, startling its repose just as Mrs. Edenall used to do in the old time. Hurriedly and eagerly, without waiting for greeting or salutation, she began to speak.

"And if she was base-born, Ma'am, her heart is as white as an angel's wing, and its ill credit to the man as dares cast in her face the sins of them as made her what she is. But its none *that* that's broke his troth, its because she's lost her bit of money; she hasn't a penny, the innocent darling, to call her own, and if he was a true man, he'd grip her closer to his heart, he would, because she'd nought to give him but herself, instead of casting her off this way. Oh, Ma'am, it's a wicked world, it is."

"I dont understand," said Janet quietly. As we have seen before, she was not expert at taking up unfinished trains of thought and linking them into actual facts.

"Ah, you haven't heard of it? It's sorry then that I am, Ma'am, to be the first to tell ye such a dreary story. It's bonny Miss Alice, bless her. The sorrow lies heavy upon her, the darlin', and all for no ill doing of hers. She's no claim to nothing in the Old Lodge, Ma'am; and yon Captain Clay, him as we thought had come to give her away to Mr. Scrymgeour, owns every penny of the money that should have been hers."

"It is very sad, and Alice is not one to contend with privation. But, Mrs. Cromarty, she will soon have a home of her own and be safely sheltered."

"Sorry a bit of it, Ma'am! He's cast her off, the false, mean-hearted money-hunter; excuse me, Miss Bruce, I oughtn't to speak such words, and me professing to be a Christian woman, but it's clean washed all the charity out of me, it has."

"Do you mean that Mr. Scrymgeour is not going to marry Alice?"

"Ay, Ma'am, the pitiful thing that he is!"

One wild thought of her brother darted through Janet Bruce's mind, but she put it away again.

"I don't see clearly what yon mean, Mrs. Cromarty. Mistress Amiel Grey had no nearer relative than Alice, at least so I always understood."

"Miss Bruce," and Mrs. Cromarty came nearer and spoke in a calm, rigid tone, "it's not a thing one cares to talk about, and I'd never have let it pass my lips, but there's others that'll tell you if I don't. Poor Miss Alice, bless her, is no niece of Mistress Amiel Grey's. She's come to her when she was a helpless baby, and we all thought she belonged to Mrs. Grey's kith and kin, but it is'nt so. She's the child of Marian Brandon, Miss Bruce—her as we called Mrs. Edenall—and yon Douglas Ramsay that lies dead in the churchyard now. Theirs was the guilt, Ma'am, and she has the sorrow to bear."

Janet showed no outward sign of feeling, but it seemed as if suddenly an icy hand had clutched her in its grasp and frozen the very life out of her. This Alice Grey—this young girl whom she had caressed and fondled—was the child of her own betrothed—the seal of his faithlessness to her. God forgive her that for one moment a thought of passionate anger burst forth against the unconscious girl! But only for a moment. Ere it had time to shape itself into a feeling, it was borne away by the God-given charity which endureth all things and thinketh no evil.

For some time she sat quite still. Janet was slow to take up new thoughts; she was not slow to take up new duties. It was her habit to be quiet, but whilst those who called her cold or apathetic were wasting time in unavailing regrets, she devised means for relief.

"Mrs. Cromarty," she said, after a pause, "I must go to Alice. If you are returning to St. Olave's, be so kind as to send me a cab down from the nearest stand."

"That I'll do, Ma'am, and welcome. I'm thinking there's none will comfort the poor young thing like you can. Miss Luckie, bless her, is as kind as kind; but, Ma'am, she's never known the real touch of sorrow at her heart—not stinging sorrow as reaches right down to the bottom—and I reckon it's none but that sort makes us able to speak a word in season to them that's weary."

It was late in the evening when Miss Bruce arrived at the Old Lodge. Captain Clay was there, examining the oil paintings in the oriel room, and directing the workmen to pack those which he wished to retain. The whole house was in confusion. Two men were taking an inventory of the furniture; Symons, a look of steady resentment on her face, was emptying the contents of the china closet and arranging them in order on the table; another servant was collecting the plate for a goldsmith who had come to weigh it. Lettice, with her arms full of linen table-cloths, met Janet in the hall.

"Can I speak to Miss Grey?"

Lettice dropped the napery and burst into a passionate fit of crying.

"Folks say she's none Miss Grey now, but they can't rob her of her blessed christened name, as we all love her by, the darling! I knowed that man meant mischief by his looks as soon as ever he set foot in the house, but I never thought to see ought like this. We're all going to be thrown out of place, Ma'am, and what's to become of us, goodness knows!"

And Lettice threw her apron over her head with a fresh burst of tears.

Miss Bruce watched her very quietly.

"Will you show me where Miss Alice is?" she said again, "I wish to see her."

Lettice pushed the piles of linen on one side, and conducted Janet to Alice's room. It was in the oldest part of the house, over the oriel room, with a heavy stone-mullioned window looking out into the Close. It had an unkept, comfort-

less appearance now; some of the furniture had been removed, the ornaments taken away, the oak chests, where Aunt Amiel used to keep her linen, emptied, and some of the contents scattered on the floor. Alice did not hear Miss Bruce come in. She was sitting on the broad low window-seat, her hands clasped loosely together, her forehead pressed against the stone framework. The sunny brown ringlets that hung over her face were wet with tears, but she was not crying now. Her grief seemed to have spent itself, and she only moaned heavily as if in pain.

This was Douglas Ramsay's child. Janet crushed back all other thoughts but those of pity. She went softly up to the poor girl and laid her hands upon the head that was bowed down so helplessly.

"Alice, I have come to take you home to me."

Think, you tender-hearted, suffering woman, who may have staked your happiness on the faith of one man and found him worthless—think of the bitterness that would curdle your very blood at sight of his base-born child, *his* child, but not yours, the seal that fixed your separation, and not the tie that bound you more closely together—and then say with whom you would mate this quiet, cold, undemonstrative Janet Bruce, as she leaned over the desolate girl and whispered—

"Alice, come home to me."

Alice only moaned and pressed her pale face more closely against the stone mullions. She was utterly broken down and crushed. She had none of the pride which carries some women through an ordeal as severe as this, and nerves them to bear it without a tear, lest pity should be offered, that pity which is far worse than silence. Miss Bruce said no more to her. She fetched Lettice up and told her to put together such things as her young mistress would need for the present; then she went to Miss Luckie to tell her of the arrangement which she had made, and then back again to the poor girl who was still sitting there in a mute, unconscious stupor of grief.

Janet's manner was calm and decided as she laid her hand on Alice's shoulder. This time Alice lifted up her face; its look, so charged with helpless, uncomplaining woe, almost overcame Janet. She put her arm round her, and led her downstairs to the cab which was waiting at the door. Without a word Alice suffered herself to be lifted in. Lettice put the portmanteau under the seat. With a jerky bow and a quick "where to next, Ma'am?" the driver shut up the steps, and so Alice Grey left the Old Lodge, the home of her childhood, the home she thought to leave ere long amidst the pomp and flutter of bridal happiness.

Night was falling when they reached Westwood.

The sky was grey, and a drizzly rain fell softly upon the fluttering leaves. Tibbie had lighted a fire in the parlor; tea was waiting for them on the little white-covered table; all looked peaceful and homelike, scarce changed from that summer evening twelvemonths ago when Alice first came as a guest to that house. The poor child seemed still to be in a sort of dream. Janet took off her hat and cloak, and then made her sit down on the sofa. As she drew the pale little face closer to her own bosom, she noticed with a sharp grip of pain how like it was to Douglas Ramsay's. For his sake she kissed the forehead, then the colorless cheeks, then the still lips folded down in mute, patient grief. This tenderness seemed to rouse Alice. She lifted herself up:—

"Oh, Miss Bruce, I could have borne it all if only Cuthbert had kept on loving me."

And then with a gush of tears in which it seemed as if she would have wept her very life away, she fell into Janet's arms, the only resting place that was left for her now.

CHAPTER LIII.

"CUTHBERT, if I were asked to give my opinion, I should say that the sacrifice of affection which you have been called upon to make, and from which, to the everlasting honor of your family and position, you have not selfishly shrunk, reflects the utmost credit upon you; and by thus nobly allowing private feeling to become a martyr to the superior claims of social status, you have immeasurably exalted yourself in my estimation."

This somewhat lengthy and well-digested synopsis of archidiaconal sentiment was given, it is needless to inform the reader, in the dining room of Chapter Court, and proceeded from the lips of Mrs. Scrymgeour, who sat in customary afternoon state at the right-hand side of the velvet pile hearthrug.

She held in her hand a piece of rich white satin, on which she was embroidering the Scrymgeour arms in gold and silver thread, for a banner screen. This piece of work was originally intended as a wedding present to Alice Grey, and Mrs. Scrymgeour had thought of having the Old Lodge arms quartered on the opposite side in royal blue. She congratulated herself however, now, that she had not gone to the expense of having them drawn for that purpose. In its present condition the screen was complete, and might answer for a future bride-elect without further alteration.

The Chapter Court cat couched in the centre of the hearthrug. Its forepaws were held together, its eyes closed, its head slightly uplifted. One might have thought it was returning thanks on account of the great deliverance which had been wrought out for the dignity of the family.

Cuthbert, in a luxuriously-cushioned armchair, sipped his coffee with the air of a gentleman. Certainly he did not give the impression of a person suffering under wounded susceptibilities, as he lounged gracefully back, his dainty kid boots elevated on a crimson hassock, his right hand lying like a lily leaf upon the black locks of a little Skye-terrier that crouched beside him, his left toying with a silver spoon crested with the Scrymgeour arms. On the whole, he looked rather comfortable than otherwise. But we will take it for granted that he possessed in an eminent degree the invaluable art of self-control. Perhaps in secret he might shed a tear or two over his blighted hopes, and men's faces don't show sorrow as women's do.

Neither was there much of the martyr spirit impressed on that aristocratic face, with its framework of silky brown locks, and pendent tassels of whisker. Mr. Scrymgeour was not

likely at present to become a martyr either to his principles or his affections. You might have looked in vain, too, for any abatement of the complacency which ruled supreme over those chiselled features, or any, even the slightest twinge of sorrow, if not for the suffering he had caused, at least for the downfall his honor had sustained. Evidently the thought never suggested itself to Cuthbert Scrymgeour, that in withdrawing from his engagement he had done violence to the minutest fraction of moral or social etiquette. It was, as he explained to his friends, "an unfortunate circumstance, but unavoidable, perfectly unavoidable." And they quite agreed with him. Had the affair touched Alice's pedigree only, and left her purse intact, possibly Cuthbert might have screwed himself up to the heroic, and fortified his resolution with that oft-quoted couplet:—

> "Kind hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood."

But when money and position pass off together in invisible vapor from the social crucible, it is astonishing how little people think of the useless residuum of goodness which remains.

"So fortunate, my dear Cuthbert," continued the Archdeacon's widow, in the blandest of tones, "so fortunate that the *éclaircissement* took place just when it did. Had not the death of that perfidious woman delayed the consummation of your marriage with the girl she palmed upon society as her niece, I tremble to think what the consequences must have been. Cuthbert, I could never have lifted up my head in St. Olave's, had I beheld the nephew, in whom are centred my fondest earthly hopes, inveigled into an indissoluble connection with—but I will not soil my lips by repeating the word which designates Alice Brandon."

"It's a confounded nuisance, Aunt. I expect the thing's bandied about all over the city."

"To your credit, Cuthbert. It cannot be mentioned but with infinite credit to yourself. I am convinced the Close families will join in supporting your motives. Indeed, the Canon's lady has already confided to me her profound sympathy with you as regards the deception of which you had so nearly become the dupe."

"I wonder how the little girl feels," said Cuthbert, lifting up a spoonful of coffee, and letting it fall in sparkling amber drops back again to his cup, greatly to the delight of Skye, who sat on his hind legs watching the process.

"Cuthbert, I have dismissed the unfortunate creature from my affections, and I trust your fortitude will prompt you to act with equal decision. I am happy, however, to say, that my indignation did not lead me to forget the claims of ceremony. I sent my maid across with cards as soon as the affair was concluded."

That was quite true. On the heels of the messenger who delivered up poor Alice's little love tokens, came a second, bearing cards and Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour's sincere sympathies. Miss Luckie was crossing the hall, and received both sets of articles at the same time; the sympathies she consigned to nameless limbo, the cards she tore in pieces, and, in the violence of her indignation, flung them among the pig's wash.

"I say, Aunt, to think now of Alice being the daughter of that imperial Mrs. Edenall!"

Mrs. Scrymgeour elevated the banner screen so as to hide her face, which glowed with insulted modesty.

"Cuthbert!" she exclaimed, "if you have any respect for your aunt, do not presume to mention that woman's name in my presence. I expunge the very thought of her from my memory; the unprincipled outcast, to think of intruding herself into the bosom of a respectable family; nay, more, to fix her residence in the precincts of a Cathedral city; nay, more, to insinuate herself morning by morning into the ecclesiastical edifice itself, and flaunt her shame in the very next pew to the prebendary stall—Cuthbert, it is an everlasting disgrace to the Close; it reflects a stain upon us which can never be effaced. It outrages all the principles of——"

Gently, gently, Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour! Now and then as you trail your sumptuous silks across the pavement of the High Street, a fair young girl, once pure as well as fair, bedizened now in the tawdry finery of the castaway, and wearing on her brow the brand which no tears can wash away, crosses your path. She once waited upon you, Mrs. Scrymgeour; she once smoothed those grizzled curls of yours, and folded the archidiaconal velvet over your heart-empty bosom, and heard you read out of that crimson-covered prayer-book words of tender, loving kindness, the words of Him who spake as never man spake, who hallowed all human love by the touch of Divine sympathy, who said not of the hardened, but the repentant sinner—"Neither do I condemn thee." She heard you read those words, Mrs. Scrymgeour. But in an unfortunate moment you discovered her gossipping with a follower, ay, brazen-faced hussy that she was, actually permitting the scoundrel to kiss her cheek behind the shadow of your ecclesiastical back kitchen door; and out of your employ then and there she went. You knew she had no home, but that mattered not; sheltered or unsheltered she should not make the grey walls of Chapter Court a screen for forbidden love passages, so she left at a moment's notice,—where, was of no consequence. And now, does it enter that heart of yours to think that one day her innocence may be required at your hands, before a tribunal from which there is no appeal?

Apparently it did not, for Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour continued in the same sedate, dignified tones:—

"I consider it a duty which every pure-minded woman owes to her sex, to discountenance to the utmost such unprincipled creatures, and to abandon them to the punishment which their evil deeds deserve. I have no sympathy which those mistaken individuals who would relax the barriers of judicious moral restraint, and extend the right hand of sympathy to women who have set at defiance the institutes of virtue."

The cat drew herself up, folded her tail decorously round her fore-paws, and turned towards her mistress with a complacent pucker of her face which seemed to say: "Mrs. Scrymgeour, I endorse your sentiments, and am proud of them."

"She must have had money, though," continued Cuthbert. "Did I not hear you say that diamond bracelet of hers was the envy of the Close, and her lace shawls or mantles, or whatever you call them, were the real things, best Spanish?"

"Cuthbert, since you force me to the subject, I repeat my conviction that the articles to which you refer were the wages of guilt, nor can I acquit the Bruces of lamentable and even culpable neglect, in not having instituted a more strict inquiry into her character before they received her into the bosom of their family."

"But," persisted the pertinacious nephew, "you once thought of leaving cards, did you not, and you only did not do it for fear of patronizing the Bruces?"

Mrs. Scrymgeour summoned all her dignity. "Cuthbert, we will, if you please, drop the subject."

The subject was dropped accordingly, and a profound silence ensued. It must have lasted some minutes, when Blanche Egerton sailed slowly past the window on her way to the Deanery, where Elene Somers was having a few musical friends to practice part-songs. She wore a heavy black lace dress, a floating burnous of crimson grenadine fell in graceful folds round her tall figure, and from her little black velvet hat a single white feather drooped and mingled with the blue-black braids of her hair.

Mrs. Scrymgeour laid down her work and deliberately took in the general effect of this magnificent brunette toilette. Then she resumed her operations on the banner-screen, and by-and-by remarked, as if bringing to a close some well wrought out train of thought—

"I should say old Squire Egerton will leave those grand-daughters of his, twenty-five thousands each at the very least." Another pause.—"Very good family too, unblemished pedigree, not a bar-sinister that I am aware of, on their escutcheon."

The cat intimated her approval of these statements by a wave of her left paw. There was no reply from Cuthbert, who was still idly toying with Skye's jetty locks.

The clock in the hall struck eight. Mr. Scrymgeour set down his coffee-cup and strolled to the window. A furniture dray stood at the door of the Old Lodge; it was half filled with packages, and a couple of men were arranging others upon it which looked like picture-cases.

"Yes, Aunt,"—it was a full half-hour since Blanche Egerton had vanished through the grey portals of the Deanery—"And I always liked a dark girl."

So, courteous reader, between you and me, I fancy we may consider that little matter as finally arranged. And let us hope that Squire Egerton will not take it into his head to marry again, as is so frequently the fashion amongst old men now-a-days.

CHAPTER LIV.

THERE was a general sale at the Old Lodge a fortnight after Captain Clay's arrival. He did not intend to use the place as a residence. Accustomed as he had been for so many years to the bustle and excitement of foreign military life, the brooding dulness of a second-rate Cathedral City appeared intolerable; and, therefore, after making all needful arrangements, he left for his estate in the South.

Of all things in this world—at least that part of it which lives in handsome houses and gives liberal entertainments—there is scarcely anything more sad than the private view days which precede a general auction sale. To watch brokers and bargain-hunters scanning with shrewd, greedy-eyed intelligence, the little home treasures which have been made sacred by their association with the departed; to see so-called friends prying curiously, and with the easy air of privileged intruders, into the rooms where once they had been courteously entreated as guests, or speculating on the possible price of services of plate from which scarce a month ago they had partaken the hospitality of its dead or bankrupt owner—there is something rather melancholy in all this. Surely, if a departed spirit wished to see one of the most painful phases of human life, he could not do better than revisit his old abode during the private view days of the auction sale which finishes up his funeral obsequies.

Everything at the Old Lodge was sold, except some oil paintings and a few pieces of the rarer furniture. The attendance was large. Some came to see the mansion with its splendid entrance hall, and wainscotted galleries, and tapestried state rooms, which had once been the resting places of kings. Antiquarians revelled amongst the carved oak cabinets and chests, each of which was worth a cart-load of modern drawing-room furniture. A few stiff old maidens, who had a weakness for china, slipped across the Close to inspect Mrs. Amiel Grey's goodly store of Dresden and Sèvres. Others, not a few, came simply for the sake of lounging over the rooms where once they had been welcomed as guests, and gossipping over the unfortunate affair which had made such a sudden splash in the stagnant waters of Close society.

The view commenced in the afternoon, but before that time a few of the families, who objected to being mixed up with the vulgar herd of ordinary sale goers, made friends with the auctioneer, and got admittance to an extra private view early in the morning, before the touch of fingers smirched with trade or shopkeeping had marred Mrs. Amiel Grey's household treasures.

"Exquisite napery this, Mrs. Spurge," and Canon Crumpet's wife laid her white hand on a pile of silken fine damask which was arranged on one of the corner tables in the oriel room. "And so new too; really it cannot have been washed more than once or twice."

"Part of the wedding outfit, dear Mrs. Crumpet," whispered the Colonel's lady; "you know the day was fixed and everything prepared, and the poor girl, expecting she had unlimited means at her command, spared no expense. An unfortunate thing, wasn't it."

"Very unfortunate," Mrs. Crumpet replied, unfolding one of the dinner napkins, snowdrop pattern, with Mrs. Grey's crest woven in the centre. "Very unfortunate, especially for poor Mr. Scrymgeour. I really pity him from the bottom of my heart; you know it must have been such a blow to him, such a very great blow."

"It was an unpleasant affair, certainly."

"Yes, and he could not have acted otherwise than he did. You know it would have been completely out of the question for him to have thrown himself away upon a girl who had not even common respectability to sustain herself with. Would it not, dear Mrs. Spurge?"

Mrs. Spurge thought that it would have been, as the Canon's wife said, completely out of the question. It behoved a clergyman to consider his position. Position in a Cathedral city was of the utmost importance; everything must give way to it.

There was a rustle of draperies behind them, the draperies of Mrs. Egerton and brown-eyed Blanche.

"Ah, Mrs. Egerton, good morning! good morning, Blanche. Beautiful show of things, is there not? Mrs. Spurge and I were just talking over this table linen, exquisitely fine, isn't it? But do you know, Mrs. Egerton, I don't fancy any of the Close people will purchase, on account of the crest."

"Can't it be picked out?" said Blanche, "I suppose it is only marked in with silk."

"No, Blanche, dear, it is part of the design. I remember once when I was dining here, Mrs. Grey told me she had it manufactured at a place in Ireland, expressly for the Old Lodge table. Poor dear old lady, you know she was always so very particular about her table arrangements. If she could only step in now and see the wreck!"

Ah, if she only could!

"Well, do you know, Mrs. Egerton," said the Canon's lady, "it strikes me as the most flagrant piece of deception I ever knew; so unprincipled, really so very unprincipled. I cannot understand how Mrs. Grey could lend herself to anything so unprincipled. And when everyone in the Close gave her credit for such unbounded goodness. But the world is very hollow, is it not, dear Mrs. Egerton?"

Mrs. Egerton said that the world was hollow, very hollow indeed, painfully so in fact; and then the four ladies moved away to examine the plate and china which were set out at the other end of the room.

Mrs. Crumpet took up the pieces of the massive green and gold dessert service, and tapped them separately with her gloved knuckles.

"Quite sound, not a flaw in them. Do you know, I've set my mind on this service. As soon as ever I heard of the unfortunate turn affairs had taken, I said to my eldest girl—Sophia, dear, there's sure to be a sale now at the Old Lodge, and I shall step across and secure that service. It was a present from Dean Grey to his wife when they were married. Beautiful workmanship, you see. Alice used to be very proud of it, on account of some peculiarity in the tint. Do you know what has become of the girl, Mrs. Spurge?"

"I really don't, dear Mrs. Crumpet. The entire affair was so exceedingly disreputable that I feel it due to my position not to inquire too minutely into it."

"I heard something about it," said Blanche, lifting her dreamy eyes from a little silver bouquet holder of Alice's which was lying with the rest of the plate. Miss Bruce is giving her a home at Westwood until she can turn herself to some means of subsistence. Mrs. Scrymgeour told me so." And as she mentioned that name, a faint blush stole over Miss Egerton's ivory cheek.

"Exceedingly kind of Miss Bruce. Possibly she knows more of the affair than we do, but the Westwood people are the very last whom I should have suspected of harboring Alice Brandon."

"Alice who? dear Mrs. Crumpet," and the Colonel's lady lifted her aristocratic head with an air of polite inquiry—"Alice who?"

"Brandon, Alice Brandon. Is it possible, Mrs. Spurge, that you have not heard?"

"Well, you know I am in the habit of having my young people always with me, and of course in their presence I make a point of abstaining from anything that might bring the slightest possible stain on their youthful minds. But do enlighten me."

Mrs. Crumpet stood severely erect at the head of the table, stately and dignified as any of the stone worthies who kept watch over the west front of the Minster. Her left hand rested on the handle of Mrs. Grey's silver urn, the urn from which, in days gone by, she had often quaffed the cuff which cheers but not inebriates; her right pressed with all friendliness the gloved fingers of the Colonel's lady.

"You recollect the—the person—the woman I mean, who, under the name of Mrs. Edenall, palmed herself, about a year ago, upon Miss Bruce. She was killed, you know, the other day."

"Oh, yes. She sat near the Prebend's stall in the Cathedral, and wore such exquisite moire antiques. A distinguished-looking woman rather, and very tall."

"Yes, some of these unfortunate creatures are quite superior in their bearing. Well, she has turned out to be—you understand," and Mrs. Crumpet supplied the residue of her information with an emphatic gesture of scornful contempt.

"It was accidentally found out," she continued, "Mrs. Cromarty, the housekeeper at Norlands, discovered her bending over that gentleman who was thrown from his horse at the landslip, and conducting herself in a very strange manner towards him. And then it turned out that he was the man with whom, nearly twenty years before, she had absconded."

"Dear Mrs. Crumpet, how disreputable! And to think that her presence was actually suffered at the Cathedral prayers. But how providential that no one left cards. Well, and about Alice?"

"The girl whom we always took to be Mrs. Grey's niece, and whom we have treated with such uniform respect and consideration, is the child of this clandestine union; illegitimate of course, and therefore unfit to be received any more into respectable society. I wonder Miss Bruce sees it consistent to have her at Westwood, but Scotch people are rather peculiar; and of course, now that Mr. Bruce is abroad, there is no danger of that kind in the way. Dear me! I am surprised you have never heard of the affair. I daresay, however, Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour would like it hushed up as much as possible; you know it was a very disagreeable thing for a man of Mr. Scrymgeour's

position to have his name mixed up with such exceptionable people."

"Exactly, and to have been made the dupe of Mrs. Grey's wiles—a person who was always thought to be the very soul of honor. But as you say, Mrs. Crumpet, the world is hollow, painfully hollow. Would you object to step across with me into the drawing-room? I fancy those tabouret curtains would just suit my bay window, and I have some thought of securing the little ormolu time-piece for the bracket in Blanche's boudoir, the dear child has such a fancy for anything tasteful."

After all, it is a merciful providence which prevents departed souls from revisiting their earthly resting-places, for in most cases the retrospect would be anything but pleasant.

CHAPTER LV.

THE Old Lodge servants were paid off, and the house advertised to be let. Greatly to the wrath and indignation of the Close families, who had set their hearts upon a baronet, or at the very least the younger son of a titled family, it was taken by a purse-proud millionaire from Millsmany, a flaunting fungus spawned in the dark recesses of dye-houses and machinery; more obnoxious, as Mrs. Scrymgeour observed, than even Mrs. Edenall herself; for that person, however faulty her antecedents might have been, always preserved the external appearance of a lady, and never roamed the Close, as the new-comers did, in toilets that might have been turned out of Bedlam.

Mr. Bullens was a jolly, carousing, country-squire-like sort of man, with a red-faced wife, who dropped her h's, and walked out before dinner in a pink silk dress with three flounces. There were two daughters, good-tempered girls, but terribly coarse, according to the St. Olave's canon of good taste. They used to carry brown-paper parcels in the streets, and laughed so that you might hear them from one end of the Close to the other. Three grown-up sons completed the family. They had warehouses in Millsmany, but came over to St. Olave's for the Sunday. The Close mammas took stock of them during their first public appearance at church, and then consigned them to oblivion, as being quite ineligible in a matrimonial point of view.

By-and-by the Old Lodge began to manifest unmistakable symptoms of its change of ownership. Mr. Bullens would fain have had the old brick-work re-dressed and painted a uniform bright red, but the landlord had reserved the right of external alterations, and so the Millsmany taste had to be confined to the garden, and interior decorations.

The pleached alleys, and trim, fancifully-cut box trees at the back of the house, were hewn down, and their places supplied by an Italian garden—a dazzling patchwork of many-colored flower-beds, with a huge wire basket full of geraniums in the middle, and plaster-of-Paris statues disposed at judicious intervals. Brilliant amber curtains, with gilded cornices of the latest design, draped the heavy mullioned windows of the drawing-room; the oaken furniture, that matched so well with the polished wainscotting and cathedral outlook of the room, was replaced by rosewood and amber damask; and Mrs. Grey's Dresden china and antique ornaments gave way before a motley array of fancy scent-bottles, papier-maché cases, wax flowers, and little bits of knick-knackery, which made the place look altogether like a Roman matron—the mother of the Gracchi, for instance—decked out in crinoline and a ball dress.

The Position Committee, with Mrs. Scrymgeour at its head, "sat" upon the Bullenses soon after their arrival, and unanimously placed them in one of the back apartments of the social edifice, quite beyond the pale of cards or civilities of any description. Mrs. and the Misses Bullens, in blissful ignorance of the locality assigned them, prepared to receive the homage which they doubted not would be tendered to their long purses. Accordingly, after making a magnificent appearance at Church, they arrayed themselves in flounced silks, and sat in state morning after morning, waiting patiently for the cards that were never sent, and the callers that never came.

They did not trouble themselves much, however, about the mistake into which they had fallen. Finding that St. Olave's was not productive in the social department, they consoled themselves by a liberal allowance of champagne dinners, gay dresses, and as much gaiety, in the way of balls and assemblies, as could be got without a voucher. Meanwhile, the goodly fellowship of the Close families looked on with a grim smile; outwardly scorning the pretentious display of the new-comers, but inwardly chafing, though they would not allow it to themselves, at the cast-iron barriers of conventionality, which prevented the golden current of the Millsmany wealth from uniting itself with their unblemished centuries of Norman blood.

Captain Clay, though a worldly man, was not hard-hearted. Finding that Miss Brandon, as she was now called, was left entirely dependent, he gave for her use the cottage at Norlands, together with the little garden immediately surrounding it. The moors and pasture lands, which belonged to the estate, were let separately. He also allowed her a stipend of fifty pounds a year, to be paid to her out of the rental of the St. Olave's property, which had formerly belonged to Mistress Amiel Grey. This was to be continued until such time as she married, or was able in some way to earn her own living. Miss Luckie's friends exerted themselves in her behalf with such diligence that, within a month from the breaking up of the establishment at the Old Lodge, she was once more safely installed into her post at the Low Gardens, with the privileges and immunities pertaining thereto. Alice staid with Miss Bruce until Mrs. Cromarty, who steadily refused to quit the service of her young mistress, had got the Norlands Cottage into order; and then she went there to live, with such patience and fortitude as she could, the new, strangely straitened life which had been portioned out to her.

Alice was too self-unconscious to be proud. That very guileless, unthinking simplicity of nature which would prevent her from reaching to any very lofty height of womanly greatness,

kept her also from the painful smart of wounded dignity, which to many suffering under a grief like hers would have been intolerable.

And even the love so heartlessly thrown back upon her, had not wrought its way far down into the depths of her nature. It had never as yet compassed her whole capacity of enjoying and suffering, or become a real influence in her life for good or evil. True, it was such a love as many, perhaps most, women marry and "live happily ever afterwards" upon; perhaps, also, it was such a love as might have served her, too, until compliments and caresses began to pall both upon the giver and receiver of them. But the loss of it did not blast her life. It did not, like some wounds which God sends, leave a scar which neither heaven nor earth can ever wholly heal. She let it go from her as children watch the death of some pet creature which has fed from their hands, and amused them with its pretty ways. She wept and bewailed much, but the capacity of enjoying and loving remained still. A few weeks, perhaps a few months, and the wound might be quite healed; and this not because she was either shallow or heartless, but simply because the young nature holds nothing with an unyielding grasp.

Alice had not lost her youthfulness of heart. It was well for her that the first great trial of her life came while as yet she had elasticity enough to meet and overmaster it. It belongs not to the first years of life to sorrow lastingly over anything that mars their sunshine. Perhaps, too, she bore her double loss better, the loss of fortune and the loss of affection, because she could not at once realize all its meaning. Self-denial, economy, retrenchment—these were words which had no meaning for Alice. She knew that a very different life to the one she had hitherto lived, waited for her now; but she committed herself to the exigencies of her new position in the same blind faith with which she had looked forward, a little while before, to the responsibilities of the feminine pastorate, trusting that ability would somehow come with necessity. And not until some months of the new life, with its unaccustomed trials and pinching privations had passed away, did her spirit falter or her little heart give way.

The day after that other letter had been posted, Janet sat down and wrote to her brother again; giving him, in her plain, simple, straight-forward way, a full account of the reverses which had befallen Alice, the breaking off of the marriage, the loss of fortune, position, name,—everything in fact but the little cottage at Norlands, and the scanty pittance which was scarce enough to keep her from absolute want. She told him of her bringing the poor, friendless girl home to Westwood for awhile; and then, which was a far harder thing to tell, of Alice's relationship to Mrs. Edenall and Douglas Ramsay.

This letter she sent to Leipsic, to the same address as the previous one. In the next letter which she received from David Bruce, he alluded to none of the facts she had mentioned. He expressed a little kind, brotherly sympathy with her in the troubles through which she had herself passed, and in a few brief words told her how closely through those weeks of anxiety she had been held in his memory and prayers. But there was no word of pity for Alice, nor of sorrow for the great grief which had come upon her. It seemed as if both in prosperity and adversity he would put her from his thoughts, and suffer the past to be as though it had never been. Janet wondered. But she had unbounded faith in her brother, and she took it for granted that his silence was the silence of wisdom. Perhaps the old dream had faded quite away now, and a new love, brighter, more prosperous, risen from the ashes of the past. Still, it would have been so easy to have sent one little word of pity, to have said that he remembered her, or was sorry for her.

Alice staid at Westwood three weeks. Janet's tender loving-kindness, so silent, but so true, did her much good. She learned not to forget her sorrow, but to receive it humbly, reverently, as something whereby she might reach to a purer life. Gradually the bitterness of it wore away. The old look, not quite so bright, perhaps, but quiet and peaceful still, came back to her young face, and at times she was almost buoyant again. Alice might make a noble woman yet, nobler far than if this sorrow had never come. The force which it opposed to the playful current of her former life woke up courage and resolution. She must do and endure now, not simply enjoy; and when this lesson is once learned, the foundation of worthy character is laid.

Often in their long conversations they had spoken of the wayward, fitful, suffering woman whose strange fate had cast a shadow over the Westwood home, but as yet Janet had found no words to tell Alice how closely her own life was linked with that of Mrs. Edenall. Over and over again, in her innocent, unconscious talk, Alice had trodden on the very verge of the great secret, and as often had Janet shrunk from telling her all the truth.

When duty led the way, Janet never flinched. Had she known for certain that to tell Alice the facts of Mrs. Edenall's history was the best thing that could be done, she would have nerved herself for the task, and, at any expense of personal feeling, told her all that she ought to know. But she questioned with herself whether the revelation would bring good or ill. The shock might be too great for Alice just now. She often used to talk, in a vague, uncertain sort of way, of finding her parents. She seemed to cling to the hope that somehow or somewhere they would meet; and to tell her of her utter loneliness might do more harm than good. The truth, however, came at last in its own time and way.

It was one quiet, sunshiny evening, towards the close of Alice's stay, and she and Janet sat together in the open bow-window of the Westwood parlor. They had been consulting about the future, what could be made of it. Janet was trying to contrive some plan by which Alice might eke out the small stipend which Captain Clay allowed, so as to make it cover needful household expenses. After the subject had been carefully discussed, Alice took out Aunt Amiel's letter from her desk. She had never read it since that fateful night when its contents wrought such terrible grief for her.

As she opened it, there fell out the little note which Mistress Grey had enclosed, but which Alice as yet had never read, thinking that it had

only come there by chance. It was very old and yellow, and had a musty smell, something like the chant and anthem books that had been mouldering for years in the organ pew at St. Olave's cathedral. This was all the note contained—

"To Mistress Amiel Grey. Madam,—I am authorized by the friends of the woman, Marian Brandon, who is now under restraint in consequence of mental derangement, to inform you that they fully comply with with your requirements regarding the infant which you have undertaken to rear. For the future no claim will be made upon it by any of the Brandon family, and the disposal of it is left to your sole control.

"I am, Madam, yours respectfully,
"AUGUSTUS BRANDON."

There was an engraved crest upon this sheet of paper, surmounted by a motto. Alice examined it carefully. She knew a little about heraldry, for Mistress Amiel Grey, with the pride of old aristocratic descent, had often shown her the Grey and Grisby crests, together with others belonging to the Close families, and explained to her the origin of the different devices. This one was an open hand, pierced with a dart. Above was the motto, "*Post tenebra lux.*"

"Miss Bruce," said Alice, after awhile, "I have seen this crest before, on a handkerchief of Mrs. Edenall's. There was a name, too, but I forget it now. What was Mrs. Edenall's maiden name, do you know?"

The truth could not be concealed any longer now. Janet took both Alice's hands in hers, and looking earnestly into her face, said—

"Alice, I am going to tell you something that may be very painful to you; can you bear it?"

"I think I can. You told me once that suffering was never too hard to be borne, so long as there was no sin in it, and I don't know that I have been doing anything wrong."

"This Mrs. Edenall, Alice, who lived with us so long, was your mother; her name was Marian Brandon. We never knew it until after she was dead. She did not know either that you were her child. They told her a long time ago that you were dead, and she believed it."

Alice seemed neither shocked nor startled. She bent down, hiding her face on Janet Bruce's knee. Janet thought she would have wept or trembled—she did neither. Over and over again she whispered to herself, "Mamma, Mrs. Edenall!" By-and-by she lifted herself up, and looking into Janet's eyes with a long, earnest, questioning gaze, she said—

"And my father, Janet?"

"Your father was Douglas Ramsay."

CHAPTER LVI.

ALICE BRANDON went back to Norlands towards the end of August, as the cornfields began to golden, and the sportsmen's guns to echo over the far-reaching purple moorlands. And not till then did she realize the change which had come over her life.

At Westwood, Janet Bruce's tenderness had sheltered her from much that was painful in her new position. She had not felt its loneliness. So long as she could nestle up to some faithful heart, and clasp a friendly hand in hers, Alice was not unhappy. Then, too, she had not known the pinching grip of poverty, nor been exposed to the altered behavior of people who had once courted and flattered her.

The Close families did not wish to ignore Alice,—oh! no, they were far too magnanimous for that. They would even take the trouble to come all the way across the road if they chanced to meet her; extending to her their dainty finger tips, and smiling with a sweet condescension, which seemed to say, "See how compassionate we are; you have no position now, not the slightest claim upon our notice, yet look, we do not scorn you; we are quite ready to shake hands with you and show you how forgiving we can be to the sin which has made you what you are." And then with a smile and a bow they would sail away.

Alice had not much pride in her heart, but she had enough to perceive this altered demeanor, and shrink from it. By-and-by she rarely ventured into St. Olave's, except in early morning time, before the fashionable folks had turned out for their daily airing; or, if she chanced to meet them, she would quietly slip aside into one of the dim little alleys that turned out of the main streets, and hide there until they had passed. Soon she was completely forgotten amongst them. They ceased to speak or think of her. As a chance remark brought her name to the surfuce of their idle gossip, it would be mentioned with a "poor thing" sort of commiseration; but even this wore out at last, and ere the autumn leaves which were to have fallen upon her bridal home had drifted away, the memory of Alice Grey was forgotten.

And so the time wore on until September, the seventh of September, Alice's birthday, and David Bruce's birthday, too. She remembered that when she woke in the morning, and mingled his name with her own in her simple prayer.

The day dawned brightly as its companion day had dawned twelve months ago. The browning cornfields waved in the sunshine; the trees put on their golden September coronals. The wold hills and purple uplands gave Alice a greeting bright as ever; others might forget, but they smiled upon her friendly still. No dainty little pink-edged notes of congratulation came to the cottage that day, though; no gay ladies in cloud-tinted muslins alighted at the garden gate with compliments and greetings for Miss Grey; no sumptuous luncheon was spread upon the lawn, and there were no longer any dancers to the music of the itinerant German band which came to Norlands in the afternoon, remembering how well they had fared there only a year ago.

Miss Luckie sent a wee little letter, half of sympathy, half congratulation. She was confined to her room with a sprained ankle, and could not offer her good wishes in person. That was all the postman brought. Not a note from Janet, nor even—poor Alice fondly hoped he might have remembered her birthday as she had thought of his—not even a line from David Bruce, to saw that he grieved with her for the great sorrow which had darkened all her life.

Was he too going to fail her—the strong, true, steady friend whose very name had always been a rest?

The morning passed wearily on. Alice had a great pile of household linen to mend, which Mrs. Cromarty brought in from the monthly wash. The dainty little fingers, so long used to only fairy-like fancy work, were growing skilful in coarser service now. But it was a weary task after all, for no pleasant thoughts wove themselves into the work; no rippling smile came and went upon her face; no dreams of coming joy made music on the silence of her life any more.

Alice sighed very wearily, and pressed her fingers over her aching eyeballs to keep back the starting tears. A cool hand was laid upon her forhead. Janet Bruce's lips touched her own.

"Alice, I have come to spend the day with you."

And the kind, close, tender hand-clasp told her all the rest. No need for spoken sympathy or half sad congratulations; Miss Bruce seldom gave either. To feel her near, was quite enough for Alice.

In the afternoon they sauntered out into the garden, and took their work into a little arbor formed of honeysuckle and ivy, close upon the beech tree hedge, which divided the Norlands garden from the high road. It was not a day for talking much. There was a drowsy, slumbrous feel in the air, and to listen to the flutter of the elm tree leaves, or the murmuring plash of the Luthen on the rocks below, was pleasanter than any speech.

"Janet," Alice said at last, not in the old, free-hearted way in which she used to speak of him, but very shyly—"This is Mr. Bruce's birthday as well as mine. I thought of him this morning."

Oh, how Janet wished she could tell the poor girl that in her sorrow David had remembered her too. But she could not say it.

"Have you heard of him lately, Janet?"

"I have, Alice; only a day or two ago."

"And did he—has he said anything about—did he say he was sorry for me—does he think about me now? Perhaps he does not know."

"Yes, Alice, I told him, but——"

If Janet Bruce had had half the tact that some people possess, she would have called imagination to her aid and tossed up some neat little extempore message of kind remembrances, condolences, or something of the sort. But Janet had no imagination, except what was strictly reined in by truthfulness. What she knew to be truth she spoke, and nothing more. She was grieved and perplexed. Never before had her brother's strange behavior so pained her.

"He does not mention you at all. Sometimes Davie is very silent about things that lie near to his heart."

Alice looked away over the harvest fields. She could see the track through which, just twelve months ago, they two had walked home in the quiet evening. She remembered what he had said then, his face as he bent down to twine those wheat ears in her hair. Had he too, forgotten all? Were men all alike faithless and deceiving?

"Mr. Bruce used to be very kind to me once," she said, not bitterly, but with a quiet sort of sadness, and then she turned her face away, and though Janet could not see them, she heard the slow tears came falling one by one like rain drops on the ivy leaves.

She let the young girl weep on for a while; then she said to her in that patient, peaceful voice whose very tone was a benediction—

"Alice, by-and-by you will see to the end of this; I mean this trouble that has changed your life so. God deals our lives out to us by a link at a time, keeping all the rest in His own hand. What we can do is just to wait patiently. He has promised, you know, that those who fear Him shall not want any good thing."

"Yes. Mrs. Cromarty was reading that to me only this morning. I think it was out of the Psalms. But, Janet, He is taking all my good things away. I have nobody left now but you and Mrs. Cromarty. Is that not wanting any good thing?"

Janet remembered the time, long ago now, when her own heart asked the same question. She paused for a little while. It was not her way to speak often on religious subjects, least of all those which touched her own past life. It cost her very much to break through the reserve which folded over all her inner life.

"Alice," she said reverently, "God's good things are sometimes very different from ours. You know His ways are not as our ways. We think that happiness, and home, and love, a quiet heart and faithful friends, are good things; but God sees that they will not always do for us, and so instead of them He gives great pain and sorrow. But Alice, if God sends even these, we may be quite sure they are 'good things.' We shall see it so by-and-by."

"I don't know," said Alice, wearily. "Janet, do you think I shall ever be happy again?"

"Yes. God never spoils our lives for us. Nothing that He sends is meant to crush us. Just the old sort of happiness, light and unthinking and careless, may not come back; but instead of it we get peace,—deep, still, unbroken peace. Alice, I am quite sure that suffering never comes for anything else than this—to make us ready for the peace that lies beyond it."

Janet had never spoken to Alice in this way before, never had she put aside her natural reticence and spoken so freely of the truths which through a long life of patient waiting, she had learned. But listening to them, Alice felt her soul gain strength. Perhaps it was their simple, personal truthfulness which made them precious. What she had known and felt, nothing but that, Janet Bruce declared.

Preachers speak to us, out of church pulpits, of grief; of the sorrow, which, like the centaur's poisoned tunic, clings to human life. They talk of patient resignation—they exhort us to suffer out our three score years, and travel through this lonely path meekly and without a murmur. And then they put off their canonicals and go to their happy firesides, where loving wives wait for them, where child voices greet them, and soft child arms are stretched out to clasp them. What do they know of sorrow? What right have they to teach others how to bear it? That is the best sermon, the most useful one, which many a suffering woman like Janet Bruce preaches from day to day by the silent influence of example, by little deeds of kindness, little words of love, coming warm and fresh from a heart which has

learned from its own grief to touch all other sorrow with gentle reverence.

After this they were silent again for a long time. The Luthen babbed noisily on its way, slipping from rock to rock, and weltering in mazy circles round its tangled tresses of river weed. There came from the distant cornfields the sounds of reapers' voices, the merry laugh of sunburnt girls binding up the sheaves, or little children garlanding each other with the loose ears that fell from the loaded wagons as they wound slowly through the meadows. And, at intervals, the Cathedral bell slowly rung out the quarters with a lazy boom that scarcely seemed to stir the air.

Presently, upon the high road, footsteps were heard coming nearer; and voices, or rather a voice, for it was only one that they could hear distinctly.

The speaker was Cuthbert Scrymgeour. He was talking in very low, gentle tones, just like those which Alice Grey had learned to know so well, whose loss left such a blank in the music of her life. The thick birch hedge hid him and his companion, whoever that companion might be, from view; but as they passed the arbor it needed not a very quick ear to catch those daintily-modulated accents.

"Blanche, Blanche," that luring voice said, "how can you doubt me? That child only woke a passing fancy. I never loved but you."

There was a soft, gentle, cooing reply, that only Cuthbert Scrymgeour and the fluttering leaves might hear. Janet took Alice's cold, nerveless hand and led her away. For a while the poor girl seemed stunned and bewildered. Then she lifted her face to Janet. It was very pale, and the sudden cramp of pain had scarce smoothed out from the forehead.

"Janet, I thought awhile ago that Cuthbert's love was one of the 'good things' that God had given me. I don't think so now."

CHAPTER LVII.

It was well for Alice that she had heard those chance words. They gave her strength for the life that came after. They swept away the last lingering cobwebs of hope, and left her heart empty, and swept, and garnished. Before that September afternoon the thought had not quite died out that Cuthbert Scrymgeour might come back to her again. Her own nature was very trusting; she did not know how easy it is for some people to forget. And so long as the thought of his return was cherished, she could not settle down patiently to the stern, dry realities of the life that lay before her. Now, however, all was over. That short six months of trusting happy love must be laid quiet away, remembered no more again for ever. And though the thought of his faithlessness came very bitterly over her sometimes, it was better, far better, that she should know the worst.

The pinching hand of poverty began to be very painfully felt now in the little house at Norlands. Punctually at the appointed time Captain Clay's solicitor forwarded the quarterly stipend of twelve pounds, but notwithstanding all their care, it melted away long before the next was due. To eke it out, Mrs Cromarty began to take in washing. Her fame in the getting up of fine linen was unrivalled, and in this way she was able to add a few shillings weekly to the little store. She would fain have labored morning, noon, and night to save her young mistress from the need of toil; but Alice would not suffer this, and roused herself, too, to the unwonted task of bread-winning. She was very skilful in all kinds of fancy work. Most of her friends—the friends who never noticed her now—had had themselves or their rooms decorated with some specimens of her handiwork in the shape of embroidery or painting. Her leather work used to be the admiration of the Close; she was never tired of surprising her friends with dainty little bouquets of flowers, modelled by her own deft fingers, or slipping into their favorite books the tastiest little markers of broidered silk, or garnishing their work-baskets unawares with pincushions of all shapes and makes. She sought now to turn this skill to some useful purpose, by getting orders for fancy-work from the Berlin shops, of which there were many in St. Olave's, or doing crochet and netted covers, which Mrs. Cromarty tried to dispose of for her. But the profits of these things were very precarious. Often, after she had spent days and days over some elaborate cushion or anti-macassar, it would be refused by shop after shop, and finally returned upon her hands as unsaleable. Even when she could find a market for her wares, the profit upon them, after all the materials were bought and paid for, was very small; most of the shops got their fancy things from Germany, and labor there was plentiful.

Then she turned her attention to fine needlework. Here, too, she met with but little success. There was a great surplus of female population in St. Olave's, as, indeed, there appears to be in most Cathedral cities; and ladies who had nothing else to do with their time, gossipped it away at sewing meetings, greatly to the detriment, not only of private character, but also of the poor unfortunates who were dependent for a livelihood on the scanty pittance they could earn by plain sewing.

Vainly Mrs. Cromarty took the crescents and terraces of St. Olave's by house-row, in quest of work. The ladies preferred having their linen made up at sewing meetings; the work was better, and the cost less, besides the satisfaction of encouraging charitable objects. Nay, even some of the good people themselves, at whose doors Mrs. Cromarty and others like her sought employment, were in treaty for the taking in of plain sewing, and were open to engagements for shirt-making at a lower figure than would remunerate the poor sempstress who had her living to make out of the profits.

Finding that she could gain little or nothing by this sort of industry, Alice bethought herself of copying music. She knew that she did it very beautifully, quite as well as any professional hand. David Bruce had told her that, she remembered with a sigh. Ah! she often thought of David Bruce now, and longed for his strong arm to rest upon. But he had forgotten her in her need. Janet rarely mentioned his name, or if Alice spoke it herself, said little of him. Something, or some one, had come between them. Perhaps he would marry some dark-eyed Italian girl, or flaxen-haired German *Fräulein*, and she would

never be remembered more. The thought of this gave Alice more pain than she cared to own.

After Mr. Bruce gave up the Cathedral organ, his place was supplied for a month or two by a young man from St. Olave's, until the Dean and Chapter had time to look out for a competent musician. They had fixed upon one at last, a graduate from Oxford, Professor Bright. He was dependent, as David Bruce had been, on his salary, but he lived in lodgings, and had no one but himself to support, so that he was not so straitened as the Westwood people were on their first arrival. Moreover, he brought one or two good introductions with him, which set him afloat at once amongst the Close families, and gave him standing room in one of the front apartments of the social edifice. He was a clever little man, tolerably fond of his profession, though not bringing to it the love and reverence —to say nothing of the genius—which David Bruce did.

To Professor Bright, therefore, Alice went, taking with her some specimens of her skill in this department of art. He was a stranger, and had not known her in the days of her prosperity, or perhaps she dare not have faced his questions and criticisms. He received her kindly. The help which she could afford would be really valuable to him—though the Professor was too much a man of the world to let her know that—and he made an arrangement with her to copy out the chants used by the choristers in their daily practice. He agreed to give her sixpence a page for all that she did for him. If he could have supplied her with work enough to keep her continually employed, she might have earned a considerable sum in this way; but the amount of copy required was uncertain. Sometimes for a week or two together, no new chants or anthems were introduced, and then she was thrown back upon her scanty supply of needlework. However, she toiled on patiently, and at last her own earnings, with those of Mrs. Cromarty, and the stipend furnished by Captain Clay, sufficed to keep them from actual want. Of the future, the long, dark, dreary future which lay before her,—of the time when Mrs. Cromarty or Janet Bruce might be parted from her, Alice dared not think. She began to learn the invaluable art of taking "short views," and suffered the morrow to take thought for itself.

When Alice came to Norlands from Westwood, she brought with her all Mrs. Edenall's property, in the shape of clothes, books, jewellery, &c. There was also the desk in which Mrs. Edenall kept her papers, but into this, as yet, Alice had not had courage to look. Indeed, that relationship scarce appeared to be a real thing. She thought of it with a dim, misty sort of bewilderment. Even the graves of her parents at Norlands, those nameless mounds greening day by day in the sunshine, had no memories for her, and woke no tears. All of love and tenderness that she could remember, clustered round Mrs. Amiel Grey, the Aunt Amiel of that old happy time; and to her stately marble canopied tomb in St. Olave's cathedral, Alice never dared to go now.

From time to time there came to Westwood tidings of David Bruce, but no word of his return home; and, stranger still, no mention of Alice. He was making himself a great name in the musical world. Sundry of the upper ten of St. Olave's, who had been touring it on the Continent, came back with glowing accounts of the distinction with which their old fellow-citizen was everywhere received. He was now residing at Munich, where he had made his first public appearance abroad. He devoted himself heart and soul to his profession, and his musical reputation was yielding him a goodly harvest of wealth as well as popularity. He never told Janet much of his successes, but she heard of them through the leading musical journals of the day, which were proud enough to chronicle the triumphs of British genius in the fastidious circles of Continental *élite*. He seldom mentioned the past either now, and the little inquiries about St. Olave's and its concerns, which once showed how tenderly he remembered the place, were gradually ceasing. His letters were chiefly occupied with details of his daily home life, sketches of Continental scenery, or anecdotes of the distinguished people with whom he mixed. And for her own part, Janet confined herself to Westwood news. After that first letter in which he had so studiously ignored the mention of Alice and her affairs, his sister had taken the hint and given him no further information respecting her. And so that friendship, with all both of joy and disappointment that it had brought, seemed to be finally wound up. Janet could not account for her brother's silence, but she had unbounded faith in his truth, and she waited for time to solve the mystery.

In December, the Cathedral bells rang out a merry peal, and carriages with outriders in scarlet liveries and white satin favors careered hither and thither across the quiet Close. The marriage of Cuthbert Scrymgeour and Miss Egerton was the great event of the St. Olave's season. People said it was the most elegant wedding that had taken place in the Close since the late Bishop's daughter was married, thirty years ago, to the eldest son of Lord Granby. Very magnificent the bride looked in her trailing garments of white satin, with a wreath of lotus flowers crowning her braided hair, and a Honiton lace veil softening the lustre of her Spanish beauty. The ceremony was performed in the Cathedral by the Lord Bishop of St. Olave's himself, Dr. Standish; Professor Bright presiding at the organ, and the singers performing a full choral service. A beautiful wedding, people said it was, and very stately, as befitted everything conducted by Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour.

The bride and groom spent their honeymoon in Rome, staying for a week in Paris as they came home. On their return, the Close was all alive for a few weeks with bridal parties, balls, suppers, dinners, assemblies, in fact a Festival on a small scale. After New Year's Eve, Mr. and Mrs. Cuthbert settled down to the cure of souls at Grassthorpe Rectory, and things came back to their old track. The Close turned itself over and went to sleep as soundly as ever; the saints and martyrs on the Cathedral front donned their nightcaps of snow, and the whole place resumed its staid, hoary stillness.

Alice knew that the marriage was to take place; but when and where, she had not heard. That very morning she came to the Cathedral with some chants which she had been copying

for Professor Bright. She had hurried to get there before morning service began, and the Close people were about. Generally at that hour of the day scarce a footstep disturbed the hush of the place, but to her surprise the nave this morning was scattered with groups of idlers who gradually formed themselves into a line between the long range of pillars that led to the choir entrance. She took her roll of music to the organist and was paid for it.

"What does the crowd mean, Smith?" she asked of the bellows-man, who stood at the door of his little den.

"It's a wedding, Miss. I thought all the place would ha' knowed; the Rev. Mr. Scrymgeour and Miss Egerton. Whist, stand back, here's the procession a comin'."

Alice had just time to retreat within the narrow doorway, ere a dozen snowdrifts in the shape of as many bridesmaids, in tulle veils and flowing robes of muslin, came fluttering past her; then there was a murmur of excitement amongst the ladies, and presently Blanche Egerton, in all the splendor of her brunette beauty floated up the broad aisle, leaning on the arm of the millionaire grandsire, whose scrip and three-percents had won her the position which she graced so well. Her dark eyes gleamed through the lace that veiled her like a mist, there was a scarlet flush on her cheek, and with every step the lotus blossoms in her hair shook out a waft of perfume. As the procession moved slowly up the choir, a burst of jubilant music pealed forth from the organ.

"Please to let me pass," Alice said, opening the little door through whose chinks she had watched the fairy-like vision. It was Mrs. Bullens, whose portly figure barred the way.

"Dearie me, won't ye stop, and see 'em come out? They say the bridegroom's beautiful, such a handsome man!"

"Please let me pass," said Alice, again, faintly.

She pulled her crape veil down over her face, and hurried through the gaping throng. No one took any notice of her; or if they did, thought that she might be some milliner's apprentice, who had just darted in to see the show, and was afraid of being late at her work.

She went through the little west door that led into the Close, the nearest way to Norlands Lane; passing on her way the gates of the Old Lodge, from which she once thought to have passed a bride. Poor Alice! and it was only a twelvemonth this very day, since Cuthbert Scrymgeour in that little wainscotted room, whose mullioned window she could see through the trees, had claimed her for his wife.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A WHOLE year dragged slowly, wearily on. Then David Bruce came home. He sent no word of his coming. He would fain steal quietly into the old city, and, even before any home-greeting had been given him, wander unrecognized once more, and perhaps for the last time, round its old familiar haunts. After that, if Janet wished it, they would go away. The place could be home to him no more now; and he knew how silently she longed for their own country, for the old Court House at Perth, with its dark pine woods, its outlook over the green and pleasant Inches, its friendships buried, but not forgotten, its memories that could never die. Yes, they would go to Scotland again, and lie down to rest amidst the heather and the blue-bells. Only one more look at the old Cathedral city before it was left for ever.

He reached St. Olave's in the dim grey twilight of a January afternoon. He left his luggage at the station, and sauntered slowly through the narrow, well-remembered streets. With a strange yet not all-painful feeling, he found himself once more beneath the quaint overhanging houses, with their black timber fronts and pointed gables. He turned his steps into the Cathedral Close. The swarthy Minster towers loomed grimly out upon the darkening sky; with just the old weird, spirit-like wail, the wind came swooping down through the belfry windows. In the half-dark of early evening, no one recognized him—indeed, had it been broad daylight, few would have found in that bronzed and bearded stranger, with his foreign garb and lofty mien, much to remind them of the somewhat uncouth David Bruce, whom they had known two years ago.

Lights were shining out from some of the Close houses. The Bullenses were having a grand party, chiefly merchant people from Millsmany—for they had not yet overcome the prejudices of the Close families—to celebrate the coming of age of the youngest son. The rooms were brilliantly illuminated; any passer-by might have heard strains of merry dance music, or, peering through the transparent lace curtains which draped the open windows, caught stray glimpses of ball-dresses all the colors of the rainbow, flashing hither and thither.

David Bruce paused for awhile at the little gate which led out of the Lodge garden into the Close. The old porter who kept the boundaries was sauntering about, on the look-out for strangers. He sometimes earned a sixpence or two by giving them scraps of information about the Cathedral, or explaining the meaning of the grotesque figures that gaped down from the gurgoyles. David stopped, and entered into conversation with him.

"The Old Lodge appears to have changed hands lately."

"'Deed, Sir, an' it has," replied the old man, looking keenly at him through his round spectacles. "Then ye're happen not a stranger i' the place. I took ye for one o' the folk fra furrin parts. We gets a sight o' furriners down here, Sir."

"I am not a foreigner," said Mr. Bruce, "and I do not belong to St. Olave's; but I know a little of the city. Who occupies the Old Lodge now?"

"It's let, Sir, to some people they call Bullens, cotton folk, Sir, fra Millsmany," and the old man looked scornful; he had the genuine St. Olave's blood in him. "They've a vast o' money, Sir, but they ain't got no pedigree, and folks as hasn't got no pedigree isn't much thought on i' this here. The Bullenses has riz theirselves i' the world wi' cotton. The house were let, Sir, when t' young leddy went away; there's been a

vast o' changes of late i' the Old Lodge, Sir; but happen ye know that."

"Yes," said David, bitterly. "Mrs. Scrymgeour lives at Chapter House yet, I suppose?"

"Ay, marry, an' that she does. I reckon the Archdeacon's widdy thinks t' Minster couldn't hold itself together if she wasn't nigh hand to give an eye to it. But she goes a good bit to Grassthorpe now, that's where her nevvy lives parson. You mind, maybe, she's got kin i' the Church."

"Yes, so I have heard. He is lately married, is he not?"

"Ay, Sir, nobbut a year ago. She were over here last Monday was a week, and rare and viewly she looked. She's a beautiful young lady is Mrs. Cuthbert, and folks say she thinks all the world of her husband; but then, Sir, he's so handsome; laws, he's the handsomest man ever I see'd, and them's the sort as wins young leddies. It ain't int'lect, nor a true heart, nor a bonnie temper as does it now-a-days, but just good looks. But they're well matched, for she's as sweet a lady as ye need wish to set eyes on, is Mrs. Cuthbert."

Alice, *Mrs. Cuthbert.* There was no more Alice Grey for David now, only "Mrs. Cuthbert." What a chilly feel it had, to hear those two little words spoken out loud, though he had said them over and over in his thoughts until they seemed familiar as household words. "Mrs. Cuthbert." But the old man chattered on, stopping now and then to take a pinch of snuff out of the pocket of his rusty waistcoat.

"Folks says she'll have a sight o' money. Mrs. Archdeacon wouldn't let her nevvy marry nobody as hadn't a big purse. He's a deal thought of about here, is Mr. Scrymgeour, 'cause he reads the prayers so beautiful; bless ye, Sir, it's every bit as good as singing, the way he does 'em, wi' sich an air and such beautiful moves as makes all the young leddies i' the choir look at him i'stead o' keepin' agate wi' their prayer-books. He's goin' to do 'em tomorrow mornin' sir, 'cause of it bein' a Saint day, an' there's a deal o' extra singin' at sich times, more as I take it than God Almighty makes much count on; but other folks knows better 'n me. I goes to the prayers reg'lar myself, but they ain't much yield's ever I see. Maybe ye wouldn't like me to show ye round the place, Sir; it's light enough yet to see a good bit. A gentleman gived me sixpence nobbut yesterday for showin' him the statties up o' the west front."

David slipped a shilling into the old man's hand, but declined being shown round the building. "She thinks all the world of him." Well, that was just as it should be. He ought to have felt very glad to hear it, but somehow the gladness was not forthcoming. It was getting dark now, and he strode fiercely across the Close, as though trampling down the bitter memories that rose. By the time he reached Westwood Lane, night had fallen, and with a pleasant friendly glow the lights of Westwood Cottage, his old home, flickered through the leafless branches of the chestnut and linden trees.

Not fiercely now, but with slow, gentle footsteps, stooping down now and then to mark how the little snow-drops were pushing their white faces through the grass, he crossed the path and went round to the side door.

Tibbie was sitting with her knitting by the kitchen fire. She heard some one coming, and taking up her little oil lamp, opened the door cautiously, for she had a genuine national aversion to "fremd folk," as she called them; and except the postman, milkman, and an odd vagrant or two, masculine footsteps were seldom heard on that track.

She did not wait to hear the stranger's errand, but holding the lamp so that its rays fell full upon his bearded face, she said in not the gentlest of accents—

"Gin ye be speerin' for my leddie, she's no' in, the nicht; ye may ca' again i' the morn." And then she was about to shut the door in his face.

David Bruce lifted his eyes to her with the look that used to be like sunshine in that home.

"Tibbie, do you no ken me?"

Down went the lamp, oil and everything, on the clean stone flags.

"Sure! it's Maister Davit come home agin!" she said, shaking her blue check apron vehemently, as though setting away a brood of chickens;—it was an outlet she had for expressing her feelings when they became too intense for words—"Its Maister Davit come home! Eh, but," and the old woman peered up into his travel-worn face with its new garniture, "I'm thinkin' ye're no ken speckle to the maister as went awa', wi' a' thae hairy duds upo' the front o' ye. Come yer' ways ben," and picking up the prostrate lamp, she led the way into the parlor.

"Miss Janet's awa' sin' the morn, I didna' just speer at her whar she would gang, but I'm thinkin' she's visitin' upon her that was Miss Alice Grey. There's no Miss Grey the noo, Maister Davit; happen ye ken that."

"Yes, Tibbie, I have heard it."

That was all David Bruce said, but the voice was tired and faint-like, and as he said it he leaned wearily against the mantel-piece.

"Ye're outworn the nicht, Maister," said Tibbie, bustling about, first in quest of his slippers, which kept their old place in the corner closet, then to fetch his loose coat and some cushions for the great chair which she drew to the fireside. "Will I get you the tea, and will ye be for scones or oat cake?"

"When I'm rested, Tibbie, not now. I just want to be quiet."

"Ou ay, ye were aye for quietness, and I'll no keep ye back from it. Maybe ye'll just gang to sleep a wee bittie while Miss Janet comes hame. An' will I bring ye the licht, or ye'll bide yer lane i' the gloamin'. Ye were aye fond o' the gloamin', Maister Davit."

"And I think the gloamin' is fond of me, Tibbie. No, I won't have the lamp, thank you; and don't let me keep you away from your knitting any longer."

She left him, giving an eye first round the little room to see that all was tidy. But, before she finally shut the door, she stood on the threshold a moment or two for a leisurely view of him—just an honest, faithful, affectionate look at the maister, who had been "aye gude to her sin' he was a wee bit laddie i' the Pairth hoose."

"He's unco' still the nicht," she said to herself, when she was once more settled down by

the kitchen fire with her knitting—"He's unco' still the nicht. I'm thinkin' some o' thae foreign lasses has cast the glamour over him, and we'll be havin' a weddin' afore lang. He needna have sought so far for a bride, if bonnie Miss Alice—bless her!—had held her ain a wee bit langer. He'd no have cast her off for want o' the siller, as yon fair-faced Southron has done."

Meanwhile, Janet Bruce was making her way home, slowly and thoughtfully, from the cottage at Norlands.

CHAPTER LIX.

When Tibbie had gone, David sat down in the great chair, which she had drawn to the fire, and his eye slowly wandered over the familiar little room with the restful look of one who comes home again after long absence. Nothing in it was changed from that other night, two years ago now, when he had returned from London, flushed with success and full of bright expectancy. The success was his still, proud as ever it had been, but the hope was away.

Tibbie had tidied up the room a little while before, ready for Janet's return. The firelight skimmed daintily over the silver-traceried paper, and pencilled out upon the white blind the delicate outline of the ivy leaves, which, winter and summer, Janet always kept in the little vase upon the window-seat. His music table stood in the corner, by the piano, with writing materials and manuscripts upon it, just as he used to leave them when he was busy over the copying out of "Jael;" and beside them was Janet's work-basket, with the perennial little half-finished sock, and her favorite book, "Thoughts of Peace," lying on the top, as she had left them when she went out. Even the great arm-chair where he was sitting—there was a thin place on the horse-hair covering of one of the arms—how well he remembered, that dim November afternoon before he went to London, how Alice had sat beside him on the footstool, and amused herself by pulling out the long hairs and plaiting them into fanciful knots, as she leaned her head down upon his knee. Now that bright head had another resting-place. Alice—"Mrs. Cuthbert Scrymgeour." David turned sharply round, so that he might not see the worn place. What a different coming home this was! Placing side by side the David Bruce of to-night and the David Bruce of two years ago, he scarce could know them for the same.

What a strange collection that would be, if one could gather together the cast-off garments which the soul has worn!—the vestures of old hopes, joys, longings, which clothed us once, but have been clutched away by the iron-strong fingers of Fate, or rent by the thorns of disappointment, or have fallen from us, piecemeal, as the years went on. Ah! how we should weep to meet them again, and handle their tattered shreds, and remember how brave they once were! After all, who knows but, in some yet undiscovered limbo of this wide universe, there may be a collection of this sort?—a rag fair of spiritual garments, filched from souls as they jostle through the crowded highways and byways of life. There is the white robe of baby innocence, unstained yet by thought or deed of wrong; the vesture of the child-heart, gay and gladsome, wrought like Joseph's coat of many colors—like Joseph's coat, too, torn often by some wild beast of the forest; the blood-red robe of passion, the jewel-broidered garb of love, the winding-sheet wherein some dead hope was buried; the shroud, stained over with tears, that wrapped a joy too bright to last. A grewsome array, truly; and ever the spoiler's hand filches fresh treasures and lays them there, until at last the years go on no more, and the whole company of Christ's faithful people find themselves robed for ever in the white raiment, clean and fine, which no spoiler's hand can touch; the brightness of whose purity no taint of sin shall find leave to mar.

Thinking, perhaps such thoughts as these, David Bruce did not hear footsteps in the room, nor did he know that any one was there, until two white trembling hands were laid upon his shoulder—

"Brother Davie!"

He turned quickly round. There was no tumultuous greeting between them, no glowing outburst of delight. The past held too much of sorrow for that. Just one close, loving hand clasp, one long look of trusty friendship—so they met after that weary parting.

David stirred the fire into a blaze; then putting off Janet's bonnet, and smoothing back the bands of her glossy black hair, he held her to him, and looked tenderly down into the pale face that was uplifted to his. A little paler, perhaps, than when he saw it last, but just as quiet; telling no story of the deaths upon which it had gazed, nor the bitter conflict which had passed over the soul within. Years hence, lying in coffined rest, Janet Bruce's face could wear a smile no quieter.

David was more changed. Two years of foreign travel had somewhat remoulded his garb and aspect. He had now the bold, upright, majestic port of a man accustomed to face the world and command its homage; the port of a man who has made his own place, and stands in it as a king should stand. A curling beard and moustache hid the worn, sharp lines of the lower part of his face, and covered the mouth, which wore an expression somewhat bitter now,—bitterer than it used to be in those first years of disappointment and struggling.

He drew the little low chair near to his, and then they sat down hand in hand, heart to heart, just as in the old long-ago time.

"I did not think to find you gone, Jean; you were aye content to sit by your ain ingle neuk."

"I don't often leave it, Davie, but sometimes it's dree work sitting my lane at nights. I—I had gone to see Alice."

Janet spoke this last sentence hesitatingly, looking up to her brother's face the while for some touch of grieving sadness. But she looked in vain. The lips only took a sterner bend, the light that gleamed out from the deep-set grey eyes grew colder.

Janet was perplexed, disappointed. She had never found him wanting in tenderness before. She had thought, she had almost hoped, that his first question would be for Alice. So earnest was the sympathy of her unselfish heart, that she could have given up even her own blessed

birth-right of sisterly ministration, so that this desolate, unprotected girl might find shelter in his faithful care.

"Oh," he said by-and-by, "if you have been there, you are home early; it is a long ride, I suppose." And then, after a pause, in which he seemed to be tracking out some painful thought—

"Janet, we have no one but each other now; no one but each other."

He leaned his cheek down upon her hand, and there fell a long silence between them. Janet did not care to break it by any trifling inquiries about his journey, or what had befallen him during those dreary years of separation. That she was sitting by his side again, that she could hold his hand in hers, and look up into his face, was enough for her.

That grand still face; it had settled down now into the habitual melancholy of one for whom the best of life is passed; it had the worn look which mental suffering or anxiety of any kind continually chiselling at the features, gives. Nevertheless David Bruce, take him altogether, was what the world calls a fine-looking man, a very fine-looking man. And his was the handsomeness which would increase, not decline with coming years.

"Janet," he said at last, in rather an abrupt, grating voice, "Janet, would you like to go away from St. Olave's?"

"How, brother Davie?"

"I mean, how would you like to go back into Scotland, quite away from here? You know I am rich now, rich at least in money and position," and there was a harsh ring in his voice which Janet had never heard before. "I could buy back the Court House at Perth, and you could live in the old home again, just as we used to do years and years ago. Then we would try to put away everything that has happened here; just lay these two years of our lives to rest."

"How would you like it, Davie?"

"I don't say anything about what I would like, I just ask you, will you go?"

Janet turned her face from him into the shadow. She was silent for a moment or two, not more. The thought of Alice, desolate and unfriended, came first into her heart. Whilst she lived, the child of him whom she had loved so truly, should never be left alone. But she did not tell her brother that. She gave him her answer calmly, without a quiver or a tremble in her voice. Once more lifting her face to his, she said:—

"Brother Davie, two years ago I would have liked fine to go back to the old home, and the old friends. But now, wherever Douglas Ramsay's grave is, is home to me, and I'll even stay by it till I die."

CHAPTER LX.

NEXT morning David and Janet Bruce went together to the morning prayers. Janet took her usual place near what used to be Mistress Amiel Grey's stall, and David went into the organist's pew. A stranger occupied it now, but Mr. Bruce's card was a passport wherever its owner presented it.

David's heart beat quickly as he ascended the stair, and passed into the little well-remembered sanctum. Verily St. Olave's was no place to wipe out old associations. The ruling spirit of conservatism kept everything in just the old track. Not a change had been made in the grey, dusty Cathedral since the last afternoon when Mr. Bruce officiated there, the afternoon when Lettice had come to summon him to Mistress Amiel Grey's bedside. As she told him Alice's message, he had unwittingly grasped one of the delicately carved oaken bosses of the canopy, and a leaf broke off in his hand. The gap was there still, broidered over now with a lacework of cobwebs, and the fragment of carving lay on the projecting capital of a pillar near by, untouched; one might tell that by the dust which lay so thick upon it. There were the old prayer and chant-books, with their brown, worm-eaten leather binding sending out a musty, century-old smell into the little chamber; and there was the rent in the crimson curtains through which Alice had peered down, that long ago morning, to watch Mrs. Edenall pace, in grave, queen-like majesty, up the broad choir aisle.

Professor Bright wished his distinguished visitor to take the musical part of the service, but David declined, and promised instead, to play the concluding voluntary. Whilst the organist chose out the anthems, he leaned over the curtain and watched the people assemble. Not much change in them either. The almsfolk came first, according to old regulations. Time had dealt gently with them, neither adding starch to Betsy Dowlie's flimping cap borders nor wrinkles to Mrs. Marris's smooth, well-kept face. Martin Speller limped up to his seat with just the same defiant sort of air; and the smile on Ruth Cane's sightless face, as she uplifted it to the organ, had neither waned nor deepened. Then the Close families took their places in the cushioned stalls, those stiff old maiden ladies who seemed carved in oak, as brown and unyielding as the canopies beneath which they knelt to perform their devotions. By-and-by a rustle of stiff black silk made—not music exactly, but something slightly the reverse—outside the choir. It was Mrs. Scrymgeour. No dresses spoke so noisily as hers of the ecclesiastical dignity which they enfolded.

With a sickening sort of suspense, David Bruce waited for her to appear at the choir entrance, which was just under the organ. She came in sight at last, accompanied by—

No, that could not be her niece, Mrs. Cuthbert! The lady who followed in the wake of Mrs. Scrymgeour's dignity was a tall, proud, elegant-looking woman, in a scarlet cloak and velvet hat. A friend, perhaps, who was staying at Grassthorpe. There was no need for Alice to come to the Cathedral now to hear the music of her husband's voice, or, perhaps, even already it had lost its charm, and she cared no longer to listen to it as once she did.

The service began. Cuthbert read it in magnificent style, making the choir ring with his melodious tones, now clear and resonant as a trumpet's silvery sound, now tender as the wail of broken hearted penitence. Heaven forgive David Bruce if the words woke not much music in his soul; if, as he bowed his face upon his hands through those daintily chanted prayers,

quite other thoughts than any which belonged to them swept over him. Yet who shall say that these thoughts were not prayers too?

The service was over. The Dean and Canon Hewlet, preceded by the choristers and surpliced clergy, filed slowly out beneath the richly-carved organ-screen. Mr. Bruce took his place at the organ to play the people out. But they recognized the master hand, and would not be played out; at any rate not until the music ceased. He began the overture to "Jael." The vergers bustled about and cleared the choir, for the Cathedral rules ordered that it should be locked within twenty minutes after the close of each service; but the people clustered round the organ stair and about the nave, listening in eager, speechless interest to the magician who poured over them such wondrous strains of harmony.

Mr. Bruce was still playing, when there came a gentle knock at the door of the organ pew.

"It's the young lady, Sir, as copies for you," said the bellows-blower, reaching out from his recess, and opening the door. "Is she to come in?"

"No, I am engaged with this gentleman, and cannot see Miss Brandon now. She must come again in the afternoon."

"Pray don't let me interfere with any engagements. Perhaps it may be inconvenient to the young person to call again. Has she come from far?" said David.

"Only from Norlands, a matter of three miles or so, and I daresay she is a good walker. But if you don't object I'll see her and have done with it. Smith, tell the young person to come in."

She came. David turned for a moment, and saw that the visitor was a girl dressed in deep and somewhat rusty mourning. He resumed his playing, and gave no heed to the conversation which went on between them.

"I have brought the music, Mr. Bright. Will it be convenient to pay me for it this morning? It is two months now since I brought back the last chants."

The voice was scarcely more than a whisper, so low that through the music David did not hear it.

"I think you must call again. I've only a sovereign in my purse, and I suppose you can't change it."

"No, Sir; but if you like I will go out and bring some silver. It will not take me long."

"Longer though than I care to wait. Excuse my interrupting you, Mr. Bruce, but could you accommodate us? This young person seems anxious to be paid."

Was it something in her attitude and bearing, or was it the single curl creeping out from the curtain of her crape bonnet, that reminded Mr. Bruce of Alice Grey? He could not see her face, for she had shrunk behind a stone pillar and was looking into the choir, bending far down over the curtain. He only noticed that her hand trembled very much as Professor Bright put the money into it. He turned to the organ again.

"I am sorry to tell you, Miss Brandon," said the organist, "that I shall not require your services any longer. One of the choristers offered only yesterday to undertake the copying in return for extra musical instruction. You have always managed it very well, but my salary obliges me to be economical, and there is at present no allowance for the transcribing of the church music. I need not detain you any longer, I believe you will find the money I have given you quite right. Good morning, Miss Brandon. I shall be happy to recommend you in case you should apply for other employment of the same kind."

There was just a low quick gasping breath. She turned towards the door, but her hand shook so that she could scarcely open it.

"Allow me," said Mr. Bruce, coming forward. He was not much of a ladies' man in a general way, but he was always ready to give help when it was needed; and he remembered of old that the door of the organ pew had a private theory of its own about opening and shutting. Before he could reach it though, she had pulled it open with a desperate effort, and was away down the narrow little staircase.

"Nice copying that, isn't it, for a woman?" said Professor Bright, throwing the manuscript carelessly upon the music desk as David finished his overture. "The young lady does it for a living. She has seen better days, and I suppose don't like the publicity of going out governessing."

It was strangely like those manuscripts of Alice Grey's, which were treasured so carefully in David's portfolio; the same clear round notes, the same finely-formed strokes and sharp Italian hand. He scanned it earnestly.

"It is not often non-professionals copy so well as this, but perhaps the young lady teaches music."

"No, I don't fancy she is equal to that. An old fellow who lives in the College Yard here, taught her; and then she is dainty rather in everything she does. You would notice that from her dress. Poor girl, I'm sorry not to keep on employing her, but you see I must consider my own pocket. The salary here is so very small."

David could quite understand that; he remembered the time when sixpence a sheet for music copying was more than he could afford to pay.

"I don't know if you are aware of the facts," continued Professor Bright, packing the music away along with the rest of the chants. "You have been absent from St. Olave's some time, have you not?"

"Not quite two years."

"Ah, well, then the affair has taken place since you left. The young lady's name is Brandon, and she lives up at Norlands, in a little cottage that stands alone before you come to the village."

"The house formerly occupied by Mistress Amiel Grey?"

"The same. You remember the old lady then? I don't. I believe she died some time before I came to the organ, but I've heard a great deal about her—high family, courtly manners, all that sort of thing, I suppose, that people make so much of here. She had a niece, at least so it was supposed."

"Yes, Miss Alice Grey. When I left St. Olave's, she was on the point of marriage to a clergyman. I presume she is now Mrs Cuthbert Scrymgeour, of Grassthorpe Rectory."

David Bruce forced himself to say this in a matter of fact, business like sort of way.

The Professor laughed a little, short, good-tempered laugh.

"Points are dangerous things, Mr. Bruce, and people slip off them sometimes. So did the young lady in question. The fact is, things turned out very awkwardly. She was found not to be a niece of Mrs. Grey's at all, but an illegitimate child of some person, a woman named Brandon, living in St. Olave's. I forget the name her mother went under, being, as I said before a stranger here. Of course, when the truth came out, she had no claim to the property, and the heir-at-law, a Captain Clay, from abroad, took it all, every penny, but a little stipend which he allows just to keep her from absolute starvation."

David Bruce's control served him well. His voice changed not from its old steady tones as he remarked:—

"That was unfortunate, very. But the marriage."

"Dropped through; blew over, came to nothing. Painful thing for Mr. Scrymgeour, but of course he broke it off at once, as soon as ever the facts got out. You know it would never do for a man in his position to marry a—well a girl without even a rag of respectability about her."

David Bruce smiled. A quiet smile, very, just rippling up to the deep set grey eyes, and moistening them with what might be tears, or possibly a twinkle of humor. Professor Bright thought it was the latter.

"You're smiling. I daresay you imagine it was the money more than the respectability that made the gentleman take fright. Well, I won't say which it was. At all events his affections were not deeply blighted, for six months after, he married a young lady, the belle of the Close, Blanche Egerton, a splendid brunette, with the most magnificent eyes you ever saw, and such hair! She came in with the Archdeacon's widow to the prayers this morning. You would see her, I daresay, in a scarlet cloak and black hat."

"Yes, and Alice—I mean Miss Brandon?"

"Lives up at Norlands, as I told you. Nobody takes any notice of her now, of course. Captain Clay lets her have the house for nothing, and she ekes out her allowance by working for the shops and copying music. Starving sort of thing, I should fancy."

David turned abruptly to the organ. A few quick, passionate chords, full of fiery vehemence, and then that old Cathedral rang with such a peal of jubilant harmony, as had never before echoed through its long aisles of clustered columns. On and on he played, his whole soul pouring itself out upon the music. His face grew bright with the triumph shining through; his whole form seemed to heighten and dilate with a strange majesty. Hope, joy, tenderness, longing, all spoke out in that wondrous melody. It was David Bruce's "Te Deum," the outburst of a prayer which no words could speak.

Suddenly the music ceased. Without a word of farewell to the astonished Professor, Mr. Bruce took up his hat and gloves and hurried away. It had been whispered about in the city that the great composer had come back, and was now playing at the Cathedral, and hundreds of people were clustering round the organ, listening to the wondrous music, or waiting to catch a sight of the performer. But he pressed through them all, giving no glance of recognition to the smiles which were poured on him from many a fair face. Right onward he steered his way, until he reached the little door that led from the west end into the Close. There Janet was waiting for him.

He took her hand in his, and hurried her away out into the quiet Close, past the grim, aristocratic old houses, and shady little back terraces, never slackening his pace until they reached Westwood Lane, where not a footstep save their own was to be heard.

"Janet," he began, and now the first gush of excitement spent, his voice was very feeble, his face deathly pale, "Janet, why did you not tell me of this? Why did you keep it from me?"

"What, Davie?" she said, quietly.

"About Alice," and Janet felt the hand that held hers tighten its grasp almost to pain.

"I did write you all about it," she said, "and sent the letter to you at Leipsic."

"How long back?"

"This is January. I sent it a year ago last August."

"That explains it. I left Leipsic early in August just after I had got the letter in which you said that she was to be married in a few days. Janet, if you knew what the time since then has been."

Janet knew somewhat of its hardness, from the lines it had graven on her brother's face.

"Who has told you now, Davie?"

"She came into the organ pew whilst I was there. A poor little trembling thing. I don't know if she knew me again, but she did not speak to me, and I did not recognize her, for the organist called her Brandon. She had come to bring some copied music that he pays her to do, and the poor child sighed so wearily when he told her she was not to have any more. After she was gone he told me who she was, and that Cuthbert Scrymgeour had cast her off because she had neither name nor fortune to give him."

"Did he tell you any more than this?"

"Only that instead of being Mistress Amiel Grey's niece, she was the daughter of a person named Brandon, and that she was left almost entirely dependent upon her own exertions. Tell me all about it, Janet."

They had reached the cottage now. They went into the little parlor, and there sitting together hand in hand, they talked over all the past. Janet told him, in her plain matter of fact way, the story of Alice's birth and parentage, as she had had it partly from Alice's own lips, and partly from Mrs. Cromarty.

"Last time I wrote to you, David, I told you about Douglas Ramsay's death, and Mrs. Edenall's, but no more than that. I knew you had much to weary you, and to have said it all could do you no good."

David pressed his sister's hand. She went on—

"I was sitting by her the night they brought her home dead, and Mrs. Cromarty came into the room. She told me she had seen her before, that she had lived maid with her when she was a child, and that her real name was Brandon, Marian Brandon. When she was very young she eloped from her father's house with a stranger who professed to marry her."

"Ha!" said David, "and Alice is their child. Is it so?"

"Stay, brother, I have not told you all. This stranger wronged her very much. He took her into Germany, and there deserted her. She came home, a poor, miserable outcast, in time to see her father die; then her child was born, and she became insane. This stranger, brother Davie, was Douglas Ramsay."

"Jeanie, my poor sister Jeanie!" and David Bruce drew the pale face down to his breast. Janet let it rest there for awhile; then raised it and went on calmly as ever.

"There were no witnesses to the marriage, and he destroyed the lines that she might have no claim upon him. Her father and mother were very wealthy people, and of good family, but after they died, her relatives quite disowned her. When she came out of the asylum, she was told that her child was dead, and not being able to remain in the neighborhood where she was known, she went and lived in complete retirement in Cumberland. From there she came to us. Mrs. Amiel Grey knew the Brandon family, and offered to take the child on condition that its parents never claimed it. So Alice was sent to the Old Lodge, and the people of St. Olave's have always imagined that she was a niece of Mrs. Grey's."

"And Mrs. Edenall never knew that Alice was her own daughter!"

"Never. She always imagined that her child was dead. I did not know that she was a mother until the afternoon of Douglas Ramsay's funeral, when she told me something of her history. I don't think she mourned much for the loss of it; she knew the stain of its birth could never be wiped out."

"Tell me more about Alice!"

David's voice sounded very differently now, from when he had spoken that name the night before. Janet went on mechanically with her story.

"Only a week or two before the time fixed for the marriage, Alice was accidentally looking into an old cabinet in the drawing-room, and found a letter addressed to her by her aunt, to be read after Mrs. Grey's death. She opened it, and found that it contained her own history. Cuthbert Scrymgeour was sitting by her at the time she read it. The next day, Captain Clay proved his claim as heir-at-law; and, as soon as the legal conference was over, Cuthbert Scrymgeour sent back Alice's letters and broke off the engagement. Of course, the stain of Alice's parentage was made the excuse for this, and so Mr. Scrymgeour has kept his credit as a man of honor."

"And you, Jeanie, what did you do?"

"Mrs. Cromarty told me of it next day, and I went to her. I found the house all in confusion. Alice was sitting in her own room; she seemed to be in a stupor of grief, and there was no one to comfort her. So I brought her here, and kept her with me until Mrs. Cromarty had got the cottage at Norlands ready for her. Poor child, it was a sair grief to her at first, but I think the bitterness of it is passed now."

"Did she love him with her whole heart, Jeanie?"

"I don't think it. He pleased her fancy, and just petted her from morning to night, but he was no stay for her to rest upon. It is licht love, Davie, that cannot hold true in the cauld blast. But I'm vexed for her now, the darling; her life is so different to what it used to be. She labors all day at that music copying, and in the gloaming, when it is too dark to write, she does crochet and fancy-work for the shops. Mrs. Cromarty gets a little washing or plain sewing, sometimes; and that, with Alice's pittance from Captain Clay, is all they have to depend upon."

David turned his face away.

"Alice! little Alice!"

And in the deep, low-spoken tenderness of those words, Janet knew how surely ere long that poor friendless girl would find a quiet resting-place in her brother's heart. And Janet murmured not. She knew that, for him even as for herself to love once was to love for ever.

CHAPTER LXI

It would seem that no life is complete without the refining and purifying influence of sorrow. Not through hope or joy, or even through busy working, but through suffering only, are we, like our Captain, to be made perfect. And so into Alice's life, dimming for awhile all its sunshine and freshness, this needful night of grief had come, to nourish with wholesome shadow the thoughts which overmuch brightness might have withered and scorched. She worked on very patiently at her new duties. By-and-by her life of labor seemed more real than the long, pleasant child-rest which had gone before it. That came to be almost like a dream, a peaceful, beautiful dream, only remembered now and then.

She came home from the Cathedral that morning, weary and dispirited. The pittance which, small though it was, had helped to keep the wolf from the door, was gone now. After leaving Professor Bright, she had gone to one and another of the organists of the different churches in St. Olave's, to ask if they could give her employment, but all had declined her services. She must turn to needlework again. Mrs. Cromarty had brought some home that morning, which had been given her as a great favor by one of the Close families. It was a set of cravats, fine cambric cravats for Canon Crumpet, who had just come into residence. They were lying on the table now; Alice had been stitching at one of them until her eye-balls ached and her weary fingers almost refused to guide the needle. If she could have laid the work down, and had a real good cry, it would have been such a relief. But she could not afford the luxury of tears now; they made her eyes smart and her head ache, and then the stint of work which she set herself had to be left undone.

At last, however, she had been forced to rest, and now in the half twilight of that winter afternoon, she stood at the window, looking out over the grey moorland. The sky was all one even leaden tint, save just a little bit over St. Olave's Cathedral, where the mist had broken away and a glimpse of clear blue sky looked through, hinting of sunshine somewhere. So often in *our* life track we stand closed round by

gloom and mist, yet never so utterly dark but one little rift remains to which we may look and catch a ray of the sunshine of God's love. But Alice's eyes were blinded; she could not see it now.

She was changed, sadly changed. Poor child! she had neither art nor pride to hide the wound which Cuthbert Scrymgeour's faithlessness had given her. She was not, she never would be, one of those grand heroic creatures who, sore wounded by a sudden sword-stroke in the battle, fight on bravely after it, bravely as ever; never showing, by tear or sigh, how sharp the anguish is; even fighting all the more desperately, and winning nobler victories, in the strength of suffering. Neither was she of that lofty sort who, having seen their soul palace swept utterly away, set themselves with patient fortitude to travel the rest of the way homeless, and beggared of all that earth can give; content so only Heaven bring them rest. She was but a child, and as a child she suffered.

David Bruce was back again, that was the thought which filled her mind now. Filled it, not with joy and comfort, not with the glad certainty of coming rest, but with a weary, sickening sort of disappointment. All that his return could do would be to close Westwood to her. She dare not go there now and meet his cold, unsympathizing face, or listen to the story of his triumphs,—triumphs which had made him forget her griefs. That chance encounter in the organ-pew had struck a great chill through her. She had so often pictured their meeting, the joy it would be to sit by him again, and look into those steady, trusty eyes. But this was before her trouble came. Now they had met—and how? He had not even turned to look at her, or told her by a single word that he remembered the old friendliness. He was the distinguished stranger now, she the penniless little dependant, toiling hard for daily bread, and scarce able to win that. Ah! was *this* not wanting any good thing?

Those cravats must be done. Mrs. Canon Crumpet had sent special orders that they were to be sent home, starched and got up, by the end of the week, and this was Thursday. But, no; she must rest just a little longer. Her head ached very much; her eyes were hot and tired. She leaned her arms on the broad windowseat and pressed her forehead against the glass for coolness.

It was very sad to see her face; there was no anger, no bitterness in it, only a mute questioning look, like some gentle pet creature that has been grievously wounded, and lifts up its wondering eyes, asking for pity. She would never be the same Alice again that she was before that heavy blow had come. The gay, glad-hearted, joyous look was gone; she had quite lost the airy, swaying grace that used to mark every step and gesture. She was no gleam of sunshine now, no strain of merry music; rather she seemed like a bruised flower, ready with one more blast to fall to the ground and be swept away. Still, when the gleam of sunshine is faded, and the strain of music gone, we soon forget them; it is the poor broken flower that we tend so lovingly; there is hope of it that it may revive and bloom once more.

She turned her head. David Bruce stood in the doorway. He had been watching her, unseen, for the last half hour. As she caught sight of him, her face brightened, and she made as if she would have sprung to meet him in the old trustful way. But, before that impulse had time to grow into action, she remembered the change that had come over them both, and drew back again—humbly, meekly, not even lifting her eyes as she placed a chair for him by the fire.

David Bruce would have taken her to his heart there and then, and ended all her toil; but something in the staid quietness of her manner kept him back. She took up her work, and stood at a little distance from him.

"It is very kind of you to come and see me," she said. "You see my life has changed very much, lately."

There was a sort of dignity in her way, even the least touch of pride. David Bruce had not offered her his sympathy, she would not ask it now.

"Alice, until this morning, I thought that you were the wife of Cuthbert Scrymgeour."

She just lifted her face to his for one moment, then bent it, crimson with stifled emotion, over her work.

"No, I am no wife for Mr. Scrymgeour now."

There was such broken-down hopelessness in the way she said this. She kept up bravely for a moment or two; then the work fell from her fingers, and she buried her face in her hands, weeping silently.

David Bruce looked at her as she stood there before him, leaning against the low mantel-piece, half turning away that he might not see her tears; the young head that once used to wear its coronal of golden curls with such careless grace, bowed down in shame and weariness.

"Alice!"

She raised herself, and looked steadily through her tears into his face. Her eyes fell before all that they read in his. David Bruce's apologies, explanations, all failed him; the old tenderness, held back so long by mistake and misunderstanding, overflowed his heart again. He held out his arms to her as she stood there, the poor little forsaken, friendless thing.

"Alice, you are very tired. Come to me and rest."

And Alice went.

If David Bruce loved her when wealth and plenty shrined her round, when the pride of rank and the iron barriers of social caste parted them, she was ten times dearer to him now, when she crept, shorn of all these things, into his arms, bringing to him nothing but the whiteness of her womanhood, and even that soiled by the mother from whom she had received it.

An hour later they sat there yet, her head bowed upon her hand, the tears still falling one by one over the fingers that clasped his so closely.

But the little rift of blue sky had widened out; and a single beam of sunlight pouring through it, rested on them both, for an earnest of the spring time that should come ere long.

CHAPTER LXII.

THAT was January, and in April they were to be married. David was impatient to get the lit-

tle blossom, once so rudely nipped, back again into the keeping of his own loving heart.

It was a different courtship, very, from the one that was even yet fresh in Alice's memory. No dainty compliments came sprinkling down upon her like sugared bon-bons, no pretty speeches or honeyed words of flattery, such as she had lived upon during that short spell of sunshine. But as time after time David Bruce came to the little cottage at Norlands, and she nestled into the shelter of his strong, protecting tenderness, she felt that one look from those steady, honest eyes, one word from that voice whose every tone was full of brave, out-spoken truth, more than overbalanced all the caresses which Cuthbert, in his elegant chivalry, had offered. That was the froth and sparkle, this the clear wine of life.

It was the night before the wedding. David had come on his last visit to Norlands, and the two sat together in the bow-window, that looked out into the pleasant old-fashioned garden, greening now in the freshness of early spring-time. Before he came, Alice had been opening and re-arranging the carved oak cabinet that used to belong to Mistress Amiel Grey. Captain Clay had allowed her to select one or two things from the Old Lodge furniture, and this had been brought to Norlands amongst them. She used it now to keep some of her own little treasures, relics of the old time; also it contained her mother's papers and the pocket-book which Mrs. Edenall had treasured through the lonely years of her worse than widowhood. Alice had turned away from them to take her place by David's side, but the door of the cabinet was open still; and whilst his arm kept her near him, he was playfully taking up one after another of her little possessions, and making her tell him its story.

His face paled somewhat at the sight of the familiar tartan on the cover of the old purse. He took it up.

"May I open this, Alice?"

"Yes," she said, without lifting her face, which rested on his arm, "I don't think there is anything in it but a few old papers. The inside has been nearly all torn out."

He opened it. There were three or four wheat ears in one of the compartments, brown and withered now as if they had been kept for a long time. David knew them again. He remembered how, as he took them out of Alice's hair that long ago night in the Norlands cornfields, she had asked for them, and he had given them into her hand. And as they came along home she had played with them, twisting the stalks into fanciful shapes. The marks were there still.

"So the little girl remembered me then," he said, fastening the brown wheat ears once more into her hair. But though he said it lightly, there was a mist of tears in his eyes, and his lips trembled as he spoke the words. Those brown withered things told him what he longed so much to know, that the child had held him in her thoughts through all that long waiting time, and that the bond which bound them now was neither new nor strange.

Alice turned, and her face flushed all over.

"Oh, Mr. Bruce! I did not know," and she stretched out her hand to snatch them from him. In doing so, the purse fell to the ground. David picked it up. The fall had loosened a spring inside, and a little pocket opened in which was a scrap of paper all mildewed and discolored. These words were scrawled untidily upon it,—

"Douglas Ramsay and Marian Brandon, married at Errol, June 14, 18—."

There was a long silence in the quiet little room. Alice felt herself drawn closer and closer —she knew not why—to David Bruce's heart, and she felt his warm kisses falling fast upon her cheek and forehead.

So then the white little hand that lay in his, marred though it might be by trace of toil, was free from stain, and the blood that flowed through its blue veins was pure, untainted as his own. He should never need to blush now that his wife was not nobly born; he should never fear to place her side by side with the proudest in the land. He could not love her with a truer, tenderer love; but it was grand to know that the world's scorn could not reach her now.

It was a very quiet wedding. In the early sunlight of that April morning, while yet the dew lay upon the grass, and sparkled in the blue violet cups, Janet Bruce rode down to the cottage, and fetched Alice and Mrs. Cromarty to Westwood church. David was waiting for them there, just as quiet and grave as ever. There was no bridal pomp this time; no sheen of satin nor flutter of orange blossoms; no peal of marriage bells, nor scattering of flowers along the path to the church. Canon Hewlet married them. The choral service was wanting, that pealed forth from the organ as Cuthbert Scrymgeour led his stately bride down the broad aisle of St. Olave's Cathedral; but, as the good old clergyman pronounced his benediction over David and Alice Bruce, a thrush, that had been swinging itself on the topmost branch of the elm tree by the east window, suddenly broke into a loud jubilant strain, grand as any wedding march need be.

David took his wife home to Westwood. They made no bridal tour just then; that was deferred until summer, when they were to go for a long, long visit to the Highlands. Besides, after the hard striving of the past few months, home, with its peace and quietness, was all that either of them needed.

Janet Bruce's bridal gift to her new sister was a little gold bracelet, fastened with a clasp of Bruce tartan. Inside this clasp was a lock of Douglas Ramsay's golden hair, braided with one of Mrs. Edenall's grey brown tresses; and round them both, graven in tiny letters, this line,—Alice knew its meaning now,—

"*They shall not want any good thing.*"

Janet fastened it on Alice's wrist the evening of their wedding day, and then slipped quietly out of the room, leaving husband and wife alone. Perhaps there might be a touch of bitterness in her heart as she closed the door upon their new-found joy, but if so it never reached her face. That kept all its old stillness.

Great was the indignation of the Close families when they learned, just on the eve of the marriage, that David Bruce, their distinguished fellow-citizen, was about to link his name and fame, and genius and position, with a penniless girl who had neither rank nor connections to recommend her; a girl, moreover, whose birth rendered her inadmissible into select society, and

who until the last month had been earning her living by taking in plain needlework. Greater still, however, was their bewilderment when the marriage was thus announced in the "*St. Olave's Chronicle*"—

"On Wednesday, at the parish church of Westwood, by the Rev. Canon Hewlet, David Bruce, formerly of the Court House, Perth, to Alice, only child of the late Douglas Ramsay of Glen Ramsay, Perthshire, and Marian Brandon his wife."

So Alice Grey was no base-born parvenu after all. What a mistake the goodly fellowship of the little Cathedral city had made. However there was no help for it. The Position Committee had to retract its verdict and subside into humiliating silence. Gladly, when the fancied stain had been wiped from her escutcheon, would the Close families have welcomed Mrs. David Bruce into their midst, or deluged her with cards and congratulations; but the Westwood home needed no aristocratic patronage now to heighten its happiness or establish its respectability.

The Ramsay estate was confined by entail to male heirs, so that the discovery of the legal marriage between its owner and Marian Brandon brought Alice no pecuniary benefit. Her father's broad acres had passed to a distant member of the family, and Mrs. Edenall's interest in the Brandon Manor ceased with her death, so that the home at Westwood did not, after all, overflow with wealth. Soon after his marriage, David Bruce rented Norlands from Captain Clay, and had the cottage furnished as a summer residence. Mrs. Cromarty continued to reside there as housekeeper, and little Miss Luckie lived to celebrate her ninetieth birthday beneath the shadows of its ancestral elm trees.

Having brought David Bruce and Alice thus far on the journey of life, and seen them fairly started side by side on the matrimonial tramway, it would of course be the most natural thing in the world to leave them jogging comfortably along, giving the reader to suppose that they lived happily ever afterwards, as people in storybooks always do when once the ring is on and the benediction said. Such, however, was not exactly the case. Some one says that trust and patience are the keepers of home happiness, and patience implies trial of one kind or other. David and Alice, as they plodded on through life, found that it contained for them a fair share of the ills which flesh is heir to; not the least of which was the occasional jarring which is at first inseparable from the blending and harmonizing of two diverse natures, educated under different conditions, and of different mould. But David and Alice never lost their faith in each other; and always over their human love, with its petty discords and imperfections, there brooded that other and diviner love, hallowing it, ennobling it, purifying it from the dross of earthly feeling.

And so as years rolled on, there came down upon the little Westwood home the unfading light of heaven-given, heaven-sustaining peace, even that peace which is made strong through patience and perfect through suffering.

CHAPTER LXIII.

LIFE creeps on quietly as ever through the musty old Cathedral city of St. Olave's. Still the quaint timbered houses uplift their tall gables, marred by the wind and storm of centuries; and the sunshine, oozing lazily through the narrow streets, ripples over richly carved doorways and picks out the mouldering remains of by-gone grandeur which linger yet in back alleys and dingy court-yards. Still those stiff old saints and martyrs look down in grim dignity from the Cathedral front, and its grey towers loom swarthily as ever upon the clear blue summer sky or the dim cloud-land of winter.

But Mrs. Archdeacon Scrymgeour has long since ceased to give an eye to them. Chapter Court has passed into other hands. Without asking her opinion on the agreeableness or otherwise of the proceeding, the great Reaper came and bound her up, with all her ecclesiastical dignities, in his sheaves. She sleeps in the south aisle of the Cathedral, side by side with her departed spouse, and a couple of fat little cherubs, with their fingers in their eyes, point to the mural tablet on which the archidiaconal virtues, male and female, are inscribed.

Mrs. Scrymgeour's death, it is believed, was hastened by severe family afflictions. Not long after the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Cuthbert, old Squire Egerton brought home a young bride, blooming and beautiful, who, in the course of three or four years, surrounded his table with as many olive branches, all healthy and flourishing, and likely enough to perpetuate the Egerton name down to remote posterity. Of course the Grassthorpe expectations fell to the ground, and the Archdeacon's widow never recovered the shock. Alice's sudden accession of social caste was an additional blow to her sensibilities; and within twelve months after the marriages of Squire Egerton and David Bruce, she resigned her post as Lady President of the Position Committee, and was gathered to her ancestors.

Martin Speller lies under the sod too. He died as he lived—most people do. First he lost his sight, then he became decrepit, then childish; but still day by day he took his accustomed place amongst the almsfolk at the Cathedral prayers, and listened, with his old half-defiant, half-indifferent air, to the chanted music. He died one sunshiny August afternoon, just as the Close families were rustling, gilt Prayer-books in hand, to their places in the choir. When they knew his change was near, they sent for Mrs. Cromarty. She came and knelt by him, praying God to give her some word for him that might guide his soul through that dark valley.

"Bell's puttin' in for prayers," he muttered, as the well-remembered sound came floating through the still air. "Nowt but prayers—i' this here place—Prayin' ain't no yield—ever I see'd——"

Then the silver cord was loosed, and Martin Speller's reckoning stands over to the great Hereafter.

The shadow of the Roman tower at Norlands, lengthening as the day declines, falls on two graves, not nameless now, but covered by a massive marble slab, bearing this inscription:

"To the Memory of Douglas Ramsay and his spouse, Marian Brandon, who were accidentally killed at this place."

They are not forgotten. Often in the still summer evenings David Bruce and his wife go there, speaking in low reverent tones of those who lie beneath. And when they are gone, one who perhaps remembers the dead more faithfully than they in their fulness of happy love can do, keeps her silent watch over the sleepers. And it may be in that silent watch the strength comes down which bears her through the long weariness of life, and the hope which hallows all its toil.

Poor Janet Bruce! Peace, peace. It may be grand to place the sword point to our breast, and, weary of the battle's strife, rashly dare the death that lingers over-long. It is grander far to take that sword, and strong in the strength of the lonely, fainting never for any toil or hardship that it brings, to fight bravely, patiently on; until, leaving it buried hilt-deep in the heart of the latest enemy, we wait for the Captain's voice to say—"Enough, come up higher."

THE END.