Chrystabel

Emma Jane Worboise

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Chapter 1. MY PROSPECTS

“Do stand still, there's a dear young lady,” said Miss Pinkerton, the dressmaker, with her mouth full of pins, while she “tried on” my new black paramatta frock, with crape tucks nearly up to the waist, crape folds on the bosom and on the sleeves, and crape frilling round the neck. Mantie, our old servant, and Mrs. Brunt, commonly called Nurse Brunt, stood by criticising and admiring.

“There ought to be another fold on the sleeve, I think,” said Miss Pinkerton, as she turned me round and about, just as if I had been a dummy in a milliner's show−room. Then she fell back in artist fashion, to get the general effect “Yes, another fold,” she said, returning, and laying hands on me once more, “and, as the tucks are graduated, I am not sure but that another, a *very* narrow one, just here, Mrs. Mantie—”

But I shook myself free, and before Mantie could answer, said, “No! I will not have another inch of the horrible black stuff put upon me. I dare say I shall get a lot of this off to−morrow.”

Miss Pinkerton exclaimed with horror.

“And I do not like the smell of black, and I do not see why I should wear it.”

“And your dear pa' carried to his last earthly resting−place this very day! Oh, Miss Chryssie!” interposed the dressmaker.

“I don't see what that has to do with it If papa *is* dead, why should I have a nasty, fusty−smelling, hideous frock?”

“It's extremely handsome and suitable mourning,” said Miss Pinkerton, severely; “and the blackness, especially the blackness of the crape, testifies your respect for your father's memory, and your deep sorrow for his loss.”

“I am not sure that I do feel deep sorrow,” I said, meditatively, and more to myself than to my audience, for whose opinion I cared little. “It will not make much difference to me. I scarcely ever saw papa, and I am sure I do not know when I spoke to him last. I think it was one day last winter, when I met him on the stairs, and he asked me what I was doing there.”

Which statement was literally correct. I knew as little about the man whom I called papa, and he knew as little about me, as it was possible to know, considering that we lived under the same roof, and that he was actually my father, and I his daughter and only child. I never took a meal with him; I never intruded upon him. The part of the house he occupied I systematically avoided. Queer, grim old greybeards of men sometimes came to see him; and dry, dusty−looking human animals, elderly, and of the male sex, reminding me strongly of some of the mummies and stuffed creatures in the Museum, hard by, came and inquired if Professor Tyndale were at home; they were literary and scientific people I was told, but they were nothing to me, nor I to them. I dare say they did not know of my existence, for I watched them from afar, and never dreamed of making their acquaintance. They all seemed to be hundreds of years old. I did wonder, as I looked at them over the balustrade of the upper landing−place, whether they had ever been little boys, trundling their hoops, and shouting, and plaguing their sisters, like those I saw every day in the square. No! I really did not see that it could make much difference to me whether I had a papa or not! Why, I could go all over the house now! And—a new light broke in upon me—surely it was *my* house! There was no one else; and I knew quite well that when parents died, their property belonged to the children they left behind them. I could go into the library now if I liked. I could ransack the museum, which I had often wished to do—the private museum in the house, I mean, not the British Museum, with which I was quite familiar, for we lived in Bloomsbury Square. And I resolved that I would not allow Mantie to dictate to me any longer. But even, as I complacently regarded myself—myself, not my frock—and I felt that I was mistress of all I surveyed, Mantie replied, severely, “You'll please not talk in that way to me, Miss Chryssie; a child like you can't understand, and it's most unbecoming, and very naughty. Your pa' *was* your pa', when all's said and done.”

“*I* never thought he was not,” I answered, coolly; “if he hadn't been, he would never have let me live here. He never wanted me.”

“Perhaps you did not want him, miss,” said Nurse Brunt, gravely.

“Well,” I said,” I don't know that I did! I am sure I do not, now. I am certain of one thing—he would have been better pleased if I had never been born, so why should I mind that he died?”

"Fie, fie, miss!" said Nurse Brunt.

"Hard little thing! dreadful, unnatural little creature!" exclaimed Miss Pinkerton, her nose red with indignation. "Why, Miss Chrystabel, don't you know your pa' was a learned, studious gentleman, not likely to concern himself with little girls—especially *naughty* little girls, that won't shed even one tributary tear over his grave in Highgate Cemetery! And who paid for your food, I wonder, and your frocks that I've had the making of these four years, and everything you've worn since you were born, and the—"

"But," I interrupted her, "what nonsense, Miss Pinkerton! Of course papa paid for all I had; if people have children, they always do pay for the things they want. He couldn't do anything else, you know; now, I shall pay for my own things."

"I hope *somebody* will pay for them," remarked Miss Pinkerton, with a sniff; and then I saw that she, Mrs. Brunt, and Mantie exchanged significant glances. Did Mantie mean to keep all the money? I wondered. I thought there was treason in those expressive looks; I knew that they telegraphed from mind to mind some idea, some secret, probably, from which I was excluded. Feeling displeased, I turned away and ran up to the room still called the nursery, and began to tidy up the cat's bed, and at the same time to reflect upon my own position as mistress of No. 155, Bloomsbury Square.

I had not long to reflect. I had not had time to arrange any part of the programme of my future life when I heard a stir below, and knew that they were come back from the funeral.

I had heard only suppressed whispers and softest footsteps as the dark procession passed out on its way to Highgate; now loud tones rang through the hall, people trod briskly on the floor−cloth, doors were slammed; once I thought I even heard a laugh. I listened, and peered over the railing, recognising in the depths beneath me some of the animated mummies who used to come to visit the Professor. I say *used*, because for a long time, or what seemed to me a long time, no visitors, save importunate or insolent tradesmen, and greasy, unpleasant−looking individuals, who refused to go away, although they were told the Professor was "not at home,"—had come to our front door. Once a bull−necked, red−faced, bandy−legged man declared that he was come to stay, and he actually did stay, to my intense surprise and disgust, for nearly three days. And he smoked villainous tobacco in the little parlour which he made his abode, and called for beer, and told the maid Fanny he would give her a kiss if she would get him rump−steak and onions for his supper. This had occurred about a year ago, and I had almost forgotten the circumstance till something, I know not what, brought it back most vividly and disagreeably to my remembrance.

I had not been long at my post on the landing, when Mantie came up to me: "Miss Chryssie, the gentlemen wish to see you."

"What gentlemen?" For I resolved I would not see the old mummies and megatheriums who had come to the funeral.

"Mr. Crabb and Mr. Silke; they are waiting for you in the dining−room."

Now I knew that Mr. Crabb and Mr. Silke were lawyers, and they had had dealings with my father, or he with them, ever since I could recollect. I had spoken to them both several times. I rather liked Mr. Crabb, though he was an ugly, gruff old gentleman with no teeth; and I detested Mr. Silke, who spoke suavely, and smiled sweetly, and had a mouthful of gleaming ivories, for which he must have paid his dentist a considerable sum.

I found these gentlemen in the dining−room. The blinds were drawn up, the shutters thrown back, and there was sherry on the table, and rich cake, and plenty of finger biscuits. Of course they uttered a few consolatory speeches, to which I did not reply, for I knew they did not mean them, and I did not want anybody to console me. When Mr. Crabb first began to talk to me he called me "my dear"; and very soon he stiffened into Miss Chryssie, and finally into Miss Tyndale.

"How old are you, Miss Tyndale?"

"I shall be ten next birthday," I replied.

"You have some relations, I believe?"

"I have heard that I have some."

"You know nothing about them, then?"

"Nothing."

"You can tell if they are on your mother's side or on your father's, I suppose?"

"No, I cannot; I know nothing. I do not know how I came to know I had relations. I suppose Mantie told me."

“Did you never hear your poor papa speak of them?” asked Mr. Silke. “Did he never say whether they were Clarendons or Tyndales, or in what degree they were related?”

“Never. Papa never talked to me; he did not like talking.”

“Most unfortunate,” said Mr. Silke, turning to his colleague. “It leaves us no clue, you see; and really something *must* be done.”

Then they conferred awhile together in what I suppose was technical parlance. It was as unintelligible to me as if it were not English. Besides, it was not entertaining, and I soon ceased to listen, and determined to have a great piece of the cake as soon as they were gone. I should not ask Mantie for it; I should take it; for was it not my own cake?

Presently Mr. Crabb came up to where I was sitting. He came quite close, and in a low voice that rather awed me said, “My dear Miss Tyndale, you are quite too young to understand business. I could not possibly explain to you the state of your late father's affairs; still I think it right to tell you that he has been for many years seriously hampered and involved, and that now—I am afraid—I am sadly afraid—It may be better than we anticipate—but I am afraid−that—”

“Papa has not left me a great deal of money,” I interrupted, coolly.

“I am very much afraid that he has left you *none*.“

“None at all!” I exclaimed, in astonishment “But I must have money to pay for things. There must be some money for me somewhere.”

“I fear there is none.”

This was a state of things I had never contemplated, and I did not relish it at all. Why, if I had no money, how was I to get dinners, and teas, and clothes, and books? And if papa had really used up all his money before he died, who was to pay the doctor's bill, and the undertaker's bill, which I had heard Mantie say would be a heavy one? And who would pay for my black frocks, and all that nasty crape, and that great cake, that only came from the confectioner's early that morning? I had four−and−sixpence of my own upstairs in my pretty bead purse, and Mantie had two sovereigns that belonged to me. How I came by them I cannot tell, but Mantie *said* they were mine, and I believed her, for Mantie never told untruths. I wondered how far two sovereigns, a half−crown, and two shillings, to say nothing of a few odd pence, would go in liquidating the cost of my father's illness and funeral and my own current expenses.

I went to bed early that night, for I had thought and thought till I had a headache. I slept in a little curtained bed in a corner of the room which was once my nursery, and where I still kept my own especial treasures—live stock and all; for I had a pet cat and kitten, and an elderly canary bird that was never known to sing, and was always under medical treatment for bronchitis. I woke up, as it appeared to me, hours after falling asleep, and I thought it was morning, for the room was quite light, and Mrs. Brunt and Mantie were busy talking, so busy that they never perceived that I was awake.

It was candlelight, not daylight, and the fire had been made up, and it cast a cheerful glow over the large, bare room. Mantie and Mrs. Brunt were at supper. They had bread and cheese, pickled onions, bloaters, and a pot of stout on the table before them. I did not want to be spoken to, so I shut my eyes again, though I was as wide awake as if it were time to get up and dress.

“I wish they would not talk,” I said to myself, very crossly. “What a buzz−buzz they are making.”

The minute afterwards Mrs. Brunt said emphatically, “And what w*ill* be done with her?”

That I was the “her” specified I did not doubt. I half opened my eyes, and saw that Mrs. Brunt was pointing a steel fork, with a pickled onion on one of the prongs, in the direction of my bed.

“Heaven knows!” said Mantie, shaking her head dolorously. “I don't, I'm sure.”

“Do you think there will be nothing?”

“There will be less than nothing, for there are debts; the last two years has been dreadful. I would not live it over again for all the Ingies and all the mines of Peru put together. No money, no credit, no anything but duns. If I hadn't served the master these thirty years, and been sorry for the child, I would not have stayed. Bless you, I've had no regular wages these seven years.”

“You don't say so! But there's this house—it will let for something decent.”

“Mortgaged long ago!”

How I wondered what “mortgaged” meant! To think that I had lived all my life in a house that was *mortgaged*,

whatever that might be! Did it mean that the foundations were insecure—that any day it might come tumbling down about our ears?

“You were very fond of Mrs. Tyndale I think I've heard you say?”

“Fond of her? I loved the air she breathed. Such a sweet creature—so young, so simple, so innocent, so tender−hearted!”

“What made her marry the master?”

“You may well ask; it is a queer story.”

“Do tell if it's no secrets.”

“No, it's no secrets; I don't mind if I do tell; I don't care to go to bed just yet. Well, you see, Mrs. Brunt, I came here full thirty years ago, when I was just twenty years old, and now I'm fifty. There was a housekeeper when I first came, and a cook, and I was housemaid, and there was a butler, or something of the sort—now there's only Fanny and me! I needn't tell you how I rose to be housekeeper, and cook, and butler all in one; but I did after about fifteen years' service, and things went on smooth and dull till one morning the Professor sent for me to say that his friend Mr. Clarendon was dead, and had left him guardian to his little girl; 'and I suppose,' says he, 'she must come here, at least for the present; you must see about a school for her, for she's got a little money of her own.' Well, I liked the idea of a child in the house, for I was dead sick of the dulness, though I had it all my own way in everything, and I said I would get ready for little Miss Clarendon. A few days afterwards the Professor told me I was to go to the railway−station to meet the child, who was coming from Switzerland; she had been at school at Geneva it seemed. A friend of her father's would bring her to Folkestone, and the guard was to see her safe up to town. Well, Mrs. Brunt, I got to the station, and the train came in, but no little girl in black could I see! Only one child came out of the train, and she was in sky blue. But I saw the guard talking to a pretty young lady who looked tired and anxious, and I went and asked him if he hadn't had a little girl from Folkestone under his care. 'No,' says he, 'but I've had this young lady, who crossed early this morning.' 'Bless me,' I says, *'you're* not Miss Clarendon, ma'am?' 'Indeed, but I am,' says she. 'Did you expect a little girl? Well, I am only just eighteen, and I've always been called *little* Belle!”

“I cannot tell you how astonished the Professor was, nor how annoyed when I brought Miss Clarendon home. 'What shall we do with her, Mantie?' he says; 'I know more about the extinct species than young ladies.' 'Never you mind, master,' I said; 'trust me, I'll make her happy.' And happy she was, and the house wasn't like itself, for she had her piano, and she sang and played, and chatted to me, and we went out walking together, and we were as happy as birds. I wondered how I had borne the dulness before she came. More than a twelve−month went by, and Miss Isabelle began to know people, and to go out, for there were friends of her father in London; and by−and−by came lovers, as might have been expected, to a sweet, pretty girl, with a nice little fortune of her own. Then the Professor got vexed. I shall never forget how angry he was with one young man in Tavistock Square, who wanted our Miss Isabelle. 'I can't have this sort of thing going on, Mantie,' says he, as cross as if I was to blame. 'I only see one way—' But he went off, and said no more. Next day Miss Isabelle came to me, and sat down in her low chair, and said, 'Mantie, I have great news for you; I am going to be married.' My heart sank like lead; it was selfish I know, but I could not bear to part with her, and I told her so. 'But you will not have to part with me,' she says, laughing. 'Mind I do not have to part with you, Mantie, for I'm going to be your mistress.'

“'Whatever do you mean?' I asked, all of a tremble like; 'you don't mean that the Professor—' 'Yes, I do; I am going to be Mrs. Professor. He says it will be the best thing for me, and I shall do as I like, and have everything I want.' 'Oh, don't! don't!' I cried. I couldn't help it. I knew it wouldn't do. Why, he was sixty if he was a day, and he had never troubled himself about a wife before. I was right mad with him, and I'm afraid I called him an *old fool* for going philandering after young ladies at his age. But I wouldn't have cared if it hadn't been my Miss Isabelle. Well, to make a long story short, Mrs. Brunt, in three months from that time they married, and I hoped it would be all for the best; but it was not.”

“Why wasn't it, Mrs. Mantie?”

“That I can't tell you; I know when to speak and when to keep a still tongue in my head. It stands to sense that a fusty old bachelor past sixty, as had been married to science, chemistry, geology, and gases, and all that for forty years, would never make a good husband to a lovely, loving, blooming little creature that might have been his granddaughter. I've no more to tell you, Mrs. Brunt, except that her health soon became delicate; and when she had been Mrs. Tyndale just a year Miss Chryssie was born. The Professor did not seem to care a bit about his

baby. When I told him he had a little girl he only frowned and said, 'Very well, don't bother.' The child grew and prospered, for all her father didn't want her; but the mother just quietly faded away. She never came downstairs again, and when the baby was eight weeks old she died."

"And didn't the Professor care?"

"Perhaps he did; he looked glum enough, and shut himself up with his gases and messes; then he wrote a paper for the Royal Society."

"But the young lady's fortune? That ought to be Miss Chrystabel's."

"It wasn't properly settled; it's all gone long ago; the child hasn't a penny nor a friend, and she isn't a nice child either. She's more like her father than her mother."

They went away, supper being concluded; and I was left to my own meditations. Truly they were not of the brightest; I did not at all like the prospect before me; and for hours I lay listening to the loud ticking of an alarum clock upon the landing that seemed to say, "Not a penny, not a penny." I wished it would say something else, but it did not, and at last I fell asleep.

Chapter 2. GOING TO BE ADOPTED

When I awoke next morning the house was very quiet, and the clock was ticking as loudly as ever, still repeating the objectionable refrain to which I had listened over night. I lay still, and tried to consider the state of affairs, as I had gathered them the day before. The lawyers said my father had left me no money; Mantie had declared that I had not a penny—she must have forgotten the two sovereigns she kept for me, and the little hoard in the bead purse—and the house was *mortgaged.*

Mantie had remarked that I was not a nice child, and she was right. I am sure that I was a very disagreeable child—a child whom it was not easy to love—a child whom it was difficult, upon occasion, even to tolerate. I was very proud; I had displayed from my infancy an uncontrollable will and an indomitable spirit. I believed implicitly in myself, and in my own opinions. I loved nobody and nothing except my black cat and her kitten, and two battered old dolls, with which I could not be said to play, though they were part and parcel of my daily life. No! my dolls were not playthings; they were serious responsibilities.

As to religion, I had none—literally none. I was a little baptized heathen. My father had concerned himself very little about my welfare, either mental or physical; but one charge he had given Mantie, and that at a very early period of my existence. It was to the effect that I was not to receive religious instruction of any kind whatever. I was to grow up with a perfectly unbiassed mind, and my faith and creed, if ever I had either, were to come to me spontaneously.

Mantie, though by no means a pious woman, rebelled against this decree, and as I began to show signs of intelligence, entreated my father to reconsider his resolve, and allow me to be brought up in a decent Christian way. He was inexorable, however, and sternly forbade Mantie, under pain of instant dismissal, to teach me either the Church Catechism or Watts's hymns, both of which she had proposed, as being a happy union of orthodoxy and *truth,* pure and simple.

But she pleaded in vain: no catechisms, no hymns, no Bible−lessons were to be included in the scheme of my education; two points only were reluctantly conceded—I might be taught the Lord's Prayer, and use it night and morning as a form of devotion; and I might go to church once on the Sunday—after I was seven years of age—*if I liked!* But on no account was church−going to be represented to me as a duty, and discussions about a future state were rigorously prohibited. As I said, Mantie was not a pious woman, or she never would have consented to this miserable *régime.* She was a very moral woman, but of the true spirit of Christianity she possessed not a spark. She was conscientious, and faithful according to her lights, which were neither clear nor many, but the love of God was not shed abroad in her heart. The one love of her life had been her love for my mother. It was a passion rather than a sentiment, and it lived on stedfast and tender years after the object of her affections had mouldered in the grave. Yet the deep, true love she bore my mother was never transferred to me. According to all the established rules of story−tellers, my nurse and I ought to have been all the world to each other, secluded as we were from all society in that wide, gloomy house. But Mantie and I never sympathized—were, somehow or other, never *en rapport;* we barely endured each other, she refraining from any great pressure of authority, because she knew that at the first symptom of constraint I should openly rebel, and inaugurate a terrible internecine war, and I refraining from asserting my independence, partly because I hated “rows,” and partly because I felt that I owed something to Mantie, who, if she did not love me, cared for me to the best of her ability. My mother was “her darling,” “her sweet dear,” “her angel”; I was just Miss Chryssie, though sometimes I was addressed as Miss Tyndale. My mother was credited with all perfections; I was continually told that I was the worst child in London, and now and then I really believed it. Mantie frequently spoke of the late Mrs. Tyndale as a saint in heaven; and once, when approaching, though unwittingly, forbidden topics, I asked if I too should go to heaven (which somehow I gathered to be a desirable place of residence) when I died.

Mantie replied, “I should think not, indeed, Miss Chryssie! People that don't do their duty never go to heaven!”

I felt rebuffed and rather annoyed, but I proceeded to inquire what were my duties. I thought I should just like to know, since so much depended upon their performance. At any rate, I should have a better chance if I knew what they were.

Mantie's reply was, “If you don't know, miss, I cannot tell you. I should think at your age you *ought* to know.”

This was discouraging, to say the least of it. But I was not entirely daunted; so I persisted.

"But if I don't know, Mantie, somebody that does might tell me, for I think I should like to go to heaven. There's no other place, I suppose?"

Mantie uttered a groan. Poor woman! her tongue was tied, but I am sure she wished to enlighten me as far as she could.

She only shook her head sadly, and said, "Oh, Miss Chryssie, if your dear mamma could hear you!"

"You will go to heaven yourself, I suppose?" was my next inquiry.

"Of course I shall; I have always done my duty."

"Oh, dear! I wish you *would* tell me my duties—just one of them, Mantie," I said, with as much entreaty as was possible to my proud, self−contained nature.

"You must love God with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself."

"Love God!" I said, musingly. "God is the 'Our Father' I say night and morning, is He not?"

"Of course, Miss Chryssie; any little workhouse child might know that!"

Alas! workhouse children enjoyed many privileges that never fell to my lot as the daughter of a gentleman and a great scholar.

"God is our Father," continued Mantie, speaking shortly, unwilling to continue, and yet scarce content to quit the subject, "and therefore we must love Him."

"A *Father*?" I repeated, trying to grasp the idea. "Then I am sure I cannot love Him; and as for neighbours, I don't know the people next door that way, and the other side is shut up, you know."

"Your neighbours means all the people you have to do with. And now please to stop that sort of talk, else I shall go down and report you to the Professor straight−way."

Which form of speech Mantie invariably used when I showed signs of contumacy, and it was the only threat for which I really cared; for once, and only once, had it been carried into execution, and then had followed an interview with my father, which had kept me in awe ever since. My punishment, after a brief reprimand that struck terror to my inmost soul, was to stand for two mortal hours at the end of the table at which he was seated making notes and sorting—bones! I never incurred the same penalty again. Mantie had only to hint that she would go to the study and report me, to ensure the most uncompromising obedience. I must do her the justice to say that she never used the threat unless I sorely worried and perplexed her.

So now I relapsed into silence, and queried no more, except in my own uncomfortable little mind, which, flung back upon itself, became a curious chaotic region, wherein dwelt a great deal of evil, and a few dormant, but still living, germs of good. A few weeks after this conversation, and when I remembered it only, as Americans would say, "in spots," my father was taken suddenly ill. Fanny had knocked at his door to announce to him that his dinner was ready, and received no answer—not even the gruff "Go along" which sometimes greeted her when she persisted in making seemingly disregarded communications. Very timidly she ventured to open the door and peep in—"something told her to do it," she averred afterwards, otherwise she would as soon have thought of intruding upon the lion of the Zoological Gardens while he was taking his repast. Her master was lying across the table, in some kind of fit, and the girl shrieked for Mantie, who came quickly to her aid, and at once despatched her for Mr. Winterslow, the medical gentleman who had attended my mother, and also myself when I required his services. Mr. Winterslow at once pronounced the seizure to be paralysis, and he did not attempt to conceal from us that recovery was hopeless. He did, however, what he could; he called in a physician, who entirely concurred with him, and sent for Mrs. Brunt, and installed her, with all due authority, at the sick man's bedside.

And a long week passed slowly away. Tan was laid down before the house; the door−bells and the knocker were muffled, and I was forbidden to make the slightest noise, and charged to go up and down stairs as quietly as my cat. All means, I believe, were duly employed; both doctor and nurse, to say nothing of Mantie, displayed untiring zeal and watchfulness, yet all in vain; the patient was in the grasp of one stronger than science, or philosophy, or even the devotion of love itself. Death had claimed the Professor as his own, and no earthly skill could loosen the iron grasp of his stern, icy fingers. There was no interval of consciousness; "he was as good as dead" from the very first, Nurse Brunt said, though the physical structure continued to display some signs of animation. But at the end of a week, or thereabouts, those signs ceased, the pulse stopped entirely; the breathing became fainter, the beating of the heart was scarcely perceptible. Presently all was still; the last faint spark of life went out; old Professor Tyndale, as people called him, was dead; and, as far as I know, no one in the world

regretted him, though Mr. Winterslow looked lugubrious, and the lawyers solemn, and the undertaker moved about as deftly as my pussy, and with a countenance which seemed to express mingled grief and resignation.

Nurse Brunt went away the day after the funeral. She came to my bedside to wish me goodbye. I rather liked her, though I had scarcely conversed with her at all. She was going, she said, to nurse another of Mr. Winterslow's patients, and she hoped I would be a good girl, and be happy and comfortable wherever I went.

“I mean to stay here. I am not going anywhere,” I replied, when she had concluded a speech which I only imperfectly understood.

“I am afraid not,” she said, with a kindness in her tone to which I was quite unaccustomed. “You could not stay here by yourself, you know, Miss Chryssie.”

“Of course not; but there are Fanny and Mantie,” I replied, though feeling at the same time that it might be difficult to make arrangements without any income.

“Mrs. Mantie is going away,” was the astounding answer.

If I had been informed that Bloomsbury Square was about to migrate bodily to Hampstead or Highgate, or to take up a transpontine position on the Surrey side, I could not have been more astonished. “Mantie going away!” I stammered. “Shall I not go with her?”

“I think it will not be possible; but Mrs. Mantie will tell you herself all you ought to know. My poor child, I am afraid trouble is before you; but trust in God; ask your Heavenly Father to help you. Tell Him all your troubles always.”

“Tell God? Will He hear me?”

Mrs. Brunt regarded me with unfeigned compassion, and no little surprise.

“Oh! Miss Chryssie, don't you know that God our Father listens to all our prayers, and knows all our wants, even? *He loves you,* Miss Chryssie.”

“Loves me?”

And I looked as I felt—utterly incredulous. What more Nurse Brunt said I cannot now remember. I only know that over and over again she assured me that God *did* love me, and that He would take care of me. She talked to me, too, about Jesus Christ, of whom I thought as of a good person who had lived ages ago, and died, and gone to Heaven. Of the Divine nature of our blessed Lord, and of His work, I was profoundly ignorant.

“But,” I argued, “I don't love God, and why should He love me?”

“He is waiting for your love,” was the answer, “and you will never be happy till you do love Him, Miss Chryssie.” And then Mrs. Brunt bade me farewell, for the cab that was to convey her to her destination was already at the door. Verily, I had sufficient food for meditation as I dressed myself that morning, without any assistance from Mantie.

About noon Mr. Crabb came again, and had a long interview with Mantie. He did not ask for me. I spent the morning in arranging my books and other possessions, and wondering where I and they would have to go to when we left Bloomsbury Square. Perhaps Mr. Crabb had settled it, and was telling it to Mantie.

It was not till late in the afternoon that I had any conversation with Mantie. Then she sat down to her sewing, and requested me to follow her example, for she had taught me to use my needle after a fashion, in spite of my strongly−avowed hatred of that useful implement. I hemmed my own handkerchiefs and the dusters, which was pretty well for a girl not much over nine; though, with the vain desire for maturity common to my age, I always took care to say that I should be ten next birthday. Then I asked Mantie if it was true that we were all going away. She bit off her cotton, nodded her head, and seemed rather nervous.

“When are we going, Mantie?”

“Soon; I do not exactly know how soon.”

“And where are we going?”

“I am going to St. Paul's Churchyard; I have got a situation there. You see, Miss Chryssie”—and Mantie took off her thimble and laid down her work, a sign that some important communication was impending—“you see I have no one to depend upon but myself. I was a foundling, you know.”

“Yes; I've heard you say so, Mantie. You lived in that great place yonder in Mecklenburg Square, and went to that church where they sing so nicely.”

“Yes, and I've done very well. My first service was with a greengrocer's wife in Clerkenwell, and I got nothing but my keep and some cast−off clothes. Next place I took a small wage. Next place I got a larger, and, what was

more, I got the best of characters for being strictly honest, truthful, and well−conducted. Thirty years ago I came here, and in course of time rose to be housekeeper and head servant, but I have not been able to save much money. A few pounds that I put out got lost, and lately money has been so scarce in this house that I have not had my proper share of it. I could not have stayed on even if your papa had lived. I told him so not many days before he was took. So, you understand, I must go into service again. I've no choice. And when I have saved a little more—and it's a good wage I'm going to get—I shall set up in some little business, and have a snug home of my own—for one doesn't feel quite as brisk at fifty as at thirty, and one likes a place of one's own, where one can't be dictated to, nor have notice given to leave at the month's end. I heard of the situation through Mrs. Brunt. It's a large house of business, and I'm to be housekeeper, with no mistress over me, for the partners and their wives live out of the City, as is the way with the thriving tradesfolk nowadays."

"Shall I go to St. Paul's Churchyard, too, Mantie?"

"Bless you, no, Miss Chryssie; they would not have you there. If you were old enough to stand behind the counter, or to learn the millinery, now, something might have been done, perhaps."

"Then where *am* I to go?" I asked, feeling very much inclined to cry.

"Indeed, Miss Chryssie, that is more than I can say. It depends upon Mr. Crabb and Mr. Silke, I believe. I've had a long talk with Mr. Crabb this morning. He says we may stay on here a few days without any alteration. He never was more perplexed in his life, he says. There's no will—not that that matters, for when everything is sold there will not be near enough to cover liabilities—to pay your poor papa's just debts, I mean. And it seems there's no relations, and no friends."

"There are some relations, somewhere."

"Yes; but they may be in China or Japan for aught we know. None of them ever came here; Mr. Crabb can find no letter from any of them. But there was a Captain Clarendon in India, who was your blessed ma's cousin or uncle, I'm not sure which; and there are, leastways there were, Tyndales or Tynedales up in the north; but your papa never had any dealings with his own kinsfolk. They could not be very near relations, for I've heard your precious ma say that the Professor had neither brother nor sister, nor cousin in the first degree; and after cousins once removed, blood don't count for much. No! it is no use to think of relations."

"I will not go to school!" I cried, in my own imperious way

"You will have to go wherever you can, Miss Chryssie. I suppose you would not care to go out into the streets as a beggar, and be took up as a vagrant; neither would you wish to be sent to the workhouse?"

"The workhouse? How dare you, Mantie?" and I was regularly beside myself with rage and indignation. "A beggar, indeed! I am Miss Tyndale."

"Poor child! poor child!" said Mantie, shaking her head, and wiping her spectacles as if tears had dimmed them. She was not angry with me in the least; I could see she pitied me, and I began to feel fairly frightened. "Poor child," she said again, "I am afraid it will go very hard with you, any way. Yes; you are Miss Tyndale sure enough, and your father's own child—scarce a bit of your mother in you; but *that* won't stand you in much stead, I am afraid. Something will turn up, I dare say. Something mostly does in such cases—only you must be humble, and bidable, and keep your proud spirit down, and be very thankful for whatever comes."

I was fairly subdued by this time, for I began to comprehend the situation. I had no money, and could not have any; I had no relations, or as good as none. I knew I had no friends besides Mr. Crabb and Mr. Silke, and perhaps Mr. Winterslow, and Mantie was going away; everything was to be sold—even the dear old cat, and the beloved old dolls, probably, and the house would be let to somebody else, who would want to come and live in it! I began to cry, piteously sobbing, "What will become of me?—oh, what will become of me?" The dignity of nine years and four months could bear it no longer; I put pride in my pocket, and wept a very deluge of salt tears.

Mantie did her best to soothe me; she took me on her knees arid kissed me, which she had not done since I was quite a little thing. She even called me "my dear," and finally said, "No, Miss Chryssie, my poor darling's child shall never want bread while I have a bit, and I would not let you go to the Union, not if it was to save my life! But I could not do much for you, however good my will might be; and so you'll just be a dear child, and not set yourself against Mr. Crabb, nor give him any of your sauce when he tells you what is for your good."

"What has he to do with it?" I asked dismally. "He will not want me to live with him, will he?"

"No, that he will not. A lone bachelor in chambers could not be cumbered with a child; besides, he doesn't like children. He bade me say nothing to you just yet; but you seem in such trouble—and well you may be!—that I do

not see why I should not use my own discretion; for, though the lawyers may know law, it doesn't follow that they know all sorts of things besides, and I'm not beholden to him that I need obey him. He *has* something in view for you!"

"Oh, what? Do tell me, Mantie. Will he send me to school? I should hate to go to school; I know I should run away."

"Foolish child! where would you run to? But he is not thinking of putting you to school. I wish he were. It would be better to my mind than the plan he was talking about."

"Oh! what plan?" I could scarcely speak intelligibly; a very agony of apprehension shook all my nerves.

"He thinks he can get you adopted."

"Adopted! what is that?" I was terribly afraid it might be a genteel way of selling me into slavery.

"Well, it's just this: he knows some people who have no child of their own, and think they should like one to bring up. And they gave him a sort of commission to look out for one; not a baby, and not more than ten years old; a girl they preferred, of good parentage, and, if possible, without any relations. It seems just the thing, doesn't it?

"Indeed, I don't know. If they were not nice people, could I get away?"

"Certainly not! You must never think of such a thing! And I dare say they are very nice people; they are not poor, and they have a very fine house. Perhaps they will be ever so fond of you, and you of them—who knows?"

In spite of these representations I felt excessively depressed. The more clearly I understood what it was to be adopted, the less I liked the notion. I brooded over it day and night; and the clock, which had so impertinently reminded me that I had not a penny, now repeated with equal zeal and pertinacity, "You are to be adopted! You are to be adopted!" till in sheer despair I got up and stopped the pendulum.

One afternoon Mantie came and told me that Mr. Crabb was waiting to see me, and that I must go down to him directly, and be sure and behave myself like a lady. I silently obeyed, and crept slowly downstairs, feeling that the crisis of my fate was impending.

Chapter 3. THE PERREN FAMILY

I walked into the dining−room with a beating heart and sinking courage, but, to all outward appearance, as composedly as if I had been a duchess about to grant an audience to some humble petitioner. Mr. Crabb stood on the hearthrug, with his back to the great yawning fireless grate, that looked like a black cavern behind him, and his coat skirts elegantly tucked up under his arms. He accosted me affably and actually shook hands with me—an unexpected ceremony that slightly disconcerted me, for I was not in the habit of shaking hands with people, for the very good reason that there were no people, so far as I was personally concerned, to shake hands with.

"Good morning, Miss Tyndale," said the lawyer, condescendingly; "I want to have a little conversation with you. Will you be so good as to sit down and listen to what I have to say?"

I bowed assent; he talked to me as if I were nineteen rather than nine, and I felt and tried to look nineteen accordingly. I took a seat; alas, for my poor dignity! my feet dangled ignominiously some inches above the floor! But I contemplated my crape tucks assiduously, and waited for a communication. After some little clearing of the throat, Mr. Crabb commenced—"My dear young lady, you understand by this time that my late lamented friend and client, the Professor, your parent, has died intestate, and that when his affairs are wound up there will remain no provision for you his daughter and natural heiress? I think Mrs. Mantie has explained all this to you?"

"Yes, Mantie has told me, what I partly knew before, that papa has been very poor for many years past; but I did not know that all his money was gone, or that he owed a great deal to several persons. I don't see how they can be paid."

"They never can be paid—in full. The creditors will accept a composition—that is—for I forget I am talking to so young a lady—they will take part of the money owing to them, and forego the rest."

"That is very good of them," I replied, feelingly.

Mr. Crabb smiled; and he looked a great deal uglier when he smiled than when he frowned.

"Perhaps," he remarked, as if *par parenthèse,* "they have no alternative. Half a loaf is better than no bread; and a portion of the whole, when the whole is not forthcoming, is decidedly to be preferred to nothing."

I thought so, too. That was philosophy within the scope of my intelligence.

Mr. Crabb continued: "Now, you, unfortunately, have not even the half loaf, or the smallest portion of a desirable but unattainable whole. It is my painful duty to remind you that you have literally—nothing!"

"Yes, I know"; and here I choked.

Visions of starvation and of rags, when my new paramatta and crape were worn out, flitted before my mental vision; and I had torn my second−best black frock that morning in trying to slide down the bannisters.

"There! there!" said Mr. Crabb, not unkindly, "don't cry; be a little woman; crying never did anybody good yet. Listen to what I am going to say, and remember that I am not telling you all these disagreeable facts because I wish to vex you or give you pain, but because, for your own sake, I wish you exactly to understand your much−to−be−regretted position. The Professor *ought*—yes, I say ought—to have made some provision for you; for a man has no business to have children unless he is prepared to provide for them—at least till they are able to provide for themselves. The Professor might have insured his life, but he did not; and if he had, I am afraid his creditors would have claimed the insurance money. Certainly your mother's fortune ought to have been inalienably settled upon her, and, after her, upon you, her only child. If that had been done before the marriage you would now have had £300 a−year; trustees would have been appointed to act during your minority, and on your coming of age the property would have been at your own disposal."

"What has become of the £300 a−year?"

"Lost! gone! dissipated! flung into a vortex! Don't think about it; as far as regards yourself, it is just the same as if it had never been." And Mr. Crabb elevated his shaggy eyebrows and waved his hands enigmatically about him, very much in the fashion of a mountebank conjuror making cabalistic evolutions. Then he composed himself and went on:—"This house goes at one fell swoop to a person who advanced money on it years ago, and the furniture will be sold by auction, also the books, and the curiosities, and geological specimens; but I am sure you may keep any little thing you like."

"There is a skull on the lower landing window−seat that I should like to have. I have always dusted it and

taken care of it."

"I dare say you may have the skull. It's a queer thing to choose, but it shows that you are your father's own child. He has been going after skulls, and leg−bones, and muscles, and gases, and minerals all his life."

"And I should like to keep my cat. I do not so much care about the kitten."

I was going to add, "and my two dolls," but on second thoughts I said nothing about them, for I suddenly determined to take possession of them whether or not; and if anybody objected, to buy them with my own money, which I had ascertained was quite insufficient to pay for my mourning, or to reimburse Mantie for the lapsed wages.

"Well, about the cat I cannot say," replied Mr. Crabb. "And that brings me to the point. You know, child, something must be done for you. You cannot be left to wander in the streets. Some one must feed, and clothe, and shelter you. I dare say—indeed, I am sure—there are orphan schools and asylums that would receive you ; but you would want to be elected, and that would require time and money. Mrs. Mantie is going into another situation, and cannot take charge of you; I cannot, for I live in chambers, and my laundress would never tolerate a child; neither would it suit in any way. Mr. Silke declines interfering in the matter; and Mr. Winterslow, to whom I have spoken, has a large family of his own, and not too large an income. The question, then, becomes serious, for you are quite too young to earn your own living. One alternative remains—how would you like to be adopted?"

"I don't know; I think I should not like it at all; but if there is nowhere for me to go, and nobody to take care of me, I suppose I had better try to like it."

"Exactly. I am pleased to find you so sensible. Listen now. I have some friends residing in the town of Northborough, and they—I am sure I do not know why—have taken the fancy lately to adopt a female orphan child, and bring her up as their own. The name of these friends is Perren."

"Have Mr. and Mrs. Perren no children of their own?"

"There is no Mrs. Perren. My friend Mr. Perren was, like myself, in the legal profession, but he has retired from business. He is, in fact, a retired solicitor; you will find his name in the Law List. He lives with his sisters, or they live with him—I am not clear which it is; but they are not dependent on him; they have their own separate incomes, which are not, I believe, inconsiderable. They are all unmarried. It is a very queer whim of theirs, wanting a child; but as matters have fallen out, it is a fortunate circumstance for you. Now go and get your bonnet on, and go with me."

"Go to the Perren people now, this minute?" I shrieked. "No, I won't!"

"Hush! young ladies must not stamp their feet, and say *'won't.'* But you misunderstand me; I am only going to take you to see them. Mr. Perren and his sisters are in town, and wish to see you before they decide. They may not like you, after all, you know; though I hope they will. But you must not stamp and use naughty words."

"And you will bring me back again?"

"Most assuredly I will. I promise you. Now go and get ready and be quick; they are expecting you."

Mantie seemed to know all about the projected visit, for she had my hat and mantle ready to put on.

"Now, mind your crape, and don't be saucy and proud," were her parting injunctions as I went down the stairs again. We went out into Southampton Row, and there I thought Mr. Crabb would take a cab. But he did not, and we walked on, not very far, along the Row, and the east side of Russell Square, till we came to Great Coram Street, into which we turned. About half−way down, we stopped at a dull but respectable house; the front door looked as if it were made of two coffin−lids. We rang the bell and knocked at the knocker, and were speedily admitted and ushered upstairs into a large, shadowy, dreary drawing−room, where sat a gentleman and two ladies.

The gentleman was drawing in water−colours what appeared to be a glorified pump. The elder lady had a grave−looking volume and a pencil in her hands; the younger was netting, and I could see that her work was full of tangles and messes, and what we called long stitches.

Mr. Perren rose and hopped gaily towards Mr. Crabb. I immediately perceived that he wished to pass for a man still in the flower of his days, for he affected a youthful style and drew himself up into an attitude. Alas! time had not dealt as kindly with him as he imagined. His hair, though sprucely brushed up and arranged with skill, was thin and limp, and of a sort of whitey−brown colour. He had weak, washed−out−looking grey eyes, no particular features, except a nose which was celestially inclined when he was displeased, no teeth, a lank, stubbly chin, a vain, foolish mouth, and cotton−wool in his ears. He was tall and painfully thin, very erect, with a long neck like a

pole, and a narrow, receding chest. His garments, I suppose, were sufficiently good and genteel, but they gave one the idea of being hung upon a clothes−prop, with the lower half split in two. I did not like Mr. Perren.

The elder lady, Miss Judith Perren, was not of prepossessing exterior, but I thought I might respect her. She was a good deal like her brother both in face and figure; but she had much more countenance, and was evidently a person of far more character. Her hair had turned iron−grey instead of whitey−brown, which was an improvement. Her mouth was firmer. There was less conceit in her smirk—for the whole family smirked instead of smiling—and her chin was larger, firmer, and more resolute. She was a woman of crotchets, and her present crotchet was education. She had conceived, and theoretically developed, a "system," and I was the unlucky wight doomed for my sins to reduce it into practice. Miss Judith did not pretend to be juvenile. She frankly owned to her sixty years and dressed according; she gave herself no youthful airs, and despised her brother for his affectation of sprightly vigour. There was "stuff" in Judith Perren, and she would not quickly wash out after the pattern of her brother; but then he had not been made in fast colours originally.

The younger lady, Mona Louisa Perren, was really younger by some years than this antiquated couple. If Mr. Perren felt himself to be, say anything between five−and−twenty and forty, Mona Louisa felt herself to be eighteen, though in reality she had counted half a century of years. She was *very* sprightly, *very* gay. She was quite a gushing young thing, and she quickly folded me in an enthusiastic embrace, and exclaimed, "Oh, you darling! you treasure! Oh, what eyes! Are they not lovely, Matthew?"

Matthew, *alias* Mr. Perren, smirked, and looked approvingly at my eyes, and smirked again, and laid his thin, flabby fingers on my curls. How I hated him! If he could only have read my inmost heart, I am sure he would never have allowed me to become an inmate of the domicile that called him master. He would have remonstrated on the spot, desired his sisters to renounce their cherished scheme, and besought Mr. Crabb to carry me away whence I came, as fast as possible. But Mr. Matthew Perren was not gifted with intuition—nay, he was so blinded by vanity, and deluded by self−complacency, that he had not mere ordinary perceptions. That anybody, especially of the female sex, could possibly fail to admire him, never entered into his imagination. If I had been nineteen instead of nine he would have expected a vivid blush of pleasure, and he would have framed a romance on the spot, more wonderful than any fairy tale.

"And this is the little girl," said Miss Judith, looking inquisitively rather than applaudingly into the big dark eyes to which attention had been directed.

"Yes," said Mr. Crabb, as if very glad to have performed his part; "here she is. You can take her or leave her. She is the daughter of a gentleman, has evidently good capacities, is of healthy constitution, has had measles and whooping−cough, and has not a relation in the world that she knows of."

"Good!" answered Miss Judith. "But her temper?"

"I know nothing about that. I cannot say she strikes me as being singularly meek and docile; but then she will be all the greater credit to you when she grows up an amiable and charming young woman, the model of her sex and age. Too sweet a temper would be to me, I must confess, *toujours perdrix."*

Mona Louisa nodded approvingly. Miss Judith looked doubtful, for I was scowling horribly, and longing to deliver myself of a few sentiments that would not have been approved. Mr. Perren remarked sententiously, "Nevertheless, amiability is a quality that highly adorns a woman."

And he smirked, as he always did, when he fancied he had said something strikingly *àpropos.*

But Miss Judith replied, "Modesty you mean, Matthew, not amiability; and I wish you would not quote old text−hand copies. How old are you, little girl?"

"Ten, next birthday."

"That means nine last May, and now it is September," interposed Mr. Crabb. "Her name is Chrystabel; did I tell you?"

"Chrystabel!" And Mona Louisa went into raptures over my name.

"As regards her education?" inquired Miss Judith.

"I am afraid I cannot say much; but then, you will have virgin soil to cultivate," replied Mr. Crabb. "There will not be much to unlearn."

"That is just what I wish; my system will then have free and full scope. I want a child untaught, untrained, unshackled by ordinary methods, untrammelled by false ideas of education."

"Then Chrystabel Tyndale might have been made to your order, Miss Judith; she can read and write, I believe,

and thread her needle, and she knows the multiplication table and the pence table, so her old nurse, Mrs. Mantle, assures me. She has never been to school, she has never had a governess, nor any young companions. You will have to teach her everything, except the barest elements; you can form her entirely after your own pattern."

"Precisely what I wish," replied Miss Judith, turning to me graciously. "We will overcome our evil tempers and our little passions, will we not, my love? We will become a pattern of piety, learning, grace, elegance, and every accomplishment, will we not, Chrystabel? We will be all, and more than all that can be desired, will we not, dear child?"

I looked foolish and said nothing. The situation was a trying one. Mr. Perren relieved it by bleating out:—

"'Delightful task, to rear the tender thought,

To teach the young idea how to shoot.'"

Miss Judith motioned him into silence. I found afterwards that he imagined he had been quoting Hannah More, whom he greatly admired.

Mr. Crabb then explained to me the terms upon which I was to be adopted into the bosom of the Perren family. I was to promise obedience and gratitude. They undertook to give me an excellent education, to provide me with all things needful, and treat me as their own relative. On my reaching the age of eighteen we were to be mutually free to part, or to renew our friendly compact. Then I was asked formally if I were willing to be adopted.

"Yes," I said, sullenly enough; so sullenly that Mr. Perren elevated his light eyebrows and looked weakly surprised.

I thought how much more surprised he would be presently when he and I knew each other intimately.

"In what religious faith has Chrystabel been brought up?" asked Miss Judith.

"In none at all," was the unexpected answer. "You may make her a female Jesuit, or a Plymouth sister, or anything else you choose. She has been baptised, however, according to the usage of the Established Church; her baptismal register, and that of her parents' marriage, can be found, if required, at the parish church of Bloomsbury."

Mr. Perren straightened his back, and remarked that piety and virtue could not be too early inculcated, and that my friends were much to blame for allowing me to remain without religious instruction.

"Never mind, Matthew," interrupted Miss Judith—her brother's platitudes generally annoyed her; "of course, all that sort of thing is understood. For my own part, I am delighted to think that in this dear young creature's mind there are no errors to be disposed of, no false doctrines to be rooted up; it remains only to sow the good seed with bountiful hand, and I am sure it is a fertile soil, and will bring forth fruit abundantly."

Miss Judith evidently did not take into account the lamentable truth that weeds spring up, especially in "fertile soil," without anybody taking the trouble to sow them. How could she expect to find in the breast of a child more than nine years old—a child quick and thoughtful, too, though neglected—ground entirely unpreoccupied?

"And now, when is she to come to us?" inquired Miss Judith, while Mona Louisa fondled my hand, and whispered sugary nothings in my ear.

"Well, the sooner the better," replied Mr. Crabb, "for the women in Bloomsbury Square want to be off on business of their own; and I shall be glad to have the house clear, to send Hewitt in to arrange for the sale; it is desirable that it should not be delayed. I wish to get things over as quickly as possible, and wash my hands of the whole affair."

It struck me that he was exceedingly glad to wash his hands of *me*, and I do not wonder at it; I must have been a very serious burden on them I did not then see that Mr. Crabb had gone out of his way for me; in after years I came to understand that the old gentleman had acted very kindly by me, and had taken much trouble on my behalf. But was I always to belong to old gentlemen, was I to be handed over from one to another? Of course I had belonged naturally to my father; but then, I seemed somehow to become the property of Mr. Crabb, and here I was to−day handed over to Mr. Matthew Perren.

"Suppose we say the day after to−morrow," said Miss Judith: "I want to be back home again, I am sick of London. This is Tuesday, Chrystabel comes to us on Thursday, and we return to Northborough on Friday morning." Against this arrangement Mr. Perren feebly protested, but in vain. He could stay behind if he liked, he was loftily informed; he could take lodgings in Wardour Street, or even in Petticoat Lane, if he preferred it.

The allusion to Wardour Street was pointed and sarcastic. Matthew evidently felt the sting and winced under it; he was fairly extinguished and succumbed to authority; so it was settled that I should come with all my personal

properties to Great Coram Street on Thursday afternoon, and proceed with my new friends to their country home on the following morning. Miss Judith gave me a grave, kind kiss at parting; Mona Louisa embraced me with effusion, and in a hurried whisper informed me that she was delighted at last to have a companion! I thought her brother and sister must be more suitable as companions than I—a child not yet ten years old, and extremely ignorant to boot. Certainly they were both her seniors by a few years, but then she was, on the other hand, at least my senior by forty years! And when we are not yet in our teens, fifty seems very old indeed.

Mr. Perren would have kissed me also, but I drew back, and said, in a tone of intense disgust, “No, thank you! I had rather not!”

That feeble, stubbly chin, that inane smirk, inspired me with unconquerable aversion.

“What a little coquette!” he exclaimed, regarding me not unamiably.

I had not the smallest idea what a *coquette* was; something very disagreeable I supposed.

Miss Judith frowned and said, “Don't put foolish notions into a child's head; you ought to know better, Matthew, and you old enough to be Chrystabel's grandfather!”

“I flatter myself that I do not look like a grandfather!” retorted Mr. Perren, drawing himself up to his full height, and assuming an air of offended dignity that was so absurd I could scarcely help laughing outright. Mr. Crabb became suddenly absorbed in some street sight, but I caught the ghost of a smile on his usually stern face before he turned to the window.

“Oh, Matthew! Matthew!” replied his sister, goodhumoredly, “your motto ought to be *vanitas vanitatum*!”

“'Would some fay the giftie gie us

To see ourselves as others see us!'“

They were still wrangling when Mr. Crabb and I withdrew.

“Well!” he said, as soon as we were fairly on the the pavement, “do you think you can be happy with them?”

“I do not like them,” I said, coolly, “but I will be happy if I can. I think Mr. Perren is a very silly old man and Miss Mona Louisa is very silly, too; but Miss Judith is rather nice. I will try to do as she bids me.”

“I hope you will. But be sure you never call Mr. Perren an old man, he would not like it; he boasts how he ran up Primrose Hill the other day.”

“How foolish he must have looked!”

“Probably. But I would advise you, Miss Tyndale, not to express your opinions quite so candidly. And I think you would do well not to offend Matthew Perren. There is goodness and kindness in him, if you understand him properly, though I must confess he is something of a—”

Mr. Crabb did not finish that sentence, and I prudently held my tongue; but I fancied he meant to say—“*humbug.*”

Chapter 4. “LET DOGS DELIGHT TO BARK AND BITE.”

“Well?” said Mantie, when once more I found myself in the old house in Bloomsbury Square.

“Well—what?” I responded, in my customary amiable style. Of course I knew quite well what Mantie meant, but I was not in a pleasant frame of mind, and I pretended not to understand.

Mantie frowned.

“You know well enough, Miss Chryssie. But you are the frowardest, provokingest, unpleasantest child I ever saw; and I don't believe there is your equal for disagreeableness in all London. Fie, Miss Chrystabel; nobody will ever take to you.”

“I shall go out of London soon; so it does not much matter either to you or to London how disagreeable I am.”

“There now, that's what I wanted to know. Do be a good child, and tell me what's going to be. Are you to be adopted?”

“I suppose I am adopted. And, Mantie, I don't like it at all.”

And forthwith the tears I had resolutely kept back burst out like stormy rain, and I had a real good cry, and felt happier and more childlike in consequence. Mantie cried a little too; I think she felt sorry to part with me.

“There now,' she said, at last, when I had fairly left off sobbing; “it's not a bit of use to fret and cry, my dear. Things are as they are, and what must be will be, and it is our duty to submit to the decrees of Providence. It's hard at my age to take a new service, and it's hard for you to go among strangers; but it's not so bad but that it might be worse. I might not have been able to find a place of trust, and you might not have found anybody to take care of you; so let's be thankful and make the best of what comes to us.”

“I'm going to, Mantie. I will try to like these Perren people.”

“What sort of people do they seem to be?”

I told Mantie what I thought of them, and described them to the best of my ability; I did not spare Mr. Perren, or the irrepressible Mona Louisa.

Mantie listened till I had finished, and then she said:—

“I'll tell you what, Miss Chryssie; your tongue is a clever one, but it's too sharp by half, and if you don't take care it will get you into trouble. I am sorry you are still going to live with grown−up people; it would have done you all the good in the world to be with other children. You know nothing of children's ways, and that is why you are so unchildlike yourself; and there is something in unchildlike children that sets people against them.”

“Don't *you* like me, Mantie?”

“Well, yes! I like you, of course; you are my poor dear's own child, after all, though you do take after your father.”

“But do you only like me because of mamma?”

“That's a question I could not answer. I'll speak plain to you, Miss Chryssie; you are not easy to like. You say nasty things—dreadful things sometimes; you are not bidable, as a child should be, and you fight for your own way, which is very often not a good way nor a nice way. You've had disadvantages, I know; you've not been taught any religion, and the Professor never did his duty by you; but, there, what can you expect of a man who has his first baby when he ought to be proud of a little flock of grandchildren? However, that's neither here nor there; I only mean to say that you might have been different if you had had your natural rights of father−love and mother−love; and if you had been brought up in a Christian sort of way, and allowed to go with other children. I'll tell you the truth, my dear; many a time I have tried not to care too much about you, because, owing to your pa's orders, I could not do my duty by you. But one thing, remember—*I am your friend!* and, what is more, I will always be your friend, God helping me. As long as I am alive, you never need feel you are quite alone in the world, and you may count upon me in any sort of trouble—in any sort, mind, whether it is trouble of your own making or of other people's. I shall get your address from Mr. Crabb, and I'll write to you regular, though not too frequent, and you shall always know where to find me in case you want me; for you are my darling's own child, and I can't forget that, whatever happens; and I wish—; but it's no use wishing, the past cannot come back again, and you'll never get your spilt milk in the porringer any more. But if I had the time over again, I would do differently by you, Miss Chrystabel; for my heart misgives me; I haven't done my duty by you as I meant to do,

when my sweet dear, just before she died, said—'Mantie, take care of my poor baby.'"

And with that Mantie took me in her arms, and cried till she sobbed again. And then for the first time I felt that I loved Mantie, and that it would be dreadful to go away from her. I had found out that there was one thing in the world to hold on by, when straightway I was obliged to let it go, and allow myself to be drifted away, far away, I knew not whither, over the dark, dreary sea of circumstance. Mantie had spoken of Providence; she might as well have referred to the differential calculus. I had only a misty sort of idea that by Providence she meant God, and He, I thought, had never shown me any particular favour. Poor, miserable child that I was! And all the while my God was so good to me, and I knew it not!

And now Mantie began to bestir herself, and she packed my things, and I was astonished to observe how many good−sized packages were constituted my property.

"For these are things that were your precious ma's," she said, as I watched her filling a great black trunk that had always stood in papa's bedroom; "things that nobody but her daughter has any right to, and that I couldn't bear to see going to strangers. I've kept them for you, and here they are; they are of no great value, I suppose, or they would have gone where other things went long ago; but such as they are you ought to have them."

And Mantie showed me, in an old−fashioned jewel−case, a garnet set, a brooch or two, several rings, including a beautiful pearl hoop, a hair bracelet, set in gold and blue enamel, a carved coral necklace, a gold thimble, a locket containing the likeness of an elderly gentleman, once encircled with brilliants which had disappeared, a lovely ivory card−case of Chinese or Japanese workmanship, and some trifles not worth enumerating. Finally, Mantie locked up the case and gave me the key, bidding me take care of it.

"Now there is only one thing more, Miss Chryssie, and that *I* would like to keep," said Mantie, when the black trunk was full. "Here it is—look."

I looked, and saw a plain gold ring in Mantie's fingers. Only a plain gold ring, but she held it tenderly, as if it were a sacred relic.

"It's *her* wedding−ring," she explained, seeing that I looked puzzled.

"That a wedding−ring!" I exclaimed, and I knew that wedding−dresses, and wedding appurtenances generally were as grand and fine as they could be, for had I not seen weddings going to our own parish church, and to the neighbouring church of St. Pancras—ladies and gentlemen in their best—silks, and gauzes, and flowers, and white rosettes, and prancing horses, and a bewildering glitter of all things fair and bright? And a wedding−ring, I fancied, would be blazing with diamonds and rubies, and all sorts of precious stones. And so I wondered at the plain, unadorned gold hoop in Mantie's reverent clasp.

"Yes," she said, sadly, "it is her wedding−ring. I took it off her finger after she was dead, for I thought your pa would be sure to ask for it, though he didn't think of it just at the first. The proper thing, you know, is for the widower to wear his dead wife's ring on his little finger; even if he marries again, he ought to go on wearing it, out of respect; but there, the Professor, I don't believe from first to last he ever gave it a thought; any way, he never asked me for the ring, or so much as mentioned it. And I've kept it till now safe in cotton−wool, and if you choose, Miss Chryssie, of course it is yours, but I should be glad to keep it. You may have it when I am gone."

"Keep it, of course, Mantie. It is more yours than mine, I think, for I never saw mamma. Is there anything else you would like to have?"

"No, there is nothing else, thank you, Miss Chrystabel. It just fits my right hand little finger; I shall wear it there. Dear me, what pretty little white fingers hers were!"

I looked my last at the dingy books, and the piles of dusty papers in the library. I said good−bye to the mineral and osseous specimens in the glass cases, and to the pickled reptiles, and other hideous creatures in the glass jars. I bade adieu to the stuffed crocodiles and armadilloes, to the curious monsters whose names I did not know, and to the skeleton of some bird, said to be of an extinct species. A fortnight ago I had not dreamed of leaving them, and now I was looking at them for the last time. Unchildlike as I was I had had up to the last few days all a child's happy heedlessness about the future. Others discerned the signs of the times, no doubt; but it never occurred to me to reflect upon possible and probable changes near at hand. That that which had been, and yet was, should quickly cease to be, I never once anticipated. And now I was like one in a dream; nothing around me seemed real, and if I tried to think I only grew bewildered.

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. Crabb came for me; my luggage had gone on before to Great Coram Street. He was in a hurry, he said, and could not wait, so that at last my final adieus were of the briefest. I kissed

Fanny and Mantie, and my cat,—Mantie was going to take her to her new home,—and I ran downstairs and out of the house to the cab, where Mr. Crabb was already seated, with several of my lighter packages; and before I could give the old place one last lingering look we had started, and Bloomsbury Square was left behind us. A few minutes brought us to the house in Great Coram Street, and glancing up, I saw that Mona Louisa was watching for us from the drawing−room window. I could just discern Mr. Perren's self−complacent features in the background. Being ushered upstairs, we were met by both sister and brother, the old gentleman skipping agilely across the landing, and Mona Louisa making as if she would rush into my arms, had such a procedure been possible.

“Welcome, child of our adoption!” exclaimed Mr. Perren, benignantly; “mayest thou be good, happy, and useful, and a blessing in thy day and generation!”

And he extended his long arms. I at once allowed myself to be clasped to the breast of Mona Louisa, lest I should be incontinently seized, and brought into too close contact with a double−breasted waistcoat. But I was not accustomed to embraces, and the novelty did not charm me.

“I wrote some lines last night,” said Mr. Perren, in a loud aside to Mr. Crabb; “very pretty lines they were; I am going to set them to music. I have called them the 'Orphan's Prayer.'“

“Good people! are you going to spend the evening on the landing?” called Miss Judith, from the drawing−room. “If you will come here I shall be happy to give you cups of tea.”

“Ah, 'the cup that cheers but not inebriates,'“ said Mr. Matthew, gaily. “Chrystal, *ma belle,* come with me.”

But I clung to Mr. Crabb, though a week before I should as soon have thought of clinging to one of the mummies in the British Museum. I felt, I suppose, somewhat like a shipwrecked mariner, who holds on to a plank of the vessel in which he has so lately sailed, more from instinct than from any idea of being saved thereby. Mr. Crabb was the last link that bound me to my old, fast−vanishing life, and I held fast by him accordingly.

We all had tea; Miss Judith almost silently performed her duties behind the urn. Mr. Matthew discoursed about himself and his “sentiments,” and Mona Louisa heaped my plate with marmalade and cake, and assured me of her devoted and inalienable affection.

The repast was soon concluded, and Mr. Crabb rose to depart.

“Good−bye, Miss Chrystabel,” he said; “I shall always be glad to hear that you are well and happy! Miss Judith Perren, I leave this young lady in your hands, feeling confident that I am thus securing to her kind friends and a comfortable home.”

“Rest assured, I will do my best by Chrystabel Tyndale,” replied Miss Judith, solemnly.

Mona Louisa gushed, and Mr. Matthew smirked an approval of this little speech, and then there was a general move, and I saw that Mr. Crabb was actually on the threshold. Utterly desperate, I made one bound towards him; I seized, in default of his hands, which were out of my reach, his coat−tails, and cried piteously—“Oh, take me back with you; don't leave me here! I can't stay; indeed I cannot. Let me go back, at least for one more night!”

“Do not be a foolish child,” replied Mr. Crabb, gravely, but not unkindly. “You will be very happy here if only you will be good and contented. There! let me go.”

But I only clung the more pertinaciously, and the good lawyer was visibly embarrassed.

“I will remove her,” said Mr. Matthew, coming blandly to the rescue. “Chrystal, *ma belle,* this is unseemly, ungrateful, and unladylike! Come and look at my pictures,” and he extended his hand.

“If you touch me I will bite you!” I exclaimed, turning upon him, wild with rage.

“Oh, fie!” he responded, keeping, however, at a safe distance. “'Let dogs delight to bark and bite,' you know.”

But I did not know. I was as unfamiliar with Dr. Watts as with Tennyson, and I had never heard the line before.

“I do not bark, but I can bite,” I replied, sullenly; “get away.”

“This is dreadful,” he said, appealing to Miss Judith. “She is as untrained as a little savage.”

“Never mind,” replied his sister; “we will soon change all that. In the meantime, stand back and leave the child alone! Why do you interfere? You know you never succeed with children and women; you exasperate the one, and disgust the other.”

“I am not aware that I do either,” returned Mr. Matthew, drawing himself up to his full height. “Your remarks, Judith, are unsisterly, unbecoming; indeed, I may say—”

“Pray do not say, if you wish me to keep my patience,” interposed Miss Judith; “you have not packed all your pictures—your wonderful findings in Wardour Street! Surely you will not trust that *Correggio* to any hands but

your own!” And she unceremoniously pushed him aside, and picked me up from the mat, where I lay in an agony of tears, for Mr. Crabb had taken advantage of the squabble to make his escape, and I heard the front door shut after him. It was of no use resisting any more; I was given over to the Perrens, and it only remained to make the best of my situation. Mr. Matthew went away, I suppose to his Correggio—apparently he was going to wash it, for he called for hot water and soft towels, and Miss Judith led me back into the drawing−room.

“Do you know this is a very bad beginning?” she said, gravely, placing me opposite to her, and looking steadily into my face.

I felt that it was, but I said nothing.

“What made you say you would *bite* my brother?”

“I said it because I meant it; I did not want him to touch me.”

“And do you generally bite when you are displeased? A girl of nine years old *biting!*—it is dreadful!”

“No,” I replied, “I do not often bite now; it is a very long time since I bit Mantie. I bit her last because she would not let me go into the square one windy day. Oh! it is a very long time ago!”

'Mantie is your nurse, is she not?”

“Yes, she nursed me when I was little, and she kept the house too.”

“What a queer name—Mantie!” interrupted Mona Louisa. “Is it her Christian name?”

“Do you mean her christened name?”

“Yes! was she christened Mantie?”

“She supposes she was, for when she was taken in at the Foundling, her name was pinned on to her clothes. It was not Mantie, but Clemanthe, and they called her 'Mantie' for short. She has no other name.”

“How very curious! And what a lovely name, *Clemanthe!* Is she pretty?”

This of course was from Mona Louisa.

I replied:—“I do not know; I think not: her face is very red.”

“She is not very young, I suppose?”

“No, quite old—as old as you are, I am sure.”

Mona Louisa shrank back, as if I had struck her in the face. Miss Judith interposed.

“Child, it is very bad manners to talk about people's ages; you must never talk about anybody you live with being old. If you do, you will be disliked. You may call me old, if you like: *I am* an old woman, and do not want to pass for a young one. And Aunt Rachel does not mind being old—indeed, she rather enjoys it.”

“Who is Aunt Rachel?”

“Our aunt, whom you will see to−morrow at Northborough. She is not so many years older than my brother Matthew, but she is our aunt nevertheless. She is a great invalid, and seldom leaves her own two rooms. She is Miss Perren, of course; I am only Miss Judith. Now tell me what you have learnt. You can read, I am told.”

“Yes, I can read; Mantie taught me. She taught me to sew, too, but I do not like sewing—I like reading.”

“What have you read?”

“Heaps of books;” and I gave her the titles of some of the volumes I had perused. They were, most of them, novels of the old school—Fielding's, Smollett's, Mrs. Radcliffe's, and others of the same class: by no means suitable literature for my tender youth.

“You read the Bible every day, I suppose?”

“No; I never read it. There was but one Bible about, and that was Mantie's, and she would not often lend it to me.”

More questions followed, to which I returned true answers, and I could see that Miss Judith was really shocked and pained.

“I did not expect this,” she said, in a half aside to her sister; “I did not think any child could be so brought up in a Christian country.”

“She must be taught religion directly,” replied Miss Mona, just in the same tone in which she had said I must immediately be taught geography, arithmetic, and music. I am afraid the sisters began to repent their bargain; a creature so utterly heathenish and ignorant they had not imagined.

“We must talk it over with Matthew,” said Mona Louisa, twisting her scanty ringlets.

“We will do nothing of the kind,” hotly replied Miss Judith. “Matthew would only harangue us on the beauty of early piety, and he would quote Dr. Watts, and Hannah More, and all the respectable old fogies whom he

affects. Pray leave Matthew alone; let him scrub and clean his pictures, and write what he calls poetry, and set it to music. We are used to all that; do not set him on a new track, I pray."

"Aunt Rachel is very religious."

"She is a Methodist—that is the worst of it. Dear me, one would think this world was nothing, to listen to her. Still, she seems to find a great deal of comfort in her religion, and she is no more afraid to die than to lie down in bed at night."

I said nothing, but I thought I should like to know all about Aunt Rachel's religion; I had no notion what a Methodist meant— something objectionable evidently, according to Miss Judith. But I held my peace.

Next morning we set off from King's Cross on our journey to Northborough. We had an immense amount of luggage, though many of our packages went by goods' train, including most of Mr. Matthew's valuable pictures. It was a beautiful autumnal day, and besides our own party there was only one passenger in the compartment—a lady in mourning, young comparatively, and with a remarkably sweet and tranquil expression of countenance. I had never seen a face I liked so much; how I wished I were going to live with her, instead of with the Perrens!

Chapter 5. THE CLOUD

This was my first long journey by railway. I had upon one or two memorable occasions taken trips in the suburbs. Once I went to Enfield to see a married sister of Fanny's, and once Mantie took me to see the famous chestnut−avenue in Bushey Park when it was in all its May−bloom glory. These were the longest railway journeys I had ever accomplished. But now we went on and on through interminable fields, by flashing streams and comfortable homesteads; through orchards laden with their rosy and golden fruitage; through long cuttings, over noisy viaducts, and, worst of all, through gloomy, darksome tunnels. And still we were not half−way on our road, "not *nearly* there," as Mona Louisa assured me when, about twenty miles from London, I ventured to inquire if we were soon coming to Northborough.

For the first thirty miles we were a very lively party. Mr. Perren especially went into raptures over all the charming "bits" by which we flashed; bits, after Landser, and Claude, and Cuyp, which he regretted he could not sketch, though both pencil and sketch−book were conveniently at hand. Then he deplored the good old coaching days, till Miss Judith snapped him up with "Pray do not talk such rubbish, Matthew; you know you would have no patience with coach travelling if you had it. As for sketching tumble−down old barns, ivy−clad gables and old mill−wheels, I am very glad you have not the opportunity, for the house is overrun with your daubs already. And you know your straight lines are never straight, and you could not make a true circle to save your life. Every mill−wheel that you ever drew is obviously deformed."

"My dear Judith," returned Mr. Matthew, with smiling sarcasm, "you know nothing about art. Alas! you do not love it, therefore it is not singular that you should fail to appreciate it. Only the soul attuned to beauty is privileged to behold beauty's self."

Mr. Perren then subsided into a dignified, or what he meant to be a dignified, silence; and taking out his pencil proceeded to scribble down something, which I rightly conjectured to be a poem, so called. He was happy in this respect, that when foiled in the pursuit of Euterpe, he could console himself with Calliope, or at least with Thalia. But by−and−by a drowsiness fell upon the trio. Mona Louisa muffled herself up in her veil and took a quiet nap. Miss Judith announced that her early rising had been too much for her, and that she meant to have forty winks. "For," she said, "at my age one cannot very well dispense with one's proper quantum of repose." And leaning back on the cushions, she was soon in the land of forgetfulness.

Mr. Perren tried to look as lively as ever; he admired the landscape, and telegraphed to me by pantomimic gestures his admiration; he jotted down his ideas; he bit his pencil, and mused in all the agonies of composition; he hummed an air, original or otherwise; he began to read a volume which he took from his pocket, and that was too much for him. Ere long his eyelids drooped, his head fell back, the book slid from his slackened hold, and Mr. Perren was fairly asleep.

Old gentlemen who desire to maintain a youthful reputation should never go to sleep in public. Sleeping old age is as beautiful as sleeping childhood; but affected simulated juvenility, with its mouth open, and its jaw fallen, and its set *pose* disregarded, is only an object for compassion, if, indeed, one can compassionate the most contemptible vanity and the most puerile infatuation in the world.

"I am twenty−five in constitution and sentiment," was Mr. Matthew's frequent asseveration.

He might have passed for seventy−five as he lay there peacefully snoring and oblivious of appearances, with his feeble−looking hands unclasped before him. Nothing shows age like the hands, and as they cannot possibly be "made up," it only remains to wear gloves habitually, if you are silly enough to be ashamed of the lustres you have passed.

Do not, I pray you, imagine that I am scoffing at *old age,* or sneering at those finger−prints of Time which the years, as they glide by, are leaving ineffaceably on all of us. Oh no! grey hairs have a beauty all their own, and even as the autumnal glory is fairer even, in the appreciation of some, than the splendour of the verdant, radiant spring, so has the autumn of life a peculiar loveliness of its own, sweet, pathetic, rich, and wearing a noble grace and beauty which is all its own. But then one never finds the woodlands pretending that they are still in all their spring−tide freshness; they never try in September to make believe that it is April or May. When we come looking for the ripe fruit we do not find in its stead artificial blossoms and green−painted leaflets. Nature does her

appointed work, and is content to grow old graciously. Would that all her children would follow her example! Pretence is always odious, and the delusions of sixty are infinitely more contemptible and inexcusable than the vain self−complacencies of twenty. Yet I must do Mr. Perren the justice to remark, that I am sure, ridiculous as he made himself, he believed implicitly in himself. It was not, in his case, simple pretence, the mere attempt to impose fallacies; it was pure self−delusion of the most complete order; he firmly credited himself with being all that he asserted, and by continual assertion I think you may bring yourself to believe anything. If a lie is only repeated, or better still, printed, often enough, it becomes a *quasi* truth, and in time it grows to be an article of belief. The only thing against its success is that a lie cannot live beyond its appointed time, while the truth, however spurned, however calumniated and disguised, is immortal, and is co−existent with Divinity itself.

I was thus the only one awake of my party. I did not mind that, for I had not been used to much society, and I rather liked being left to my own reflections. But presently I grew rather weary of the monotony of the train, and I turned my eyes towards the lady who was our fellow passenger. She was looking towards me, with a pleasant smile on her sweet, calm face, that I instinctively called beautiful, though I knew not why. There was something so winning in that smile, that I involuntarily returned it, and changed my seat in order to be close to her.

“Do you like grapes?” was her first sentence.

As it happened, I had never tasted them; my only acquaintance with them was in the fruiterers' windows. I replied, therefore, rather bluntly, I fancy, “I don't know.”

“Suppose you try,” she said, giving me a fine bunch; “they will not hurt you.”

“Well?” she said again, when I had eaten a few.

“Oh, I like them very much. They are much nicer than apples, or pears, or plums. And I am hungry, too,” I added, just then bethinking myself how many hours it was since I had eaten anything. In half a minute I had a large piece of nice seed−cake in my hand, and I ate it nothing loth. When I had finished I said, “I thank you very much, ma'am.” And then I suppose I astonished her, for she regarded me with mingled surprise and amusement. I went on, “I wish I were going with you instead of with *them*.” And I pointed to the sleeping trio.

“Why? Is not that your grandpapa?” she asked.

“No, indeed. I never had a grandpapa; but if I had he would not have been like *that*.“

And I glanced indignantly at the unconscious sexagenarian, who was dreaming, I dare say, of his imaginary Correggio. I saw that the lady wished to know more about me, but did not like to ask questions. I resolved to treat her with my usual candour. Reticence was a virtue to which I never leaned.

“They are nothing to me,” I said, nodding at the Perrens, who all nodded back again as we jerked over the points at a junction, “I never saw them till three days ago, and now they have got me, and they mean to keep me.”

“What do you mean? They do not look much like child−stealers!”

And she laughed. Oh, what a pretty, low silvery laugh it was! It sounded like far off joy−bells, and it awoke merry music in my heart.

“No; they have not stolen me.” And I, too, laughed at the idea. “I am too old to be stolen, you know. I could run away.” I did not add, “And I could bite and kick.”

It had somehow dawned upon my mind, since last night, that *biting* was not exactly the thing.

“But,” I continued, “I am *adopted*, you know; they have taken me to be their child. I did not want to go with them, but I could not help it; I should not have liked to go into the streets and beg, or sweep a crossing, and there was nothing else.”

“Poor little one! have you no father or mother?”

“No! Mamma died when I was a baby. Papa died a fortnight ago. Mantie went away to another situation, so there was nobody! I wish you had adopted me.”

“I could not have done that. I have little boys and girls of my own, and I could not afford to take another person's child into my family. And your father has only been dead a fortnight? Poor darling! it is very hard for you!”

Her tenderly expressed sympathy was infinitely sweet and soothing, though I could not tell exactly why.

I was feeling sadly depressed, for the more I thought of my life with the Perrens, the more I shrank from it. I was not quite sure, after all, whether the crossing would not have been, on the whole, more agreeable. Altogether I was wretched enough, I suppose, and I found a certain relief in telling my new friend all my story, so far as I knew it myself. It was indeed a pitiful one for a child to tell.

When it was finished, the lady's kind brown eyes were full of tears.

“Poor little one!” she said, and she folded one arm closely round me. “You have had sad experiences, and yet you are no older than my little Laura, who does not know what care and sorrow are. Take courage, darling! God is still your father; He will care for you, He will never lose sight of you. Don't be afraid, my dear.”

She saw my puzzled look, and she inquired, “You know that God is your Father, my child? that He will never desert you, that you have only to trust and love Him, and be happy?”

“I don't quite know what it is to—trust!”

“To trust a person is to believe in him, to be sure that he is doing what is right and best for you. If I said I would do something for you if you would come with me, and give yourself up to me, would you not believe me?”

“That I would; but I have never seen God, and He has never said that He will do anything for me.”

“Oh, yes, He has. Listen!” and she took out a little pocket Bible. “These are God's own words: 'Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.'−'When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.'—'Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.'“

We talked a little longer, and she began to find out how extremely ignorant I was; that I was in very deed a heathen child in a Christian country. There was something like dismay in her countenance when she discovered that I knew nothing, literally nothing, of the “sweet story of old!” I knew there had been a person on earth called Jesus Christ, and that He was sent by God: but that was ages ago; and He died and was buried, and went back to heaven. What Christ came to do, I knew not in the least—that His coming to this earth had aught to do with me, I never guessed.

“Shall I tell you about Jesus Christ?” my friend asked pleasantly.

Of course I answered in the affirmative, and she commenced the story, and in simple language told me the whole sweet, sad, tender tale, from the birth at Bethlehem to the burial in the garden, and the ascent from the Mount of Olives. I listened entranced, my heart beating high, and my pulses throbbing, drinking in every word of the marvellous history—the “old, old story,” that has thrilled thousands of bosoms with its pathetic records, ever since its first telling in far−distant countries, eighteen centuries ago. The train went on; mile after mile it sped away, and still my protectors slumbered, and still I listened, and only feared we might come to Northborough all too soon. When my friend had ceased speaking, I said, “It is all true—I know it is!”

“It *is* all true,” she replied; “but why do you know it is?”

“Because I *feel* that it is,” was my illogical but satisfactory reply; “and because all the people in church stand up and say the same thing; they say, 'Who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell'—but you did not tell me *that.*“

“No; it is a foolish expression that ought to be altered; it simply means that He went down into the grave. Go on.”

I continued:—“'The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven'—that is all I recollect. Is heaven a *very* beautiful place?”

“So beautiful, so happy, that we cannot even fancy anything like it. It is a land of joy and peace, where nothing can come to vex us any more; where there is no more sickness, nor pain, nor parting, nor death; where we shall see God, and serve Him perfectly.”

“There is a great deal of trouble on earth,” I said, with a sigh. I had found it out lately.

“Yes, a great deal; for there is sin in the world; and sin brings sorrow and shame, and all kinds of suffering. But God is over all; He makes all things work for our good, because He loves us; it is good for us to have trouble, more or less, and to every cloud there is a silver lining.”

“A *what?*“

“A silver lining! Look at that cloud yonder over the hill. How dark it is!—it is almost black. But if you could see the other side of it, the side that is turned towards the sun, you would be dazzled by its brightness—it would be like those lovely golden fleeces that we see when the sun goes down on a fine summer evening.”

“And our troubles are like clouds?”

“Exactly. They keep out our sunshine, or some of it, for a while; but they have a bright as well as a dark side, and in good time—just when God pleases—we see the edges of the cloud turn to silver, and the light grows and grows till the sunshine comes again, and the cloud has floated away, or melted into pure blue. There! look at the

cloud—it is not so dark now."

Indeed, it was not. It was no longer black, but grey, and it seemed to be set in gleaming, lustrous silver, which, however, soon deepened into burning gold. The cloud itself grew thinner; very soon it broke up and scattered, and all that remained of it were little sailing flecks of amber radiance, that mounted higher and higher, till they were lost in the great blaze of undimmed sunlight. It was a beautiful thing to see.

"It is quite gone now," I said, when I had watched the last tiny wreath dissolve; "and what a great black cloud it was a little while ago!"

"Yes; it looked like a coming tempest. Now, my dear, try never to forget that cloud. So fade and die, in due season, our darkest cares and sorrows, because God, who is our Sun and Shield, shines on always. And often, too, the very clouds we fear the most bring us our best blessings. There is a verse of a hymn that says—

"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercies, and shall break
In blessings on your head."

And now we are going to part—you and I—for I get out at the next station."

"Oh! do you not live at Northborough?"

"No, I live at Chippington, twenty miles this side of Northborough. Will you tell me your name, that when I am asking God to bless my own dear children, I may ask Him to remember you, whom it has pleased Him to make an orphan?"

I told her, and she wrote it down in her memorandum book; then she wrote something else in a pretty little New Testament which she took from her travelling bag.

"I must give you this," she said, placing the tiny volume in my hand. "I meant it for my little Laura, but I can easily procure another for her. This book will tell you all about Jesus, much more than I told you, and I think if you read it in the right way you will find in it the sunshine to brighten and chase away many a cloud. But don't *fancy clouds*, Chrystabel; don't make troubles for yourself. These people,"—and she lowered her voice,—"you do not seem to like them?"

"How can I like them?" I said fretfully; "they are not nice; I could like them if they were nice."

"And yet it is very kind of them to take you, who do not belong to them, and feed, and clothe, and educate you."

"I wish anybody else had taken me."

"Oh! do not wish that. You are with them, because it is the best thing for you. Try to love them."

I felt that I could not, and said as much. Mrs. Hamilton, for that was her name, merely answered, "Well, then, try to do everything you can for them, try to please them in every way, and do not care about pleasing yourself; and if you think they might be wiser, remember that you are only a little girl, and that they are old people. They are in the place of your parents, therefore you must honour and obey them. Now we are coming to my station. Kiss me, dear child; we shall meet again some day, I am sure. God bless you and keep you. Only love Him, and all will be well. And do not forget the cloud."

We glided into the station, and directly the train stopped some one opened the carriage door. It was a tall, handsome gentleman, about forty years of age, and somehow I knew at once that he was Mrs. Hamilton's husband. Close behind him were a little girl of my own age and a boy rather younger. Their faces were glowing with delight. I saw the brief but loving embrace between them and their mother. Oh, happy, happy children, how I envied them!

The bustle of Mrs. Hamilton's departure woke up my companions. Miss Judith shook herself, adjusted her bonnet, and sat up as prim and brisk as ever. Mona Louisa yawned, and came gradually to herself. Mr. Matthew looked extremely cross, shivered, and protested that he had not been to sleep at all—he had only shut his eyes. It always fatigued the visual organs reading in a railway carriage.

"Let us have some luncheon," said Miss Judith, taking out her stores. "You look pale, Matthew. I am afraid you have taken cold."

"Oh, dear, I hope not; I do hope not!" was the almost querulous answer. "Give me some sherry at once, Judith. What station was that we stopped at?"

"It was Chippington."

“Nonsense! We have not passed Lisboro' Junction or Fream Road.”

“Oh, yes, we have,” I rejoined quickly; “we stopped at the Junction. But you were fast asleep.”

“I tell you I was not asleep, child,” returned Mr. Perren, testily.

I did not know then that nothing offended the old gentleman more than being suspected of sleeping in the daytime.

“But you were *snoring!*” I persisted.

“Ill−mannered child,” he retorted, severely. “I tell you what, Miss Chrystal, you will have to learn politeness.”

“There! there! Matthew,” interrupted Miss Judith, “that will do; no doubt you did snore, you always do; so do I; it's in the family. Next time you hear Mr. Perren snore, Chryssie, do not tell him of it. Have you been eating grapes?” for I still had the residue of the bunch in my hand. Child−like I was saving the last half−dozen grapes for a *bonne bouche.*

“Mrs. Hamilton gave them to me,” I said; “she gave me seed−cake too, for I was hungry, and you were all asleep. And we had a long talk.”

“Chrystabel,” said Miss Judith, reprovingly, “you must never talk to strangers—it is highly improper. Remember never to do it again. I expect you always to obey me in everything, and when I once give a command I do not wish to have to repeat it.”

Meanwhile the sunshiny day faded. Not one cloud, but many, gathered all around, and the atmosphere grew thick and murky. We had come into a dull, unlovely country, with plenty of smoke in the horizon, and by−and−by we got into the dingy suburbs of a large straggling town, and into the smoke itself. As we proceeded it grew darker and colder. We reached Northborough in a steady downpour of rain.

Chapter 6. AUNT RACHEL

Our journey was not quite at an end when we reached Northborough. The Perrens did not live in the town, but in an outlying suburb, which had once been a distinct village, only connected by the high−road with Northborough itself. It was called Stanbridge; and as the Perren mansion was at its furthest limit, almost outside the suburb, we had still from four to five miles to travel before reaching our destination. It was pouring with rain, and clouds and smoke hung heavily over the town, when, shivering, tired, and cross, we found ourselves out of the train, and claiming our luggage on the Northborough platform. The porters seemed out of temper, the station−master was angry with everybody, and the guard and Mr. Perren had a fierce dispute at the very outset: his precious Correggio was missing! It was certainly not in the luggage−van, nor in any portion of the train, and yet with his own eyes he had seen it safely deposited at King's Cross. He was aghast, furious, confounded; by turns piteous and outrageous; he fretted and fumed, and be−wailed himself, and threatened the railway company with all sorts of pains and penalties. It had evidently gone off at one of the junctions when the train was made up afresh; it was gone, no one could possibly say whither!

“Come along, never mind the row,” I heard one porter say to another, as I stood a little apart ; “it's only old Perren!”

“Eh, I thought it were he!” replied the other. “Isn't he in a tantrum, though?”

Which, indeed, he was, for the coolness of the porters and the guard was driving him to the last pitch of exasperation. He stuttered and stammered, and his articulation, always imperfect from the loss of his teeth, became incomprehensible. I had never in my life seen any one in such a passion. Why, in single combat with Mantie, I had never been more furious myself. Poor old gentleman, it was a pitiable sight. Mona Louisa began to cry; it was so cold and damp, she said, and what was the use of standing there quarrelling over a silly picture? She wanted to get home to her tea.

Miss Judith interfered.

“Of course it is very careless of them, Matthew, and they must be made to produce the lost property as quickly as possible. I have no doubt it was properly labelled and directed, for whatever you are, you are not inaccurate. But it is of no use standing here any longer; the station−master has taken down all particulars, and that is all that can be done at present. Very well, you can remain if you choose; Mona and I and the child are going on in any case. I don't want to be laid up with influenza if you do, and there is a cold, damp wind cutting through the station.”

That decided Mr. Perren; he had a great objection to influenza, though influenza seemed rather partial to him. With many parting injunctions and cautions, and not a few threats, he at last consented to leave the place. I saw the railway men laugh and exchange glances as we walked away—Matthew and Judith arm−in−arm, Mona Louisa and I behind. And Mona Louisa was as fractious as a tired child; she was cold, she was hungry, she was tired to death, and the wind was spoiling her complexion. And, indeed, with her bonnet out of shape, her blue veil limp and rumpled, her ringlets uncurled, and her whole woman disarranged, she did look an object worthy of compassion.

We had a weary drive to Stanbridge; first of all through the Northborough streets, which were grimy as well as muddy, through dirty shabby outskirts, and then along a straight, broad turnpike road, bordered on either side by genteel terraces, and all sorts of “villa residences,” detached and semi−detached, and in every possible and impossible style of architecture. And it rained heavily, and the clouds rolled darkly overhead. Thick, leaden, hopeless−looking clouds they were; had *they* too a silver lining, I wondered! Were there beyond them the bright blue sky and the golden autumnal sunshine? It seemed most improbable, and yet, all things considered, I knew it must be,

At last, just when my patience was exhausted, and I was beginning to feel desperate, and to question what would happen if I relieved my feelings by kicking Mr. Perren's shins, the carriage turned up a drive, and wound its way under dripping trees, and splashing through pools of water, till it stood still before a handsome portico and an imposing−looking front door. So I concluded we were at home.

I think we all got out of that carriage the wrong foot foremost, just as sometimes, you know, people get out of

bed on the wrong side, and continue in an unamiable mood the whole day afterwards. This I know, that we were all four extremely cross. For myself, I can testify that I had never been in a worse temper in my life, and I longed for something whereon to wreak my vengeance. I should have liked to fall upon Mr. Perren there and then, and pummel him to my heart's content. A sweet, amiable child! you will say: but I told you that "people never took to me." The house seemed to be large, and all the rooms and passages spacious; and dim as was the light, I could see that Mr. Perren's favourite pictures,—"picters," he called them,—lavishly adorned the walls. We all went into the dining−room, and bewailed ourselves, and sparred a little with each other—at least the elders did, while I listened, and desired nothing better than to come to issues with them all. Presently Miss Judith rang the bell, and told the girl who answered it to take me to Dobbs, who would take off my things, and get me ready for tea.

I followed the young woman with alacrity. She was a sonsie damsel, with a colour in her cheeks, and a sparkle of fun in her eyes, which were dark and bright. I was sure she was good−natured and kind−hearted. When we reached the top of the stairs, and stood upon the wide, dreary landing, hung, of course, with the inevitable "picters," I said, "Don't take me to that Dobbs. I can take off my things myself."

"Oh, but I can't, miss; else I would," replied Jenny, shaking her head. "We must do as we are bid in this house. Bless you, if we didn't mind what Miss Judith says I don't know where we should be. No; I must take you to Miss Dobbs, and I must go and carry in the tea−tray. I am parlour−maid, you know!"

I consented to be taken to Miss Dobbs, whoever she might be; and in another minute I found myself in that worthy's presence. Miss Dobbs was a spinster of uncertain age. She was trim and upright, and wore an old−fashioned, shabby silk dress, and a cap of very peculiar construction. She had a thin, long face, high cheekbones, with a round red spot on each, cruel red−brown eyes, treacherous lips, and a general expression of cunning. She had on a *front* of dark, sleek, shining hair; and her high−hooked nose was bestridden by a pair of heavy tortoise−shell spectacles. I cannot say I fell in love with Miss Dobbs at first sight. On the contrary, I felt a strange repulsion as I approached her. Some unaccountable instinct told me that she was to be my enemy.

She looked at me keenly through her spectacles, then took them off, and deliberately surveyed me from head to foot, just as if I had been a lay−figure with clothes upon it. My cheeks burned with anger at her impertinence; for that she *meant* to be impertinent I easily discerned. Quick perceptions are a very doubtful blessing; I scarcely know which is the worse, to be dull of apprehension, or to be gifted with intuition so keen, so unerring, as to approach very nearly to second sight. Often and often I have wished I did not know what people were thinking about me; heartily have I deplored the instincts which told me things were not what they seemed.

"I have brought the young lady," said Jenny, after a pause, for she was a little taken aback by Miss Dobbs's long stare. "Miss Judith says you are to get her ready for tea."

"Oh, indeed," returned Miss Dobbs, through her teeth.

She positively seemed to hiss rather than speak, and I at once compared her to a snake. Certainly I was not to be welcomed into the family by Miss Dobbs. Jenny nodded her head and left the room, and I heard her running lightly downstairs. Then, seeing that Miss Dobbs still stared, I stared again; my great black eyes and her small red−brown ones met, and I gazed steadily, unflinchingly until her eyelids fell.

"I can get myself ready," I said, coldly; "show me to my room."

"Show you to your room, indeed!"

"Yes, please, and make haste; they told me to be quick, for the tea would soon be ready."

"That's not the way for a child to speak; you'll have to be made eat some humble pie, I can see. Come along!" and she seized me rather roughly by the hand. I felt very much inclined to struggle, but thought better of it. Mantie had never touched me in such fashion, except, indeed, when we were really having a pitched battle, as sometimes occurred; and here was this stranger hauling me along as unceremoniously as if I had been her prisoner going off to be put in irons. However, I was beginning to learn self−control, for I went with her without resistance, though unwillingly enough.

She led me through a long passage, and up another flight of stairs, to a large low room, very neat, very scantily furnished, very cold and cheerless in its general aspect; and the wind howled mournfully in the chimney, and the rain beat against the window. I felt that I should hate Northborough, or rather Stanbridge, where I had come to live. Still roughly, Miss Dobbs proceeded to pull off my bonnet and cloak; I was obliged to let her have her way, for Mona Louisa in her zeal had wrapped me up as securely as if I were going by the overland mail, not to be unwrapped till I reached my destination.

The ceremony of washing and hair−brushing I chose to perform myself; I did not want those bony hands on my face and among my tangled curls. Meanwhile the red−brown eyes regarded me stealthily.

"What's your name?" asked Miss Dobbs presently.

"Tyndale—I am Chrystabel Tyndale."

"Chrystabel! Mercy on us, did anybody ever hear such an outlandish name! Chrystabel? But of course they call you Bell?"

"I am called Chrystabel—or Miss Tyndale."

"Are you come to stop long?"

"I am come to stop always, I suppose;" and I was about to explain that I was "adopted," when it struck me that it was unnecessary as well as undignified to enter into explanations with a servant.

"Stop *always!*" she shrieked. "No child ever stopped here before. What do you mean?"

"Only what I say; you had better ask Miss Judith about me. I am ready to go down."

Regarding me still with suspicion, she led the way downstairs. On the lower landing we met Miss Judith coming from her room. She took my hand, and addressing Dobbs, said, "We have come back one more than we went out, Dobbs."

"Yes, I see," replied Dobbs, trying to speak amiably; "she says she is come for good."

"I am sure I hope she is not come for anything but good," returned Miss Judith; "but if you mean to inquire whether she is come to reside here—yes! We have adopted her—my brother and sister and I—she is to be to us as our own child, and I trust she will be a comfort and a blessing to us in our declining years. You had my letter?—you got ready the white room?"

"Yes," said Dobbs, half sulkily. "Don't you think, ma'am, a child will be too much for you? Children have such spirits there's no such thing as checking them. I am sure when I went to my niece's that fortnight in the spring I thought I should have gone mad with the noise and the constant worry. When you are not used to them they're just distracting, and children are all spoiled nowadays. When I was young—"

"But Miss Chrystabel is not spoiled, and we shall not spoil her, I am sure, and I do not fancy she is very noisy; besides, she will have her studies to attend to presently. Come, Chrystabel, we will go down to tea."

A very fine tea was spread for us on the large mahogany dining−table. There was tea and there was coffee, and broiled ham and eggs, and cold boiled ham, and jam tarts and cakes of various kinds, and all sorts of biscuits, and gingerbread, and preserves, and a hot sweetbread, and a mutton chop, and a decanter of sherry for Mr. Perren. Clearly the Perrens were people of substantial means, and I should not starve with them whatever else befel. I had never seen such a tea−table; it lacked one thing only—a tablecloth. The polished mahogany, in which we could see our faces, looked cold and comfortless, and I was in mortal dread of spilling my tea, or scattering the crumbs of cake, or dropping islands of guava jelly on that shining mahogany sea, which must have cost much toil and time ere it came to present a surface so imposing. Mona Louisa revived when she had had something to eat, and devoted herself to me, and would have helped me to everything upon the board had not Miss Judith interposed.

"Mona, do you wish to make that child sick?"

"But she has been travelling."

"Three kinds of jam are not necessary after coming off a journey."

"But it is her first evening in her new home."

"And, therefore, she should not be crammed into a bilious attack. Besides, she says herself she has had enough. Don't try to make the child greedy."

Tea being over, we gathered round the fire; by special desire, I sat next to Mona Louisa, who put her arm round me, and fondled me incessantly, very much as I had fondled my dear old cat, which I had left in Bloomsbury Square, And every now and then she gave me a hug and whispered, "Oh, you darling!" Suddenly Mr. Perren sprang up, exclaiming, "I have an idea!"

"Do not give us the benefit of it to−night," said Miss Judith.

"No, pray *don't,*" said Mona Louisa, for he was approaching the pianoforte.

"Just one minute," he replied, deprecatingly; "you will be delighted; it is so sweet!" And he played something with no particular tune in it, something which would have revealed to any one possessing only a small amount of musical science that Mr. Perren was entirely innocent of thorough bass, or of the rules of harmony.

Presently Mr. Perren ceased playing, and turned towards us. "What do you think of it, sisters?"

“Oh, it is very pretty,” said Mona Louisa, to my astonishment; “but very much like the last thing you composed, is it not?”

“Mona,” said her brother, severely, “the last composition which I rehearsed in your hearing was—let me see, was it not my own madrigal, 'My love is like the starlight'?—and this is the *Lord's Prayer!* “

“You might leave *that* alone, I think,” was Miss Judith's reply.

“It is b*eautifu1*” he returned emphatically, and he evidently believed it was. “Listen! where it passes into the minor key; it moved me to tears as I played it!”

“It's all very well to call it minor,” said Judith, when she had heard the movement; “but if I know anything of music, it is simply discord! And there is something not quite right about the time; it is like your poetry—you will put too many words into one line. Your verses don't scan; never did, you know.”

“But surely, Judith, you perceive the idea—the beautiful, plaintive idea in that minor phrase?”

“No, I cannot say I do; and do you know, Matthew, though I am no musical genius, it strikes me that, if I chose to waste my time, I could compose pieces like yours by the score? If I wanted anything specially original, I would make the cat walk up and down the keys.”

Mr. Perren closed the piano with a sigh; his sisters, as he afterwards assured me, had no soul for music. A piece of paper lay on the hearth−rug. Miss Judith bade me pick it up. I recognised the “poem" at a glance.

“Ah! my sonnet!” said Mr. Perren. “Now, Judith, confess that this is really something quite out of the common way;” and he read his sonnet, which told us that sunset was beautiful, that the trees were green and the skies blue, and the sea as smooth as glass, and that his spirit longed to soar away to a world where all was pure and calm, etc. etc. etc. It was the sort of poetry which luckless editors get by the waggon−load, which they just glance over, and then consign to the waste−basket for Betty's benefit. Still there was a certain *prettiness* about it, I must confess, though few people would count it any merit to be able to write *pretty* verses.

“Yes, it is pretty,” said Miss Judith, glancing over it again; “but, my dear Matthew, it is not a sonnet, though you call it one.”

“Not a sonnet?”

“Certainly not! a sonnet cannot go beyond fourteen lines; this has sixteen! It has only a certain number of rhymes, which you have exceeded, and it expresses but one leading idea, which, expanding line by line, reaches its climax in the final couplet, or last line. There is nothing of the sort in this so−called sonnet of yours.”

“Are you sure of what you say?” asked Mr. Perren, looking sadly crestfallen.

“Quite sure. Go and read any number of real sonnets—Shakespeare's, Wordsworth's, Milton's, Browning's You will discover that what I say is true.”

Mr. Matthew gathered up his unlucky sonnet, his notebook, and his sketch−book, and walked away, with his chin stuck out and his head thrown back: I saw no more of him that night.

“Oh, dear!” said Miss Judith, when he was gone, “how I do hate literature, music, and the fine arts generally!” and she poked the fire savagely. Presently she added: “Aunt wishes to see Chrystabel to−night, Mona; it is getting late; will you take her, or shall I?”

Mona said she would take me, and we went upstairs accordingly, and, passing through a baize−covered door on one side of the landing, entered what seemed to be quite a distinct part of the house. Mona knocked at a door, and a deep, but not unmelodious voice bade us enter. An old woman, a real, indisputable old woman, sat by the fire—a woman with a pale, withered face, a bent form, and hair as white as snow, but with such eyes!—dark, earnest, pathetic, loving.

“This is the little girl, Chrystabel Tyndale,” said Mona Louisa. “And, Chryssie, this is Aunt Rachel; you need not be afraid of her, though she is so old.”

Afraid, indeed! I liked the looks of the old lady better than aught else I had seen since Mrs. Hamilton left me in the train. In spite of her wrinkles she was a beautiful old woman, for her features, though worn by time and sickness, were still fine, and her expression was truly lovely; and then that snowy hair, gleaming like pure silver in the shaded lamplight; and those sweet, deep, serious eyes, that seemed to say a thousand things as they kindly regarded me! I sat down, as she bade me, on the stool at her feet, and I felt with pleasure her withered but delicate fingers passing gently over my thick curls.

“It is a long time since I saw a little girl,” she said, presently. “I never go out, Chryssie; it is many years since I went out of doors. I shall never go out again; and little girls do not often come to see me.”

“Never go out again?” I answered, thinking how sad that must be.

“No, not till they carry me out to the churchyard yonder, my dear.”

“Don't, auntie!” shrieked Mona Louisa; “you know such allusions always make me ill; and you will frighten the child.”

“And yet, Mona, both the child and you are hastening to the hour you cannot bear to hear spoken of. Death, or what you call death, comes to all in turn.”

“Still, I cannot bear to think of it. When I am as old as you are, auntie—”

“Child!” and the old lady spoke not to me, but to Mona; “I have been thinking of my change—of my going home—these forty years. If I had not thought before, I should not like to think now. But now I wait patiently, I trust, yet sometimes longing for the hour when my God shall call me to Himself. It cannot be very long, you know, Mona.”

“And you really do not fear death? No! I know you do not. But, auntie, I cannot understand it. Besides, you say you do not *believe* in death; and yet you will have to die.”

“Death and dying are only words. This poor worn−out frame will crumble to dust; this tired heart will cease to beat; these aching limbs will lie still; but *I—I myself*—I shall go to God. I shall pass from this life straight into another—the life of the world to come. I shall be dead to you who remain, you will see me no more after they have fastened down the coffin−lid upon me; but I shall know nothing about dying. One moment my happy soul will say farewell to earth; the next, borne on angels' wings, it will be carried into the presence of Him whom I have loved and longed to see face to face these many years. No, Mona; to the soul that lives in God there is no death.”

“If I were only good like you!” sighed Mona.

And I too thought it must be a pleasant thing to be so good as not to fear dying.

“Ah, child, it is not my goodness; I have told you that many and many a time,” replied Aunt Rachel. “It is that the sting of death is taken away. 'Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.'“

And at that beloved Name the pallid face of the aged saint kindled with joy and she reverently bowed her head. It was the Name to her above all other names. It was indeed “music to her ears.”

Child as I was, I thought how extremes met in that house—extremes of folly, and extremes of something that I could not comprehend, but which I yet knew to be both wise and grand. Soon afterwards we wished Aunt Rachel good−night, for she was very weak, and a little talking sometimes tired her sadly. But her words—I did not know then but that they were her own words—rang in my ears: “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Chapter 7. THE PERREN POLITICS

When I was left alone that night I lay listening to the wind—the grave autumn wind, sweeping solemnly through the withered leaves of the old elms about the house, and to another sound, that I had never heard before—a low, measured thunder, sinking and swelling yet never ceasing—like slow, deep organ cadences, such as I had once or twice listened to in the aisles of Westminster. What could it be? It was certainly not thunder, nor yet a passing train; the storm was over, and the room was flooded with moonlight. I sprang from my bed, and ran to the window; perhaps if I looked out I could find whence came those mighty chords of sound, mingling so strangely with the wind's wild choral song.

I drew up the blind. Oh, never shall I forget what I saw that hour! The rain had long since ceased, though every bough and spray was glittering as with crystals; the sky was clear of clouds, save for a few white fleeces, sailing swiftly away due South, across an illimitable ocean of pure azure. Here and there shone out pale stars, their milder radiance quenched in the rich, mellow lustre of the autumnal moon, which, large and full−orbed, shone down upon such a scene as I had never imagined. For there was the sea—the broad, shining, moon−lit sea; and the sound I had heard was the deep monotone of the waves, as the advancing tide bore them higher and higher on the rocky shore. I had seen the sea at Sheerness, for a few hours only; once I had spent a day at Margate, and I had been down the Thames as far as Greenwich; but never had my eyes beheld a spectacle like this! The wide expanse of heaving waters seemed boundless, and a broad path of molten silver—or was it not pale gold rather?—stretched far away into the vast immensity, where earth and heaven met. One little sail, like a dove's wing, flitted for a minute or two across the shining track, then passed into the mysterious twilight beyond, and the faint stars paled and glowed and paled again, as spellbound I stood shivering in my night−dress, drinking in full draughts of that night's exceeding beauty. How beautiful it was I can never tell! I have never seen such another night, for it seemed then to my childish apprehension that more than the loveliness of earth was compressed into that hour.

And I had not even remembered that Northborough was near the sea; very likely I did not know it was, for geography was not included in Mantie's scheme of education. A dissected puzzle−map of Europe had given me all my geographical lessons.

Stanbridge, as I quickly discovered, was not exactly on the coast; the Perrens, as I told you, lived at its extreme boundary in a district commonly known as “The Hill.” And the Hill was quite a mile or more from the beach; yet as the ground sloped down seawards all the way, it seemed to me in the illusive moonlight that the great tide−waves were actually breaking on the margin of the green meadow immediately beyond the garden.

And again I listened to the grand, solemn chant which the sea was uplifting beneath those purple skies and that resplendent moon, and remembered the glorious organ−music which had thrilled my heart not many months before, when in the dusk of a winter's afternoon Fanny and I had stolen into the Abbey by the Poet's Corner while the afternoon service was going on. The mystic beauty of the night, the majestic music of the ocean, awoke I knew not what in my heart. I scarcely know whether I felt more of pleasure or more of pain as I questioned within myself what it all might mean; I wanted to cry, and yet what I felt lay all too deep for tears, and while I could have wept I could have laughed also for exceeding joy. The truth was I was listening to an anthem of more than earthly sweetness and sublimity, and I was trying in vain to catch the key−note of the strain. I could not comprehend the melody, though it stirred my inmost being; the tune was strange to me, I could not catch the measure. How should I? I knew not the great Master of that unequalled band, which human skill and genius may seek to imitate, but can never rival. I knew nothing of the everlasting “Song of the Redeemed”; I could not sing, “Al1 hail the power of Jesu's Name!” or “Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ!”

You will think I was a strange child in these half musings of mine, as in my waywardness and hardness. Please to recollect that my life was never the natural child's life. To begin at the beginning, I was the offspring of a most singularly consorted pair. My father was a man of remarkable intellectual power, and apparently free from all ordinary human sentiments. My mother was a sensitive, refined, tender creature, of a passionate but most noble nature, nervous and highly impressible, and of a warm, unselfish, affectionate temperament. I believe strongly *in race;* and though Mantie always assured me that I was altogether my father's child, I know that from my mother I

also inherited some of my strongest, if not most prominent characteristics. Like her, I needed love, and I had never had it. I was at once boldly self−reliant and clinging. I was proud, insolent, and disdainful; and yet, though I knew it not, I was ready to be the gentlest of the gentle, the meekest of the meek. My solitary life and the injudicious course of reading which had been permitted had fostered in me a singular and unhealthy growth of character, as unpleasing as it was unusual in a girl not yet ten years old. And to crown all, I was allowed to live in a state which was as near as it could be in a Christian country to actual heathenism; and I had never, as far as I can recollect, exchanged ideas with another child. I had lived entirely with grown−up, elderly people; the maid Fanny, whom I should suppose was about twenty−five when the household in Bloomsbury Square was broken up, being the only young person with whom I had ever associated.

I became at last so cold that I was glad to go back to bed; but I left the blind up, that the lovely moonlight might come in full and free, and that I might still behold, when I lay down, the glory of the sea. And as I nestled among the bed−clothes, tired as I was, sleep still seemed far away. I could only lie open−eyed, and watch the restless, shining waters, and listen to the mysterious harmonies that fell so solemnly upon the stillness of the night, and question within myself, what did it all mean? what was it *saying*—that awful monotone, that mighty voice, with its great measured music sounding in my ears, and thrilling all my soul? And I felt that ere I slept I must answer that great voice; oh, if I only knew what it was saying!

“It is of no use;” I murmured to myself, at last; “I never heard it speak before; I cannot tell what it says; I cannot speak to it again—yet it will not let me rest!”

Once, I think, I dozed, and fell into a light slumber, for, for a minute or two, I was certainly a wanderer in the shadow fields of dreamland. I know not whither I strayed in that enchanted region. I saw, or seemed to see, the moonlight still, only it was brighter than any moonlight I had ever seen with my waking eyes; for it was intense, pure, silvery light, yet undazzling, and I still heard the billowy chorus of the waves, but there mingled with it the booming of a great church bell and the diapasons of an organ. And suddenly I heard, low, clear, and distinct, another voice, which said, “Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And then I awoke with a start, and the room was comparatively dark, for a cloud had come over the moon, and the silvery track upon the waves had disappeared. But the words which I had heard in my dream were still ringing in my ears, blending themselves with that other mysterious voice of the great sea, and I cried, “Is that what it is saying—'Thanks be unto God'? Is it telling about God, about Jesus Christ? Is it talking of heaven? Yes, it must be that. I don't know why, but I am sure it is. It is telling all about God somehow. Ah, I am very glad it tells that; it is very grand, very beautiful. Now I think I can go to sleep.”

And go to sleep I did, even while I was wondering what sort of “victory” it was, which God gave to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. And when I awoke it was bright morning, and sunlight instead of moonlight was on the sea, and the anthem of the waves, though still continued, was lower and less distinct than it had been in the stillness of the midnight; also the tide was very far out, which I knew nothing about, though I had heard of “high water at London−bridge.”

While I rubbed my eyes and tried to recall my faculties, Dobbs walked into the room.

“You'll please get up this minute, miss,” was her greeting. “Laziness won't do in this house, I can tell you; we don't allow no lie−a−beds here. Can you wash and dress yourself?”

“Of course I can. Please to go away; I want to get up.”

“I'll see you out of bed first, young lady, or you'll lie down again, and take another nap, I'll warrant. Come!” and she seized the bed−clothes, with intentions very evident. But I seized them also, and held them tightly around me, exclaiming—“Leave me alone! If you touch me, or do anything I don't like, I will scream till they hear me downstairs!”

“Oh, you'll scream, will you? Screaming don't go for much with me, I can assure you. Scream away!” But she shut the door.

“I can bite, too. I had rather not bite you, but if you make me I shall do it.”

She drew back a little; and I am sure I looked dangerous.

“You are a little savage,” she retorted, her chestnut−coloured eyes reddening with fury. “I never in my life saw such a vicious little creature. You *dare* to bite me!”

And once more she advanced upon me. This time she seized me by the shoulder, and I at once fulfilled my threat. A second afterwards, and she had let me go, and was wringing her hand with pain. I had made my teeth

meet in her flesh, she averred. I do not believe it was so bad as that, but I have no doubt I gave her a pretty hard grip. Happily for us both, Mona Louisa just then entered the room, and Dobbs of course appealed to her. She told her tale, and I told mine, and then Mona said to the waiting−woman—“Really, Dobbs, you are most injudicious. You should not have aggravated the child. Of course she does not choose to get up and dress while *you* are in the room. Why did you not go when she desired you?”

“Go at the bidding of a chit like that!” replied Dobbs, still cherishing her wounded hand. “Well, I never! What will the world come to if women of my age are to give way to children like her! That was why I wouldn't go, Miss Mona, because she told me to!”

“I said *'please',*“I interrupted.

“I am sure you did, my darling!” cried Mona, with effusion. “Never mind her, Chryssie, my dear; she is an ill−tempered, cantankerous old maid! But she shall not plague you. I will speak to Judith and settle it at once. Go away this minute, Dobbs.”

For a moment or two Dobbs hesitated; but as Judith and Mona were, in point of fact, equally her mistresses, I suppose she thought it would scarcely be safe openly and directly to oppose the latter. With a toss of her head that nearly shook off her tortoiseshell spectacles, she marched away, muttering, *sotto voce,* and yet loud enough for me to hear, “Old maid, indeed! I wonder what she calls herself! Old maid! Well, I never!”

If Mona caught the words she had the discretion to turn a deaf ear to them. At any rate, she made no rejoinder. Only she said to me—“Really, my sweet Chrystabel, you *must not* bite people! Indeed, young ladies never bite. But she is a nasty, tiresome thing; I could bite her myself sometimes, she is so utterly provoking.”

“Why do you not send her away?”

“Well, you see, though I am actually mistress as much as Judith—for my fortune and hers are equal, and the house and garden (the estate, as Matthew calls it) belongs to us all three—still, Judith is so very much the oldest, you know, and she is so—so—well, I can hardly say what, but somehow she always rules, and if any dispute arises, however hard we may struggle for the victory, Matthew and I always get the worst of it.”

“And Miss Judith likes Dobbs?”

“Yes! that is to say, she would not part with her. She is an old servant, and what people call a faithful servant, and we always leave her in charge when we go away from home. If I said Dobbs should go, Judith would at once say she should not, and in the end I should have to yield, and Dobbs would triumph, as she has done more than once,—disagreeable old thing! I do think these faithful old servants that so much brag is made about are dreadful nuisances;—the respectful, really devoted ones are only to be found in books!”

“What would Mr. Perren say? Does he like Dobbs?”

“Oh! we should not listen to anything he might say, unless it met with our approval; we never do take any notice of what Matthew says, at least when he says what we do not agree with! He is not of any good in such matters—it is only in the fine arts that his word is of any weight.”

Judging by the specimens I had already seen of Mr. Matthew's fine arts capacities, I privately thought he must be a very useless person indeed! Mona resumed —“But you really must not bite, it is so like a wild beast to bite, and I am sure Judith will never allow it! Nor, indeed, shall I,” she added, after a pause. “Little girls that bite and scratch are obliged to be punished for their own sake, you know, for you must see you could not be let grow up to behave like a wild cat. So do not bite any more, there's a pet.”

When, at last, I reached the morning−room, I found the family assembled and the breakfast waiting. But first we had prayers—a proceeding that astonished me quite as much as if we had performed an Ojibbeway war−dance! Prayers out of church were something I had never imagined. Mr. Perren did not officiate, as would have seemed to be only natural as the recognised head of the house; but Miss Judith read a few verses out of the Bible very rapidly, and then with equal rapidity, yet not exactly without reverence, a short prayer, concluding with the Lord's Prayer and the usual form of blessing. The final “Amen” was scarcely pronounced ere she sprang to her feet, and gave orders that the coffee should be brought in and the eggs boiled immediately. Miss Judith wore a loose, ugly wrapper, and her grey hair was by no means becomingly arranged; her morning toilet was certainly of the most elementary description. And Mona Louisa, on the contrary, was dressed with all the elegance and freshness of a youthful *belle;* and her morning costume was quite in the fashion—innocent looking frills and modest tuckers gave her quite a school−girl air, and her light scanty tresses were coquettishly snooded with gay sky−blue ribbons. The bloom on her cheeks was lovely. Altogether Mona Louisa had a marvellous complexion,

if, indeed, she were, as her sister asserted, fifty years of age. I had, of course, no idea that her roses and lilies were her own simply because she had paid for them. If I was so utterly heathenish as never to have heard of family prayers, I was also unworldly enough to be ignorant that there were such things in Christendom as borrowed charms. I knew that savages painted themselves, but I had no notion that English ladies followed their example, differing only on the score of taste, the *squaws* chiefly affecting pigments of blue, or red, or yellow ochre, the British maids and matrons preferring the more delicate pink hues, and *blanc de perles.*

As for Mr. Perren, he looked older and more shrunken than ever in his scarlet slippers and his gaily−flowered dressing gown. He was not in a particularly sweet temper; he seemed rather deaf, and his mind ran, and, of course, his conversation, on his lost and loved Correggio. We afterwards discovered that this precious piece of art was exactly three months old when he purchased it, and that it had been manufactured to order in a miserable garret not a hundred miles from Oxford Street. But as Titania loved Bully Bottom, the ass, so loved Mr. Matthew Perren the forgery which he esteemed to be a genuine Correggio.

Now that I had the advantage of daylight, I could see that many of Mr. Perren's art treasures were not to be appreciated by unskilled eyes. He had Rembrandts, and Rubens, and Murillos, and Claudes, and Titians, etc., which Rembrandt, Rubens, and Co. would scarcely have taken the trouble to disavow. He had a Greuze which most certainly Greuze never painted; and he had what he persisted in calling an “Angelina Kofemann,” though Mona Louisa continually assured him that no such young woman had ever existed, much less painted his favourite allegorical “picter.”

In the matter of frames, he had certainly original notions. Judith and Mona had insisted on those which hung in sight being at least respectably framed; but those which hung in what he called his *gallery* were framed anyhow, or nohow, and were hung up by any odd pieces of cord or string that came readily to hand. The water−coloured drawings were all mounted awry, or, as Jenny the maid said, “askew,” which circumstance led me to the very obvious conclusion that they were mounted, if not framed, by Mr. Perren's own industry.

After breakfast, Mona took me all over the house, which was really a large one, far larger than the exigencies of the Perren family required. She told me, too, that this estate, which I found was distinguished in Domesday Book and in the Ordnance Maps as “Elmwood,” had been for many generations the property of the Perrens, who were an old Northshire family. She favoured me, too, with some particulars of her family history, telling me among other things that Matthew had been “bred to the law,” not because he had discovered any legal ability, or manifested incipient forensic talents, but chiefly because his father had not thought it to be a good thing that a young man, however well provided for, should have his time entirely at his own disposal. “He thought,” pursued Mona, talking as if I were a woman of experience, “that every young man, unless he were the heir to great landed estates, should be brought up to a profession; and he selected the law for Matthew because he never was over−wise.”

“But I thought lawyers were obliged to be very clever, Miss Mona?”

“If they are to get on in the world, they must be, of course; but if a man only wants some sort of gentlemanly occupation it does not matter about his ability. My father used to say that the Law and the Church were either of them safe refuges for a man of mediocre attainments, provided it was not necessary that he should rise to eminence. It was not safe, he used to say, to embrace the medical profession without first−rate capabilities, because a well−meaning simpleton might so easily kill his patients. And as for the army, why, Matthew cannot bear the smell of powder, and would certainly run away at the first sounds of firing. So my father made him a lawyer, and he pulled through his examinations somehow—I daresay he imagines with all possible *éclat,* for poor Mat is very vain; his heart is in the right place, Chryssie, always remember *that;* but he is vain, conceited, and all that, and it makes people not like him. In due time he became a regular solicitor, and he did a quiet and respectable little business for many years; then he gave up, and devoted himself to the fine arts generally. When my father died, he left the property equally divided between Judith, Matthew, and myself, and we have lived together ever since, and Aunt Rachel with us. Aunt Rachel has a good bit of money of her own. We are not rich, we Perrens—that is to say, not rich as people count richness nowadays; but we are a very comfortable, well−to−do, substantial family, and all our money is well and safely invested, and we want for nothing. And we do not mean to grudge you anything, Chryssie; you are to have an excellent education, and to be brought up as if you were our own niece. Only you must be a good girl, and leave off biting; you must not disobey Judith, and, if I were you, I would not anger Matthew.”

“Why has Mr. Perren never married?” I asked, it must be confessed very impertinently, considering my age and position. Mona shrugged her shoulders.

“I am sure I do not know, Chryssie; he is always thinking about it, but the ladies do not seem to take to him. Every now and then he professes to consider himself all but engaged, but it never comes to anything, and we are quite used to it now, Judith and I. At first we really believed him.”

“And why don't you get married, Miss Mona?”

“You are too curious, Chryssie; that is precisely the sort of question a well−bred little girl would never dream of asking. You must not be inquisitive, you know; it was curiosity that made Eve eat the apple, and brought so much trouble into the world. Take warning by her example. If I am not yet married it is my own fault, you may be certain; I suppose I *am* fastidious; but there is no time lost; early marriages are a dreadful mistake. But that is a subject you cannot possibly understand; and we must go down now, for Judith will have finished with Dobbs and the housekeeping books, and she is intending to ask you a few questions in order to ascertain at what point your education must be commenced. You will have every advantage, and be taught everything that a young lady ought to know, and all on a very superior *system*, which Judith herself has developed out of all the best ancient and modern educational treatises. You will be a sort of experiment, you see; and you must be sure to succeed.”

I did not understand her at all; had I fully comprehended, I should have gone downstairs to the library, where Miss Judith sat enthroned, with a little less alertness.

Chapter 8. MISS JUDITH'S “PLAN”

“Now, Chryssie, I must find out what you really know,” said Miss Judith, as I entered the room. “Mona, I think you had better leave us together. My child, I want you to tell me exactly what you have learned. You *can* read?”

“Oh, yes, quite well!” I answered readily.

The table was loaded with books large and small. I hoped devoutly I was not going to learn lessons in all of them! Miss Judith turned over several volumes, and selected one which she put into my hands, desiring me to read aloud a certain passage, which she pointed out. I read it glibly enough—that is, I did not stumble over any of the long words, but then I was not at all particular how I pronounced them; I tripped boldly over vowels, and jumbled up consonants, exactly as it suited me; I rattled on, regardless of stops, and in a monotonous sing−song tone that would infallibly have sent a drowsy person to sleep.

“That will do, Chryssie. You read very badly—indeed, I cannot call it reading; you mispronounce half your words; you have not the slightest idea of emphasis; and you bawl and drawl like a dame−school child!”

“Mantie said I read like a parson!”

“Some parsons do read very badly, reading aloud not being duly taught in our public schools or in our universities, so that was no great compliment, Chryssie; but I never heard a parson miscall his words as terribly as you have just done. What you read may be sense to yourself, but it is nonsense to those who listen to you.”

I felt as crestfallen as, I suppose, Mr. Perren did, when he discovered that his “sonnet” was *not* a sonnet—only an unmeaning set of lines. I had taught myself to believe that I read beautifully—for I read as well as Mantie, and what more could be desired?

“Now, listen,” said Miss Judith; and she read the passage which, she assured me, I had *hashed up* so horribly. I was obliged to confess that it sounded very differently. Then I was examined in various other departments, and was praised for nothing but my arithmetic. I had learned and read some English history, and a fine jumble I made of the legendary Arthur and the famous Alfred; I mixed up ancient Britons and Saxons, Normans and Plantagenets, Magna Charta and Gunpowder Plot, Fair Rosamund and Lady Grey, with delightful facility. Miss Judith let me run on; and I told how Margaret of Anjou gave Lady Jane a bowl of poison in Woodstock Bower, and how Charles I. was beheaded for signing Magna Charta, how Thomas−a−Becket was burnt by bloody Queen Mary, and how King John was beheaded at Whitehall by Guy Fawkes, with much more equally novel and edifying. The examination came at last to an abrupt conclusion, Miss Judith deciding that I should begin everything over again from the very beginning.

Only on one point I distinguished myself. When I thought all was over, Miss Judith gave me a large ruled slate and pencil.

“Now,” she said, “write as well as you can an account of our journey yesterday, and of our arrival at Elmwood. I will leave you to yourself, that you may have no interruption; I will come again in an hour's time, when I shall expect you to have covered both sides of the slate.”

That was a task after my own heart; I had often written letters to imaginary people and described imaginary events; now I had not to invent, simply to narrate; and I fell to and wrote so fast that my slate was filled in a few minutes. I looked around me and found a white china slate covered with neat writing; I seized it, cleaned it, and filled that also, and then appropriated some sheets of paper and a lead pencil, which I found on a davenport in the window. But my *cacoëthes scribendi* increased as I went on, and when Miss Judith returned, having been detained, considerably later than she had intended, I had not nearly finished my “exercise,” although I had covered two slates, and written all over half−a−dozen sheets of notepaper.

Miss Judith praised my composition. I was told that I had expressed myself very well, and with less grammatical error than might have been expected, considering that I did not know a noun from a verb. But I was warned to beware of my spelling, which was peculiarly phonetic, to say the least of it, and it was also pointed out to me that from the beginning to the end of my composition I had not made one single stop, an omission which certainly tended to obscure my style; and whereas Mantie herself had had no clear idea of the prerogatives of capital letters, I was precisely in the same predicament.

Nevertheless, Miss Judith seemed pleased, for she patted my head and smiled as well as she was able, and

said—“I see, Chryssie, that you have excellent abilities, but hitherto they have been turned to no account. You are woefully ignorant, even in those departments in which you might have been expected to be instructed. However, it is quite as well as it is; I prefer laying the foundations myself to building upon other people's bases. You would like to be a clever woman, Chryssie?”

“Yes, I should,” I answered promptly. There was plenty of ambition in my foolish little heart, and plenty of assurance, too; for I had never doubted in my own mind that I should grow up to know everything that a gentlewoman ought to know, and to be everything that was desirable.

“Well, then,” pursued Miss Judith, “you must be very industrious, and very painstaking, and I need not say thoroughly obedient. When I give a command, Chryssie, I expect it to be obeyed immediately, and to the letter. Nor need you ever trouble yourself about my reasons; they do not, and should not, concern you; all you have to do is to obey at once, and unconditionally.”

“Shall I have to obey anybody else?”

“Of course you will obey my sister and my brother, and, in some respects, Dobbs, who is an old and trusted servant, and much respected by us all”

I was going to declare that I would not obey Miss Dobbs, whatever might be the consequences; but I changed my mind, and decided to reserve the expression of my sentiments on that head till they were called for. I replied—“I will try to do what you tell me, and what Miss Mona tells me; but I do not think I can do as I am told by Mr. Perren.”

“Why not?”

“Because I do not like him. And then he is so silly.” Miss Judith frowned. “Hush, Chrystabel! Only a silly little girl would talk so about a person so much older than herself. Little girls must not have opinions, you know. Just understand that you are not to say what you think about people or things, unless you are asked. And you must think as I tell you to think. Instead of having opinions of their own, which are sure to be false and foolish, young people should trust to the judgment of their elders. What I say is right.”

“Are you *always* right, Miss Judith? Mantie was not.”

“I am always right where you are concerned, and you must not compare me—an educated lady—with an ignorant servant, who must have been quite incompetent to take charge of you. I am going to write out a plan for you—a very carefully considered plan—which shall include all physical as well as mental advantages.”

“A plan?” I thought of some drawings which used to lie about in the old lumber−room at Bloomsbury Square, and which Mantie said were “plans.” As for *physic,* I always literally set my face against it!—I was quite as willing as Macbeth to throw it to the dogs.

And that very evening the “plan” was drawn up, fairly copied, framed, and hung in the small room that was to be my school−room—the study it was called. It was a charming little room, bright in summer and snug in winter; and its bay−window commanded the garden and orchard, the green paddock, and the full, beautiful, broad sweep of sea and coast beyond, with the great Headland of the Ness on the north, and the island of St. Clare on the south. The study was replete with every convenience; there were books and bookshelves, desks and stationery in abundance, maps, illustrations, illuminated texts and mottoes—all, indeed, that could be required for Miss Judith's “system,” which was certainly elaborate, if it had no other special merit.

The “plan” was read over to me and explained, and I listened with horror! As item followed item, I felt that I was being sold into Egyptian bondage, or at least into slavery of some kind;—I knew no more about the Pharaohs than the Ptolemies. I was to rise at six, to the minute, both winter and summer. I was immediately to take a cold plunge−bath, and be dressed by half−past six; I was to walk till a quarter−past seven, attended by one of the servants, and practise on the piano till half−past eight. Then came breakfast and prayers. From half−past nine to half−past twelve, studies without intermission; from half−past twelve till one, another walk, or brisk exercise in the garden; from one till half−past one, dressing for dinner. Then dinner itself, then studies again till four, then plain sewing till five, then another walk and tea till six, and fancy−work till seven, when, for one whole hour, I was free to choose my own occupation. My bed−time was eight o'clock—my candle was to be fetched at half−past eight precisely. The different studies which were to employ my time were all exactly specified; they were manifold. Especially it was arranged that I should commence a course of divinity, and twice a week I was to go into Northborough for dancing and calisthenics. How I wondered what it would be like! I had never seen anybody dance, and I had not the remotest notion what calisthenics were, unless, indeed, they had any connection

with the mysteries of clear−starching, into which I was to be initiated.

"The plan I have explained to you," said Miss Judith, in conclusion, "because, in order to fully pursue it, it is necessary that you should understand it in detail as well as generally. But my 'system' I shall not unfold; that is not needful. All you have to do is to obey implicitly and without question, exercising no will of your own, and forming no opinions save such as you receive from me. I trust to see you in a few years' time a learned, accomplished, useful, graceful woman, healthy in mind and body, animated in conversation, religious and conscientious, and far above all vulgar prejudices and feminine weaknesses."

I shuddered! Would she drop burning sealing−wax on my bare arms, or fire pistols in my ears? I had read the preface to "Sandford and Merton," and had no mind to rival the experiences of Sabina—who, after all, was *not* a success! Miss Judith went away for a short time, and left me with the hated "plan" staring me in the face. A wild desire seized me to demolish it there and then; to rend it in pieces by poking the scissors into its very centre, or to burn it with the poker, which could easily be made red−hot. But what was the use of that? If I did destroy the "plan" there would be another to−morrow, and I should only make Miss Judith angry, and perhaps bring down upon myself unknown pains and penalties. But the longer I looked at the horrid thing, the wilder I became. I felt as if I were bound with actual fetters, as if I were at the very best a prisoner on parole. And I had enjoyed till now not only liberty, but licence. I had done pretty much as I liked with Mantie, and such restraints as she imposed I never recognised. I did not want to be idle, but I did want to labour according to my own sweet will. I learned lessons under Mantie's reign, but then I learned them when and where I chose, and I had certain tasks of sewing, which, in process of time, were invariably completed. I got up when I liked, and, as a rule, I read a story−book of some sort while I breakfasted; I read as much as I liked, though occasionally condescending to work a sum or to write a copy. I spent a great deal of time by myself in the lumber−room with the beloved dolls, and my much−regretted cat; I sang to them, talked to them, and constituted them the principal *dramatis personae* of my plays, which were sometimes original, and sometimes taken out of my favourite story−books.

I seldom got into mischief, and I very rarely did anything which could be construed into actual naughtiness, excepting, of course, my outrageous fits of temper, when I fought, and scratched, and bit, and screamed, and called names regardless of consequences. I was *free*, and able to do as I liked, for the most part, left to think as I liked, to speak as I liked, and to form my own opinions. And *now!* Oh, what would become of me? As a colt of the desert trembles, snorts defiance, and regards with amazement the cruel bit and bridle; as a wild bird just caught and caged quivers, palpitates, and beats its weary wings against the bars; so I, the hitherto unfettered child of lawless freedom, struggled and writhed, and longed wildly, desperately, to escape from the trammels of my lot!

But it was all in vain, there was nowhere to escape to. If I had only stayed in London—dear old London! where there were crossing−sweepers, and flower−girls, and lucifer−match vendors, to say nothing of the itinerant newspaper trade, and the delightful avocation of front−doorstep−cleaning, in which I had frequently desired to engage!—I might have run away from Bloomsbury Square; I might so easily have given Mr. Crabb and Mantie the slip, and gone out into the wide world to seek my fortunes. But now it was too late; I was in a strange land, and the Perrens had me in their clutches, and would listen to no appeal.

When Miss Judith returned I was lying on the hearth−rug, sobbing as if my heart would break. It was long before I would or could tell her why I wept so passionately. At last I steadied my voice enough to say that I hated her "plan," and should certainly die if I were compelled to follow it. I believe, in my vehement unrestraint, I declared that I would drown myself in the sea rather than submit. I thought she would scold me; she did not even expostulate; she only laughed, and exclaimed, "You silly child, you are crying out before you are hurt. Why, you will like it excessively when you have tried it. There! go and wash your face and smooth your hair. Aunt Rachel wants to see you. Just look how you have rumpled the crape on your frock! and dear me, you have been tearing the hearthrug to shreds! What a cry−baby you are, Chryssie, and how ugly crying makes you! There! run off, and never be such a little simpleton again."

I went away sullenly, and vowing vengeance, yet at the same time feeling that I had quite the worst of it. I had expected a reprimand, or a lecture, perhaps even a good shaking, but I had not calculated upon being laughed at! My tragedy was taken for comedy. It was as if Lady Macbeth had been accosted as a Columbine; as if Desdemona had been accredited with the woes of Cinderella. I was terribly humiliated.

But when I entered Aunt Rachel's room my anger was quelled, my passionate regrets were lulled. I felt the influence of the calm, peaceful atmosphere in which she lived, and I sat down quietly on the stool at her feet, and

felt her trembling hand laid upon my curls with a thrill of pleasure. She did not take any notice of my tear−stained visage, she did not ask why every now and then I involuntarily caught my breath—the natural result of my violent fit of sobbing; but she must have perceived that all was not right with me, for old as she was her perceptions were of the keenest. She began to talk quietly and on indifferent subjects, and I listened to her dreamily. It was a relief to sit at her feet and hear the low murmur of her gentle voice, to shut my swelled eyes even from the soft shaded lamplight, and to feel the glow of the fire upon my cold hands. At last I said, “Do you hear what a noise the sea is making, ma'am?”

“Yes, it always makes that noise when the tide is rising; sometimes it is far louder. But call me Aunt Rachel, my dear.”

“It is a very grand sound, Aunt Rachel.”

“Very; I know no grander. I am very fond of music, Chryssie. Some years ago I used to hear a good deal of it, and I hear it still, though it is of a different kind. God has so ordered my lot that I may still sit and listen to glorious harmonies. Hark! no orchestra ever swelled fuller, finer chords than those. It always sounds on, Chryssie, day and night, summer and winter, year after year. Sometimes it sings low, sweet, thanksgiving hymns, sometimes it bursts in overwhelming chorus, and yet one never tires of it.”

“What does it say? What is it telling us? I know it tells something.”

“It tells us of God; it speaks always of Him, of His great love and might. It says, 'The Lord sitteth upon the flood, yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever.'“

“I thought it spoke of what you said last night.”

“What was that?”

“About the victory, you know—the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. I lay awake wondering about it.”

“It speaks of that also. Nature's voice, especially the voice of the great sea, speaks of many things. At least, it speaks many things to me.”

“Will you tell me what it tells you?”

“I will tell you a little; it would take too long to tell you all, besides you are too young to understand. It tells me how great and good God is, how grand and beautiful are all His works; it speaks to me of His love, His wonderful love in Christ Jesus. It tells me that my Father is as strong as He is good; as mighty as He is kind and tender. It tells me to be patient, to be calm, to give myself entirely into God's hands; more than all, it tells me of that other and still more glorious song which the saints above are singing before the throne—that song in which I shall some day join; I know not how soon.”

“Are you very old, Aunt Rachel?”

“Yes, Chryssie, I am seventy−eight. I have had a long life, and it has had in it much sorrow and much pain; now it is nearly over.”

“Yet you say God is so good! How can He be kind if He lets you suffer pain, and be miserable?”

“I never said I was miserable. Child! when one is as old as I am one sees things in a far other light than that in which one saw them in the days of youth; one sees, too, the whys and wherefores of much that was a sore puzzle once. All things become plain in the clear, calm light of the blessed eventide. And I see—though not quite distinctly yet—all the way my God has led me through the wilderness for nearly twice forty years. It was good that I should suffer pain and sorrow; I had to learn many a lesson, and pain and sorrow were my teachers—stern, yet loving teachers. They taught me to walk by faith, and not by sight; they taught me trust, patience, and joy in God's will.”

“And you sit or lie always in these rooms?”

“Always. I have not been beyond the garden for fifteen years; for nine years I have never passed the baize door out yonder.”

“Are you not very tired sometimes?”

“Yes, sometimes my pain tires me very much, and I sleep very little; old people never sleep much. But then I think it is only for a very little while; very soon I shall be where there is no more pain, and no more weariness; it cannot be so long now. It is pleasant to know that I am near home, to sit still quietly, and wait till God calls me.”

“You said last night you did not believe in death; yet the end means death, does it not?”

“No, Chrystabel, it means *life!*“

“But this is life, that we have now?”

“Only the beginning, the faint beginning of life, the first imperfect stage of being. What we call death is a great mystery; only one who passed its solemn portals ever came back again.”

“Who was that?”

“Jesus Christ our Lord! and where He went His children need not fear to follow. Besides, what is there to fear, when one is going *home*, and to one's father? What is it but to close one's eyes on this world, with all its cares and pains, and open them,—I know not where,—I care not where; for it will be with God, and at His right hand there are pleasures evermore.”

“Mantie said once that dying was going out into the dark.”

“It is going out into the light. The darkness is all here, for here we grope and wonder, and see things but indistinctly. There we shall know even as we are known; there the great mysteries with which here we perplex ourselves in vain will be unravelled. Did you ever watch the stars pale and die away out of sight on a fine summer morning? No, I dare say you never did; but I have, many a time. As the day breaks their lustre fades, and they grow fainter and dimmer, till we see them no more. Yet they are not dead, not lost, only hidden in the glorious sunlight! That is how God's children die, Chryssie; they pass out of the shadows, through the dawn, which people call death, into the presence of God Himself. They are for ever with the Lord, and that is all that we can surely know about them. But they are not lost in the darkness, they are gone on into the Eternal Light.”

Chapter 9. HOW I SPENT MY HOLIDAY

For a little while I found the “plan” not so terrible as it had seemed; while the novelty of it lasted I endured it patiently, and even without much inward repining. For I really liked study; I had an earnest desire to know things, and what I now learned explained to me much which in my former miscellaneous readings had perplexed me and confused me. Mona Louisa undertook to teach me music; and, as I had a good ear and nimble fingers, I soon made so much progress as to equally surprise and delight my preceptress. As for my French, the less I say about it the better. Mona honestly declared she knew nothing of the pronunciation, and little enough of the grammar, though she had once waded painfully through the first five books of *Télémaque;* therefore, she declined the honour of giving me elementary lessons. Miss Judith had never learnt the language in her youth, but she often remarked that she had “picked up” from time to time more than Mona had ever forgotten. Nevertheless, she would have nothing to do with teaching it to another, and it was almost arranged that a young lady in the neighbourhood, who had been partly educated in Paris, and who gave lessons in several families, should be called in to instruct me in this necessary department of my education.

When, lo and behold! Mr. Matthew interfered. It was not requisite that extraneous assistance should be secured; he himself would impart to me the rudiments of the French language.

“Are you sure you know French?” asked Miss Judith, sternly.

“To be sure I do!” replied Mr. Perren, stiffening his back. “Of course I understand French.”

“Well, I do not quite see the 'of course,' Matthew; no kind of knowledge that I am aware of comes by instinct. Still, now I come to think of it, I have heard you translate sentences that Mona could make nothing of, and a few years ago you were on the Continent for several weeks, though I believe you scarcely set foot in France. So, if you like to take the trouble—”

And so it was settled, greatly to my consternation, for I was persuaded in my own mind that Mr. Perren did not know French. Somehow I could not give him the credit for really and truly knowing anything, though I believe he would have professed an intimate acquaintance with Sanskrit had he ever been privileged to hear half−a−dozen words of it, for it was his unfortunate speciality to imagine that he knew a thing thoroughly as soon as he had gained the smallest smattering of it. Moreover, I had a horrible conviction that under the tuition of Mr. Matthew I should do something irremediably disgraceful; the more I saw of him the more I disliked him, the more I shrunk away from him, and the more I despised his ridiculous self−assumption. I felt quite certain that when we came to be intimately associated as pupil and teacher I should lose all control of my unlucky tongue, and say things which a far wiser man than he would find it difficult to forgive. Miss Judith, I am sure, thought the scheme anything but desirable, but Mr. Matthew persisted, and it was agreed that three times a week I should receive from him lessons in the French language.

I must do him the justice to say that he worked very hard as a teacher, and took infinite pains to explain every difficulty. His explanations, however, generally confused rather than enlightened me; and I do not know how long we were hammering away at the *accents,* with which he commenced the course. For as he insisted on a thorough and primary groundwork—and the accents came first in “Hamel's Grammar”—it was natural that we should master these before proceeding to the parts of speech, which we were to take in regular succession from the article to the interjection. I quickly perceived that my master was not at all clear himself on several points; and—unamiable young puss that I was—as soon as ever I began to get a glimmering of the formation of the language it was my delight to torment him with subtle questions, which I knew he could not answer. I used even to invent difficulties; I loved to put impossible cases, and watch the lack−lustre of his eyes, and the reddening of his visage, while he cudgelled his brains for some sort of plausible reply. The result of these studies may be imagined. Early in the new year he had taught me to say at tea−time, “*Sil vous play, vouley−vous, donney−mor une morso doo pain et doo bure.*“

Which, being interpreted, means, or is supposed to mean, “If you please, give me a piece of bread and butter.” I said it fluently enough, and my French master nodded approbation, with a gracious, “ *wee, ma chère, avec beaucoo plaiseer!*” I am afraid no native of France would have had the remotest idea what we were saying; indeed, I think it is very probable that the said native would not even have recognised his own tongue!

It must have been hard work for the poor man though, for he was as much dependent upon grammars and vocabularies as I was myself; and my memory was incomparably the better of the two. I do not think, however, he had any doubts as to his pronunciation, which I have endeavoured to express. Nothing ever could have made him a linguist, and I am pretty sure that after six months' residence in Paris he would still have spoken of the "ChongsElesy," and have called the "*Louvre*" the Louver! So, like the redoubtable Miss Kilmansegg, I continued to acquire "a French not spoken in France," and I should hope not frequently spoken on this side the Channel. And my dislike to my teacher became an actual antipathy; it was not so much hatred as contempt I felt for him. He irritated me continually to the last pitch of endurance, and at last the sight of him acted upon me precisely as a red rag acts upon a turkey−cock, or a scarlet shawl upon an irate bull.

Things went on, however, pretty peaceably for nearly six months, and then I was heartily sick of Mr. Matthew and also the "plan"! It was glorious spring weather, the sun shone, the sea glittered, the waves seemed dancing with glee, as they came leaping in upon the shingly shore. I could hear the skylark singing high up in the clear blue air; the garden was gay with early flowers, the almond trees were in full blossom, and I could see the shining, unexpanded buds on every branch and on the wayside hedges. I longed to fling away what Miss Judith called my "duties," and be once more as free and fetterless as I desired. I was quite willing to learn some lessons; I was not idle. I think I could have worked like a negro one half of the day for liberty to dispose of the other half exactly as I pleased.

The continual restraint irked me; the monotony of unvarying system—and it *was* monotony, for one day was precisely like another—wearied me, and made me feel often like a wild caged animal. If I might have had some companions of my own age it would not have been so bad; but I was still kept aloof from all other children. This isolation was part of Miss Judith's "system"; she held that children invariably contaminated each other. And during the winter I had seen little of Aunt Rachel, for she had been seriously ill, and entirely secluded from visitors. Had my intercourse with her not been interrupted, I do think I should have been in a far better frame of mind.

It was a glorious morning, in the last week of March, when, coming in from my early walk, I met Miss Judith in the hall, with a letter in her hand.

"Oh, Chryssie!" she said, "I was looking for you; I thought you came in some minutes ago. I have a letter here which will take us on a short journey—Mona and I. Do you think you can be a good girl, and amuse yourself quietly during our absence?"

"When will you come back?"

"Probably to−night; certainly before to−morrow noon. You will practise your usual time, and write the regular exercises, after which you may dispose of yourself as you like. I trust you to get into no mischief. You may take a long shore−ramble if you like, with Jenny for your companion; I will desire her to get forward with her work that you may set out early.

I danced for joy. I was so very glad, I could not repress my delight.

"And I may go as soon as I have finished my lessons?" I inquired, eagerly, feeling as if it were all too good to be real.

"Yes, if Jenny is ready; but I hope you will not be wild and give her trouble."

"No, no, indeed; Jenny is always kind to me."

"Well, I trust to you, remember. You will be in Jenny's charge. Dobbs goes with us."

That was good news indeed. It would be charming to go up the house and down the house, knowing there was no chance of encountering that austere virgin and her tortoiseshell spectacles. But then arose the question, to which I at once gave utterance, "Is Mr. Perren going too?"

"No, he remains at home; he has some pictures to varnish in the gallery."

Devoutly I wished he were going to accompany his sisters and the amiable Dobbs, for suddenly I recollected that this was "French−day," and from eleven o'clock till half−past twelve Mr. Perren might lay claim to my attention.

"Must I do my French?" I inquired, lugubriously.

"Well, that must depend upon Mr. Perren, since he is good enough to instruct you; but I should think your French lessons might be excused for once. I should like you to have a holiday to−day—you have not had one since Christmas. I will tell him you have a holiday."

Mr. Perren did not appear at breakfast or at prayers. He was busy upstairs, in the midst of varnishing one of his *pseudo* Titians, and could not be interrupted on any account. But a cup of strong coffee, a roll or two, and one of his favourite dried haddocks were carried up to him notwithstanding. Directly after breakfast the carriage came round for the ladies, and with a parting charge to be a *very* good, obedient child I was left alone. It was not ten o'clock, and I had made all needful arrangements with Jenny while she was removing the breakfast things. The girl seemed quite as pleased as I was, and readily entered into my project, which was to get as far as the ruins of Gretton Priory, four miles or more along the coast. We were to dine or rather lunch early—neither Jenny nor I could be at liberty much before noon—and to take some food with us in a basket, so that we need not return till late unless we chose. We both felt ready for any amount of walking and scrambling, and we knew that Miss Judith would be satisfied if we reached home before dark. So we settled it all, immensely to our own satisfaction—a charming little impromptu picnic on the very smallest scale. Jenny and I were equally in high spirits, in fact we were both a little rampant; and when she retreated with the breakfast cloth I rushed to the piano, and commenced to practise as noisily as possible, as if playing loudly and rapidly would get me more quickly through the hour.

I tried to be conscientious; I counted out loud; I went back once or twice when I felt that I had "scuttered" through a bar, as my music mistress called it; but I continually regarded the timepiece with anxiety, and once I got up to ascertain if the fingers really moved. The moment the hour had expired I shut down the piano with a crash that filled the room with vibratory sound, and rushed away to the study, where I seized at once upon my slate and my atlas, for my sole remaining duty now was to write a geographical exercise. And Jenny just looked in to say she had only to set the tray for Mr. Matthew's solitary dinner, and then she would be at my service. Mr. Matthew! truly I had forgotten all about him; in all our delicious little schemes both Jenny and I had ignored him altogether. But the servants did ignore their master whenever they could possibly do so.

The last island was discovered, the last river traced from its source right into the sea, and I pushed away my slate, threw my atlas across the room, and my pencil into the fire. I was just about to ring the bell for Jenny to bring in my luncheon when the door opened, and Mr. Perren entered, evidently in the worst of tempers, and smelling evilly of oils and varnish.

"Is your French ready, Chrystabel?" he inquired, looking sourly at the table, where the French books were not.

"No; did not Miss Judith tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"That I had a holiday! I am going on the shore with Jenny."

"I have heard nothing about a holiday, and even if Miss Judith did give you, as you say, a holiday, which may or may not be the case,—that does not excuse you from your French. You will take your lesson as usual; get out the books immediately."

I looked at him, but did not stir.

"Do you hear me, Chrystabel?"

Oh, how he flattened his long back, and drew up his pole of a neck, and tried to look commanding. I don't know why, but I thought immediately of a gander I used to meet whenever I went near a certain farm−house on the Hill. Obey *him?* No, indeed! That was not the sort of man that any feminine creature could obey. Besides, had I not right on my side? Was I not lawfully entitled to my holiday?

"Yes, I hear," I said, "but I am not going to do my French. Miss Judith has given me a holiday; she told me to go on the shore with Jenny, and I shall obey *her!"*

"You will obey me first! You can go on the shore as soon as ever you have taken your French lesson, but not before—not before, mind! And mind you, *I mean what I say!* So get the books at once."

"I shall not; it is past the time. It is just twelve o'clock."

"That is nothing to you. The pupil must wait upon the master's leisure. Now, Chrystal, I *will be obeyed!* Are you going to get out the books?"

"Not to−day, Mr. Perren."

"But you will get them today, I say; you *shall* get them!" And Mr. Perren grew excited, and looked more gander−like than ever. He was fast getting into a passion, and he would have set his teeth had he had any to set. I, too, was rapidly falling into what Mantie was wont to designate as one of my "white rages." I felt the attack coming on, and I did set *my* teeth, remembering with infinite pleasure that they were strong and sharp and

numerous, and quite fit for action. “Get them this moment, I say, or I'll make you!” quoth my furious tutor, his weak, watery blue eyes absolutely flashing for the moment, his thin lips tightly compressed, and his mean, lank chin sticking out most exasperatingly. That chin of his always drove me to desperation; it was more aggravating, more offensive, than any other feature; I suppose because of the weakness and ineffable self−appreciation it betrayed.

“You will *make* me?” I said, coolly. “We shall see!”

“Do you know who I am, Chrystal Tyndale?”

“Yes; you are called Mr. Perren, and sometimes Mr. Matthew. The servants call you 'old fogy,' and 'that old duffer!' And *I* think you are an old gander, and have no business to teach me French at all, because you don't know it yourself!—you know you don't. You are all a pretence, you are ever so old, and you try to skip about like a boy, and you talk about art, and everybody laughs at you, because any kind of scratching and daubing you call art. As for your 'picters,' most of them are only fit for firewood. Miss Judith says so. And I know what the rector said of you the other morning. *He* thinks you are a bit out of your mind. Yes, you are a sham, and your 'picters' are shams, and your music is a sham, and so are your 'pomes,' as you call the stuff you write for poetry! Oh, you are a wretched old sham! and I hate shams, and I despise them more than I hate them.”

And, having ended this elegant harangue, principally from want of breath, I was going to dash out of the room, when the foolish old man seized me, and shook me with all the strength of his hot anger. I do not say I did not deserve it, but it was terribly unwise of him. It was not in me to stand still under chastisement. I had never taken personal correction meekly in my life, and it was not likely I should do so now. We closed in fight; I grappled him tooth and nail, he—I scarcely know what he did, but I believe he beat me about the head with one hand, while I worried the other with my teeth. We overturned a table or two, knocked down the inkstand and some of the chimney ornaments, made a horrible clatter of the fire−irons, and finally came down together in a heap on the floor, where he shrieked for help, while I mercilessly continued to inflict my favourite punishment.

Jenny came in with the luncheon tray, and stood still in mute consternation. Her master sat on the carpet, breathless, dirty, bruised, bleeding, and plentifully bespattered with ink. I kept grim guard over him, with the ruler in my hand, my frock torn to pieces, my crape trimmings in absolute shreds, my hair rumpled and wild, my face white even to the lips, and my eyes “like a hungry panther's,” Jenny said.

“Go away, girl,” cried Mr. Perren to Jenny.

He looked savagely at her, unoffending as she was, as if in some way he associated her with his misfortunes. Still too much aghast to speak, Jenny put down her tray on the table, and retreated to the kitchen, where, of course, she had a wonderful story to relate.

When she was gone I dropped from sheer exhaustion on to the nearest chair. My heart was beating till it nearly choked me. Mr. Perren slowly rose, and regarded me with mingled fear and hate. What a spectacle of misery he presented.

“You are a wicked, depraved, fiendish child!” he enunciated solemnly; “indeed, you are not a child; you are a wild beast; and you ought to be chained up like bears and tigers. But you shall pay for this—you shall repent this day. I say I am not to be insulted, to be assaulted, to be outraged, even by a *ti—gre—ess!”*

“It was you who assaulted me!” I shouted after him, as he closed the door, “and you shall be sorry too.”

But he was gone, and I was left alone in the study, sitting Marius−like, among the ruins of my Carthage: for the table−cloth was deluged with ink, black pools were slowly soaking into the carpet, which was also strewn with broken china and glass, while rags of crape were everywhere. I know not how long I sat there, but no one ventured near me, and at last I began to come to my senses, and to feel ashamed of myself. I went to the looking−glass, stumbling as I did so over the shovel and the hearth−brush. I looked at myself in sad astonishment. That white−faced creature, with large wild eyes, and tangled hair, dirty with rolling on the floor, I suppose, for I feel sure we did roll over several times;—inkstained, bruised, and in tattered garments! Was that my reflection?—was I, Chrystabel Tyndale, like that? For *“that”* was something horrible, degraded, wicked, almost fiendish! I felt so utterly demoralised that I turned away and wept bitterly.

After what seemed a long time, some one did come to the door; it was Jenny, for I heard her voice—“Let me in, miss, please; I want the tray.”

“Come in,” I responded, sullenly. I did not want to see any one just then.

“But I can't, miss, if you don't unlock the door.”

“It is not locked.”

But it was, for Jenny turned the handle in vain; amid then I discovered that I was a prisoner.

“Oh, dear!” cried Jenny, “did I ever? Oh, miss, why did you go to quarrel with him? He is such a grumptious old fellow! And now he'll always bear malice against you! And now we can't go our walk, for I dare not go and ask him for the key.”

Go our walk, indeed! Even if I had been instantly liberated that could not have been. I was so weak now that I could scarcely have made the circuit of the garden. Presently I lay down on the hearth−rug, and went to sleep.

When I awoke, the evening rays slanted so much, and the shadows were so long, that I knew it must be nearly sunset. I felt hungry and feeble, and I was glad to eat some of the luncheon which Jenny had so opportunely produced before I was made captive. I suppose Mr. Perren thought to starve me into subjection, for he sent me no food. I ate, and was strengthened; and then I sat in the deep−cushioned window−seat, watching the soft, rich evening lights upon the landscape, and the roseate glow upon the sea and sky. It grew dusk; the stars began to glimmer, and the ship−lights to twinkle on the waves; very soon it was dark, and I was cold—so cold—for the fire had long since burnt out, and I was glad to get the inky tablecloth, and huddle myself up in it, covering head and shoulders. Almost stupidly I wondered what would become of me—what would be my awful penance? That some terrible, unheard−of expiation would be my doom I felt assured.

And, as the hour grew late, I wondered, too, whether I should have to pass the night in that cold, desolate study, without undressing, and with only the hearth−rug for my bed. I wanted, too, to wash myself; for ink, and dirt, and passion, and tears must, I knew, have combined to render me truly hideous; and it is most unpleasant to feel one's self hideous.

At last, tired out and sick at heart, I lay down again upon the hearth−rug, and dreamed that I was sweeping a very muddy crossing in Oxford Street, and found it a light and pleasing occupation. I was awoke by some one calling my name, and I started up to find the room full of light, and Miss Judith, and Mona, and Mr. Perren surrounding my lowly couch.

Chapter 10. A LITTLE CHEMISTRY

I started up, dazzled and confused, wondering for the first few moments where I was, and whether I could be actually awake. But I felt so excessively sick and dizzy, that I found it impossible to keep upon my feet, and therefore sank down again upon the hearth−rug and tried to draw the tablecloth over my head. But I was quickly roused by Miss Judith pronouncing my name in a sharp, imperative tone,—“Chrystabel!”

Then I began to remember all about it, and I sat up, and put back my tangled elf−locks from off my swollen, tear−begrimed face, and feebly responded, “Yes!”

“What is all this about? Why are you not in bed? Do you know that it is almost midnight?”

“I couldn't go to bed; he locked me in!” and I pointed to Mr. Matthew, who stood at a safe distance, his lean form drawn up to its full height, his chin lanker and meaner than ever, and his countenance adorned with various small pieces of old−fashioned court−plaister. His left arm too was in a sling, and his hand was wrapped up in a red silk handkerchief.

“Locked her in? I should think so, indeed!” was Mr. Perren's rejoinder, addressed not to me, but to his sisters. “Was it safe to leave such a wild beast at large? She was in such a state of frenzy that I quite expected she would rush all about the house, tearing and worrying everybody she found. Such a mad cat! I will never be left with her again; indeed, I think, after this, we had better send her away; she ought to go to a Reformatory School.”

“But what is the matter, what *does* it all mean?” again inquired Miss Judith. “We left Chrystabel in a very good temper, and as you were very busy with your pictures, and she was to have a holiday, I did not think you would see anything of her till the evening. Now you tell me the child flew at you, tearing you with her teeth and nails—and indeed, I can see you have been in the wars—but I do not understand what made her do it. How did you provoke her?”

“I did not provoke her at all! I only desired her to take her customary French lesson. She refused, and manifested a most rebellious and contumacious spirit, and when I insisted, she flew at me like a ferocious tiger−cat!”

“You are telling lies!” I interrupted, fiercely. “You know you shook me, and I never let anybody shake me! I should not have touched you if you had let me alone.”

“Oh! you wicked child! I did not shake you till I felt your teeth in my hand,” quoth Mr. Perren, with his most righteous air. I dare say he had really forgotten who was the actual aggressor, for there were occasions on which his memory was palpably defective, and he was frequently taken to task in the family circle for telling his tedious stories twice over. But just then, excited as I was, and ready to believe any evil of him, I felt assured that he was simply lying!—a procedure to which I never condescended myself—I was both too proud and too fearless to be untruthful. And I despised my antagonist accordingly, and was proceeding to express my detestation and contempt, when Miss Judith interposed;—“Hush, Chrystabel! Be silent this moment: I will not listen to such unseemly altercation: even if you were provoked you are not excused. Whatever was the cause of the quarrel, *you* have behaved abominably, and I am deeply disappointed in you. You are not to be trusted, I am grieved to say. Go to bed.”

But when I tried to walk, I staggered and reeled like a drunken person, and it was not without aid that I at last reached my white chamber at the top of the house. And when I got there, I sank into a sort of stupor, that was half exhaustion and half sleep. I suppose somebody washed my face and hands, and undressed me; for when I awoke in the morning I was clean, and in my nightgown; and I know that I took a *James'−powder*, and that I heard Dobbs assuring her mistresses that she had never in the whole course of her experience met with so perverse, and wicked, and depraved, ungrateful, and hardened a child as myself, and that I should certainly come to some most dreadful end!

I awoke with a terrible headache, and other feverish symptoms, so I was kept in bed all that day, and I had another *James'−powder*, and some thin mutton broth for my dinner. And I lay, and dozed and dreamed, and wondered with a stupid, careless sort of wonder what punishment awaited me. I was too ill to be miserable, and too worn−out to feel the loneliness of that long solitary day, during which no one but Dobbs came near me.

Next morning, however, I seemed to regain the full use of my faculties, and though I had still a general

sensation of weakness, I was supposed to have recovered my normal state of health. I was desired to rise and dress myself as usual, but not to presume to show my face in the dining−room! I was to take my breakfast alone in the study.

Dobbs delivered this pleasant message with peculiar unction, glaring at me all the while through her tortoiseshell spectacles, which somehow always made me think of a cobra di capello. But without response I obeyed, and in a short time I found myself once more in the scene of my late disasters.

And a scene, too, of ruin and desolation! The room had been merely put to−rights by the housemaid, and no attempt had been made to restore to its ordinary neatness and propriety the violated sanctum. Everything reminded me of my disgrace. The carpet was hopelessly disfigured, the table−cloth was in the same condition, the books were in confusion; the broken china lay in a heap on the chimney−piece, where stood also a headless mandarin, and a cracked Etruscan vase, filled with what had once been a choice bouquet of beautiful wax flowers. The glass−shade had vanished entirely, only the stand remaining. We had evidently, in one of our rounds, completely swept the mantel−shelf! One of the window−curtains, too, was torn from the cornice, and hung down most forlornly; everywhere, indeed, were signs of the unseemly combat; and to make matters worse, the morning itself was cold and drizzling, and a heavy mist hung over the sea, which was breaking sullenly upon the shore.

I took my solitary breakfast, but it did not taste well, and I felt too much depressed to take a book as my companion, as in the Bloomsbury Square days of old.

When Jenny came in to carry out my tray she looked very grave, and in answer to some inquiries I made, replied, “Indeed, miss, I cannot tell; I suppose you know you are in disgrace?”

“I suppose I am. Shall I have my dinner here?”

“I have not heard Miss Judith say; she is extremely displeased with you. Oh, Miss Chrystabel, how could you be so *dreadful?*“

“He provoked me, Jenny; he made me feel as if I were mad.”

“Very likely, miss. He often makes me that wild that I forget myself, and give him sauce. He's the foolishest old fellow in the world, is the master, I should say. John the coachman says that when he dies there will be a sale of all his precious 'picters,' and that all the publicans in the country will come to the auction and want to buy his 'old masters,' as he calls them, for sign−boards. But that's neither here nor there, Miss Chrystabel; if he'd been ten times worse than he is, it didn't become you to fight him just like a cat. Oh, fie, Miss Chryssie! I should be ashamed to use my teeth and my nails on people's flesh. The heathen that eat up the missionaries couldn't do much worse.” And Jenny walked away with an air of virtuous disapproval.

For my own part I felt confounded; I began to perceive that my conduct was regarded as something more than naughty—as actually criminal, and I was not quite certain whether Mr. Perren could not, if he chose, commit me to prison for “assault and battery.” I knew that the London police not unfrequently took people up for fighting, and I thought it quite possible that I had transgressed the laws of my country, and thereby exposed myself to legal pains and penalties. Only, if I were guilty, so was Mr. Perren, for he had used his hands to good purpose, and might have used his teeth as well, had he possessed those efficient weapons of warfare. And while I was perplexing myself, and thinking that perhaps he would prosecute, laying all the blame upon me, and denying his own share in the quarrel, Miss Judith solemnly entered, and, without saying a word, seated herself at the head of the table, and regarded me gravely and silently.

A long cross−examination followed. She had heard Matthew's version, of course; she now wished to hear mine. I told her the exact truth, and I could see that she believed me; but I also perceived that she by no means considered me acquitted. When nothing remained to be disclosed, she read me a long and severe lecture—such a one as I had never in all my life received—while at the same time I could not but acknowledge that all she said was just and reasonable. It clearly *was* unchristian−like, unladylike and even inhuman, to fight with teeth and claws, as did the wild animals to whom no laws of God or man had been revealed. I resolved that I would never, if I could help it, bite any one again, and I was filled with a sense of miserable degradation as I remembered my fierce, mad passion, and its results. And, with my usual candour, I hastened to express my contrition, actually asking pardon for my error, and promising to behave better for the future.

“I am glad to find you in so proper a frame of mind,” said Miss Judith, when I had finished speaking. “And, as far as I am concerned, I freely forgive you, although you have caused me far greater pain than you can possibly imagine. But there are others whose forgiveness you must seek. First, and before all, you must confess your sin to

Almighty God, and beg Him to pardon it; then you must certainly humble yourself to Mr. Perren, who is really in a very pitiable state. His hands are torn most cruelly, and his nerves are shaken; I am not sure but that we shall have to call in the doctor."

Humble myself to Mr. Perren! No, never, *never!* Sooner would I kneel at the feet of every servant at Elmwood; sooner would I go and beg in the streets of Northborough; sooner would I fast on bread and water for the remainder of my existence! But Miss Judith was inexorable: I could not, she assured me, be restored to my place in the family till I was reconciled to Mr. Matthew: he was the head of the house, and must be treated with respect. It was in vain that I implored her to assign me any other punishment: any amount of extra lessons; any privation of indulgences; I would even prefer being *whipped* by her to begging forgiveness of Mr. Matthew. "If you would only give me a good whipping, *you* yourself, I would not mind a bit,—I should like it, I am sure I should," I sobbed in conclusion.

But she answered, gravely and coldly, "No, Chryssie, I do not think that would make you any better; besides, I confess I should be afraid to whip you, lest you should again lapse into a fury, and serve me as you served my brother."

And she went away, and left me to my own reflections. I had made myself as much dreaded as if I were some noxious animal! Oh, how completely I was humiliated!

But the more I writhed under my humiliation, the more I hated and loathed Mr. Perren, for I considered him to be the source of all my misery, forgetting entirely how large a share of my disgrace and pain was owing to my own wicked temper. And as day after day passed by, and I, still stubborn, remained apart, a desire to be revenged on my enemy took possession of my mind. The solitary life to which I was condemned was bad for me. Miss Judith said she would not teach me while I continued practically impenitent, for it was of no use saying that I was sorry, when I would not prove my contrition in the only way required of me. Mona Louisa gave me the cold shoulder entirely; she used to exasperate me by coming into the room where I was, and pretending great alarm lest I should bite or scratch her. As for Dobbs, who acted as my jailor, and under whose charge I took daily outdoor exercise, I believed she taxed her ingenuity to find out new ways of tormenting me and driving me into a passion. I had a wretched time of it; the hours hung heavily on my hands; there were few story−books within reach, and I soon grew tired of more solid literature. When I had read "Mrs. Markham" through for the second time I was left without any occupation. I tried to sew, but soon flung away my needle and cotton in despair; I could not practise, for the piano was in the dining−room, where I had not set foot since that bright−seeming but most fatal morning when, in the exuberance of my spirits, I had closed the instrument with a mighty crash that made the lustres on the mantelpiece dance visibly and jingle audibly. Aunt Rachel was still too ill to see any one, and Dobbs took care that I should not enjoy the society of Jenny or of any of the servants. So I lived—I know not now for how long—an outcast, a rebel, and a pariah.

Gradually the idea of revenge, which had been a mere passing thought at first, became fixed in my mind; it haunted me, I dreamed about it, I longed for it, but felt myself utterly impotent whenever I tried to frame any sort of design. What *could* I do? How should I revenge myself on the person who had caused and was still causing me so much unhappiness? He seemed quite out of my reach. I did not wish to do him any real harm, I only wanted to make him suffer something which should be to me as compensation for all I had myself endured. But how to compass anything of the kind I could not divine.

At last, one afternoon, it occurred to me that to while away the dreary time I might unpack a box of my own which had never been opened since I came to Elmwood. It was filled principally with my playthings, I knew, and these I had not wanted because I had been so busy with the "plan" that I had had but scant leisure for amusement. I seized upon the notion with avidity. I shut myself into my room, found my keys, and proceeded to overlook these treasures of the past. There was not much in the box that I cared for: somehow the dear old dolls gave me no pleasure, my dissected map and my other puzzles were useless now; other toys I felt to be babyish,—for I had grown old in the saddest way in which a child can possibly grow old during the last few weeks. At the bottom of the box I came upon something bulky, carefully wrapped up in old newspaper and cotton wool; I lifted it out, and there was the old companion of my London life—the *skull!* I kissed it with effusion; the empty eye−sockets, and the cavern that was once a mouth, seemed to me as the face of a familiar friend. How could I have neglected it so long?

I sat a long time with the skull in my arms, thinking of other days, of Mantie, of my father, and also how

horrified Dobbs would be if she should suddenly burst in upon me, as she was fond of doing, when suddenly there darted into my mind a thought which became more and more defined the longer I encouraged it. Could I not make the skull the instrument of my revenge? Could I not frighten Mr. Matthew with it, and so gratify my earnest desire to “serve him out?” I went down presently to my lonely tea in the study, having previously locked up again my treasures, No one at Elmwood knew that I possessed so ghastly and unearthly a plaything; and it was essential to the success of my project that no one should know. All the evening long, while the rain beat against the window, and the wind howled dismally, I thought and thought till I matured my scheme.

I had not been so many months at Elmwood without finding out that there was some absurd story about ghosts concerning it. For myself, I had not the smallest fear of the supernatural. I had been familiar with skeletons and bones all my life long, and I only laughed when Jenny told me in confidence that all Mr. Matthew's side of the house was haunted,—especially the long room which he called the picture gallery, and which led to his own bedroom and dressing−room. His sleeping apartments however could be reached without going through the gallery, for there was a staircase leading up from one of the offices below,—a sort of kitchen−parlour very seldom used,—and opening on to a little square landing just outside Mr. Perren's door. Also I knew, or rather some instinct told me, that Mr. Perren was constitutionally timid, and that though he professed to deride the idea of ghosts he was by no means convinced in his own mind of the impossibility of supernatural visitations.

Now I was not my father's own child for nothing; the professorial blood that circulated in my veins, and the atmosphere of science which I had breathed from my infancy had combined to teach me some things of which most children of my age are ignorant. I do not pretend to say that I had the smallest true knowledge of science, but l had come to know, in one way or another, a good many stray facts and small curiosities of chemistry. It seems my mother had once amused herself by dabbling a very little in popular chemistry, and Mantie had always shared her experiments; which experiments Mantie had sometimes repeated in my presence, as a reward for any special good behaviour, or as a bribe to secure any desired obedience. So it came to pass that I was quite familiar with the uses and appearances of *phosphorus*; and I knew quite well how to manage it so as to prevent it from becoming dangerous. I determined in the present exigency to avail myself of certain phosphoric agencies, only the difficulty was how to obtain the phosphorus itself! I never went outside the gates unattended by the watchful Dobbs, and I had, moreover, a very strong suspicion that if I should succeed in eluding her vigilance, and getting as far as the chemist's shop “unbeknownst” as Jenny would have said, the chemist would refuse to sell to me a substance so highly dangerous in careless, inexperienced hands.

At last I hit upon a plan; I ran down into the garden, while Dobbs was taking her afternoon siesta, and straight−way swore Jem, the gardener's boy, to secresy. He was not quite a boy; I suppose he was really a young man, but he was always called “the boy” in the Perren household. He was a kind−hearted fellow, fond of flowers and pets and children, and he and I had become excellent friends. One day he brought a nest of young dormice to show me; he collected curious things from the shore on purpose for me, and he had marked out and dug a little spare plot in the kitchen garden, which I was to cultivate myself, and grow my own vegetables and bouquets. So to Jem I now resorted, telling him that what I was about to disclose must never be divulged. He promised solemnly, and also agreed to procure for me a small quantity of phosphorus, which I duly instructed him how to handle, and which he was to place in a certain hole in the trunk of an old tree, which I specified. I had never bought any phosphorus, and had no notion what it might cost, so I gave him half a sovereign, and besought him to be very heedful of all my directions, and to get the stuff as soon as possible. Jem promised, and I knew he would be faithful and do his best. Of course he had not the remotest idea as to what I was going to do with his mysterious purchase.

The next day, as Dobbs was marching me up and down the gravel walks, by way of a constitutional, Jem telegraphed to me his success, and the safe deposit of the phosphorus. And, an hour or two later, I stole quietly to the hollow tree, found the packet, and carried it off in triumph to my own quarters, where I deposited it securely under lock and key. Now, then, the materials—viz., the skull and the phosphorus, were in my hands; I had only to carry out my scheme as cleverly and cautiously as I could. Oh! would not Mr. Perren be horribly frightened! I made up my mind that I must in some way manage so as to witness his defeat.

Chapter 11. THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS

The first thing I had to do was thoroughly to reconnoitre the intended scene of action; therefore I deferred till the morrow the execution of my design. I went into the gallery at an hour when I knew I should be undisturbed, in order to make my arrangements, and found that it would be quite easy to carry out the plans which I had laid. At the end of the gallery was a small recess, conveniently dark, and there I determined to establish the spectre which was to terrify my unfortunate enemy out of all the senses he possessed. The stairs of which I have spoken did not terminate, I discovered, on the landing between the gallery and Mr. Perren's bedroom; there was another and yet another flight leading up to the garrets in the roof, which were only used for storing winter apples, onions, herbs, and other culinary treasures. And up those stairs, and through those deserted rooms, I could make my way back to my own chamber, which lay quite on the other side of the large house, without retracing my steps by the way I came.

All things seemed favourable; there were fewer difficulties than I had anticipated; I had only to make the necessary preparations and—watch the result.

I knew the ways of the house; all retired early, Mr. Perren himself being generally the last person to go to rest. But he was always as a rule in his room when the clock struck eleven. He used to leave the dining−room or drawing−room about half−past ten, examine the fastenings of the front door, and make a general survey of the regions round about the hall. The kitchens, which were numerous and rambling, however, he never explored; then he ascended the stairs, crossed the great landing, which penetrated the house from front to back, and traversed the gallery till he came to the little landing and to his own door, where I concluded he shut himself in for the night on all ordinary occasions.

But I was providing for an extraordinary occasion, and my only fear was lest he should by any chance stray into the offices, and ascend by the little staircase to his chamber—a course of action which would bring to nought all my preparations, and perhaps expose myself to discovery, for on the second flight of those back stairs I intended to post myself in order to watch what would happen. Dobbs did not trouble herself much about me within doors; she only interfered to keep the other servants away from me, and to hunt me to bed at an unconscionably early hour. And that I did not mind, for I was always tired of my day, and did not at all object to lying awake in bed, thinking in my own strange way about all sorts of things, and frequently weaving charming romances of which I was the heroine, till I fell asleep, and dreamed that my resplendent castles in the air had turned into actual, substantial tenements in which I had taken up my abode, and entered upon perpetual and unbroken bliss.

All that day, in spite of my best endeavours, I felt nervous and uneasy. Isat forlornly in the study as usual, with my eyes bent upon a book, but my mind fixed upon the scene of the approaching catastrophe. And when I went into the village, for exercise, with Dobbs, she looked at me once or twice curiously, and asked me, quite sharply, if I was walking in my sleep. “For you look as if you was in a dream, or stupid,” she said, again peering at me, through and over her large spectacles. “You all but ran against the baker's boy, and now you are walking through a puddle, as if you had lost your senses.” Thus admonished, I began to look to my feet, and to try to wear an aspect of unconsciousness; but I was very glad when we reached home, and I was relieved from Miss Dobbs's penetrating glances. For, if she should suspect anything, all was over; at least, the performance must be postponed, and Ifelt that I could not bear the strain of a secret purpose on my mind much longer.

Arrived at home, however, Dobbs, as usual, left me to my own devices, and the hours passed slowly away till bedtime came, and I was ordered 0W for the night to my own quarters. As I went up stairs I overheard Dobbs telling the maids to be very quiet, for Miss Judith had gone to bed with a bad cold, and Miss Mona thought she should go soon, for she had been suffering from toothache, and had had little sleep the night before. I let the clock strike ten before I rose and partially dressed myself, and when I listened from the upper landing, all the house was still. I passed Dobbs's door, and heard with delight that she had commenced her nightly nasal exercises. The other servants, I knew, had gone to their rooms soon after nine o'clock, and all was still as death, except Dobbs's snoring. But, looking down, I could see that the hall−lamp yet burned, and that told me that Mr. Perren was still downstairs; for, as he went up to bed, he regularly extinguished it. So far, all was singularly propitious.

I wonder I did not falter—I wonder in my excitement I did not get frightened at myself and at my own audacity. I knew I was wrong! I looked out, and the stars seemed as if they knew all about it, and stared at me awfully with their steady, searching eyes. I listened to the roll of the tide, and the deep sound reproached me for my treachery and vindictive spirit. And if Aunt Rachel only knew! But it was so long since I had seen the dear old lady, that the remembrance of her was scarcely so powerful as it once had been; besides, during the last few weeks I had grown callous and hardened to a degree, and I had altered considerably for the worse.

Still I reassured myself; I said to myself—for I had taken to talking to myself, since I had had no other companion—"Don't be silly, Chryssie Tyndale! you have gone so far, you must carry it out now, And it is quite time all this came to an end; you will have something now to beg Mr. Perren's pardon for! There will be a tremendous fuss, but anything is better than living this horrid life any longer. Besides, no great harm will be done, and it will be such fun to see him rush across the landing into his own room; I wonder if he will scream. If he were a woman he would yell awfully, and he is worse than any woman, except the very silliest. Oh, yes! I dare say he will scream! I hope he will; I shall be vexed if he is not properly frightened. When I have done it, I shall feel I have served *him out!*"

And in this heathenish frame of mind I proceeded to my self−imposed task. I struck a light and took from my box the materials for my spectre—the skull, the phosphorus, and a table−cloth, which I had abstracted from the linen−closet. I carried them all through the garrets till I came to the last one, and there I stopped and did a little chemistry. I was almost appalled myself as I perceived the effect; eyes of flame filled the hollow sockets, a strange flickering light played around the temples; it looked really horrible, though how horrible I could not perceive, knowing that it was all my own handiwork; neither could I comprehend how terrifying such a sight must be to any person who was not familiar, as I had been, with skeletons, leg−bones, and other grim inhabitants of a professor's studio.

There was a bracket in the recess, on which stood a bust of some heathen goddess. This classic lady I removed, and substituted, of course, the skull, while the table−cloth I arranged in artistic folds below. The effect was all that I could desire. In fact, it was so very startling that for one minute my heart smote me for my cruelty to the poor old dandy, and I felt half inclined to snatch away the paraphernalia which had cost me so much trouble, and retreat to my own room before he came upstairs.

Oh, why did I not listen to that still, small voice? Why did I not yield to the promptings which bade me abandon my design, and which told me plainly enough that I was a very wicked child?

But the tempter to whom I had listened so long prevailed; I would not heed the whispers of my uneasy conscience, and having completed my arrangements entirely to my own satisfaction, and having ascertained that the dim light of a chamber−candle would not interfere with the phosphorus in the gloomy background, I retreated to the top of the second flight of stairs to watch for the event. After all was quiet—for I counted upon Mr. Perren's locking himself into his chamber, not daring to issue forth again till morning—I meant to steal on tiptoe into the gallery, repossess myself of the skull and the table cloth, replace Mrs. Venus or Flora, or whoever she might be, and return to bed. Then next day, when the old man told his piteous tale, nobody would believe him; he would be laughed at for fancying he saw a ghost. Especially would his sister Judith frown and chide severely; for nothing displeased her more than the expression of phantom fears and beliefs; Mona, too, would laugh contemptuously, for her weaknesses did not include the least dread of the supernatural. But Dobbs would hear this "horrible tale," and her cheeks would turn pale, and she would never dare to set foot in the gallery after dusk any more; and I should be doubly avenged.

But alack! alack!—

The best laid schemes of mice and men
Gang aft agley!

And my schemes were successful to a certain point and no farther. The issue was far otherwise than I had anticipated; had I guessed how it was to be, I hope—I believe—I should at the last moment have beaten a retreat.

I had not long to wait, my work was completed none too soon. I had scarcely established myself on the top stair and extinguished my candle, when I heard the door at the other end of the gallery closed and bolted, and Mr. Perren came along, not quite so agilely and nimble as was his wont, humming to himself one of his own tuneless compositions. Once he paused, and I knew he was contemplating one of his beloved works of art. Nearer and nearer he came! Oh, how my heart beat; it seemed to drown the sound of his footsteps! nd oh! how cold I was; my

teeth chattered, and my knees shook, as if I had an ague. Never, never, shall I forget my sensations on that dreadful night, both before and after the catastrophe. Hours rather than minutes seemed to elapse, while my unconscious victim was slowly advancing to his doom.

Suddenly, as he came near the door, there was a full stop, a dead silence, in which I heard only the loud throbbings of my own guilty heart. Then there was a shriek, or shout, rather as of mortal terror, the clattering of a candlestick, sudden darkness where there had been rays of feeble light upon the landing; then the fall of a heavy body, then a deep groan, and all was still again. Scared myself, I sped away to my own room, not daring to look behind me as I crossed the four dark garrets; and once in bed, I hid my head under the clothes, lest I too should see some dreadful sight, or hear that groan again.

But I could not rest there. A horrible fear seized upon me, I had heard of people being literally frightened to death. Suppose Mr. Perren should *die* there, all alone in the midnight darkness. Suppose he should be found in the morning cold and stiff, quite dead! then I should be his murderess. I made up my mind that if it were so I would confess at once and be hanged straight off, rather than live a guilty creature, with a man's blood upon my soul! I sat up in bed horror−stricken, neither daring to stay where I was nor to return to the scene of my exploits. Yet, if I let him lie there to die without aid, would not my crime be deepened? I began to know, or to think I knew what Cain felt when he said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” And another text that I had learn since I had been taught to read the Bible, flashed across my memory—“The way of transgressors is hard.”

Aye, and *it was hard!* I would have given worlds, would have given my life, I believe, in that moment of supreme anguish, could I have undone that which was done—done irrevocably! Oh! that it were a frightful dream! Oh! that I could awake and find that I only dreamt! And now the deep sea murmur seemed to say “The way of transgressors is hard.”

At last I decided to return to the gallery, and I groped my way thither, trembling in every limb, and sick with fear. My candle and my matches I had left at the stair head: I had utterly forgotten them in my wild flight.

I crept down the stairs, and all was darkness, only a faint glimmering showed from the landing window.But I could see that Mr. Perren's bedroom door was open, just as it had been an hour ago. He was not then within, he was still lying senseless in the gallery. I ventured to look in, and there was the horrible spectre I had conjured up! still horrible, though the effect of the phosphorus was comparatively feeble. But in my anxiety I had forgotten all about it, and it so startled me with its ghastly, unearthly aspect, that I gave a shriek that echoed through the gallery from end to end, and was even heard by Mona, lying wide−awake in all the agonies of toothache.

Tremblingly I lighted my candle, and there lay Mr. Perren, white and cold, and apparently quite dead. I touched him, and he did not stir; I spoke to him, but he never raised an eyelid. I felt sure that I had killed him. And while I was deciding who I should call up, for call help I knew I must, I heard some one trying the handle of the further gallery door which the poor old gentleman had locked according to his nightly custom. It was Miss Judith's voice I heard, for Mona had not had courage enough to come and explore on her own account. She went and awoke her sister, declaring that she had heard a scream—a long, loud, thrilling scream from Matthew's side of the house! Miss Judith had not believed her, but came, nevertheless.

“Is anybody there?” I heard Miss Judith say.

And I answered, “Yes, yes; I will unlock the door.”

Had Cheops's ghost or the shade of Julius Cæsar appeared to the ladies I scarcely think they would have been more astonished than they were beholding me, candle in hand, in demi−toilet, and with a face that must have been as colourless as my nightdress.

“Am I dreaming?” inquired Miss Judith, while Mona gave several little shrieks, not being certain, as she said afterwards, whether her senses had not deserted her. But I flitted before them through the gloom of the long gallery to the place where Mr. Perren lay.

“Call Dobbs! call the servants!” said Miss Judith, in extreme consternation. “He is dead, or next to it! Oh, what does it mean?”

And at that moment, as Miss Judith and I looked into each other's scared faces, Mona happened to glance towards the recess. The three candles we had had pretty well put out the phosphorus, but there was the skull and there were the white seeming robes. Mona gave a wild scream, and a sort of howl that sounded inexpressibly dreadful, and she, too, fell prostrate.

“Are you both possessed?” fiercely demanded Miss Judith, terrified herself past self−control at the situation of

both sister and brother. But Mona was not senseless; she lay moaning on the slippery floor, which indeed had been equally with her fright the occasion of her fall; for it was polished oak, and she had, in her terror, leaped off the strip of carpet which ran the length of the room, and so lost her equilibrium. Mona pointed to the awful object. Miss Judith looked in the direction of Mona's trembling finger, and saw what Mona saw, and partially what poor Matthew had seen in all its pristine horrors.

For one instant the strong−minded spinster recoiled; she was not naturally nervous, but the ghastly relic of mortality on which her eyes rested was so awful, so weird, falling as it did so unexpectedly on her amazed vision, that she too uttered something between a shriek and a groan, and let fall her brother's hand, which she was chafing. The next minute she was mistress of the situation, and turning to me, she said, “This is your work, Chrystabel Tyndale! cruel, wicked child! Go this moment to Dobbs. Call all the servants. The house must be aroused. The doctor must be fetched. Go this instant.”

Miss Judith was pale with horror, and Mona sat crying and rocking herself on the slippery floor. As it turned out afterwards, she had sprained her ankle. As for myself, I fled the nearest way to the servants' quarters, first visiting Dobbs's chamber, and awakening her with the utmost difficulty. And when I had succeeded in making her sit up in bed with her eyes wide open, it seemed as if she would never come to the clear use of her senses.

“Get up?” she cried, crossly, “what for? it is not morning? Oh, dear! to be woke up out of one's first sleep in this way! What is it, child? Is it thieves? Or is Miss Judith worse? Or—oh, heavens—*is it fire?* I declare I smell it! the house is in flames!”

And without more ado she sprang out of bed, snatched at her huge silver watch hanging at the bed−head, and was proceeding to take her valuables from a drawer, when I stopped her.

“There is no fire, Dobbs, and there are no thieves. Miss Judith wants you directly in the gallery.”

“In the gallery at this time of night?”

“Yes, Mr. Perren is very ill; the doctor must be fetched.”

“Well! I never! I knew something was going to happen. I saw three ravens feeding this morning, and the warming−pan began clattering and swinging on the wall of itself; I said to cook—'There's a warning, see now, if it is not!'“

But I hasted on my way, and proceeded to do as I had been commanded. I woke up the whole staff of servants, from the cook down to the little knife−boy, and thoroughly scared and astonished they were. In a very few minutes the household was astir, and everybody had crowded to the gallery. Miss Judith had taken the precaution to throw the tablecloth over the skull, lest some one else should have to be lifted from the floor and require the doctor's services. Mona was helped back to her own room, her neuralgia cured for the season, and her ankle badly sprained. Mr. Perren was carried to his own room, and laid upon the bed, where he soon showed symptoms of returning animation.

It was not till next day that I knew how much he was injured. One leg and two ribs were broken; but the fall and the shock had also done something else; it was feared that the back of his head was seriously hurt, and he recovered from the death−like trance into which he had fallen only to lapse into violent delirium.

For some days I felt sure he would die, and for the first time in my life I really prayed—I prayed earnestly that he might live! I forgot how much I had hated him, how thoroughly I had despised him. I remembered no more his vanity, his foibles, his egotism; I felt only that he was a poor, suffering old man, whom I, in my wickedness, had horribly tortured and brought to the brink of the grave. Oh! if he would only get well and forgive me! I did not care how I humbled myself to him now; and now and then I stole into the darkened room and listened to his ravings—always about the dreadful spectre that glared at him, and which seemed always before his eyes, and I looked at the white shrunken face, on which it seemed to me that the seal of death was visibly impressed, till I could bear it no longer, and ran away to hide myself, and weep, and pray in very agony that God would not let me be a murderer.

And one morning they told me he was better, he would probably get well again, and then I should be punished as I deserved.

I did not care about that, only I felt that I scarcely could be punished according to my deserts. I was willing to acknowledge that nothing could be too bad for me. No one took much notice of me, and I roamed about the house like a restless ghost, pale, miserable, and overwhelmed with the sense of my own terrible iniquity.

I think I was fast falling ill myself, or getting into a. state of mind bordering on insanity, when one day Aunt

Rachel's maid came to me, saying that her mistress desired I would come to her immediately.

Chapter 12. MY POSTWOMAN

I never felt more heartily ashamed of myself than when I entered Aunt Rachel's room. As I went slowly along the passages I wondered why she had sent for me. Was she going to tell me how wicked I was? Did she wish to reproach me for all I had done, and would she then dismiss me from her presence, charging me never to return, or see her face again? Or was she about to “give me a good talking to,” as Mantie would have called it?

A poor, miserable little thing I must have looked, with my pale, thin face, with its black circles under its large, dark, wild eyes; and I stood before the dear old lady the most self−abased, self−convicted, remorseful penitent that ever reaped sin's harvest of misery, or tasted the bitter Dead Sea fruit of evil−doing. But I raised my head, and there was the sweet old face, and sweet, and calm, and kind as ever, and the small frail hand was extended, and the gentle voice bade me come near and take my favourite seat on the footstool at her feet.

“It is a long time since I saw you, Chryssie,” said Aunt Rachel, stroking softly my thick unkempt curls, which I had sadly neglected of late, and which no one had cared to attend to, though I had been chidden once or twice for my untidiness.

“Yes, you have been so very ill!”

“So ill, Chryssie, that I did not think I should talk to you again; I thought I was going home.”

“That would make you glad.”

“Yes, I was glad, for I wanted rest. One gets very tired when one is nearly eighty years old; but God says I must wait a little longer; He has still something for me to do here.”

“But you cannot do anything. You cannot get up out of this chair, and your hands are too weak for work.”

“And my eyes are too dim, and my whole frame too feeble for active service. But, Chryssie, my dear, I may serve my Master still; one can always serve Him while one has breath and consciousness. One can always praise the Lord!”

“But how? It seems to me that you can do nothing, you are so old and so weak.”

“I can speak of God; I can tell to others how good He is; I can tell how through a long life He has been with me, and guided and upheld me; how every good thing that He has promised me has been my portion; how He has never failed me all the journey through; and how He comforts me, and brightens every step of the way, now I am come to the bounds of this mortal life. Also I can serve Him by patience under suffering and weariness, by giving myself up wholly to His will, whatever that will may be. And His will now is that I should remain on earth awhile and do the work He gives me. Chryssie, I wonder whether that work has anything to do with you? Is it on your account, I wonder, that I am still on this side the golden gates?”

“I am very glad you are still here, for I thought no one cared for me; I thought everybody hated me. It is a long time since I have listened to a kind word, or seen a kind face. I have been so lonely, Aunt Rachel.”

And I laid my head on her knees and wept without restraint. For a little while she let me cry on; she knew that tears would not harm me, that afterwards I should be more ready to talk to her. It was singular how thoroughly Aunt Rachel comprehended human *nature,* how in her solitude she had learned the fullest and the deepest sympathy; but then she had 'a heart at leisure from itself,' and to such hearts come always the diviner instincts. Presently she said, “Tell me all about it, my child.”

“Do you not know? Have they not told you? Why even the people in the village know all about it!”

“I have been told; I have heard a very sad story, Chryssie; but I should like to listen to your own account of what has happened, if you do not mind.”

“They could not tell you worse than there is to be told—I have got to hate myself; almost.”

“No! do not hate yourself; that would do no good.”

“ I will tell you Aunt Rachel.” And I began at the day of my projected picnic, the day when my sorrow and disgrace began; and I told her all, not sparing myself but showing to her, as far as one human creature can show to another, my inmost heart. It was a true and veritable confession.

“Poor child! poor child!” was all her rejoinder as I proceeded. “Ah, Chryssie, my dear, there is nothing so dreadful as to be left to one's self, to be permitted to work out one's own will, when that will is not subject to the law of God. But have you told God all you have told me?”

“He knows it all, He knows it, and He is very angry with me; I feel He is. Why should I tell Him what He knows already?”

“Because it would comfort you and ease you to tell Him everything; you would ask more earnestly for forgiveness. I have heard of people having a hidden wound and bearing all the pain secretly, till they could bear it no longer, and showed it to the doctor, and let him examine it, and so were healed. Now, there are wounds and sores that the most skilful surgeon cannot cure; there are instances in which no treatment can avail; but the great Healer, Christ, never fails. He has a balm for every wound; He can cure every disease of the poor sin−sick soul. It is only to go to Him—as the sufferers went to Him in old times when He was on this earth—and be made whole.”

“That was so different! Those people could really go to Him, just as I can come to you. But Christ is far away now; we cannot really get to Him; we can only say prayers to Him.”

“Do you see that cross, Chryssie?”

I looked, and saw a beautiful carved cross standing on the mantelpiece; it was the copy of a famous ancient Norman cross—from Caen, I believe. It was perfect as a piece of art, and I had often admired it on former visits paid to Aunt Rachel.

“What does that cross teach you, Chryssie?”

“It teaches me—that is, it reminds me—that Christ died upon the cross—for my sins. I know that now.”

“What else does it teach you?”

“That I ought to repent and be sorry.”

“And nothing else?”

“Nothing else that I know of. Oh, yes! I recollect now that you said the cross teaches us self−denial.”

“It does! But, Chryssie, there is more, much more, than that! See! that is an *empty cross.* There is no broken body, no form agonised and dying there. Why is that?”

“I do not know, Aunt Rachel.”

“It is because we worship a living, not a dead Christ. The cross occupied, which is the crucifix, tells us that Christ died. But if we stop there we are of all men most miserable. The empty cross shows forth the resurrection. It shows the victory won, the joy complete, the hope fulfilled. Christ suffered and died, then He left the cross. Now He is in heaven, living still—our ever−present, ever sympathising Redeemer! And we can go to Him just as easily as the disciples went to Him when He was on earth. Nay, more easily, for then they might have to travel from afar, now He is so near to every one of us that we have but to speak to Him, and He listens. We have but to seek His presence, and He will come and abide with us, and fill us with His own exceeding peace. And oh, Chryssie, the peace which He gives is so sweet, so infinitely deep and full. How sweet, how deep, how full, you will never know till, like me, you are waiting for the Master's call.”

“I should like to be at peace. For many weeks I have felt as if I were being driven about, as if something dreadful ruled over me. I have wanted to rest, oh, ever so much; I should have liked to die, I was so tired of my life. I should like to die now, only that I am so wicked, and I should go to the devil whom I have served, for I have not served God.”

“No, my child, you have not! You have listened to Satan, you have done his work, and he has paid you his wages—the wages which all earn who are his servants. Chryssie, I think you understand me?”

Ay, that I did! I understood as well as if I had been thirty or forty years old that I had served a cruel master, and that I had received, and was still receiving, the reward of my services. Did I not feel the bitter bondage, the abject slavery, the heavy yoke? Oh, yes I quite understood that I was only suffering the consequences of my own fault. Some dim notion of the inevitable, immutable law of consequences had come to me in those dreary weeks of solitude and dread and vain repentance. I began to know that reaping must succeed to sowing; that I might as well scatter broadcast thistledown upon the ground and expect to gather in the finest wheat as obey the evil impulses of selfishness and self−will and look for happiness as the result.

Aunt Rachel continued: “We are always the servants of those we obey; but if a servant finds that he has engaged himself to a bad master, whose service is hard and whose wages bring misery and shame, what does he do?”

“He leaves him, I suppose.”

“Exactly; and that is just what you must do, my child. Here and now you must renounce your bad master, take another who will never deceive you, never cheat you, never leave you to your own bad, foolish self. His wages

are peace and rest here, and joy and glory unspeakable in the ages to come. His yoke is easy, His burden is light. He says to you—to *you*, Chryssie Tyndale—'My child, come to me. I love thee; love thou Me, serve Me, follow Me, be thou Mine, and I will be thine, and nothing that is or that shall be, shall ever separate thee from My love. All the days of thy life on earth I will guide thee with My counsel, and afterwards I will receive thee into glory, for where I am there shall My servants be also.' Will you not come when He calls you thus? Will you not now give your life to Him, and ask Him to do with it as He sees best?"

"I would like, but indeed I do not think I can. I am just full of badness."

"So much the more reason why you should be made good. And Christ can fill you with all goodness."

"I am very tired of being bad. I never thought of it, but it seems to me as if I had been bad all my life. I must have been, for no one ever cared for me; Mantie was only kind to me because she had loved my mother so greatly; she often told me that I was hard to like, and that people would never take to me, and she was right. And even Fanny, who liked me now and then, used to say that I was a regular *limb*! I do not know what she meant, but I am sure it was something bad. And papa, you know, never took any notice of me—it troubled him when he saw me."

"My poor child! Yours has been a sad experience; you have had, indeed, the saddest of all childish experiences. You have grown up to a certain age without love. And that age is in many respects far greater than your actual years. You have lived with grown people till you have acquired the tone and, to a great extent, the spirit and habit of thought of maturity. At the same time you have all the ignorance and consequent rashness of childhood. Neither have you the wisdom and sober judgment which time only can produce. You are a curious little personage, Chryssie; you are a child woefully untaught and untrained, and you are a woman undisciplined and unsoftened by all that makes the tenderness of woman. You are both too old and too young!"

"What *shall* I do? It is all true what you say. What will make me different?"

"Do you really wish, do you earnestly desire, to be different, Chryssie?"

"I do indeed. Oh, Aunt Rachel, it has been so miserable, so very miserable. I know I deserve it, but if they had only said one little kind word to me I should have felt better. I think if *you* had asked me to beg Mr. Perren's pardon I should have done so. I do think I would do anything you told me, Aunt Rachel, because you speak so gently, and because I love you. I did think of you the night that I did the mischief; I thought, What would Aunt Rachel say to me if she knew what I was doing? But somehow the little bit of good got all smothered by the great heap of bad, and I could only think how I hated Mr. Perren, and what fun it would be to see him horribly frightened. But, indeed, I never thought of doing anything more than frightening him. I would not have hurt him wilfully for anything. I bit his hand when I was in a passion, I know, and that makes them think I am terribly cruel and savage, but I would not have done him any harm when I was quite calm and not at all in a frenzy."

"What makes you hate Matthew so much?"

"His foolishness. He *is* so very foolish and pompous and he pretends so much. And he thinks he is so clever and he is so satisfied with himself, and—and *I don't like him.* When I am near him I always want to get further away; his very looks make me uncomfortable! I do not understand how it is, but *it is,* Aunt Rachel, and I cannot help it. I like him though now just a little, because he has been so ill, and it was I who made him suffer."

"What you describe of your feeling towards Mr. Perren is called an *antipathy,* and I must confess that not a few people have regarded him in the same way. Well, Matthew was never over−wise, and age does not always confer wisdom. Also he is lamentably vain, and affects gifts which he is very far from possessing. But that is no reason why you should hate him, Chryssie; your hatred is almost as foolish as his self−assumption, and it is more than foolish, it is very wrong and displeasing to God. You must get over it."

"I am afraid I cannot."

"Cannot is a word for very little children and for cowards. No person who is worth anything ever says *cannot.*'"

"Must you never say 'cannot'?"

"There is one case, and only one case, in which you not only may but *must* say 'cannot'. And 'cannot,' then, is sometimes a very hard word to say, and needs all the bravery and resolution we can summon to our aid. If you are tempted or asked to do anything which you know to be wrong, then it is your duty to say boldly, 'No! I cannot!' Such a cannot, spoken for conscience' sake, is spoken for God, and its utterance is truest courage, not cowardice."

"Aunt Rachel, if you told me to go and kiss Mr. Perren's feet because you wished it and because it was right, I

would go this moment and do it. For, you see, one can make one's self *do* a thing, but feeling is quite different. I could not make myself love Mr. Perren if I tried till I died."

"Never mind about loving him now; I only want you to think kindly of him, and to pray for him, and also, if it may be permitted to you, to wait upon him, as if you were his own child."

"I do not think they will let me go near him now that he is quite sensible. I have not been in his room since he knew people and remembered things. But as for praying for him, I have done that—I have prayed till I cried and sobbed that he might get well again, and be none the worse for my wicked folly."

"Were those prayers for yourself or for him, Chryssie?"

"For him—were they not?

"That depends upon why you prayed. If you asked only to be delivered from a terrible fear and life−long burden, you prayed for yourself; if you asked for his life, that he might yet be spared to his family, and live to enjoy once more those pleasures which so greatly contented him, then, Chryssie, it was for him you prayed."

"Then I prayed for myself;" I answered bluntly; "for I think—I am afraid I should never have thought of praying for him if his illness had been a natural one, or if I had had no concern in the—the—I don't know what to call it—the accident that I contrived, and that put his life in danger."

"See how selfishness may deceive us. But now, Chryssie, I want you to try to pray for Matthew for his own sake and for our sakes. And you will humble yourself to him and ask his forgiveness."

"I will—yes, the moment I may go to him."

"Suppose you wrote to him?"

"I never thought of that. I will write at once, But suppose he will not read it?"

"I think he will; but whether he do or not your duty is the same. When you know you ought to do a thing you must do it, regardless of consequences. Duty is duty, and there is no evading it; results must be left; God will shape them as He pleases. And now, my child, you must go. I have already talked to you beyond my strength, and I shall have to suffer for it. But I shall not mind if you are really the better. I think—nay, I am pretty sure now, why God did not take me straight home when I longed so much to be there. I see now why He raised me up from that bed of painful and, as all people believed, of mortal sickness. He has kept me here a little longer for your sake; you need a friend, and I am to be that friend. Now go, my dear; first of all shut yourself up alone, and tell God all your sin and all your trouble, and ask Him to pardon you and to help you for Christ's sake; then sit down, think over what you ought to say, and write your letter."

"But to whom can I give it? I am sure Dobbs would not take it, neither would Miss Mona, and I dare not ask Miss Judith."

"Bring it here to−morrow morning at twelve o'clock; I will see that it reaches Mr. Perren. And, Chryssie, I should have sent for you sooner had I known how things were going with you. It was only on Tuesday that I really knew what had occurred; they kindly kept it from me, thinking the agitation would be more than I could bear."

She kissed me, and then, with one more glance into the dear old face, I left her, to do as she had counselled.

It was a sweet May day, and the sun was shining and the birds singing, and the tide flowing in, with its deep musical thunder, and I thought I would go down to the bottom of the meadow beyond the kitchen garden, for there I could be alone as surely as in my own chamber, or in the study, which had been deserted by the family ever since it had become my separate retreat.

In a corner of the meadow, which was also in part an orchard, there was a comfortable, roomy summer−house, and thither I betook myself, and did exactly as my kind friend bade me. I simply told God "all about it." I hid nothing, I tried to empty my heart of all its bitter and proud thoughts, and then I asked that I might be forgiven, and have patience granted to me to take meekly the punishment that I felt sure awaited me. And then I discovered the infinite comfort of making full confession to Almighty God. For when I rose from my knees and went out into the sunshine, and sat down on a grassy slope, all starred with daisies, I felt happier than I had been since that wretched day now almost two months ago. I am not sure that I had ever in all my life been so happy; for I felt that I had spoken to God, and I did not doubt that He had heard me, and would do something for me. A sort of quiet content filled my heart, and I listened once more with pleasure to the grand booming of the leaping waves.

Suddenly I remembered the text—"Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Now I began to comprehend what was the fight, and what the victory, Surely, since I came into that

green, flowery meadow, I had gained some small victory over myself; and yet not in my own strength, but in the might of Him in whose name I had asked for peace and pardon.

Later in the day I wrote my letter. I made many copies before I could satisfy myself; but at last I concluded that one of them should stand, and I took my pen and wrote it out as fairly as I could. Then I put it into an envelope and addressed it to “Matthew Perren, Esq.,” and laid it aside till next day, when it was to be committed to Aunt Rachel's care.

That night I slept soundly and had no bad dreams; and when Dobbs spoke to me, as was her wont, rudely and harshly, I kept back the sharp answer that trembled on my tongue.

At noon I made myself quite tidy, and went to Aunt Rachel's room. She at once despatched her maid with my epistle, bidding her put it into Mr. Perren's own hands, and if any hindrance should arise, to say that she was desired to do so by her mistress. On no account was she to confide the document to any other person.

So my postwoman departed, and with beating heart I awaited her return. I thought I should at least know something of the way in which it had been received when she came back, though Aunt Rachel warned me that I could not expect a speedy answer. Perhaps, even, I might not get any answer at all.

Chapter 13. THE JOY OF PARDON

“Will she never come back?” I exclaimed a little fretfully, when some minutes elapsed, and my messenger did not return.

Aunt Rachel regarded me compassionately. “Oh, my child,” she said, “how much you have to learn! And I fear how much to suffer! You will be always making your own troubles, Chrystabel; and of all the troubles that come to us in this mortal life, none, I think, are so hard to bear as those we make for ourselves.”

“I feel as if I should always be getting into trouble.”

“You always will be getting into trouble, Chryssie, unless you grow patient and gentle. Do you not wish to be happy?”

“I have wanted to be happy ever since I can remember, but something always came in the way. And now I am more unhappy than ever, though I was really happy, I think, for a little time yesterday.”

“What made you happy then?”

I told Aunt Rachel how I had passed my time in the meadow, and how I felt afterwards.

“You went to the one source of happiness, my dear,” she replied, a smile of satisfaction lighting up her face; “there is always happiness to be found in God. And out of Him there is not—there never can be—anything like pure content. Oh! if the world did but know it!”

“A good many books say so, and sermons tell us so; very many people *must* know it.”

“It is one of those truths which must be said again and again; but what is the use of any truth if it lie dead and cold in your heart? A truth that does not come out in your life and character, Chryssie, is not so very much better than falsehood. But here comes Hagar!”

It was a moment of dire suspense; I could scarcely breathe. I could not ask the woman how she had succeeded.

“Well, Hagar?” said her mistress, rather anxiously.

“I did as you desired, ma'am; I waited till I could see Mr. Perren and give the letter into his own hand. He is sitting up to−day in his dressing−room, but he is evidently extremely weak. I thought l had better wait for an answer, as there might be one. When he had read the letter through twice he asked me to call Miss Judith. When she came he showed her the letter, and she too read it through, and Miss Judith said, 'Matthew, I do think the child means it; what will you say to her?' Then they had a little conversation apart, and at last Mr. Perren said, 'Go, if you please, and fetch Miss Chrystabel. I wish to speak to her.'“

“Oh, I cannot go!” I cried, shrinking back now that the decisive moment had arrived.

But Aunt Rachel said gravely, almost sternly, “Yes, you can, Chryssie, and you *must!* This is part of your penance—the penance that you have appointed for yourself. But before you go let us pray together. Hagar can stay with us and help us, for she is a Christian woman.”

I knelt down by Aunt Rachel's chair, and she folded her weak hands and said, “'O Lord, our Father, who hearest us always when we pray, and knowest all our sin and all our sorrow, look down, we beseech Thee, on this child, who has wandered so far away from Thee, and bring her into Thy fold, and make her a new creature in Christ Jesus. Her heart is so hard and proud, and her will so strong, that nothing less than Thy converting grace can do her any good; let her then be born again into Thy kingdom, that she may henceforth serve Thee and love Thee, and know Thy love and Thy peace which passeth knowledge. And now grant her strength and wisdom to meet the trial before her; go with her now, and put into her heart the spirit of meekness and humility; let her not seek to justify herself in any wise, and let her take all the consequences of her fault, sweetly and patiently, as becomes one who has sinned so deeply. And, we beseech Thee, soften the natural displeasure of those who are so justly offended; draw together the hearts that have been estranged, and unite them in love. Hear and answer, O my Father, our God, and pardon all our sin, and grant that we may serve Thee and only Thee, here, and in Thy glorious kingdom beyond the grave. For the Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.' Now, go at once, Chryssie,” said Aunt Rachel, when the prayer was finished. “Hagar, go with the child, but return to me when you leave her with Mr. Perren. And, Chryssie, I should like you to come back to me and tell me if it is all right. Now, do not linger—delay will not give you courage. Go!”

And I went in the strength of that prayer; but I was weak in the body, as well as in mind, and my heart

throbbed painfully, and my knees bent under me, as I traversed the passages, and especially the gallery leading to Mr. Perren's rooms. When I passed the niche I trembled, and scarcely dared to glance towards the bracket on which, as of old, stood the marble Venus; the skull was nowhere to be seen—I wondered what had become of it.

But in another moment we had crossed the landing, and Hagar was knocking at the chamber−door. Miss Judith opened it, and signed to me to follow her. Hagar went away. We passed through the bedroom into the dressing−room beyond, and there, seated by the open window—for the day was oppressively warm—sat my ancient enemy. But oh! how wasted, how wan, how changed! There could be no pretence of youth now; it was an old man's form that reclined on the pillows, an old man's face that, white and shrunken, lay back upon the gay−coloured sofa blanket, and it was an old man's hand, tremulous and withered, that was feebly put out towards me. The evident suffering, the wistful eyes, the feebleness smote me to the heart, and I could only burst into tears, and sob out, “Oh, Mr. Perren! forgive me! forgive me! I never meant to make you so ill; do not hate me. Oh, I am so sorry!”

As indeed I was. I would have endured much and braved much to see my victim once more strong and well. I should have listened with pleasure to his “sentiments” and quotations. I should have rejoiced to hear him descant on a Correggio or a Cimabue; his tuneless songs and madrigals would have been as sweetest music. I hated him no longer; I longed to assure him of my penitence, of my sympathy, of my affection. He looked at me gently—I had no idea he *could* look so gently—and said, oh! in such an altered voice, so broken, so weak, and so low, “I do not hate you, Chryssie; I am glad you are come. It was not *all* your fault”

“Oh, don't say so, please,” I cried, in a very agony of repentance; this unexpected humility in him plunged me into the nethermost depths of humiliation.

I was prepared for reproach, for scorn, for any amount of reprimand, for every demonstration of dislike and loathing, but I was not prepared for this leniency, this self−inculpation. It might be true; it was true, of course; he was to blame, but I could not bear to hear it; so, when I could speak distinctly, I went on “Yes, it was all my fault; I was a very wicked child, very cruel, and very hardened. I ought to have submitted that day, when you came to give me my lesson; it was my duty to submit, and it would not have cost me much, only about one hour of my holiday. And then I said things to you that I am ashamed to think of; and when I was in disgrace because of that day I hated you for being, as I thought, the cause of it, not seeing that my own naughtiness was the sole true cause of all. Oh, please forgive me, dear Mr. Perren! I am so sorry, and I do so want to begin a new life, and to be a comfort to you all.”

“I forgive you with all my heart,” he replied solemnly; “henceforth we shall be better friends, Chryssie, for we shall understand each other better. You have learned something of late, and I—I have learned more than I can tell in these long hours of helplessness and pain. Little Chryssie, we will try to do each other good. Will you kiss me?”

I threw my arms round his neck, and kissed him as if I had been his child, and I resolved that I would never laugh at him again, however foolish he might be. For I saw plainly enough that under all the unlovely crust of foolishness and vanity and self−assertion there lay a deposit of real goodness and generosity of soul. Mr. Crabb was quite right when he declared that there was goodness and kindness in Matthew Perren, if only he were properly understood. Like all impulsive and inexperienced persons I had regarded his character from one side only. Oh, how much mischief is wrought, how many fatal mistakes are occasioned, how much bitter sorrow results from taking one−sided views of persons and of subjects! Even the truth suffers; ay, and the deepest truths suffer most when not considered as many−sided. It is inevitable that ignorant people and children form one−sided opinions, but then such should be docile and humble, and the children should submit themselves to their elders, who are far less likely to make mistakes than they, even if they are unwise and injudicious.

I looked up to see Miss Judith bending over us, her eyes full of tears.

“And do you too forgive?” I asked, emboldened by her face; “can you pardon me, and take me back to my old place?”

“I do pardon you,” was her reply. “We will have a general amnesty! We will begin again, though not quite in the old way. We will put the past behind us, Chryssie, and go on afresh, more wisely, I trust; more lovingly, more happily,”

And then she kissed me quietly but affectionately, and we all sat down together by the open window and looked out upon the blooming garden and the blossoming orchard and the shining sea beyond, rolling in its great

purple waves upon the sunlit shore. And high over all, like a speck in the deep blue empyrean, soared a skylark, singing its most impassioned lay. And when the exultant strain was well−nigh ended it changed to a low sweet trill, and the bird sank quickly to the ground. Surely that was the song of peace and reconciliation, and at that moment the full joy of pardon came over me, and I sank down again and cried—not bitterly as before, but softly and quietly, a blessed rain of tears that as it fell softened my proud heart, and refreshed my weary spirit, even as the warm spring−tide showers refresh the thirsty ground after a long season of drought and barrenness. It seemed too good to believe that I was fully forgiven; I could hardly realise returning to my old privileges, knowing how little I had deserved forbearance.

I could not stay long then with Mr. Perren, for he was too weak to bear excitement, and already he was exhausted, so our interview terminated. But first I asked when I might visit him again; for a new womanly spirit had come into me, and I longed to minister to him as far as my youth and inexperience would permit.

“You may come again this evening,” said Miss Judith, “if you will promise to be very quiet.”

“I will be as quiet as any mouse,” I answered; “but could I not read to Mr. Perren?”

He caught at that.

“Yes, you could, Chryssie, for my eyes are not right yet, and my head swims if I look on the pages of a book for several minutes together, and time passes rather wearily. My sisters do not like reading aloud, and it will be a nice exercise for you and very pleasant for me. We will begin this evening.”

And so we did; and many an evening I spent by his side, reading to him from such volumes as he chose, and listening to his explanations, which grew rather tiresome and prosy sometimes, but to which I accorded all due respect and manifestation of interest. Some of the books, too, were very dull, and I often longed to close the drowsy page, and steal away into the garden, to enjoy myself among the flowers, or under the trees in the little orchard. But I was glad to think I could do something to prove my repentance, something to evince my kindly feeling towards the poor man whom I had so sorely hated. It showed me, too, that I was actually changed in myself, for six months before I should not have denied myself any gratification, in order to benefit or please anybody in the world, unless indeed it were Aunt Rachel, towards whom I had felt wonderfully drawn from the very first.

But I must not forget to tell how she and I mingled tears of joy together in that eventful day of my pardon.

Dismissed from Mr. Perren's sick chamber, I went straight to the dear kind old lady to whom I owed so much, and told her, rather incoherently it must be confessed, of my happiness.

“Oh! I am so very, very happy!” I cried in my delight; “I never knew what it was to be quite happy before! I did not know it was so sweet to be forgiven!”

“The sense of pardon is very sweet,” she said, “and if the forgiveness of an earthly being brings such deep and full content, how great is the rapture of the heart filled with the sense of God's love and pardon! Do you know anything of that pardon, Chryssie?”

“Yes, I think I do. God forgave me yesterday when I prayed to Him in the meadow, and then the sunshine seemed brighter, and the sea and the shore looked more beautiful, and the sky was bluer, and the apple−blossoms pinker, and the grass and the leaves greener. I know they were not so really, you know, but I felt as if they were. Was it not strange?”

“Not at all. You had sunshine in your soul, the blessed sunshine of your heavenly Father's presence, and that made the external world fairer to you. It is always so, Chryssie: the nearer one gets to God, the more beauty there is in the outer life; for the beauty of this world, well as the joy and glory of that which is to come, is the manifestation of His love. And till we see Him in all the loveliness that delights our eyes we do not see half the beauty that surrounds us. God is the great Artist, the great Master of melody. When the poet said,

“Who can paint like Nature?”

he meant like Nature's God; for Nature so−called is to the Almighty Father what canvas, and colours, and pencil are to the painter. Only the painter does not make his own materials, he depends for them on other persons, and his work is the work of patient toil and hard labour, as well as of genius and its conceptions; while God's work is from first to last a grand and marvellous mystery to us poor mortals; it is wrought in secret, and according to certain laws, which we speak of as 'the laws of nature,' and many of those laws we know, yet without any true comprehension of the vast mysteries they enshroud. We, whose eyes are not yet opened, see dimly, or not at all; some day we shall know more.”

“After death, do you mean?”

“Yes! after what we call death. Children know very little; even intelligent children cannot but be extremely ignorant, as compared with what they will be as grown persons of liberal education and rich culture! And what are we but children? the children of the Eternal Father? And the life that we have here is but the very faintest foreshadowing of the life that is to come. And now, Chryssie, my child, a new life is before you. Old things have passed away, all things have become new. God has been very good to you; it is His will that you put the sad past behind you, and go on afresh, having as it were a new existence, new pleasures, and new sorrows; treading new paths, and looking for another reward than that which has satisfied you till now.”

“I will try, Aunt Rachel.”

“I am sure you will. And do not be too down−hearted if at first you do not quite succeed. I do not mean that you are not to mind failures—we should always mind our faults, even the smallest; but do not, if you find yourself giving away to the old temptations—for you *will* be tempted, Chryssie—do not feel as if all were over with you. Do not imagine that it is no use striving. If you fall, be humbled, but get up again as quickly as you can, and ask God to keep you upright in the way you have to go. It is one of the commonest devices of the evil one to say to people who do wrong, 'You see it is of no use to try; why give yourself so much trouble and so much pain to no good end? Give up the conflict, take things smoothly, and enjoy life while you can.' Never listen to that lying voice, Chryssie, but call on God afresh, and seek His help, His strength, His guidance, as well as His pardon for the wrong−doing. It seems strange, but men are often the stronger for being beaten.”

“How can that be?”

“Because defeat shows us our weak places. We are all so self−confident, so self−complacent, that after a while, if things go smoothly, we are apt to pride ourselves on our successes, and to say, 'My mountain standeth strong, I shall never be moved!' And then the danger is at hand. Have you not seen a heedless child loose its mother's hand and rush on, thinking itself quite able to guide its own footsteps and to choose its way? And it stumbled and fell and was bruised, and so learnt that its place of safety was at its mother's side, and in the clasp of its mother's hand. Just so we stumble and hurt ourselves when, either carelessly or self−confidently, we let go the Father's hand, But that is enough for once, Chryssie; I do not want to tire you with my sermons. Go now, my child, and rejoice in the happiness of to−day; God is pleased to see His children happy when their happiness springs from that which is well−pleasing in His sight.”

A few minutes afterwards the dinner−bell rang, and as I sat in the study, feeling a certain shyness at the thought of making my appearance in the dining−room, and wondering whether I ought to return to my old place without a special invitation, Dobbs entered, and regarding me anything but amiably, said, “You're to go in to dinner as usual, Miss Chryssie, Miss Judith says! I should think, though, you'll feel mightily ashamed of yourself. I should, I know, if I was in your place. I should be ashamed to face the very chairs and tables and poor master's pictures!”

For one minute the spirit of resentment was strong within me, the next the victory was won. I answered humbly, “I am very sorry for what I did, Dobbs. I was very, very naughty!”

“You were worse than naughty,” interposed Dobbs. “Naughty you always are—that's nothing! It's only what we always expect of you! But you have been downright wicked! Why, you all but killed the master. Suppose he had died, and you had been took up, and hung at Northborough, where do you think you'd have gone to?”

I said nothing; I could say nothing, partly because I felt that I deserved all condemnation, and partly because I was afraid that if I spoke I should very likely speak rashly with my tongue. My silence and my sad looks, I think, rather disarmed my severe monitor; for after a pause, in which she waited for what she not inaptly called my “impudence,” she said gruffly, but in a tone which I knew to be conciliatory for her, “Well, I hope you *are* going to turn over a new leaf! I am sure it's high time, and I should think you are pretty well sick and tired of your bad ways, and what they bring upon you. And if the master and mistresses forgive you I suppose I must; so we'll say no more about it. There! turn round, and let me settle your sash; and your hair isn't fit to be seen, only there's no time to make it tidy. Jenny's carrying the fish up now. Go along and come to me to−night to have your hair well brushed.”

And thus I was restored to Dobbs's favour. Though I dreaded the brushing process, I hailed it as a sign of her good will. She had never condescended to touch my unfortunate curls while I was in disgrace. I made up my mind to do a little private brushing and combing before I submitted myself to Dobbs's good offices; for I knew of

certain tangles which she would reduce to order by main force of hand, she being one of those persons who think it their duty to clean children's hair and skin with a vigour as uncompromising as distressing to endure. I do not think Dobbs meant to be unkind, but she often hurt me much, and unnecessarily roused my ire, by her roughness when she officiated at my toilet. She forgot sometimes that skins need not be scrubbed like floors and tables, and that yellow soap in the eyes and mouth is, to say the least of it, unpleasant.

At the dining−room I found Miss Mona, and then I remembered that I had to ask her forgiveness, for she had suffered personally as well as relatively, and she was even now rather lame and unable to take much exercise.

“There! there! that will do, child!” she said, crossly, when I had said a few words by way of preface to my petition. “For goodness' sake let us hear no more about it! My sister and brother have forgiven you, and Aunt Rachel chooses to take your part, and so I suppose I must say I forgive too. But I shall not *forget*, I can tell you, and I think it is quite a mistake not to punish you as you deserve.” As if I had not been punished through all those days and weeks of bitter wretchedness! “However, it must be so if Judith and Matthew please, I suppose; for they rule, and Matthew must have his own way while he is an invalid. Now, don't stare at me any more, but eat your dinner, and be a good girl if you can, which I very greatly doubt. I know very well you will soon be in disgrace again, and worse than ever.”

Chapter 14. NEXT−DOOR NEIGHBOURS

It is written somewhere—I am sure I have not the least idea where—that a little girl of six years old once exclaimed, “What a nice thing it is to be alive!” Whether the little girl was a mythical or veritable personage, I have no means of ascertaining; but I am quite sure that up to my tenth birthday I should not have believed in her; had I read about her I should immediately have put her down as a mere Edgeworth or Barbauld creation.

But in that pleasant May time, when the earth was teeming with new life, there came also to me a new and rich existence. And I, too, could rejoice in my “creation and preservation,” and say with heartfelt truth, “What a nice thing it is to be alive!” For lo! the winter was past, the rain was over and gone, the flowers appeared, and the time of the singing of birds was come. It was spring time in my soul, and my heart was glad within me, and the world seemed so full of beauty and sweetness that I could only wonder where it had been before, or rather what was the matter with my eyes which had been blind so long.

But then I had never before seen the country in May; and London, though brilliant enough at that season of the year, scarcely represents in its parks and squares the sweet verdant bloom and beauty of the month of flowers. The sea was so glorious, it had for me a strange fascination, and one of my great pleasures was to get down to the shore and watch the tide coming in, sparkling fresh and fair; now bursting in pearly foam upon the wet, gay−tinted pebbles, or raging in mimic fury round the little crags of low−fretted rock, which were covered at high water; and now sweeping in in great smooth curves, ringing out its liquid chimes like silver bells upon the shingle. And ever I listened to the mighty voice which seemed, amid its thunders, to murmur always in undertones of the secrets of the sea—to whisper of the time when it should give up its dead. And I loved to get a little way down the cliffs to a tiny cave, where pink−streaked shells lay strewn upon the white sparkling sand; and still further to where the cliff had fallen, and great masses of shattered rock and weed−fringed boulders lay far along the shore, huge, weird, and solemn, as if the Titans had been there in long past ages at their boisterous play.

And by the margin of those ever−restless waves I learned many a lesson that has stood me in good stead since. Also I learned a great deal of natural science—that is a great deal for a child; for, though I had what my friends called “quick parts,” I was not at all a prodigy; and sometimes I cared for nothing but clambering over the rocks, to the great destruction of my frocks, or racing up and down the sands with a little dog, which Mr. Perren caused to be purchased for me, because I said I did not like being on the shore quite alone, and a servant accompanying me was such a bore.

Elmwood, as I think I told you, stood alone in its own grounds, which were tolerably extensive, and which were bordered by other grounds much larger than ours, but in a most forlorn, neglected state. The house to which these grounds appertained was called—most uneuphoniously and stupidly, I thought—Cuppage! Not Cuppage House, nor Cuppage Place, nor Cuppage anything!—but simply “Cuppage!” With all my natural perversity I took a dislike to the house and to the people to whom it belonged because of its ugly name.

But the Cuppage people I had never seen, neither was I very likely to see them, if all tales were true. The family had gone abroad “on account of troubles,” Dobbs said, more than sixteen years before, and the house had been shut up ever since, and the gardens and shrubberies were allowed to fall into decay. Of course Cuppage had come to have that desolate, weird aspect which appertains to all deserted mansions. It looked dreary and ghostly and ghastly, and even the sunshine failed to enliven its damp−stained, lichen−grown walls, and its tall dilapidated roof and tumble−down out−offices. An old retainer of the family, who was said to be a gardener, and his wife, who was currently reported to be a laundress, were the sole inhabitants of the house, which was more than twice as large as Elmwood. They were grave, reserved, taciturn people, and were seldom seen in the village, where of course there was the usual taste for gossip. But long ago the gossips of Stanbridge had found out that Roger and Sarah Thexton were utterly impracticable; they were never to be seduced into a “regular crack.” Roger drank his pint of ale and smoked his pipe every Saturday night at the public−house, as regularly as Saturday night came round. It seemed to be his way of preparing for Sunday; but he generally held his peace, or else talked gruffly on the markets, or the shipping, or the state of the nation as revealed by the *Northborough Weekly Express*. To all queries, hints, and innuendoes which related to Cuppage Roger was obstinately deaf.

“Your people coming home this summer, Master Thexton?” some astute personage would inquire, blandly and

deferentially.

“Mappen yes, mappen not,” was Roger's curt answer.

“Are they still in that foreign town in Italy?”

This was an arrow shot out at a venture, for no one in Stanbridge knew whether the Catherwoods were in Europe, Asia, or America; for all their former neighbours knew to the contrary, they might be assisting in the exploration of Palestine, or making a railway in Kamtschatka, or keeping a sheep−farm in Australia, or teaching the Fijians to renounce cannibalism. And at last, infinitely to Roger's own peace of mind, they came to the unwilling conclusion that he really knew no more than themselves, and ceased to question him. And as time passed on the interest in Cuppage died away, and nobody troubled themselves about the long−absent Catherwoods. Sarah was as impenetrable as her husband; not even unlimited cups of strong tea and hot buttered toast could seduce her into confidences; and being really hard of hearing she delighted in tormenting the inquisitive friends who entertained her by playing admirably at the game of “cross questions and crooked answers.” “Has Mr. Catherwood got over his troubles?” some would−be crony would ask when, as she thought, she had skilfully brought round the conversation to the point desired. “Ah!” would be Mrs. Thexton's answer, “it's them cruel north−east winds; it's a terrible pain is the rheumatics.” “I was asking after the Catherwoods!” would scream her baffled auditor. “Please don't screech so!” would be Sarah's reply. “I can hear if you speak low and distinct, but I never hears them that screeches and hollers, and it turns my blood too.” Then the question would be repeated, and Sarah would nod complacently, and give some piece of information that had nothing at all to do with the subject of inquiry. And now nobody cared at all whether the Catherwoods were dead or alive.

“How many Catherwoods are there?” I asked one day of Mr. Perren, when we both sat in the summer−house under the apple−trees.

There was a gap in the fence which led into a sort of coppice or wilderness, which seemed to be a sort of debatable land between the two estates. “It really belonged to Cuppage,” Mr. Perren said, “but it had always been open to Elmwood, and since the family had been away they had come almost to look upon it as their own. Not that there is much in it to attract one,” he continued; “it is a wild sort of place, full of briars and brambles, and the trees are as scrubby as trees on the coast mostly are, and the underwood wants felling. And that, of course, it is no business of ours to do, though we might put the coppice into something like order. But Judith says we had better leave our neighbours' property alone, and I cannot say but what she is right; and Mona says she likes to go there when she feels melancholy and listen to the sough of the wind among the firs, and it would not be half so nice if it were cleared and properly attended to, she says.”

I quite agreed with Mona; I liked the coppice extremely; its very wildness was its great charm. I could hide myself among the overgrown brushwood, and catch lovely little glimpses of the sea between the straggling branches, while overhead the wind played solemnly among the pines; and their tall, straight stems showed at evening like pillars of ruddy gold in the red sunlight, which bathed all the wood, and turned the bramble leaves to bronze, and trembled on the great tufts of fern which grew in the little rocky hollows with emerald and crimson mosses, and other small but lovely growing things. There were rabbits in the wood, too, and all kinds of birds, and little sharp−eyed mice and shrews, and once I saw on the dark tree−tops what I supposed to be a squirrel; and once, to my infinite delight, I caught a hedgehog, which, however, was far from satisfactory as a pet. No! decidedly the coppice must not be touched ; the wilder and the darker it was the better. Only if the Catherwoods should come home—and some time or other they surely would return to Cuppage—they would doubtless take the matter into their own hands. It was at this juncture that I very naturally asked how many Catherwoods there were.

“How many Catherwoods?” returned Mr. Perren, rubbing his nose. “Let me see. Well, Chryssie, I really do not know; there is old Mr. Catherwood, though somebody did say he was dead; and there was his eldest son, about whom was all the trouble. He was said to have contracted a very undesirable marriage abroad; and there were other reports about him that were not at all to his credit, though whom he married, or what were his other sins against his father, no one knows. Some said one thing, some another, but it was all report and guesswork and rumour tells far more lies than truth, you know. It was said that Mr. Horace Catherwood 'disappeared'; but whether his misdoings drove him into exile, or whether he died as was asserted, is more than I can tell you. It must be getting on for twenty years since news came of the marriage which so displeased Mr. Catherwood. He said he would never forgive his son, and he made his second son, Edmund, his heir.”

“And where is Mr. Edmund?”

“He lives in London; he never comes to Cuppage, he hates the place, and the air of Northshire always makes him ill. I suppose, though, old Thexton gets his orders from him, for he is certainly the only member of the family in England.”

“Were there any more children than these two sons?”

“Yes; the lads had a sister, Julia, older than themselves. She was very pretty, and very sweet−tempered and gay. She and I were once the closest of friends; that was!—ah—a great many years ago!”

“And where is she?”

“I have no idea; she married a military man of good family, and went out to India. I rather think she is dead.”

“Altogether,” I replied, “it seems very doubtful whether there really are any Catherwoods still living.”

“That there are Cuppage Catherwoods still alive I feel pretty sure,” said Mr. Perren. “If the old family had died out some new claimant of the estate would have arisen. Places like Cuppage are not left ownerless; besides, I never heard any report of Edmund's death, and that he has or had a daughter I am nearly positive. So I suppose Cuppage will be inhabited again some day.”

“It must have been a nice place once, though it looks gloomy enough now.”

“Yes. When I was a boy, when Stanbridge was quite separate from Northborough, Cuppage was considered a fine place. When Mrs. Catherwood was alive they kept up a very good establishment, and before the young men went away, and when Julia was in all her bloom, it was a very gay house; company always coming and going; plenty of servants; balls, dinner parties, picnics, or gypsy parties as they were called in those days, and that sort of thing. And in all their festivities we took part, Judith and I; Mona was much away with friends in Scotland; for they were our next−door neighbours; there were not half−a−dozen houses, then, on the hill, and they were all old, substantial places, like Elmwood and Cuppage.”

“It would be nice if they came back. Should you not like next−door neighbours again?”

“I am not sure that I should, Chryssie. Cuppage has been shut up so long that I do not think I should like a change. Certainly I should not like strangers there; and only strangers could come there now. I have not seen Edmund these thirty years, and it is nearly twenty since I bade Horace good−bye. His children, if he have any, must be grown up now. Dear me! dear me! how time flies! And I remember the birth of both those boys, for they were some years younger than I. Julia was nearer my own age; she was the only child of the first Mrs. Catherwood.

“Let us go into the wood, uncle!” I said, coaxingly; I had somehow learned to call Mr. Perren “uncle,” and his sisters my aunts, during that long happy summer.

“Very well!” he replied; “I want a little walk, and the coppice is so shady. Did you ever go on the Cuppage side?”

“Oh, no! There is something about man−traps and spring−guns stuck up!”

“What, that rotten old board on the dead chestnut tree? There are no man−traps, nor spring−guns either now, and I very much doubt whether there ever were any. I fancy the board was only put up to frighten away trespassers—like the scarecrow yonder, among old Peter's peas. Come along! I'll be surety against man−traps, Chryssie.”

So I trotted by his side, and we passed through the fence into the wood, and by another gap on the opposite side, through which I had often longed, yet never dared, to venture into the unknown regions of the mysterious Cuppage.

First of all we found ourselves in a large orchard, the trees thickly covered with moss and lichens, most of the boughs distorted, and very poor promise of a crop of fruit.

“Dear me!” said Mr. Perren, “the old 'nonpareils' have not a single apple on them, and they used to be so laden that we had to prop the branches. As for these 'golden pippins,' they have gone back into something little better than crabs again. And the plums, what are left of them, are not better than sloes! The whole place has run wild. It is a pity to abandon an old estate like this.”

From the orchard, where the coarse, scant grass was knee−deep in places, and where there were whole forests of nettles, to atone for the deficiency of fruit, we passed into the kitchen garden.

Such a wild, sad, desolate place; the wall fruit−trees seemed more neglected than those in the orchard; here and there were patches of straggling vegetation—stumps of defunct cabbages, self−grown lettuces run to seed, spindled carrots, aged gooseberry and currant bushes, rotten decaying cucumber frames, shattered flower−pots,

mingled with a straggling growth of larkspurs, old−fashioned roses, sweet−williams, and gilliflowers, to say nothing of chickweed, groundsel, white goosefoot, docks, and the common African marigold, which overran everything, and together with many other weeds presented a fine field to the exploring botanist.

“Ah! three gardeners were always at work here in the old days,” said Mr. Perren, with a sigh. “Look, that was a pinery once, and many a splendid bunch of grapes have I had out of that old forcing−house yonder. Ah! the vines still remain, I see, poor, miserable things; and here is actually a bunch of grapes, of which the finest will never be bigger than a pea! Oh, dear me, how different it all used to be Now let us go into the flower−garden; that used to be beautifully kept, for Julia had quite a passion for flowers. And she was a flower herself, with her lovely bloom, and her bright flowing ringlets, and her laugh—oh, what a ringing laugh she had! I often told her she was a rose among the roses. She never need have left Stanbridge; she might have been at Elmwood to−day, for there, just there, Chryssie, at the entrance of that covered walk, which they used to call the *berceau*, I asked her to marry me.”

“And wouldn't she? No, of course she wouldn't, or else she would be Mrs. Perren now!” And the very idea of a Mrs. Perren made me laugh.

“Don't laugh, don't!” he said, in a tone of pain, and with something of his old testiness. “That was just how she laughed when I made my proposals. She would neither say 'no' nor 'yes,' but she laughed—little musical peals of childish laughter, till the garden rang again, and Horace and Edmund, who were mere boys then, came running in from the meadow where they were playing cricket, to know 'what fun was up.' How well I remember it! It was very unkind of her, and not quite lady−like, I think. If ever, in years to come, anybody ever makes you such a proposal, Chryssie, and you decide to refuse it, speak gently and gravely; a little sadly if you can, and try to feel a little sorry for a fellow−creature's pain; but don't laugh! it's heartless, it's unwomanly, to say the least of it.”

“I never will,” I replied, feeling great indignation towards Miss Julia Catherwood, who was very probably a grandmamma now, if she were not long since in her grave, under the burning skies of India.

“Ah well!” sighed Mr. Perren, as he gathered a half−wild flower; “it might have been the better for her if she had not laughed that day! But we will not go any nearer the house, Chryssie, the Thextons are terribly jealous of intruders; besides, it makes me miserable to see all this desolation, and to think of the old happy times long, long ago! I could stand and muse and meditate till I fancied that I was waiting for Julia to come out of the house in her white dress, and her crimson scarf, and a little bit of lace tied about her sunny curls. And I can fancy I hear Horace and Edmund shouting like boisterous fellows as they were; and I can see Mr. and Mrs. Catherwood pacing the terrace there, just under the drawing−room windows. All those five windows belong to the great drawing−room, Chryssie; many a time have I seen it lighted up for a gay dancing party. Nothing dances there now but rats, and mice, and spiders. It is one of the penalties of growing old that we leave our friends as well as our youth behind us. Life is at the best a very unsatisfactory thing, only we cannot think so when we are young. Let us go home, Chrystal, I am tired.”

Chapter 15. “MY CHRYSSIE”

I think I felt more respect for Mr. Perren after this conversation about the Catherwoods, and I wondered greatly what he was like in those old days when Julia, in her white dress and crimson scarf, had rejected his addresses. I was right glad that he had had one genuine attachment in his youth, for I had heard so much of the absurd flirtations of his later years, Mona liking nothing better than recounting her own experiences, which somehow always got mixed up with those of her brother.

And very curious reminiscences they were; Mona being continually on the eve of an engagement, when, by some singular fatality, her lovers always retired, and declined “coming to the point.” Judith, she informed me, had “cared” for somebody years and years ago, when she was quite a young woman; and “somebody” went away to India and got killed in a tiger hunt, and Judith had never “cared” for any other man. And this I could quite believe, for Aunt Judith was not a person to fritter away her affections in little pieces; her attachments were deep and lasting, and her nature, though undemonstrative and reticent, was singularly profound and strong. Her character in many respects resembled that of Aunt Rachel, although she lacked the exquisite tenderness and refinement, and the sweet heavenly−mindedness that so eminently distinguished that dear old saint. I think Aunt Judith would have been a charming woman had the softening influences of married life ever been hers; but Aunt Rachel was charming, and always must have been charming, under any circumstances.

Towards the close of the summer a change awaited me, a change which seemed trivial in itself, but which was really, as you will easily imagine, very far from unimportant, for it introduced me to the true child−life, of which I knew so very little, and remedied an ignorance which had already done me harm.

My studies had never been regularly resumed, since the sudden and violent disruption of the “plan.” I now and then read with Aunt Judith, or wrote an exercise, or worked a sum, and my readings with Mr. Perren were very far from being entirely unprofitable. But the French lessons were not continued; we all tacitly agreed to say nothing about them, and Mona, who could never quite forgive me for her fright and her sprained ankle, refused absolutely to attend any longer to my practising.

She and Dobbs were my thorns in the flesh all through that pleasant summer, which but for them would have been entirely Elysian; they would not, or they professed not, to believe in my reformation. They were continually referring to the past, hoping that I would not bite them, nor scratch them, nor set up horrible things to scare them from their senses! And they were constantly hinting that I was not really a bit the better at heart, but that I was"shamming goodness,” as the readiest way to escape punishment, and to disarm suspicion.

At first I was bitterly pained, and every fresh display of want of confidence roused my indignation; but one day, when I went to Aunt Rachel to tell my troubles, she said,. “Oh, child! this is only what you might have expected. One may, by God's help, put away one's sin; but one cannot put away the consequences; one must meekly wait God's time for that.”

“But, auntie!” I pleaded, “you know I am in earnest, and God knows it also, and it is so hard to be doubted.”

“Chryssie! all evil that we do brings with it its own punishment! It is one of God's eternal laws—a law of love, too, as some day you will perceive for yourself—that sin and suffering must go together. You may repent of your sin, but its results remain; and remain they will, till in God's good time they have worked themselves out, and answered their appointed end. All you have to do now is to be patient and take your punishment, for this is your punishment, Chryssie; and to persist in doing well. Do not be afraid; this trouble will not last for ever; only take it gently, and sweetly, and contentedly, as God's way of dealing with you just now. Be constant in the right, and you will eventually win esteem and confidence. But above all things, try not to show resentment, however you may be provoked!”

“You have set me a hard task, auntie,” I said.

“Not so hard but that it may be performed. You must ask God to help you.”

“Yes! but I see no end of it. I have tried and I have conquered myself. But it comes again and again. If I get well over to−day, the same trouble will come again to−morrow, and over and over again, for ever so many to−morrows.”

“Never mind to−morrows! That is a lesson you cannot learn too early, my child. Dreading the 'to−morrows'

has kept many a Christian in the valley of humiliation all his days. Leave them to God, not only in temporal concerns, but in everything else. God has promised you strength for one day at a time, and no more; 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' and sufficient unto the day is the grace which alone can preserve us from falling, and keep our feet in the way of peace. The simplest and happiest way of living is to take the day as it comes, ay, and even the hour as it comes, being satisfied that, betide what may, *'The Lord will provide!"*"

"Then, every morning, I must get up, and pray for that day only?"

"Just so. In this case, it is your only resource. Pray every morning for strength, and wisdom and patience, to meet the difficulties of the day; let to−morrow take thought for itself, for when it does come, you know, it is no longer 'to−morrow' but to−day; the 'to−day' for which God has promised you all you need."

"I never thought of that," I exclaimed with delight; "why, auntie dear, there are no to−morrows!"

"There are none to Christian people, who really live by faith. There is yesterday, and there is to−day, and there is the grand and glorious 'for ever!' the never−ending to−day, when we shall be for ever with the Lord—but to−morrows, with all their shadowy but terrible cares and apprehensions, and their possible griefs and anxieties, are for those who do not know and love our God. So, Chryssie, you need never disquiet yourself about the '*may−bes.'* No, nor about the *'might have beens."* What is, is best, for God has ordered it. What is past, is best also, for that, too, was in God's hands, and He knew your path from the beginning. As to what will be, leave it to your Father's care. There may be discipline in store for you, but there certainly is love, and all must work together for your good. If you live to be as old as I am, I hope and I think you will say, Chryssie, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.' I think you will say out of your own experience, as I in humble gratitude say this day, *'They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing!"*"

So after that I bore the taunts and reproaches of Dobbs and Mona's innuendoes more patiently; and as time passed on they became less frequent, till at last they began to trust me, and to give me credit for a true repentance.

But long ere this desirable consummation was reached the change to which I have referred took place. It seemed to come about quite naturally, and in this wise:—I was playing over my old music lessons one morning, and wishing I could learn something new, when Aunt Judith and Uncle Matthew came in and seated themselves in the great bow window, among the flowers, and appeared to be listening to my performance of an easy arrangement of *I Puritani.* When I had played the last bar, and was looking for something else, Aunt Judith said to me,—

" Chrystabel, come here."

I went of course. She was picking the dead leaves off a choice pelargonium, and Mr. Perren was attentively examining a fine myrtle. They both looked entirely preoccupied, and I had to wait for nearly a minute before either of them spoke. Then Aunt Judith solemnly took off her spectacles, as was customary with her whenever she was about to make a communication of any importance, and said, "Chrystabel, your uncle and I have been talking about you this morning, and we both think it is quite time you recommenced your lessons. You have had a long holiday, though I must say you have been very far from idle; still, the desultory mode of study which you have pursued of late cannot be good for you. In short, you must once more seriously and regularly take up your education."

"Indeed, Aunt Judith, I am quite ready," I replied; "and I will try not to give you any more trouble than I can help. I shall like to have my lessons regularly again."

"That is well. I was only afraid lest your long vacation might have unsettled you for a proper course of study. But, Chryssie, I am not thinking of going back to the old system. I believe I am too old for the work of education, and I shall scarcely be doing you justice if I continue your instructress. Mind you! I do not think myself quite incompetent; for what I do know I know very thoroughly, and, as far as I go, I am perfectly certain of my ground. But all things are changed since I was young; there are new ways of teaching and new things to be taught, and I am not one of those people who believe only in their own particular era! I have no doubt that, on the whole, the times are greatly improved; things are wider, and go deeper, than they did in my day; and the routine that was held to be sufficient for young ladies when I was being educated would be for you quite insufficient; and what suffices for you will not suffice in years to come. It has always been so, and will be the same so long as the world stands. And all this preface means, my dear, that we are going to send you to school."

"Oh, Aunt Judith!" and I burst into tears.

"Do not be foolish, Chryssie; I thought you would be so pleased."

“Are you not sending me away as a punishment?” and I looked imploringly at Uncle Matthew, who was flattening his back, and trying to the best of his ability to enact Mentor, or to represent a whole “School Board”; though I suppose there was no such thing at the time of which I write.

“No, indeed, child!” replied Aunt Judith, “nothing of the kind. But it is for your own sake that we wish to make this alteration: we wish to give you every advantage in our power; and we think we have made a mistake in attempting to bring you up apart from other children. No child could have behaved better than you have all this summer, but you have behaved too much like a grown person; and really, Chryssie, you are what people call 'old−fashioned.' Association with girls of your own age will do you an immensity of good.”

“I do not mind being old−fashioned,” I pleaded, still crying; “and I have been so happy since you all forgave me. If only you and uncle would go on teaching me, I would, indeed I would, try to be so very good. I shall feel as if you were still angry if you send me to school.”

“Chryssie,” said Mr. Perren, “I thought you had more sense! You know we are not angry! You know we love you very much! And, indeed, it is because we love you that we wish to do our very best by you. There, leave off crying, and be a little woman again. And why you should distress yourself after this fashion I cannot guess. I thought you would jump for joy at the prospect of going to a good school.”

“Oh, uncle,” I said, reproachfully, “how could I jump for joy at going away from Elmwood? And you have been so good to me, and I have got to love you, and Aunt Judith, and Aunt Rachel.”

“Going away, child, what do you mean?” said Aunt Judith, abruptly. “Who said you were going away from Elmwood?”

“If I am going to school—” I began; but Mr. Perren cut me short by exclaiming, “Why, she thinks we meant a boarding school!”

“And am I not?” I asked, a sudden and most welcome light dawning upon me. Stupidly enough, I had forgotten that there were such institutions as day−schools.

“Certainly not That is to say, you are not going as a boarder, though Mrs. March does take a limited number of boarders, I believe. You will be at Canterbury House every morning, except Saturday and Sunday, by ten o'clock. You will take an early dinner with your fellow−pupils, and return here at four o'clock. Saturday will be your own always to spend as you or as we please. There is nothing so very dreadful in such an arrangement!”

“Oh, no! no! But I thought I was to go quite away from Stanbridge—away from Northborough. I heard you talking about that school in Edinburgh only a few days ago, and I thought—I thought—”

“You thought, like a little goose, that you were going to be packed off at once to Edinburgh. Well, Mona did suggest it, because our Rector's daughters are being educated at this Mrs. Macpherson's, and she is rather a celebrated woman in her way, and her school is a very famous one. But we never for a moment thought of sending you over the border, Chryssie. Matthew and I would not like the house without a little girl in it; we should be dreadfully dull without you now. Still, for a few hours every day we can do without you, and you can do without us, especially as it is for your good. I think you will like it.”

“ Indeed I shall! I shall not mind it at all. At least I think I shall not,” I added, with a little hesitation, feeling a sudden trepidation at the idea of going among strangers. “And I shall have so much to tell you when I come home in the afternoon. And I shall like to know some girls—I never knew one in all my life! It will be so funny to talk to people no older than myself! Oh! I think it will be very nice.”

“And you really cried at the thought of leaving us?” said Mr. Perren, when we were walking together in the orchard after tea in the evening of that day.

“I couldn't bear the thought of it,” I said, again on the verge of tears.

“Do you then love us so much?” he asked, gravely.

“I love you and Aunt Judith dearly!” I replied. “I know I did not once. I never saw how good it was of you to take me, and do everything for me; but I was so horribly bad and foolish! And now I want to stop with you always, and make up to you for what I did in those shameful, dreadful days.”

“You are making up,” he said, gently; and he bent down and kissed me. “Little Chryssie, I, too, have learned some lessons. I might have been wiser. But we love one another now?”

For answer I clung to him and kissed him tenderly. His lank chin never exasperated me now, and I should have resented most strongly any disrespect towards him. But then, he was certainly much changed since the spring. And I was changed, too, for I loved him; and you know how love softens all asperities, and brightens dulness, and

beautifies that which in itself is plain and homely. There is no magician like true affection.

As soon as the quarter commenced—for “terms” were then scarcely heard of—I commenced my attendance at Mrs. March's, and in process of time grew more than reconciled to the situation. For at first I had something to contend with; I felt strangely shy and awkward in the company of other girls; I felt the indescribable difference between them and me, and was quite inclined to shut myself up, oyster fashion, in my own shell. But the girls at Mrs. March's were for the most part nice, good, ladylike girls, and some of them were clever girls, and well up in their studies, and they were all kind to me and willing to be friends. When the Christmas holidays arrived, I was quite at home among my schoolfellows and with my governesses, and for the short time I had studied at Canterbury House I took a good place in my class.

Mrs. March was a widow of about forty years of age, a true Christian, and a thorough geutlewoman, and though not herself very learned or very highly accomplished, eminently fitted for the important post she held. Her daughter Clara, who was just two years older than myself, became my special friend, though I had other friends in the school, and among them bonnie little Olive Carr, the prettiest, merriest, most engaging kitten of a girl that you can fancy. She was only eight years old; she was a most loving little pet, but brimful of fun, and she took to me—I am sure I don't know why—and I took to her; and we are dear friends now, though I live in England and she is living in another hemisphere. But my great friend from first to last, my adopted sister, my *“alter ego,”* as we romantically called each other, was my well−beloved Clara March.

Mrs. March received only eight young ladies as residents in her house, but more than thirty girls from Northborough and from our own more immediate neighbourhood attended her classes as day boarders or as morning pupils; so we were a pretty large community, a little world in ourselves, in which something or other of an exciting nature was constantly transpiring. Now we were working hard for certain prizes, now preparing a present for one of our governesses, now celebrating a birthday, or lamenting a departure, or discussing the apparent merits of a newcomer; and, of course, like all other school−girls, we had our favourites both among the teachers and among ourselves, and we had our small rivalries and petty quarrels, and occasionally, but not often, somebody got into disgrace, for Canterbury House was in Northshire, England, and not in Utopia, where of course things never go wrong, and *contretemps* are never known.

We had two English governesses besides Mrs. March, both of them wise, liberal−minded, highly−educated women; and we had our *“Mademoiselle”* and our *“Fraulein,”* and masters attended for accomplishments and for some of the severer studies, and once a fortnight our rector gave us what would now be called a “Divinity Lecture,” but what we believed to be a superior kind of Bible−class.

I am not going to treat you to any special school−girl experiences, for though my school−life was to me far from monotonous, it was ordinary school−life and nothing more. We had little “sensations” among ourselves, and what we held to be affairs of the deepest importance were frequently discussed in our girl parliament; but nothing which really bore upon my own history happened at Canterbury House during the four years of my pupilage.

And my progress gave the greatest satisfaction at home; there was some fear lest I should be spoiled by Uncle Matthew, who was never tired of singing my praises and exalting my abilities. And after my first half−year nothing would serve him but that the tables should be turned, and I must teach him French; and he bought me all the new music he could lay hands upon, and listened with the profoundest reverence and admiration to my German, of which he did not understand half−a−dozen words. And on Saturdays, if the weather were fine, we always took a long ramble on the shore, and sometimes Clara accompanied us. Mr. Perren liked her very much, and after she had gone away he was wont to say, “A very nice girl that, and a very good girl, but not like my Chryssie.”

And that was the style in which he commonly spoke of me to others; I was always “my Chryssie” to him. To think that I should have come to be Mr. Perren's Chryssie, and to think, too, that I should like it, and dread nothing more than losing his affections! But as Mantie used to say, “We never know what we shall come to, and nobody need make too sure of themselves.”

Chapter 16. MR. PERREN HAS A PRESENTIMENT

Time passed on, and I had nearly completed my second year at Elmwood. Oh! how I loved my home, the home that I had once so foolishly, so ungratefully despised. I loved it so much that I sometimes shivered at the thought of its being broken up, as sooner or later I knew it must be. I loved every room in the great old house; every stone in its walls I counted as dear to me; every tree and shrub was to me as a friend; and when for a short time we stayed in the cathedral city of St. Beetha's, I longed to be back at Elmwood, and thought the return thither the pleasantest part of the holiday.

It was, as I said, the close of my second year at Elmwood; it was the beginning of September, and the woods and shrubberies were gorgeous with the rich, mellow tints of autumn. The weather was splendid; the early summer had been wet, but from the middle of July we had had nothing but unclouded sunshine. The garden was gay with brilliant flowers; the orchard was rich in ripe russet−brown and rosy fruit; not very far off we could see the golden sheaves piled on the upland, waiting to be carried; and we heard on every side that it was a most abundant harvest, “such a one as had not been known for years!” so all the farmers and so everybody said. And day after day the sea ebbed and flowed in sunny calms; the blue waves rippled peacefully on the strand, or idly lapped the rocks, till in the quiet noon it sounded like a lullaby. And when the tide went down in the grey eventide the sands shone like vast stretches of opal; now it was the crimson sunset blushing and fading on the wide waste of heaving waters; now it was a silver sea, in the broad moon's flooding light; and now it was all one glitter as of emeralds, sapphires, and brilliants in the dazzling sheen of the unclouded moon; and sea and shore and sky were so softly, sweetly fair that as I gazed upon them I thought involuntarily of that hour when all the morning stars sang for joy, and the great Creator of this beautiful world of ours saw the work of His own hands, and “behold, it was very good!”

Over those placid autumn days I linger tenderly; for now, as I look back upon them, they seem to me as a blessed, thrice blessed time of green pastures and of still waters; a time to be remembered with deep thankfulness, as one of those pleasant resting places which our Father provides for us by the way, as over the rough−ploughed furrows of time we journey towards the golden hills of heaven.

One September day Mrs. March gave us a holiday; I think it was on account of the marriage of a former pupil; and I got up in the morning feeling that I had the whole long bright day before me to do with as I would. Mr. Perren and I, and my little dog Grip, took a long shore ramble before dinner, and enjoyed ourselves most thoroughly, talking as was our wont on all sorts of subjects and about all sorts of things. Uncle and I always revelled in these quiet, discursive confabulations, and we liked nothing better than going out together for a “good talk,” with only Grip for an auditor and critic of our conversations. We wandered ever so far down the beach, and got among the boulders, and gathered several rare seaweeds, and picked up a shell but seldom found on our northern coasts, and by−and−by we were so tired that we sat down upon a nice flat slab of rock, that had often before served us as a seat on similar occasions.

Then we ate our luncheon of dainty sandwiches and ripe apples; that is to say, Mr. Perren took the lion's share of the sandwiches, and I ate both the great rosy, juicy apples which Dobbs had put into my basket at starting, and I thought them infinitely more delicious than the substantial portion of our repast. Heigho! what a vast number of things are so nice while we are still in our *première jeunesse,* and how they lose their flavours as we advance in age!

After we had rested awhile I wandered away higher up the sloping cliff, at the base of which we had sat down, and in a narrow ravine I found rich large juicy blackberries in wonderful profusion, and after I had feasted to my heart's content I gathered a large handful for Mr. Perren, never doubting but that they would be to him, as to me, luscious and as acceptable as pines and hot−house grapes. He ate a few, and then was content. I was disappointed; I could not understand any one not delighting in such great, big, sweet blackberries, and I had gathered the very finest for him at the expense of my own fingers, which were scratched, as well as stained to a deep purple−black.

“Don't you like blackberries, uncle?” I asked, feeling quite chagrined as, after tasting about half a dozen berries without any rapturous manifestations of approval, he turned away from my humble offering, and stared abstractedly far away across the purple water, as if he wanted to see to the other side of the broad sea.

It was a minute or two before he answered. “Like blackberries, eh, Chryssie? Yes, I like them well enough, only a very few content me now, and what is more they do not agree with me. As one gets older, one has to be careful what one eats, or suffer the consequences, which are often far from pleasant. But there was a time, Chrystal, when I would have beaten you at blackberries. Do you know I have gathered many a basketful in yonder valley, and eaten them upon this very stone, ay, quarts of them I dare say, for hungry lads can eat anything and be none the worse. I wonder why indigestion so often comes with riper years!”

“Then you used to come here when you were a boy, uncle?”

“Of course I did, and when I was a tall, gawky youth, and Julia Catherwood would often come with me in those days. She was as greedy after blackberries as I, only she did not care to scratch and stain her pretty white hands in gathering them, and I was only too glad to victimise my own paws on her behalf. Oh, the feasts we have had on this very rock! I wonder where Julia is now? I do not think she is dead.”

“Were you thinking of her when you looked so steadfastly out yonder, to where the sea and sky appear to meet?”

“I was thinking of her; I have been thinking of her all day; everything here reminds me of her. But it is years since I have thought of her so persistently as has been the case for the last week; she haunts me, I cannot get her out of my mind. It is very strange.”

“She is quite an old lady, is she not, uncle?”

“Well, I daresay you would call her old, Chryssie, for girls like you think anybody twenty years their senior quite aged. Yes, I suppose she is not to call young, not any younger than myself in fact—we were born in the same year. She must be sixty and upwards. I can't fancy Julia sixty; it seems ridiculous! The last time I saw her she was a beautiful blooming young woman of five−and−twenty.”

“Was she married then?”

“Yes; she was Mrs. Trafford, and in all her bridal splendour. She went to London directly afterwards, and the next year I heard of the birth of a son. Then Captain Trafford's regiment was ordered to India, and she did not come back to Cuppage before she sailed. I saw her for the last time when she went away from her father's house with her gay young husband, one of the happiest of brides! She was not happy long; Captain Trafford was very charming, no doubt, but he had no principle, and not too kind a heart. I am afraid he made poor Julia very wretched. If she had taken me it would have been better for her.”

“Mrs. Trafford's son must be quite grown up now?” I inquired, feeling curiously inquisitive about these shadowy Catherwoods, who seemed to me not unlike personages in one of my favourite romances.

“Grown up? Yes, indeed; he cannot be much under forty. It is thirty−seven, or, perhaps, thirty−eight, years since news of him first came to Elmwood. Dear me, what it must be to have a son nearly forty.”

And Mr. Perren seemed seriously to consider the position, thinking, perhaps, that if he had married Julia in the days of his youth he too might have had a son of middle−age.

All the way home Mr. Perren talked of Julia and of her brothers.

“Her brothers, you know,” he said, “were younger than she, for they were the children of the second Mrs. Catherwood. Edmund must be about Mona's age; he was a slim youth of twenty when he went away. His last words to me were, 'I shall never come to Cuppage again, Matt, so if you want to see me you must come to me where I am, wherever that may be.'

“He was going out to South America then, and he did go, and amassed great riches as I have heard. After some years' absence he returned and married a wealthy heiress, very ugly, and older than himself. She was the only child of some rich City man, who dealt in oils and tallow. She had one daughter as ugly as herself, I believe, who, if she is living, is probably the heiress of Cuppage. It is very singular that we never hear of Edmund or of his family. Old Thexton and his wife pretend to know nothing of them; but Thexton must get supplies and orders from some one—and who can it be but Edmund?”

“What a pity Mr. Catherwood would not forgive his eldest son !”

“A great pity! There was not nearly so much harm in Horace as there seemed. He was all open and aboveboard—except, indeed, in the matter of his clandestine marriage. He went abroad when he was quite a young man, and he lived very much at some German Court, not over−famous for its morality, if all reports were true. His father was expecting him home when word came of his marriage. Old Mr. Catherwood never told the facts to any one; he was at first furious, and then sullenly miserable; what he did say, before he left Cuppage, led

me to believe that poor Horace had disgraced himself in other ways than in that of his unsuitable marriage. At any rate his father was implacable, and I fear remained so till his death. He said Edmund would be his heir. Julia had her fortune—which was considerable—when she married Captain Trafford. To think how intimate we used to be, Judith and I, with those young people at Cuppage; and now, and for years past, we do not know whether they are alive or dead! Only I feel sure Julia is not dead; I could not say why, but I am somehow certain that she is still in this world. And what is more—but do not tell your aunts, Chryssie; this is between ourselves—I cannot help thinking she is in England again; I feel as if she were near me. Perhaps she is in London, at Edmund's house; I should like to see her once more, and I should like you to see her, Chryssie."

"Uncle, why did you not try to find out Mr. Edmund Catherwood when you were in London this time two years?"

"I did try; that is to say, I made certain inquiries, which were fruitless. I must confess, however, that I did not press the matter, for I felt shy of seeing my old companion after so many changes, and after the lapse of so many years. He used to live in Portland Place, but when I went there and found out the house, another family, who knew nothing of the Catherwoods, occupied it. They referred me to the agent to whom they paid the rent, and I called upon him, but could not obtain an interview; and feeling disheartened and, as I said, rather shy, I gave it up, and made no further efforts. I wonder if I could make old Thexton tell me whether Julia has returned home or not?"

"Very likely he does not know, and would not tell you if he did."

"Be sure, Chryssie, you do not say anything about this idea of mine to either of your aunts; Judith has no patience with presentiments, and Mona would laugh and mock."

"I will be sure and not say a word, uncle; you know I never do when you wish me to be silent."

Which indeed was the case, for Mr. Perren frequently took me into his confidence, and I shared with him divers small secrets, all of which I kept faithfully as in honour bound.

We lingered so long on our way home that we were late for dinner, and Mona scolded us heartily because the fish was spoiled. I was dreadfully tired, and so was Mr. Perren; and after dinner he went to sleep, and I was almost fain to follow his example, till having half dozed over my book for the best part of an hour, I resolved to go out into the open air, that the sea−breeze might blow away my drowsiness. I tried the garden, the orchard, and the summer−house, but could not settle comfortably to my reading in either, and the volume I carried was from the Northborough Library, and must be returned next day.

At length I chose the coppice. I found a charming dry, mossy seat, under one of the trees. The moss was soft as any cushion! I could lean back against the trunk of the scraggy old elm, and before me, whenever I raised my eyes, stretched the purple sea, with one broad slant of gold upon its heaving bosom. I tried now to settle down to my book, for I was very anxious to finish it; but in spite of my best endeavours the letters would swim before my weary eyes. I read line after line without perceiving the sense; the soft wind on the tree−tops, the low coo of some wood−pigeons close at hand, and the measured chime of the waves, all combined to lull me to repose, and presently I gave up the strife, and resigned myself to the exigencies of the hour. I slept as soundly as if I had been in my own bed, and dreamed all sorts of delightful dreams about mermaids, and sea−caves, and coral islands, and blue lagoons, and buried cities under the smooth waves, till I suddenly started and half roused up at the sound of music, coming from I knew not whither. Was I really awake, or did I still dream? and were the sea−fairies chanting me a lullaby? Was it "the sharp, clear twang of the golden chords" that I heard, or seemed to hear, while I lay so blissfully entranced between waking and sleeping? I was in no hurry to open my eyes, for it was deliciously comfortable down there upon the springy moss, with the low sun showing in little glints between the branches, and the murmur of the gentle tide, and that sweet, low music in my ears.

But suddenly the strain ceased, the fairy spell was broken, and I began to awake in real earnest. And before I had quite regained the use of my faculties the music recommenced, no longer in low, sweet, plaintive cadences, but in quick, lively measure, and I recognised a popular tune to which we often danced at school, and it seemed to me as if the tune were being played upon a concertina.

Then I rubbed my eyes, and opened them wide, and sat up and looked about me, and knew that I was in our own coppice, and not in fairyland. And meanwhile the merry dance−music went on.

It was evening now, and the whole landscape was bathed in lovely sunset lights; crimson islets in the heaven above were mirrored in the azure depths below; roseate mists were gathered on the distant hills; the tall straight pine−stems stood up like pillars of wrought gold and bronze; sea and shore, earth and sky, were all resplendent in

that celestial glory.

But ere I had time to apprehend the full beauty of the scene I caught sight of some one standing on the slope not many feet below me. It was a boy about two years older than myself—a boy who might have served as model for the most fastidious of sculptors, or for the most ambitious painter. He was tall for his age, slim, but exquisitely proportioned; his throat, which was exposed, was round and white as a girl's; his hands were white and finely shaped; his features were those of a young Apollo; his eyes were large and lustrous, and of a most singular colour—of a sort of violet−purple, with long dark lashes, and slightly arched, delicately pencilled eyebrows. As for his hair, as he stood there with the last red beams of the September evening glowing on his curls, it seemed floating round his fair young face and his statue−like head in a halo of veritable glory.

I gazed like one stupefied. I had never seen such radiant beauty save in a picture; indeed, canvas and pencil could never portray the living loveliness before me, and for one instant I thought again of the sea−fairies, and after that of angels. I really believe I should not have been much astonished had I suddenly perceived silvery pinions sweeping behind that Guido−like face, and those rippling waves of ruddy golden hair.

But then an angel would not play “Nix my dolly pall, fake away!” nor yet “Coal−black rose”; neither could I fancy a fairy or siren with any other instrument than a harp, and my young hero was performing on a modern concertina. He must certainly be a veritable mortal. At length the music ceased, and the youth stepped forward and bowed respectfully, and accosted me with, “I trust, mademoiselle, I have not disturbed your sweet repose. When I saw you asleep like Titania on this bank, where doubtless the wild thyme grows, though I do not at present perceive it, I could not resist the temptation of watching your slumbers. And I tried to feel like Oberon, and partially succeeded.”

Now I had been in this coppice times out of number, and I had never once seen in it any human creature. There was no way up from the shore, I knew. There were the two gaps in the stone fence, on the Elmwood and Cuppage sides, and other entrance there was none. Certainly the youth did not come from Elmwood, and I felt equally sure he could not come from the guarded fortalice of Cuppage, where the Thextons like the fabled dragons and gryphons of old kept continual watch and ward, nor suffered any one to come anear. So rather rudely I demanded, “How did you come here?”

For answer he pointed to the gap in the Cuppage boundary.

“But you could not come that way,” I said. “No one is ever admitted at Cuppage.”

“Save its lawful owners, mademoiselle. Had I not been educated in the strictest code of deference and courtesy towards your charming sex, I might ask you how you came here?”

Then I pointed to the gap on my side.

“I come from Elmwood,” I replied. “I come here very often, but I never saw any person in the wood till now.”

“Are you Miss Perren?”

“No, I am Chrystabel Tyndale.”

“I thought the Perrens lived at Elmwood still.”

“So they do, and I live with them. They have adopted me. Elmwood is my home.”

“I think they have acted very sensibly. But having asked your name, permit me to give my own. I am Louis Trafford.”

“Trafford! then you *do* belong to Cuppage?”

“Of course I do, mademoiselle. Do you doubt it? And my name seems familiar to you.”

“Of course, I have heard about the Catherwoods.” And then I added eagerly, “Are you Mrs. Trafford's son?”

“I am, mademoiselle. Is that a curious coincidence?”

“No, I suppose not; but is Mrs. Trafford here?”

“Certainly she is. I left her not an hour ago in the thicket they call the rose−garden. I never saw such a desolate place in my life as this Cuppage of mine. I felt all the morning like the prince in the fairy tale. I did nothing but scramble through tangles and bushes; and this afternoon, lo the Sleeping Beauty!”

“Your mother was once Julia Catherwood?” I inquired.

“Indeed, she was not. She was Louisa Lascelles when my father married her. She was a widow with one boy—my half−brother, you understand. Her maiden name was Herbert. But Julia Catherwood is my grandmother, and she is here at Cuppage, as well as mamma and James Lascelles. We all came together last evening, just before dark.”

I abruptly wished Mr. Trafford good evening, and ran away to find Mr. Perren. I had news indeed. His presentiment was fulfilled. Julia was actually at Cuppage!

Chapter 17. I AM INVITED TO CUPPAGE

I tore back through the orchard and the kitchen garden, intent upon finding my uncle alone and imparting to him the wonderful news which I felt pretty sure he would much rather receive privately than in the presence of his sisters. But as I crossed the lawn the great bell which summoned us to meals began to clang, and I knew that tea was ready. I went, therefore, straight into the dining−room, and found, as I had expected, the family already assembled; the lamps were lighted, though it was not quite dark, the urn was bubbling and hissing, the coffee sent up a fragrant aroma, and Mr. Perren had his steaming cup of tea before him, and was helping himself to honey, in which he greatly delighted.

"Why! where have you been?" said Mona, as I entered. "It is half−an−hour past tea−time, and the bell rang ten minutes ago."

"I did not know it was the second bell, Aunt Mona, and I did not think it could be so late."

"Well, never mind! Only if there is one thing in the world which puts me about more than any other it is irregularity in meals. In fact my constitution will not bear it, and I always feel ill if the repast is delayed. When we have finished tea I want to try over some duets with you."

"Very well, Aunt Mona." But though I heard what she said I took very little note of it; I spread the jam on my bread and butter mechanically, and I ate some of it, without in the least knowing how it tasted. And I stirred my coffee round and round till Aunt Judith passed me the sugar−basin, supposing she had not sweetened it sufficiently. At last she said, "Chrystabel, child, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," I answered, blushing furiously, as I became suddenly conscious that I was not behaving in my usual manner, and that I was being observed. "Only—only—"and I looked imploringly at Mr. Perren.

"Let the child alone, she is tired," he said, rather crossly. "I am tired too, and quite stupid; no wonder! we went quite too far this morning."

"Chryssie looks excited rather than fatigued," said Aunt Judith. "But there, child, go on with your tea, and leave off telegraphing with your eyes to Matthew."

"Something is the matter with her," said Mona, demurely. "Judith, why do you go on putting out this strawberry jam, when you know how much I prefer damson?"

"Because last year's damsons are all but finished, and this year's fruit is not ready, and we have more strawberry jam than we shall get through before next season."

Happily Mona became quite interested in the jam question. She was a very baby in the matter of sweets, and ate Everton toffy and sugar−candy by the pound; so I was left to finish my tea in peace; but I could see that Uncle Matthew was watching me with some anxiety. And when I thought my aunts' attention was thoroughly diverted, I looked at him as intelligently as I could and formed words on my lips, and nodded my head portentously. Poor Uncle Matthew! He was fairly puzzled, as he well might be, at my mysterious conduct, and he was uneasy too, and did not linger as was his wont over his last cup of tea. And when he had finished, and while his sisters were still debating how much damson cheese should be made, and whether it would be advisable to let cook try the new receipt for grape jelly, he beckoned to me, and immediately left the room. I followed him as quickly as I could, and found him at the back hall−door.

"Let us go into the garden," he said; "the moon is getting up over the sea, and the air is quite mild and soft. We can keep to the gravel−walks; the grass will certainly be damp."

How well I remember it, that beautiful September night. The glow had scarcely faded from the west; the outlines of the hills and the upland fir−woods were clearly defined against a singularly clear sky, and over the sea, which was smooth as an inland lake, a large red moon was slowly, majestically rising. The air was heavy with the scent of mignonette, heliotrope, and sweet alyssum, which grew luxuriantly in all the borders.

We said nothing till we reached a sort of terrace bounded by a low wall, which, however, was a very high wall on the kitchen garden side, to which one had to descend by about a dozen steps.

We were at some distance from the house, and the shrubs hid it from our sight.

Then Uncle Matthew said gravely: "Now, Chryssie, my child, what is it all about? Whatever the trouble may be, tell me, and I will—if I can—set it right."

"Oh, uncle!" I burst out, "it is not a trouble; nothing of that sort; but—she is come! *she is here!*"

I felt the arm that was round my shoulder tremble and twitch; and he answered, "Whatever do you mean, Chryssie? *Who* is here?"

"Why *she!* Julia Catherwood, of course, only she is not Catherwood now, you know. She is at Cuppage!"

There was a dead silence. Uncle seemed to be swallowing down a whole legion of lumps in his throat. Then he said, "But, Chryssie, how do you know?"

And I told him the whole history of the mystery; how I fell asleep in the coppice, how I was awakened by strains of music, how a beautiful youth had appeared to me, and told me who he was and whence he came; and how I had questioned him, and elicited the fact that Julia Trafford, *née* Catherwood, was now actually at Cuppage, and that she was—his grandmother!

"His grandmother!" quoth my uncle at last; "a big lad's grandmother! It is of no use, I cannot realise it! Julia a grandmother! though, I suppose, I might have been a grandfather myself, if I had married—let me see! how many years ago?—why, at least five−and−thirty. People at sixty and upwards are sometimes grandparents, I know. But Julia being called *'grandma'*! It is incredible! Such a charming girl as she was; and it seems only the other day since she laughed at me as I stood trembling in the *berceau*! Heigho, Chryssie! how time does fly!"

"Yes, it does," I answered, philosophically; for I was thinking how swiftly the last two years had flown, and how dreamlike was the strange, abnormal London life, which had once been the one reality of my experience; and then I, too, became silent and abstracted, remembering the old Bloomsbury Square days, and the dull dark house where I was born, and the man who was said to be my father, but who had never given me even the shadow of a father's love, and Mantie and Fanny, and my cat, and the preserved reptiles in the study and *the skull*! What had become of it? I had never seen it since that dreadful night when Aunt Judith sent me to arouse the servants. Our reveries, uncle's and mine, were disturbed by the sound of voices. In half a minute the voices were close to us, and our retreat in the shadow of the silver birches was discovered.

"Here they are," exclaimed Aunt Judith. "Matthew! are you crazy, standing still while the dews are falling, and keeping that child out in this unwholesome air?"

"Bother the dew!" was Matthew's ungracious answer.

"Matthew, I do not think you know what you are saying," was the quiet rejoinder. Aunt Mona flounced herself round, and gathered a yellow dahlia.

"I am not sure that I do!" replied my uncle, gravely, and with a certain significance that excited all his sisters' curiosity.

"Chryssie has been getting into some scrape," exclaimed Mona; "I knew she would! Now, it is foolish and wrong of you, Matthew, to try to shield her, if she really deserves punishment."

Miss Judith simply said, with a slight tremor in her deep tones, "What is it, Matthew?"

"Chryssie has nothing to do with it," replied Mr. Perren, answering first Mona Louisa's insinuation. "At least, Chryssie has everything to do with it, for the news comes from her."

"What news?" asked both sisters at once.

"The Catherwoods are come back."

"Come back to Stanbridge—to Cuppage, do you mean?" And Judith pointed to the thick belt of trees which divided the Cuppage ground from ours.

"Yes; that is to say, the Traffords are at Cuppage. As to the Catherwoods, they are all dead and buried, I should say, except Julia, who was married, you know, and so became a Trafford."

"And Mrs. Trafford has really returned to her old home, do you say, Matthew?" inquired Miss Judith. "And how should Chryssie know anything about it? Are you sure you are not deceived?"

Whereupon Mr. Perren told them the story of my adventures in the coppice, and how I fell asleep, etc. etc., greatly to Aunt Mona's scandalisation.

"Really, Chryssie!" she said, "you must be more careful now that we have neighbours. It was highly indecorous to fall asleep under a tree, and lie there, very likely with your mouth wide open, to be discovered by a stranger, a young man whom you had never seen before."

"He was not a young man, Aunt Mona, he was only a boy; I am sure he could not be more than fourteen."

"And it was very improper of you to talk to a boy. Modest girls never talk to boys."

"Oh, don't they?" interposed my uncle, with difficulty repressing a sort of whistle, which Mona knew to be

indicative of derision. “You used to talk fast enough to Horace and Edmund, I remember, but I suppose the laws of etiquette are changed.”

Mona turned away with an offended air, and Aunt Judith seemed to have fallen into a state of abstraction equal to that of her brother. She knew more about the Catherwoods than Mona did; and their sudden return had really agitated her. She forgot all about the night−dews, and stood leaning, with her elbows on the wall, looking vacantly across the sea, not seeing, I knew, the moonlit waves, but the scenes of her youth, the Cuppage and the Elmwood of forty long years ago, when she and Matthew were young, and when this wonderful Julia was in her bloom.

“Of course we must call,” observed Mona; “that is, as soon as the ladies have appeared at church. Mind, Chryssie, you are not to go into the coppice any more.”

I looked and felt exceedingly blank at this intimation, for the coppice was my favourite resort, where I enacted my own dramas, and laid the plots of innumerable novels, to be written some day in the far−off future of my womanhood.

But Aunt Judith replied, “The coppice has always been open to Elmwood; I do not see why the child should be forbidden to enter it. It never made any difference in old time whether Cuppage was inhabited or not.”

“But it cannot be right for Chryssie to associate with a boy,” persisted Mona.

“Why not, if he is a good boy, and a gentleman, as Julia's grandson ought to be?” was Judith's answer.

“Oh, very well! What I say goes for nothing, of course,” said Mona, angrily. “When Chrystabel is rude, and vulgar, and insolent, *like a boy*, then you will remember what I have said.”

I thought she was rather hard upon the boys; but I made no reply.

A little later I went to pay my usual evening visit to Aunt Rachel, and of course to carry her the important tidings about Cuppage. She was as much surprised as her nephew and her nieces had been, and she, too, seemed to be filled with reminiscences of the past, as she gently murmured to herself, “Come back again!—come back once more to Cuppage. It is strange.”

“But people must come back some time if they do not die,” I said, presently. “A place like Cuppage cannot be left deserted for ever.”

“For ever is a long time, Chryssie; but I never expected to see a Catherwood again in this world. And do you know you are talking very faulty English, my dear, and you must recollect I set my face against involved sentences.”

“I will try to talk better, Aunt Rachel, but really, I think we have all taken leave of our senses a little: I never saw Aunt Judith so surprised, and as for Uncle Matthew—and yet he seemed to think that Julia would come back before long.”

“Did he? He has thought so at intervals nearly ever since she went away: at least ever since Captain Trafford died in India, and we all thought she would come home when she was left a widow; but Julia never in all her life did that which was expected of her. I never knew any one person to disappoint so many other people! She was selfish; yes! and she was heartless, that is the truth, Chryssie. I really do not believe that she ever intended to hurt any one; I am sure she never deliberately set to work to make anybody miserable, and yet she did make people miserable—very, *very* miserable!” And Aunt Rachel spoke as I had never heard her speak before; there was even a slight bitterness in her tone I thought; certainly there was an excitement in her manner quite unlike her usual sweet, calm composure. There was even a spot of pink on the dear old cheeks; evidently she had once taken a deep interest in these Cuppage people, and in Julia especially.

“I know that she behaved badly to Uncle Matthew,” I said presently; “he told me how she laughed at him and mocked him when he wanted her to marry him.”

“She was very cruel to Matthew,” replied Aunt Rachel, sadly; “she did him a great deal of harm—women such as she was always harm the men with whom they are intimately associated. She played with him for years; she tortured him without mercy, and at last scarcely deigned him a courteous refusal. Oh, Chryssie my dear, when you grow up never play fast and loose with an honest man's heart. Never trifle with true affections; never play the coquette!”

“Indeed I will not,” I replied earnestly; “it would be so contemptible.”

“It would be far more than contemptible, Chryssie, it would be wicked! As a Christian woman you could not do it, and I trust, my dear child, you will never be what is called a woman of the world!”

"What is a woman of the world?"

"One who thinks chiefly of paltry successes, who will freely sacrifice the interests of others to her own; who will make people useful, and then when they have served their purpose fling them aside. One, too, who loves extremely worldly things, and in whose heart the love of God has no place; one who seeks admiration, riches, position, and all the splendours which wealth and rank can give; one whose portion is in this world, and who knows nothing and cares nothing about that peace which passeth all understanding."

"And Mrs. Trafford is a woman of the world?"

"She was, as Miss Catherwood; but that is full eight−and−thirty years ago. She may be a true Christian woman now, Chryssie; God grant it may be so! Poor Julia, she was not happy! I trust in the time of her great sorrow she learnt the insufficiency of those things on which she had trusted so long, and came to the one source of never−failing blessing. Yes! I shall be glad to see her again, if she will visit me. Poor Julia! I am afraid I have often been hard upon her, but I have prayed for her many times, never thinking that she and I would meet again on this side eternity. And now she is in her old home, and her grandson is with her, you say?"

"Yes. And what do you think? He spoke as if Cuppage belonged to him!"

"What is he like?"

I described him as well as I could, dwelling on the marvellous personal beauty which had so much impressed me. Aunt Rachel shook her head. "Ah, my dear, do not think too much of looks! Beauty is a great gift, but it is often sadly abused, and it is frequently a snare. I do not want you not to prize beauty, Chryssie, for, like all other precious things, it comes from God; and it is a joy to look upon a really beautiful face; but try not to attach too much value to mere handsomeness. Ah, I am talking like an old woman, and my warnings will be of little use. It is always so: I remember how I felt myself when I was a young girl. Things wear such a different aspect, my dear, seen from opposite ends of life; but it all comes right in time. Experience teaches us bitter lessons, but after a while the bitter turns to sweet, and that which we thought we had lost for ever comes back to us again, only not as it used to be, but fairer and purer, and bearing the impress of heaven's own seal and sign. Oh the riches of God's mercy! But to return to this youth, Chryssie. He is not at all like his grandmother; he must resemble his father, who was said, I remember, to be the image of *his* father, Captain Trafford. Captain Trafford was a wonderfully handsome man; he had those strange but lovely violet eyes, and that luxuriant golden brown hair, of which you speak. And he had a very fine figure, and he could talk brilliantly. He was the life of every circle in which he moved, and he was of good family and very wealthy. Also, he had great expectations. And for all these advantages I suppose Julia married him, for I feel sure she really liked Matthew the better of the two. And though Matthew was not clever nor handsome, and had only a moderate fortune, he had a true heart devoted to her, and she would have been happier as his wife than in the splendid marriage she did make. But oh, dear! what nonsense I am talking. What we wished was not to be, and Matthew is an old bachelor to this day. I am rather sorry Mrs. Trafford has come to disturb us; it is years since I have thought so much about those old times. Wish me goodnight, Chryssie, and Hagar shall read me into a quiet mood again."

I do not know how it was, but the Cuppage arrival made us all feverish for a few days, and we did little else when we met than discuss possibilities and probabilities concerning them. I did not venture into the coppice, and I saw no more of Louis Trafford till Saturday afternoon, when, being quietly seated in the summer−house learning next week's lessons, I heard a low, sweet whistle, and looking up, beheld the splendid boy with his concertina standing very near to me, under one of our own apple−trees.

"Where have you been, Miss Tyndale?" he asked at once. "I have been in the coppice every day, and many times a day, and you were not to be seen; and I wanted to ask you to come and be introduced to my mamma. I told her all about my Titania, and she wants to see you—won't you come now?"

"No, thank you," I answered gravely, privately furious at the mention of Titania. "I have my lessons to learn."

"Do you go to school?"

"Yes."

"Do you like it?"

"Yes."

"Are your lessons long and difficult, Miss Tyndale? Let me look at them."

And in an instant this audacious youth was in the summer−house turning over my school−books quite leisurely. I tried to feel indignant, but only succeeded in feeling foolish. And there was he, quite at his ease,

leaning over the table and chattering away as if he had known me all his life.

“I say, come and see mamma,” he said at length, shutting my French dictionary with a bang. “She is the very jolliest little mother going, and you will like her awfully, and I know she will like you—you are just her sort, I am sure. Do come now, it's wretchedly dull at Cuppage, with not a sou1 to speak to, only James.”

“Who is James?”

“James Lascelles. I told you before. He is mamma's eldest son, only he is nobody.”

“Nobody! and your elder brother, Mr. Trafford?”

“My half−brother. Mamma was married to Mr. Lascelles first, you understand, and they had this boy James. After Mr. Lascelles' death—a poor parson he was, as poor as a church mouse—mamma married my papa, Mr. James Trafford; and I am their son, and so heir to the estate. James is heir to nothing. His father didn't leave him a sixpence; he couldn't, for he had nothing to leave. James is a good fellow on the whole, and a terrible sap, you know, and I read with him; but he is deadly stupid. Come and see him. He is not a bit like me.”

“Thank you, but I am not sure that my uncle and my aunts would like it. I never pay visits except with their permission, and then only to my school−fellows.”

“Where is the revered old gentleman? and where are those honoured ladies your aunts? Take me to them, and I will make my request.”

I stood still, aghast at the youth's assurance. Ah! what would my aunts say to him? And how Aunt Mona would blame me. And yet I could not help it. But in spite of my misgivings I only admired the spirited style and independent air of Mr. Louis Trafford.

Another minute and he was out of the orchard and right in the midst of the kitchen garden. He was clearly about to invade the Perren household. I followed very slowly, determined that he should make his *début* without any assistance from me.

Chapter 18. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Slowly I entered the house, resolved that the adventurous youth should have plenty of time to make his explanations; and when at last I found my way into the drawing−room, the whole family in full conclave were assembled, and Louis Trafford in the midst thereof, haranguing them all by turns, in the easiest, most affable, most fascinating style imaginable.

I had lately read Thackeray's charming story “The Rose and the Ring”; and as I listened to my hero's well−framed sentences, and noticed the effect they produced upon his auditors, I began to wonder whether he might not carry about with him some fairy talisman which should cause him to find favour in the eyes of all whom he addressed. He took them all by storm. Even staid Aunt Judith could not quite repress the admiration she evidently felt for this graceful, beautiful boy, whose ready wit and pleasant flatteries were almost too much for the more susceptible and demonstrative Mona. Yes Louis Trafford had spells of his own by which he threw his glamour at will over those whose good opinions he desired to secure.

And for once in her life Aunt Mona was right when she exclaimed, with girlish vivacity, “He is irresistible!”

So irresistible they all three found him that I was permitted to pay the proposed visit without any further hesitation.

Only Aunt Judith said, “You are sure your mamma will not be surprised, Master Trafford?”

“Oh no, madame!” he replied with a bow that he might have practised with a view to winning the heart of any elderly maiden lady—a bow at once courtly and deferential. “My mamma, madame, is only too well pleased when I am good enough to provide myself with innocent amusement. I am sadly given to getting into mischief; and mamma is so glad when I find a companion who does not aid and abet me in this unfortunate propensity. Now, she will be quite sure that with Miss Tyndale I shall be safe; besides, grandmamma wants to see her.”

“I hope Mrs. Trafford is quite well?” said Mr. Perren, with quite a rosy hue upon his cheeks; I knew he could not bring himself to say—“your grandmamma.”

“Pretty well,” replied Louis. “Oh! indeed, I dare say she is quite well; only she fancies she is delicate and ailing, and never owns to being quite the thing. She was talking about you this morning, Mr. Perren.”

“Indeed! I am honoured.” And my uncle drew himself up, and stiffened his back, and looked disconcerted. I could understand that he had no very great reliance on the fair Julia's sense of honour, and that he feared she had been telling the story of his old love and its rejection. For years ago she *had* told it to all her acquaintances—a proceeding which surely degraded her rather than her luckless suitor. What can be baser, meaner, more indelicate than for a woman to play the coquette, and having drawn a man into the sincere avowal of his affection to publish the fact of his disappointment and boast her imaginary triumph? And as I very quickly discovered, Louis knew quite well that my uncle had once been his grandmother's lover.

But now it was necessary that I should prepare myself for my impromptu visit, for Aunt Mona insisted that I should change my frock and reduce my “mop,” as Dobbs uncivilly called my curly crop, to something like order. Aunt Judith, however, remarked that my frock would do well enough, as I was not going to pay a visit of ceremony, but that my hair must be made neat and my hands washed, for I had been playing with Grip before I sat down to my lessons.

My toilet was soon completed, and I ran downstairs half pleased and half cross at Mr. Trafford's pertinacity. He was chatting gaily to the elders, but as soon as I reappeared he sprung up with radiant face ready to escort me.

We did not go through the gardens and the coppice, but round by the front way; and for the first time I passed those high and heavy gates, through the bars of which I had often gazed so curiously, vainly wishing that I might enter to explore the wilderness beyond. They were immense gates, tall enough and grim enough to have guarded the portals of Giant Despair's castle; they were black and rusty with age and long neglect, and the stone pillars on either side were overgrown with bushy, unpruned ivy. Above the ivy, however, scowled two ferocious−looking beasts with wings and tails, which I erroneously supposed to be dragons, till gravely informed by Louis that they were *gryphons*, which mystical creatures had been from time immemorial the crest of the Catherwoods.

“For we are a very old family,” continued Mr. Trafford, sententiously, “one of the oldest in the county. The most ancient chronicles of Northshire make constant mention of the Catherwoods.”

“But you are a Trafford,” I replied, coolly, though really I was very much impressed by the claims of the Catherwoods, old families and long pedigrees being one of my pet weaknesses.

“I am as you say a Trafford by birth, and the Traffords are people of importance, not mere upstarts of yesterday. They have blue blood in their veins; but it is settled that I unite the honours of both houses. As soon as I am of age I assume, in conjunction with my own, which nothing could tempt me to resign, the name and armorial bearings of the Catherwoods.”

All this while we were slowly walking up the dark avenue which led to the grand entrance of Cuppage. The broad walk, which had once been gravel, was thick with moss and creeping weeds, and under the tall straggling trees mouldered still the leaves of the last autumn—perhaps of many previous autumns—for it was evident that no attempt had been made of late years to render the place even outwardly respectable.

Louis shrugged his shoulders as we ascended an immense flight of broken moss−grown steps leading up to a majestic portico supported by massive Doric pillars.

“Rather a desolate place this Cuppage of mine, Miss Tyndale. And where I am to find funds to put it in order—to 'restore it,' as people say—is more than I can tell I unless, indeed—”

“Unless?” I replied, interrogatively, with more curiosity, I fear, than good breeding.

“Unless I come into a fortune, which does not seem highly probable. The Cuppage Catherwoods have always suffered more or less from impecuniosity; they have a genius for scattering, and not the smallest taste for gathering. The Traffords are worse than the Catherwoods, inasmuch as they have no notion of the value of money, and are so dull at arithmetic that no one of them ever could learn to do a sum in compound addition.”

“It is quite easy!” I interrupted, eagerly. “I can show you in five minutes,”

“Thanks,” was the gentleman's courteous answer; “but knowing as I do the family defect I have resolved never to bother myself with figures. In fact, I never do bother myself about anything. And now let me take you to my mamma, and to Madam, my esteemed grandmamma.”

The huge door had been silently opened by a manservant in a sort of livery. He was a foreigner of very dark complexion, yet scarcely of the negro cast of feature, and he fell back obsequiously as his young master and I entered the hall, which was a vast and echoing place, all black oak, and grim, dark, family pictures, and gryphons, painted, and sculptured, and carved on chimney−piece, and frieze, and cornice, and indeed everywhere I looked. The floor was in lozenges of black and white marble, cracked and uneven; the ceiling was low and dark, and heavily paneled—a gryphon with monstrous claws being depicted on each panel; on one side was a huge fireplace, with rusty andirons for logs; and on the other side several dark passages yawned; and at the back was a broad stone staircase, having heavy stone balusters, and lighted by a large window of dingy−coloured glass. Though the sun was still an hour above the horizon, this gloomy apartment showed as in dim twilight, with mysterious recesses, and weird openings, and spectral−looking, high−backed chairs, shaped like the coronation chair, which I remembered to have seen in Westminster Abbey. It seemed to have grown suddenly dark since I entered the mansion, and I shuddered as the cold, damp air rushed past me; and I felt the dead]y chill, and could perceive a decided odour of mustiness, as if the very walls and timbers of the sombre old house were mouldy and decayed.

“Decidedly,” I thought, “I would rather live at Elmwood than at Cuppage. Though Elmwood be not half as large, or half or a quarter as grand; but then it is warm, and dry, and in good repair; and everything in it is, of its kind, good and substantial, and comparatively modern.”

Elmwood might be dull to a casual observer, and it had, doubtless, a ghostly flavour about it. No wonder, being next door to Cuppage, with only about half a furlong of lawn and wood and a buttressed wall between. As for Cuppage itself,

“O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear;
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear−
The place is haunted!”

We climbed the broad stone stairs, and came upon a bare wide landing−place, branching out into long dim corridors, right and left; and down one of these we took our way, I wondering whether I was to be ushered into one of the bedrooms. But Louis explained:

“Grandmamma has chosen what used to be the ladies' morning−room as a sitting−room; there really is no

room below stairs which could be used as a parlour. So we live up here, in the west wing; I am getting jolly tired of it already."

In another minute we came to the end of the gallery, and Louis opened a door, and led me into a good−sized, comfortably furnished apartment, looking to the west; though the blinds were partly down, because the rays of the descending sun streamed in full glory through the three large windows. There was a good fire burning in a grate that was fifty years old at least; the atmosphere of the room was delightful after those cold passage; for it was warm, and soft, and odorous with mignonette, which I saw arranged with a few late semi−wild flowers in pretty vases, that seemed quite too new and graceful to belong to Cuppage. By the fire sat two ladies—one who was not more than thirty−seven, and another, wrinkled, wizened, worn as any witch, and apparently of any advanced age under a hundred. The younger lady was still in widow's weeds. She was pale and fair, with pensive, sweet, brown eyes, and the loveliest smile it is possible to conceive; and she was like somebody I had seen before—so like that I involuntarily began to consider when or where we might have previously met. This lady was Mrs. James Trafford, Louis's own mother.

The lady on the opposite side, huddled up in shawls, was Mrs. Trafford, Louis's grandmother, and the beautiful Julia of my Uncle Perren's young romance. I had looked for grey hairs and faded bloom, and sharpened features. I knew quite well that at forty the fresh flower tints and the sylph−like figure of nineteen are wanting; and I knew also that at sixty the rich, ripe charms, which the British matron so frequently preserves till forty, or even later, must have passed away. But I was not prepared to see a bent, shrivelled, little old woman, older, to all appearance, than dear Aunt Rachel, with a dingy yellow skin and a million of wrinkles, and hard, thin lips that seemed to shut within them no end of disagreeable secrets. If she had had grey hair it would have been all the better for her; but her *chevelure* was nearly as dark as my own, and tolerably smooth and glossy. Of course I gave her all the credit of that hideous disguisement, "a front"; but the thick braids under her head−dress, for *caps* she eschewed, were all her own, and contrasting oddly with her dun−coloured face and harsh features, gave her an aspect almost ferocious. Her eyes were rather dark, with a shrewd, not to say sinister, expression: they looked at you piercingly, suspiciously, and sometimes with a gleam of malice. She had a firm, square chin, and hard, square jaws, and with these naturally a long upper lip. That she could ever have been beautiful I could not believe, for she had not a single good feature, though I daresay her eyes might have been bright enough in the days of her youth. I forgot, or rather I did not know, how long residence in a hot climate renders sallow the most delicate complexion; nor how the beauty that depends entirely on colouring and sparkle dies out as utterly as fade away the glowing hues of a landscape when the red sunset gleam is gone.

Louis introduced me in due form, and Mrs. James Trafford welcomed me most kindly, finding me a low cushioned chair, and taking my hat from me, and saying how very kind it was of me to come to bear Louis company.

"Oh!" interrupted Louis; "Cuppage and Elmwood were always good friends, I know; so I thought I would resume the alliance without loss of time. Though I am not sure that I could have ventured on the invasion of Elmwood, if grandmamma had not told me to fetch Miss Perren—I beg pardon, Miss Tyndale—to tea, Well, Madam, I have done your bidding."

Mrs. Trafford, I must mention, was generally called "Madam" in the household, and by−and−by in the village, to distinguish her from her daughter−in−law; and Louis not unfrequently gave her the title, which she evidently preferred to that of grandmamma. There was one person who invariably addressed her as *Madam,* Of him I shall speak directly.

"Come here, child!" said Madam, in a thin, cracked voice; "let me look at you."

I rose and walked up to her, my cheeks flushing, and my head set a little proudly. It is not altogether reassuring to be called up for inspection, and I did not like the dark eyes that peered at me, as if I had been some singular specimen of humanity. I would have gone back to my seat by Mrs. James, but a pair of strong, bony hands clutched my wrist and held me fast. "Don't be in a hurry, child, I shall not eat you!" Somehow that thin, wiry voice set my teeth on edge, and made me shiver in spite of myself. "I want to know all about you," she continued; "what are you to the Perrens?"

"I am their adopted niece."

"Humph! A very curious notion for an old bachelor and two old maids. Are they very strict with you?"

"No; they are very kind. I am very happy with them, and I love them."

“Have you no relations of your own?”

“I believe I have some on my mother's side, but I do not know where they are; I belong entirely to my aunts and to my uncle, for they wish me to call them so.”

“Did they buy you, then?”

“No, ma'am,” I replied, indignantly; “they gave me their home when I had no other, and they took care of me just out of kindness—nothing more. They have been so very good to me that I can never pay them back.”

“Does Matthew Perren ever talk about me?”

“I have heard him mention your name,” was my guarded answer.

I was determined not to let this disagreeable old woman know how much she had been spoken of, nor how faithfully my uncle had clung to the memory of early days; I felt quite sure that she would mock at him even now.

For more than a quarter of an hour by the timepiece did Madam continue to question me about the Perrens and about myself. It was a regular cross−examination, and I was getting something more than weary of it when Louis interfered.

“I say, grandmamma, you have kept Miss Tyndale under fire long enough. I am sure she is very amiable, and very discreet to answer as she has done. Do let her alone now. I want to talk to her, for I confess I brought her here quite as much on my own account as on yours. I never had the blues so awfully in any place!”

No one excepting Louis, as I afterwards discovered, would have dared to address Mrs. Trafford in this tone. Her temper was exacting and vindictive, and if people offended her she made them suffer for it. No want of respect, either real or imaginary, was ever overlooked by her; no dereliction of duty, actual or supposed, was forgotten. She remembered against you all your transgressions, and was perpetually reminding you of your faults. In short, I have never known a woman who so thoroughly understood the unwomanly art of dealing small stabs; and she was most dangerous when apparently most complacent. I was positively cross, I was so bitterly disappointed in Julia Catherwood; for I had had a romance of my own concerning her, which I kept all to myself, and cherished in secret, till we met face to face, and I was *désillusionée*! Surely my uncle would be disillusioned likewise when he met once more the idealised idol of his youth!

We had tea in due time: not such a tea as I was accustomed to at home, where, in conformity with the Northshire usage, a thoroughly excellent repast was spread evening by evening—tea and coffee with abundance of good milk and cream—for we kept a nice little Alderney—cakes of various kinds, hot and cold, rich and plain; preserves and marmalades, honey and boiled eggs, and very frequently sliced tongue or ham, or raised pie, or potted meat, or anything else that was ordered, or that cook in her wisdom thought it advisable to send up. The Elmwood teas were as substantial as they were delicious; the Cuppage teas, as I made my first acquaintance with them that Saturday night, were frugal, and not at all appetising.

There was no urn, only an old smoked kettle bubbling on the hob. The tea, which was infused in a battered antique silver teapot, on which a whole army of gryphons flourished, was not particularly nice. There was thin bread−and−butter, and thick bread−and−butter, and dry toast about as tough as indiarubber, and some grubby−looking apples which Louis himself had picked up in the orchard. I noticed that there was set one cup and saucer more than was required, and that the table was laid for five persons, whereas there were but four, and I wondered who was absent. Then suddenly I remembered the “James,” of whom Louis had spoken so slightingly; doubtless he was the person who should have occupied the fifth place at the board.

“Is not Mr. Lascelles come in? ” inquired Mrs. James Trafford of the servant who attended. And, the reply being in the negative, Madam instantly observed that people who chose to wander about at meal times could not be hungry, and deserved to be left fasting. But Mrs. James quietly desired the woman to keep the teapot by the fire, though I could see she looked uneasy as she gave the order.

“In my young days,” snapped Madam, “boys and girls had to come to their food at the right time, or go without. The world has gone crazy now, I think.”

No one answered, and I was just thinking how dull it was, when the door opened, and a young man made his appearance—the defaulter himself, Mr. James Lascelles.

He had none of his half−brother's beauty; he was not strikingly tall; he was slight, and he stooped, as if from weariness or weakness; his hair was of no particular colour, but it was very fine and soft, and scarcely curled at all, when compared with Louis's rich rippling waves of gold. He was pale, yet fair, and he had a moustache and beard just coming, which made him look, as I thought, quite a man. He was like and yet unlike his mother; there

was the same delicacy of feature, and the same refined expression, and the same sweetness about the mouth; but the eyes were different—they were not brown, but grey, and not so pensive as they were deep; and, oh so wonderfully gentle, kind, and true! Somehow I found myself looking from the brilliant Louis to the less attractive James, who said very little, but seemed to enjoy thick bread−and−butter amazingly.

Child as I was, I saw in this young man's face truth and goodness; and instinctively I recognised in him nobler and higher traits of character than those displayed by Louis; and yet—yet I went with the stream. I took Louis for my hero, I submitted myself like the rest to his fascinations, and acknowledged his sway, as did apparently every other person with whom he consorted, except his mother and his brother; and afterwards, when she came to talk to him, Aunt Rachel.

Mrs. James Trafford dearly loved her handsome, wilful boy; but I soon found out that James was her darling—the son for whom she lived, and in whose love she rested. I do not know that I have ever seen a mother and son what these two were to each other—he so tender, yet so reverential; so thoughtful for her comfort; so devoted, yet so implicitly obedient! She so trusting, so confiding, so sympathising, so deeply, passionately loving! Louis was his grandmother's pet, her spoiled child, and oftentimes her tyrant.

Before I left Cuppage that evening I had learnt that Edmund Catherwood had been dead some years; that his widow and daughter still lived in London; and that the girl was “as rich as a Rothschild, and as ugly as a Hottentot Venus!” Such, at least, was Mr. Louis's dictum. “I have seen her,” he whispered, confidentially; “and she is as red−headed and freckled and snub−nosed a creature as you ever saw! And *such a vixen*! But then she has a million of money!”

And in default of the disinherited elder branch, and failing male issue of the younger, Mr. Louis Trafford, Julia's only grandchild, was liege lord of Cuppage

Chapter 19. SUNDAY EVENING

“I don't like her at all—not at all!” was my unqualified reply, when my uncle and I found ourselves alone, and he inquired what I thought of the elder Mrs. Trafford.

“I am sorry you do not like her,” was his answer; “but you know, Chryssie, you are naturally very vehement in your likings and dislikings; perhaps when you come to know her better you may feel differently towards her.”

“I think not; I am pretty sure not,” I returned, shaking my wise head with all the rash and positive certainty of my age. “ I never could like any one so ugly.”

“Fie, Chryssie!” was Mr. Perren's reproof. “I thought my Chryssie had more sense than to attach an undue value to mere good looks. We are all as God made us, and not to be despised because we are not as handsome as are some of our fellow−creatures. But, as for Julia being *ugly,* it is out of the question. Of course at her years one cannot look for the fresh bloom and brilliance of youth; I dare say it has all passed away. Bless me! I remember Judith with a colour like summer roses; and look at her now! But Julia would always be a fine, personable woman; and she is not so old. Oh, no! she is several months younger than I am.”

“I assure you, uncle, that Mrs. Trafford is a very ugly old woman, and you will say so when you see her. I know you will.”

I saw he was getting angry, so I hastened to change the subject, telling him about the house itself, which he had not entered since the family went away. I described the dank, overgrown garden walks; what had been the lawn covered with coarse grass and weeds and scarlet poppies; the mossy stone steps; the dark, weird hail; the grim old staircase; and the melancholy rooms and echoing long corridors.

“Ah!” he said; “it has been gradually falling to decay as long as I remember it. The fortunes of the family have been declining for more than a century. And you say this boy is the heir?”

I told him all I knew. He shook his head sadly when I had finished speaking, and said, “So Edmund is dead too; and Horace dead! And they were much younger than myself. Dear me! how the generations pass away! We all do fade as a leaf, and our life is even as a vapour. And it will be our turn someday; we cannot tell how soon. It is very sad—very sad, Chryssie.”

“Is it?” I said. “Well, uncle, I do not want to die now, because I should like to do something with my life, and it is all before me. But I think when I begin to get old I shall feel like that verse Aunt Rachel taught me.”

“What verse, child?”

“ It is this—

“'One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er;
I am nearer home to−day
Than I ever have been before.'“

“Nearer *home*! Ah! if one could but feel it so. If one were but sure of heaven! Is there only one verse, Chryssie?”

I repeated the whole hymn, comparatively little known then, though now so familiar in all Christian circles. My uncle seemed struck; and he repeated over and over again the closing lines—

“For it may be I'm near home,—
Nearer now than I think!”

The next day being Sunday we saw the younger Mrs. Trafford and her two sons in church. After service we met, and Louis introduced his mother, but took no notice of James, who was standing quietly by. Madam was not well enough to come out; she was a martyr to neuralgia. And in the afternoon, as we walked home together for the second time, Louis said to Mr. Perren, “I say, sir, come in and see grandmamma. She asked why I did not bring you this morning,”

Greatly to my surprise, Mr. Perren went. He took my hand, intimating that I was to accompany him, and we passed through the great gloomy gates, and between the shattered gryphons, into the wild, neglected grounds of Cuppage.

My aunts excused themselves; they would have the honour of waiting on Mrs. Trafford next day, if she felt

equal to receive them. Or, in any event, they certainly would leave their cards. “I should as soon think of leaving visiting−cards at the Coliseum, or in the banqueting−hall of any ruined castle,” said Louis, as we walked down the avenue, where the frogs and lizards seemed to be enjoying a promenade concert. Mr. Perren buttoned up his coat and shivered as we crossed the great hall and staircase, that echoed strangely to our steps and voices. In three minutes we were in the presence of Madam, who was sitting by a scorching fire, huddled up in Indian shawls, with an enormous fan in one hand, which she used as a screen.

“Matthew Perren, I declare!” said the old lady, vivaciously, extending her disengaged hand. “What made you wait for an invitation? Why did you not come in this morning?” Then, without giving him a second for reply, she rattled on, “Oh, dear! dear! what a horrible climate this is! and what a view!”—pointing to the windows—“that everlasting sea, cold, and restless, and noisy, and so monotonous! And how this place has run to ruin! of all the wildernesses that ever were! It is most depressing, this piercing cold, the shrieking wind, and that *triste* sea. Ah! it is all *triste* together, but my grandson's interest demanded the sacrifice; it was necessary that his estate should be looked after, and here we are! Really, Matthew, you are not so much altered; the climate of India plays the very—” I believe she was going to use a naughty word, for she did indulge in expletives occasionally; but thinking better of it she finished up inelegantly with—“plays the very *bear* with one's good looks!”

If she expected a compliment she was disappointed, for Matthew Perren had none to pay. I am not sure that I knew it then, but I did afterwards—the dream of a lifetime was for ever dispelled. The woman whom he had pictured to himself as excelling all other women of her period, at least in the particulars of grace and beauty, was before him once more, looking old enough to be his mother, in spite of her dark hair and her bright headdress, composed of costly lace and what I afterwards discovered to be artificial pomegranate blossoms. She was haggard, worn, fretful, repining; and, more than all, she was false! Her smile was false, her affectation of gaiety was false, her voice had a false ring and jarred upon the nerves; even her “hand−shake” had a false feel about it, and impressed one unpleasantly.

The conversation naturally turned on old times, and Madam inveighed bitterly against her dead husband, and I think she seemed to be deploring the fate which separated her from Elmwood. Had I not known to the contrary, I should have gathered from her half−implied regret and her half−uttered sentences that in those deplored days of her youth Julia Catherwood had been wronged. She talked and talked, very curiously I thought, though I did not of course understand a fourth part of what she had said, for she was at the same time reckless and enigmatical in her speech. But I could see that my uncle grew uneasy; he glanced at me as if he wished me somewhere else, and at last he said, “Suppose the young people took a walk, Mrs. Trafford! Chrissie would like to go into the garden, I am sure.”

Madam nodded and spoke to Louis in French, and forthwith we went away into the grounds. But as we parted—for Mr. Perren told me to return to Elmwood by the coppice—I overheard the lady say coquettishly,

“Mrs. Trafford! you are formal indeed, Matthew! I thought we were always to be Matthew and Julia!” And I heard my uncle reply, nervously yet coldly, “You became Mrs. Trafford to me nearly forty years ago; it is too late to alter now.”

“Suppose those two old things should get up a courting match?” laughed Louis, as we went down the stairs. “I wonder what kind of a *réchauffé* old love makes?”

“Oh, don't!” I cried, involuntarily shrinking. There was something in his tone which repelled and almost disgusted me. And the idea of such a thing, though I had entertained it before the arrival of the Traffords, seemed now altogether horrible. I think Louis saw he had offended me, for he made every effort to please me as we walked up and down the mossy walks and terraces, and along the famous *berceau,* where the rank grass grew so long as to be inconvenient. And I soon forgot my hasty displeasure, and thought that Louis Trafford was as charming as he was handsome. We were standing by the ruins of an old apiary, when Thexton came and asked to speak to Mr. Trafford; the full title was given him, I perceived, just as if he were already of full age. At the same moment James Lascelles came up from the desolate rose−garden.

“Here, I say, Jem,” cried the young lord of Cuppage, “take charge of Miss Tyndale, will you? I must go with Thexton for a few minutes. She is going home by the coppice; mind you see her safe into her own grounds.”

And before James could assent, or I could declare that I needed no escort, my hero was gone, and I felt uncomfortable enough, left with the young man to whom I had scarcely spoken, and whose grave, quiet manners rather awed me.

“Louis is rather unceremonious,” he said, looking after his brother with a smile. “You will excuse him, Miss Tyndale; he is the most impulsive creature in the world, and would rush out of the presence of royalty itself if he remembered that he wanted a new dog−collar.”

I made no answer, for I felt shy and constrained. Mr. Lascelles seemed to me so thoroughly grown−up; and the society of young grown−up people I had never affected. I did not mind how old my companions were, and I was at my ease generally with boys and girls of my own age; but of young men and young women I stood somewhat in dread. And yet the kind grey eyes, and the quiet, tranquil expression of James Lascelles's face reassured me. I looked at him, as he made a path for me through the low, straggling branches in the orchard, and once more recognised the beauty of goodness—simple goodness, which shone out in every trait and lineament! I felt that I might admire Louis, that I might worship him even, hero−worship being one of my inherent proclivities; but I must perforce respect James.

He stopped in the coppice to gather some pale harebells that grew on a little rocky projection He offered them to me, and I took them saying how very pretty they were!

“More than that; they are lovely!” he replied, “and they suit so well with this quiet wood, and that calm sea, and the still, sweet Sunday evening; I never saw a more peaceful landscape.”

He was right; the spirit of repose brooded over the sea and shore, and filled the silent blue overhead; and peace rested on the grave yet cheerful face of him who stood beside me; and there came into my mind, I know not why, the verse, “Great peace have they who love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them.” I felt sure that James Lascelles was one of Aunt Rachel's sort of Christians. I had no right, I dare say, to make such distinctions; but I never met with any person whose life manifestly glorified God without thinking of Aunt Rachel, and her beautiful, consistent piety, which approved itself in patient waiting and meek endurance, as well as in hoping and in doing. And religion, as I soon found, was not in James's heart only, but on his lips; not that there was the smallest approach to cant in his conversation; and he seldom used those phrases which seem to be a sort of *shibboleth* among too many professors; but he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, and he longed to make others sharers of the joy and blessing which he had found. And now he said, “How nicely they sang that hymn, 'Thine earthly Sabbaths, Lord, we love.' I never heard it to that tune before, Miss Tyndale.”

“That is the tune to which we always sing it at Stanbridge, Mr. Lascelles.”

“Indeed! it is a pretty tune, and a good old hymn, and so suitable on a quiet Sunday evening like this. Sunday is the golden day of all the week.”

“I heard some one say a little while ago that she wished every day were a Sunday.”

“Oh, that would not do; God never meant it to be all Sundays. This is not the time for rest but for labour; and to be happy we should be able to thank God as much for Monday and Tuesday and the other days as for Sundays, which give us just the rest we need, and strengthen us to go on with our labour again.”

“And yet labour is the curse.”

“Oh, no! No, I think not. Toil, which means excessive labour, is in itself a curse, I suppose, though I believe that too is often turned to blessing. But honest labour—work, and plenty of it—is in itself a blessing for which we must thank the good Lord, even as we thank Him for repose.”

“But suppose our work is disagreeable work?”

“If it is not unlawful work we must try to like it, or at any rate to do it patiently and bravely, as *'for His sake.'* And going about one's daily tasks in this spirit it is wonderful how crooked things become straight, and rough places plain—of themselves, it would seem, if we looked no deeper than second causes; but we know that God has all the threads of our life in His hand, and that we have only to leave them there in faith and love—and lo, presently, the perplexed, confused tangle is wrought into a perfect, glorious pattern. I have heard old people say that even here they began to see how things were shaped to one great end.”

“You should talk to Aunt Rachel!” I said, eagerly. “That is just what she says. She is very old, nearly eighty, you know; and she says now it is like standing on a hill and seeing all the path by which she has reached so nearly the end. She could not see it once, she says; she could only get on a step at a time, not knowing whither the next turning would lead her. And there were other ways she wanted to take, only they were hedged up, and she was kept in the one path that took her right.”

“I should like very much to see your Aunt Rachel. Yes, that is the true wisdom—'one step's enough for me!'“ And he looked fixedly across the wide waste of darkening water to where the ruddy beams of the revolving light

flashed through the purple shadows; and I knew, though I said no word, that his soul, filled with the peace which passeth understanding, communed silently with God, his Father, and his King—the King beneath whose banners he had taken service. “Many a year is in its grave” since that placid hour when he and I watched together the rising of the evening star; but its memory is precious and hallowed to me still. In the dark days that came afterwards I remembered, with a strange, sad, irrepressible yearning, that quiet season in the little wood on that calm autumn Sunday evening.

“But it is nice to see our way before us!” I said, presently, with a sort of inward misgiving that the road which seemed to me so smooth and so straightforward now might anon turn aside into thorny, desert places. He answered, “Yes, we do like it; but liking and having are often widely apart. It is good for us to have to take God's word on trust, and to wait for the blessing which He has promised us. But the happiness will come if we only look for it; for God means His creatures to be happy.”

“All of them?”

“Yes, all of them. And we all look for happiness; we strive after it in our various ways, and according to our individual estimate of happiness. We hope for it, we long for it, and we certainly shall and do attain it.”

“Not always in this life?

“In this life, I think; for a person who is truly miserable here could scarcely be happy in the next world. Suffering does not necessitate misery, you know.”

“Does it not? I thought it did. I am sure if I suffered continually I should be miserable. I was miserable once, Mr. Lascelles—very miserable; and I was miserable because I suffered.”

“You suffered without God; that is why you were miserable.”

“Yes, it was so. I did not know God, I did not care for Him. I did not try to please Him, and I never thought of going to Him for help and comfort.”

“No wonder you were miserable! And in reality you would have been scarcely more happy had all things gone with you exactly as you wished. No one can be happy out of God. That is the great abiding truth which so many fail to recognise, and so spend long years in running after myths and chasing phantoms, only to say at last, with weary hands and feet, and heartsick with hope deferred, 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.' But in Him is fulness of blessing, and peace, and joy, and *satisfaction*! For it is satisfaction for which we yearn; it is but another and more expressive name for happiness—we all want to be satisfied. And we shall be satisfied to a great extent here on earth if we abide in God, and fully satisfied when we awake in His likeness.”

When I got home I found my uncle already returned, He looked vexed and fretted; “out of sorts,” Mona remarked. His visit to Cuppage had certainly not agreed with him. He did not mention Mrs. Trafford's name; indeed, he declined all conversation, and on the plea of a severe headache went early to his room.

But some days afterwards he told me that I was right. Julia was wretchedly changed for the worse—for the worse in every way. He should not care if he never saw her again.

But notwithstanding this the old intimacy between Cuppage and Elmwood was revived, and we saw a great deal of each other as time passed on. James continued to act as Louis's tutor all through the winter. In the spring the boy was to go to Eton or to Harrow—it was scarcely decided which. Cuppage was not, as Louis said, “restored”; that was left for a future day. Still, much was done in the way of repair, and the workmen were about for months. The state apartments were left untouched, but suites of smaller rooms were made not only habitable but comfortable.

And the garden was gradually reduced to order. Louis and I planned and worked unceasingly, till the grass was green and smooth once more, and the flower beds radiant with bloom. And a regular gardener was engaged, and the old trees were pruned or cut down, and new ones planted. One greenhouse was rebuilt, and several of the frames were made serviceable again. But we agreed to leave the coppice pretty nearly as it was, only thinning the brushwood and clearing the main paths, and putting a seat or two on which to rest in damp weather.

Chapter 20. THE MORNING SUN

It was a dreary winter that followed that bright mellow autumn; from November to March we had incessantly either deep snow, bitter frost, or fog, or deluges of rain. We were shut up in the house week after week, and early in the new year Aunt Judith had a terrible attack of influenza, which seemed to be infectious, for one after another we all fell sick, and suffered more or less from the same tedious malady. We all had it, servants included, and Dobbs was so seriously ill for several days that her recovery seemed doubtful; my uncle, too, had a very sharp time of it, attended with bronchitis, and he declared that it made quite an old man of him. Aunt Rachel was the one who had it most lightly, so lightly that after the first day or two we did not much concern ourselves about her, believing her to be quite as well as usual.

But when we were all quite convalescent, and Dobbs even getting up her strength again, it struck us that Aunt Rachel showed no symptoms of rallying; on the contrary, the weakness, which we had attributed to influenza, gradually increased, till she was entirely confined to her bed—never more, as we felt, to leave it. She said so little about her ailments, and we were so accustomed to her afflicted state, that we were quite taken by surprise when, on one of the first bright days of the early spring, the doctor told us that beyond all doubt this was “the beginning of the end,” that dear Aunt Rachel's days on earth were fast drawing to a close.

“Does she know?” I wondered to myself, as I heard the sad intimation—sad for us, who would remain, but most blessed for her who so soon would enter into her Master's joy.

That very evening I was answered. I went to sit with her while Hagar did some business in the village, and I had no sooner seated myself by her bedside than she said, “Chryssie, my dear, do you know I am going to leave you?”

“Perhaps you will get better,” I replied, thinking of her all but fatal illness two years before, and with a sort of foolish hope in my heart that saying so might somehow bring it to pass.

“No, no!” she answered, quietly; “there will be no turning back now. I am come to the Borderland; I am going down into the valley, and I can hear the deep murmur of the river. My God is calling me to Himself. Don't cry, Chryssie! when one is tired it is so good to go home.”

“I shall miss you so, dear Aunt Rachel; you have been so good to me. I owe you, oh, so much. If I ever go where you are going—home—it will be your hand that led me there.”

“Oh, no, my child; not my hand, not mine, a stronger Hand than mine, the Hand that even now is holding mine, oh! so softly, so securely! the Hand that will never let me go till on the other side of the river I see the golden hills of God. Though I do believe, my dear, that it was ' for your sake I came back, as it were, two years ago. You needed a human friend, and our Father chose me for the service. He honoured me by giving me more work for Him, when it seemed as if I could do nothing more. But one is never too old or too feeble for the Lord's work. He gives the strength and the ability, the opportunity and the inclination. All is from Him, and by Him, and to His glory. Now, my dear, I want to ask you one question. Are you on the Lord's side?”

“I don't know, aunt; I hope I am, but I am not sure.”

“Do you not know which way your face is turned? Are you looking straight on to the place where Jesus dwells, or are you looking the other way—to a land where the shadow of death rests always?”

“I think my face is turned the right way, for I want to belong to Jesus. I dare not say that I am His, but I am sure I love Him.”

“If you love Him all is well. Keep close to Him, Chryssie. Lean on Him always, trust Him always, and follow in His footsteps. He has said 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'“

“You have been faithful, Aunt Rachel.”

No, my child, not always; but *He* has been faithful. Through youth, and through middle life, and now in extreme old age, I have proved His love and His great tenderness. He has never let me go, even when in my sin and folly I would fain have wandered away from Him. He has kept me all the journey through, in health, in sickness, in ease, in suffering, in life—and now in this—which we call death—this putting off the weeds of the flesh, and the putting on of immortality.”

“Some people are very much afraid of death, aunt.”

“Yes! I have known people who could scarcely bear an allusion to it. Even old people sometimes will try to put away the thought of the enemy whom shortly they must face. I am very sorry for them. I know no more pitiable sight than an old man or an old woman clinging desperately to earth, feeling, as days, and weeks, and months go on, the ground, as it were, slipping away from under them, and experiencing within themselves all those infirmities which portend the breaking up of the clay tabernacle, and knowing that very soon—they know not how soon—they must face the foe, whose stealthy footsteps they can hear, drawing nearer and nearer every hour.”

“But can they help it? I have heard Aunt Judith say there are some people who constitutionally fear death.”

“There is a mere physical fear of the article of death which I am sure *is* constitutional, Chryssie, and which it must be very difficult to overcome. It is in the nature of some people to shrink sensitively from the smallest pain, and they really cannot help it, and we ought to have patience with them, though, I must confess, they are never nice people to live with, because they are, as a rule, intensely selfish, and there is something in a downright cowardly spirit with which it is not easy to sympathise. But it usually comes to pass with those who fear only the article of dying, and not that which comes afterwards, that God has mercy on His feeble ones, and, when the trial comes, gives special strength or takes away fear of death. Besides, people, I am persuaded, exaggerate the actual pains of dying. I do believe that in the last struggle one will suffer less than in previous illnesses that did not end fatally.”

“But those, auntie, who fear death, not so much for the pangs which may attend it, as from dread of the awful change?”

“My dear!” and she spoke very solemnly, “I confess I cannot understand it. I cannot understand Christian people being afraid to go to God! I think if the ties to life are very strong and very sweet, if one must leave behind dearly loved ones, and work unfinished, it must need great faith, when the Master calls, to answer without a murmur, and with a perfect acquiescence in the Holy will! Only God Himself can so softly draw the soul that it shall calmly let go all to which it clung so fondly, and, turning to Him, find in His glorious presence more than full recompense for what is lost—lost only for a little while, to be restored by−and−by, under conditions far more glorious than any which we can imagine here. But when one by one friends and kindred have gone before; when closest ties have already been broken; when the day is fairly done and the shadows of evening fall around; then how any one, in whom is the hope that maketh not ashamed, can want to linger on in the cold dim twilight, I cannot comprehend!”

“Do you think God will receive those who go to Him unwillingly, those who would stay away from Him to the very last moment?”

“I think God will receive many whom their fellow Christians judge harshly, because *He knows all*! He has seen the secret struggles; He has heard the anguished prayers; He has witnessed the voiceless agony of those who are groping their way heavenwards. Many years ago, Chryssie, I knew some children who had been brought from India in their infancy. They were twins, a boy and a girl; they lived with kind friends, they had all they wanted; they were as happy as they could be. They did not at all remember their father: their mother was dead, Of course, India, though the land of their birth, and their father's land, was nothing to them; they had not the faintest recollection of the home where they were born and they loved England and all that was English enthusiastically. In addition to all this, I must tell you that for some years—the years that intervened between early childhood and blooming youth—they heard nothing of or from their father; for he was taken prisoner, and by some accident of war his fate, for I know not how long, was unknown, and could not be ascertained. And the children, in the home of their adoption, were content, though they rejoiced when they heard that their father was no longer a captive; he was to them a name, nothing more! But the time arrived when he claimed his children, and he wrote to them to come out to him. Oh! how unwillingly they went; they went not from choice, but as a duty which they could not evade. They were not even resigned; they were miserable, and meant to be so; and at last the girl was carried on board the ship that was to take her to India, in a state of insensibility; the young man was so overcome that he could not speak, and he wept like a child as the shores of England faded from his aching view. Well, Chryssie, the brother and sister reached India in safety, and they met their father and were folded in his embrace, and gathered to his heart, and they felt that he was indeed their father, and they loved him. Some time afterwards they wrote to their friends in England, saying how happy they were with their father, 'their own father!' and the girl wrote, 'How foolish and naughty we were, but it was *because we did not know our Father!* Now that we do know him we

would not for anything desert him.' And that is just how it is, Chryssie, with the Christian people who fear to die; they do not know their Father, and so they are afraid to go to Him, and would rather stay on earth, though life has become rather a burden than a pleasure. They will see His face, and then they will wonder at themselves, and there will be no regretful looks turned backwards towards the land they have left."

"But can such people be Christian people?"

"Beware, Chryssie, of measuring people by your own standard. Do you know the legend of the Bed of Procrustes?"

"Yes, auntie, I know it very well. I had it to translate into French just before the holidays."

"That fable, my dear, has a deep moral significance, as indeed have all those curious stories of ancient mythology. There is some truth underlying all of them, even the wildest and most foolish. Chryssie, don't let the Bed of Procrustes be your stumbling−block; do you understand me?"

"I think I do. I must not, as you say, judge people by my own standard. I must not think they are wrong because they do not think just as I do; nor shake my head at them because their sentiments, and tastes, and desires may be opposed to mine."

"Exactly! You are never to say—no, not if you live to be ninety—'This way in which I go is the right way, and all who walk not in it are going wrong!' Everybody cannot feel as you feel or think as you think; as there are diversities of gifts, there are also diversities of natures. So, do not unchristianise people who do something you would not do, or believe something which has no place in your belief. Let this spirit be far from you, Chryssie; it is a most unlovely one, and may prove a stumbling−block to weak brethren. Whatever you do, as you grow older, do not set up a Procrustean bed, to stretch or to mutilate—souls upon; and always take into consideration the manner in which people have been educated, and the influences under which they have been trained."

That was the last regular conversation I had with Aunt Rachel, for I was never again alone with her for many minutes, and a day or two afterwards she began to sink so rapidly that we knew the end must be fast approaching. But she told me once or twice that she suffered far less than she had done for many years; she had very little pain, only she was extremely weak, and so drowsy that she scarcely knew how the hours passed; though now and then she brightened up, and seemed full of joy, and spoke freely and distinctly. To the very last her intellects were clear, her calm, quiet faith unclouded; and to the very last, even so late as the afternoon of the day on which she died, she interested herself in our doings, and was pleased to know such little household matters as it had been our custom to confide to her. Never was a more unselfish creature than Aunt Rachel, and that was one great secret of her happiness, and the largest source of her influence over others. She was not wrapped up in herself; she did not close her heart against the joys and woes of others who were in the world, from which she was secluded. The public weal, the welfare of our neighbours, the household events, had each and all a place in her thoughts. She was interested in everything we told her, for she had most emphatically

"A heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise,"

She seldom spoke of herself, she never dwelt on her sufferings, she never talked about her maladies in the wearisome, nauseous way which makes a visit to some invalids little better than an act of penance. The love of God and of her fellow−creatures filled her whole soul; there was no space for selfish lamentations and vain repinings. When her paroxysms of pain were most violent we were always locked out, and Hagar alone remained with her; and even she was occasionally sent into another room when the agony was at its worst; for her mistress said, "She can do nothing for me; all I require is within reach; why should I distress her by the sight of sufferings she cannot alleviate? Besides, I can bear it better left alone with God."

But now the terrible pain had ceased, the long discipline was over, and she lay dying as peacefully and gently as a child lulled on its mother's bosom sinks to sleep. Though from time to time the eyes that were growing dim flashed as with exultation, and a glow of triumph spread itself over the aged face on which the pallor of death rested; and often she would try to join her trembling fingers, and say over and over again, as if the words were as new wine to her spirit, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

One evening, I remember, Mona, who sat by her, said something about the shadow of death. I shall never forget her answer!—"Shadows! I am going to the light; and *all the shadows are behind me*!"

God grant that when I, when you, my friends, who read this page, come to this world's extremest verge, and earth is fading away, and our feet are on the river's brink, we too may see the Light shining steadfastly across the

waves, the way before us all illumined by the glory that is not of sun, or moon, or star; and *the shadows all behind us*!

Later that night, she sent me to her old walnut−wood bureau, and bade me take from it some MS. papers which I should find. I brought them to her; one or two had not long been written, for they were in her own weak, pencilled characters, and I believe I was the only one present to whom they were really legible. As I turned them over she fixed upon one, and said, “Read it, Chryssie; I do not know who wrote it*, but whoever it may be, to him or to her I owe thanks. It gave me strength and comfort when I first saw it; and I think I should like to hear it once more. It is just what I have been trying to feel, what Christ has given me grace to feel, what I feel now, that I am going to see His face.”

I read:—

“Little remains to do as day grows late—
Only to trust, to love with all thy heart,
To bless like Christ the Lord, to stand and wait,
And when He calls, depart.

“Oh, accept, my God,
Thy servant's feeble sacrifice of praise,
For that Thy goodness has to me allowed
The fulness of my days.

“I praise and bless Thee—bless Thee for the gain
Which of Thy mercy life has been to me,
Bless Thee for joy, bless Thee for grief and pain,
Which brought me nearer Thee.

“Lord when Thou willest, call Thy servant hence,
But to the last let love my being move;
Unto the last, like Thee, let me dispense
From Thy great treasury love.”

*Mary Howitt.

On the last evening of her life she watched for a few minutes the beautiful sunset light upon the sea, and said to Hagar—“I am going to the setting sun, Hagar, for beyond its sinking glory is the eternal day. Oh, how sweet it is when God calls, how pleasant to go home! And all these fourscore years He has kept rue, and guided me, and led me step by step to this hour. Not one of His promises has ever failed me, no good thing has ever been withheld. He has dealt bountifully with me; praised be His name!”

Now, I not only comprehended, but saw with my own eyes, what was the “victory” that was given, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It was the victory over sin, over weakness, over the infirmities of the flesh, over death itself. True is it that the sting of death is sin, but not more true than that Christ conquered sin, and so robbed death of all its bitterness—death no longer the king of terrors, but a kind, strong angel, who when he lifts his veil, shows the face of a kind friend. No longer does he gather round him the black shades of impenetrable night, but about him float the rosy clouds of dawn, that will quickly melt away into the sunshine of heaven.

When my bedtime came I wanted to stay on, but they said she would most likely remain through the night, and I had better not sit up any longer; so I kissed the dear, pale face, believing that I should not see it again till it was still and cold in death, and went away. But early in the morning, just as the first sunbeams were tingeing the waves, and while the stars still burned faintly in the clear, grey sky, Hagar came to my bedside, and told me that if I wished to say good−bye to Aunt Rachel I must come at once.

With a beating heart and a little natural tremor I went. I need not have been afraid; it was the angel in most loving guise, not the dark−robed foe, who stood beside that bed. She had asked for me and also for Mona, for Mona had slipped away—she could not see any one die, she declared piteously; “She did not mean to be unkind, but she could not stay; she could not bear the sight of death.” But Aunt Rachel had said, “Let the child come; there will be nothing to terrify her; let her see how easy and how sweet it is to die in Christ.”

When I came I think she knew me, or at least knew that I was present, but she did not speak; she was past that now; those pale lips were to unclose no more till they joined in the chorus of the redeemed.

My uncle put back the curtains and drew up the blind, and there were the early sunbeams flooding all the east,

though, large and lustrous still, hung the morning star in the deep purple zenith. Ever since the morning star has seemed to me the type of happy, serene death, not sinking into clouds and darkness, but losing itself in the golden light of day; still there in its place among the hosts of heaven, but hidden from our sight in the sunshine's dazzling glory! I watched that star pale and pale as the glowing beam grew stronger; at last I could not see it at all, for the dawn had melted into the day, and the brightness was all over the sky. And she, who had suffered and waited so long, had entered into her Master's joy; she

“Had another morn than ours.”

Chapter 21. WEDDING BELLS

We had no idea till she was gone how much we should miss Aunt Rachel. A spirit of love and wisdom and largest charity had passed from our midst. Though for nearly twelve years she had not left her own rooms, and though it was full eighteen years since she had last walked up what was then the village−street, yet her presence had always been felt among us. As I said before, she lived no self−centred life; had she done so most deplorable indeed would have been her fate through all that long period of time during which it pleased God to shut her out very much from the exterior world. We could always go to her in any trouble, great or small, sure of kind, wise sympathy, and sound advice; if we were full of any new scheme, or any special news that had reached us, we knew that she would listen with interest to what we had to tell. I have never known any one whose conversation, or rather "citizenship," which I believe is the more correct reading, was so visibly in heaven; yet she never affected that abstraction from earthly concerns which some people seem to imagine to be the essence of saintliness. Her character was too full−orbed, her mind too broad, her sympathies too large to permit her to bury herself in herself, under the delusion that because she read only religious books, and prayed, and refused to listen to secular affairs, that she was living to God. She knew that one may shut one's self up in one's own heart and affections, just as much as in a cloister, and that such a life is not acceptable to God, who has given us every faculty for use and improvement, not for abuse, and not to be let rust in any dormitory of the soul. So to the last she kept her loving, happy spirit, and cared for us, and for our concerns, and for the concerns of others outside our own particular circle. To the last we read the newspapers to her, "for," she used to say, "I want to know how the Lord is dealing with my people, and what the world is doing."

Well, we laid the poor worn−out garment of the flesh to rest in our quiet, secluded churchyard. Mona used to speak pitifully of Aunt Rachel being in the cold, damp ground; but I knew that Aunt Rachel had no more to do with that grave than the butterfly has to do with its chrysalis shroud from which it has escaped. *She* was

"Gone—past night, past day,
Over the hills and far away!"

Far away from sorrow and pain and weakness and all the infirmities of the flesh, past the night of suffering and decay, past the day—the long, long day—of sultry heat and toil, past the rugged, steep hills on this side the river, and safe in the "far away" of the glorious world beyond. For God had said to her—His patient, loving, happy child,—"Well done, good and faithful servant! enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

A few weeks after we lost Aunt Rachel, Aunt Judith came up to me one evening, as I was pacing under the apple−trees, from which the pale, pinky blossoms were falling like summer snow, and learning my lessons for the morrow, saying—"Chryssie! I have something to propose, and I think you will like it."

"I dare say I shall, aunt," I replied, closing my book. "What is it? You look as if it were something very nice."

"That is as you take it, my dear! It was Matthew's thought, I must tell you, in the first instance, but directly he mentioned it I fell in with it. We both think you would like to have Aunt Rachel's rooms; it would be far better than having them empty."

"I should like it very much. It is just what I should choose, only I should never have ventured to ask such a thing."

"And that room at the top of the house, among the servants, is scarcely the thing for you now. It was all very well for a child, you know, Chryssie, and you were a child when you came here, three—nay, almost four—years ago."

"It will be four years in September. And, oh, Aunt Judith, what a horrible child I was! I can hardly bear to think of all that time, and yet for some reasons I like to think of it. How I did hate and despise you all, and what a conceited, ignorant little creature I was! And now—how I love my home, how I love you all; and dear, dear uncle, to whom I was so cruel, how good he is to me. Now I know what a father can be like, I never knew before."

"You did not know what love was, Chryssie, that was the spring of all the old troubles; a child brought up without love is pretty sure to be a sort of savage. And we were very foolish, too; of course we knew nothing about children, Matthew and Mona and I, and we did not go the right way to work. However, my dear, we have all learned our lessons, I trust, and are the better for them; if we have learned to love you, you have learned to love

us, and Elmwood without you—the child of our adoption—would no longer be the same Elmwood. Then you would like to go into the west rooms?"

"Indeed I should. Do you mean that I should have them all, Aunt Judith?"

"Yes; the sitting−room you can make your own study, and the bedroom and dressing−room are just what you want. The room beyond has been Hagar's so long that I do not like to turn her out of it. She can sleep there still, and do all that you require. I prefer an elderly, trustworthy person for a young lady's maid; and, indeed, I have already spoken to Hagar about it, and she will be very glad to continue with us on these terms."

And so it was arranged that I was to have the west rooms for my own; and as they really required a thorough rehabilitation, they were freshly papered and painted, and almost newly furnished. My sitting−room had in it a nice bookcase and writing−table, and there was a stand for flowers, and a mignonette−box outside the window, which was wreathed with *noisette* roses and Virginian creeper. And on my birthday, which occurred long before my new rooms were ready for occupation, my uncle gave me a beautiful pianoforte for my very own! Aunt Judith gave me a pretty timepiece in white marble, and Aunt Mona presented me with "Una and her Lion," which I had always said I would buy when I was rich enough. Clara March made me some wax flowers, in which she was an adept, and Mrs. James Trafford gave me a pair of Chinese hand−screens. I began to feel myself quite a woman of property.

Though I have said little of our Cuppage friends of late, we saw them continually. Madam, when she had thrown off her influenza, frequently came in—rather more frequently indeed than was either agreeable or convenient. The only person who took to her was Mona. Aunt Judith said she should always keep up the intimacy for the sake of "auld lang syne," but "that she was not just what she liked"—a very mild way of putting it, for I do believe that Aunt Judith too often found the elder Mrs. Trafford a serious infliction. Uncle and she were very good friends, but he was as completely *désillusioné* as a man could be; and ever and anon he wondered at his youthful infatuation. Of all the idols of clay and base metal that he had set up between twenty and sixty years of age, Julia was the worst; he could only be thankful that he was not her husband, though he used to say: "Ah! if she had only married me forty years ago, instead of selling herself to a handsome profligate for wealth and position, she would not be what she is now; she would be a very different sort of woman, and far happier, not to say more respected." And, indeed, he was not very far from wrong, but he generally concluded with a philosophic—"Well! you see it was not to be, things were to be as they are, and whatever is is best. *'Che sarà sarà!'"* Julia, however, had been a coquette all her life: she had coquetted in long clothes Aunt Judith averred, and certainly as a girl; and, as we heard afterwards, as a wife. And now at sixty−five she was a coquette still, and the silliest−clever, and the cleverest−silly old woman it has ever been my fortune to encounter. And I do think if my uncle had then asked her to be mistress of Elmwood she would instantly have consented.

Louis was at Harrow, and James was in London or somewhere thereabouts: what he was doing we did not know. He left Stanbridge very soon after Christmas, just when the wintry weather was at the worst; but he came to see Aunt Rachel several times before he went away, and the two became almost intimate. When her will was read, we were all a little surprised that she had left £500 to James Lascelles. Aunt Rachel had what Dobbs called a very pretty little property of her own, which meant a very respectable and sufficient income. The bulk of it went to her nephew and her two nieces, as was only natural and right, and as it had been willed for the last thirty years. But a codicil had been added, which bore date no later than the last February—which devised to James Lascelles the sum I mentioned; to myself a similar amount, and to Hagar an annuity of £30 a−year. An old ruby ring of some value, but set in most antiquated fashion, she had given me a little before her death; her other jewels were equally divided between my aunts.

And now I come to an event in our family history of a totally different complexion from that which I have in much reverence recorded. From pathos I am constrained to turn to bathos, from the solemnities of death and burial to the festivities of marriage; for before the autumn was over we had a wedding at Elmwood. In the language of the *Northborough Express* Miss Mona Louisa Perren was led to the hymeneal altar by Dr. Danvers Dashwood.

Who was Dr. Danvers Dashwood? you will naturally ask. It was the question we all asked, when he first appeared amongst us, with his raven−black hair, his stylish contour, and his diamond ring and studs. That he was a doctor of medicine was easily ascertained; and he had settled at Eastfleet, a small and rather aristocratic little town, not many miles out of Northborough. Mona met him at the house of a friend—a friend of her own, of whom

neither her brother nor her sister approved, as being a designing, crafty, vulgar woman. But Mrs. Bradburn had a good deal of money; she dressed magnificently, though not often in taste; she possessed a showy exterior, and was the centre of a large circle of a certain sort of society. She and her *clique* flattered Mona, who like all other weak and vain people was easily imposed upon in this particular. Mrs. Bradburn affected to treat Mona as a girl; she really *seemed* to believe in her golden tresses and in her radiant bloom, though I suppose she knew quite as well as we did at home that her charms were her own only because she had paid for them. She made much of Mona; she insisted on her being at all her parties and picnics; they went shopping together, and called each other "Mona" and "Caroline"; they took little expeditions together, very much like two overgrown, ill−bred school−misses; they grew to be inseparable; it was a case of "eternal friendship!"

And at Eglantine Villa, the name of Mrs. Bradburn's pretty cottage ornée, Mona first met her adorer. According to her own statement, he fell madly in love with her at first sight; he strove to stifle his passion, believing it to be altogether hopeless; he grew melancholy, listless, ill; he even neglected his patients, and ran the risk of nipping his young, rising practice in the bud, that he might meditate on the perfections of his lady, and deplore the attachment, which he dared not hope could be returned. Mrs. Bradburn pitied him; but encouraged him, and promised to stand his friend. At length he ventured to propose; and Mona was flattered, coy, and hesitating, though having quite made up her mind. Finally, the doctor was accepted, and then, of course, it was necessary that he should be introduced at Elmwood.

My uncle and aunt heard her with amazement. Aunt Judith, accustomed as she was to Mona's self−delusions, was astonished at her credulity. Matthew Perren, unwisely enough, informed his sister that "he could not permit the marriage; he utterly refused to sanction the engagement!"

"Dear me," said Mona, with a sneer, "I never asked your sanction, Matthew. Of course, if you and Judith took to my intended husband, it would be all the pleasanter, but really I do not much care about it. You are both so elderly now, and so old−fashioned in your ways, and of such a different stamp from Dr. Dashwood's friends, that I am not certain whether any frequent intercourse would be desirable. I shall not be of your set nor move in your circle. As for asking your consent, Matthew, I never thought of such a thing; I should as soon ask Chryssie's. I am more than one−and−twenty."

"More than one−and−forty," cried Miss Judith, angrily, and unconsciously quoting somebody in one of Dickens's stories.

"You are fifty−three—*turned.* I am not sure but that it is *fifty−four*," said Uncle Matthew with emphasis.

"How ill−mannered you both are, how ill−natured, how spiteful!" returned Mona, bursting into tears. "No, I protest against being fifty−three or anything like it. People like me, who keep fresh, and young, and girlish, are as old as their feelings, not as old as their years. And whatever I am, remember you are ten years older, Judith, and Matthew two years older than that."

"I do not deny my age," replied Judith, quietly. "I shall be sixty−four next month if I am spared till then, but I am not going to marry an adventurer."

"What right have you to call Dr. Danvers Dash wood an adventurer?"

"No man of standing would, under the circumstances, act as he has done. You tell me he is under forty, and if he is the same man I saw with you and Mrs. Bradburn at the Town Hall the other day I can well believe it; I should say he is not more than thirty−six."

"Well, there is no law against marrying a man who is your junior. Some men like expanded charms—Danvers does; he never cared for young girls, he says; he prefers full−blown roses to silly little buds; he told me so only yesterday. And he has never loved before, so that I have his first affections; and, as he says, first affections at his age are likely to be permanent, I believe, Judith and Matthew, you envy me my happiness!"

Judith answered gravely, "Mona, you are very silly, I know, but I did not think you could be so silly at your age as to believe all the folly this man has poured into your ears."

"My age again!" cried the bride−elect, with another shower of tears. "How unkind you are! always bringing my age up against me, as if I could have stopped the years. I am sure I would if I could; there's nothing I hate like growing old. Of course *he* hasn't an idea I am older than himself; I dare say you will be ill−natured enough to go and tell him. Matthew will make it his business, I know, and if the match is broken off, and my affections are blighted, I shall sink into an early tomb. I shall die of a broken heart."

"I shall not tell him anything of the kind," replied Mr. Perren, "and I am sure I can answer for Judith. But,

Mona, listen to me patiently. I do not mean to be unkind, but is it likely that he has fallen in love with you at all? Do men under forty, as a rule, marry women over fifty? and when they do, is it not rather for convenience's sake than for affection? You have a nice little fortune, Mona; all the world knows that! We Perrens are reputed to be wealthy, and tolerably rich we are. This man wants not you, but your money. If you marry him—and I have no power to prevent it—you will bitterly repent it! The time will come when you would give the world to be back at Elmwood as Mona Perren again. I need not say I shall make every inquiry."

"You can make what inquiries you like," returned Mona, loftily; "but I warn you, Matthew, that you will have your trouble for nothing. I am going to marry him, and that is all about it. He has been rather gay, I know, young men will be young men, but marriage generally sobers them. He has not always been so serious and right−minded as he is now; he has done a great many things he regrets. He has confessed to me all his errors; I know all about his past life; he has been as candid with me as possible. Therefore, it is quite immaterial what you find out about him, seeing that I know all beforehand."

Mr. Perren did make inquiries, but could learn very little, that little, however, being decidedly in Dr. Dashwood's disfavour. Nobody knew much about him. He said he was of good family; he affected to have a good practice and private property besides. His diploma came from some unheard−of college in the United States. There was not much against his character at Eastfleet or at Northborough; but he was generally regarded as "a little gay." He liked cards, he took more wine than, as a medical man, he ought to have taken. But then he had a strong head, and could carry more than most men. He was fond of company. Some people liked him extremely; others would have nothing to say to him. He seemed to be about equally admired and distrusted. He was not known to be in debt, but then he had only been a few months at Eastfleet. There were stories whispered about him concerning his former course, but though reputed to be *fast* he could not now be charged with any immorality; and it was generally asserted that he had sown his wild oats and repented.

It was in vain to urge Mona to defer her marriage at least till the following spring; she was proof against entreaty and warning and argument; and as she was immovable, and of course her own mistress, and, worse still, mistress of her very handsome fortune, there was nothing more to be said or done. It only remained to make the best of what was inevitable, and, for the sake of respectability, to receive Dr. Dashwood with as good a grace as possible.

He did not, however, profit much from having the *entrée* of Elmwood. I do not think he liked us any better than we liked him. It was summer−time, and Mona was very sentimental, so they rambled about the grounds together, and eschewed our society as much as they decently could. It was the first time I had ever seen lovers, and I thought them particularly absurd, and wondered greatly if all lovers were like them. Much of Mona's leisure was spent at Eglantine Villa, for Mrs. Bradburn made herself very useful in the matter of the *trousseau.*

Such a *trousseau*! I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the pretty things as they came home; only I wondered whether my aunt was providing herself with clothes for the remainder of her natural existence, never intending to purchase any more. Oh, the silks and the satins, the muslins and the lace, the feathers and the flowers, and the jewels!

But it was all finished at last. The wedding−dress came home, the wedding−breakfast was in preparation, the wedding−cake arrived, the wedding−ring was tried on, and the ringers were quite ready to ring the wedding−bells. Clara March and I were bridesmaids; Matthew Perren reluctantly gave his sister away. Miss Judith cried all through the ceremony, for, as she said afterwards, she felt as if Mona were reading her own sentence of death. Altogether it was not a pleasant wedding, though the Stanbridge folks called it a brilliant one.

And Mona herself cried bitterly when the time came to say good−bye. I think at the last moment her heart misgave her, and that she was afraid she had done a very foolish thing, which no after repentance could undo. But she was Mona Perren no longer, and her gay young bridegroom was waiting for her. The carriage was at the door, the doctor was beaming with impatience; and, drowned in tears, Mrs. Danvers Dashwood drove away amid the usual shower of old shoes flung by the servants, with Mrs. Bradburn, Louis, and myself at their head. But my aunt and uncle threw no shoes, and as the carriage rolled through the gates they turned away with sad faces and sadder hearts, and left Louis and me to do the honours till the company departed. They were more than ever convinced that their foolish sister had given herself and her money to an unprincipled and heartless deceiver.

Chapter 22. EXPLANATORY

And again the stream of life flowed on placidly at Elmwood. Week after week and month after month glided by, calmly, happily, uneventfully; I was fast growing up, and my dear aunt and uncle Perren were visibly growing old. Mona came to see us now and then, but not very often; at first we saw more of her, and she used to arrive in all her glory, assuming the full dignity of a matron, and taking precedence of Judith, as a married woman—"a young married woman," she continually called herself. But as time passed on Mrs. Danvers Dashwood visited us very little, and when she did favour us with her company it was a very fretful and discontented countenance she showed us. She began to make complaints; Danvers was always away from home, and she was quite sure he was not always, as he affirmed, upon his rounds, or detained by urgent cases; for she had soon found out that his practice, like his private income, and a few other things of which he had boasted, was on the smallest possible scale. He neglected her, he laughed at her, used coarse language; he persisted in addressing her as "old girl"; brought suspicious−looking individuals home to dinner—vulgar snobs, who treated her rudely, and forgot the deference due to her as mistress of the house and a married woman; and who, like the famous Miss Kilmansegg's objectionable guests, "fancied spirits instead of wine," and made themselves in every way obnoxious.

Danvers never paid her compliments now; he never cared what she wore or how she looked; and though the money was hers, all hers, her very own, she couldn't get a sovereign without almost crying for it! It was too bad, when he would have been as poor as a church mouse, if he hadn't married her! And then—she was sure he gambled—he had confessed to *losing* at the Northborough races; she was afraid he would squander her fortune; he was certainly extravagant. Was there no law to restrain him? Was not Matthew lawyer enough to do something to secure her own income to herself, so that her husband could not touch a sixpence unless she gave it to him.

But Matthew gravely replied, "No, Mona; it is too late for a legal settlement. When I wished before your marriage to secure to yourself the greater portion of your inheritance you would not listen to me. You despised me, you said, for my mean, grasping, suspicious spirit, and determinately refused to take any of those steps which your friends advised, and which the commonest prudence demanded. In a girl of nineteen one might have pardoned such romantic folly. What you called generosity was rashness. When, in your hour of sentimental enthusiasm, you obstinately persisted in putting not only yourself but your fortune absolutely into the hands and power of a man of whom you really knew nothing, I told you that ere twelve months had elapsed you would bitterly regret the part you had taken. I told you, too, we all told you, that a truly honourable man would have insisted upon the bulk of your fortune being inalienably settled upon yourself. But you would not allow me to interfere; you resented even a hint which seemed to imply suspicion of your idol. You said Dr. Dashwood was worthy of all trust, and you would not insult him by the ordinary precautions of settlements and deeds, and now it is too late. I can do nothing. As a married woman, you and all you have belong to your husband. He may spend every penny you possess, and the law cannot touch him. What is worse, he may virtually desert you, returning every quarter−day, or when dividends are due, helping himself with a strong had to all he requires, and spending your money apart from you, and in ways you could not possibly approve."

"But I am sure something may be done," cried Mona, tearfully. "Didn't you draw out, or draw up— what you call it—a settlement for the Buckleys, years and years after they were married?"

"That was a very different thing. Mr. Buckley made a settlement on his wife; he was too poor to do it when he first married her, having, as he openly confessed, nothing to settle. Such a settlement it is in the power of any man to make, provided only he be entirely solvent when he executes the deed. But that is quite another affair. You have no redress now, Mona; if you doubt my word take further advice. All the counsel I can give you is to be as prudent and patient as possible, and try to conciliate rather than infuriate your husband, You will gain nothing by quarrelling with him; if you and he come to issues it is you who must be the loser; he is the stronger—in any struggle with him you must fail. Be as kind to him and as tolerant as you can; let him be constrained to respect, if he cannot love you; it is your only hope for the future."

Happily it was not often that Mrs. Dashwood invaded the quiet precincts of Elmwood, for when she came she always made us miserable. We could not help her, and it was difficult even to yield her the sympathy she demanded. She and Madam were alike in one particular; they poured out their home troubles in torrents of words;

and I know nothing more difficult than sincerely to sympathise with persons who are ceaselessly retailing their woes and pouring out their wrongs. It is quite impossible to pity people who seem so heartily to pity themselves. Napoleon I. said a good many wise and trenchant things in his time; he was noted for his pithy sayings, and I think one of the pithiest and most sensible of his axioms was—"*Il faut laver son linge sale en famille!*"

When I was nearly fifteen I left Mrs. March's school. Both my uncle and my aunt objected to so tall a girl walking backwards and forwards daily on the public road. So I had masters at home, and I studied a good deal by myself, for my old love of learning increased rather than diminished as the years went on, and I was abundantly supplied with books. When I was sixteen it was proposed that we should all go abroad, chiefly, I believe, for the perfecting of my education, but also for my uncle's health, which had been for many months so failing as to cause Aunt Judith and myself no small anxiety.

Louis and I wrote to each other regularly, but not very frequently. Whenever he was at home for the holidays we saw plenty of him; in fact Madam complained that he lived more at Elmwood than at Cuppage. We read together, and practised together, and in the summer we gardened together, and every season the desolate old Cuppage garden became neater and gayer, till at last my uncle said it was more beautiful than ever; by no means so formal, but so much brighter and prettier than ever it had been before. It was the desert blossoming like the rose, he frequently declared; and sometimes he came to help us with our budding, and training, and other floricultural labours. We had seen very little of James Lascelles since that inclement winter, now more than three years ago, when he left Stanbridge for the south. He had been twice at Cuppage, but the second time we had missed him, as we were staying for some weeks at Harrogate. His mother said he was living in London, but she did not tell us what he was doing there; once she went to him when he had some slight illness, and she remained away so long that we began to fancy she might not come back to Cuppage as to her home any more. Madam seemed almost to detest the young man, who, as far as we could perceive, gave her no reasonable cause of offence. But then Madam was unreasonable, and, as my Aunt Judith said, always had been from her youth upwards. Louis seemed in some unaccountable way to share his grandmother's sentiments with regard to his half−brother. He generally spoke of him in a half−contemptuous style, that did not at all exalt him in my estimation. Still, he was Louis Trafford, and I tolerated in him what I should have abhorred in any other person. I never dreamt of disputing his commands, and they were sometimes arbitrary enough. If I differed from him I did not argue, telling myself that he *must* know best, that it was presumptuous in me, who knew so little of the world, to compare myself with him who knew so much, and who was so wonderfully gifted! For the renown of Louis's scholarship, and his popularity at Harrow, had reached Northborough. Masters and lads alike seemed to be bewitched with the dazzling beauty, the sparkling talent, and the gay *debonnaire* deportment of the young lord of Cuppage. His Harrow name was *Louis le Debonnaire,* and somehow it followed him to Stanbridge. For myself, I could never quite tell whether I loved the cognomen or not. I liked it, I think, because it flattered my hero; but it did not satisfy me.

One brilliant June morning Louis and I were gardening in the shade; cool breezes from the sea tempered the heat, and we were not doing much more than picking off dead leaves, tying up, and languidly raking over the beds. But presently, as it grew warmer, Louis threw down his tools, and flung himself on the grass, under the great mulberry tree, exclaiming, "It's quite too hot for work, Chryssie, and it's quite time to take our ease. Put down that rake, and come and talk to me."

"I must just finish this bed. I wonder what they call this thing; it's a sort of *Sedum,* I should say."

"Perhaps so; I am not much of a botanist. James could tell you if he were here; he goes grubbing about in the hedgerows whenever he has the opportunity, and he rushes after common weeds as if they were the rarest exotics. Just like him—a poor, stupid, petty−minded fellow! Chryssie, come out of the sun this moment; you will ruin your complexion."

"I am not sure that I have one to ruin. Dark people do not tan. However, I will obey you; for I am getting horribly hot, not to say tired. But I do wish you would not call your brother names."

"Well, it's not polite, I must confess; but there is something about James Lascelles I cannot abide. He is good enough, no doubt, far too good; he is more than conscientious—he is crotchety. And then he is dull, and *plain,* and always poring over books: but there, some fellows must sap, if they mean to do anything, and do something he must, poor beggar! for I believe his patrimony was about £200, all of which has been spent upon his education. Then, as for being dull and plain, you know he can hardly help that; everybody cannot be born handsome and

witty—as you and I are, Chryssie. But don't call him my brother; I do not care about the relationship, and grandma hates it."

"But he *is* your brother. You have but one mother between you."

"Ah! but you must know we are, socially speaking, the children of our fathers, not of our mothers. From our fathers we derive our rank. Now my father was a gentleman, and a Trafford; Jem's father was a poor clergyman, the son of a still poorer army surgeon. He is nobody—a miserable, drudging schoolmaster; I am heir of Cuppage."

"Why are you heir of Cuppage? Are all the Catherwoods dead and gone?"

"Indeed they are not; but they are disinherited, which comes to the same thing. The entail was cut off in my great−great−grandfather's time, so Cuppage can go anywhere so that it is not out of the family. My Uncle Horace got himself into tremendous scrapes, and he married greatly beneath him; but he left sons, and daughters, too, I fancy. Where on the face of the habitable globe they may be, I cannot tell you, not knowing, nor, indeed, caring. They are Catherwoods, but they are not, and never will be, Cuppage Catherwoods."

"But why did not your uncle Edmund's daughter succeed? She is of the elder branch?"

"Partly because my great−grandfather naturally preferred a male heir; partly because Uncle Edmund hated Cuppage, and was a millionaire without it; partly, too, because grandmamma was always with the old gentleman in his last illness, and could do with him exactly as she pleased. *She* drew up the will, and made him sign it in the presence of competent witnesses; and she took care that I should inherit all there was to inherit—not much to boast of after all! A tumble−down old house, and a few hundred acres of unprofitable land, and some ramshackle, stupidly underlet farms on the other side of Gretton. If I had only a few thousands pounds to spare, I would soon make an alteration. Grandmamma is my trustee and guardian, you know, and she will not tell me much about my own affairs. It is the one point on which I cannot get the better of her. But as soon as ever I am of age I will—heigho! Chrystal, *ma belle*, we shall see what we shall see.

"That is more than three years to come."

"Yes, I shall be eighteen in September. James came of age a little while ago; but what did that matter? His father, as I told you, left him nothing, but his grandfather somehow did leave him £200, the which he thought it expedient to make use of; so that now he has literally nothing but what he earns."

"That seems very odd, and he Mrs. James Trafford's son.

"Forgive me, he is Mrs. Lascelles's 'son.' What on earth induced my father to marry a widow, I wonder? Grandmamma never forgave him for it—indeed, my respected parent gave her no end of trouble, which fact you know as well as I do, since Madam continues to publish the iniquities of her husband and her son. I say, Chryssie, her husband, my father's father, was a downright—well, I won't say what to a young lady; but if all accounts be true he did almost everything that a man should not do. And I am afraid he did some things that were incompatible with the honour of a gentleman. I have heard he was all but cashiered, that he was cut off by his fellow−officers, and was regularly sent to Coventry. He sold out, which was the best thing he could do. Grandmamma brought up her son, my father, very strictly, I am told. Nevertheless he was not what folks call steady till he married my mother. I have heard say she was the making of him, or would have been had he lived. But he died while I was an infant in arms. Old Catherwood lived a few months longer; he must have been a very old man. The Traffords do not seem to be a long−lived family."

"Where were you born, Louis?"

"In India, as my father was before me. Madam married Captain Trafford, you know, and went out to India with one sickly baby that gave up the ghost on that voyage. My father was born not long after her arrival in that country; and from all I can gather, from that period Madam and her gay husband were two people. He was very dissipated, very reckless; she was bad−tempered, haughty, jealous, passionate. They did nothing but quarrel, and steps were being taken to effect a legal separation when, luckily or unluckily, he departed this life, and the scandal was avoided. He had only a short illness; people never are ill long in that hot climate—they die or they get better. Whether they would have been reconciled had there been time it is impossible to say, but the wife was not with her husband when he expired. They parted in mutual disgust and anger never to meet again."

"I wonder if there are many such marriages, Louis? Look at Aunt Mona—how miserable, and with just cause, she is! And then I know my own father and mother were not happy. How was it with your parents—do you know?"

"Oh, I believe they were like two love−birds, but then they had no time to get tired of one another. They were

only married about a year and a half in all. I can just remember India. We came away when I was quite a little chap; I fancy I should know some of the places again if I were to see them, but perhaps I only think I remember them—seeing pictures and hearing places talked about, you know. We went and lived in the Tyrol—why, I don't know, except that it was grandmamma's whim. I was sent to school in Munich and afterwards in Berlin; Madam laid great stress upon my acquiring modern languages. Of course I learnt Latin and Greek, but I never took heartily to classical studies. After a while we gave up our Tyrolean home, and spent nearly a twelvemonth wandering about in northern Italy—part of the time we were at Florence, part at Venice. Then we spent a winter at Cannes and a spring in the Riviera. Lastly we got to Paris, and there we settled down, as if it were to be our permanent abode, till, all of a sudden, it was decided that we were to come to England; and there grandmamma talked to me about my inheritance of Cuppage, and my prospects, and all the rest of it. And here we came, and I thought I had never seen a place I liked so little. The first gleam of sunshine was meeting you, Chryssie! I declare it was as good as a fairy tale, finding you fast asleep in the great wood yonder, with your dark curls all hanging about you, and your long black lashes on your cheeks, that were the colour of damask roses. How I did wonder who you could be; I thought you must be one of the Indian princesses of whom I had heard Madam talk; only you had no *bangles,* nor did you wear a heap of jewels."

"And I thought *you* must be one of the gods of ancient Greece come back again—I had just been learning a lot of heathen mythology—only you were too young for Apollo."

"And too old, by at least seven years, for Cupid. Well, Chryssie, I have told you all I know about myself."

"Tell me about James."

"There is nothing to tell. My mother, Louisa Herbert, married the Rev. Mr. Lascelles, a missionary, and they went out to India to convert the natives, or some such tomfoolery. He died of jungle fever, of course, and she almost broke her heart, but she struggled on for the sake of her child. Why and how she married my papa I do not know; no one knows except herself, not even Madam. Papa was up in the hill country for his health—somewhere near Simla; and mamma was there too, looking lovely, I dare say in her widow's weeds. She was getting ready to return to England, where she had scarcely any relations—none who could do anything for her. I dare say my father loved her for her gentleness, as well as for her Madonna−like beauty, for I need not tell you there is not a sweeter soul under the sun than my mother. If she were not a saint she would never get on with Madam, who, in her heart, hates her like poison."

"How can she hate anybody so good and lovely?"

"There is no accounting for antipathies generally, but in this case I think it is chiefly because she became my father's wife, and Madam had just arranged for him a very wealthy marriage with a sort of Begum. Naturally he objected to the Begum, and thought he had a right to please himself."

"And so he had, I should say. Louis, she will arrange a marriage for you some day."

"No doubt she will," and he laughed lightly. "I am not at all sure that she has not some scheme of the kind in her head. She was talking only the other day, very mysteriously about the duty of 'uniting properties.' I don't know what she meant—at least I would not know, though I could form a guess. But I shall marry whom I choose, Chryssie; Cuppage is mine, and I cannot be disinherited."

"Of course you will. She does not trouble herself about James, I suppose?"

"Not a whit. She would not care if he married a scullery−maid if only he kept his distance. She would never have him at Cuppage at all if she had her will, but my mother can be quietly resolute on some points; and it certainly is awkward, for Jem is her son as much as I am, though he is a person of no consequence. But Jem won't be able to think of marrying for ages, if ever. He can do nothing but teach and preach—two very unprofitable occupations, and far from respectable."

"Surely it is respectable to teach, and something more than respectable to preach. But I had no idea that James was a clergyman."

"Neither is he, Chryssie. He has sunk himself by joining some miserable set of Dissenters. If he had gone properly into the Church I would not have cared, though I don't like parsons of any sort except on Sundays, and when one wants to get married or buried. But there, Chryssie, he will go and preach in the very worst parts of London, and to such a vile rabble! Not in a church, mind, not even in a conventicle always—he'll hold forth in a room or under a railway arch, I am told. Faugh! isn't it disgusting? And mamma upholds him in it!"

"And so should I, for I am sure he is trying to do good."

“But you know, Chryssie, it can't be good to turn Dissenter. It's extremely wrong.”
“Is it?” I asked, innocently. “I wonder what Aunt Rachel would have thought.”

Chapter 23. THE HEIRESS OF ELMWOOD

We were interrupted by the appearance of my aunt and uncle and the two Mrs. Traffords, who came towards us from the house. Madam seemed to be in a specially good humour; her daughter looked a little flushed, as if some exciting conversation had been taking place. My aunt and uncle, too, had evidently something upon their minds. Madam was the first to speak, and she addressed her grandson, “Louis, you were wishing the other day to go abroad again?”

“I know I was, grandma, and I wish it still, particularly as Mr. and Miss Perren and Chryssie are going. What on earth am I to do with myself all this summer? I can't go up to Oxford till October, and I had rather not go at all this year. And you won't let me have any of the fellows stopping here; and I won't accept invitations, which I cannot reciprocate! Yes! I should like a few months on the Continent immensely!”

“I have decided that you shall go; Mr. and Miss Perren do not object to your joining their party. They are going first to Switzerland, then on into Italy, intending to spend the winter in Rome. They will not return, probably, before this time next year, but you can come back whenever you feel inclined. I am in no hurry about your going up to Oxford.”

“Capital!” cried Louis, flinging up his straw hat into the tree. “I was only thinking this morning, before I got out of bed, that the best thing I could do would be to take myself off somewhere! I had some notion of Niagara, but Geneva and Chamounix will do as well, to say nothing of Rome, which I have never visited. And, indeed, my reminiscences of Italy generally are rather of a hazy, indefinite sort. I shall be glad to renew my impressions. This is a thousand times better than reading with a tutor, as you, Mr. Perren, suggested.”

“Louis!” said Madam, in her most dictatorial fashion, “your reading must not be neglected. You are not going to travel for mere amusement; time, at your age, is too precious to be lost; Chryssie will have masters and lessons whenever she is stationary for awhile.” Louis turned round to me and made a grimace. “I am not going to be bored with a tutor, I hope,” he said, roughly; “I had quite enough of that fellow, Long, in Scotland, last year.”

“James Lascelles may as well accompany you; it will keep him out of mischief, and it will be less expensive.”

“I won't have James Lascelles!” said Louis, doggedly, “a miserable, peddling bookworm! And now that he has taken to preaching, and turned Dissenter, he will be more intolerable than ever!”

“Louis!” said a gentle voice. And I saw the tears rising in his mother's sweet dark eyes. “Louis, you cannot tell how much you pain me.”

“I am sure I do not want to vex you, mother dear; but you know James and I have very little in common. I am an out−and−out Trafford. He is a Lascelles, I suppose. And as I grow older we seem to diverge more and more. We never did get on.”

“That is your fault, Louis, not James's!”

“No! nothing is ever James's fault; that is one reason why I had just as lief decline his company. However, we will talk it over, grandmamma.”

And for several days there seemed to be no end of “talking it over.” My uncle and my aunt, but especially the former, were continually running into Cuppage, and Mrs. Trafford walking into Elmwood at all sorts of unreasonable hours. Once, I remember, she came in, while family prayers were going on, before breakfast; and the next evening she astonished us by making her appearance at the drawing−room window a little before midnight—for we were sitting up late, with maps and guide−books before us, discussing our projected route.

Louis was very sulky all the while; he wanted to go with us, but he did not want to be “bothered with James,” or with anybody else in the shape of a tutor. Of course, he would read regularly when opportunity served; he was not a schoolboy to be forced to his books, but to go about with a tutor everlastingly pursuing him was what he would not endure. Mr. Perren, on the other hand, firmly declined taking the sole responsibility of Mr. Trafford. He would prefer a regular thorough−paced tutor, with experience, and not too young; he feared Mr. Lascelles might not have sufficient weight or authority with his half−brother. And Aunt Judith echoed her brother's sentiments; for her part, she confided to me—“she would just as soon we went comfortably by ourselves. My French was very good now, and I must get up my Italian as fast as I could—there would be no difficulty about the languages.”

But I knew that I could not speak nearly as well as Louis, who had lived for nearly two years in Paris, and longer still in France; whilst I had very small confidence in my Italian. I could translate tolerably, and frame short sentences; but as for talking in Italian—why, I had never even tried it. It would be an unspeakable comfort to have Louis and James to rely on.

Then there came a day during which the houses of Elmwood and Cuppage held no communication, all sorts of arguments being exhausted, and everything that could be said, having been said, at least a dozen times. We held our peace, and busied ourselves with our own preparations, which, indeed, were no trifling matter, seeing that we were leaving Elmwood for a year, possibly longer.

The plate had to be sent to Mr. Perren's bankers in Northborough; inventories had to be drawn up; small properties packed away, orders given, and arrangements made with such servants as were to remain upon board wages. Dobbs was to be installed as housekeeper; I did not envy those who had to submit to her rule. She absolutely refused to cross the sea, or to go into any foreign country where the Romish religion was professed.

"No, miss," she said to me, as I was helping her with an inventory:—"no! I'll never trust myself with them Papists! I mean to live and die a Protestant. And as for going to Rome, why, that is the Babylon spoken of in the book of Revelations! I wouldn't do such a thing if I were to be crowned Queen of England for my pains! To go right into the lion's den!—I never heard anything more foolhardy! You are only a lass, and it is natural you should be rash and like to go gadding and skirmishing about, but what's come over master and missis is more than I can fathom. Why, what's to hinder the Pope from catching hold of the lot of you, and clapping you all in the inquisition, where you'll never more be heard of till the judgment−day? I never look to see you again, I can tell you; I told master I hoped he'd set his house in order—meaning his affairs both temporal and spiritual, for he'll never see Elmwood again."

"But, Dobbs, we are British subjects; even if the Pope wished to hurt us, he dare not."

"Then you should stop on British soil! And there's other things besides Popery that you will not like. I know all about foreign parts, though, thank God, I never saw them. I had a sister married to a fellow as was always going about on what he called the Continent. He said his trade took him there, but I knew better; honest trades never take one to foreign parts. In France, you'll have nothing but frogs and snails to eat, and still dirtier stuff in Italy. As for a wholesome bit of wholesome butcher's meat, or a nice tasty pudding, don't you wish you may get it! Scraggy chickens fried in rancid oil, and stuffed with garlic, and filthy maccaroni, and cheese like tallow, won't suit master, I'm thinking; no! nor Miss Judith neither, who's had a good home of her own all these years, and everything decent and comfortable. Perhaps *you'll* enjoy it, Miss Chryssie; young people is so eager for a change, that very often they don't care if they do change for the worse; it's anything by way of variety. I only hope Hagar won't find herself disappointed; what's come over her, I can't think. After being content to be shut up in those west rooms for half a life−time, she goes and starts for the Pope's country, and the Lord Himself knows where, but none of ye don't, though ye think ye do."

It was vain to argue, Dobbs being firmly persuaded that we were all bound for the City of Destruction, that we should be poisoned with dirt and vile food, that we should tumble down precipices, that we should lose all our luggage and fall among thieves—for in her youth she had read the "Castle of Udolpho," and upon that romance all her ideas of Italy were framed—black pine forests, haunted by spectres and banditti—grim castles in mountain−fastnesses, inhabited by fierce and wicked tyrants, with a ruthless soldiery at their command. If the Pope did not put us into the Inquisition, after giving us a taste of the rack, and other novel experiences, we should certainly be taken prisoners by banditti, and languish out our lives in turret−chambers, or fortress−dungeons, unless we ransomed ourselves at the cost of Elmwood, and by the sacrifice of all the Perren possessions generally. I burst out laughing, and told Dobbs that the railroads would secure us from banditti, and that the Castle of Udolpho, if it ever existed at all, was probably a heap of ruins, among which we could pleasantly pic−nic. "And as to our ransom," I continued, "we should be ransomed at the bayonet's point, I imagine, if at all. I can't fancy my uncle selling Elmwood, and his canal and gas shares, and bank and railway shares, and all his other property, to ransom us from Italian banditti."

"Ah well!" she said, crossly, "young folks always knows best, and old folks knows nothing nowadays. It's a sinful age; but there will come judgments on the land; and then you'll see."

At length debates came to an end; on the morning after that day of silence and suspense Louis came in. "It's all settled, Mr. Perren," he said, cheerfully; "after all, perhaps I might do worse than have James for a companion.

Madam was determined, so I had to give way, and having given way, and resigned myself to the inevitable. I, with my usual philosophy, desire to make the best of it. So when am I to be ready?"

"Next Thursday is the day we had fixed on," said Judith; "wiIl that suit you and Mr. Lascelles?"

"It will suit me, of course; I am at your disposal. James will join us in London. And, oh! I am forgetting half my lesson; it is proposed that my mother shall accompany us. Grandmamma has taken it into her wise head to shut up Cuppage, and go and visit her friends while we are away, though who her friends are I haven't the least idea, except that they are Londoners. Now, it would be very dull for my poor dear little *mater* to be left alone, in a great shut−up, deserted, ghostly house, with only Thexton and his deaf wife for companions, and Elmwood empty too. And it will be such a pleasure to her to travel with Jem; and Jem has not spent much time abroad. He was at some school for the sons of missionaries for four or five years, while we were expatiating on Continental ground; and mamma never saw him more than once a year, and not always that, though he did spend the last twelve months in Paris with us, because Madam thought he must be old enough to be of some service to me as home tutor. He will be very useful to look after the luggage, and see to passports, and take tickets, and haggle with *vetturini*, and all that sort of thing. You don't mind my mother going?"

On the contrary, we were very much pleased. Aunt Judith had said several times she wished we were not going to leave poor Mrs. James to be tyrannised over and browbeaten by Mrs. Trafford. And I—especially since Aunt Rachel's death—had felt my heart greatly drawn towards Louis's gentle, saintly mother, who always seemed serene and cheerful, though she had as little to make her either serene or cheerful—so far as this world's sources of happiness were taken into account—as anybody I ever met with. For her life was one long discipline of patience, and self−denial, and self−repression.

"At least," I said, "she will be free from insults and taunts; for, though Louis is sometimes not quite filial, he does love his mother, and does not care to vex her. And she will be so happy with James—they understand one another so perfectly. We will do all we can to make it a thoroughly pleasant time for her, will we not, Aunt Judith?"

And Aunt Judith felt as I did—only too pleased to have the opportunity of brightening for awhile, to the best of our ability, Mrs. James Trafford's sombre experiences.

Something happened, the evening before our departure, which startled me considerably, and I must put it down here, as it certainly has something to do with my life−history. Louis and I were taking a farewell stroll through the grounds. We went through our own gardens; and then passed by the coppice to the Cuppage territories. Finally, having gone over our favourite haunts, and commended our floral treasures to the care of the head−gardener, whose services Louis had stipulated should be retained, we returned to Elmwood, through the little wood, and lingered in the orchard, watching the purple lights upon the sea, and talking quietly, though rather fitfully, about what might happen to us before we saw the sun set upon "our own waters" again.

But Louis was looking rather inland than across the waves; from the point where we stood together the two houses of Cuppage and Elmwood were plainly to be seen, and we could almost trace the boundaries of the two estates. They looked fair enough in the calm, mellow evening light; the two large many−windowed houses, and around them a wealth of *parterre* and shrubbery, and orchard and *pleasaunce.* But I liked Elmwood best, with its ivy and roses, and jasmine and Virginian creeper, almost hiding its dark−red brick lichened walls and heavy stoned copings; whereas Cuppage, though a much grander house, and far more of a "mansion," was almost bare, except for some straggling ivy of rank rather than luxuriant growth.

All suddenly, Louis said, "Let us say good−bye to our respective homes, Chryssie; I the lord of the soil, and you presumptive heiress. Our inheritances fit in well together, do they not?"

"Elmwood and Cuppage fit in together well enough; uncle thinks they must originally have been but one estate; and Cuppage is undoubtedly yours; but why do you call me presumptive heiress of Elmwood?"

"Why, who else is to inherit it, if not you?"

"I do not know; I never thought about it."

"Then think now. When Mr. and Miss Perren are dead, to whom can Elmwood possibly descend if not to you? They will not leave it to Mrs. Dash wood, for certain. Her brother and sister paid her a certain sum on her marriage, in accepting which she, according to her father's will, renounced all claim on the estate. It was provided, it seems, by old Mr. Perren's will, that if either of the daughters married she was to receive a stipulated sum of money, in lieu of her share of Elmwood; and if your uncle married he was to pay off his sisters, and keep the

estate himself. And the one that lives longest can will it away to whomsoever he or she chooses; and whom can either Mr. Perren or Miss Judith choose except yourself?”

I began to think it sounded very plausible, but that Elmwood could ever be mine had never entered into my imagination.

“Louis,” I said, “who told you about old Mr. Perren's will?”

“Grandmamma told me; she knows all about Elmwood, of course. And as for your heiress−ship, everybody in Stanbridge looks upon you as the future mistress of Elmwood. You don't mean to say, sincerely, that you have never thought of this?”

“I do; I say it most sincerely. And I am very sorry you have mentioned it, for I had far rather it had never come into my mind.”

“Nonsense, Chryssie!”

“And it seems horrible to calculate upon what may be after the death of—well, my father and mother, in point of fact, though not in point of law; for no parents could have been kinder and more generous to me than have these best of friends whom I call 'uncle' and 'aunt'; and who are yet not related to me in the remotest degree.”

“They have no relations, Madam says—none at least that they acknowledge. Come, Chryssie, it is of no use to be sentimental, and ignore facts; you will be a rich woman one of these days, so you had better reconcile yourself to the prospect. It's good that they are both so fond of you, because it cannot matter which of the two survives; in either case you are quite safe; Mr. Perren is as old as Madam, but his life may be good for another ten years, and—”

I could bear no more, and turning round to Louis with a passionate burst of tears, and very nearly in one of my old furies, I exclaimed, “Do you want to make me *hate* you? You are wicked—wicked! Your heart is hollow! If you ever say such things again I will—I will—“ and my voice died away in choking sobs; but I believe I stamped my foot and clenched my hand by way of telegraphing what I could not speak.

Louis stood confounded.

“Why, Chryssie, Chryssie!” he said, “I never meant to vex you like this, I had no idea that you loved the old buff—I mean the old gentleman and the old lady so much. I am positively jealous of them. There! dry your eyes, and I'll never call you heiress again. But do you know you have been quite a little fury, a positive vixen? However, you looked very handsome in your rage; you would make a good Cassandra or an outraged Clytemnestra, or a Cleopatra accusing Cæsar. No, your face is too *spirituelle* for a Cleopatra!”

But I broke away; and going to my rooms, on pretence of doing something, I had a good cry all by myself, and then, woman−like, I felt greatly relieved, and almost in charity again with Louis, with whom I could scarcely afford to quarrel. Next morning we were on our way to London.

Chapter 24. ON LONDON BRIDGE

Once more in London streets! Once more listening to the deep, dull roar, which, morning, noon, and night, summer and winter, sounds, oh, like the grand yet monotonous thunder of the waves on the distant shore. “Men may come and men may go,” but the strong heart of London beats on, striking its thousand pulses into the blood and veins of all the country. For at least twenty hours out of the twenty−four the great human tide of its streets flows ceaselessly; its highways are full of life; great streams cross and recross its bridges; while, on the bosom of the quieter stream beneath, an endless procession moves swiftly to and fro upon its darkling waters.

I love London! I love her venerable thoroughfares, replete with memories of a memorable past, for every inch of London is historical, and her history is England's history. To know the history of London is to know the national history, for what has happened in the provinces has been but the outcome of that which has been wrought either secretly or openly in the great mother−city of the land; which Dr. Arnold calls “that enormous city, grand beyond all other earthly grandeur, sublime with the sublimity of the sea or of mountains.”

And, girl as I was, I felt my spirit stirred to its inmost depths during those few days we spent in town, before setting out on our foreign tour.

I went and looked at the old house in Bloomsbury Square, and no sad, sweet tears gathered in my eyes as I gazed on its dull, grimy walls; also, without one pleasant association, I walked about the W.C. squares, every yard of which was once as familiar to me as were now the environs of Stanbridge. But still I liked going there, and I got my uncle to accompany me in many of my rambles; and, without any particular end in view, we sauntered about London, up and down, hither and thither, sometimes afoot, sometimes in cab and omnibus, and finding out its busiest centres, literally telling the towers thereof.

I remember well one evening standing on London Bridge looking over the stone parapet up the river, which might have flowed through the New Jerusalem itself, so marvellously was it glorified in the summer sunset light. Far away it wound and curved by the Temple Gardens, under the grey walls of Somerset House, under the span of Waterloo Bridge, and onwards towards haunted Whitehall, and the stately pile of Westminster—a broad stream of liquid gold fading off into shimmering silver in the hazy distance. The dirty barges might have been fairy shallops or Cleopatra's galleys; the tall, grim warehouses and the squalid houses on either shore might have been ruined castles and imperial palaces, so completely were they, too, glorified in that celestial radiance, blending its auriferous sheen with rosy flush, and delicate opal gleams, and pure purple hues, all fused together in that transcendent hour of the world's transfiguration—the hour when Nature herself rings out the vesper−chime from her own vast cathedral, when she lifts her voice in the great hymn of praise and thanksgiving, when she casts her mantle of beauty over earth's sad−coloured, sordid robes, all soiled with the sweat and dust of the day's labour, till one wonders whether it be indeed the same dull, grey, work−a−day world on which one looked so unconcernedly and so wearily one little hour ago!

And high over gilded roofs and bronzed chimney−stacks rose, calm, solemn, and majestic as a lonely mountain peak, the great dome of St. Paul's, with its cross of fire burning against a heaven of intensest blue, far above the city's smoke, and haze, and din—the symbol of our faith lifted high and shining out of the clear, serene sky on all the children of sadness and misery and sin and folly who hurried to and fro so far beneath it. Surely that bright cross, whenever it flames in the red sunset glow, must speak to the heart of mighty London, bidding the sorrowful rejoice, telling of rest to the weary and heavy−laden, urging the grovelling soul to arise on wings of holy trust, and calling to the sin−polluted to leave their defilement and their shame, and come to Him of whom the cross reminds us—the Saviour of mankind, who died and rose again, and ascended into heaven, whither He went to prepare a place for all who love Him in simplicity and truth.

Surely that *empty* cross must appeal to the thousands who tread the city's crowded streets from dawn to dewy eve, like a perpetual Easter anthem, sung louder than the ceaseless turmoil here below. “Christ is arisen! Christ is arisen! He is risen! He is not here! He lives for evermore! Thou art the King of glory O Christ!”

I should like to think that our great cathedral cross spoke *thus* to the weary and saddened spirits of those who saw it:—“Children of sin and sorrow, accept the pardon and the joy which Christ offers to you all! Are you poor? *He* waits to make you rich! Are you lonely and deserted? *He* can sympathise and soothe! Are you sin−laden and

sin−stricken, tossed to and fro with doubts and fears, cast down, and all but hopeless? *He* waits to lift you up, to whisper peace and forgiveness of sins, and grace for time to come, and to fill you with the hope that maketh not ashamed. The cross must be borne patiently, even as He bore it: but after the cross comes the crown—the imperishable crown laid up by Him for all who trust in Him and love Him—for trust and love are all He asks! And you, ye busy children of commerce, be not too intent on this world's wealth; let not your chief treasure be of the earth, earthy, but rather lay up for yourselves treasure where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal! Work well and heartily, but lift up your eyes to the hills whence cometh your help. Think of the rest that remaineth, of the glory to be revealed, of that other and higher life, or rather of the perfection of the life that now is, in the world beyond the grave!"

Surely one would not do one's business any the worse for some such thoughts. One would go on to the shop, the counting−house, the office, or, perhaps, the dreary, comfortless garret, all the stronger, all the wiser, all the more patient for that little rest and solace by the way. And, doubtless, there are, nay, we are quite sure that

"There are, in this loud, stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of th' everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat."

I am afraid all this will be voted sermonising, and sermonising I am really afraid it is. I beg pardon for so long a parenthesis, which grew up dimly and gradually, out of the crude, imperfect thought that came to me years ago, when I, with my life all before me, and scarcely a cloud on my horizon, watched the city sunset, and the red gold cross of the great cathedral, burning like fire against the evening sky. Many and many a time have I read its lessons since; and many a sunset I have seen on marble shrines and tall campaniles, on mountain peaks and purpling wilds, and on the desolate Campagna, but never one that has lived in my memory like that sweet sunset which I watched from London Bridge so many years ago. And if only one poor, sorrowful child of humanity, pacing with weary feet the thronged yet lonely London streets, should look at St. Paul's great cross, shining far above the city's rush and clamour, and be comforted, or feel his sad heart lifted one moment from earth to heaven, I shall not in vain have written so much which is extraneous to my story.

The few days we passed in London sped rapidly away; and what with preparations for our journey, and our rambles about town, we found ourselves wonderfully busy. But I had made up my mind to go and see Mantie, who had given up her situation in the city, and had at last realised her long−cherished project of setting up in business for herself. She had taken a small shop at Hoxton, and there, one burning hot summer afternoon, I found her, very little changed from the Mantie of Bloomsbury Square, and quite absorbed in serving a customer, who seemed rather difficult to please.

I wore a hat which considerably shadowed my face, and the shop−window being shaded I sat down in complete incognito, to wait till the young woman, who was bent on buying a cheap crochet collar, should be suited. I had plenty of time to look round and make observations, for Mantie's customer was as troublesome a one as could be well imagined; no fine lady at the West End choosing Honiton flounces, or a Brussels lace bridal−veil, could possibly have been more fastidious, or more undecided in her choice. I saw the frown—the frown I knew so well of old—deepening on Mantie's brow; she rubbed her nose savagely,she pushed back her grizzled locks, she began to tie and untie her apron. I knew well what such signs portended, and I expected each moment that the tempest of Mantie's wrath would break forth. But she had certainly improved since we parted, for she had evidently learned to curb her temper, to control the manifestations of even just displeasure; perhaps, too, she had made the discovery that a shopkeeper cannot get on without an inexhaustible fund of patience at command.

The customer was suited at last; the coarse crochet collar, neatly folded up in paper, was handed over the counter; and Mantie received in exchange, and with thanks, the sum of one shilling and three−halfpence.

Then she turned to me. "1 beg pardon, miss, keeping you waiting so long; what shall I show you?"

"I should like to look at that *portemonnaie,"* I replied, pointing to an imitation Russia leather article, which happened to be the first thing I could fix upon; for it was only when Mantie addressed me as a complete stranger

that I resolved not immediately to disclose myself. She took out the *portemonnaie,* and showed off its superior make, and extolled its cheapness in a most tradeswomanly style. Mantie had evidently found out her true vocation. But all the time she spoke I could see that she was glancing under my hat, and looking curiously at me. Changed as I was, there was something about me, I suppose, either in my manner or my voice, that awakened some echo in her heart. I let her talk on a little while longer, till I could perceive that she was so perplexed as scarcely to know what she was saying; then I looked straight into her face, and said, “I will take it, *Mantie.*“

“Mantie!” she exclaimed; “sure it never can be, and yet it's the same voice, only with a foreign sort of twang. It's never *you,* Miss Chryssie?”

“Yes, indeed, it is Chryssie, come to see you at last. I should have known you anywhere, Mantie.”

Mantie coolly walked from behind the counter, and pulled me into the centre of the shop, where the light could fall full upon my face.

“Yes, it is,” she exclaimed, as if she had been able to convince herself; “it's Miss Chryssie, and nobody else. God bless you, my dear; you've grown up a fine young woman, and a deal handsomer than I ever thought you'd be.”

And then she fell to kissing me as if I had been her long−lost child, and greatly to the admiration of a small youth who was inspecting one of the illustrated pocket−handkerchiefs hanging up in the doorway.

“Now come in and take off that hat—that's something like a hat!” was her next demand. “I've got a girl—such as she is, more plague than profit—and she shall come and mind the shop, and I'll get the tea myself. To think now of you, of all people, coming in this broiling hot afternoon. That shows how dreams comes true. I dreamt about you only last Sunday night as ever was.”

“And have you never dreamt about me before, Mantie?”

“Well, yes. I have dreamt about you scores of times, I dare say, since you went away north. But it was a special dream Sunday night. I saw you as plain as could be, sitting on a doorstep in Finsbury Circus, playing with that skull you used to set such store by.”

Oh, how my face burnt as Mantie said this. I could never think of that unlucky skull without infinite shame and distress, and the keenest pangs of remorse. It was years since I had seen the skull—years, too, since I had heard it mentioned.

“You look hot,” Mantie continued; “but no wonder, it's downright dog−days, such as they have constant in India, I suppose. That's right, put down your hat, and set ye down on the sofy. The sun's off this room, that's a comfort.”

Mantie's sitting−room was small and close, but beautifully clean and neat. As I looked round I recognised some of her old properties, and opposite to me ticked the very clock which had once told me how I had not a penny in the world, and how I was going to be adopted.

“The old nursery−clock?” I said, as Mantie came up from some mysterious nether region with the butter and the milk.

“Yes,” she replied; “I bought it when the sale was; I got it for next to nothing: I thought I should like to have it, if it was only to look at, for the sake of old time. I never expected it would go, for it never was a good clock in its best days, and you used to play such pranks with it. But I thought I would just have it cleaned and set to rights before I hung it up, and, bless you, it has turned out a first−rate clock: it goes wonderful, only it gains, but that's a good fault. I put it back half an hour every morning, and half an hour every night, and then it's not so far wrong, and I like it a little too fast. But never mind the clock, I can hear that tick any day. I want to hear you talk now. Tell me all about yourself, Miss Chryssie. First of all—let me see—how old are you?”

“I was sixteen a few weeks ago.”

“To be sure! How time flies! it seems but a little while since you were a baby. But you might pass for twenty, Miss Chryssie, you're that big and old−looking.”

“Yes, everybody takes me to be older than I am,” I replied; “but I do not care for that; perhaps when I am five−and−twenty I shall look eighteen. It was because I had such a grown−up appearance that uncle would not let me go to school any longer.”

“Your *uncle?*” And she looked up eagerly. “Have any of the Clarendons turned up, my dear, or is it your pa's family?”

“Neither. I call Mr. and Miss Perren uncle and aunt. I think they have quite forgotten that I do not really belong

to them."

"They have been good to you, then?"

"So good, Mantie, that no words of mine could ever tell half their goodness. I am not an orphan now; I am loved, and petted, and cared for—oh! a hundred times more than I deserve, though I do love them dearly—*dearly!* and I would do anything to please them."

"You are altered, Miss Chryssie; you never used to want to please anybody."

"I was a most intolerable child, Mantie; I wonder people had so much patience with me. I must have given you no end of trouble."

"Well, you were a pretty good handful; but there, don't let's scrape up old grievances. Perhaps I didn't go the right way with you; perhaps if I'd loved you a little more I might have managed you more easily. I've often thought since I wasn't the one to bring a child up, above all, such a queer child as you were. And these Perren people have really been kind to you, and don't put upon you?

"Instead of putting upon me they load me with benefits. I have everything I want—more, everything I wish. I am treated just as if I were their own child—indeed, I believe a great many people do not treat their children half so well."

"I never thought things would turn out so comfortable," returned Mantie. "I must say you're wonderfully improved; I dare say you're what some folks would call handsome; but there! you're not fit to hold a candle to your mother! *She* was a real beauty and no mistake, and you're not a morsel like her, except a look you've got in your eyes, though hers were blue as violets, and yours are black, leastways dark brown, or grey, or something that looks like black; the Professor did use to say there was no such thing as human black eyes. Now you're very like your father, and I never admired him. But it don't matter about beauty: handsome is as handsome does, and everybody can't have a snow−white skin, and golden hair, and eyes like the sky! and they do dress you nicely; I must say you look quite the lady! Have you got a gold watch?"

"Yes, Mantie!" And I showed her my pretty costly little watch, of which, girl−like, I was immoderately proud. "It was my last birthday present," I explained—my uncle's gift; my Aunt Judith had given me the chain.

And then I told Mantie how I came to be in London, and how I was going abroad for at least some months. Afterwards she wanted to know what kind of a place Elmwood was, and I described it as well as I could. She seemed a good deal impressed with the wealth and consequence of the Perrens; and admitted that it was a grand thing to go abroad, and visit foreign countries, though nothing, she declared, would ever tempt her to go upon the open sea; she had had quite enough of it going down to Margate. And like Dobbs, she warned me against "taking to worship idols," and against frogs as an article of food. It was evident that she supposed frogs to be to the French people what bread−and−cheese is to the million at home.

I am sure Mantie was very glad to see me, and I know it pleased me greatly to look once more into her square, honest face, but the longer I talked to her the more I comprehended how great a gulf had opened between my present and my past. I scarcely wondered now at the wildness and waywardness of my childhood, and more and more thankful I felt as I reflected on what might have been my lot had not my Heavenly Father put it into the mind of the Perrens to adopt and educate a little girl. It was sweet to look back and see that even then all my steps were ordered by One who loved me when I cared nothing for His love, and scarcely knew His name.

Truly the clouds that in earlier years gathered so darkly about my path had shown to me their silver linings. Would it always be so? I wondered. When trouble came again would it be only blessing in disguise? And trouble then seemed very far away; and the summer sky was full of sunshine, and my heart was full of happiness.

At length our preparations were complete; Mrs. Trafford, Louis, and James Lascelles joined us, and the next day we crossed from Dover to Calais.

Chapter 25. UNDER THE STARS

Next to the solemnity of being in Jerusalem is that of being in Rome, that proud city, once mistress of the world, and once Queen of Christendom. It is something to stand among those relics of a venerable past; to drive by the wonderful columns of Trajan and Antoninus, just as at home one drives by the Monument, or the statue of Achilles; to ascend to the Capitol, and from the lofty tower where hangs the great bell of Viterbo—which is rung only to announce the death of a Pope or to proclaim the opening of a Carnival—to behold the seven hills and all the panorama of plain and mountain spread around in the clear, transparent Italian atmosphere.

The Capitoline Hill rises between the ruins which remain of old Rome and the new city which has sprung into existence on the other side, “between the ancient capital of the Republic and the Empire, and the modern city of the Popes which has grown up in the last few centuries.” And so you gaze down upon the land of the living and of the dead! There are the lofty pillars of the Forum, the “arches upon arches” of the Coliseum; there are the remains of heathen temples, of Christian churches in all their glory; there are garden terraces rising one above the other, glittering with snow−white pillars and statues; there are orange and cypress groves, and stone−pines, while below are the narrow crowded streets, and the “yellow Tiber,” and far, far away stretches the desolate, death−like Campagna! It is something to gaze on all this; to wander, too, at will through galleries and vestibules and chambers filled with those miracles of art which have won for themselves an imperishable fame; to stand before those great pictures which have stirred the heart of lookers−on for centuries; to pass from church to church, from palace to palace; to cross the bridge of St. Angelo; to watch the red sunset−glow illumine the bronze Archangel on the tomb of Adrian; to behold from one's windows on the Pincian Hill all the pomp and pageantry of cloudland, on distant peaks, on the spires and domes of the Eternal City, and on the sun−beloved classical mountains of Soracte! Only I must remember that I pledged myself not to write about Rome, but about myself, and about those with whom, in my foreign travels, I was associated.

We lodged, as you will readily infer, on the Pincian Hill; it suited us in many respects; and we tried to explore as systematically as possible. My uncle, of course, became enthusiastic, and mapped out our routes daily, and made lists of what we were to see, and what we had seen, and of what it behoved us carefully to study, and what we might content ourselves merely to observe. He seemed thoroughly in his element, and every now and then declared that he desired nothing better than to end his days in a world so full of marvel and of beauty; and he could hardly tear himself away from the Beatrice Cenci in the Barberini palace, from the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, from Raphael's unfinished “Transfiguration”; or indeed from any of those wondrous pictures in the Stanze di Raffaelle. But Mrs. Trafford smiled and told him that he would be glad enough to get away when once the summer heats set in, and Aunt Judith chid him somewhat sharply for being ” so absurd and so stupidly un−English!” Poor Aunt Judith was not very well; travelling did not exactly suit either her health or her temper; she was heartily tired of cold marble palaces, and innumerable pictures and statues, and even of ruins to which she at first took very kindly. She was getting too old, she said, to be hurried and bustled about to lose her natural rest—for she was always a light sleeper, and Italian beds are not good for undisturbed repose—to have her stomach turned and her digestion impaired by Italian cookery, to be burnt up by the hot sun on one side of the street, and to be nipped by keen Roman winds on the other. And she knew we should all have malaria fever, and some of us would die of it and be buried among our countrymen in the Protestant cemetery! I began to feel quite unhappy, remembering that it was very much on my account that the journey had been undertaken.

Nevertheless we settled to remain till the ceremonies of “Holy Week" should be past, and that year Easter fell quite early in April. One balmy March evening, softer than many of our own May evenings, Louis and I, James and Mrs. Trafford were walking in the Borghese Gardens. Aunt Judith was at home suffering from a bad cold, and Mr. Perren, who had been all the morning in the Vatican, stayed to bear her company. Mrs. Trafford grew tired, and wished to turn back, but Louis vehemently insisted.

“No! no!” he exclaimed; “I cannot go in yet; I hate being indoors so early. Besides, I have promised Chryssie to show her that view we were talking about this morning, and I must be as good as my word.”

I hastened to say that another day would do quite as well, that I was sure Mrs. Trafford was very tired, she looked so pale; and finally, that we might see a charming landscape from our own *loggia*. But Louis was not to be

persuaded; he was bent on continuing his ramble and on my remaining as his companion, and at length it was arranged that James and his mother should return home at once, and that Louis and I should follow in half−an−hour's time.

“Do not be longer, dear Chryssie,” said Mrs. Trafford to me at parting. “Do not let my bad boy there keep you out too late; the air is unwholesome an hour after sunset, and Miss Judith is so poorly she will be sure to be anxious about you if you are not in to time.”

“I will be obedient, Mrs. Trafford,” I replied; “it will not be my fault if I am late.”

“It will be your fault if you do not resist Louis,” she replied, gravely.

A moment afterwards she and her elder son had turned away towards the Pincio, and Louis drew my arm within his, saying, “Come on, Chryssie, my dear; never mind the *mater,* dear fussy old thing. If we young people listened to all that old folks say, we should have to live out our lives in very crippled and narrow fashion.”

“But do you not think they may be right sometimes, if not frequently?” I replied. “You know they have had experience.”

“Experience is a bore, Chryssie. I hate to have it thrust down my throat, whether I will or not. Now don't answer me with one of Jim's wise saws, there's a darling. I see you look reprovingly, but sage counsel is about as graceful in a young woman of your age, as would be a promising beard and incipient whiskers. I shall gain experience for myself, in due time, so will you, so we all shall; it is just one of the things we cannot help gaining—it comes to us with increasing years—and I hate secondhand things. I prefer those which are fresh and new, and of my own seeking and finding.”

“And yet, Louis, don't you think we *may* learn and profit from the experience of those who are ahead of us in the journey of life? When we go into a new country, how glad we are to get information from those who have already visited it, and who know the road. May it not be the same with life?”

“Well, to some extent, I do not say it may not be so. But you see, my dear, each generation is wiser than the one which preceded it, and so inherited or imparted wisdom is, after all, not of so much account. But, Chryssie, I did not keep you out to talk this bosh, which is anything but entertaining, and extremely unsatisfactory. And, really and truly, I do not mind about the view from the Firanze Terrace; I only made it an excuse. It is so difficult now to get you quite alone for a little while; either you stick to the old people, or that marplot Jim is in the way, or there is a whole *posse* of us going about like a perambulating 'happy family,' and pairing off is not so easy to effect.”

“What is it you want to say to me, Louis?”

“Can't you guess, Chryssie, my darling? I think it is quite time we two understood one another.”

“And do we not?” I asked, timidly, knowing full well what he meant.

“I hope we do; but I want to be quite sure. I want your own word for it, Chryssie. You know that I love you.”

Yes, I knew that! I had known it for some months; ever since we were in London I had quite comprehended that I was dearer to Louis than to any other person in the world. At least I believed so much, and was happy in my belief. There had been passages between us to which I have not referred, because I am not writing exactly a love−story, though of course there is no story of any account that has not more or less of love interwoven with its more prosaic threads. There had been “passages,” I said; I do not know how to express myself better, but I am sure every woman will understand what I mean. Things had been said that might mean much or little; there had been looks more eloquent than speech; but no sensible girl dare presume on looks only; there had been a thousand little hints, both of word and of action, that told me as plainly as a formal declaration that I was beloved. And yet there had been nothing conclusive; if Louis had left me there and then, and engaged himself to some other girl, I should have known myself wronged, but I should not have been justified in making any outward complaint. And I was quite content to let matters remain as they were; I knew that I was very young, and I supposed Louis would speak all in good time. As for my aunt and uncle, I was certain they would approve, and I was so quietly, tranquilly happy in their protecting love, and in the sweet unconfessed affection I entertained for Louis Trafford, that I scarcely desired any change. I think if I had been questioned I should have said, that probably, nay almost certainly, Louis and I would be engaged *some day,* and in due time married; but how it would all come about, and when it would be, I did not know, and could not at all imagine.

And now, under the beautiful blue Roman sky, with the purpling mists of sunset stealing over the lonely Campagna, and the rosy light falling on temple, tower, and dome, he said, “You know that I love you?”

"Yes," I faltered, a host of new sensations stealing over me as I spoke, "I think you have tried to make me know it, Louis."

"I have. Chryssie, I do really believe I fell in love with you when I found you sleeping in the coppice years ago. And I have gone on loving you ever since, more and more, till the boy's liking has deepened into the man's love. And I think you love me a little—just a little, Chryssie?"

How handsome he looked, with the red sunlight on his golden hair, and his deep violet eyes gazing intently into mine! I had seen nothing more beautiful than Louis in all this wondrous land of fairest art. No Apollo, no Adonis, no Endymion was more perfect in its marble beauty than was the living, breathing Louis who stood by my side—my own lover, and as I told myself then, the only man in all the world whom I could ever receive as a lover.

I am not going to tell you all that followed; not that I look back upon it as foolishness, for I at least was too much in earnest to be silly and missish, but because such scenes are sacred—far too sacred to be retailed for the world's amusement, and also because I will not attempt to describe that which is indescribable. We forgot all about our promise to return in half−an−hour; we forgot—I at least forgot everything but that Louis loved me, that he had told me so, and that he had claimed my love in return. He had kissed me, too, almost solemnly, and I felt that that was my betrothal. As for any thought of being married, it never occurred to me, though of course I knew that such engagements were expected to terminate in marriage. But in that first hour of my great happiness I could think only of the exquisite present. I wished then for nothing further; I was fully satisfied; my cup of joy was full to overflowing.

And so we stood together under the shade of a mighty ilex, till the pale stars came out, and the young spring moon went down on the purple horizon towards Ostia. Shall I ever forget that hour? No, not if I live to be "the oldest inhabitant" in a circle famed for its longevity. I was so blissfully content, so very, very happy! I held in my hand the golden goblet of life, and it was filled to the brim with the richest and most costly wine. I could raise it to my lips, and drink and drink again, and *it would never be empty,* I confidently told myself. Oh, if I had only known! A girl's first love, when it is the genuine thing, is so confiding, so trusting, so undoubting, and I believed in Louis almost as I believed in God. If I had only guessed how soon the sparkling wine would be mingled, how quickly the costly chalice would be snatched away, and another cup put into my hand, of which I must drink, however bitter its contents, howe'er reluctantly!

"Oh, Louis, listen!" I exclaimed at length, as from the nearest campanile the hour rang out. "Why, it is an hour and a half since Mrs. Trafford left us! What will be said to us?"

"Is it really so late? It does not seem many minutes since we reached this seat. Never mind, my darling! Even now, why should we hurry? This—just *this*—can never happen again; it comes but once in a lifetime! why should we voluntarily shorten that which in itself is brief, and departs to return no more?"

There was a melancholy in his tone that for a moment saddened him; but I answered, "Just the same experience can never come over again, of course; but there will be other experiences richer and fuller, and even sweeter than this to−night. It will be so beautiful to plan together, and work together, and share each other's inmost thoughts—to be as nearly one soul as in this world it is possible to be."

"The ripe fruit with the bloom off it, my Chryssie!"

"Never mind the bloom! It is very pretty, and we like to see it; but who cares about the vanished bloom if the plum is all that one could wish? And we mustn't expect our life to be all romance—there will be stern duties and responsibilities, and no doubt something to be borne bravely and patiently."

"Hush, Chryssie, dear! Let the responsibilities and the duties be, at least for to−night. Surely this hour of our betrothal may be given to romance alone! I suppose one must be content with prose for the greater part of one's life; but pray let us enjoy the poetry while we can. We love each other, and we are promised. That is surely enough just now?"

And I felt that I was scarcely reasonable in wishing for more, and yet—though I would not admit it even to myself—there was just *something* wanting, I could not tell what. And when I analysed my feelings I persuaded myself that I was perfectly and most entirely satisfied; there was no "little rift within the lute" that by−and−by should "make the music mute." And yet, and yet, it would have been so much more in unison with the emotions swelling within my breast if Louis had looked more gravely, more practically on our engagement. Then I scolded myself for a miserable matter−of−fact utilitarian, and asked myself what I was thinking about to imagine that I

knew better than my lover? he whom I had chosen among men as my king and lord? Of course he was right! What could I, a silly girl, know of the world? And how much larger and fuller and wider had been his experience than mine.

"Yes, it is enough!" I whispered; "all else may be left. But, indeed, dear Louis, we must go home now, see how dark it is!"

"I suppose we must. We cannot dwell in Arcadia for more than the passing hour! Come, my darling, we will go home, and we shall never, never forget this evening, shall we?"

"No, never. I may be as happy again, but I cannot fancy that I ever shall be happier."

Please to remember, reader, that I wanted two months of seventeen, and you who have been seventeen can doubtless recall all the pleasant infatuations of that innocent age, and feel more compassion than scorn for my lack of experience.

"One thing more, Chryssie, love," said Louis, with his arm around me, in the fast−gathering shades of night. "We need not let the world into our confidence, let us keep our joy to ourselves."

"By all means," I answered, promptly. "We are both so young, and it is not nice to be talked over, among friends even. No one outside our own immediate circle need know."

"No one outside or inside the circle need know, Chryssie! I want us to keep our precious secret to ourselves—solely to ourselves, you understand."

"You do not mean—you cannot mean, that I am not to tell uncle and aunt?"

"But that is just what I do mean, dearest! Why should any one intermeddle with our joy? Let us have no interferences, and I am sure, my Chryssie, you are free from the small vanity of wishing to proclaim yourself an engaged young lady, or of desiring gratification from the exhibition of your lover a true captive, although in silken fetters."

"Indeed, I wish nothing of the sort. You cannot desire reticence more than I—only that reticence must not include my uncle, and my aunt, or your mother. Louis, do not ask me to deceive."

"Indeed, my dear child, I would not ask you any such thing. I only ask you to keep silence, just for a while—silence is not deception, you know! And surely I have a right now to ask something of you; surely, as your promised bridegroom, I deserve some consideration."

"You have a right to be considered in every way: it will always be my happiness to obey you, to meet your wishes; but in this case it does not seem the best way of beginning. I know my uncle so well, and Aunt Judith likewise, and I am sure they will offer no objection. Nay! I am almost certain it is what they wished. You will see, dear, they will at once sanction our engagement."

"I do not doubt it."

"Then why must they not be told?"

"I have reasons, Chryssie—strong, cogent reasons; for one thing—for the chief thing indeed—I do not wish *Madam* to know that we are promised to each other, that is, not just yet! You are aware how peculiar she is?"

"Yes! but if your mother does not object, it does not matter so very much, does it, about your grandmother? I do not feel as if one were bound to get the consent of every relation one has in the world: it must be enough to be approved by one's own parents and guardians. I should be glad for Mrs. Trafford to receive me cordially, but I should not mind so very much if she were not so thoroughly pleased—only I *must* have uncle and aunt's sanction, and Mrs. James Trafford's."

"Chryssie, you vex me! Can it be that you really love me, when you will not grant me the first little favour which as your betrothed I ask of you? It is such a little thing, too—only to keep our own secret for a time, perhaps not more than a few days."

"But I shall feel that I am doing wrong, that I am wronging both my uncle and my aunt."

"Then you prefer Mr. and Miss Perren to me, Chryssie. You do not know what pain you are giving me."

That was more than I could bear, and I burst into tears; and then Louis soothed me, and again tried to convince me that he demanded only what was just and right. I could not, however, be convinced; I tried to persuade myself; I was ready and willing to be deluded; but it could not be! It ended in my giving way so far as to promise not to speak to Mr. or Miss Perren till we had conversed again upon the subject; but my conscience was ill at ease, and already there was a drop of bitterness in the cup of joy which had been brimming over in unalloyed sweetness not an hour ago.

Chapter 26. PERPLEXITIES

We fully expected to be reproved for our loitering, Louis and I; and I dare say we walked in like a couple of culprits, well assured that we deserved to be reprimanded. But, to our surprise, very little was said to us. Mr. Perren only remarked that it was quite too late to be out, and Mrs. Trafford gave Louis a very mild lecture for keeping me so long. And then the subject was comfortably dismissed, to my infinite relief; for at the first word I felt the tell−tale blushes suffusing cheek and brow, while Louis seemed as pleasantly *degagé* as ever.

But I quickly discovered how it came to pass that we were let off so easily. Aunt Judith's cold had become so much worse that she had gone to bed, and signified her intention to remain there till it was undeniably better.

“I know how it happened,” said my uncle, laying down Mrs. Jameson's “Sacred and Legendary Art,” and taking off his spectacles, as he always did when he wished to express an opinion or to ask a question. “Judith is imprudent; she would go out yesterday, though that wretched *tramontana* was blowing. Then, feeling shivery, she would walk in the sun, though the Romans say—'No one but dogs and Englishmen ever walk in the sun.' She wanted to go to Sebastiani's, in the Via del Campo−Marzo; and go she would. And then, after getting thoroughly heated, she insisted on going with me into the Vatican, just to rest herself. And the gallery in which we stayed was like a vault. I thought if I stopped more than a few minutes I should be qualified for residence in an actual vault; and I have had a twinge of rheumatism in my left shoulder nearly ever since. I saw that Judith was blue with cold when we came out, and I warned her that she would suffer for her wilfulness. But you know, Chryssie, when your aunt has once set her mind upon doing anything there is no turning her from it; and she never listens to me in such cases—she never did,”

“I wish I had gone out with her yesterday; it was about my morning−dresses she went to Sebastiani's. I think I had better go to her, uncle.”

I went to her chamber, and found her indeed suffering from a very distressing cold. Hagar was with her; and no better attendant could she have desired, for Hagar had well served her apprenticeship to the profession of nursing long years ago, in Aunt Rachel's room. I found Aunt Judith not only very unwell but very cross, and the scolding I had escaped in the grand saloon I received upstairs in the sick−chamber.

“And now remember, Chryssie,” was her conclusion, “this must not happen again. It is not seemly that a young lady should be wandering about with a young gentleman after dark, and without a chaperone. You must not forget that we are among strangers, and that it is our duty to set before them examples of decorum and propriety.”

“But, aunt, you have never objected to my walking with Louis before.”

“Daylight and starlight make all the difference, my dear. Of course there is no real harm, except that you run the risk of *malaria,* in staying out so late alone with Louis; but it is not *nice*—not the thing, you know. And some day Louis himself will know that such was the case, even if he do not know it now. I daresay you think these are only an old maid's scruples, but I can assure you, my dear, that girls cannot be too particular—not prudish, for prudery always indicates a lack of true delicacy, but careful not to expose themselves to criticism, and jealous of their own dignity. Well, my dear, don't be distressed; I am not accusing you of any want of modesty; I am only cautioning you. Let us say no more about it.”

And I would have given worlds to say a great deal more about it; it was dreadful to hear aunt talk in this strain, and to be unable to reply. I knew as well as she did that our proceedings that evening were, outwardly considered, against all established rules of propriety. If only I might have told her that Louis and I were *engaged*! I knew that altered the case, and placed me in quite another position. And I could not speak, could not even defend myself. Since the days of my childhood I had never experienced so keen a sense of humiliation.

“I will remember what you say, Aunt Judith; I will not do it again,” was all I could reply.

I had made my promise, and I must keep it; only I ought never to have made any such promise. With guardians so kind and tender as were mine, I ought to have been certain that concealment was both wrong and foolish.

My own misdemeanours having been considered and condoned, Aunt Judith had leisure to revert to her cold. “It is about as bad a cold, Chryssie, as ever I had,” she moaned, putting her hand to her head and to her chest alternately; “it's influenza and bronchitis combined! And however I am to get better in this outlandish place, I am sure I cannot tell.” And she glanced round the large, showily−furnished room, which displayed a certain gaudy

grandeur, but lacked all that snugness and air of comfort which English people cultivate so successfully in their sleeping apartments; and that in spite of half a hundred little English touches and appliances. It is not well to be laid−up with influenza in a Roman bedroom, except in the dog−days, and then you are sure to have fever.

Aunt Judith was determined to be treated in the good old English way; she hated homopathy, and every other *pathy* which interfered with the old−fashioned school of medicine. She liked plenty of medicine, draughts, and pills, and powders. She believed in strong aperients, emetics, and sleeping potions. A blue−pill was her delight, and she had a stern respect for salts and senna—as I knew to my cost. Camomile tea she reverenced; she must have imbibed gallons of it in her time. She was intensely and entirely allopathic, with a strong proclivity to herbal medicaments. She had faith, too, in leeches and blisters; she rather despised mustard−plasters as being unimportant; she did admit that cupping and setons had been carried to too great an extent, but it was her opinion that the old custom of being “let blood” in spring and autumn was a good one.

“What are you going to take, auntie?” was my next inquiry.

“Well, my dear, I have taken a blue−pill; what a mercy I had the medicine−chest well stocked before we started! And this morning I drank more than a pint of strong, hot camomile tea! Of course I have put my head—no, I mean my feet, into hot water, with a handful of salt and mustard in it; and I have greased my nose well—so do not think of kissing me; and presently I am going to have a regular basinful of gruel, with a glass of gin in it. But I have done nothing for my chest, and it is so sore; you cannot think how it burns!”

“If you would try a little of my bryonia, aunt! But it would be of no use, I am afraid, after the chamomile and the blue−pill.”

“My dear,” quoth Aunt Judith, testily, “keep your silly little bottles of stuff; I wouldn't touch them if I were dying! I cannot approve of a system which is just as silly as it can be. Medicine administered by the billionth part of a grain, or something like it, and all rank poison too! Monkshood, that I never would have in the garden even, and deadly nightshade, and arsenic, and strychnine!—though you do call them by their Latin names, but that makes no difference—they are poisons just the same!”

When Aunt Judith talked in this illogical strain I never tried to argue with her, but when I wished her “good night” her pulse ran so high and she was so feverish that I wished I could administer a dose of *aconitum*. I was not certain that the gin in the gruel was the right thing for her, neither was Hagar; but her mistress was not just in a mood to be contradicted, and opposition would only strengthen her in her purpose, and perhaps cause her to increase her usual quantum.

When I went down again for a few minutes I found Louis reading a letter over which he looked very far from pleased.

“Here's a nuisance!” he cried, when he had doubled up the document and thrust it savagely into his pocket. “Who would ever have thought of such a thing?”

“What is the matter?” placidly inquired my uncle, looking up from his note−book and his well−conned “Sacred and Legendary Art.”

“Why, Mrs. Edmund Catherwood and her ugly daughter are here, or coming here directly, and Madam issues her mandate that I show them all attention.”

“They are your relatives.”

“I cannot help that! I never saw a more detestable woman than my Aunt Edmund, and as for Clementina, she is just the sort of girl—or woman, rather, for she will never see twenty−five again—to give one the horrors. What could make my great−uncle marry such a creature?”

“Money, I suppose,” said my uncle, drily. “The Catherwoods were always rather given to marrying for money.”

“Well! money is a very desirable thing, I am sure. I wish I had a lot of it. What a pity it is that heiresses are so often ugly and vulgar, and lovely girls penniless, or comparatively poor! Now Clementina Catherwood is said to be worth a million of money, though that I do not believe. But that she has two or three hundred thousand pounds of her own I suppose is tolerably certain.”

“A fine rich damsel,” said my uncle as he closed his book and lighted his taper. “Why do you not secure her for yourself, Louis? Such a fortune ought not to be allowed to go out of the family.”

Louis laughed.

“If she hadn't red hair and freckles, and thick lips, and a snub nose, and green eyes, and a tendency to

embonpoint, one might have tried to set her wealth against her stupidity. But there is that vulgar mother, who addresses a gentleman as 'Sir,' and murders the Queen's English, and tells you how much she gave for her jewels and her house−finery. She will buy anything if it be only expensive enough. And the idea of her coming to Rome! She would be far more likely to appreciate Birmingham! Imitation Venuses and bronzes would do for her quite as well as originals, provided they were not too cheap."

I stayed a few minutes to put away some needlework and papers which my aunt had wished me to arrange before going to bed. Louis and I were left alone together.

"I wish these Catherwoods were not coming, Chryssie, my dear, they will spoil all our pleasure."

"We will not let them; perhaps they will be better than your expectations. The daughter is educated surely?"

"So far as the daughter of such a woman—and she is her mother's own child—can be educated. Of course she has had governesses and masters, and she has gone through a certain round of studies and accomplishments; but you will see, Chryssie! I should not wonder if they are here now; they are sure to be at the Hotel d'Angleterre. I say, what is the matter with Aunt Judith?"

"Only a cold, I hope, but a very bad cold. She will have to keep her room for several days at least. Louis, she was so vexed because I stayed out so late with you to−night. I do wish you would let me tell her."

"Now, Chryssie, you are not going to tease me? I thought we settled that question before we came in."

"We settled it very uncomfortably—very improperly, I am afraid. I wish to please you, Louis, but I do not think I ought to keep secret anything of this kind from my uncle and aunt."

"It is only for a little while. Oh, dear! you women—you have not a bit of patience in you."

"That is not generally our character, Louis. We need not discuss that point, however; but I am sure both my uncle and my aunt may be trusted. They would keep our secret as long as you wished it to be kept."

"That they would not, my dear. Cannot you see that they would make it a point of honour to communicate at once with my grandmother? Mr. Perren would say, I know, that we must either be engaged openly or not at all."

"Would it not be better, then, to wait till we can speak openly? We know, now, that we care for each other; surely that ought to satisfy us for a little while. Let us each be free till things are altered."

"Do you repent, Chryssie?"

"You know I do not, so you need not look so reproachfully. Only it is so hard to me not to be open; and when I think of what uncle and aunt will feel when they know about it, and discover that I have not placed confidence in them, I am constrained to blame myself for what has passed between us."

"To blame yourself is to blame me. And I have done nothing with which my conscience reproaches me. We will go to bed, Chrystal, my queen, and in the morning you will see things differently. But oh! what a dreadful infliction will be the visitation of the Catherwoods!"

I went to my own room, wondering why it was that I felt so unhappy. I suppose a newly−engaged young lady was never more depressed and inclined to cry than was I when I laid my head on my pillow that night. Louis loved me; he had asked me to be his wife, and we were betrothed! And yet although I tried to rejoice, and feel like a heroine in a novel whose course of true love runs quite smooth, I could not shake off the gloom and apprehension that weighed down my spirits. If "coming events cast their shadows before," the shadows were surely around me, as I tossed about on my alcove−bed that night, and listened wearily to clocks striking and bells chiming, and to the melancholy wail of the wind sweeping over the Campagna, vainly wishing all the while that I could forget my perplexities in sleep.

In the morning Aunt Judith was no better, and both my uncle and Mrs. Trafford urged her to send for an English doctor. But she was resolved to doctor herself; she knew her own constitution, she said, "better than any stranger, and nothing should tempt her to take Italian medicines. Her own chest was full—filled at Savory and Moore's; and she had Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* with her, and she could find out all about the symptoms."

Hagar respectfully intimated that Dr. Buchan did not say anything about malaria fever; and she was almost sure from what the servants said of the malady that Miss Judith had a touch of it.

But Miss Judith replied quite hotly that she had no malaria fever! She had bad influenza, with bronchitis symptoms, and she wondered what Hagar meant by talking so foolishly. I had never heard her speak with so much temper; I had never seen her evince so little self−control. She sat up in bed, with a large piece of new flannel pinned over her quaint frilled nightcap; she had flannel round her throat, and she was inwardly longing for a blister on her chest. But she talked rapidly, and I fancied, once or twice, rather incoherently; her eyes were

unnaturally bright, and a red spot burned on each cheek. I began to feel seriously apprehensive. How glad I was that Mrs. Trafford had accompanied us, for she alone seemed to have some influence over the fractious and unreasonable invalid.

A little before luncheon−time she came to me, saying that my uncle had sent for the English doctor, who was to be found at the Hotel d'Angleterre. They were both convinced that Miss Judith's ailment was something more than a common cold, and she was certainly inclined to be slightly delirious. I was very much relieved when Louis himself, with his usual good nature, insisted on going to the hotel to look for Dr. Grigor; and in the meantime Mrs. Trafford kept me out of the sick−room, lest the attack should be of an infectious nature.

I was sitting alone in the *salon,* feeling more disconsolate than ever, and wishing with all my heart that I had not given my vote for remaining in Rome till Holy Week should be past, when our Italian servant, looking much impressed, entered with two cards, which he handed to me with all proper ceremony. They were those of Mrs. Edmund Catherwood and Miss Catherwood. Before I could ask a question, or give an order, there was a great rustling of silks, and two gorgeously apparelled ladies stood before me.

Chapter 27. MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

“I wish to see Mrs. James Trafford,” said the elder of the two ladies, as she spread her capacious skirts over one of the couches with which the room abounded. I explained that Mrs. Trafford was particularly engaged, but would probably appear in a short time if I sent up the cards.

“Is not Mr. Trafford at home?” was the next demand.

Of course I had to say that Mr. Trafford was not at home, and the ladies, I thought, looked a little incredulous.

Mrs. Catherwood was altogether on a large scale—very tall, very stout, very loud−voiced. Her taste in dress was not good. She wore a red satin dress over an enormous crinoline, a huge ermine mantle, a violet−coloured velvet bonnet with yellow flowers and strings, and bright green gloves, which tightly clasped a blue parasol. Her face was of the hue of brick−dust, but then she was hot, and the ermine was evidently too much for her.

“How very vexatious, ain't it, Clementina?” she exclaimed, turning to her daughter.

A more disagreeable−looking young woman than Miss Clementina I thought I had never seen. Louis was quite right when he said his cousin was “ugly.” She could not help that, you'll say; you will perhaps add, “we are all as God made us.” But I am not at all sure that that is true: if people give way to evil tempers and discontent, or self−indulgence; if they persist in obstinate, narrow−minded notions; if they cherish spite, envy, hatred, suspicion, and meanness, they mar God's handiwork; they make themselves something quite different from that which He intended them to be: *once,* I grant, they were as God made them; now they are as they have marred themselves. I have seen a person with the homeliest features and the most miserable complexion looking beautiful, because of the beauty of the soul within its commonplace casket. I have seen dull eyes light up; I have seen the sweetest expression illumine most irregular features; I have watched the glow of deep feeling suffuse a skin that was irredeemably coarse and colourless; I have seen a smile of heavenly loveliness, and touched with heaven's own brightness, steal over a face that in itself was positively ugly. Also I have seen people who ought to have been really handsome, so far as features and complexion and hair were concerned, looking so plain, so altogether unlovely, as to cause repulsion. There is a saying that “beauty is only skin deep,” and of a certain kind of beauty that is quite true; but of the highest and the most lasting kind of beauty it is utterly and glaringly *untrue.* There is a beauty—we all know it—that depends entirely on youth and health, and prosperity, and red and white beauty, blue−eyed or dark−eyed, that an accident or a severe illness may deface for ever; and there is a beauty over which age has no power—a beauty of thought, and purity, and sweetness, that lingers even when death has stamped his signet on the still brow and on the silent lips that will open nevermore.

I hope I have said enough to establish my theory that true beauty is of the soul, and that really ugly people are *not* as God made them; for that God ever made anything or any creature actually and innately ugly and repulsive I cannot believe. If you wish to be “beautiful for ever,” young ladies, there is no reason why you should not be so. But first and foremost you must be a *Christian.*

Not a mere professing Christian, mind, who thinks if she only attends to what are called religious duties, observes regular seasons of private devotion, and abjures what she supposes to be “the world,” that she is making meet for heaven. But a Christian whose temper is under control, who knows the joy of self−sacrifice, who lives Christianity, rather than preaches it, who makes all around her happy, and constrains even the scoffer to acknowledge the loveliness of true religion. Such a person *must* live closely with God, must love Him and trust Him, must rest in Him, and wait patiently for Him, and must be filled with the spirit of love for those with whom she is associated. If the peace of God which passeth all understanding reign in your hearts, something of the sweetness of that peace will shine out in your eyes and irradiate your countenance; if you walk by faith, looking more for the unseen than the seen, a true nobility will be stamped on every feature; you will possess the beauty that does not diminish with years, that nothing can impair, that will survive even mortal life itself.

And it was not Miss Catherwood's coarse red hair, or her freckles, or her pug nose, or her lack−lustre eyes, or her thin lips that made her so distressingly plain. I have seen people quite as homely in appearance upon whom it has nevertheless been pleasant to look. But there was something in her face which absolutely startled me! it was cunning, cruel, malignant, and it was utterly unrefined. She was richly dressed and in better taste than her mother, but her toilet was far from elegant. Her voice was soft and purring, and her movements were rather stealthy than

gentle. There was clearly something feline in her character.

Louis's absence seemed particularly to annoy both ladies; I wondered whether they had expected him to stay at home day after day till they should choose to make their appearance, for no exact time had been named in Madam's letter.

“I suppose as you're Miss Tyndale?” said Mrs. Catherwood, presently. “I've heard of you.” And she looked as if what she had heard had not been altogether to my credit; certainly not to her own satisfaction.

Miss Catherwood regarded me suspiciously; she scarcely removed her greenish eyes from my countenance, which I felt growing very hot under the merciless, rude stare. How I wished my uncle or Louis, or any one, would come in and rescue me from my disagreeable position.

“How long have you been at Rome?” commenced Mrs. Catherwood, as if she were examining a witness before a jury. I told her how long, and further informed her that we should not remain longer than Easter.

“I should think you'll have had about enough of it by that time,” she replied. “We only came yesterday afternoon, and, of course, we haven't gone anywhere yet; but, from what I've seen of Rome, it seems to me not at all a pretty place; and so dirty, too! And as for all these ruins the guide−books tell about, I am sure I sha'n't care to go trapesing up and down them, spoiling my clothes, and catching my death of cold, and, perhaps, getting lamed for life. Clementina may go if she likes; she says it's quite the thing now to know Rome as well as London! But give me London, where there are good broad streets and plenty of fine shops, and decent churches and theatres—”

“I am sure, ma, if you care for churches,” interrupted Miss Catherwood, “you will not be disappointed in Rome, I suppose there are more churches here than in any other city in the world.”

“But I don't care for churches, except on a Sunday morning,” persisted her mother. “It's everybody's duty to go to church on a Sunday morning; but I like the seats well cushioned, and nice high hassocks, and a place where you can see the preacher. And I like good music, and I never could do with sermons over half−an−hour. And I don't mind collections; I always give gold, Miss Tyndale, whatever it's for! I'd scorn to put silver in the plate, and our clergyman and the churchwardens knows it. And if there's any subscriptions going about I always put my name down for something handsome. I hate being mean, that I do; and nobody ever prospers as neglects their religious duties. But as for going over churches when there's no service, or as good as no service—for I don't think nothing of the mass—the *mess* they calls it at Paris, and a pretty mess it is, that nobody can understand a word of except them priests, that one would think was silly, going on as they do, and turning their backs upon their congregations, which I think extremely disrespectful and ill−mannered. I never did like the Popish religion; you see, Miss Tyndale, I was brought up among the Methodises, and taught to set my face against Popery.”

“Really, mamma, all this must be very uninteresting to Miss Tyndale!” interposed Miss Catherwood. She evidently wished to check her loquacious parent, who was only too delighted to secure a quiet listener.

“Never you mind, Clementina!” was the quick reply. Mrs. Catherwood was warming to her subject, and was not to be so easily silenced, “You and I are different; I like conversation and you don't, generally speaking; so I'll do the talking, and you can keep your lips shut if you like it. I was saying as I was brought up among the Methodises. Clementina says they're a vulgar set, but there's some good people among 'em, as I often tells her, and quite as respectable as them as goes to St. Paul's or to the Abbey; but she says it's not *'ton'* to go to what she calls conventicles. I'm sure my mother was as good a woman as ever lived, and she'd been a joined member of society from her youth upwards. I never goes near the Methodises now, but I like 'em and respect 'em for what I've known of 'em. We lived in the Borough when I was a girl, and my father—”

“Now, really, ma, it's too bad!” exclaimed poor Miss Clementina.

It was mortifying, I dare say; and there was no knowing what Mrs. Catherwood might choose to reveal touching her early experiences in the Borough. Besides, when she became talkative she also became frightfully ungrammatical, and Clementina was a great stickler for Lindley Murray, and prided herself on her unexceptionable English. I tried to turn the current of Mrs. Catherwood's thoughts by asking what church she attended in London.

In reply she named a fashionable West−end chapel−of−ease; but she was not to be diverted from her subject.

“Let me see,” she continued; “what was I saying? About my father—as worthy a man as ever wore shoe−leather, though he did make up his books regular on Sunday morning, which the Methodises didn't hold with, and so he joined himself to the Church of England, where, as he said, it's all quiet and comfortable, and no questions asked. Somehow, I took to Church ways, and went along with my father; mother, she kept to her

Methodises, whose ways was sincere but aggravating. Then I married my first husband, a rich leather merchant in Billiter Street, but we lived out Walworth way. And my first, he was a strict Churchman, and did not hold with any sort of Dissenters being encouraged; and, naturally, I went with him; and when my mother died I cut the Methodises altogether. They was always a nuisance, going on at me about my soul, as if that was any concern of theirs. So I says, I'll go to a minister as won't bother hisself about my soul, which is my own, I suppose; and I went, and now I'm a good Churchwoman, though Clementina says I ain't."

"You are not a Churchwoman at all!" said Clementina, coldly and resignedly; "you go to church, mamma, once on Sunday, when it is neither too hot nor too cold, and you go to sleep in your pew very comfortably; I do not call that being a Churchwoman."

"Never mind what you call it," replied the mother, good−humouredly; CE it does for me, and suits me better than any other sort of religion. One *must* have a religion, you know, Miss Tyndale; the Methodises taught me that, if they did not teach me nothing else; and of course, if you've got good sense, and plenty of money, you'll choose the most comfortable religion. I've no doubt, if I died to−morrow, I should have a funeral sermon preached for me, and our clergyman would go on about the liberal hand which he says I've got, and no mistake, and I dare say there would be a tablet erected to my memory in the church; it could not be opposite to our pew, for there's one there already, though, seeing how handsomely I have come down on all occasions, they might move it for *me*; and they would put at the bottom, 'She lived respected, and died lamented.' And overcome by the prospect, Mrs. Catherwood "wept a little weep."

Her daughter took advantage of the inevitable pause to remark that they had better be going—Mr. Trafford could call upon them at the Hotel d'Angleterre.

"That is where he is gone," I explained; and I told them on what errand he was bound.

"Dear me! and we have just missed each other," said Miss Catherwood.

"I hope it's nothing infectious?" observed Mrs. Catherwood; "no fever, nor nothing of that sort—I do dread a fever! Are there any chemists in Rome? Could one get any Disinfecting Fluid, I wonder?"

I hastened to reassure her; but she continued to look a little scared, and to hold a magnificent gold−topped and jewelled vinaigrette to her nose. When her composure returned, she asked, "Well now, Miss Tyndale, what is there to see here? What's the first place to go to?"

"Most people go first to St. Peter's," I replied; "of course it is a matter of choice. I believe many persons both begin and end with St. Peter's."

"I'll go over it *once,* and no more; it wouldn't do to come to Rome and not to see the inside of St. Peter's—I know as much as that, Clementina, for all you look so scornful. But there! I've been into St. Paul's a score of times or more, and this Pope's church is only the same thing over again, but bigger. And our own St. Paul's is big enough to tire you to death going over it, from the crypt to the golden gallery, to say nothing of the cupola and the ball, into which I can't fancy any respectable female going. And I've been over Westminster Abbey too, often—chapels and all; and I've been to Windsor, and to the Chapel Royal there; and I've seen lots of cathedrals—they are all pretty much alike, so what should I care about St. Peter's for? As for the ruins, I will not be dragged into them; I never had no taste for ruins. I know a lady who strained her knee−joint, climbing up an old castle tower, and she was a cripple ever after. Besides, I've been to Kenilworth, and to Tintern, and to Fountains, and to Warwick—no, Warwick was not in ruins, I think—and I've had quite enough of them."

"But the Coliseum, Mrs. Catherwood! That is like no other ruin in the world."

"I've seen the Coliseum in Regent's Park, and I dare say this one in Rome is no better than that, nor half so good. English people are such asses, going abroad to see what they can see quite as well and better in their own country. But it's the fashion, and somehow we all do bend to that; and Clemmy, she would come to Italy, and, of course, I could not let her come by herself; I know my duty as a mother too well for that. And when I know my *duty,* Miss Tyndale, I always do it."

I thought Mrs. Catherwood must be a very happy person, but I was becoming sadly tired of her confidences, and of her daughter's contemptuous stare, and, therefore, I felt no small relief when Louis walked in and greeted his relations. I was glad to beat a retreat, so I left them to themselves, and went up to my aunt's chamber. She was rather worse than better, and we anxiously expected the doctor.

"Uncle," I said, as we were talking together that afternoon, "I thought you said Mr. Edmund Catherwood was a widower?"

“So I did, child; but I made a mistake. Perhaps it was that I had been told that he had married a widow! This woman is in the flesh, certainly, and poor Edmund is dead and gone. And to think he should have had such a daughter! Still, we must be civil to them, for they are Catherwoods, and I hope Louis will be very attentive to them. I must give him a little advice; he seems rather inclined to neglect them.”

But Louis, after the first day or two, behaved very well to his relatives, for he spent quite half his time at their hotel; and, meanwhile, Miss Judith remained extremely ill, and Mrs. Trafford and Hagar and I had enough to do nursing her and looking after my uncle, who was in great distress at his sister's serious illness. Under other circumstances, I should have felt Louis's defection; but as it was, I scarcely missed him. James did all he could to supply his place; indeed, I do not know what we should have done without him; Mr. Perren at length declared that he was “the very best young man who ever lived.”

The Catherwoods, I soon found, travelled in grand style; they had with them two maids, a footman, their own coachman, and of course a courier; and they had engaged the handsomest suite of apartments in the hotel.

Chapter 28. DAYS OF GLOOM

Oh! how wearily the days passed away! Seasons of illness are always sad and anxious times, even when one is at home, with all the home comforts and appliances about one, and the dear home friends close at hand. But how inexpressibly sad, how painfully depressing they are, when one is far away from one's own land, and, to some extent, unavoidably dependent on strangers. We all felt it in nursing Aunt Judith, we missed so many little necessaries, and we found so many difficulties that would never have beset us in our own country. How sorry I am for those whom the doctors send into a strange land to die!

The fever, which was not at all infectious, was, however, very difficult to subdue, and it was evident that the lungs were seriously affected. “A violent inflammatory cold,” the doctor called my aunt's attack, “with bronchial derangement, and unmistakable symptoms of malaria fever.” The worst features of the illness at length disappeared, the fever succumbed to treatment, the lungs began, as we hoped, to resume their ordinary play, and we flattered ourselves that the worst was over, and a daily amendment to be looked for with not unreasonable confidence. But day by day convalescence seemed to be deferred. Our dear invalid became alarmingly weak, and still continued to be tormented by a violent cough. She was very quiet and patient, never complaining, though I am sure she suffered greatly, and most anxious not to give more trouble than she could possibly avoid. All the irritability that had characterised the earlier stages of her illness had disappeared. All the brusquerie and harshness which had marred the external beauty of what was in itself a fine nature had passed away, and she was gentle, tranquil, and forbearing.

And so the days went on in a sort of anxious monotony scarcely to be described. Mrs. James Trafford, Hagar, and I took our turn as day and night nurses; my uncle wandered about disconsolately, and sometimes came into the sick−room to ask if he could be of any use, and to sit with his hands crossed over his chest, gazing mournfully at his sister. One evening, after he had spent an hour in Aunt's Judith chamber—which we had made as much like an English bed−room as possible—I followed him down, and we went together into the little formal quadrangle which served us as a garden.

“Chryssie,” said my uncle, after we had made the circuit of the small grass−plot twice or thrice in silence, “I wish we had never come to Rome.”

“I wish so too, now,” I replied; “but then there was no real reason why we should not, and we did it for the best”

“Ah! how little we know the issues of our actions; we plan to do this and to do that, to go there and to stay here, and all the while we are blindly advancing to trial and pain, and it may be to death.”

“But God knows, uncle; and if we trust in Him, may we not hope to be guided where we go, and led in ways that we know not of, into all peace and joy?”

“I know, Chryssie, I know! I think very differently from what I did when you were a little girl. I have found that religion is not a theory, nor a philosophy, but a hidden vital principle—a life within, from which flows all thought, and speech, and action. I learned my lesson very late, you will say, but, thank God, not too late! Still I find it no easy task to trust simply and entirely in a Divine Providence, for it is difficult to begin, as it were, afresh, and change or modify all one's notions, and slip off old habits and take to new ones, when a man is as old as I am. I shall soon have completed the threescore years and ten which is the average limit of common life, and after which all one's labour is but heaviness and pain. You have much to be thankful for, my Chryssie, that you have chosen the good part in your youth.”

“How much I owe to Aunt Rachel!”

“How much we all owe to her! There is no preaching so eloquent, so forcible, so persuasive as that of a holy, loving life. How truly she might be said to have her conversation in heaven, and yet how perfect was her sympathy with us, how real her interest in all our little cares and joys and sorrows.”

“Yes; I remember how she entered into my pleasure about my new cabinet for specimens, and about a new frock which I had when I went out of mourning—how she made Hagar alter the trimming, because she thought it did not suit. I always felt that there was nothing which I could not take to those rooms, which are mine now. Oh, the dear old rooms, uncle, how I do long to see them! I am sure I shall dance round them for joy when I find

myself in them once more. Dear, dear Elmwood, I never knew how I loved it till I was hundreds of miles away."

And my heart bounded at the thought of seeing again my dear home by the sea. But I did not know it then. Elmwood was never to be my home again. The pretty rooms, sanctified by Aunt Rachel's sainted memory, and so dear to me as evidences of the love of those who had prepared them for my comfort and delight, were never, never to be my own again. Never more might I roam about the beloved coppice, and the old orchard and the garden, which had become so beautiful of late years; never more might I tread those familiar haunts; never more might that which had been be to me again. I knew it not; God mercifully draws a veil before our eyes; I knew not the sorrow upon sorrow that was coming upon us. So long the clouds had fled away, or showed me only their lovely silver linings, that I had almost forgotten there were such things as dark days, and lowering sunsets, and heavy sweeping tempests.

Even now the clouds were gathering thick and fast; Aunt Judith's illness was only the beginning of sorrows. Said my uncle, as slowly we paced the formal parterre, "Chryssie, I am beginning to be very anxious about your aunt. I am not sure she will recover. I spoke to the English doctor to−day, telling him I was really alarmed, and he admitted that there was abundant cause for fear. I reminded him that his patient had an excellent constitution, and I assured him that she had had but few illnesses in her life—none, indeed, of any importance, and that from any sort of malady she rallied quickly. 'Yes,' he said, 'she had a wonderful constitution, or she would have succumbed ere this to the force of the disease. And even now if she were younger she might recover; but when people were past sixty it was not so easy to regain tone.' And, in short, he seemed to say that we ought, while we hoped for the best, to prepare ourselves for the worst."

"I feared this," I answered, sadly; "I began to lose heart several days ago when I first saw that she was growing weaker, and I know that Mrs. Trafford shares my misgivings. Oh, uncle! if we could only get her home to Elmwood!"

"That is impossible; my own sense told me she could not be moved; but still I asked the physician if she could possibly leave Rome, and he assured me such a thing was not to be thought of, and she could not under any circumstances take even the shortest journey. And I fear, Chryssie, she will never, never leave this place."

I feared so, too, but I kept silence. A weight of sorrow unspeakable was on my heart that night; an undefinable sense of coming trouble lay heavily upon me. Aunt Judith's illness and danger were not all that made me so profoundly wretched. "We see nothing of Louis nowadays," was my uncle's next remark. "It is not very kind of him to desert us in our hour of trial."

"Dear uncle, he always inquires how aunt is, and he brings in choice fruit for her nearly every day. He could be of no use if he stayed continually at home; perhaps it is the best thing he can do to keep away; I dare say he thinks it is so." But, though I defended Louis, I felt very sore about his desertion. I saw so little of him now, though when by chance we did spend a few minutes together he was as affectionate as ever, and I used sometimes to wonder whether the engagement which had caused me so much uneasiness were a reality or a dream. I had no engagement ring, I had never received anything approaching to a love−letter, I had never mentioned to any one my betrothal, I had only the memory of that strange evening, half−sweet, half−bitter, in the Borghese Gardens. And all my troubles, all my sense of impending calamity, seemed to date from that era.

"It is all very well to find excuses," replied my uncle, almost crossly, "but I do say Louis Trafford is very unkind, to say the least of it—very thoughtless. And I think he is behaving rather oddly to you, Chryssie; he has quite left off taking you out and laying himself out for your amusement. I tried to fancy—well, never mind, we old bachelors fancy all sorts of foolish things, no doubt, but I cannot understand his being so much taken up with that vulgar woman and her hideous, red−haired daughter at the Hotel d'Angleterre."

"But they are near relations, uncle."

"Louis is not the one to concern himself about relations, simply as such. He would not take trouble on their account, or give them his society if for reasons of his own he did not choose to be interested in them. I hope he is not going to sell himself to the heiress; her overflowing coffers must be a temptation to a young fellow like Louis, with extravagant tastes and deficient resources. The Cuppage estates are terribly involved, I am afraid, and Madam, though she thinks she will retrieve matters, is by no means as wise as she imagines. And Julia is so worldly−minded that she would not care how entirely Louis sacrificed himself if only he could become a wealthy man. I can see that James Lascelles is uneasy; but it is as I feared, he has not the smallest control over his wayward pupil. As for Mrs. Trafford, Louis shamefully neglects her; it is well for her that she has one dutiful,

affectionate son."

We turned into the house, my uncle with an anxious, absorbed countenance, I with a pain at my heart that would not be stilled. I was learning reluctantly enough that useful, but costly lesson, how "to suffer and be silent." Could it be that Louis was playing me false, that he had been amusing himself, only playing with me at love−making simply as a pastime? How my cheeks burned with shame at the bare idea! How bitterly I regretted that I had yielded to his caresses even for a moment! how angry I felt! and yet all the while I loved him dearly—dearly; and I knew that if he came back again with a plausible tale all would be as before. I knew that I should only be too pleased to accept his apologies. But upon one point I was resolved—the very next time he spoke of love to me—the next time he took advantage of his position as my affianced husband—I would tell him that, whatever might come of it, I neither could nor would practise concealment any longer. I would either be engaged with the consent of his mother, and my uncle and aunt, or remain an unengaged young lady.

Again the time wore away in long and anxious watches in the sick chamber. Aunt Judith grew rapidly weaker, and at length we could plainly perceive that hope was vain. She began to speak of herself in the past tense, and, referring to the future, she made no mention of herself, till at last she spoke plainly of our return to England without her.

"Don't grieve, Chryssie," she said to me, as she saw the trouble I could not hide; "sit down on the bed by me, my dear; I wish to talk to you while I can. I have something I want to say to you, and to−morrow I may not have strength. Chryssie, you are like our own child, you know."

"If you were really my mother, auntie, you could not be more to me; at least, I think not. I feel that I owe you not only the love but the duty of a daughter."

"I was not wise at first, Chryssie; I went far to ruin you. I made your life a burden to you, and I did you harm."

"Don't, auntie dear; I was such a dreadful child that I wonder you could do anything at all with me. If you made natural mistakes, they were all rectified long ago; if, indeed, you did do me harm, which I do not believe, it has all, somehow, turned to good. All has worked together for good. And you have made me very happy, you and my dear uncle; no beloved child under her own father's roof could have been happier than I."

"I am glad of that, Chryssie; and do you know Matthew and I often say how greatly your coming among us changed us for the better. Not just at first, you know, but soon afterwards; a child in our house was a softening, expanding influence; in caring for your welfare and happiness we found happiness ourselves; long cherished selfishness gave way, and self−conceit gradually disappeared. Our great failure taught us to doubt the infallibility of our judgment, and to question the hitherto unquestioned wisdom of our own plans. But let all that go; you have been a blessing to us, Chryssie; that is what I wish you to know; and now, if you think you owe me anything, my child, promise me that you will never forsake my brother."

"Indeed, I never will, Aunt Judith. I will be all to him that a daughter can. Who should I care for if not for him?"

"He is getting old, Chryssie, and I think he has aged considerably during the last two years. Till this illness came on I was by much the stronger of the two. I do not believe he will live very long, and I should have liked to have ministered to him to the end. But that may not be; God calls me away, so I leave him in your care, my dear. Perhaps he will need much care, much tenderness, before he joins me where I am going almost immediately."

"You think he will become a confirmed invalid, and perhaps make large claims on my time and patience before it pleases God that he should go home to his rest? Well, I hope my affection, my gratitude, even more than my sense of duty, will be sufficient for every need. Come what may, auntie, I do not think I shall ever feel any care of him who has been and is my second father to be a burden! I hope, and feel sure, it will be my joy and my privilege to love him and serve him in every way as the most devoted of daughters. Be easy about my uncle, Aunt Judith!"

"I am, child. And now I have not a care except poor Mona, and neither you nor any one else can help her. I can only commend her to God. Most of my money goes to Matthew as the survivor; but there are still several thousands at my disposal, and I have left those to you—half for yourself, half in trust for my sister, Mona Dashwood. If I left any money to her that man would be sure to possess himself of it under some specious pretence, and Mona would be none the better for it. And that is all, dear, as regards this world. I am bound for another, and that very soon. And I thank my God. I am ready and willing to go to Him. It will not seem so very long before you all come."

“Not very long, auntie. I have heard people say that as they grow older the years slip by faster and faster, just as the river rushes the more rapidly as it broadens towards the sea. But, oh! auntie dear, I wish we had you at Elmwood!”

“Don't wish it, dear. I wished it at first; but now I am content that God's will, even in this, be done. And what does it matter where this poor worn−out garment of the flesh is laid by, since all the earth is the Lord's? I shall sleep just as sweetly, Chryssie, under these blue Roman skies as in the family vault at Elmwood. For it is not I that you will put under the sod and leave behind you in Italian earth; I shall be—I know not where, and it boots not where, only that I am sure I shall be with my Lord—my Lord who died for me and who rose again that in Him I might have eternal life. I used to fear death, Chryssie; it seemed so terrible to die, to leave all pleasant things to lie down in cold and darkness. Now it is all changed. I saw Aunt Rachel die, and I prayed that my last end might be like hers, that I, too, might have that life in Christ which is immortality and everlasting joy. And God heard my prayer, and revealed Himself to me. I saw God made manifest in the flesh, and I came to know His love and power and glory. And I feared death no more. It is quite true, Chryssie, what Aunt Rachel said—there is no death to the Christian. Death is to those who remain behind; to them is the darkness and stillness of the grave. To those who go to God there can be nothing but light and blessedness. A few more hours, and how much I shall know! What mysteries will be explained! what problems will be solved! Live to God, my child; let your life here below be in Christ, and you will find there is nothing to fear when the time comes for you to lay down your head in what they call death. It is sweet to hear the Master's voice saying as He says to me this moment, Chryssie, and as He has been saying, blessed be His name, these many days, 'My child, thy work on earth is done—come home.' It is very good of Him to give us this tired feeling when the hour of rest is fully come.”

Aunt Judith lived till the evening of the next day, but she said little more to any one. She sank rapidly, and seemed at times only half conscious. Her last words, for she rallied just before she went, were—“Death is swallowed up in victory. Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” So another victory was won, another soul had passed from the dawn into the day; from the dim, uncertain twilight of earth into the full brightness of Heaven's resplendent morning.

Chapter 29. THE NORTHBOROUGH BANK

On a lovely April day we buried Aunt Judith in the Protestant cemetery. The sun shone brightly yet softly on the flowery terraces and sweet, green slopes of that fairest of grave gardens; the birds sang tranquilly; the scent of orange and lemon and other fragrant blossoms was in the warm, clear air; violets literally carpeted the velvet sward beneath our feet; and over all there hung the intense blue, cloudless heaven, one broad arch of pure, calm, azure crystal. And we stood by the open grave, listening to the solemn voice which told us how this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality, when the hour shall come, and the voice of the archangel shall be heard over sea and land, and the dead in Christ shall rise to everlasting joy. And then, indeed, shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory! Oh! death, where is thy sting? oh! grave, where is thy victory?” It was an unspeakable comfort to listen to those words of solemn cheer in our own dear English language; and sad as we were we turned away from the hallowed spot with hearts consoled and strengthened for the onward journey.

I am glad that my last memories of dear Aunt Judith are all so peaceful and so fair. Whether I think of the last days of her life, when she rested so serenely in the everlasting arms, ready to respond at any hour to the Master's summons; or whether I think of her in her lonely resting place, far from the graves of her kindred, I can rejoice, and thank God that so He took her to Himself ere yet the storm which was to visit us so severely had arisen in its power. God in His great mercy took her from the evil to come.

That evening Mrs. Trafford and I sat together. My uncle had gone out on the Pincio with James Lascelles, who showed him every kindness, and was as a son to him, and rendered him all those trifling attentions which the old gentleman prized so greatly. Louis had remained with us till late in the afternoon, then he had suddenly announced that he was engaged to dine with the Catherwoods at the Hotel d'Angleterre.

“Do not go this evening,” I had ventured to say. “It is so dreary, Louis! I think Rome is the very saddest, dreariest place I was ever in.”

And Louis replied, not unkindly, but in that tone which at once extinguishes any latent hope of gaining one's end, “I am really sorry, Chryssie, but I promised Mrs. Edmund I would be there. You see they know no one in Rome, and somehow they don't get into any set, and it is really very lonely for them.”

“We know scarcely any one,” was my answer, “and we are very lonely. I wish you would stay.”

“Impossible, my dear Chryssie. You know you would not like me to break my word, and indeed Clementina is expecting me to help her to decide upon some cameos this evening. She must make her choice to−night, and she wants to secure the best that are to be had before Lady Louisa Morecomb sees them.”

“It is all Clementina now!” I said, bitterly. It was a foolish speech, I confess—a silly, impolitic, and slightly vulgar speech; and I can only plead in defence that I was young and inexperienced, and apt to speak unadvisedly with the tongue.

“Women are all alike,” quoth Louis, quite angrily. “I think jealousy is as natural to them as the air they breathe.”

“You mistake me,” I said, coldly; “I am not jealous. I should be very sorry to interfere with Miss Catherwood, and I am only pleased that you should pay her every attention; but in this time of our great sorrow I thought you would have liked to be more with us. We need all the comfort we can get.”

“Now, my dear Chryssie, you are utterly unreasonable. I never had a genius for consolation. If you want that sort of thing, let me advise you to consult with Mr. James Lascelles; he is great, I believe, in the art of comforting the broken−hearted. And though, of course, Miss Judith Perren was a very good old soul—and I do not mean to say her unexpected demise is not much to be deplored—I do not see why you should be so stricken in spirit! The old lady had nearly accomplished her threescore years and ten, and, really, when it comes to that, I do think it is quite time to shuffle off this mortal coil as gracefully as possible. I always thought Miss Judith Perren a very sensible woman; I am confirmed in my opinion now that she has taken her departure without unnecessary fuss, and without making herself a chronic nuisance for I know not how many years, as too many old people are in the habit of doing. Now, don't look so horrified, my pet; that frown does not become you. You know old people are a bore.”

“And yet, if our lives are spared, we shall come to be old ourselves.”

“A self−evident fact, as we shall certainly live till we die; but when the facts are disagreeable, why remind one's self of them? In such cases I always think of that inimitable Frenchman who, on being reminded that 'facts *were* facts,' ingeniously replied, 'so much de worse for de facks!' The wisest course is to enjoy the present to the very extent of one's capacities, and to let the future go. If one ever so foolishly tries to get a peep into the book of fate, one is sure to be horribly scared. Even a casual glimpse is to be avoided.”

“If we were not immortal creatures, your philosophy might be very desirable. But, Louis, you do not mean all this? Say you do not, for you are making me very unhappy. You have adopted a strange, cynical tone of late. I cannot understand you; you are not at all like your old self.”

'You can understand me when I tell you that I love you more than ever, Chryssie! My intimacy with the Catherwoods is but a measure of prudence. I seek their society far more in accordance with my grandmother's desire than for any satisfaction of my own. No, of course you are not jealous of Clementina Catherwood, for she is nearly as ugly as you are beautiful, and her vulgarity is far worse than her mother's, which at least, has the merit of being unaffected. What can be more atrocious than an underbred, pretentious fine lady?”

“What, indeed! But, Louis, I have just one thing to say to you. I did not mean to say it to−night, but as opportunity serves I will speak at once. I did very wrong in permitting you to call the understanding between us an engagement. Ever since I consented to it. I have felt humiliated and wanting in my duty to those whom it has pleased God to set over me in the place of my parents. Louis, when I looked at Aunt Judith's dear dead face, I felt most bitterly the concealment I had practised towards her. I would have given the world had I not kept back from her the one secret of my life. So it must be one of two things—either you must speak to my uncle, or permit me to do so, or else we must be to each other simply what we were before that evening in the Borghese Gardens.”

For a minute Louis was silent; he stood contemplating the hat which he held in his hand as if he were carefully examining its workmanship and determining its value. At last he said, “Well, Chryssie, I suppose you are right; I *will* speak to Mr. Perren—I do not say this evening, nor to−morrow, but very speedily. But I think it is only seemly to give him a few days to recover himself after the loss of a sister to whom he was so much attached. Funerals and betrothals don't go well together, and the fitness of things ought to be considered.”

“And your mother, Louis? Oh! I am learning to love her so much; she is so good, so sweet.”

“Never was a better, sweeter creature ever born! But my mother is neither a Trafford nor a Catherwood, and it is perfectly useless to consult her in family affairs. She has James, who is all the world to her and who tells her all his heart; she is happy in him, and she is wise enough to content herself with the confidences she enjoys, and not to hanker after those which after all would only be a burden and a perplexity. Nevertheless, you need not feel any scruples concerning yourself; my mother is so very fond of you that I am certain she will only be too pleased to receive you as a daughter. Now Chryssie, my dear, I really must go; I am shamefully behind time. Good evening!”

I went back to my room with a weary, unsatisfied feeling, and a sense of disappointment as indefinite as it was tormenting. Louis's manner was more lover−like than his words; and for the moment, as we parted, I felt my old faith in him revive; but no sooner was I left alone than I began again to question whether this love which he proffered was the genuine thing. “Is it love or self−love?” I asked myself in the solitude of my chamber. “Has he for me that pure, steadfast, unselfish affection on which the happiness of married life so largely depends? Will he be, not only my lover, but my best friend, my guide, my counsellor? Can I depend upon him to do the thing that is right and wisest? Will he—” And there I stopped, for I was asking myself a question so momentous in its issues that I, knowing that no satisfactory, no plausible answer even, could be returned, shrank back affrighted and dismayed. For I could not make myself believe that Louis was truly a Christian. And how could I hope for God's blessing on a union which must lack the best and the holiest of ties—oneness in spiritual as well as in secular interests? And yet I loved him with a strength that seemed to defy every obstacle. He was capricious, cold, careless, and, I was obliged to own, selfish and worldly−minded; and yet I loved him, with all his faults, a thousand times more than I could have loved the greatest paragon of manly virtue and Christian heroism that the century could produce. I know now that I put him in the place of God; I placed him first, before all duty, and before all other considerations earthly or heavenly; and bitter was the punishment—or, rather, let me say, severe though loving was the discipline—for I do not believe in any punishment which is not intended to correct the evil it chastises. The parent who beats his erring child simply because he is angry or in a vindictive frame of mind is

far worse than the child himself; he is not chastising, but revenging his own wrongs upon the person of the offender, and the act is therefore devilish. Whereas, the father who corrects in love, who seeks to check the sin and the folly rather than to vindicate his own authority or to assert his outraged dignity, chastens in the true spirit of parental tenderness, and the act is God−like. So I will not say my Heavenly Father punished me, His foolish, wayward child; but rather that in His lovingkindness and goodness He visited me with sore and heavy discipline. In short, He permitted me to reap that which I had sown, for what are called God's judgments upon the sinner are most frequently the inevitable consequences of that sinner's own act and deed.

A few days more came and went, and still Louis had not spoken to my uncle, the plea being that Mr. Perren was very far from well. Absorbed in my own anxieties, I am afraid I did not notice how greatly he was indisposed. And at length the time came for our return to England.

We intended to journey as quickly as possible, not visiting any of the towns on our homeward route, for we all were extremely anxious to find ourselves on British soil, and my uncle and I longed to be once more at Elmwood.

Rather to my surprise Louis elected to accompany us; there seemed to be a coolness between him and the Catherwoods in those days, and I fancied he was not sorry to break with them easily and naturally. And he openly declared that he was tired of Clementina.

Notwithstanding our rapid flight northwards, it was arranged that we should spend at least a week in London, not for pleasure, but for necessary business. My uncle had some trifling legal matters to arrange, and he wished to consult one or two old friends in Lincoln's Inn; so we took up our quarters once more in the great metropolis.

It was my seventeenth birthday, a bright May day, brilliant but rather cold, as May days often are in England; and as we sat at the breakfast−table my uncle asked me how I would like to spend the day. I had already received from him a beautiful mourning brooch in memory of dear Aunt Judith.

“Shall we go to the Academy again?” was my answer; for I knew how thoroughly he enjoyed the hours spent among the pictures.

“Well no, my dear,” he answered; “seeing so many pictures rather tires me. I had a most wretched headache, you know, after we were there on Tuesday. What do you say to the Crystal Palace?”

“That I should like it extremely. Only let us go by the High Level; there are so many stops by the London Bridge Line.”

“Of course; the High Level is the most convenient. Now go and put on your hat, my dear; we may as well have a good long day; and I saw something about an evening concert at St. James's Hall; we might go there, if we are not too tired. I must give my Chryssie her pleasure on her birthday. Where is the newspaper? That will tell us about the concert.”

I gave him the newspaper, and went to my room to dress. Something, I forget what, made me longer than usual, and it was quite a quarter of an hour before I returned to Mr. Perren. How carelessly I put on my walking dress and buttoned my gloves as I came down the stairs, and tripped along the passage! How little I thought of what awaited me! I felt gayer and lighter than I had done for many weeks, and I was anticipating the delights of the Palace, then almost a novelty to me, with all the keen appreciation of my seventeen years.

“I am afraid you are tired out of all patience, uncle,” were, I remember, the words with which I entered the sitting−room. “Why, you are not ready! Let me get your hat, and I think you will need your light overcoat, for the wind is in the East again. Shall I fetch it for you?”

There was no answer. My uncle still bent over the newspaper, his forehead leaning on the palms of his hands—a very common attitude with him when reading. He had become very hard of hearing of late, so I supposed that he had not heard my voice, and half playfully I went up to him to remove the hands and make him lift his head. But as I did so he looked me full in the face, and then I saw that something terrible had happened. He was very white, his eyes had a wild, scared look in them, and his lips were quivering as if he were trying to keep down emotion.

“Oh, uncle, what is it?”

And my first thought flew to Aunt Mona. I was ready to impute any sort of wickedness to Dr. Danvers Dashwood. Still, there was no reply, and the whole countenance was convulsed with a sort of spasm, which followed an ineffectual attempt to speak. He looked at me with such pitiful eyes, and pointed to a paragraph in the paper.

I read: “We are sorry to be obliged to confirm the report which reached us yesterday evening, too late for

insertion in our second edition, of the failure of the long−established and highly−respectable firm known as the Northborough and District Banking Company. The bank suspended payment yesterday morning. It is rumoured that business will not be speedily resumed, the deficiencies being of the most serious character. It is also stated, on good authority, that this disaster, which will painfully affect the whole district, is entirely owing to several important failures in London."

I looked at my uncle, scarcely comprehending, yet fearing I know not what.

"Have you money in this bank, uncle? Oh, of course you have! All your cheques are on the Northborough and District Banking Company. Shall you lose very much?"

"Child! I shall lose every penny I have; I am one of the largest shareholders. Everything must go; Elmwood must go; in my old age I shall be reduced to work for my living."

And the poor old man bowed down his head and wept. I, too, wept, though I was as yet far from realising the extent of our misfortune.

"I have a little bit of money, you know, uncle," I said, trying to soothe him as if he were a child. "Aunt Judith left me nearly two thousand pounds; you shall have that. I can work, and ought to work; besides, I am sure I shall like it." And there I checked myself, thinking of my engagement.

"That is all gone!" he replied, wiping away his tears, and trying to speak bravely. "All Judith's money was invested in that luckless bank; so was Aunt Rachel's. Poor Hagar! her annuity and her own savings have gone together."

"But, uncle, you have canal shares, and gas shares, and shares in ever so many things, besides some houses in Northborough."

"All will have to go, Chryssie. I am ruined! Everything I have will scarcely meet the calls that must fall upon me."

"But not Elmwood, uncle? They cannot take away your inheritance; you did not buy that with bank−money?

"Elmwood must go—there is no doubt about it—if this news be true. Yes, all must go, all shall go. At least I will keep my honour and the integrity of my name. The name of Perren has never been dishonoured, and, please God, never shall while it rests with me to maintain it unsullied."

And then he explained to me the nature of property invested in shares, and the liabilities of shareholders. When he had finished I replied, "I see it all clearly, uncle dear. Yes, I am afraid Elmwood must go; you could not keep it and a pure conscience together. It will be very hard, but perhaps things will turn out better than our fears."

"They will not, my dear, and we had better prepare ourselves to meet the worst. But oh! my little Chryssie, I thought to leave you quite an heiress. I have willed Elmwood to you. I thought you would be mistress of the old place when it pleased God to call me away. And now it must go to strangers; it will have to be sold to the highest bidder. And what will become of you, Chryssie, when I am gone? I am getting old, and this shock will shorten my days. My poor dear child!"

"Uncle, darling, don't trouble about me. If the worst come to the worst, I could earn my living and yours, too, somehow. Better girls than I have had to work. But I ought to tell you—I will tell now—don't be vexed that you did not know it before; it was not quite my fault—Louis and I are engaged."

"Then all is right! I am so glad, my child. And perhaps a little may be saved from the wreck, and you will give your poor old uncle a corner by your own fireside."

"I will give him the best place in all the house. I am sure Louis would allow nothing else."

"Thank God, you will not suffer, my Chryssie! More than half my anguish was for you. The dark cloud has now shown its silver lining. Thank God! thank God!"

Now, all this while Louis, with James and Mrs. Trafford, were at Brighton, but they were coming on to London on the morrow.

Chapter 30. “I HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE”

It was all too true; the Northborough and District Banking Company was no more. Doubtless there had been mismanagement and, I am afraid, unjustifiable speculation—at least, so it was affirmed when the public began to discuss the matter; and so James Lascelles declared when, on behalf of my uncle, he investigated the actual state of affairs. The ruin was complete; depositors were clamorous, and shareholders stricken with despair. That amongst others Matthew Perren would be stript of all his possessions was absolutely certain. Elmwood and all it contained must be sold; gas shares, canal shares, railway shares, lands and houses, all must go, and even then it seemed uncertain whether the bank would pay more than fifteen shillings in the pound. My uncle, after the first shock, bore up bravely, and was only anxious to give up everything at once and without reserve.

Of course there were a few days of mingled hopes and fears, during which it was presumed that certain arrangements might be made, in virtue of which the bank would go on again, and Louis was most sanguine that all would yet be well. James Lascelles, on the contrary, was sure that the evil was past remedy, as, indeed, it speedily proved itself to be.

Louis came to me one morning and found me alone. It was only on the previous evening that we had come to a full comprehension of our sad position, that we had perceived that the shareholders would have to surrender everything, and that nothing would remain to Matthew Perren save his unimpeachable honour and integrity.

“This is a very bad business,” said Louis, when he had taken his seat in rather a formal manner, and without any lover−like demonstration; “they have made a terrible mess of their affairs, and those of them who are not fools are knaves. Somebody must be the gainer; there are two or three who have feathered their nests nicely, I am well assured. How could old Perren be such an idiot?”

“Please do not speak of him in that way. You know, Louis, all that my uncle is to me.”

“I really do *not* know, nor can I at all understand how any person of taste can entertain an affection for so ridiculous a person. Of all the old humbugs I ever met with he is the most absurd! A vain, weak, pompous fool!”

“You are unkind, Louis; I would not speak so of any one you loved, whatever might be my own opinion.”

“There! don't cry, you silly child, and I'll not abuse him any more; I did not come here to talk about him—I came to ask you what you meant to do?”

“What I meant to do? Do you mean for the present?”

“Of course I do! When all is settled Mr. Perren will not have twenty pounds in the world that he can call his own, and as your own little fortune goes with his, it becomes a very serious question how you will contrive to live!”

There was something in his tone that I disliked intensely, something that smote me with sudden pain and apprehension; something that I secretly resented, while, at the same time, I by no means understood what it was or what it might portend. My heart was very full, but I repressed the rising emotion, and answered with as much steadiness as I could muster.

“I have not yet discussed any plans with my uncle; certain ideas have flitted through my own brain, but I am not sure that they are at all practicable, and I have not spoken of them to any one. Naturally I wished first to consult you.”

“I am afraid I am about the worst person in the world to advise you; I really have no notion what you could do unless, indeed, you turn governess—that is what young ladies in novels mostly do, I believe. But I fancy you are too handsome for a 'school−marm,' Chryssie, and I am pretty sure you have too high a spirit. A governess ought to be plain, or only passably good−looking, at the best; she ought to be meek and humble, much−enduring and content to sustain her moral nature on that much−despised aliment called 'humble pie.' She ought to anticipate slights, to take them as her natural portion, and to thrive upon them; she ought to expect to be constantly ignored as a human being, and at the same time to be incessantly reminded of her status as a governess. In fact, she must, if she would prosper, sink the woman in the governess, and be content to occupy the debatable position between semi−gentility and actual servitude, which is assigned to unfortunate young women so circumstanced; and all this, I fear, would never suit you, Chryssie; you would be miserable.”

“I would try hard not to be miserable; but I will not, if I can help it, 'go a−governessing,' as Hagar calls it. For

one thing, I promised Aunt Judith that I would not leave my uncle; and, even had I never given any such promise, I should feel it impossible now to separate from him."

"The height of folly, Chryssie! You must be infatuated with the Perrens. What business had that doting old woman to extract from you any such promise? And what astonishing infatuation makes you cling so fondly to a stupid old fool, who fancies himself a genius and a *virtuoso,* I cannot imagine."

"Louis, you cannot have the smallest regard for my feelings. Shall I tell you what I think? You are not behaving as a gentleman!"

"Oh, very well! since you prefer old Perren to me, you must prefer him! that is all I have to say. At the same time, I must remark that you have extremely bad taste, and are not over−wise into the bargain. You have chosen between us, I suppose."

"I do not know what you mean; I did not know there was any choice to be made. The love and duty I bear Mr. Perren is that of a daughter. One does not give up one's father because of other attachments. When you asked me to be your wife, I was Matthew Perren's niece, or adopted daughter, which you will. I stand in the same relation to him now."

Louis was silent for more than a minute. He seemed about to reply, then he hesitated, and nervously twisted his watch−chain.

At last he said, "Chryssie, it is best to be candid, is it not?"

"It is. Be as candid as you like. I only ask to know the truth."

"The truth then is this; do not be vexed, my dear, and do believe me—it costs me more than I can express, to have to say to you that—"Again he paused: I think he hoped I should take the hint, and help him out by answering what was obviously implied; but I did not feel inclined to meet him by one single step. I only repeated his own words, "You have to say to me? yes! go on, I am listening."

"You need not put me to the pain of a full explanation. Surely you understand?"

"Indeed, I do not understand you at all. You have puzzled me greatly of late, Louis, but at this moment you are more of an enigma than ever. I must request you to proceed."

"Very well, then, I have no alternative. You see, my own position is an unfortunate one—a peculiarly unfortunate one, I may say. I wish things were otherwise; I wish we Cuppage Traffords were not so horribly cursed with impecuniosity. I call the heavens to witness, Chryssie, that were I a prince and a *millionaire* I would choose you among all the women in the universe."

"And being only Louis Trafford, with an encumbered estate, you cannot afford to indulge your—what shall I call it?−your *fancy.*"

"That is it," he cried, eagerly. "I knew you must see it; you have so much good sense. But do not call my love for you *fancy*; it is something far deeper than that."

"However deep, it seems to be something which fails utterly when put to the test."

"Chryssie, you are hard upon me. When I asked you to be mine, when I exchanged vows with you, you were the heiress of Elmwood. Now, however much I had loved—and I swear by all that is holy I loved you passionately, Chrystabel Tyndale!—I should have felt it my duty to crush out the affection and to fly your presence had not the alliance appeared to be entirely prudent. But it seemed that for once love and expediency went hand in hand. It was necessary that I should marry money; and the girl I loved had money, or would have money, and so there was no reason why I should repress my inclinations. I have always dreaded an imprudent marriage—a marriage on insufficient means. Why, I know a fellow, not much over thirty, a very nice fellow too, who rushed into matrimony with only half an income. He had expensive tastes, very refined tastes, and he fell in love with a charming girl, who unluckily had not a halfpenny. I never saw a prettier creature for a *blonde;* and I can quite appreciate the temptation which led him to make shipwreck of him−self. They have been married now about ten years; they have half−a−dozen crying children who always have whooping−cough when they are not having measles. They live in a little six−roomed house, in a shabby terrace at Camberwell; they keep one wretched drudge of a maid−servant; they dine on cold mutton and rice pudding, and the poor little beauty gets a new dress once in two years. They have gone persistently down—*down*, ever since they married, and Jack, I can't blame him, hates to go home. Now this sort of thing is just what I could not bear, Chryssie; a man has no right to sacrifice a lovely young woman in such fashion; it is cruel, it is abominably selfish, and in short," continued Louis, working himself up into a climax of virtuous heroism, "it is what I will never do, I will never ask any girl

to share my poverty."

"Your poverty! It is scarcely that!"

"It is that to me,—a Trafford and a Catherwood; the lord of Cuppage, which wants I know not how many cool thousands spent upon it, to clear it of incumbrance, and to make it what it ought to be. It is not I who am to blame, it is my miserable position."

"Let me clearly understand you," I replied. How thankful I was that I could keep outwardly calm though my heart beat so wildly that it required a strenuous effort to speak collectedly:—" let me know exactly what you mean. You offered me your hand, believing that I should inherit Elmwood, and the rest of the Perren property; you entangled me,—no; I will not say that, for I was to a great extent a free agent; but you were the cause of my entering into an absolute, but clandestine engagement, for which I shall ever reproach myself, and on account of which I feel deeply humiliated. Now, if I do not mistake, you wish to be released from that engagement? I am no heiress, but a poor penniless girl, who has to seek her own fortune in the world, and with whom you object to connect yourself."

"Chryssie! I shall always love you! It is fully as much for your sake as for my own."

"Pray do not make needless excuses; and let me finish what I was about to say. You are free, free as air! The engagement, which never ought to have existed, is cancelled. Henceforth we are nothing to each other; if we meet, we meet only as common acquaintances. Take back your ring. Take back your locket. Take back every word of love you have ever spoken; you are free, Louis Trafford."

"Chryssie! you are stately as a queen, you are worthy of a coronet! Oh, my beautiful Chryssie, whom I must lose for ever, I never loved you more madly than at this moment, in which a cruel fate compels me to accept my release!" And he would have wound his arms around me, and pressed his lips to mine, as in old time.

But I drew back, with a haughty gesture. "No, Louis—never again; I should hold myself degraded by your caresses; you are no longer my betrothed lover, my future husband. A girl who respects herself never suffers familiarities from any other. It is sufficient humiliation that I have allowed you so long the privileges of a declared lover, believing firmly that you would in due time be my own wedded husband; and now to find that you have been merely amusing yourself with me—that henceforward we are Miss Tyndale and Mr. Trafford—nothing more!"

"Nay! there is no reason why we should not be friends! We have only to forget the episode of the last two months; what need for formalities between us two?"

"Every need. No! we cannot be friends in the way you mean; your friend in one sense I shall ever remain, but all association must cease. Those who have been lovers cannot well be common acquaintances; after to−day we shall meet no more in private, though I suppose we may occasionally meet in the presence of others."

"You do not then absolutely forbid me your presence?"

"Certainly not; it is not worth while."

He looked a little mortified, it hurt his vanity that I could give him up so calmly.

"But," he continued, "though it will always be pleasant to me to speak to you, and to see you even, I will not, if it gives you pain, intrude upon you. At least, not for the present; in time to come, you know, when you have quite ceased to love me—"

"I have ceased to love you now!"

God forgive me, if in that agony of wounded pride and crushed tenderness which only a woman can know, I said what was not quite true; but, in the bitterness of that moment, I tried to convince myself that I hated him. I could not bear that he should think that he was still dear to me. I had given him of my best, the best I then had to offer; I had given him a true woman's love, and now he carelessly flung it back to me. And yet he could never restore to me that which once he had prayed for and obtained. I felt beggared as I stood before him; my treasure was gone, lost, utterly wasted, and it could never, never—so in my impotent misery I told myself—be regained.

"You can love and not love then at will?" said Louis, with something very like a sneer. "I always thought, at least I have always understood, that woman's love was imperishable; that constancy and fidelity were, notwithstanding many foibles, many frailties, the distinguishing characteristics of the sex."

"You say rightly, true love *is* imperishable, and inconstancy or unfaith can never pertain to it, be it woman's love or man's love. But, Louis, I know now that I have never loved you—Louis Trafford! I have, like too many other women, loved an ideal, a myth, which never had any real existence, save in my own credulous fancy. I gave

you credit for everything that is noble and excellent. I believed that you were all that heart could wish. *Why*, I scarcely know, except that I was dazzled with your personal beauty and your brilliant talents while I was yet a child, and I suppose the glamour remained upon me when childhood passed away. But I deliberately repeat, you, as I see and know you now, I never loved! I loved a good, large−souled, generous man, whose highest aim was to please his God and to serve his fellow−creatures—a man who *might be trusted*, and who was worthy of all that woman counts most sacred and most precious. You are not that man, Louis Trafford! You never were. I would not marry you now though you laid at my feet riches and honours and rank, and what is more, as much love as you are capable of."

"Upon my word, Miss Tyndale, you are extremely cornplimentary. You do not mince matters, I must say. If you have a hand of steel you might just as well put a velvet glove upon it. I could not help it if, with the romantic fancy of your sex, you invested me with all sorts of possible and impossible heroic virtues. I have never deceived you."

"Not willingly, I admit; and I blame myself far more than I blame you. I ought to have been sure that no good could come of insincerity and concealment; I ought to have mistrusted the man who first taught me to deceive those who were to me as parents, Let us part, Louis; why should we go on disputing? We fully understand each other now; the past, mutually considered, is as though it had never been. If you have done me any wrong I forgive it freely; only, Louis, do not go about pretending to love this woman and that. What may be very delightful to you may be death to them. You have a strange gift of winning hearts; but do not, if you would not some day suffer all the agonies of a late and vain repentance, amuse yourself in winning what you do not care to keep."

"Chryssie, I vow I never thought of amusing myself with you. In all good faith I asked you to engage myself to you. It is my misfortune, not my fault, that I now restore to you—unwillingly enough, God knows!—the troth−plight exchanged at Rome. I am a poor man—I must remain a bachelor, or marry money."

"I am afraid you will not find much happiness in such a marriage, in which the money is the chief thing to be secured, and the woman a mere necessary appendage, if not an incumbrance But let us end this discussion; I am weary of it, and if you choose to marry an Indian *begum* it is nothing to me now."

"One thing more, Chryssie; no one knows that we were once engaged?"

"Yes, my uncle knows it. When the crash came, and he was greatly distressed about me and my darkened prospects, I told him at once that he need not concern himself on that head, for that I was to be your wife, and I showed him the turquoise ring you gave me and your portrait, when we left Rome, which I carried in my bosom."

"You should not have done that; you promised silence. You have not kept faith with me."

"I kept faith with you too well—too blindly. But do not trouble yourself; I will engage that my uncle shall never upbraid you—never speak to you on the subject. I believe your mother knows there was something between us—indeed, I am positive she does; but I did not tell her. She has, as you know, very acute perceptions, and you were not so guarded but that she might easily make the discovery."

"Oh, I do not care about my mother! My only objection to her knowing was that she would certainly make it her business to speak to Mr. and Miss Perren. Though it is better never to take one's mother into one's counsels."

"I know there are mothers to whom one cannot give one's confidence; but I believe and I hope they are very few in number. But with a mother like yours there need be no hesitation; a sweeter, purer, gentler, more unselfish creature never lived. And you are not to her what a son should be."

"I believe you are in love with my mother. Now confess, Chryssie, you accepted me that you might be Mrs. James Trafford's daughter−in−law? Well, the chance is still open to you. Who knows what may yet come pass?"

For answer I bade him good morning; his levity was even worse than his self−defence. And I tried to tell myself that regret for one so unworthy of my esteem was altogether foolish and shameful, I dare say I philosophised very wisely, and reasoned as logically as could be desired; but in spite of all I could say to myself my heart was very sore, so sore that even now I do not care to recall its long dull aching, or its fierce spasms of keen pain which would come, though I tried so hard to be proud, and cold, and calm, and stoical.

And now the clouds had gathered more thickly and darkly than ever; not a gleam of sunshine could I find, not a rift through which the blue could for a moment gladden my sad eyes, and as for the "silver linings," I had to take them quite on trust. All I could do was to try not to be rebellious, and to wait patiently for the brighter, better day.

Chapter 31. NOT TOO LATE

And now arose the momentous question, “What am I to do?” Or rather, it was, “What are *we* to do?” For it was very clear, that when our ready money was gone, there would be no more forthcoming, and my uncle's purse would be as empty as my own. And though he talked daily and almost hourly of “getting a situation,” I felt sure that at his age, and with his feeble health, and above all, with his peculiarities, which would expose him on all sides to ridicule and misconstruction, the alternative he proposed was impossible. No one would engage him, or having engaged him, no one would care to retain his services. And I could not bear that he should be laughed at, and undervalued, and treated with contempt. Oh! if only I could earn enough to support us both!

The sooner a difficulty is faced the better, and the greater the dilemma the more urgent is the need of extrication, Obviously our first step was to economise, so as to husband what small resources remained to us; then we must look about us, and see what could be done. My uncle was most unwilling to make any changes. When I told him that I was no longer engaged to Louis he burst into a fit of indignant anger. I did not repeat to him what had passed between us, I only said that Louis felt that a match between him and me was imprudent, and that he requested to be set free.

“The pitiful sneak! the contemptible beggar!” shouted. Mr. Perren, almost beside himself with rage. “Let him go, Chryssie! let him go, my dear child, he was never worthy of you; let him go, for he is not worth keeping or fretting after—a mean, wretched, cowardly, miserable cheat!”

“Do not let us speak of him, uncle! Of course I was obliged to tell you what had happened; but let us try to forget all about it; please say no more.”

“I shall require from Mr. Louis Trafford a full explanation of his most indefensible behaviour,” returned Mr. Perren, drawing himself up with his old gesture of assertion, and straightening his back as he spoke.

This was what I dreaded, and I hastened to reply, “You will grieve me very much if you do, uncle; that which is unavoidably bitter will then be made immeasurably more bitter. If you love me, promise me to let this subject drop.”

“If I love you, Chryssie? No father ever loved his own and only child more than I love you! All my care is for you, all my sorrow is for you!”

“Then you will promise? I ask it as a kindness; let bygones be bygones. You and I have a new future before us, uncle; let us begin afresh, putting away from us all the painful past. Only some memories we will ever still cherish! As for friendships, we shall see who will care to be accounted our friends in our changed and lowly estate.”

“Of course I will promise if you really wish it, my dear And perhaps it will be the best way; perhaps, after all, silence will be more expressive than speech. You are better without Louis, my Chryssie.”

“I am sure of it; I could not marry him now, because I do not respect him, and not respecting him I must cease to love him.”

“He is a regular chip of the old block! a thorough Catherwood! he is worthy to be Julia's grandson! Well! if the Catherwoods are born without hearts and without consciences I suppose they cannot help it. It is curious that we both should suffer from their want of faith.”

“I shall not suffer, uncle; do not fear for me. I am too proud to regret a man who deliberately rejects me. I am no love−sick girl to wear myself into a decline, or to have brain−fever, or, in short, to do any of those painfully romantic things which heroines in novels do. We have done with the Cuppage folk, uncle—peace be with them! Let us discuss them no longer; let us rather talk about ourselves.”

“What is there to talk about?” said he, moving uneasily on his chair, “The bank has broken—there is an end of it! Why talk of that which is so distressing, and at the same time so unalterable?”

“But, uncle, we must *live*! We have to eat and drink, and clothe ourselves; and we must keep some kind of roof over our heads. How is it to be done?”

The poor old man burst into tears and wrung his hands.

“Oh, Chryssie, it is hard, very hard! and it is not my fault. Oh, what will become of us? I must return to my profession, I suppose; but I don't know—I am getting infirm; I am getting so deaf that I can only understand those

to whose voices I am accustomed, and I feel stupid sometimes, my memory fails me—no, I am not fit to practise again, even if I could find any clients who would entrust their interests to me. What *shall* I do, Chryssie?"

"I think the first thing we should do is to get into cheaper lodgings. These are not very luxurious, certainly, but we are paying too much a week in the present state of our finances. I have no doubt we could get rooms at less than half the price."

"You think we had better stay in London, then?"

"Nothing would be gained by our going back to Northborough or its neighbourhood. Indeed, I am not sure that you could bear it; I may be wrong, but it seems to me that a new life is best begun among strangers."

"A new life, a new life at my age!" moaned Mr. Perren. "Oh, Chryssie, it is almost cruel of you to remind me of it."

"Uncle, dear, we *must* face it. If I had only a little money of my own, I would not worry you at all. You should have all you wish. I would spend every penny upon you, and work for my own living. But, as it is, ways and means must be considered, and the sooner the better."

"I suppose you are right," he replied, with a heavy sigh. "Yes, we must get into cheaper lodgings—we will go look for what we require to−day."

"How much money have you got, uncle? If you tell me, I will try to make it go as far as possible."

"I have not—we have not—more than fifty pounds in the world! How long will that keep us?"

It was a question I could not answer. I knew nothing about the prices of things; I had never practised economy for I had never learned the value of money.

Hitherto what I wanted I had; if I could not purchase it myself my uncle or my aunt purchased it for me, the moment I had made known my wishes; and my own purse was never permitted to be empty. I certainly had an allowance, but it was merely nominal, for I never thought of making it cover my expenses, and the moment my funds were exhausted I knew that I had only proclaim the fact and receive a fresh supply. I could scarcely have had a more undesirable training for the career upon which I now was launched. And yet I was not essentially extravagant ; it was simply that I had not the least idea of the value of money. I could only say "I will do my best to be very careful, uncle; I will not spend a penny that can be saved. I only hope I shall not be what Hagar calls penny wise and pound foolish."

"What is to become of Hagar?"

"I believe she will be provided for. She has friends who will get her into a comfortable almshouse, and she thinks of taking in plain sewing. You know, old as she is, she still does it beautifully. I wish we could keep her but it is out of the question. We could not afford to pay her any wages, and all her money is gone with ours. Indeed, I am afraid even her board would be a serious consideration. I am going to have a talk with her, for I rely very much upon her judgment; I only deferred it till I had spoken to you."

Accordingly that same evening I told Hagar all that was in my mind, and asked her advice.

"Well, my dear Miss Chryssie," she replied, "I think you are quite right, and the first thing is certainly to get out of these fine rooms. They are dear as well as expensive, and the landlady knows how to run up a bill; she is accustomed to people who have plenty of money, you see, and she has got certain ideas of her own which don't square with my notions of fairness; but that's neither here nor there, my dear. Where will you go to look for suitable apartments?"

"That is more than I can tell, Hagar. London is such a wide place. I should like a cheerful situation in a respectable neighbourhood—healthy it must be, or we shall be having a doctor's bill. Three rooms will be sufficient. I wish I knew how much a week we really ought to pay."

"That will largely depend upon whether you rent furnished or unfurnished rooms."

"We have no money to buy furniture."

"But you have some furniture of your own. There are some things at Elmwood that are your very own. Of course you will go down before the sale?"

"I suppose it will be necessary. There are certainly some few things to which I can honestly lay claim. There are clothes and books besides which none will dispute belong to me. It should be looked to at once."

"That it should. If I were you, Miss Chryssie, I would go to Elmwood without any more delay. You must see those who are responsible for the estate, and they will tell you what you may and what you may not meddle with. I am quite sure no one will be too hard on poor master"

Hagar was right. The very next morning we had a letter from Northborough. A meeting of the creditors had taken place and much sympathy with my uncle had been expressed and he was requested to take away all personal property from Elmwood before the catalogue of effects on sale was officially presented. So we went down to Northborough by a middle−day train.

It was a miserable journey, hot, sultry, and dusty, and I need scarcely say we did not travel, as usual, first class. We reached our old home late in the evening, with thunder rolling in the distance, and a dark haze upon the leaden sea; Judith Dobbs was in charge, and she looked sourer and sterner than ever.

“Didn't I tell you harm would come of it?” she said, almost the minute we set foot in the house. “I knew you would never come back as you went! I knew there was judgments in store for you, and I told you so, and you wouldn't hearken. And now the Lord's hand is heavy upon you, and you are sore visited for your transgressions. There's poor missis in her grave, in a foreign land among the Papists, without even Christian burial!”

I hastened to set Miss Dobbs right on this point; but long separation and her present independent position had taken away all former deference, and by no means improved her manners. “Don't tell me,” she replied sharply; “she couldn't be properly buried in the Pope's country; I only hope she was prepared to go, and then it don't matter so much about her poor bones. Well, it's a warning to you, Mr. Matthew, and to you, Miss Chrystabel, and I hope you'll consider your ways, and remember that in the midst of life we are in death, as the Bible says.”

“It's the Prayer Book, not the Bible, that says it, Judith, though it is quite true,” I put in.

“That's a sign you don't read your Bible,” replied Judith, sourly. “I've read it through from Genesis to Revelation over and over again, and I ought to know.”

“Well, Judith, if you will show me those words in your Bible, I will do anything you like to ask me.”

“I'll show them to you fast enough to−morrow,” she replied; “I don't exactly remember chapter and verse this minute, but they are somewhere in the minor prophets. I am certain sure I know my Bible if I know anything!”

Which, however, she certainly did not, and no further reference was ever made to the disputed passage. But I caught her the next day poring over “Cruden's Concordance", the large edition, nearly buried in the huge folio, tortoise−shell spectacles and all!

We were informed that we might take any articles of furniture we chose, “anything, of course, in reason, wherewith to furnish a small house or apartments,” said the official assignee; also we might select a limited number of books; “and I am sure, Mr. Perren,” said the gentleman in question, “the creditors will not object to your retaining any of your favourite pictures. You have behaved so nobly, so honourably, and have been yourself so shamefully victimised, that I know you will be dealt with generously in return. Only let me have a list of such articles you select. Whatever Miss Tyndale can fairly call her own she is of course at liberty to deal with as she chooses.”

This was almost more than we had expected. But it was a painful task going over the dear old house, and making these selections. My poor uncle, he determined to take six of his cherished pictures, and he could scarcely have been in greater difficulty had he been compelled to choose between his own children. Now he chose one set, now another, now one picture was substituted for another, and now I was called upon to decide between rival favourites.

I found afterwards that he might have taken a score or two of his “gems,” as he esteemed them, for they were valued at extremely small sums, and sold afterwards for a mere song! No one cared for the “celebrated Perren Collection,” as it was called in the advertisements; it was unfortunately too celebrated, and no judge of art would have anything to do with it. The “Perren Gallery,” which had taken a lifetime to collect, was scattered over the whole length and breadth of Northshire, ale−house keepers and petty tradesmen being the chief purchasers. The mock “Correggio” went for eighteen shillings, and it became the property of mine host of the “Blue Boar.”

After I had taken out all my own especial belongings, I went, at my uncle's request, to look through some of his things in his dressing−room. He was painfully undecided what to keep and what to let go, and he was quite disposed to accumulate a heap of lumber, which would only have been a trouble and an expense to us to remove. I was turning over the contents of an ebony chest, bound with silver, and commenting upon the heterogeneous collection before me, when suddenly I touched something which seemed to burn my fingers. My cheeks burned too, and my heart beat painfully, and I hesitated quite a minute before I drew from its seclusion the strange object which had excited my emotion. You will guess what it was! It was the memorable skull which I had never seen since it had played the part of spectre in the gallery years ago.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Perren, curiously, observing my agitation. "My dear child, do not turn red and white in that way."

"Oh, uncle! this wretched memento of my wickedness which you have forgiven, but which I have never forgiven myself!"

"Oh! the skull! Never mind that, my pet; we were all simpletons together in those days. What shall we do with the poor old thing?"

"I will keep it, uncle, as a memorial of your great goodness. How you ever could take to me, after my shameful behaviour, is more than I can understand; it was so good of you to accept my contrition, to believe in my repentance."

"Child! have we not all need of repentance? do we not all sorely stand in need of free forgiveness? I learned many things in that illness, Chryssie. Of course it was very naughty of you, though I did provoke you to wrath; but somehow it all turned to good! We have been very happy ever since, have we not, my child?"

He was lying back in the easy chair, the same chair in which I had first seen him pillowed up, after the illness resulting from the shock: oh! how old and worn he looked now, how weak, how sorrowful, yet how kind and gentle! I ran to him and threw my arms around his neck:—" I have been more than happy, uncle, and I am happy still while I have your love and your care, while I may still give you a daughter's affection."

"I fear, my darling, I shall only be a care to you—a care and a burden! All this has been too much for me. I am feeble as a child; I am unfit for the simplest transaction even. You will not leave me, Chryssie? it will not be for long."

"Do not say that, uncle. I hope God will spare you to me for many a year. You are not so old, you know. Seventy is not a very venerable age! I shall take great care of you and pet you, and not let you tire yourself. Please God, I shall keep you a long time yet."

"Please God!" he responded earnestly. "It will be just as He pleases, and it must be well. Oh, Chryssie, my dear child, do not waste your life as I have done!"

"Have you wasted it, uncle?"

"Most fatally so, most shamefully! Have I not lived to myself, seeking my own pleasures, walking in my own ways, absorbed in trifles, and lost in vanity, and self−centred? They were innocent pleasures, you say? Yes, innocent, comparatively—that is, according to the world's false standard; but then, the common and grosser forms of sin were never any temptation to me. Other men with my income and in my position have drunk, gambled, lived what are called 'fast lives'; but it is no virtue in me that I have refrained from these things. Vice was always most repugnant to my nature. I shuddered away from it whenever it approached me; therefore I am not to be applauded because I have lived what society would term a strictly virtuous life! For I have pleased myself, and sought only my own gratification, just as much as if I had given myself to the turf, the gaming−table, and the wine−cup. I have not lived to God, I have not lived in Him, I have done no work for Him. I have walked up and down my vineyard, which after all is His vineyard, plucking the ripe grapes, yet never tilling the soil, never pruning nor training the branches! Oh, Lord, my God! I have done those things which I ought not to have done, and I have left undone those things which I ought to have done, and there is no health in me. Most merciful Father, be merciful unto me, a miserable sinner, for Christ's sake!"

"Uncle dear! I will not argue that you have used your life to the best advantage, for you say you have not, and it would not comfort you to hear that which you could not credit, but there is one thing that surely you may count up as a truly good action, that is, an action pleasing unto God."

"What is it, Chryssie? I have given more money to charities of late, but I have given of my abundance; I have never missed what I gave! I have never denied myself that I might feed the hungry, or clothe the naked, or teach the ignorant; I have hidden my one talent in a napkin. I am an unprofitable servant."

"But, uncle, was it nothing that you took me into your home and heart, and made me your own child? It is only lately that I have quite realised from what you and dear auntie rescued me. No pauper child was ever more desolate, more helpless than I. Orphaned, friendless, penniless, worse than unprepossessing, you gave me all I needed; nay, more! all that heart could wish. Up to this hour you have laden me with benefits; you have forgiven and forgotten my black ingratitude, and you love me with all the tender, thoughtful love of the best of fathers! Surely you have not *quite* wasted your life?"

"It is the one redeeming point, Chryssie. But even in the matter of your adoption, my motives were far from

pure; for it was more to please myself, to foster the idea of my own benevolence, than simply to do good, that I joined with Judith in taking you as our own. Even that seemingly good deed is tarnished in God's sight."

"Which of all good deeds are not so tarnished, uncle? And if, indeed, you feel that life has not been made the best of, it is not too late!"

"Not too late, when old age warns me of coming death? Not too late when my riches are gone, my health enfeebled, my powers of mind fast falling? Not too late to work for God at three−score years and ten?"

"It is never too late to work for God; I am quite sure of that, uncle. Blessed are they who bear the heat and burden of the day in that happy service; but not unaccepted are those who only labour at the eleventh hour, if only they labour in love and faith, and in the name of Christ. Take courage, uncle dear, God will yet find something for you to do for Him, and your last days may be your best."

"I will try to think so, Chryssie! Bless you, my child, you always comfort me. For all the benefits of the past, you have long repaid me. But, Chryssie, if you would be happy in the evening of life, spend your morning and your noontide well. Give yourself to God. You *have* given yourself to Him, I know; but yield yourself to His service more completely. It is not too much to work all through one's life for Him who has freely given us all things—existence, temporal benefits, and life and immortality through His dear Son! And we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Chapter 32. NO PLACE LIKE LONDON

At last every arrangement was made, and it only remained to take our last leave of Elmwood. We had quite sufficient furniture for the three rooms we meant to take in some open and healthy neighbourhood, far from the fashionable localities, and where consequently we might expect rents to be moderate. Some few things that were legally and indisputably my own I sold, for I felt sure it would not be long before we were short of money; as for the skull, after all, I carried it out into the garden one evening, and buried it in a spot I thought not likely to be disturbed.

Our visit to Northborough brought us one great source of satisfaction. Nearly every one whom we had known sympathised with my uncle; and though the feeling in the town was very strong against the directors and the manager of the defunct Bank, all without exception mentioned his name with respect, and spoke of him as a victim rather than an accomplice in the fraudulent and reckless speculations, which had reduced so many respectable families from a comfortable competency to actual poverty. Scarcely a day passed, when it was known that we were once more at Stanbridge Hill, without a kindly visit from old friends and acquaintances who came with their sincere condolences, and in several cases with offers of assistance.

“It is the first rift in the cloud,” said my uncle to me, after one of these visits; “I did not know that people thought so well of me; I had no idea that I had so many true friends in the town and neighbourhood; we may call this the first little gleam of the 'silver lining,' I think?”

“We may, indeed,” I replied; “I suppose every misfortune has its accompanying benefit, but I never thought so much actual pleasure would come out of so painful a sojourn as ours has promised to be. But, uncle, we cannot accept Mr. Bray's most kind offer.”

“Certainly not, my dear; we will not begin our new life by burdening ourselves with pecuniary liabilities; it is impossible to say when we could return the money he so generously presses upon us; it might even be that we could never pay it back. And as to taking it, as he wished, as a free gift, that could not be; I could not bear it, Chryssie, unless it were for your sake in the last extremity. Just fancy a Perren receiving charity−*alms!* even from a friend! It would be enough to stir all the ashes of my forefathers in yonder church!”

But we had two visits that were not quite so pleasant. The first was from Madam, who returned to Cuppage while we were still at Elmwood; I had hoped to escape without meeting her, and my uncle, I think, had secretly shared the desire. But one day when we were making our final arrangements Julia stepped in, according to ancient custom, through the drawing−room window, and found Mr. Perren and myself very busy over some filed bills of past years.

“Well, you've made a nice mess of it in your old age!” was the lady's salutation as she took possession of an easy−chair close to us. “What a fool you must have been, Matthew Perren, to sink so much of your money in that ridiculous bank, that was sure to fail some day or other! Banks always do break, you know.”

“Not always,” I replied; for I could see that my uncle was too agitated to speak; there was something in the hard, wizened face, and the harsh, wiry voice that touched him strangely; and I could not bear that Madam should see and comment on his weakness. “Every one believed the 'Northborough and District' to be as safe as the Bank of England,” I continued. “It was impossible to foresee the failures in London; the panic, indeed, which has convulsed the country.”

“Not so impossible as you assert,” returned the mocking tones. “*I* knew they were paying most absurd dividends, and that the thing could not possibly continue. So I sold out more than three years ago, and bought shares in something which pays far better, and which has *not* failed. Matthew Perren, you never had an overplus of judgment, I am aware, but you ought to have known better. And so Elmwood is to be sold! I am not sure but that we shall buy it.”

Who was “we,” I wondered. Even though she had escaped the general ruin caused by the bank failure, I knew that Cuppage, far from being kept up as it ought to be, was scarcely preserved from falling to decay. How, then, was it possible that Elmwood should be purchased?

I dare say we both looked the inquiry we did not speak, for Madam went on as if we had actually put the query:

“When I say 'we,' I mean our family of course. The alien branches of that family have long been dissociated; they are now happily united, and will henceforth flourish together. I allude to the Catherwoods.”

“Have they returned to England?” I asked, by way of saying something.

“They returned a fortnight ago; this commercial crisis happily does not affect them. We are going to have a wedding in the family, Matthew!”

“Indeed!” said my uncle. “Is Mr. Lascelles about to marry? We have not heard any rumours of an engagement.”

“Mr. Lascelles! I have yet to learn that James Lascelles belongs to the family. It is not of the smallest importance to me whether he marry or not. I allude to my grandson, Mr. Trafford of Cuppage.”

“Louis Trafford is in his nineteenth year,” said my uncle. “He will scarcely marry while in his minority.”

“As to that he can do as he likes,” replied Julia, rubbing her nose, as if vexed; “but of course I meant simply that he is engaged, and engagements terminate in marriage all in good time.”

“With honourable men and women engagements do so terminate,” he replied; “there are persons, however, who think nothing of playing fast and loose with other people's affections; there are women who will coquette with a man till they lure the heart out of his bosom, and then—laugh him to scorn! And there are men who will seek a girl's first love and faith, winning from her the confession of her attachment, and requiring her sacred promise—only to cast aside all bonds, all ties of honour, should self−interest or expediency suggest it!”

“The parents and guardians of young people sometimes prudently interfere,” returned Madam. “In this case, however, our dear Louis is exactly carrying out our fondest wishes; it is only right that the Catherwood money should return to Cuppage.”

“Am I to understand, then, that Mr. Trafford marries Miss Catherwood?”

“I am happy to say the alliance is arranged. The dear girl herself is so anxious that her great wealth should not go out of the family. You have seen Miss Catherwood, Chryssie?”

“Many times,” I replied, quietly.

I saw my uncle looking at me almost piteously, and I was most thankful that I could maintain my composure before this woman, who I knew would be delighted to put me to pain and confusion.

“She is not remarkably handsome,” resumed Julia; “but there are other qualities far more to be desired in a wife than mere beauty. She is an excellent girl, sensible, clever, strikingly amiable, and so modest, so unassuming, and so respectful to her elders—no common virtue in this degenerate age, Matthew! I am sure young people nowadays seem to despise any one of mature age. I often wish she−bears would come out of a wood and tear a few of these saucy youngsters as they did Elisha in the old Scripture times.”

A smile played over my uncle's face, the first I had seen there that day; but he did not correct Madam's absurd mistake. He simply replied, “Miss Catherwood is not, as you remark, at all handsome, neither did she appear to us either clever or amiable, and she treated her mother with manifest disrespect. And Louis Trafford professed to dislike her, and on more than one occasion deliberately contrived to shun her, rather than appear with her in public. Besides, she is so much older than he.”

“A mere nothing—two or three years at the outside. I am delighted to think she is not so youthful as her betrothed, who, however, is by no means boyish. What are three or four, or even five years between married people when all else is equal?”

“Doubtless,” said my uncle, “such disparity is not an insuperable objection. The superior age ought, however, to be on the side of the gentleman. Still, as you say, all the rest being equal, no sensible person would object to a few years' difference, even on what we term the wrong side. But Miss Catherwood looks full thirty years of age; indeed, I understood from her mother that she was quite as old as she appeared to be. I wonder, with so large a fortune, that she still remains unmarried.”

“Ah, that is because of her peculiarly refined tastes, and her virtuous determination not to bestow her hand unless her heart goes with it. Of course, with her wealth and her attractions generally, she has had a pretty large choice of suitors; but you see Heaven in mercy reserved her for my dear Louis. I do not think delicate−minded girls are ever engaged very early.” And with this last dart from her venomous shaft she took her departure.

“Never mind, Chryssie, never mind, my darling!” said the old man, soothingly, when we were once more left alone. “Don't shed a tear for him, don't heave a sigh for him! A selfish love like his would never have made you happy. His very unfaithfulness was the greatest blessing; it is well for you, my child, that the tie between you is

severed."

Yes, I knew that; I really felt in my inmost heart that it was best; for I knew now that Louis had never loved me. He had admired me because my looks pleased him: he had a *penchant* for dark hair and eyes and a brilliant complexion. And he had sought the heiress of Elmwood, and doubtless his grandmother had not forbidden, though she would not openly sanction, his suit; for that mythical heiress would have had money enough to render her a suitable match even for Louis Trafford, and then her imaginary possessions lay so snugly contiguous to Cuppage, Cuppage and Elmwood conjointly would make a very handsome property! But why there had been no earlier effort to secure Clementina Catherwood I could not conceive. We heard afterwards that she had been formally betrothed over and over again, and that she had always made some plausible excuse to break off the engagement. She was naturally extremely fickle and capricious, hating to−day that which she had loved frantically yesterday, as far as her dull, stoical nature *could* love and hate; and even in her dress, her ornaments, and her pets, which she had in wondrous variety, she evinced her roving and inconstant temperament; for she frequently flung aside, after a short period of possession, that which she had sighed for, and longed for, and secured at infinite cost of pains as well as coin. Moreover, she was extremely suspicious—as those inert, passive natures very often are—and she was continually discovering that she was being wooed only for her wealth, and she had an ambition, for which no one could blame her, to be married for pure love. As time went on, and I knew more about her, and the film of my girlish passion cleared from my eyes, I saw Louis as he really was—vain, selfish, utterly unprincipled, extravagant, and addicted to evil habits—I scarcely knew which I pitied the more as being indissolubly joined together for the journey of life.

Still, the wound was recent, and it was a very deep one, and bled inwardly for many and many a day. And, though I knew all was well, and I could even thank my heavenly Father for the lot which He had seen fit to appoint, I could not help feeling sometimes intensely miserable. My love for Louis—it was a very blind, foolish love, I confess, bordering on infatuation—had grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength. We had been so much together, I had worshipped him from the very first, and he had done his best to win my sincere regards. And I could not all at once cast off the habits of what seemed to me then a whole lifetime. All my studies and all my amusements, my recreations, my rambles, my projects, and my dreams were inextricably blended with Louis; in each and all he bore his part, and took his place in the foreground of my thoughts, the most prominent and brilliant figure in the landscape. And our elders had helped on the fond delusion; we had always been encouraged, never by any means checked in our youthful attachment, which, however, so far as I was concerned, did not assume a serious character till I had passed my sixteenth birthday. How was it possible that I, a weak girl of seventeen, should at once lay aside that which had been my most inestimable and engrossing treasure? Alas! how many women make idols but to find them clay! How many of us hoard up in secret that which we believe to be infinitely precious only to discover that our fancied gems are but sparkling imitations, and our imagined pure gold little more than base metal, thickly gilded! Happy those whose supreme love is early set on One who never deceives and never disappoints; the clasp of whose hand never loosens, who is ever faithful in adversity; the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother—the Friend who still remains tender and true when parents are gone, and earthly homes are swept away, and friends, kindred, and lovers stand afar off—He who has said, "I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee!"

And so it came to pass that I suffered much, and I was often so wretched that I could not take pleasure in anything about me. Not that there was much to give me pleasure, for it was bitter work to say farewell to Elmwood and to the friends we had known so long; and it was harder still to contemplate the future which lay in such deep gloom—a future of uncertainty and toil and privation, and which seemed to threaten all sorts of dimly comprehended evils.

Our other unsatisfactory visitor was poor Mona. Of course her money—or at least the residue of it, for Dr. Danvers Dashwood had been making ducks and drakes of it ever since his wedding day—had gone with ours, and her irate spouse was so furious that she scarcely dared remain alone with him.

"I know he will kill me," she sobbed out when she had told us her sad tale of desertion, and insult, and unmanly cruelty. "He can get nothing more out of me, and he tells me to my face he wishes I were *dead.* He calls me 'an old hag,' a 'miserable, faded old woman.' Oh, to think I should live to be called an ugly old woman! Oh, what deceivers men are! Don't have anything to do with them, Chryssie; you had better a great deal go into a convent, or into a sisterhood, than get married. Matrimony is just a cheat, take my word for it. It may be all very

well for men to marry, but we women always get the worst of it! So don't fall in love, Chryssie, and don't put your trust in anything of the masculine gender. All male creatures are base, and wicked, and faithless, and cruel, and horrible, and treacherous, and altogether dreadful! Be an old maid, Chryssie. I would give anything to be an old maid again. I was happy for just three weeks after I was married. For three weeks I lived in a fool's paradise; then I dwelt in Hades; now I live in a Tartarus, in its darkest, deepest depths. There is nothing a woman should shun so persistently as what the Prayer−book calls 'Holy Matrimony!'“

It was a relief to both my uncle and myself when Mrs. Dashwood took her departure. We could not help her; it was difficult even to sympathise with her. We could only pity her and bemoan the folly which had brought about so much incurable wretchedness.

Mrs. March offered me, and even urged upon me, a situation in her establishment; but it would have involved separation from Mr. Perren, and that was not to be thought of. Also, I saw that he shrunk from association with his former friends, and, much as he dreaded the final wrench, he would be glad to be away from the neighbourhood of Elmwood. As the time went on, and our business was nearly concluded, I could see that he was impatient to return to town.

“There is no place like London,” he used to say. “One can hide one's self and one's broken fortunes in London, and no one be the wiser. Besides, Londoners never talk about their neighbours; they have too much to do, and too much to think of. In country towns, however large, people seem to have idle minds. London is the place for us, my Chryssie!”

I thought so too. I did not then know that London, which is the brightest, most enchanting city in the world to the prosperous and happy, is one of the saddest, dreariest, loneliest spots on God's earth to the desolate and unhappy! I had much to learn in various ways. Truly my education, which I vainly supposed to be “finished,” was just about beginning!

Chapter 33. THE PROBLEM OF THE AGE

The morning of our departure was dark and lowering; the radiant evening had not been true to its promise of a bright morrow, and the sea was heavy and rolling under a dull grey, brooding sky, while heavy mists, portending rain, hung over the great headlands and the nearer hills. “It is better so,” said my uncle, as we stood on the steps of the hall door, watching the loading of the fly which was to convey our luggage to the station. We had promised to look in the last thing on Mrs. March, and she would drive us to Northborough in her own pony−carriage in time for a mid−day train.

“It is better so, Chryssie; I would rather see Elmwood looking sombre and sorrowful than gay and sparkling in the summer sunshine, as it was all day yesterday. The trees and the flowers, and the lawns, and even the sea, seem to have sympathy with us to−day. Are you sure you have remembered everything, my dear?”

“I think I have. I took the cuttings early this morning, and packed them in wet moss; I hope we shall get them to take root. Nothing remains now but to wish Mrs. March and Clara good−bye. I almost wish we had not promised to see them again; I would rather go off this moment to the station, and know that all our farewells were said.”

“Farewells are and always must be sad; but I suppose in this world we cannot escape them; it is God's will that we should have to say adieu to what we love. If there were no separations from home and friends we should cling too closely to this lower life; we should not even desire that better country where there is fulness of joy at God's right hand and pleasures for evermore. Here we have no abiding city. And what does that matter, my Chryssie? We who seek the Celestial City of our God can afford to miss a few poor delights on our journey thither. I was thinking this morning of what your favourite poet says;—

'Nor by the wayside ruins let us mourn

Who have th' eternal towers for our appointed bourne.'

Some natures bloom late, some ripen late, and such had been the case with Mr. Perren. But it was wonderful, even startling, to note the change which had come over him, especially since Aunt Judith's death. And now that this great trouble had befallen him he seemed to rise to heights where I, in my wilful youth, could not follow him. All the folly, all the frivolity, all the vanity of former years had passed away. He was simple and brave, and oh! how patient, how earnestly desirous to yield himself to God's will, how calm while the tempest raged around him, how restful amid the sundry and manifold changes that beset him!

We walked through the village to Canterbury House, the dull grey day around us, the sea moaning drearily, and a low sough of wind rustling the summer foliage. I gave one last look at Cuppage as we passed.—The great gates were closed, and the gryphons still kept watch and ward over the great dreary house. Six months ago, and I was led to believe that Elmwood would be my inheritance, and that in due season I should be the happy mistress of Cuppage! Now, I was going to work hard for my own living, and for the living of my dear old uncle. I was heiress to nothing except poverty and toil; I was bankrupt in love; my possessions were very few; I could not see my way before me, and I could only cry, “Lead, kindly Light, lead Thou me on!” I am glad that in the day of darkness and uncertainty I did not ask to view the distant scene, that I was content to take the one step which God vouchsafes to all, whatever be their extremity. And looking back upon that time, I really believe that I was not half so unhappy as I fancied I was. I grieved, it is true, over earthly change and loss, and over the bitterness of desertion. But I was not so sorrowful after all, for, loosed from many earthly ties, my spirit sprang towards Him in whom alone it could find rest and joy. One is never so happy, whatever be the concomitants of one's lot, as when one trusts all to God, and takes cheerfully, as absolutely *His will*, whatever of great or small things may betide.

We found Mrs. March and Clara looking out for us, and with them was a lady whom at once I recognised. I had seen her but once, and years had rolled over my head since our brief meeting; but I had thought of her often—very often of late, and wondered whether in this world we should ever meet again. It was Mrs. Hamilton, of Chippington, with whom I had travelled on my first journey northwards, nearly seven years before—the Mrs. Hamilton who gave me my little Testament—it was in my bag at that moment—who had first taught me to look and wait for silver linings to the clouds.

“I knew it was the same,” she said; “the moment Mrs. March mentioned your name I remembered it. I wrote it

down in my memorandum−book when we were in the train, and I gave you a little Testament. Have you quite forgotten?"

"No, indeed; I have thought of you very often, and wondered how it was that in some way we did not meet again. I have been several times to Chippington, and inquired about you, but could never hear any tidings."

"We have been away from Chippington for years. Soon after I met you and your friends my husband received an appointment abroad. We have been leading a colonial life ever since, and now we are very glad to be once more in dear Old England; we only returned a few weeks ago."

And then Mrs. March explained how Mrs. Hamilton was one of her oldest friends; and I remembered distinctly having heard of a certain Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, of New Zealand, but it had never occurred to me that my friend and Mrs. March's could be the same; for I always fancied my Mrs. Hamilton living happily with her children, only a few miles away—in one of the outlying villages about Chippington, probably. That she with her family had meanwhile crossed the ocean and settled at the Antipodes I never even guessed.

"So I thought I must just see you, Miss Tyndale," continued my long−lost friend. "Mrs. March has been telling me so much about you, and I felt so great an interest in the child who was my little companion on that journey. But I am afraid I should scarcely have recognised you."

"Am I so much altered?"

"You were a child then, with an active but singularly undeveloped mind; now you are a woman, though, as far as I recollect your age, you must be a mere girl still. But you are very much what I fancied you might be, grown−up, if you came under good and gracious influences."

"Yes, it was the first good and gracious influence I ever knew; others followed, but yours was the awakening voice. I never forgot your words. I got into sad trouble in the first year of my Elmwood life—trouble chiefly of my own seeking; but I never quite forgot what you said to me in the train about the clouds and their silver linings, and about not *fancying* clouds."

We had gone out through the window, which opened upon the lawn. Clara was absent, giving orders probably for our luncheon, and Mrs. March and Mr. Perren had walked in an opposite direction. It was strange how at once I felt my heart drawn towards this lady, of whom I really knew so little; but I knew now of whom Mrs. James Trafford had always reminded me; she and Mrs. Hamilton were singularly alike. There was the same clear pale complexion, the same dark, earnest, slightly pensive eyes, the same sweet, pure, calm expression, the aspect which belongs not to the children of this world. And they were very nearly of the same age, Mrs. Trafford being only a few months Mrs. Hamilton's senior.

"I, too, have had need of the lesson I tried to teach you," she said, with a little quiver in her voice. "Our colonial life has been one great disappointment; my dear husband has met with unwonted difficulties and much ungenerous treatment. We come back poorer than we went away; clouds have gathered around our path, and sometimes the tempest has not only threatened, but descended on our heads. We had such fair prospects, our expectations of prosperity were so seemingly well founded; but it has pleased God to hedge up our way, to deny us that which we sought, and to take from us much that we greatly prized. We have left two of our darling children in that far−away land. Sometimes our faith has all but failed us, and we have said to each other, 'Why are we troubled thus? Why is the hand of the Lord against us?' But blessed be His holy name, He has never left us to the unspeakable misery of sheer mistrust. Our doubts were but for a moment; our sinking faith was speedily recruited. Every dark night has had its stars, and every cloud its lovely silver lining! For we knew—He had told us so over and over again—that all *must* work our final good! And you, too, have had much trial, Mrs. March tells me; you must not be vexed that she has spoken to me rather freely about you, and about your kind guardian, Mr. Perren."

"I should never be vexed at anything Mrs. March said; she is one of my oldest, as well as one of my truest, friends; I owe much to her. As for our affairs, all Northborough, and half the county besides, are cognisant of them. Everybody knows that my uncle is what is called a ruined man, that he has lost all, except his honour and integrity as a Christian gentleman, that Elmwood has gone from him, and that nothing remains to him or to me but honest work of some sort or other."

"Do you really mean that nothing remains to Mr. Perren of the handsome income he once enjoyed?"

"Absolutely nothing! And his sisters' fortunes as well as a little money of my own, left me by Aunt Rachel and by Aunt Judith, all went together."

“But surely some small provision should be made for Mr. Perren? He has known only affluence all his life, and he is an old man, and has given up all he has.”

“He was even scrupulous about retaining a small sum that he had by him,” I said, proudly. “My uncle is the most honourable man, some people even call him Quixotic, but they do not understand him; he would never be happy were his conscience soiled, if he believed that he was spending what was not justly his own.”

“The Bank authorities have been much to blame, I hear.”

“Very much. They have speculated wildly, rashly; it has been a sort of gambling, I suppose; and accounts have been falsified for the last half−dozen years. They have paid enormous dividends,—if I had understood all about bank property as now I do, I should have suspected something. The manager is gone, no one knows where, but he is reported to have committed suicide; altogether it is a very sad business.”

“Very sad indeed! And if I may be so bold, what are you going to do?”

“I do not know; I wish I did! I have a hundred plans, but I have no idea how they will work. I only know that I *must* earn money somehow, enough to keep my uncle as well as myself; for it is quite impossible that he should undertake any regular occupation. He is very feeble, his memory often fails him; if he secured a situation, as he says, I know he could not long retain it. No, I must work for both. Oh! Mrs. Hamilton, if I only knew!”

“My poor child! If you only knew what?”

“If I only knew what to do. If I only knew what will come of the trouble! Is it wrong to want to know?”

“I think not wrong; it is only natural. One may wish for a thing, and at the same time submit one's self to God's will, and be equally thankful whether one's wish is granted or otherwise. But *not knowing* is often our severest discipline; it is the trial of our faith. It is good for us to have to take everything on trust, to lie quietly in our Father's arms, and wait to see what He will do; for we are sure that He will never forsake us, never give us one stroke too much, but always do us good. The little child does not know how it will be provided for to−morrow, next week, next year; but its parent knows and cares for it, and, while baby wakes and sleep and cries and smiles, all is duly ordered for its welfare; safe in its father and mother's watchful love and superior wisdom it grows and thrives, and is serenely happy, without one thought for the future. So we must surrender ourselves to our heavenly Father. What if we are ignorant? He is all−wise! What if we see nought, and know nought of the path before us save the single step in front? *He knows.* Oh, my dear, it is so sweet when the darkness thickens, and we can only grope, as it were, and weary for the light, to feel the clasp of a Father's hand, and to say to Him, 'My God, Thou knowest all things. I know nothing of what is coming to pass, but *Thou knowest*, and that is enough for me, and all will come to a happy issue when Thou pleasest. My times are in Thy hand.”

“I used to think the silver lining to the cloud was always returning sunshine—earthly sunshine. I know now that it is God's smiling face behind the providence that to our weak sense seems frowning. It is as much the comfort and the joy we find in Him in the day of adversity as the prospect of serene skies and brighter heavens. Trouble teaches us so much.”

“So much that we all, as time passes on, have reason to say, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.'“

“And I have had such a sweet, calm, satisfying life for so many years. I wonder—no! I think the same sort of life can never come again.”

“The same? No, never again the same! But doubt not, my dear, that God has yet many blessings in store for you. He will give you a greater and fuller happiness than you can at present comprehend. What we willingly yield to God is always restored to us fourfold.”

Presently we joined Mrs. March and Mr. Perren, and soon afterwards Clara came to call us in to luncheon. We had none of us much appetite, and very soon the time came when we must quit Canterbury House if we intended to take the train at one o'clock.

“You will come and see us, will you not?” said Clara, as she put into my hands a beautiful bouquet freshly cut from greenhouse and garden.

I did not answer, partly because I could not, and partly because I felt that I should have scant leisure for visits of any kind.

“And remember, my dear Chryssie, you can always come here and find a home and a welcome,” said Mrs. March, drawing me a little aside. Then she added, “Come into the conservatory, my dear; I want to say a few words to you; there is still time to spare. John is only just putting in the pony. I hope you will not be vexed if I ask if you are pretty well in cash at present, because if you should be short—”

“Many thanks, my dear, kind friend; but for several months to come we are well supplied. We were allowed to retain so many more things than we actually wanted, and the sale of them has brought in quite a nice little sum Then I have some jewels; I will not part with them if I can help it; but there they are, and could be turned into hard cash if need were.”

“Well, my dear, I trust you will let me know ere you part with your ornaments, most of which, I imagine, are valued gifts. And if you should change your mind I shall still be able to find you work to do here. I am not sure, Chryssie, that you are acting quite wisely in going away to London.”

“I am not sure either; but it seems the right thing to do just now. Mr. Perren wishes to return to town; he feels and I feel, though with how much wisdom I cannot say, that we had better begin the new life before us among strangers and in unfamiliar scenes. But wherever my uncle goes, I must go too; I cannot leave him; I will not, unless it is in his own interest, and unless he sees that it is better that it should be so.”

“And you have not decided upon any plan? You have nothing particular in view?”

“Nothing! I wonder if my painting could be made of any avail. I do not think I *could* teach! I am afraid I have not the governess vocation, and I do not think one should undertake the task of tuition without a very strong bias in its favour.”

“I believe you could teach very well.”

“I am afraid I have not the gift, nor yet the necessary patience. But people have said that my paintings have more than average merit. I shall try with those watercolour landscapes I took abroad; if I could find a purchaser for one or two pairs I should be at once encouraged to proceed. You remember how highly the Osbornes and the Franklyns thought of them? And Captain Osborne, who has so much taste, said it was a pity I was a well−to−do young lady instead of a poor struggling artist!

“My dear, I do not wish to damp your ardour, and I do believe that you have more than ordinary artistic talent; but I must just warn you that the productions of a wealthy heiress, and those of a girl seeking to turn them to account, are apt to be very differently valued. Partial friends will too often applaud a girl's accomplishments so long as they are mere accomplishments, and depreciate them the moment they become her sole dependence, her stock−in−trade, as one may say.”

“Then there is literature! Suppose I wrote for the magazines?”

Mrs. March shook her head.

“You would starve, my child, while you were making a name. So many have tried, and so many failed, and I suppose—do you not think one must serve an apprenticeship to authorship as well as to any other profession?”

“I suppose so! Well, dear friend, as soon as I am settled in our new home I will adventure the drawings, and if no one will purchase them I must try something else. Copying, needlework, plain or ornamental, even giving lessons; I shall not, I trust, be easily discouraged. But, oh, dear, what a problem it seems to be how best to coin one's talents into money!”

“It is one of the most perplexing problems of the age. The sphere of woman's work is yearly enlarging, it is true; yet I cannot see that the case is really much amended, for some training is necessary in every department of art or science or manual labour; and a lady suddenly reduced from affluence to actual poverty has but small choice of occupation.”

The carriage came to the door, and we said good−bye to Mrs. Hamilton, who gave me at parting a copy of some verses which she greatly liked.

“Take them, my dear,” she said. “I know them every word; they did me so much good when I was cast down, and ready to say, like Jacob, 'All these things are against me.' I do not know who wrote them, but I do know that they were a very blessed message to me in my great trouble and dismay, and they gave me more comfort than I can tell. God bless you, and keep you, and give you strength and guidance.”

Mrs. March and Clara drove with us to the station, and saw us safely into the railway carriage. And just before we started the former said, “There is a hamper in the luggage addressed to you, Chryssie. Clara and I thought you would be too tired this evening to enter at once into housekeeping responsibilities. You will find some chicken all ready for your supper, and a few fresh eggs—London is not a good place for eggs, and these are laid by our own hens.”

I had scarcely time to thank her ere the train started, and very soon Northborough was left far behind. But when I opened the hamper that evening I found not only a pair of chickens, most delicately cooked and quite

ready for the table, but a store of eggs, home−fed bacon, cream−cheese, butter, preserves, and other good and useful things. How kind these dear friends were! And how kind our God was to us in giving us such true and faithful friends to minister to our comfort in the day of our extremity.

It rained heavily ere we reached London, and we found King's Cross a scene of much discomfort; mud and water, and splashed, bedraggled pedestrians, were all that we could see through the driving mist as we drove to our new lodgings in Camden Town. It was a relief when at length the musty, jolting cab stopped at a mean−looking house in one of the quieter streets, and we knew that we had reached our destination. We were very tired, and by no means in good spirits.

Chapter 34. “HE KNOWS”

A day or two sufficed for our comfortable settlement in our new home. That is to say, we made ourselves as comfortable as we could; but at first we felt most painfully how narrow and confined was the space to which we were restricted. The rooms were really “poky”; after the large and airy apartments to which we had been accustomed they seemed little better than capacious cupboards. We had two bedrooms and a sitting−room, that was all; the former were low−ceiled and stuffy, with dingy paper on the walls, and windows looking upon a small backyard, called by courtesy the garden, where several rusty evergreens, some spindly geraniums in rotten wooden boxes, and some scanty tufts of coarse grass, contrived to maintain a feeble existence in association with a grotto chiefly composed of oyster−shells, an untenanted and dilapidated rabbit−hutch, a weird−looking cistern, a dustbin suffering from chronic repletion, and an immense Cochin China cock, which, together with his three dirty, bedraggled wives, roused us from our peaceful slumbers punctually at three a.m. I never knew before how much noise a sturdy rooster and three irrepressible clucking hens could make; for the first time I perceived that even partial deafness has its advantages, since my uncle, with a little cotton−wool in his ears, was able to go to sleep again after the first startling note of defiance had been sounded. As for myself, I only wished I were in Parliament, that I might bring forward a Bill prohibiting people who lived in streets and rows from keeping male poultry to the annoyance and distress of their neighbours. Alas! our chanticleer was only one of half−a−dozen of his kind belonging to adjacent families; and every morning these sprightly birds got up a competitive concert, each one evidently defying and answering the other, till the air rang again with their shrill martial music and its ceaseless echoes. The street—I will call it Eldon Street, premising, however, that it is entirely a fictitious name—was just like a thousand other London streets, it was not very wide, and it was tolerably long; every house—and the type was by no means so charming as to deserve repetition—was precisely like its fellow; the bricks were all of one dingy hue, the windows and the front doors might have been turned out by machinery; each house, of course, had an area, and at certain hours of the day each area was decorated with pewter−pots—the only break to the horrible monotony of the unlovely perspective being when a house was newly painted, or when there was one considerably dirtier than its companions. All the even numbers were on one side, all the odd numbers on the other. We lived at No. 35, and only by remembering the number could we hope to distinguish our own residence from other people's. Returning home one evening shortly after our introduction to Eldon Street, after dusk, we were both of us genuinely perplexed as to the identity of No. 35.

“This is the house,” said my uncle, stoutly; “ring the bell, Chryssie.”

Meanwhile I felt with my fingers the figures denoting the number, and found that I could not possibly trace the outlines of either 3 or 5.

“No; this is twenty something; besides, there is no street lamp opposite our lodgings. Which way do the numbers run?”

“I am sure I do not know, my dear; this way, do you not think?” pointing northwards.

I agreed; and we went on, carefully scanning the general features of stone steps, area railings, and parlour windows, till at length Mr. Perren cried in a tone of relief, “Here we are, Chryssie! I know the scraper—our scraper is broken, you know.” On the strength of the broken scraper we knocked and rang lustily, for we were very tired, and it was beginning to rain. The door was speedily opened, and we walked into the narrow dun−coloured passage, which looked exactly like our own “hall,” as the landlady of No. 35 chose to call it. Were there not the same worn−out floor−cloth, the same doors in the same position, the same steep stairs, the same everything, as it appears to us? We advanced with all the calm security of conscious right, and my uncle had his hand on the handle of the sitting−room door, and I was going to run upstairs, when we were confronted by a tall, large−boned woman, in a red flounced dress, with a flaring candle in her hand; she shot up like a Jack−in−the−box, from the head of the kitchen stairs, and shouted in a voice that a town−crier might have envied, “Stop that, you there! I should like to know what you want, old fellow, making so free with people's houses.”

My uncle let go the brass knob as if it burned him, and I paused with my hand upon the bannister. The passage, the door, the stairs, even the carpet and the mats appeared to be those with which I had lately grown familiar, but certainly the fiery−robed and fiery−faced matron was an entire stranger; we had never met before!

“We are come home,” stammered my uncle in extreme dismay, and retreating, as the irate lady advanced upon him, with a liberal distribution of candle−grease.

“Come home, are you?” shouted the wearer of the red flounces. “You're drunk, with yer imperence; here, Sally, call a perlice!”

“Is not this No. 35?” I asked as politely as possible, hoping to mollify the virago's fury.

“No, 'tisn't, and you know it ain't,” was the uncourteous reply.

“But there is the broken scraper,” pleaded my uncle, unable to doubt evidence so apparently conclusive.

“What's that to you, if my scraper is broken?” shrieked the angry woman. “You be off, both of you! Cut your stick, I say.”

And opening the front door she all but propelled us into the streets.

“What shall we do?” said my poor uncle, almost in tears. “I think I never met with so disagreeable and unkind a person; I suppose she took us for housebreakers!”

“I should say she is half−intoxicated: she smelt very strongly of spirits. Never mind, uncle, we will make sure of our ground before we enter another house.”

Another broken scraper! But this time we did not presume on the fact. It seemed to be a peculiarity of Eldon Street that most of the scrapers were broken, and most of the door steps cracked and flawed. So we looked carefully before we declared ourselves, and found that again we were mistaken; but I managed to make out that this was No. 31; clearly No. 35 must be close at hand.

“Yes, now we *are* right,” said Mr. Perren, drawing a long sigh of relief, “and the scraper is broken, and there, at the top of the area steps, is the cat that comes into our rooms sometimes. Oh, I am so glad!”

And at last we were right, and next day I bought several cheap geraniums in pots, and put them into a pretty tiled box that came from Elmwood, and set them on the window−sill, that we might not fall again into a similar error.

This was an adventure scarcely worth narrating, perhaps, but I record it to show what sort of neighbourhood we lived in, and how utterly changed was the life we now led from all former experiences. The dreadful monotony, the unmitigated ugliness, the unspeakable dreariness of Eldon Street were to my uncle a serious affliction. He did not complain—indeed, he strove to make the best of everything; but I could perceive that our surroundings frequently depressed him.

There were, however, some palliatives, as there nearly always are, if one will only look on the sunny side. Our rooms—and, indeed, the whole house—were scrupulously *clean*; no minor consideration in choosing cheap metropolitan lodgings, I can assure you; and our landlady, though not a good−tempered person, was honest, and kept honest persons about her, and I do not think would have wronged us of a sixpence. This, too, in our circumstances, was of great importance. But oh, how strange it was to be obliged to be economical in such matters as bread and butter and butchers' meat! I shall never forget my sensations when, for the first time, I went out to order a little joint for our dinner, nor my dismay when I discovered how much the little joint cost.

Hagar had taken these rooms for us, and she had arranged the furniture which we sent from Elmwood. I made some alterations, which I ventured to think were improvements, and my uncle hung and rehung his pictures, till at last we decided that all over which we had control was satisfactory. I only wished I dared spend a pound or two in a little fresh paint, and in cheap and pretty paper for the walls. That in the bedrooms was dust−coloured and black, that in the sitting−room deserved to figure in a chamber of horrors; but we had our own carpets and our own draperies, so we managed to make our apartments look tolerably cheerful, in spite of drab and black and blue and green, and yellow roses. No sooner were we “settled,” than I was eager to begin to work. The more I thought of it the more certain I felt of being able to turn my drawings to good account. I loved the art; I could pass hours in sketching or in painting without being tired, and “everybody” said that my flower pieces and my heads in chalk were alike excellent, but that my coloured landscapes were “worthy of an academician.” Alas; alas! “everybody's” praise is about as false and hollow as “everybody's” blame is cruel.

Of course my uncle encouraged me, and together we selected a pair of drawings, Italian landscapes, executed abroad, under a famous master, and pronounced to be faultless in colouring and in outline. As I looked at them fondly I regretted the necessity of parting with them more than any one who is not a young amateur artist can at all understand. They were to have been handsomely framed in London, and hung up in the drawing−room at Elmwood. Now I must sell them to anybody who would buy them.

“What ought I to ask for them, uncle?” I said, as we sat in consultation on the morning of my expedition to the West End. “Would five guineas be too much?”

“Five guineas, my Chryssie? Why, they are honestly worth twenty−five. What colouring! what tone! what perspective! what richness! It is a shame to part with them.”

“No one will give me twenty−five guineas, I am certain; an artist without a name never commands really remunerative prices. I must begin at the bottom of the ladder, uncle; if I can only get a few pounds, just to pay our way for the present, I shall be satisfied. If I can but make a beginning, never fear but that I *will* succeed. Only we must get some money soon; our funds diminish so rapidly, and it would be terrible, you know, to come to our last sovereign. Suppose I ask ten pounds, uncle?”

“Well, my child, it will perhaps be wise not to put too high a price upon them, though selling them for ten pounds seems little better than *giving* them away. Still, ten pounds, with our present resources, is not to be despised; and whoever buys these may buy others, you know, Chryssie. You have plenty more?”

“Yes, plenty; though none, I think, so good, so truly artistic, as these.”

“Shall I go with you?”

“I think I had rather go alone, uncle; there will be sure to be things we shall not like, and I had rather encounter them by myself.”

“The more reason why I should accompany you. Suppose you met with impertinence?”

“Impertinence of a certain kind I am prepared for. I expect to be told that my paintings are mere daubs, that the perspective is all wrong, that I am altogether out of drawing. Never mind, I can bear it if I only find a purchaser at last.”

“But it is not only that sort of annoyance that I fear. A young, handsome girl ought not to go about London by herself; your dear Aunt Judith would never have permitted such a thing.”

“Uncle, I see many girls as young as I am, and certainly as handsome, going about quite unattended.”

“No doubt, my dear; but you are a young *lady*. Of course girls of no position must go about, even in London, without escort; but you have been accustomed to another order of things. And suppose you—I mean suppose you met—met anybody we used to know, what would they think?”

“It would matter very little what they thought. Dear uncle, do not let us make ourselves absurd. My position is no longer that of Miss Tyndale, of Elmwood; I am very much, I suppose, as I should have been had you never adopted me; my own father left me nothing, as you know. I am going to adapt myself to the new position in which I find myself, and if possible to do my duty in that station of life in which it has pleased God to place me. Nothing will be gained by trying to keep up appearances; the mere pretence will only aggravate our trouble. I know that girls of a certain rank—the rank that through your goodness has been mine so many years—never do go out unattended; but I have now no pretentious to that rank; I belong to the middle class, which is, after all, the most useful and helpful class, and I must learn to make my own way. And really it seems to me that one may go about one's business alone in London far more easily than in any smaller place. It is only to dress quietly, to conduct one's self unobtrusively and steadily, to maintain a certain dignified gravity, and you are pretty sure to pass without notice and without molestation. Do not be afraid, uncle; I can take care of myself. Real danger there is none; small annoyances I can cope with readily enough. Trust me for keeping the world at arm's length in the present conjunction of our affairs.”

I took my way; my uncle consented to let me go alone. I felt that it was far better that he should not accompany me; I could not bear that he who had always purchased pictures should in his old age go chaffering with dealers to dispose of them. Moreover, I was terribly afraid that in his too partial appreciation of my talents, coupled with some remnants of the old vanity of a self−pronounced art−critic, he might make himself ridiculous. I knew pretty well what I should have to encounter—at least, I thought I did. He, dear, innocent old gentleman, fully believed that I had only to bring my wares into the market to find eager purchasers, ready to outbid each other. So, preparing myself for rebuffs and disappointments of all kinds, I went my way, taking the omnibus to Regent's Circus.

I got so far without the smallest unpleasantness; no one spoke to me, no one looked at me; I was noticed alone by the conductor, who, as in duty bound, looked sharply after his fares, and I—in my ignorance—gave him a penny short. Then I commenced the real work of the day—I had a list of shops, and I began with those nearest Regent's Circus, going down towards Holborn as I proceeded. For alas! very few of the dealers would so much as

look at my cherished productions, and those who did glance at them informed me that they were literally overrun with “that sort of thing!” I might leave them on sale or return if I liked, and I should have whatever they would fetch—minus, of course, the shopkeeper's commission. But this offer, which was not repeated, I declined.

I returned home, at last, tired, hungry, footsore, and sick at heart; yet I tried again next day, and the day after, and for many days, with invariably the same result. I wore out shoe leather and gloves; once or twice I was caught in drenching rain, and had my walking−dress so far spoiled that it looked shabby ever afterwards. Also, I took a severe cold, and had to nurse myself for nearly a fortnight, lest serious illness should ensue, and lest a doctor's bill, which we had no means of paying, should be added to our inevitable responsibilities.

And so that weary summer passed, and autumn slowly stole upon us, at first stifling, glaring, dusty, as autumns in London generally are, and then showery, cold, and gloomy. The days shortened rapidly, the evenings became so chilly that we were obliged to have a little fire, the few trees in the neighbourhood prematurely lost their foliage, and by the end of September everybody was predicting a long and unusually severe winter. My uncle became daily more feeble; our rooms were draughty, London stout or porter did not agree with him, and I knew that he really needed a generous diet, and plenty of good old wine, such as used to be abundantly stored up in the cellars of Elmwood; for the Perrens had always prided themselves on their choice wines, and when they were offered for sale all the gentry in the neighbourhood came to bid for them. In times of sickness, too, the poor were always welcome to a bottle of good sound port, old sherry, or whatever the doctor ordered; the best that the Elmwood cellar boasted was at the service of the humblest labourer if required, and was as freely dispensed to the needy invalid cottager as at the festive gatherings. And now I knew that my uncle in his old age really wanted that which he had once so generously bestowed—I watched him shivering over our scanty fire, I saw him, rubbing his thin, nerveless fingers, or falling into uneasy dozes, as I feared from very weakness; and I knew that if I called in a physician he would order, not medicine, but good nutritious food and costly wines!

And our purse was being emptied, oh! so strangely, so miserably fast! I know now that I was not a very judicious housekeeper, and Mr. Perren could never be brought to understand the value of small coin; but it was too late in the day for him to be niggardly over sixpences, and I was only just beginning to learn how fast a whole sovereign melts away when once it has been changed into nineteen shillings and tenpence! A month or two longer, and we should be in extremity, even if I sold some of the few ornaments I possessed.

My drawings were at last left “*on sale*”; but I heard nothing of them. As the days passed by I was unwell myself; the air of Camden Town, I thought, did not suit me; my appetite failed me, or became capricious, and I longed for dainties I had never appreciated when they were at my disposal; and all the while my dear uncle, though he tried hard to be cheery and bright, faded visibly.

One dreary evening, when the north−west wind whistled down Eldon Street, and the rain pattered on the window, and our fire—I had not yet learned to manage London coals—persisted in going out, I went upstairs, after having seen my uncle fall asleep on the sofa, to enjoy the feminine luxury of ” a good cry.” But it was bitterly cold in my own room, and I wanted a woollen shawl that was not immediately forthcoming; I had to look for it. In my search I came upon several things I had not disturbed since our first arrival in Eldon Street; among them, the copied verses which Mrs. Hamilton had given me at Northborough Station. I had quite forgotten all about them.

Now I read them, and they comforted me so much, and were so useful and precious to me afterwards, that I think I may be forgiven if I transcribe them at length, though I believe they have since been published in Edinburgh:—

“I know not what may befal me,
God spreads a mist before mine eyes;
At every step in my onward path
He maketh new scenes to rise;
And every joy He sends me
Comes with a sudden and strange surprise.

“It may be the bitter future
Is less bitter than I think,
The Lord may sweeten the waters
Before I come to drink—

Or, if Marah must be Marah,
He will stand Himself by the brink.
“It may be He is keeping
For the coming of my feet
Some gift of such rare blessedness
Some joy so strangely sweet,
That my lips will only tremble
The thanks they cannot speak.
“O blessed, happy ignorance!
'Tis better not to know,
It keeps me so still in the tender arms
That will not let me go;
It hushes my soul to rest
On the bosom that loves me so.
“And so I go on not knowing,
I would not if I might;
I'd rather walk in the dark with God
Than go alone in the light;
I'd rather walk with Him by faith
Than go alone by sight.
“My heart shrinks back from the trials
The future may disclose;
Yet I never had a sorrow
But what the dear Lord chose;
So I force the coming tears back
With the whispered word—'He knows!'“

Chapter 35. LOST IN THE FOG

Eldon Street grew more and more dreary as the winter set in. Ours was not the sunny side of the way, and I found our rooms dull and chilly in the extreme. By degrees we left off many little luxuries which we accounted as necessaries, and I was surprised to find how many things one actually could do without, and not be really any the worse, in one's bodily health, nor yet really unhappy, save as the cause of all one's scheming and cheeseparing would continually obtrude itself. My uncle would have given up many little comforts, but I would not let him; I had been told that too great changes in the way of living would be injurious at his age, and I thought illness, even if it were slight, must entail more expense and infinitely more anxiety than any other form of trial.

But there came a day when, on examining our finances—for I was now sole cashkeeper—I found that what I called my reserve purse contained little over five pounds, while my housekeeping purse held a solitary sovereign and some silver. And this was Saturday, and there was the milkman's bill to pay, and our landlady's weekly account for the rooms and for firing to settle, and the laundress to deal with, Oh, dear! how these London washerwomen did charge! and how they tore the things, and lost them, and changed them for inferior articles, and how badly they did their work! And I was just out of groceries, and fresh meat must be ordered for to−morrow, to say nothing of vegetables and such sundries as will mount up even in the most frugal housekeeping. I calculated that when I had paid what I owed, and got in what I absolutely wanted, I should not have more than five pounds in hand. And come what would I was resolved that my uncle should have some port wine, for every morning when I carried him his breakfast, which I had persuaded him to take in bed, I thought he looked feebler and older, though he had always a smile for me, dear old man, and some little thing to say to prove that he was better or that the weather had improved

His taking his breakfast in his own room was a very great accommodation to me, for I could abstain from butter without his knowledge, and when I had poured out his cup of tea I cared very little about the strength and flavour of my own. And if it were not very cold, I could always economise in the article of fuel. Except for their pitiful cause, these petty privations never troubled me; I was young and healthy, for my influenza happily passed off; I always had, thank God, an excellent constitution, and a marvellous power of resisting disease. How it would have been with us had I been really delicate, or of an hysterical temperament, I scarcely dare to think, even now. In the article of food itself, I resolved that so long as we had it I would not stint myself, since I needed strength and unbroken health, as much for my uncle's sake as for my own; and one is sure to lose both on insufficient rations. So I went in for quantity rather than quality, and satisfied my appetite—which, save during my brief period of indisposition, was never squeamish—on great hunches of bread−and−cheese, a goodly allowance of potatoes, and beef and mutton at discretion.

I am afraid some of my readers will lose all interest in me; these confessions are so extremely unromantic. Doubtless it would have sounded more sentimental had I half−starved myself, or had my appetite failed me, on such coarse, or rather on such very plain fare, or had I pined away, and had a hacking cough, and looked frailer, and of course lovelier day by day, till recovery seemed hopeless, and I resigned myself to an early grave. At the same time, I do not know how in such case I should have survived to tell this story, nor what would have become of my poor uncle, who came by degrees to depend upon me in all our emergencies, both great and small. At any rate, Aunt Judith's plain, common−sense maxims, and her excellent, practical training stood me in good stead in this the day of my adversity.

“Well,” thought I, “Chryssie Tyndale, you must be up and stirring. Five pounds is a nice little sum to have in reserve, but it is by no means satisfactory when it comes to be all the wealth one has, and when it is an inscrutable mystery as to how the next five pounds are forthcoming. Five pounds will take us but a very little way in London, where we have to pay for every stick we light our fires with, and for every sprig of parsley we want for mutton broth.” And I could not help giving one sigh to the memory of the great productive kitchen garden and the orchard at Elmwood, where fruit, vegetables, salads, and herbs were so abundant that no one ever thought of sparing them. “With all the thrift in the world, if I had it, which I am sadly afraid I have not, I could not make it go further than a hundred shillings will go, with a perpetual demand upon them. Economy is commendable, no doubt—highly commendable. If not quite a first−class virtue, it may at least be estimated as second−rate in the category of

feminine good qualities; but, then, if means fail, wherewith shall one economise? Which is the better, to earn five shillings, or to devote one's self to stretching out half−a−crown into the greatest possible length of silver wire? The half−crown will be presently expended, even though you dole it out in halfpennies and farthings. The loaf will be eaten, even though you gather up every crumb, and if wine be a necessity you will not be long in coming to the dregs of the bottle, though you administer it in homopathic doses. It seems to me, then, that as I can only save up to a certain point, though I should work my fingers to the bone, and deny myself past the limits of endurance, it would be wiser to increase our income! Yes, that is it—I *must earn money!* But how? I relied so much upon my pictures, and there they stay in that man's shop, and nobody will give me even a few shillings for them. And I thought I had only to offer them for sale, and receive a nice little sum in current coin. I quite believed that if I could only conquer my silly pride and make the sacrifice of parting with what I naturally valued so much I should quickly find myself in cash."

That afternoon I resolved to go once more into Oxford Street, to inquire into the fate of my pictures—my cherished pictures which all the world despised. As I got ready for the expedition, I saw how very shabby I was beginning to look, and shabbiness I knew well was anything but an advantage to one fighting hand−to−hand with the world and all its difficulties. Say what one will, do what one will, society condemns shabbiness as disreputable, and it is quite inclined to treat it as the priest and the Levite treated the luckless traveller of old time who came to grief as he journeyed to Jericho. Shabby virtue loses half its merit, and shabby vice is sure to get the worst of it! In fact, one would think that there existed a human as well as a Divine decalogue, and that the commandment of greatest force next to "Thou shalt not be found out!" was "Thou shalt not be shabby!" For as long as you are not found out you will be tolerated, if not applauded, and you will receive more or less attention, and be treated with a certain amount of deference, if only you present what is commonly called "a genteel appearance."

Instinctively I felt that my shabbiness would be against me; my black was very rusty, my crape bonnet limp and crushed, my waterproof cloak had been ruined on our journey home from Italy, and, worst of all, my boots let in water, and presented a most inelegant appearance, yet I dared not spend a few shillings in the purchase of another pair; and if I sent them to be mended—even that was an expense I dreaded—I should have to remain in the house, or to go out in the thinnest summer soles. If only it would not rain! For my umbrella was quite discreditable, and I never took it out with me if I could help it.

"Going out, my dear?" said my uncle, as I looked into the parlour with my battered bonnet on.

"Yes, uncle; I am going to see Mr. Flint once more. Perhaps my pictures are sold; who knows?"

"I wish they might be, my Chryssie, you would be so pleased, and—and—we should be glad of a little more money."

I went my way; I had grown used to travelling about London unattended by this time, but I did not care to be out after dark, and the days now were short; I knew the gas would be lighted before I could transact my business, so I hurried on as fast as I could through the squares and down Charlotte Street into Oxford Street. But fast as I had walked the shops in the great thoroughfares were already lighted up, and the air was dark and heavy, and I heard some one say in passing that it would be foggy presently.

Mr. Flint was in a very bad humour, and he was evidently tired of me and of my persistency; he had never been extremely polite, and to−day he spoke in a positively uncivil tone. He looked up as I entered—he was inspecting photographs through a magnifying glass—and immediately resumed his occupation, neither accosting me nor replying to my modest "good afternoon," and leaving me unnoticed to attend his pleasure. I waited patiently for several minutes, but, seeing that he either was or pretended to be quite unconscious of my presence, I presumed to put the usual question: "Any good news for me, Mr. Flint?"

"What did you say?" he replied, coldly, still scrutinising the photos.

I repeated my question, my heart beating with violence, for there was insolence in the man's voice, and bad temper in his face.

"I tell you what it is!" he said, getting up hastily and coming opposite to me, and leaning his elbows on the counter; "I am tired of this sort of thing; I told you I would write to you when the daubs were sold, if anybody ever bought them, and there *are* fools that will buy any blotch if only the colour is put on glaringly enough! I had your address, and that was quite enough; I can't be troubled in this way. I only deal with celebrated artists."

"Then they are not sold? Perhaps I had better take them away?"

"You can if you like, paying me the proper commission money, of course."

"But, unless they are sold, there is no commission."

He burst into a rude laugh.

"Much you know about it! Did you suppose I should let your rubbish stop in my shop—in my very window, keeping out better productions—for *nothing*? Why, they have been on my hands for weeks, and I have shown them and pressed them till I am sick of the very sight of them. People only laugh at them, you know. They have been more trouble to me than all the rest of the stock put together. Still, as I have said, there are some people with such bad taste that they prefer gaudy, unnatural colouring and impossible perspective; and such a person *may* come in some of these days,—all sorts do business with me. So, to be rid of the nuisance, and as you seem to be badly off, I will pay you for them at once, and then there will be no more bother. I'll give you thirty shillings *down* for the two."

"Thirty shillings!" was all I could respond. And I had hoped for at least ten pounds.

"Well, it's too much; I daresay I shall be a loser by the transaction; but I am willing to risk it, and there will be an end to the matter. Just sign your name to this form, and I'll hand over the cash."

"But," I said, falteringly, "I hoped—I really thought—I do not think I can afford to take so little. I have been assured by competent judges that they are worth a great deal more."

"The public is the most competent judge, miss, and the public has passed its opinion pretty plain. Ladies always do put such a value on their scraps of drawings. I have really said many a time that I will have no more dealings with ladies, except they come as *bonâ−fide* purchasers. Besides, you see, there's a fashion in everything; your sort of picture has had its day, nobody cares for trees and hills and ruins and purple skies now; as I said, they've had their day! If you had done, say, something in the way of *genre*, now!" and he pointed to a coarse, showy representation of a melon cut in half; an antique china plate and jug, a curious silver knife, and a tortoise−shell kitten, asleep! "Or, if you had done a bird's nest now, with blue or speckled eggs in it, and primroses and a bunch of lilac, and plenty of moss and twigs, and a snail crawling in the foreground with a striped shell on his back, just like life, that might have taken. I've sold a dozen pieces of *genre* this week, and there's quite a run upon interiors and birdsnesses, to say nothing of robin redbresses and butterflies; but the redbresses take best about Christmas Day, with snow foregrounds, and bits of holly and mistletoe. Let me advise you, miss, to turn your attention to *genre.*"

"Thank you, Mr. Flint, I will think about it. But just, now I really want money very much indeed, and should be glad to sell the landscapes, only I am afraid I cannot, I ought not, to take what you offer me."

"Very well, miss! Just as you please! Only you see I must request you to pay me my commission, and have done with it. I can't go on with this profitless nonsense any longer; my time's my money, miss!"

And he looked significantly at the heap of photos.

I hesitated, cruelly uncertain as to what I had better do. Even thirty shillings were not to be despised, but then it would be throwing my labour away. Though I could easily believe that I had overrated the drawings as artistic productions, I was quite sure they really were good of their kind—better than almost any I saw about me in the shop. One thing was clear, if I could get only thirty shillings for what took me so many days and so much pains to achieve, I must perforce abandon the idea of getting my living by painting; I had better take to plain sewing at once, it could scarcely be less remunerative. Then I thought, "Why should I not ask God to guide me in this matter? A child goes to its father in every perplexity. I know not which way to go; I cannot even see the next step I must take; Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do? Cause me to do that which is right, and that which will be for the best."

Meanwhile it grew rapidly darker, and I felt very cold and tired. Mr. Flint never asked me to sit down, and I was not sufficiently self−confident to take a chair unbidden.

"Well, miss," he said, at last, impatiently, "*have* you made up your mind? We're going to close directly, and I've got to get to Shepherd's Bush before the fog stops the 'busses running."

This sounded alarming. I had heard of London fogs, and thought it must be extremely unpleasant to be out of doors in them. It behoved me to get back to Eldon Street as quickly as possible.

"Might I not leave the pictures till Monday, Mr. Flint?" I said. "I should like to speak to my uncle before I quite decide. I will promise you to come back on Monday morning, and either accept your offer or take my property away, paying you the commission you require."

“I'd rather have it settled now!” he grumbled.

And he thrust the photos into a drawer, while two pale youths entered, one to clear away engravings, and to cover over portfolios and oil paintings, the other to put up the shutters.

“But I would come early on Monday morning,” I pleaded. “I really must think about it.”

“Very well! But please to remember, miss, that the transaction must be closed at once. There is thirty shillings or your pictures back again, and a very handsome offer too, as perhaps you'll be convinced by Monday morning. Good night, miss.”

Thus coolly dismissed I left the shop. Great was my consternation as I stood once more on the damp slippery pavement; Egyptian darkness had gathered round me, only it was rather brown than black darkness at present, but I could not see half a yard before me. The first thing I did was to run full tilt against a cross old gentleman, the next to embrace a fat, loud−voiced woman, who ran full tilt at me, and then gave vent to her feelings in singularly strong language. The gas in the shops showed like dying rushlights through the vapour; whether the street lamps were lighted I could not tell, for not a glimmering could I perceive, though I peered anxiously along the kerb. And, worst of all, I had to cross Oxford Street!

I wandered on, helpless and dismayed. I could hear the roar and dash and crash of vehicles, and the tramp of horses' feet, though I could not see any object. To adventure myself into the fray seemed like rushing upon certain death, and yet I must cross the street before I could begin to go home.

At last I found a policeman, who kindly volunteered to take me over, and so I achieved the passage, not, however, without many hair−breadth escapes and terrible affrights. Once a horse's bit struck against my bonnet, and once the wheel of a heavy−laden omnibus almost grazed my arm.

“They'll stop the traffic directly,” grunted the policeman when I thanked him; “it's getting worse and worse! There's a pretty smash! They *must* stop. All the world will come to grief if they don't give in.”

By the time I had reached the other side of Oxford Street I was so confused I did not know which way to turn. I knew a short cut to the New Road, if I could only find it; only somehow—it seemed very stupid—but I really could not tell on which side of Tottenham Court Road I was. I asked one old woman, and she said “she knew no more where she was nor the child unborn; she did not know whether she was making for Holborn or for the Marble Arch. And it wasn't no good to ask anybody.”

I went on a few steps further, and then I felt a gloved hand laid on my arm, and a well−dressed man was close to me, so close that his bushy and scented whiskers swept my forehead.

“Lost your way, my dear?” he whispered, familiarly. “Take my arm; I will see you safe home. Come along, my beauty.”

I wrenched my arm away and fled, I knew not whither, up the first dark street I could find and down another. I thought I heard him behind me; I am sure he followed me at first. At last all was silence, and I paused, leaning breathlessly against some area railings wondering where I was.

Meanwhile the fog deepened, and the dark moisture seemed to penetrate to and chill my very marrow. The street was empty; I met no creature save a wailing cat; I heard no footfall but my own. I could feel the railings, otherwise I might have been in the loneliest country lane at midnight. Should I knock at a door and ask my way? But I fancied such things were never done in London, and I had heard something of traps to catch the unwary. I decided that I dared not do that, so I went on and on till I was ready to drop with fatigue, not even knowing whether I was in the right direction, only supposing that I was somewhere between Oxford Street and the New Road, since I could not possibly have crossed the latter unawares. And the streets along which I went seemed to become narrower and darker and more intricate, and once I heard loud shouts as of drunken men close by, and in passing a house I heard shrieks of children and howling women denouncing each other in the most undiluted Saxon. I began to be afraid that I had wandered into unknown regions, and into an exceedingly disreputable neighbourhood.

Chapter 36. SILLY JOHNNY

As the night advanced the fog grew thicker, if indeed that were possible. The by−streets through which I wandered like an unhappy ghost were almost deserted, and the cold grew more and more intense. I began to feel not only chilled and tired, but faint and sick, and fairly frightened out of all self−possession. It was getting serious. At first it was exciting, then it was perplexing, then distressing, and now it was absolutely terrifying.

"How will it all end?" was the question I kept asking myself, as I turned every fresh corner, not knowing in the least towards which point of the compass I was steering. Was I doomed to pass the night in wandering about the streets, or should I be taken up as a vagrant, and carried off to the police−station?

The dreadful idea of the police−station inspired me, however, with a new notion. I had already met one police−man; I knew him by his heavy tread—as far as sight was concerned, the whole force might have passed by, and I been none the wiser; but the next policeman I met I would consult, and request him to assist me. A policeman would be sure to know the locality, and there would be neither danger nor impropriety in addressing him. So I plodded away, with the darkness, like walls of blackness, around me, and the stifling vapour pouring into my lungs, and provoking fits of painful coughing. I began to be afraid that I should literally "catch my death of cold." I had turned, and turned, and returned, and crossed over till I was so confused that walking in a labyrinth was nothing to it. I think I must have walked several miles on that memorable night, and I began to have some dim idea of what the discipline of the treadmill must be! At last I sat down on a doorstep, in a street that, as far as I could form an opinion, was respectable. It was strangely quiet, and if I had not been so cold I am not sure that I should not have fallen asleep. I felt extremely wretched; all sorts of evils seemed showered upon me; at the moment I could have cried out that God had forgotten me, that all the world had forsaken me, that I was desolate, deserted, and dying of despair! I had asked God to send me help, but none came; I had besought Him to deliver me from my peril, but no deliverance arrived. And there I sat, shivering with cold and apprehension, no friendly gleam to light me on my way, no kindly voice to proffer aid. I wondered greatly what was the time; it seemed hours since I had left the picture−dealer's shop, many hours since I had quitted the dull house in Eldon Street that appeared to me now, as I thought of it with a vain yearning, a very haven of celestial happiness and peaceful rest. And oh, my poor uncle! what agonies he must be enduring! He had never approved of my going out alone, he had always predicted some strange disaster as the result of my solitary expeditions; and now, as the darkness deepened, and the fog thickened, and he watched and watched, listening to every footfall along the dreary street, and starting up at every ring of the door bell, I knew his anxiety would be intolerable. And as the night wore on, and I was still absent, I was sure his excitement and distress would be little short of frenzy.

By−and−by, when I had almost forgotten to listen for it, came the measured tramp of the policeman. I felt too wearied, too utterly worn out to get up and speak to him; but as he came close to me, he perceived—it could scarcely have been by the sense of sight—that some one was near to him, and in close proximity to his feet. In an instant the rays of his bull's−eye were full upon my face, the lantern itself almost touched my nose, and its owner was asking me in a professionally stern, but not unkindly tone—"what I did there?" I tried to tell him; but I could only sob out something which he could not comprehend. "Come now," he said, when he had listened for several minutes to my incoherent account, "stop crying, there's a good woman! for I can hear it is a woman, though it might be a dog, or a sack of coals for all I can *see!* You women do the water−cart business so extremely well; but there's no need of any extra moisture to−night; so if it's all the same to you, I'll trouble you to speak without crying. You can't sit there, you know, you *must* move on."

"I have been 'moving on' for at least two hours," I replied, struggling with a lump in my throat, and a curious flutter at my heart, and in a most *larmoyante* tone. "I come from Oxford Street, and I want to get home to Camden Town; I am tired to death, I am afraid I can go no further. What am I to do?"

"Young women ought to be safe in their own homes such a night as this!" was his answer. "What call have you to be out after dark?"

And there was a sort of paternal severity in his voice that comforted me inexpressibly.

I explained to him the true state of the case, gathering confidence and fluency of speech as I proceeded, and asking him in conclusion where I was.

“Well, as far as I know this is Gower Street; a bit further on, and you get out into Euston Road at the Metropolitan Station. I think it's Gower Street, for I haven't got off my beat as I know of. But this fog beats all! we haven't had one like it these seven years, to the best of my memory! And you want to get to Camden Town?”

“Yes, please. Oh! can you help me?”

“What part of Camden Town?”

“Eldon Street.”

“That's not so bad but it might be worse. Why, you must have been tramping in a sort of zig−zag circle ever since you got out of Oxford Street. But you are not out of your road after all. What o'clock is it? It went seven by St. Pancras some little time ago.”

Seven! and I had not expected to be home a minute later than five o'clock. Oh! what a state my poor uncle would be in!

“What would you advise me to do?”

“Well, miss, I really don't know. You see there's 'busses from the Hampstead Road corner right to Camden Town, and there's one as crosses the end of Eldon Street as would set you down at your own door, as one may say. But then 'busses and cabs have stopped running these two hours. I doubt you couldn't get any sort of vehicle for love or for money to−night; there's nothing to do but just to tramp it. I'll take you to the end of the street, and see you over the crossing; I can't go any further, because I am on duty, and I mustn't go beyond my beat. You had better take my arm, if you don't mind, miss, or we shall not easily keep together.”

I gratefully accepted the offer, for a strong arm was just what I needed. I absolutely tottered as I prepared to recommence my journey. Nevertheless, comforted by companionship and inspired by hope, the motion seemed to restore me and do me good, and I soon found that my pedestrian capacities were by no means as entirely exhausted as I had supposed when I sank down, half exhausted and half benumbed, on the wet doorstep, and more than half inclined to resign myself to the torpor which was gradually stealing over me. A few minutes' walking brought us to the corner of a street, where was a confectioner's shop, and we could see a faint glimmer of blurred light, and by dint of pressing one's nose against the glass behold, as in clouded vision, certain jellies, buns, and tarts, and other tempting comestibles.

“Now, suppose you just step in here, miss,” said the policeman. “This is a most respectable shop, and kept by very respectable people, as all this neighbourhood will testify. And if you'll wait a bit till I come to you, I think I can find some one whom you may trust to go with you to your home, or as far as you may find needful. You had better get a bite of something to eat and a glass of ginger−wine—it's very bad to go about in a fog on an empty stomach. I'll just speak to the people here; they know me, and I know them, and they might think it rather strange to see a young lady like you coming in all alone on such an evening. The streets are pretty well emptied of respectable females.”

I thanked my kindly “Bobby,” and together we entered the confectioner's shop, which was a very comfortable one, and well supplied with nice and wholesome refreshments of various sorts. My Bobby explained, and I was graciously received by a buxom young woman in a Rob Roy plaid dress, and a chair was placed for me by the stove, which burned brightly and filled the place with warmth, and I was asked what I would take, a little hot brandy and water being strongly recommended.

But I thought I should prefer tea or coffee, and in three minutes I had a steaming cup of the latter beverage in my hands: the very aroma of it did me good. It was excellent coffee, strong and clear and hot, and Miss Rob Roy—she had ribbons of the same plaid in her hair—cut me several nice slices of fresh roll and butter, upon which I feasted as upon heavenly food. Verily, Olympus itself could not have rejoiced in nectar and ambrosia that surpassed the coffee and roll of that never−to−be−forgotten evening! I soon grew warm, I had young blood in my veins, and by the time the cup was emptied I was quite ready to face the world—the formidable fog included.

Miss Rob Roy told me weird stories of London fogs till my friend the policeman returned, with a tall, thin youth, who squinted horribly, and had a peculiar inane expression of countenance. I wondered if this gentleman was to be my escort; he looked more likely to lose his own way than to help me to find mine. But Miss Rob Roy seemed to know him, for she accosted him familiarly, and called him “Johnny,” and handed him a stale Bath−bun, which he began greedily to devour upon the spot.

“This young man will take you safe, ma'am,” said the policeman. “He don't look up to much, and I'm bound to say he ain't in general, but he knows his way about London, if anybody ever did; he'd find it blindfold any day or

night; so it stands to sense that a fog makes no difference to him. You needn't talk to him if you don't like, but he's not bad company; he knows a sight of queer things, about beasts, and birds, and creeping things. He isn't all *here*, you know;" and the good Bobby pointed significantly to his forehead, and shook his head lugubriously. I must say I felt slightly uneasy at the prospect of my walk through the darkness with a madman, and I did not feel in a mood to listen to zoological revelations.

"Don't be afraid, ma'am," said Miss Rob Roy, seeing me glance doubtfully towards the Bath−bun, or rather towards its remains, for it was rapidly disappearing; "Johnny's no lunatic, nor yet an idiot; he's what we down in the country '*an innocent*.' And *we* think, there,"—and she lowered her voice—"that God Almighty favours such poor creatures more than others, and makes up to them, somehow, for not being like other folks. Anyways He takes special care of them! You'll be safe with Johnny, safer than with many who are too clever by half."

Thus reassured, I prepared to depart. Anxious as I was to reach home, I felt no small regret at leaving the kindly haven of the pastrycook's domain, and the friendly Miss Rob Roy, and the good fatherly policeman. I shall never forget my entertainment there; that corner shop has been to me ever since a place of no ordinary interest, and I think of it as a returned traveller must gratefully think of the oasis in the desert, which gave him rest and nourishment in the hour of his extremity.

Johnny and I set out, and soon lost ourselves in the Cimmerian gloom of the uncompromising fog. But we got safely into Euston Road and to the other side of Euston Square, though I had not the least idea where I was going.

Once or twice Johnny stopped abruptly, and when he stopped I stopped also. "What is the matter?" I asked when for the third time we came to a sudden pause. For a second or two there was no answer, then my guide replied—"I'm asking Him, lady."

"Asking *who*?"

"The Great Father—Johnny's Father. He is up there, though we can't see Him, and He's good, quite good, and always good. When I can't tell the way, I ask Him to show me."

"And does he show it to you when you ask?"

"Of course he does, lady. He loves Johnny, and so He wouldn't like Johnny to be lost. He's been so kind to Johnny, taking care of him, and giving him meat and bread, and cold potatoes, and hardbake—and some day He'll give Johnny a fine house, and a white coat, and He'll say, 'Come my Johnny!' and then I shall go and live in the beautiful house He's been and got ready for me. It's not in London at all, but in a grand city a long way off, where there are crowds of people in the streets, all dressed in shining white, and where there's always music, and nobody is ever hungry or thirsty, and nobody ever cries. There are no fogs there, lady. Now we must turn— yes, this is the street—and now we are in Oakley Square."

And I could walk from Oakley Square to my own door in seven minutes. How glad, how grateful I felt!

"Does your Father give you all you want, Johnny?" I asked.

"Yes, *all*, lady—all I really want. Sometimes I think I should like things that are no good, lady. A long time ago"—half a−year was "a long time" to Johnny, I afterwards discovered—"I had my foot scrunched, and I couldn't walk, and I longed for a Neddy; there was a jolly Neddy in our yard, and so I said to my Father—'Please, my Father, give Johnny a Neddy to ride on, for his foot is scrunched, and it hurts him awful to walk, and it's miserable not to be out of doors. So please do give him a Neddy straight away.' But no Neddy ever came; the good Father thought Johnny had best not have the Neddy—for the good Father knows, you see. Johnny don't know much, but his Father knows all about everything so it's no odds that Johnny don't know. Johnny got no Neddy, but one day there came a beautiful lady, like an angel, and she took Johnny out riding in her trap—such a trap! soft cushions, and a soft fur thing, and two prancing grey ponies, with long tails. Oh! it was *scrumptious!* And my Father sent her, she said so—she knows Him, and loves Him, and she's one of His own ones, you see."

"I think the fog is lifting a little, Johnny."

"It will soon be down again, lady; it won't lift till morning, and perhaps not then. I don't mind the fog. I rather like it, it is like the dark, it shuts me in: and when I am close shut in, and there are no men's voices, and nothing to be seen, then I can hear my Father. He speaks to me; He says, 'Don't be afraid, Johnny, you are *My* Johnny, I'll take care of you; it is not dark to Me; I can see you, so you needn't be afraid!' I used to be terrible skeered before I came to know about my Father up there!"

"Who told you about Him?"

"That's what I can't tell you, lady, for I don't rightly know. The Great Father don't let Johnny remember things:

it comes in here”—and I heard him thump his head—“but it all runs out again; my head's like a tin mug full of holes. But I never forget my Father; He lets me remember *Him* always. I think He must have told me Himself all about Himself. When I think, I'm all in a muddle—I shan't be in a muddle when I get to the golden city, shall I, lady?”

“No, Johnny, and I think you are not in a muddle now, about some things. But certainly all will be clear when you reach that blessed home whither all God's children are bound, for you will see His Face, and in His light you will walk.”

“I shall see *His Face!*” he said, rather to himself than to me. “Johnny will see the Great King's face; for my Father *is* a King!”

“*Our* Father, Johnny!”

“Is He your Father, Lady?”

“Yes, Johnny; He is my Father.”

“And do you love Him?”

“Yes, I love Him; but I want to love Him more. And He loves me, and He loves all those I love.”

“That's nice! That's good! Well, then, lady, why was you skeered at the fog?”

“How do you know I was scared, Johnny?”

“I saw it in the shop. Your face was skeered−like. Why didn't you call out to our Father? He is in the fog and in the sunshine. He's *everywhere—everywhere.* No need to be skeered where He is.”

I cannot tell you how Johnny's words seemed to strengthen and refresh me. They came like new wine to my weary, sinking soul. No, there was no need to be afraid! With my Father's eye upon me, and my Father's still small voice whispering sweet words of gracious promise, and with my poor weak hand fast clasped in His, what need to be afraid? Ah, Johnny! but you were far wiser than I. You taught me faith; you, by God's blessing, cheered and strengthened my heart; and once more I could take down my harp from the willow, where for many a day it had hung silent and unstrung, and once more I could sing hymns of praise to Him who loved me and redeemed me by His precious blood. So my “innocent” guide became my teacher, and the fog was as a parable to me.

We were almost home; we were crossing over to Eldon Street, when some one whose footstep seemed strangely familiar came near. I could not tell why, but, as the sound of that tread came closer and closer, my thoughts flashed off to the city of the Seven Hills, to the Pincio, to the Borghese Gardens.

“Is that Miss Tyndale?” said a shadowy figure, which just loomed through the mists.

It was James Lascelles's voice; I knew it in a moment.

In another instant he had taken my hand, and was thanking God that I was found at last.

“Have you been looking for me?” I asked. “Scarcely looking,” he replied. “That is the worst feature of these fogs that one cannot look. I went in about an hour after your departure, just as it began to get alarmingly thick, and I found your uncle very anxious on your account. Of course when you did not return at the time expected he became very greatly distressed, and I, too, felt much solicitude; for none but Londoners born and bred ought to be abroad in such nights as this; and knowing that the traffic would be stopped, I could not imagine what would become of you. There seemed to be nothing to do, that was the worst of it. There is no suspense like inactive, passive suspense. I could only commit you to our Father's care, and try to comfort Mr. Perren by reminding him that you were in His hands, and that God was in the murky dark as well as in the daylight or the moonlight.”

Johnny interrupted here by eagerly exclaiming that he had told me so. And then followed an introduction and an explanation, which lasted till we reached the door of No. 25.

I do not know how it was, whether it was reaction after the undue nervous strain, or whether it was mere physical exhaustion; but I no sooner saw my uncle than the fog seemed to be once more around me; the gas shone hazily, the fire grew red and lurid, the figures of my uncle and of James and Johnny suddenly appeared to recede, the voices sounded faint and distant, and the next thing I recollect was awaking, or something very like it, on the sofa, with my uncle standing by, the tears streaming down his cheeks, and James with a glass of some restorative in his hand, and our landlady, Mrs. Betts, with smelling−salts, and Johnny at the foot of the sofa, all agape, and looking more idiotic than when I first saw him in the pastrycook's shop.

It struck me that I must have fainted, and the idea seemed so entirely absurd that I could not help laughing. This only complicated matters, for immediately I was treated for hysteria. James half choked me with brandy and

water, my uncle dashed water into my face, and Mrs. Betts rushed off for that popular and supposed infallible specific—burnt feathers! Happily, I had reassured my friends before she came back with what seemed to be the best part of some unlucky fowl's tail.

My uncle made fresh tea, and Mrs. Betts brought up some nice toast, and Johnny sat down at our request and made a hearty meal. I never saw any one enjoy buttered toast so thoroughly; it was “better than a stale bun or hardbake!” he continually assured us; and he drank five cups of tea, as weak and sweet as we could make it. But though he ate—almost devoured—the food set before him, he would not take the small sum of money we wished him to accept. And when he had taken his fill, he said, bluntly, that he “was full, and could not eat any more”—he was in a hurry to take his departure. But before he rose from the table he joined his hands, and looked upwards, while his lips moved for half a minute or more.

Then he said, “I was just saying, 'Thank you, my Father, for this jolly good feed!'“

We asked him his full name, but he said he was only “Johnny”; and when we pressed for his other name, he looked puzzled. But at last his face lighted up, and he looked relieved and happy; while he told us his other name was “Silly!” He was often called “Silly Johnny!”

Chapter 37. MY FIRST EARNINGS

James Lascelles looked better and stronger than when I had seen him last, immediately after our return from Italy. I wondered—indeed, I had wondered for weeks—what could have become of him, though at the same time we had taken measures to keep our place of residence a profound secret. Mrs. March and one or two old Northborough friends had our address, but not one among our London acquaintances had been taken into confidence. Still I had wondered, unreasonably enough, that James Lascelles never wrote or came, for in spite of his being Louis's brother, I had somehow come to the conclusion that he was true, and altogether trustworthy—a person upon whom one might depend whether the day were dark or bright.

As we sat round the fire that evening, after Johnnie's departure, I thought how kind he looked; and I felt for the first time that in our soreness at Louis Trafford's heartless desertion, we had dealt somewhat ungraciously with James and with his mother. We had identified them too completely with the obnoxious Cuppage family. While I was reflecting on these matters my uncle put the very question I wished to ask.

“But you did not tell me, James, where you have been all this long time—five months and more? I began to worry about my Chryssie, and that stopped our conversation. Where have you been?”

“I have been in Berlin and Vienna. The house to which I was attached before I left England with you last year had important business abroad, and when the head of the firm knew that I had returned, and was disengaged they at once did me the honour of offering me the situation, which was one of great responsibility. These gentlemen treated me with so much courtesy, and proposed such satisfactory terms, that I could not think of refusing them. Indeed, I scarcely deliberated at all. I could perceive that the business was one which would not admit of delay, and I was quite sure that my mother would immediately acquiesce in any arrangement which it behoved me to make. In short, I accepted on the spot, and in three days I had set out for Hamburgh. My mother accompanied me. There were many reasons why she shrank from returning to Northborough, and she preferred a Continental sojourn to being left alone in London. The very day after our arrival in Berlin I wrote to Mr. Perren and my mother wrote to Miss Tyndale, and after an interval of about a fortnight our letters were returned to us through the Dead Letter Office. We wrote again and again to the old address, and requested that our letters might be forwarded; but word at length came to us that you were gone, and that your present abode was entirely unknown. Then my mother, rather against her inclination, I must confess, wrote to Cuppage, but failed to gain the desired information. Madam protested that she knew absolutely nothing of your whereabouts.”

“That was quite true,” I interrupted. “We said no syllable which could give Mrs. Trafford the slightest clue to our retreat. How, then, did you discover us?”

“Rather curiously, as you will own, when I tell you the particulars. The day before yesterday I was walking along Oxford Street with Mr. Mowbray, the junior partner in the firm I serve. Mr. Mowbray and I are friends, and on the strength of his artistic tastes and my acquaintance with many galleries and celebrated collections abroad, we have become rather more intimate than is usual with an employer and his subordinate. Sauntering along on our way to a private exhibition in Old Bond Street, we paused to look in at the window of one of the well−known picture dealers, and there I saw a pair of landscapes which I knew at a glance to be yours, those which you took at Tivoli, in the Abruzzi. Even without your initials in the corner I should not have had the smallest difficulty in recognising the drawings, which I had seen so often under your hand. Mr. Mowbray, after contemplating them for some minutes, said, 'I wonder, now, what the fellow would ask for those two pictures? I like them; they are just what I want. I think I shall go in and ask the price. Of course I shall beat Flint down; one never gives Flint what he demands, he is such a regular scamp!'

“I told him they were the work of a friend of mine, whose address I was very anxious to discover; and then we went into the shop together. Mowbray asked to look at the drawings, and inquired the price.

“'Ten guineas the pair,' said Mr. Flint; 'I ought to ask fifteen, but the artist is young and unknown and wishes to make a name, and moreover, is sadly in want of ready money. The pictures are left with me on sale or return.'

“While Mowbray was critically examining them I asked Mr. Flint if he would kindly give me your address, as you were a friend of mine whom I was anxiously seeking to discover. He instantly changed colour and declared that he was quite ignorant of your abode; but he thought you were to be found somewhere on the Surrey side!”

“What a dreadful untruth!” I exclaimed; “he has known my address from the beginning. He was to communicate with me if the pictures were sold, and I was very particular to write down such an address as could not possibly be mistaken. What is more, I saw him copy the card I gave him into his own book; and only this very afternoon he assured me that no person had ever cared to look at my drawings, that no one had ever proposed to buy them, and finally he offered me thirty shillings for the two—'to be quit of the bother,' as he politely declared.”

“Oh, indeed! I think I can find you a better market that that; indeed, I believe that a better market has already been discovered. Mr. Mowbray proposed to give Flint eight guineas. If he had asked twelve, Mowbray would have bid ten; no one, it seems, ever does give this Flint what he first asks; he does not expect it. Naturally, this mode of procedure makes him lose *caste* among the more respectable dealers; but people go to him because occasionally he has a really good thing. I knew the man lied, I saw it in his face; and I knew also that it would be useless to try to extract from him any trustworthy information. I could only hope that if Mowbray purchased the drawings, I should be able in some way or other to trace your whereabouts. But the knowledge I despaired of obtaining came from a totally unexpected source. Do you know a pale, freckled boy, with no eyebrows, and pitted with the small−pox, who seems to be shopman and errand lad and warehouseman to Mr. Flint?”

“I have frequently seen him—a dull, unhealthy−looking youth, who seems to stand in absolute terror of Mr. Flint's displeasure. Mr. Flint is very sharp with him, and the youth seems nervous. His name is Peter.”

“Well, Peter was busy at the other end of the shop; and while Mowbray was turning over a heap of sketches, which Flint was praising up to the skies, I strolled round, looking at some nice things, and at a good many daubs, till I came up to the place where this Peter was standing. I saw him give a quick glance towards the counter, where his master and Mowbray were conversing; the next instant he handed me, under cover of a huge portfolio, a slip of paper, giving me at the same time a signal to keep silence. Rather wonderingly I put the small document in my pocket, for I thought that secrecy might be desirable. I did not look at it till I had left the shop. What was my astonishment and delight to find your address, written in a great, sprawling, school−boy hand, and underneath these words:

'I trust to you not to let the master know as I give you the young lady's directions. He'd snap my head oft, and turn me away afterwards with no caracter; and I've an invalid parient as looks to me for help. But I wish the young lady well, and the master he gammons her!' Here it is: I think I had better hand it over to you, as a memento of your friend Peter's kindliness.”

“How very kind of him! And an hour ago, when I was sitting on a door−step, I felt like a waif and stray that no one owned. I thought all the world had forgotten me; it was very wrong.”

James Lascelles laughed.

“I don't think it was so very bad: it only shows that you are not a very strong−minded woman. The circumstances were depressing; you were lost in a fog, you were very cold, very hungry, and very tired, and you had been snubbed by the redoubtable Mr. Flint. A young lady sitting on a London door−step, on a November night, and in a London fog, may well be excused if she give way to the apprehensions which her situation naturally inspires. Don't scold yourself for nothing, Chryssie.”

He called me “Chryssie” in the old familiar tone of other days, before Louis's defection put a sort of intangible barrier between us. There was both pleasure and pain in talking with James Lascelles again, but the pleasure predominated.

“To what conclusions did you and Mr. Flint arrive after all?” inquired our friend. “I sincerely hope you did not clinch the bargain, and accept the thirty shillings he had the impertinence and the dishonesty to proffer.”

I told Mr. Lascelles how I had been tempted to take the thirty shillings, though I did not tell him that it was because the family purse contained little more than three times that amount. And I told him how I had requested leisure to consider the splendid proposal; and how I had promised to give my final answer early on Monday morning.

“And you will give it by declining the magnificent sum of one pound ten shillings, and requesting the immediate return of your property. I think I had better accompany you, for the man will be sure to browbeat you, and it requires a typical, or rather a representative 'strong−minded woman' to deal with such a dealer.”

“Thank you,” I answered, earnestly. “I shall be most thankful to have your countenance. It is hard work for a girl to do battle with such a one as Peter's master.”

“You must never do it again,” he replied; “you need not, now I have found you out.”

“Indeed, she shall go out no more alone!” quoth my uncle. “I always said harm would come of it. And here she loses herself in a fog, sits down on a door−step, and is brought home by an idiot, narrowly escaping the clutches of the policeman. I hope you have had enough of rushing about London unaccompanied, my Chryssie?”

I did not reply, for I was quite sure that I should still have to walk about the great metropolis without escort; I only smiled, and observed that life, contemplated from a wet door−step, and through the medium of a fog, was far from enlivening, and that I never should wish to find myself in similar circumstances. And then I asked if Mr. Mowbray really wanted my pictures.

“Of course he does. He would have closed with Mr. Flint there and then had I not whispered to him in German to delay the purchase; for I felt quite sure that not half the sum bargained for would find its way into your pocket. Happily, I never imagined the truth, or I am afraid I might have expressed myself somewhat too strongly. But tell me, are you really desirous of turning your artistic talent to pecuniary account?”

“I am indeed. I ask nothing better. The plain truth is, I *must* do something. We have lost all, as you know, Mr. Lascelles; it is very sad, but it is of no use making a moan about it. To lament over vanished riches is like crying over spilt milk. The milk can never be gathered up again, but more may be procured; and the money that is lost will never come back again, but more may be earned, and that is just what I must do. The difficulty has been how to earn it. I began to be afraid that I had overvalued my capacities; for, in spite of all my efforts, I could not succeed in turning any of my handiworks into hard cash.”

“I am glad you did not try the *rôle* of teacher; that is what well−born and educated women generally resort to, I believe; but if I were a woman I would rather, I think, turn housemaid, and hope for better days to come!”

“Or *cook*! I am developing quite a culinary genius. Mrs. Betts has been good enough lately to give me the run of the kitchen, and I have not only learned a little plain cookery, but improvised certain small, economical, savoury dishes of my own. Mrs. Betts thinks that if I had a few months' regular practice I could get good wages as a first−rate cook. The only thing is I am afraid I could not stand the fire.”

“You do not think of such an alternative?”

He said this so soberly that I could not help laughing.

“No, indeed, for in order to distinguish myself as *cordon−bleu* I must take a situation, and I could not leave my uncle; I might as well turn governess! I have thought of giving daily lessons; and to confess the truth, I have made sundry furtive efforts to procure morning pupils—efforts which have resulted only in failure. I have spoken to several people, and I have written several attractive notices or MS. advertisements, and left them at the stationer's shop and the Berlin repository in the next street. But the advertisements, which were triumphs of caligraphy and English composition, lay till they were soiled and torn, and the good folks who promised to let me know if they heard of anything, never did hear of anything, or else they forgot all about it.”

“Very probably they did forget; or else they did not like the trouble. But I do not think teaching is your *forte*, Chryssie.”

“I am afraid not; I always pitied the governesses at Mrs. March's, and wondered how they could sustain their manifold trials, and how they could possibly meet the incessant demands upon their patience. It was so like grinding in a mill; and when they had finished they had to begin again—the same monotonous round, the same endless repetition.”

“And then governesses are so ill−paid. And nothing, I am assured on all hands, and I can well believe it, nothing takes so much out of one as regular continuous teaching, especially if the teacher be conscientious, and throw herself into the work. No class of working people grow old, and to a certain extent superannuated, so rapidly as governesses.”

“And yet it can scarcely be the actual brain−labour, for after a governess is fairly accustomed to her work, the demand upon the intellect is not excessive; it is chiefly memory and method that one requires in regular professional tuition.”

“It is the ceaseless strain upon the faculties, the strain upon the nerves, which exhausts the constitution. Then only about three governesses in a hundred ever marry; the others can scarcely succeed in saving up sufficient to eke out a scanty income for their declining years. If a governess receive what is called a handsome salary, she generally has to dress handsomely, and so she is not much of a gainer, except in the matter of position, which is by no means permanent.”

“The *ne plus ultra* of governess−life is to save enough to set up school−keeping on one's own account. If it

were God's will that I should keep a boarding−school, I hope I should be humbly content to keep one; but otherwise I would rather have a millinery or dressmaking establishment of my own, or I would keep a shop; either would be equally respectable. As for mere gentility, let it go! I cannot recognise a distinction without a difference. I would just as soon keep a crockery−shop as a ladies' college—all female seminaries are called colleges now, I believe."

"But in the crockery−shop you would find little, if any, scope for your intellectual capacities."

"I beg your pardon. I would not confine my energies to the willow pattern. I flatter myself my artistic proclivities would find full development in various pleasant directions. Beauty is cheap enough nowadays, thank God. I say it reverently. I would go in for Parian china and cheap Worcester, if I lacked capital for jewelled tazzas and Ceramic ware and rare Majolicas; and by−and−by these also might be within reach. I do believe I should make a capital tradeswoman. And the crockery−shop is an excellent idea."

"And you would not think yourself compromised by turning shopkeeper?"

"Not in the least. I do not see why one should be ashamed of any honest calling to which one is suited, and which one pursues heartily. And I am sure shopkeeping would suit me better than teaching."

"I quite believe it would; and there are thousands of girls at this moment toiling in schoolrooms who are far better fitted for business, and who would, had they the courage to forswear the worship of that Moloch called 'gentility,' be happier and healthier and more usefully employed in what they falsely imagine a humbler position."

"Still, there *must* be governesses—plenty of them. And the office of instructor has always been deemed honourable."

"And so it is, and ever will be. But the mischief is that every girl whom reverses or actual station calls to active exertion turns to governessing. Consequently the market is overstocked, and even very small salaries are at a premium, and situations are difficult to procure. The highest order of governesses—indeed, second−class as well as first−class governesses—will always be able to hold their own, and to command from £80 to £200 per annum. But these ladies are not to be found in any large numbers. There are plenty of pretenders to the post, who, however, are unequal to what they profess. People who can afford to pay high salaries require something substantial for their money. They seek a highly−cultured, accomplished gentlewoman, who is able to impart what she knows; and they will not put up with a mere sham. Hence it is that only a limited number of these true governesses are ever to be found."

"Yet middle−class people want their children taught, and they must be content with middle−class governesses."

"No doubt. I am not finding fault with the profession itself, but with the folly of those who, unqualified for their work, overthrong the ranks, and make the calling so wretchedly ill−paid. I heard the subject discussed the other night by some kind ladies who are wishing to widen the field of remunerative female labour. They said that many girls took up the life of the governess simply because they had to earn their living, and no other vocation seemed to them to be "genteel." They had learned little and could *teach* less; great numbers of them were quite content to be nursemaids, in point of fact, if only they might take rank as governesses; and these deluded young people were too often obliged to submit to such remuneration as a really respectable, confidential nurse would refuse, knowing well that her services were really valuable, and were sure to find a better market. One of these ladies told me, as a pitiful instance of the overcrowding of the ranks of tuition, that a friend of hers had lately advertised in a London paper for a governess, offering only a moderate salary, and she had had no less than eight hundred applications for the vacant situation."* (* A fact)

"All of which convinces me that I had better not join the overcrowded sisterhood of teachers. I should never make a first−rate governess; I am not sufficiently accomplished. And, what is worse, I am afraid I have not the gift of teaching; I could hear lessons and correct exercises with anybody, and I could speak French, German, and Italian with a tolerably pure accent and with fluency; but I could not *educate*. I feel it is not in me; so I will not make a martyr of myself, and a dupe of some simple parent, who is content to take the shadow for the substance."

On the Monday morning I met James Lascelles by appointment in Euston Square, and we went together to Mr. Flint. On demanding my pictures we discovered that they were actually not on the premises. Mr. Flint, anxious to secure a profitable customer, had sent them to Mr. Mowbray, pretending that several other persons were desirous of purchasing them.

Mr. Flint was extremely angry, and I was very thankful to have James to speak for me. Mr. Flint insisted on

the return of the drawings to his shop. James told him very firmly that he would never see them again. Mr. Mowbray would probably buy them; or, if he did not, they would be consigned to the care of some other dealer.

Mr. Flint grew more and more irate, and insisted on his “commission.” James told him flatly that he did not deserve any, but that if the drawings became the property of Mr. Mowbray he should receive the recognised honorarium of such a transaction, at the rate usually paid by artists to the dealers who acted for them.

Mr. Flint was obliged to submit, though with a very bad grace; and in two or three days I received the price of my pictures—ten guineas—minus Mr. Flint's commission.

Chapter 38. I SPECULATE IN PORT WINE

How proud I was of that money, the price of my own honest labour! I looked at the golden sovereigns with something, I suppose, of a miser's fond affection for the precious metal, and I only wished I could keep one of them to wear round my neck as a locket *in memoriam* of the memorable transaction. But I had too many uses for my sovereigns to do anything of the kind; I knew they would melt only too fast; for I was determined, now that I had cash in hand, to buy, so far as I could, what was absolutely necessary. So I invested in a new pair of boots, strong and thick enough to defy the winter mud and slush of London pavements, but not at all elegant in appearance. Hitherto I had worn only beautifully−fitting Paris boots and delicate kids, and I was quite surprised to find how clumsy my feet and hands, which were once reputed to be pretty, looked in their new encasements of substantial leather boots and ill−cut woollen gloves! I began to perceive the truth of the old saying that “fine feathers make fine birds.” Also I bought a tidy gingham umbrella, and, best of all, I got James Lascelles to procure half a dozen of what was called “good old port” for my uncle. James told me that he could get some excellent wine for a sovereign, and I, in my simplicity, believed him; I should have been sorely puzzled to order wine on my own responsibility.

Well, the wine came, and, with more real pleasure than I had felt for many a day, I hastened to uncork a bottle and present a glass to my uncle, who was looking unusually pale and languid.

“Now, my Chryssie,” he said, raising himself from his cushions, “this is a downright extravagance! My half−pint of stout is quite enough for me.”

“No, it is not, uncle; you need wine as much as a child needs milk, and you are going to have it. It is not more expensive than medicine, and it is pleasanter to take. Even if I had not sold my pictures, you would have had it, for I quite meant to pawn my watch.”

“My dear Chryssie, do not say such things! To think of *you* having dealings with pawnbrokers!”

“Better people than I have had to do business under the three balls. It would not be nice, but it might be expedient to know a respectable pawnbroker.”

“It would not be respectable.”

“Indeed, uncle, I think it would be quite respectable if it became an actual necessity! I have no doubt the pawnbroking system is a curse to the country; but it is rather its abuse than its proper use that leads to the great evils it develops. But never mind pawnbroking just now; I begin to hope—I trust we shall do without it. Drink your wine.”

“Oh, my Chryssie, to what a lowly estate I have brought you! I have nothing to share with you now save penury.”

“You shared your prosperity with me as long as you had it; and now by way of change we have the penury. It is God's will, uncle; why should we fret about it? But if you do not drink your wine you and I will certainly have a quarrel!”

Thus adjured he lifted his glass to his lips, but as quickly set it down again, for he was a connoisseur of wines, and had always prided himself on certain vintages.

“Where did you get this, Chryssie?”

I named the house whence it purported to come—“Williams”—in the City, adding, “Mr. Lascelles kindly ordered it for me; he said you were sure of a genuine article there.”

“How much have you bought?”

“Only half−a−dozen. I can be prudent, you perceive.”

“Half−a−dozen!”

And Mr. Perren tasted his wine again, and held it up to the light with a critical air.

“I should have thought Williams would never sell less than a dozen—scarcely so small a quantity as a dozen—of such stuff as this! My Chryssie! this is worth a guinea a bottle; it has been laid down for ever so many years, and it is a most special vintage, besides! Let me look at the brand.”

“A guinea a bottle! My dear uncle, the whole half−a−dozen did not cost a guinea. I am glad you like it.”

“It is just the wine I want; one glass of it is worth six of any ordinary wine, brandied and adulterated as our

popular wines are. But show me the brand."

I gave him the cork, and he examined it carefully.

"Ay!" he said at last, with the old smile on his lips, "I thought so, I thought so! Matthew Perren knows wines when he tastes them if he doesn't know pictures when he sees them, as once he thought he did. Taste it, my Chryssie, and judge for yourself."

"It would be no use my tasting it, uncle. I should be sure to say it was very nasty. But what does the brand tell you?"

"That the wine is what I said it was—a very rare and very expensive vintage. Mr. James Lascelles must have been to a first−rate market; it is a pity he cannot buy us beef and bread and other requisites at the same rate."

I comprehended now, and felt very much vexed. I was glad that my uncle should have the very best wine, but I was far from glad that it should come to him as a gift from James Lascelles. I was very proud in those days, as you will understand.

I did not see the offending young man again for a week, but I no sooner had him to myself—I manuvred my uncle out of the room—than I charged him with his misdemeanours. He coloured and looked distressed, but he could only admit the fact.

"I beg your pardon," he said at length—his confusion was only momentary—"I cannot deny your accusation, but I trusted to the chapter of accidents not to be found out. I saw that Mr. Perren did need wine—not common wine at half−a−crown or three−and−six the bottle, which is quite good enough for ordinary purposes, and too good for half the uses it is put to, but scarcely the right sort of stuff for an old gentleman like Mr. Perren whose health is failing, and who, moreover, has drunk good wine all his life. Now I thought—I presumed—I fancied—you had spoken so candidly of your present circumstances—that you would hesitate about the price of such a wine as Mr. Perren really *ought* to have; so—the temptation was very great, and my mother approved of it too—I ventured to impose upon you an article which was not what it professed to be. I fancied Mr. Perren would not think about it, and I was sure that you would never find out the fraud. But frauds, even pious frauds, do not succeed in the long run, as you perceive. I suppose I ought to have dealt frankly with you; but pray forgive me, and do not for one moment suppose that I intended the smallest impertinence. It was a liberty, I confess; but I never meant to offend. Please say you pardon and will think no more about it."

"But I shall think about it," I replied—the tears almost in my eyes, and quite overcome by the sweetness and sincerity of his manner—"I shall always think you were very kind—yes, very kind indeed; only you must promise me not to do the same thing again."

"I promise," he replied, "I will not resort to stratagem any more; as I remarked, it seldom, if ever, answers. In the meantime I hope Mr. Perren will enjoy his sound old port, and be much the better for it."

"Only I am sorry that you should have been at so much expense—"

"Do not speak of that; it was such a pleasure. Besides, I may tell you—you set me the example of candour—that things are going well with us. My engagement with Devereux and Mowbray is a good one, and may lead to something still better. My mother and I, for the first time in our lives, find ourselves independent, and in easy circumstances. No one, I suppose, can appreciate the full value of these blessings more thoroughly than ourselves; for we have had a long comparative adversity. My mother wants to see you, Miss Tyndale; will you not pay her a visit? She cannot come to you, for her doctor forbids her to leave the house while this cold, foggy weather lasts. We are very comfortably situated at Clapham."

"That is a long way off!

"But easily accessible. You can go by rail from Gower Street or King's Cross, if you do not mind the Underground line, as far as Farringdon Street. We do not live very far from the station. Will you drink tea with my mother to−morrow?"

After consulting my uncle, I promised that I would. It would be quite a treat to drink tea with a friend, quite a little dissipation; for, saving occasional buns in pastry−cooks' shops, which served for luncheon, *alias* dinner, I had neither eaten nor drunken at any table but our own since the morning of our leaving Northborough, now nearly five months ago, and I really wanted to see Mrs. Trafford again. I loved and respected her for her own sweet sake. Whether I loved or dreaded her as Louis's mother at that time I cannot tell. I suspect there was a mingling of both sentiments in my mind.

But next day, when I looked over my wardrobe, I was chagrined to discover that I had not by any means a

suitable mourning dress in which to pay my visit, and I could not make up my mind to put on a coloured gown. There was indeed a pretty soft grey silk repp dress, which I had bought the winter before, and scarcely worn. It fitted perfectly, and it was the work of Clarisse, the celebrated artiste of the Corso. It would pass very well for half−mourning, but then it scarcely agreed with my battered crape bonnet, which, in spite of all my furbishing up, looked miserably and hopelessly shabby; and my rusty old waterproof and the gingham umbrella, they would look strangely inconsistent with the delicate tinted, fashionably−made dress. After all I decided on my old black silk; it was more in keeping, and I hoped that by gaslight it might make a tolerable appearance.

Then suddenly it struck me what folly all this fuss of mourning was, especially when people were actually short of money. And I resolved, if my uncle did not mind, to lay it aside. Here I was with nothing but the most abject−looking black, and as for buying suitable winter garments, it was out of the question; I had not the money to buy them with, and I could not go into debt if I would, for l was pretty certain no linen−draper or modiste in London would give me credit. And lying by in my trunks I had plenty of good, warm, handsome dresses, and a pretty velvet bonnet, only they were not mourning. My common sense told me that it would be absurd to go meanly clad in unseasonable black raiment while I had a good store of substantial coloured dresses in my wardrobe. And as I put on my frayed, rusty black silk, I said to myself, “I will talk to Mrs. Trafford about it.”

I found James waiting for me at the Clapham Road Station, and very soon we had reached the house where he and his mother lived. They had apartments in Bedford Road, and very good and handsome rooms they were—altogether they seemed very comfortable. It was like old times to see those two familiar faces together once more. Nevertheless, there was a certain sense of pain and bitterness in pronouncing her name—I could not forget that she was Louis's mother.

In spite of all her gentleness and kindness, and in spite, too, of every effort to be natural and unconstrained, I was conscious of a certain stiffness in my manner and tone, as we sat and talked about all sorts of things except the Cuppage people and our own misfortunes. Especially the story of my dealings with Mr. Flint seemed to interest Mrs. Trafford. After tea James left us; he was going out for an hour, he said, but would be back in time to see me safely home.

When we were left alone I felt more nervous than ever, and I could not help showing my embarrassment, though I was enraged at my own stupidity, and vexed that I could not enjoy my evening more completely.

At last Mrs. Trafford said, “Chryssie, my dear, we are both rather distraite to−night, and I suspect we are both thinking of the same thing; would it not be better to air our grievances and have done with them?”

“I have no grievances,” I replied, as cheerfully as I could.

“Yes, my dear, you have, and so have I; and our grievance is one and the same. Louis's conduct has been a great trouble to me—the greatest *almost* that I ever had. My deepest sorrow was the death of James's father. But, Chryssie, why did you not speak to me about the engagement? It pained me that I should be treated with so much reserve, and by you, whom I loved as a daughter. Also it pained me that you should practise concealment of any kind, and both Mr. Perren and Miss Judith were the most indulgent of guardians.”

“But how did you know it was an actual engagement, Mrs. Trafford?”

“My dear, the sixth sense which all mothers possess told me that. But I had something more than conjecture to go upon. When I perceived that my poor boy was acting so unworthily I spoke to him, and he confessed that there had been promises between you; but you had not wished, he said, that the engagement should be announced till your return to Elmwood.”

“Oh, Mrs. Trafford, did he really say that?”

“He did, indeed; and was it not true?”

“True! No!—a thousand times no!” And here, lest I repeat myself, let it suffice to say that I told Mrs. Trafford all that the reader knows already. I was very much shocked, for little as I now held Louis in esteem, I had not imagined him to be a liar—a very contemptible liar, for he had coined a falsehood to my discredit. I quite understood, though, how it came about. Louis's love of approbation was intense, and little as he cared for his excellent mother, he stood rather in awe of her expressed displeasure, and he had told her the story of my stipulations for secrecy, in order to avoid what he would very much have disliked—hearing himself condemned by one whom he was constrained to respect, and, after a fashion of his own, to reverence.

“Chryssie,” said Mrs. Trafford, at last, “will you be vexed with me if I say that I am very glad you and Louis are separated?”

“I am so glad of it myself that I cannot blame you for the feeling. It needed a great shock to open my eyes, but once opened, I could be blind no more. And, oh, Mrs. Trafford, I trusted Louis so fully, so completely! My love for him grew without my knowing it; he was so bright, so clever, and he could be so sweet and gentle. And somehow, from the very first, I seemed to belong to him. It was a hard lesson to learn, that I did not and could never really belong to him, but harder still to discover that the Louis whom I loved, in whom I believed, had never actually existed, or had disappeared. The Louis who had been so very dear to me seemed to die, and I feel a strange tenderness yet for his memory. But the Louis who left me, who courted the heiress of Elmwood, I do not regret. Better that I was undeceived before it was too late!”

“Better—far better! God was very kind to you, Chryssie. It is our woman's lot, I believe, 'to make idols and to find them clay'—to create for ourselves a beautiful ideal, which fades away as we embrace it; but when our lives are blended inextricably with the clay idol or the mythical ideal, and we know that we have been deluded, the misery is unspeakable! Better twenty mistakes before marriage than one after! But, Chryssie, I wonder you did consent to be Louis's wife, for the great safeguard was wanting—he never even professed to be a Christian.”

“I wonder, now, at myself. I deserved all the pain my self−will cost me; for I knew in my heart that Louis and I were looking different ways. And yet—yet, Mrs. Trafford, Louis could talk beautifully sometimes—just as if he felt, and in his secret heart owned, the truth and beauty of Christianity.”

“Perhaps he did!—I trust he did, my poor deceived child! but to own a truth and to live by it are two very different things. Also, there is a jargon of poetical sentiment which, upon occasion, will pass muster for pure religious emotion. Never again, Chryssie, consent to unite your life with the life of one who does not share your highest hope, your deepest joy, your most perfect peace, the joy that no one can take from you—the peace that the world cannot give.”

“I shall never think of marriage again, Mrs. Trafford—I have lost faith in man.”

Mrs. Trafford did not smile at this silly remark, which grew so naturally out of the inexperience of my youth. But she answered, gravely, “You think so now, my dear, and I cannot wonder at it. But life at seventeen and a half is not over. Please God, there is still the best of earthly happiness in store for you. Time heals deeper wounds than yours, Chryssie.”

“Perhaps. But I think I am more than content to be an old maid.”

“We shall see! Meanwhile, my dear, I hope you will forgive me for being Louis's mother, and let me see as much of you as possible. I will take care that no unpleasant interview shall be possible; indeed, I am sorry to say, on some accounts, that Louis Trafford is about the last person you may expect to meet here. Louis and Madam have chosen their path—James and I ours. I need not say they are quite distinct. It was painful yet imperative that we should make the choice.”

“And Louis will marry Miss Catherwood?”

“I really do not know. I am afraid he will; for his grandmother is bent upon the match, and Clementina herself is not averse; and the poor boy is so weak, so vain, so easily wrought upon by merely worldly influences.”

“Cannot you control him? He is not of age.”

“I cannot. His grandmother was left his sole guardian. I have no legal control over my son, and he is so entirely a Catherwood−Trafford, that my natural influence goes for nothing, or is subverted. Yes, I suppose—I fear—Louis will marry Miss Catherwood's money.”

Chapter 39. “QUITE A LITTLE FORTUNE.”

A few days after my visit to Mrs. Trafford I had the totally unexpected pleasure of myself receiving a visitor. I was busy with my painting, and my uncle was half asleep over his book—for we had finished our early dinner—when a very handsome close carriage and pair drove up the street, and with a mighty clatter drew up opposite to our door. Now a handsome carriage, and a fine−stepping pair of chestnuts, were quite phenomena in Eldon Street, which, as a rule, dealt only in cabs, tradesmen's carts, and sometimes by way of variety a brewer's dray; and I may be forgiven if I confess to dropping my brush full of sap−green into the middle of my roseate sunset, in a sudden access of astonishment and curiosity. For not only was I surprised at the apparition of so aristocratic an equipage, but startled at its stopping at No. 85. The chestnuts champed at the bit, and pranced most becomingly, while a tall footman thundered at our humble rapper, and I could hear Mrs. Betts tearing wildly upstairs from the kitchen at express speed, evidently under the impression that this was a summons requiring promptitude of attendance.

“Who can it be?” exclaimed my uncle, rubbing his eyes. “I don't know the liveries, my dear.”

“Nor I. It cannot be anybody with whom we have any concern; visitors probably for the people in the drawing−room.”

But at this moment, the front door being opened, I heard the gentleman in plush inquiring if Miss Tyndale lived here, and before I could recover my composure Mrs. Betts, too excited to announce herself in the ordinary way, burst in, exclaiming, “There's carriage company asking for you, miss. I thought you'd like to know as it was for you. What a pity you ain't got your best frock on!”

Meanwhile a lady had alighted, and before I had time to consider the state of my toilet Mrs. Betts was reverently ushering her into our sitting−room. She was tall and singularly graceful in bearing; she was plainly but richly dressed, and I had never, to the best of my recollection, seen her before. Instantly I jumped to the conclusion that my written advertisement in the next street had borne fruit at last. This lady doubtless wished to engage me as morning governess.

“Miss Tyndale, I believe?” said the stranger, smiling most affably. I was sure I should like her and get on with her; but she looked rather young to be the mother of a family in need of tuition. Of course I replied that I was Miss Tyndale, and Mr. Perren brought forward one of the comfortable arm−chairs which remained to us of Elmwood luxuries, and courteously begged her to be seated.

“Oh! thank you, Mr. Perren, you are very kind,” said the lady. “You are Mr. Perren, I suppose, as this is Miss Tyndale?”

Mr. Perren bowed assent, and looked a little bewildered. I was fairly puzzled; for in offering my services to the public I had given only my own name; I had not even mentioned my uncle. “Now I must introduce myself!” continued my visitor. “I dare say you have heard my name, as I have heard yours? I am Eleanor Mowbray.”

“I have heard a friend of mine speak of a Miss Mowbray, the sister of Mr. Walter Mowbray, of South Kensington.”

“And that friend was Mr. Lascelles, of course? Well, he is my friend also, and my brother's great friend, and it was from him I obtained your address. I fancy he did not think I meant to call, but to write to you. But I wanted to see you so much!”

I scarcely knew what to reply; I dare say I looked very foolish. Miss Mowbray went on: “You must know we are delighted with your paintings! I recognised the Tivoli scene directly; I was there two years ago. Nothing will serve my brother but that he must have some more of your pictures. He says they are excellent. He understands Art; I do not; I only know when a picture pleases me; and yours please me extremely. *Could* you do some more things for us, Miss Tyndale?”

Could I? Oh, how my heart beat with thankfulness. Here at last was the opening for which I had so long prayed and sighed in vain. Yes! I would undertake “more things” with all the pleasure imaginable.

“Will you let me see some of your drawings?” said Miss Mowbray. “Mr. Lascelles says you have some lovely things, and that you draw in several styles. What is that you are doing now?”

“Merely a fancy piece, my own design, that is all; an opening in a beech−wood—a pool, with lilies in the

foreground—purple moors and hills beyond the woods fading away into a purple and rosy sunset, touched here and there with gleams of fading gold. The time is autumn, of course."

"It will be lovely! Have you never seen anything like it?"

"I have seen just such lights and colouring many times, and those beeches may be said to be almost copied from memory. But this drawing is little more than a study for a more ambitious picture that I have in my mind. It came into my head the other day to try to illustrate Tennyson's—

"Across the hills, and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
And deep into the dying day,
The happy princess followed him."

"You will do it charmingly, and you must let us see it when it is finished. Ah! this is your portfolio; may I look at everything?"

Yes, she might look at everything, for I had another portfolio upstairs, the lids of which held those few pictures which I deemed too sacred for general inspection. Miss Mowbray I soon perceived had true artistic tastes, and was able to distinguish genuine good work from mere meretricious flourish. She was honest too. Several times she glanced at a drawing saying, "I do not care for that," "Oh! that is too florid for me!"

But over two of my best productions—choice *morceaux* I must confess in my own too partial estimation—she fairly went into raptures. They were small, but I knew that they were good, and they were a pair.

When Miss Mowbray had concluded her examination she laid these two aside, and after colouring a little said, shyly, "Should you deem me impertinent if I asked to have these two drawings? They are in your private collection, and perhaps I ought not to wish for them; but if you *could* part with them I should be so glad to become the purchaser, at any price you may choose to name. They would just do for my own sitting−room; I have some nice things there, Miss Tyndale, that will not disgrace yours. But I have set my mind on these—may I have them?"

I liked her so much; she was so perfectly charming, and there was so much sweetness and frankness in her manner that, in girlish fashion, I fell in love with her, and longed to present her, there and then, with the drawings in question. I had not yet got used to trading on my art; and it was one thing to bargain with a sordid, grasping tradesman like Mr. Flint, and another to mention a price to this lovely and gracious young lady. And yet I felt that *I must not* give away anything that really represented money; our finances were again of the narrowest, only now I began to hope that all might yet be well. I hastened to say that anything and everything in the portfolio was for sale, if only anybody wanted to purchase; but as I had never thought of selling those two particular drawings, I scarcely knew their proper value.

"Yes! I know," she said, softly; "it must seem very strange to you to be selling your pretty paintings. You feel just as I should feel if I had to dispose of my embroidery, which people are good enough to say I do to perfection. And yet such a thing might happen, of course. Devereux and Mowbray might come to grief, I suppose; and then—I am afraid I should not be half as brave and patient as you are. But about these delightful drawings! let me calculate."

She examined them with the air of a *connoisseur,* which she really was, though she spoke so modestly of her own ability. Then she named a sum of money which brought all the colour into my cheeks, for I felt it was far more than I ought to accept. She saw the flush and the visible hesitation, and hastened to add, "But if that is not enough, and of course it is not, for these pictures are gems, and—"

But I interrupted: "Oh, no—no, indeed! It is not that; I could not take so much; it would be imposing upon you. No one else would think of making me such an offer."

"But if I choose to make it?" she said, with a smile and a little blush. "When people take a fancy to things they must expect to pay a fancy price. Do let me fix a price."

And she took out her handsome purse.

"Miss Mowbray," I said, "though I am thankful to sell my pictures, and in some respects quite humble, I am nevertheless very proud. Pride and trade ought not to go together, you will say; a girl who wants to make capital of the work of her own hands has no right to be proud. But, nevertheless, I am still so proud that I cannot take one penny which I feel I have not honestly and honourably earned. I cannot and will not abuse your generosity. I am quite sure that *now* I could not get nearly the sum you offer for these pictures if I took them into a fair market, for

I am an unknown *artiste.* By−and−by, when I have made a name—and I do think that time will come—then I may demand more even than what I now refuse. In the world of painting, as in the world of literature, a name is everything; and one must earn a name by hard and patient toil and by the exercise of experience. I will take that five−pound note, if you please, and think that I have done a good day's work."

"Very well," answered Miss Mowbray, quietly; "I think you are right. As a lady dealing with a lady, I may not press more upon you than you say you can honourably receive. Only let me make a trifling alteration. Artists—I know so much of the craft—deal in guineas, not in sovereigns, therefore I must pay you f*ive guineas.* You cannot surely object to that?"

"No, I do not object; you are very kind, and I will honestly confess that five shillings is a sum of some consequence to me; it will buy something that I really need."

She said nothing as she laid the crown−piece on the bank−note; but an instant or two afterwards she said, "I ought to tell you that I know more about you than you know about me, and it is not alone from Mr. Lascelles that I have gained my information. I have friends at Gretton, near Northborough, and I was staying there this summer and last. I know Elmwood, your beautiful old Elmwood. Oh! how can you bear the change?"

And she looked round the small, dull room and out into the dreary street. My uncle had gone away to lie down. I think he could not bear to see me occupied in any sort of business transaction, and he had made good his retreat upon the production of my portfolio.

"I cannot say," I replied, "that the change has not been quite as much as we could bear. Naturally I felt it on my own account, for I am afraid I like luxury and ease and all the advantages of good position. But it does not come so hardly upon me as upon my uncle; I have youth and strength, and I am of a sanguine temperament; my life, humanly speaking, is before me; my uncle has lived his life, He is old and feeble; he has been accustomed from his youth up to a well−filled purse; he has never known the want of any reasonable luxury, and his tastes are singularly refined and æsthetic. It must be hard indeed at seventy to relinquish the habits of a lifetime, to lay aside the customs of wealth and rank to which one has been brought up. And this is what my uncle has had to do; but if you know him as the late master of Elmwood, I need not say so much to you."

"I understand it almost as well as you can yourself. Because, you see, at the Stanleys'—my Gretton friends—I frequently heard of the Perren family. But I could not tell you how much my friends—how much I honour your uncle for the part he has taken in the lamentable matter of the Northborough Bank. He might so easily have resisted or evaded the full claim made upon him—something he might have kept back, and yet preserved his reputation before the world. But this he has not done; he has surrendered *all,* from a simple sense of right and honour. Even those who clamour loudest against the Company are silent when his name is mentioned, and there are many who speak of him with the highest reverence. Now I have made you cry, Miss Tyndale!"

"Only tears of pleasure. It is so good, so comforting to hear this. And, Miss Mowbray, he made the sacrifice so simply, so humbly, as a mere matter of course. He acted so nobly, and yet he had no idea that there was the slightest heroism in anything he did."

"He has never regretted the decision, I am sure."

"No, never! though he grieves sometimes over the hardships of my lot. He cannot bear to see me soil my hands or work for pay. And then he wonders whether he has done absolutely the right thing, and he says, 'I am afraid, my Chryssie, I have wronged *you.* I ought to have made some provision for you.'"

"You do not think he has wronged you? I need not ask."

"I would not for the world he had kept back anything on my account. It is my great joy that the good old name of Perren has not suffered."

"But is it quite true that nothing remains to Mr. Perren of all that he formerly possessed, that your fortune also went down with the foundered ship? Forgive me; I do not mean to be impertinent, and yet I do so long to know."

"It is quite true my uncle has no income whatever. He talked of taking a situation, but that idea is given up. He is past work of any kind: his memory fails him so much that he cannot often count the change out of half−a−crown; and his bodily health is very weak. I fear he is breaking fast. The shock was too much for him, coming, as it did, upon a great grief—the loss of a dearly−loved sister, who died abroad."

"Yes, I know—Miss Judith Perren. The Stanleys knew her, I believe."

"Yes, they did. We kept up a sort of intimacy with the Stanleys; but visits between Gretton House and Elmwood were not frequently exchanged—the distance was too great. Surely I never met you at Mrs. Stanley's?"

“No, never. The first time I went to Gretton House you had just left Elmwood for the Continent; and you had finally quitted the neighbourhood when I reached it last August. I only returned to town about a month ago. I paid my friends at Gretton an unconscionably long visit, and then, being so far north, I went on to Edinburgh, to spend some time with relatives on my mother's side, whom my brother wished me to know. Altogether I was away from Kensington nearly three months. I am come back to be a fixture for at least some months. And now listen to my most presumptuous request—will you come and stay with me?”

“I should like it of all things—it would be delightful; but I cannot leave my uncle. I should be unhappy if I were to leave him for a single night.”

“But why should not Mr. Perren accompany you?”

“My dear uncle is not very fit for society just now. Strangers make him nervous, he is not what he was. But I could, if you were so very good as to wish it, spend a day with you.”

“I must be content with a day, then. When will you come? will next Tuesday suit you? I am engaged all this week, and Monday will be a busy day, but I shall be delighted to see you as early as you please next Tuesday. You will let me send the carriage for you?”

“Thank you, *no*. I think I had better learn to do without carriages. I shall never have one of my own, and I am just getting accustomed to omnibuses, and to walking alone. It would be a pity to resume old habits, even for an hour; luxurious habits come so naturally to people: putting them off is not quite so easy a matter.”

“No, indeed; but what if I come and fetch you?”

“I cannot be so ungracious as to say you must not; if, indeed, you think me worthy of so much trouble. And now you must let me give you a cup of tea.”

“I shall be very glad of it. I am as fond as any old woman of my cup of tea. Five o'clock tea I take to be the redeeming feature of the age. I shall come for you exactly at half−past eleven, or earlier if you like.”

“That will be quite as early as I ought to leave home. I must make all arrangements for the day, and settle my uncle comfortably. He will be so glad when he hears of my going out.”

“He does not mind being left, then? Some old people are so selfish.”

“So I have heard on all hands; but the old people I have known have been so beautifully unselfish that all their happiness seemed to lie in giving themselves up for others, especially their juniors. It has been one of my dear uncle's great trials that I have been shut up so long with him. Youth and age, he says, may dwell together in spite of the poet very happily, provided that age is not grumpy and fretful, and that youth is forbearing. But that youth should receive its chief impressions from age cannot be for youth's good, however it may be for age's pleasure and profit.”

“I understand him; he is right to a great extent. But unselfish age is so lovely, I think it must do youth the greatest good to be associated with it. No, not another cup, thank you; I shall go home on the strength of that one, and dress for dinner with renovated spirits. You will be ready by half−past eleven on Tuesday?”

“May it not be twelve?”

“Twelve, certainly, if more convenient to you. Having so few duties of my own I am afraid I am sadly inconsiderate towards those whose life is more of a working−day than a holiday. Good−bye, dear Miss Tyndale. I hope—I do believe, we are going to be real friends.”

I hoped it also, but it seemed almost too good to be true. When my uncle came down I told him what I had done in his absence—sold two little pictures for five guineas, and accepted an invitation for the whole day. Dear old man, he was so rejoiced.

“I am so glad, my Chryssie,” he said, “so thankful. The dark clouds are silvering once more. How good God is! Depend upon it, you will succeed, my dear. Fifteen pounds in a fortnight! Why, it is quite a little fortune as things are, and this is only the beginning. I am so rejoiced, too, that you are going to spend a pleasant day. I hope you have a nice dress, my Chryssie?”

I assured him that I had, for I had advised with him, and laid aside my mourning.

“And you do not mind being left alone so long, uncle?”

“My Chryssie, no. I should be a shocking old frump if I did. I shall find my pleasure in thinking about yours.”

Chapter 40. MY FRIEND AND I

Next Tuesday arrived, and I came downstairs ready dressed for my visit. It was a brilliant morning for the season of the year; I had finished my “study,” which Miss Mowbray had admired, greatly to my own satisfaction; my uncle was very much better, and rejoicing in the sunshine, and I was really in excellent spirits. For once more the wolf was driven from the door; my purse was replenished for some weeks to come; and “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!”

“My dear child, you look quite radiant this morning,” said my uncle, putting down his book and rubbing his glasses that he might the better behold me. “I am so pleased that you are going out to spend the day.”

“That is scarcely complimentary, uncle; I am afraid you do not appreciate my society.”

“My Chryssie! But I know you are only pretending to misunderstand me. Why, you are the very sunshine of my life, the magnifier of my joys, and the sweet soother of all my sorrows; though I need not tell you that, my dear. Indeed, I value your society; it is that I am so glad you should have a little pleasure again. And it does me good to see you nicely dressed once more. Is it very silly, I wonder? Perhaps I am getting rather childish! but it really refreshes me to see you in that gown. Humble fare and lowly cares have not spoilt your beauty, Miss Tyndale.”

“I hope not, if I have any beauty to spoil; you are a sad flatterer, Mr. Perren, and I should stand in danger of becoming as vain as a peacock, did I not know that love is apt to be partial, and that I am lovely in your eyes chiefly because I am so very dear to you. But will you not be lonely?”

“No, my dear, I *won't* be lonely! If I get depressed I will send for that huge tabby−cat that basks on the area−steps, and looks out so keenly for the purveyor to the feline race; only I am afraid he—the cat, that is, not the cats'−meat man—is not of an amiable disposition. He rubs against my trousers, and puts his paw most confidingly on my knee when meals are in progress; but he bites and scratches the hand that caresses him if he do not wish to be disturbed. Still, if I have him in at dinner−time and tea−time he will certainly make himself agreeable.”

“Poor Tom! I am afraid he is not one of the best specimens of cathood; but he is a very handsome beast and I am told he is a wonderful mouser. He does his duty as far as he knows it, and I don't know that he is much worse than many human creatures, who are good tempered enough as long as they are pleased and comfortable, and cross−grained and spiteful as soon as things grow crooked. We, too, can purr and rub ourselves, after our fashion, against the people who give us the tit−bits we long for, and the saucers of milk that we desire—

or their equivalents. And we are not invariably grateful. We, too, sometimes scratch the hand that has ministered to us.”

“Sometimes, I am afraid, we do. I will try to have patience with our tabby friend's little peculiarities. But, oh, Chryssie, the worst as regards ourselves is our ungrateful, wayward conduct to our best Friend. We take lovingly from God's hand all the benefits He showers upon us; we sing His praises while He gives us the corn, and oil, and wine, and fulfils all our desires; and we are sullen and repine the moment any blessing is withheld, the instant our repose is invaded, our peace of mind disturbed. It is chiefly so, I believe, in the days of unbroken prosperity; and it is one of the chief uses of adversity to teach us to take thankfully from our heavenly Father the seeming evil as well as the good, the pain as well as the pleasure, the bitter as well as the sweet, to be—

“'Ready to give thanks, and live
On the least that God may give.'“

“Uncle, do you not think it is good for us all to have these seasons of reverse? Is not living from hand to mouth for a season most excellent and wholesome discipline?”

“That it is, if rightly taken. It is just as people take it. I have known persons made worse instead of better by trouble; their better nature has been dwarfed and cramped, their worst qualities increased and strengthened. And all this has grown out of moralising on the depravity of feline nature. I was going to say that not only will I invite Mr. Tom, but I will go out myself this lovely morning and see that poor man Mrs. Betts told us about. It has struck me that I might read sometimes to sick people; I should be of some little use then. What do you think, my dear?”

“I think it would be very good for you, and for the sick people too; only do not tire yourself, and be sure not to

forget your glass of wine at dinner time. Surely that is Miss Mowbray's carriage coming up the street!”

Yes, it was Miss Mowbray's carriage, and Miss Mowbray herself sprang out, not waiting for the tall footman's services. She was looking lovely in her pretty winter dress, all violet velvet and minever. I wondered how it was that James had never told me what a very charming person she was.

“It is such a fine day,” she said, after we had wished each other good morning, “that I think you would not object to a drive before luncheon? It will do the horses all the good in the world to take us round Hampstead Heath, and I should say it will do us no harm.”

I was only too pleased to assent. And it was a real treat to get free of bricks and mortar once more, and to feel the wind, cold as it was, blowing freshly on my cheeks. Even the easy motion of the luxurious carriage was a strange source of pleasure, after so many weary muddy walks, and occasional joltings over the stones in fusty omnibuses. For the first time in my life I appreciated the comforts and delights of a well−appointed carriage. Alas! I had learned the value of many a luxury by its loss; after all, I was not nearly so philosophic as I had believed myself to be.

We had a delightful drive, and a nice cosy chat about all sorts of things. By the time we reached Jack Straw's Castle we had found out that we agreed upon nearly every subject, and that we had precisely similar tastes, and to a great extent the same opinions. I am afraid we were rather gushing; for long before we were half way on the return journey we had assured each other that we felt as if we had been friends and intimate associates for years! But on this return journey something happened which greatly moderated my joy, and lessened my flow of spirits. We had to cross Hyde Park, and we were going rather slowly by Grosvenor Gate, because our side of the road was rather blocked, when a beautiful little low carriage, drawn by a pair of splendid cream−coloured ponies, met us, and passed us at full speed.

“Oh! what loves of ponies!” cried Eleanor, “and what a charming *bijou* of a carriage, and what a tiny groom, and what a wonderfully handsome man; but terribly self−complacent and lazy I should say! As for the lady, she drives very well, but she is downright ugly, and quite out of keeping with her surroundings. I beg your pardon; are you ill, Chryssie?” For, girl−like, we had just made up our minds to be Eleanor and Chryssie. For a moment I did not reply, for I did feel ill, and was most reluctant to admit the fact. Eleanor continued: “I hope the lady is no friend of yours? I am afraid I am very thoughtless; I really must learn to keep my silly tongue in rather better order. Walter says I am always 'putting my foot into it', if you understand the expression; and that some day I shall get into a scrape! But really, now, do you know the mistress of the creams?”

“I know her very well; and it is very probable you too have heard of her. Her name is Clementina Catherwood; her father was a Cuppage Catherwood. That gentleman whose beauty you admire is her second or third cousin; and he is Mr. James Lascelles's half−brother.”

“Is it possible?” said Eleanor, with great vivacity. “Louis Trafford! Ah, I have heard of him, and of his extraordinary personal beauty. Why, he might sit for Sir Lancelot of the Lake! What a head! what grand, perfect features! and what marvellous eyes! And I am told that his manners are strangely fascinating.”

“Did Mr. Lascelles tell you this?”

“No! I know little of Mr. Trafford from his brother; they are not quite on terms, I believe. But some friends of mine—the Sorrells—know him intimately; he is very much at their house in town, as well as at their place near Dorking. But they don't quite like him; they admire him, but they do not trust him. Emily Sorrell, who is a very clever and a very downright sort of girl, and a great ally of mine, says in her quaint way, 'He is not the real thing, not the genuine metal; there is a ring of base coin about him.' Though Emily says also there is some pure gold in his nature only the alloy predominates! But I am forgetting myself again! Now I come to think of it, this Mr. Trafford was abroad with you, and he may possibly be your very dear friend. And Cuppage and Elmwood being so close together, you have doubtless known each other from childhood.”

I thought a little, and then I said: “Eleanor, if you and I are to be true friends, we must not begin by a misapprehension. I had better tell you what no one certainly knows, except my uncle and Mrs. James Trafford—I was once engaged to Louis Trafford.”

“And now?”

“I have reason to believe that he is engaged to Miss Catherwood. His grandmother says that it is so, and appearances confirm the assertion, which at first I doubted. It seems to me, knowing Louis as I did, at least as I thought I did, that it was too monstrous!”

“Monstrous, indeed! She must be years and years older than he! Why, he is a mere boy.”

“Only a boy. And that to a great extent excuses his conduct; he does not know what he is doing, and he is under evil influence, the worst kind of evil influence—that of a worldly old woman who sacrificed her own youth and beauty for glittering shadows almost half a century ago. The Traffords are poor, very poor! Clementina Catherwood is rich, very rich; and her money will restore to its pristine glory the ruined estate of Cuppage.”

“I see. I understand the young man's unworthiness. But you make excuses for him, Chryssie. May I ask you one thing? Do you care for him still? for if you do I will not abuse him.”

“I had rather not hear him abused, if you please, and in a way I do not care about him; women go on caring so long, so much longer than men deserve. But I do not *love* him! There came the little 'rift within the lute,' and gradually the music was made mute. No, Eleanor, I do not love him; I can never, never love him again. He is gone out of my life; I have learned to do without him. At first it was hard, oh! so hard; but patience and perseverance make many a hard thing easy. And I will be true to myself. I will not let him spoil my life. Why should any man spoil a woman's life before she well knows what life is?”

“Why, indeed? But men do spoil women's lives, and for all time.”

“That is because women are not true to themselves. Don't think I am heartless and opinionated, Eleanor; but I have learned many a lesson within the last few months that only bitter experiences could teach—lessons that you in your sweet rose−lined life could not possibly comprehend.”

“I hope you have not learned to undervalue love. A woman's life without love—the one love I mean, of which we women think so much—must be dreary and empty.”

“God makes up for that which by His will is lost or lacking. No life need be dreary, no life need be empty; I am sure of it. For God's service is delight, and He will give us work to do; and work is the strengthener of our souls, as sorrow is the purifier. But I grant you, Eleanor, that love is very sweet, very precious, and I am glad that I have known it—

“'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.”

“Indubitably. The woman who has never loved has only half lived. But, Chryssie, are you sure that you have known love?”

“I do not know what to say. Seven or eight months ago I thought certainly that I did know love, but now—well, I am not so certain, only I think all that goes to make love's depth and passion is dead within me for evermore. Louis Trafford should not spoil my life; but that life will be henceforth a life in itself, and, as far as love is concerned, self−contained.”

“And such a life is spoiled, say what you will. No, Chryssie, I do not think you ever loved this foolish, handsome boy, who, after all, is not worthy to be Sir Lancelot, for he could love truly, though guiltily. And though his 'honour rooted in dishonour lay,' still there was a semblance of honour which this Louis Trafford does not possess. He could not be constant; he will never be constant. A great many men do not know what constancy means; a few do, thank God. No, Chryssie, a rich nature like yours is not all spent; you have poured out the froth, the mere effervescence of the draught of life, but the new wine remains untouched Your heart has been stirred and troubled, but its great depths have never been sounded. Your prince has yet to arrive, Chrystabel Tyndale.”

“Are you a prophetess?”

“No; only I can see farther than some people can, and I can read aright that which is written in cipher, because I have the key.”

“What key?”

“I have two keys—the one comprehension, because I understand you, though till to−day I have scarcely known you; the other, that of experience, because I have gone through it all myself, and can now discern the reality from the illusion. I am older than you are, Chryssie.”

“In years, perhaps; but I feel very old.”

“I know. One does feel like that at eighteen when one has had a great shock. But when one has recovered from the blow, when one begins to feel and to enjoy once more, one is astonished to find that one's career is not finished—scarcely, indeed, begun; that the world, by which I mean God's providence, has other and better things in store for us than those we thought life's best and only treasures. We find, too, that our capacities for enjoying are enlarged and intensified, that our scale of measurement is altered, that our views are changed, that things are

not as they were with us, and that that which once filled all our souls satisfies us no longer."

"You have gone through it all, you say?"

"Yes; I was little more than sixteen when I thought I had found my ideal, my womanhood's lord and king. I thought I had gained all that there was to gain. I was happy, blissfully content. And then before I was eighteen—it all faded away. My idol proved itself of clay. I could not swear fealty to one who was false, false as falsehood itself. Of course I thought I had lived out my life, after a little while discovered that my life went on, and would probably go on, for many years to come, although one person had gone out of it. And now I am glad that it was so. I no more regret my lost lover than I regret the great doll that I cried for in Regent Street ages ago, and which some one promised to buy for me, and never did."

"Dolls and lovers scarcely come into the same category."

"Not true lovers, I grant, but mine was no true lover, and I am also bound to say that mine was no true love. It was very much like it, though; it is very difficult, almost impossible, in our first youth to separate the true thing from the sham. I never knew till lately that the affection which as a girl I cherished, and which cost me such bitter pain, was only sentiment. If we women could keep heart−whole till we are one−and−twenty we should not make so many irremediable mistakes."

"Only people's ages are relative. You may have lived in the world for seventeen years, and yet be a woman to all intents and purposes, and you may be two or three and twenty and yet a mere child. For myself, I feel as if I were thirty!"

"You will get younger by−and−by. People who mature too early do not grow old in a hurry. Perhaps when you are really thirty you will feel like sixteen."

"It may be so; but you talk as if you had had the experience of half a century. You are not so much older than I."

"I am three−and−twenty—more than five years your senior, and I have had experiences which you have not."

"And I have had some which have not, happily, fallen to your share."

"True, I have never been tried with adversity such as yours. My troubles have been the death of the very best of fathers, and the dissolution of an engagement which, at the time, I believed to have been the stronghold of my future happiness. They were very heavy sorrows when they befel; but my dear brother has, as much as possible, filled my father's place; and as for the other affair—well, now I have the substance, I cannot grieve that I could not grasp the shadow."

"You have a lover now whom you may safely trust?"

"I have, one of the best of men—one who will always be true to himself and therefore true to me. I am so happy, Chryssie; and yet once I thought that my life was to be empty of love, that I should never marry, never be as other women are, to whom God grants the great honour and blessing of wifehood and motherhood."

"I am very glad," I replied; and I wondered in my own heart whether this "best of men" was called James Lascelles. Something seemed to tell me that it was so; and at the same time I felt uncertain as to how far the gladness really went. I wanted a little time to think about it; somehow I could not think of James as belonging to Eleanor Mowbray—it seemed easier to look upon Louis as Clementina's property. But then I had grown accustomed to this latter fact; yet, oh! how could Louis be content thus to barter himself for gold? For love Clementina Catherwood I was quite sure he did not, and yet he would marry her! There is something inexpressibly painful in being compelled to despise what you have once loved and respected.

We reached Mr. Mowbray's house, and Eleanor took me up into her own sitting−room, which was nearly as pretty as that which had once been mine at Elmwood. Only there was no sea to look at, no great purple headland, no wild rocky shore, but an imitation garden of evergreens, and a Wardian case of ferns outside the window. We had luncheon by ourselves, then we spent a very quiet afternoon, and I saw my two paintings—which Mr. Flint had so cruelly despised—once more. They were hung in a good light, and looked very well. And around them were —some of the choicest pictures I had ever seen in a private amateur collection.

Many other beautiful things Eleanor had to show me,—for the house was full of rare and lovely things—quaint etchings, choice engravings, a few gems of photographic art, costly bronzes, and delicious little bits of carving, to say nothing of several most exquisite statuettes, and a few, a very few, oil paintings by the best masters.

Mr. Mowbray came home about six o'clock, and at seven we dined. I liked him extremely, for he was kind and good, as well as clever and refined. He was not exactly handsome—Eleanor seemed to have monopolised the

beauty of the family—but there was something in his face which inspired trust and reverence. He was much older than his sister, and he looked older than he really was. Eleanor had told me that he was nearly forty, and forty appears quite a ripe age to seventeen and a−half. He was a middle−aged man, I thought, almost elderly; but I liked him none the worse for that, and I spent a very pleasant evening, and was surprised to find it gone so soon.

The Mowbray carriage took me speedily and safely home, and I found my uncle in good spirits, waiting to hear the history of the day's proceedings. And continually I wondered whether it was indeed James Lascelles to whom Eleanor was engaged. I might easily have asked the question, it was on my lips more than once; but I kept silence, I know not wherefore, and now I regretted that I had not made the inquiry. Still, what could it matter to me whether it were James Lascelles or any other?

Chapter 41. A CHANGE IN THE WEATHER

When I awoke next morning my first thought was of the question I had failed to ask; and the more I reflected the more certain I felt that Eleanor Mowbray and James Lascelles were engaged. Only I wondered that she who had been so frank and communicative should not have plainly stated the fact; and I felt also some surprise at Mrs. James Trafford's reticence, for she had spoken very freely of her son's position and prospects, yet said no word which could lead me to suppose that his relations with Miss Mowbray were other than those which proceeded naturally from his intimacy with her brother.

"But I am very glad," I said to myself, as I dressed in the cold, grey winter's morning, shivering and rather depressed; for the thermometer had fallen rapidly during the night, and my long drive or something else had tired me so woefully that I felt little inclined to rise, and would willingly have slept on for several hours longer. "But I am very glad," I said again, as I twisted up my long back hair with listless and benumbed fingers. "Heigho! how used−up I feel! It is very clear that I am not fitted for a life of dissipation; I should not have been half so tired had I spent the whole day at my easel. What should I do if I dined out five days in the week, and went to parties, concerts, or the theatres every night? A life of pleasure—so called—must be a downright hard life, I should think; a kind of white slavery that must be as burdensome as unsatisfactory. Still, yesterday was innocent recreation, not actual dissipation—though, by the way, I suppose dissipation is something like worldliness, very difficult to define. Anyhow, I am tired; and I look as rakish as if I had danced from eleven to half−past five. I fancy James will come this evening; he promised to bring us some more books; I shall be sure to know then. I shall see how he looks while I talk about Eleanor. She will make him an excellent wife; and how lovely she is! Nothing could be more suitable, for James is well born, though he is poor; and, from what Mr. Mowbray said, I fancy he is of immense use in the business. I dare say they will take him into partnership. And then his great goodness, his high principle, his learning, his beautiful mind, his devotion as a son! Verily, Eleanor Mowbray is a fortunate woman! They are nearly of an age too; how nicely it all fits in! Yes, I am glad I—I am sure I am glad, for it will be all so well for James, and Eleanor will be sure to make him happy; and she is just the girl in whom his mother must delight."

Then I made haste to complete my toilet, remarking with dismay the number of " blacks" on the dressing−table, on the washing−stand, on the chest of drawers; and I thought how miserable and meagre the room looked, in spite of the furniture being good and handsome. How different from Eleanor's elegant boudoir! how different from my Elmwood bower! how different from anything I had ever imagined! You will perceive that I was not in a desirable state of mind, and that my meditations were, on the whole, unprofitable. I suppose I was what is called "out of sorts."

Presently I opened my window, as my custom was before going downstairs, and a bitter east wind drove in upon me, chilling all my blood and making my teeth chatter. A miserable, small, fine rain came in also, drifting pretty much like sea spray on the piercing blast. How leaden was the lowering sky, how misty and smoky was the heavy air, how the smoke beat down, and how wretched and forlorn looked the pouter−pigeons that gathered disconsolately on the dripping roofs! Down below one bedraggled white hen stood mournfully on one leg; the Cochin China cock crowed hoarsely; our next door neighbour's chanticleer perched on the wall and flapped his wings lugubriously. He was clearly too much depressed by the state of the weather to reply to the trombone−like note of defiance sounded by his rival. Those two cocks were sworn and bitter foes, as I knew to my cost, for many a battle of Dorking was fought uproariously in the early mornings, when feathered bipeds do seem most belligerently disposed. But Mr. Dorking was too sulky for anything to−day. I believe he took the east wind and the pitiless cold rain as a personal affront and injury; and I am afraid I largely shared this sentiment with the fowl.

And only a year ago I was in sunny Italy, and winter had not set in; I was a dweller in ancient Rome, in one of her stately old palaces; the skies were blue and clear as crystal; only faint opal mists gathered now and then in the hollows of the Apennines, or edged, as with amethysts, the Campagna seawards; the turf was golden green, violets and roses bloomed as if the death of the year were nothing at all to them; rosy sunsets flushed and faded on the bronze archangel, and Loraete glowed at midday in the sun.

And now, the dull grey vapours, and the dim air of Camden Town, which is neither classical, rural, nor

antique. *Now,* long dreary streets, and dismal squares, and wind—wind everywhere. *Then,* the Pincian Hill, the Borghese Villa, the cypress glades of Monte Mario, the snow−streaked Apennines, and the purple Sabine chain!

Then, luxury and plenty, no sordid cares about butchers' bills and milkmen's scores, no perpetual inquiry of what shall we eat and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed !—knowing that eating and drinking and clothing were imperative, but must not cost one farthing more than necessity demanded. *Then,* long, pleasant mornings in the Vatican, lingerings before the lovely mournful Beatrice Cenci in the Barberini Palace; promenades on the Pincian terraces; shopping on the Corso, loiterings in the studios of the Via Marquetté, and a hundred other pursuits, all healthful, tasteful, and refined.

Now, calculating the exact value of a meal; counting the number of scuttlefuls of coals consumed; darning old stockings, and even attempting to cobble old shoes; doing a little amateur tailoring—alas! most unsuccessfully—mending everything that could by any possibility be mended, rather than spend an extra sixpence; and even my beautiful art that I loved so well prostituted, as it were, by being turned to gain.

And there I stood, chewing the cud of my bitter thoughts and fancies, and contrasting this and that, and now and then. Oh, how foolish, how worse than foolish I was, making the very worst of my troubles, and ignoring half my blessings! My mind insisted on looking out on the world through smoked spectacles, and then it grumbled and bemoaned itself that the whole creation was done in sepia. I need not tell you that I could not perceive even the faintest rim of silver to my clouds on that inauspicious morning; on the contrary, I could see only blackness and darkness above me, and my life about me and before me spread out into one long, grey, dim, cold monotony. If the people who seek the sunshine are blessed of God, self−cursed are they who wrap themselves in despondency and gloom, and watch fearfully for the rain−spout and the thunder−cloud.

Now, I ought to have said to myself, even as I surveyed the disconsolate fowls and the dead, dark mignonette—“Chrystabel Tyndale, my dear, you are a very naughty girl. Also, you are an idiot! What is the use of standing here in the rain and the cold bemoaning your past life that it has pleased God to put far away from you? So you want to be heiress of Elmwood again, do you? Well, that cannot be. You are almost as likely to succeed to the Crown estates, as to Elmwood. Why cry for the moon? Why reach after the unattainable? Why not make the very best of what you have? Why dwell on the happiness that cannot return? May there not be a richer, sweeter happiness in store for you, of which yet you know nothing, and of which you cannot now conceive? Have you forgotten what your favourite Dante says?—

“'Nessun moggior' dolor,

Che ricordarsi del tempo felice

Nella miseria.'“

Which Tennyson freely renders—

“'A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.'

“Ah! foolish, stupid, *wicked* Chrystabel; go about your business at once; go and light fires, sweep rooms, black boots—anything rather than waste your time in this sinful, unprofitable repining, which will do you harm in every way. *Silver linings to your clouds,* indeed! Do you think you are likely to see them ever so faintly while you cherish this craven spirit of discontent? If people *choose* to grope in subterranean caverns, no miracle can show them the rainbow. If people will persist in going out walking in smoked spectacles, behind a thick crape veil, they are very, *very* unreasonable to complain that the landscape is lugubrious. There now, Chryssie, my dear; go you down and get breakfast ready with a cheerful countenance. It is late, and your poor old uncle must be wanting his tea and toast. Stirring about briskly will do you all the good in the world. Go, my child; thank God for all you have—ay, and for all you have not—for He knows best what is good for you; and make the toast, and brew the tea, and dust the chairs and tables, and sweep up the hearth, which is your work, and say to yourself, 'What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee,' my Lord and my God.”

All this I ought to have said to myself, but didn't.

No! I took another look at the dismal prospect of back premises generally, and shut down the window with a bang, and stupidly pinched my fingers; and then I went slowly downstairs, still bent on being miserable. Surely yesterday had used up all the sunshine apportioned to the week.

Now, my friends, do you know—nonsense! I am quite sure you do know, especially my women friends—what it is to find things going, as the servants say, *“contrairy”*? I will not say how far the “contrairiness” is self−made and self−sustained. I will only agree with you that, every now and then, *somehow,* our little domestic world and

we find ourselves at cross purposes. There are days in our lives—black−letter days—when the chimney smokes, and the soot falls, and the fire won't burn, and the kettle won't boil, or what is equally amazing, boils over, or tumbles over, and sends forth an odour more penetrating than agreeable, more subtle than fragrant. I wonder, *par parenthèse*, whether a kettle boiling over furiously into the fire was one of the famous seventy−two "distinct and separate stenches of Cologne!" A day when it rains, of course; when the butcher does not send home the ordered joint; when the oven won't draw; when cook announces that you are out of salt and pepper and Worcestershire sauce, or whatever may be your favourite condiment; that you are cutting at the last loaf, and the baker will not come till to−morrow! A day when your husband has the headache, and finds fault with the dinner and with the servants, and with the baby, and with your dress, and with you personally, and with everything that comes within his ken. A day that is pretty certain to be washing−day, if you do any laundry work at home; for soap−suds and steam cruelly aggravate all other household woes. A day, in short, of all the sorrows that womankind is heir to.

Well, such a day, on a small scale, of course had dawned for me. I had no children to get into mischief, and no husband to deliver a conjugal jeremiad on my shortcomings and mistakes; and I could not wash anything at home, unless it were a bit of lace or my best pocket−handkerchief, in my washing−basin; but failure haunted me that day, vexations thick and fast beset me! I came to grief continually.

I got downstairs at last, very cross, very tired, and very cold. I longed for a cup of nice warm fragrant tea, hot toast, and a rasher of bacon. I might as well have wished for grouse−pie, *pâté de fois gras*, *Galantine de Dindon*, Périgord−pie, and *pigeons en aspic*! An immoral old axiom teaches that one may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, and surely one may as well wish for a splendid as for a medium impossibility. It is just the same in the end, and I do not know that the disappointment is any greater.

I reached the sitting−room, and lo! the table was set in the slovenly way which Mrs. Betts's sole handmaid affected; worse than that, the fire was black in the grate, and the kettle seemed as far from boiling as it had been when first filled with water, and the loaf was heavy and burnt. I stirred the fire, not judiciously, but impatiently. Now, London fires have little conceits of their own, and they will not bear rash handling. When they are in that stage in which my fire was, they require much tact and temper, delicate touches, considerate attentions, and a prudent judgment. And I took up the poker and used it rashly, violently, angrily; and then I watched the smoke and the cinders to see if any little tongue of flame shot forth. But, no! I heard that peculiar crackle which, proceeding from "best Wallsend" and "Silkstone," is equivalent to a valedictory address. Crackle! crackle! fainter and fainter and thinner grew the smoke which my fierce objurgation had raised; duller grew the dull red of the expiring embers; the crackle sank into a sort of rustle, the dull red died out in utter blackness, and I stood fireless on the hearth.

Now, if there was a crime that Mrs. Betts resented and refused to condone, it was letting out your fire and ringing to have it rekindled; and I knew this by sad experience. Mrs. Betts was not an unkind woman, and she was ordinarily as polite as she knew how to be, and I know she represented my uncle and myself to the other lodgers as "real quality come down in the world;" but in the matter of fires she was strictly impartial; you had your fire lighted for you the first thing in the morning, and if by any unhappy accident or neglect you let it expire, you must rekindle it for yourself, or take the consequences! And the consequences were that Mrs. Betts grew extremely voluble, and uttered her sentiments more freely than was desirable.

So I got the match−box and an old newspaper, and I was even prodigal enough to wish for two or three candle−ends; but do what I would I could only succeed in raising a bright but transient blaze; and I was obliged at last to ring for some wood, and humbly to beseech that I might be allowed to have some boiling water from the kitchen kettle.

In due time I had my fire again, but it burned unwillingly, and for a long period there was more smoke than flame. It was what housewives call "a very ill−tempered fire," and it kept up its culpable behaviour all day. Presently I had the water I required from the lower regions; but alas! it was very far from being at boiling point, and my tea, when ready, was lukewarm and weak, and strongly flavoured with smoke. I could have cried with sheer vexation; and yet it was all my own fault, for if I had come down at once instead of airing my grievances at the open window I should have saved my fire, and had boiling water of my own. As for the toast, I was ashamed to take it upstairs, so I cut some bread and butter, clumsily enough, for the butter was hard and rank, and the loaf all crust; and I ended in cutting my thumb, which bled profusely, and delayed operations considerably. Lastly, I discovered that the cat had helped himself to the milk and drunk it nearly all.

In due course, however, I did carry up my uncle's tray—his cold, sloppy, smoky tea, and his rough slices of bread and butter. I found him quite tired of waiting for his breakfast. He was sitting up in bed, all huddled in his dressing−gown, and looking—for him—excessively querulous.

“Why, my Chryssie,” he said, quite pitifully, “I thought—I really began to think—you had forgotten me. My dear, do you know it is half−past ten? But I dare say you were very tired, and so were late.”

“I was tired, and I was late,” I replied, shortly, “and the fire went out. I don't believe it was ever properly lighted. And the kettle would not boil, and the cat stole the milk, and the tea is not fit to drink, and the loaf is like a geological specimen.”

“And you have cut your hand. My poor child, if I had known I would have come down to help you. There, I dare say the tea is not so bad. You know I sometimes from choice dispense with the milk, because I do believe they water it before it leaves the dairy. It is not at all like our Elmwood milk, is it?”

And he stroked my hand gently, as one would caress a naughty, pettish child.

But I drew away, rather ungraciously I am afraid, saying, “Oh, don't, please, uncle; leave me alone. I am disgracefully cross, and I poked the fire out in a tantrum. I know I did. If I were a little girl the best thing you could do would be to whip me and send me to bed again. It is very clear that going into Society does not agree with me.”

I left my uncle to his long delayed miserable repast, and I went downstairs and cried like a great simpleton as I was, instead of making some good hot tea and eating of the geologic loaf. I should have felt better directly if I had made a good breakfast. As it was, I got sick, and my head ached, and I made myself into as ugly a young woman as any misanthrope could wish to see. And things did not mend as the day wore on. My uncle came down looking pale and limp, and he sat shivering over that obstinate fire, saying he was sure he had taken a little cold, what a draught there was from the window, and didn't I think the baker ought to be told about the loaf, and had I not better do something for my hand?

I satisfied him that clean cold water was the best remedy I could apply; but the cut pained me very much, and the bandages were inconvenient. I tried to paint, but the light was bad, and my head grew worse, and I had to put colours and pencils away. I could not read, I could not sew, I could only sit still nursing my wounded member and my grievances together.

Our dinner was a failure. I had ordered rump−steak, and the butcher sent me a steak off the round, and it was so tough that even my young, sound teeth ached with the toil of mastication. I began to be seriously afraid my uncle would be starved, and faint from exhaustion. He dined chiefly on bread and marmalade.

We had an early tea, and matters were a little amended. The room grew warmer, the kettle boiled, and I made toast that was eatable, though it was by no means a fair specimen of its kind. Also I indulged my uncle with an egg, which for a wonder was tolerably fresh. After tea I lay on the sofa, thinking of Elmwood, of Cuppage, of the Borghese Gardens, of Mrs. Mowbray's drawing−room, of everything likely to contrast most favourably with my present experiences. I was just sinking into a half−doze when I heard a rap at the front door, a rap that lately I had learned to know from every other rap on that well−used knocker. I knew that James Lascelles was outside waiting for admittance.

Chapter 42. LIGHT AT EVENING TIME

Yes! it was James Lascelles, laden like one of *Mudie's* weekly carriers, so many volumes had he to lay upon the table before he could conveniently shake hands. And how bright he looked, though his fingers were tingling with the cold, and his overcoat was glistening with rain−drops, while he informed us that it was as miserable a night outside as could be well imagined. “It rains, and it drizzles, and it sleets, and I am not quite sure that it does not freeze,” he said, laughing, as he sat down in front of our still sulky fire. “As for the mud, one wants seven−league boots to get through it; in fact, the night is the climax of the day; I cannot say more.”

“How could you come out here?” I asked. “Why do you not go straight home from business?”

“Because I had promised myself as well as you that I would come out to Camden Town this evening, and I make a principle of carrying out my plans despite of weather. To depend upon English weather is altogether out of the question, and to let it interfere with preconcerted arrangements is to abandon half your programme to incertitude.”

“It is indeed,” I replied. “ English winters are wretched indeed, especially in London—do you remember this time last year, James?”

“Yes; my mother and I were talking of it only this morning, and glorifying the sunshine and the skies of Italy; but we came to the conclusion that we would rather live in England, in spite of its wet weather and its bitter frosts, and in London, notwithstanding its fogs and its mud, than in Italy and in Rome. But, Chryssie, you are not looking well this evening.”

I could only plead that I had a headache, which was true enough, but my uncle was more communicative.

“We've got the blues, both of us,” he said, rather grimly. “Yesterday we looked at the world through rose−coloured spectacles. To−day we've got our smoked glasses on, and everything, consequently, looks very gloomy. We are just as naughty as we can be, the pair of us. No, don't sympathise; a little hearty scolding would be more to the purpose. You preach sometimes. Well, I think a good rousing sermon on the duty of cheerfulness might improve us.”

“What is it, Chryssie?” and James turned to me.

“I cannot tell you, except that I am altogether wrong. I am afraid I am cross; I am sure I am discontented. As for my uncle, I believe he would be all right if I had not persistently done the wet blanket business. I must have been an eminently disagreeable companion all day. The fact is, I woke up this morning feeling tired rather than rested. Then the melancholy state of the weather depressed me; then I began to brood over our misfortunes, and to deplore the brightness that has passed away. Then came ever so many little worries that I will not trouble you with, and so the day has been a black day, and I am ashamed of myself.”

And there I stopped, feeling that in another minute I should begin to cry again and make a baby of myself.

“Don't be too hard on yourself,” said James, kindly. “It strikes me that your depression is partly physical—mind, I do not say entirely so; and even if it were, it would be no reason why you should not combat with it. Except in most rare and extreme cases, the spirit must always strive with the flesh, for the flesh is a hard task−master and a tyrant if once it be allowed to get the victory. But, Chryssie, did you take your trouble where alone it could be lightened?”

“No, I did not; that is the worst of it, James. I hugged my misery like a heathen, and I am afraid I thought hard things of God. Oh, how quickly one may get wrong!”

“One may, indeed,” he answered, seriously; “but it is something to know and feel that we are wrong; the worst is when we try to make out a case for ourselves. Well, now, the next thing is to get right again, and lose no time about it. The longer we wander in bye−paths, the more difficult will it be to return to the high road. And the Christian cannot be happy unless he be at peace with God. Home is no longer home if the child cannot look lovingly in its father's face.”

“And I have not sought my Father's face to−day; I have not asked to see His smile; not even tried to clasp His hand.”

“Nevertheless, He has not let go His hand; only you, being like an erring child, estranged, cannot feel the clasp. You have only to confess your fault, and to go back to Him, humbly, lovingly. For, after all, Chryssie, if we

live in God's sunshine, if He is ever present with us the darkest day is light about us; and away from Him we are sure to stumble, and sooner or later to fall."

"And I thought I was so perfectly willing to accept all that befel me, so content to give up what God saw fit to withhold. I do believe I was getting a little proud of my resignation; I was secretly boasting how great was my faith."

"Perhaps so; we are so foolish and so vain that we make snares for our feet, even of the most precious graces and blessings. We feel strong, and forget whose is the strength in which we rejoice. We say to ourselves, 'I shall never be moved,' and then the Lord hides His face, and straightway we are troubled. It is well that we should thus prove ourselves, and know, in very deed, our own weakness, and our only source of strength. And now tell me, did you go to South Kensington yesterday?"

"I did. Miss Mowbray came for me, and we had a delightful drive round Hampstead Heath. I am afraid it was yesterday's sunshine that made to−day so dreary; it was the glimpse of the old life that made present circumstances so unbearable. I must stay at home till my mind is better disciplined. I am not able to bear a day's pleasure; if I would be happy as Cinderella I must keep to Cinderella's duties."

"That is nonsense," he said, gravely. "And I can see that it does you no good to go on accusing yourself. Never mind the effect of your day's recreation, but tell me all about it. Do you still like Miss Mowbray?"

"I like her exceedingly; she is charming! But why did you never tell us how beautiful she is? She is almost faultlessly beautiful!"

"Is she? Yes, I suppose she is very lovely—indeed, I am sure she is; but that chestnut−haired, pale, rose−tinted beauty is not the style that strikes me. And though I have been so much with Mr. Mowbray, I have not seen so very much of his sister, but she has behaved towards me with the most perfect courtesy and kindliness. She is to be married in the spring, I believe."

"Yes, she told me that she was engaged, but she did not say to whom; and I thought—" and there I stopped short and blushed furiously, for it struck me that I was going to say what perhaps I had no business to say.

"And you thought—?" questioned James, persistently. "Nothing. That is, nothing that I ought to speak about. It was only a foolish fancy."

"You surely did not fancy that it was I to whom Miss Mowbray was engaged?"

"Indeed I did! She spoke so highly of you, and I thought you would just suit; and the more I reflected the more certain I felt that I was right."

"I am not at all sure that we should suit, but I never debated the question. I knew from the first that Eleanor was to be married, and if I had not known it I am quite sure I should never have aspired to the honour of her hand. I am glad you spoke of it; mistakes of this sort are liable to occur, but they should always be set right."

"I suppose it is as well. But who do you think I saw in the park yesterday?"

"My brother! I know he is in town—with the Catherwoods, of course. I have not seen him, but I have heard of him."

"But surely he has been to Clapham? Has he not been to see his mother?"

"No! nor do I think he will come. Poor Louis has chosen his own path, and it is far away from ours. I am afraid the encounter did you no good, Chryssie?"

"I suppose it did not, for it was seeing those two, Louis and Clementina, that took me back to the old days. I could not but remember our bright Italian sojourn—so bright, till dear Aunt Judith left us. And then came thoughts of Elmwood, of the Cuppage garden, and of the dear old coppice, where I used to be so happy. I suppose it is really true that Louis will marry Miss Catherwood?"

"I understand that he will; the engagement is announced, and, Chryssie—may I ask—do you care?"

"I scarcely know; I cannot but remember that such things were, and were most sweet; but I hope, I believe, I care chiefly on his account. He will not be happy."

"Happy as Clementina's husband, certainly not; for I am certain—well, I may confess to you that he has said it—if he could have Miss Catherwood's fortune without herself he would only be too glad to resign all claim to possessing her. You are dearer now to him than she, if that is any comfort to you, Chryssie."

"But it is not—very far from it. If she is going to be his wife, he *ought* to love her. There is something most horrible in the idea of selling oneself for money, and that is what Louis is deliberately doing. Will he ever love her, I wonder?"

“I should fear not. There is nothing in Miss Catherwood to love. Her plainness of person and her want of breeding are the least objections to the union. Her temper is notoriously bad; she is proud, suspicious, imperious, and entirely selfish. She, too, regards the marriage as a matter of expediency. There is no affection on either side.”

“It is very wicked! If Louis will marry her, he ought to set himself to love her.”

“It would be all in vain. It is impossible to love the unlovable. The wickedness lies in the marriage itself. I wish something would happen to put a stop to it. I mean to see Louis once more. I used to have some influence with him.”

“But will they marry soon? Louis is quite a boy, you know. Must they not wait at least till he attain his majority?”

“By no means. There is no law which forbids a man to marry under age—provided his legal guardians consent; and Madam, who is sole guardian, not only consents, but makes the match. There is no impediment, so far as the law of the land goes. The law of God, and, indeed, the law of nature, they will set at defiance. There is some fighting about the settlements, I believe. When that is arranged the marriage will take place.”

“Louis will be ashamed of her.”

“Of course he will; he will want to keep her in the background, and he will insist on going his own way, without any reference to her—and what that way will be, Chryssie, knowing Louis as I do—his love of pleasure, his wavering principles, his intense self−appreciation, and his reckless self−will, coupled with a loveless home, and ties which gall rather than bind—I tremble to think what that way may be. He loves wine; he loves costly dissipation, he loves excitement; in short, he loves to please himself and cares little for consequences.”

“But still this marriage is a sort of self−sacrifice. Does it not argue a kind of prudence, which foregoes a smaller for a larger gratification?”

“The larger gratification is of so base a kind that it scarcely deserves the name of prudence. Of course Louis would have preferred to marry you, only he could not do without Clementina's money. To work hard, to live in obscurity, to deny himself, to renounce all the glitter and show of a wealthy position, would be a far greater sacrifice to Louis than giving up the girl of his heart. He has always hankered after money, not for the mere love of it, but for the advantages which it yields; that he may enjoy spending it freely and lavishly. I do not blame him for that; I should like to be rich myself—there are so many things one might do if one had money! But I hope, I believe, I would choose rather to struggle with poverty to my life's end than secure wealth according to my brother's example. And, after all, gold and silver do not make happiness, thank God! One may be quite happy in a shabby coat, though it is pleasant enough to wear good and fashionable clothes; and one can eat one's meat cheerfully, even without a silver fork, though I must say I like a well−appointed table.”

“I thought how very pretty your tea−table looked the other night.”

“Ah, that was because my mother is such a manager. And then she has so much taste! She loves beauty, and beauty comes to her as naturally as singing to the birds. If she had but a three−legged deal table, and willow−pattern plates and dishes, and a pewter mustard−pot, she would somehow make things look ten times better than they really were! She has wonderful fingers, has my dear mother, as well as artistic tastes. She gives this a twist and that a turn, and the effect is marvellous. Grace and beauty are not dependent on a full purse, that is a blessing. And, Chryssie, I often think you are like her. This room always looks bright and pleasant, and you are always prettily dressed, or so it seems to me.”

“I am afraid there is little brightness or prettiness here to−night. Oh, dear, that sulky fire! I am sure fires must be bad−tempered occasionally.”

“Stop! that is not the way to treat a London fire when it is in an unamiable state of mind. Give me the poker if you don't mind. There now, two or three small bits on lightly, pyramidwise, not too forward, mind; and unless there is something radically wrong with the draught we shall have a charming little fire. There now, look at that flame how lively it is. Did I not tell you so?”

“But it crackles, and that crackling nearly always means going out.”

“Chryssie, yours is not an educated ear. There is the hopeful crackle, which portends a cheerful blaze and glow, and the despondent crackle, which means black cinders and cold ashes, and this is the hopeful crackle. In ten minutes we shall have as good a fire as can be wished.”

And we really had; the fire's sulkiness and my own gloom had alike been charmed away. I got up and drew the window curtains, and set them in graceful folds; I straightened the sofa cushions and the antimacassars, and I

opened the piano, which had remained closed all day. Meanwhile James deftly swept up the hearth; “for,” said he, “my mother always says that no room, whether in a palace or in a cottage, can look pleasant with an untidy hearth. And I believe the fire−spirit, if there be one, dislikes a dirty hearth, for the fire burns as well again if the hearth be duly swept.”

And he did his work as completely and dexterously and noiselessly as the most accomplished parlourmaid.

“How did you acquire such an accomplishment?” I inquired, laughing; for I could laugh now.

“I learned all sorts of queer things when I was alone in London, and in lodgings. I became quite a domestic character, I assure you. I can make a bed, and cook a dinner, provided it be not on too extensive a scale; I can sweep up a room, I can put on buttons, and mend socks, and once I composed a plum−pudding, which was a remarkable success.”

“You might have gone to live in the bush.”

“I had some thought of it once, especially when Aunt Rachel's legacy came to me; it would have set me going nicely in Australia, or in the backwoods of America. But then there was the dear little mother! Not for all the gold of Australia and California would I leave her; and she could not, for manifest reasons, go with me to another hemisphere. Besides, I have no actual yearning after a colonial life, and I began to think that I had found my work—God's work—here in London.”

“You mean your preaching?”

“Yes, if it can be called *preaching*! After all, it is only talking—very queer sort of talking, too, I am afraid you would think it was, sometimes. But I can make navvies, and London roughs, and East End lads listen to me. God has given me the power; it is His gift to me, and I must use it for Him.”

“I should like to hear you preach, or talk!”

“I scarcely think you would, Chryssie. I tell them the 'old, old story' in their own language, which is as unlike yours as French is unlike Hindustanee.”

“I wonder you never thought of becoming a clergyman!”

“I could not take orders in the Established Church, for my conscience would never let me 'subscribe.' I love the Liturgy of the so−called Church of England, but her government, her rule, is not that to which I could submit. I am that which better men than I have been taunted with being—though the sneer now has lost its point—I am proud to say *I am a political Dissenter*.“

“Then why not join the ranks of the Nonconformist clergy?”

“I think I can do more good remaining as I am. I can reach where very few ordained ministers of the Gospel can reach. Not that I undervalue the ministry, as such; I am quite convinced—spite of what some very good, but I believe mistaken, men say—that the ministry of the Word is, *per se*, a Divine institution, and that men who are called to it should make it their calling, and live by it. But I do not feel that I am called to it, in the sense in which many of my friends are called. In some quarters there is a prejudice against ministers of any denomination, and it is there I go. When the prejudices of ignorance and coarse vice are abandoned, I always try to hand over my members to the lawful authorities, whether they be Episcopalian or otherwise. And now, Chryssie, I really must go. I will not awake Mr. Perren; he is most sweetly asleep, and has been this hour or more.”

“No wonder. I have made him so miserable to−day. Oh, I am ashamed of myself!”

“It is no light thing to make any one or any creature miserable; it is a sin against the good God. But I am not sure you have made Mr. Perren miserable; and if you have, I know you will make up for it to−morrow. Are the clouds all gone?”

“No! but they are silver−lined once more.”

“That is better, perhaps, than their sudden departure. It is good, sometimes, to dwell 'under the shadow.' You will come soon, and pay my mother another visit; you know your way to Clapham now?”

I promised, and James went away; but the brightness that came with him remained when he was gone. And, humbled and yet happy, I could once more rejoice in all that had befallen me. Once more I was content, and I could feel my Father's hand leading me in the right way. I was willing that my life should come to me, hour by hour and day by day, and that the future should be exactly as God willed it. Once more I could leave “the sacred untouched *to−come*” with Him; and I was happy.

It was a painful experience that I had that dark, cold winter's day; but I think it did me good, as frequently happens with painful experiences. I began to understand that I was no heroine; and I trusted in myself with

smaller confidence. And though the weather grew worse and worse, and the days grew shorter and colder, and the mornings darker, I did not again relapse into that state of gloomy unfaith which rebelliously cries out, “All these things are against me.” But I shall never—no, not if I live to be a centenarian—never forget that winter in Eldon Street, Camden Town.

Chapter 43. “THINGS WILL HAPPEN.”

And so the year—that most memorable year—waned, and Christmas came and went, and the old year was gone, and the new year had commenced, and its first day my uncle and I spent by special invitation with the Mowbrays. And my uncle and Mr. Mowbray became fast friends; and it sometimes happened now that the latter found his way to Eldon Street, and took a cup of tea with us, and talked art, or gave us the news, or brought a message or a book from Eleanor. Also, I sold four more pictures, and I began to think whether, after all, it would be expedient to go into the crockeryware business, the only consideration being that nearly everybody wanted plates and jugs and dishes, while only a very limited portion of the community required water−colour drawings.

But through Mr. Mowbray's kindness I found a new picture dealer, who was not only honest and polite, but liberal beyond my expectations; and being something of an artist himself, he was able to offer some very valuable suggestions. One day when I was in his shop looking over some very beautiful copies from the antique, Mr. Silver said to me, “I beg your pardon, Miss Tyndale, but do you happen to know any one among your friends who could and would do this sort of thing?”

Now “this sort of thing” was to colour engravings and illustrations for a very superior class of children's books and education plates. To do them as they required to be done needed some little taste, great accuracy, and a moderate knowledge of pencil and palette. They would take time, but they would not take much else, beyond a little ordinary judgment and painstaking.

“I could do them, easily enough,” I replied, “but—”

“But it would be sheer waste of your time, because you can do that which is far better. I must find somebody, and, strange to say, I cannot just now lay my hand upon the proper person. A poor lady who had seen better days used to do them for me, and very satisfactorily; but she died about a month ago. Since then I have made trial of three different people, and all have failed. See! these floral specimens are abominably done—those blue−bells, or wild hyacinths, are absolutely slate−colour; and here is a rose more like turkey−rhubarb in tint than anything else! Some of the plates are spoiled altogether; and this, of course, cannot go on, and the work is actually standing still. The shading, you see, is ready done but the colouring must be *natural* —that is the point.”

“I think I know some one who would do them nicely, Mr. Silver, some one who has a good eye for colour, and will certainly take great pains; if you will trust me with half−a−dozen of those sheets I will be responsible for them.”

For it struck me suddenly that it would be just a nice little bit of work for my uncle, who wearied sadly for want of occupation. James and I both thought he would be much better in health if he had some kind of real work, and if he could only earn a few shillings a week, and James had wondered whether he could get him any copying to do; but I had not encouraged the notion, simply because Mr. Perren's writing, once so neat and lawyer−like, had come to be a miserable scrawl. But if his hand were only steady enough I knew he could manage these plates delightfully, for he was continually doing a little amateur work while I was busy at my easel, and I could take care that he used only the right shades of colour.

Mr. Silver willingly consented to my carrying off the plates, and remarked that if my friend were successful he might have abundance of work for some months to come. My uncle went into raptures on the spot, as soon as ever I unfolded my scheme and explained to him its requirements.

“My Chryssie,” he said, with effusion, “this will do me a thousand times more good than all the quinine and port wine in the world. It is just what I wanted, what I longed for, what I prayed for!—something to do, and something that I *could* do. And here it is! If there is one thing I can do better than another, it is painting in watercolours. Oil−colours, you know, I gave up as a bad job years ago—a pretty mess I made of them!—but watercolours, and all ready designed—why, it is as easy as going to sleep! And I always could do things neatly and trimly, you know; it is my way, my precise old bachelor way, I suppose. And it will be such a relief to my mind to be gaining a little money; I have not said much, my Chryssie, but it has been a heavy trial to me that I must remain a burden upon you, making you sole bread−winner—you, a woman and a girl! and I eating the bread of idleness and incapacity.”

“My dear uncle, you know it has been, and will be, my chief happiness to work for you; think of the years in

which I took everything from your hands. But for you I should never have done this”—pointing to my Tennysonian picture, which Mr. Mowbray had already secured for what seemed to be quite a handsome sum of money. “But for you and dear Aunt Judith I might have gone to the workhouse, and have been apprenticed to some horrible trade. Think of what my education at Mrs. March's cost you! and then the masters that I had for everything I cared to study, both at Elmwood and on the Continent! You are getting a little interest for your money, uncle, dear, that is all.”

“Ah, my child! I little thought, when I was so proud of your accomplishments, to what end they would subserve. Little did I ever dream that you would one day use one of your beautiful gifts for the mere purpose of living. I used to smile and think what a graceful and high−cultured woman my beautiful heiress of Elmwood would be! And now she is toiling for daily bread!”

“And very thankful to be able to toil, uncle! How many poor creatures there are in this great city, quite as daintily bred and as delicately nurtured as I, who cannot find work—congenial work—to do! I thank God that He has given me work, and the very work, too, that I love best. I dare say, if I had been at Elmwood, I should have worked quite as hard, only I should have hung your walls with my productions instead of selling them. I assure you I begin to appreciate the blessing and the dignity of labour. I quite agree with the old lady who said there was nothing in life so spiritual as work, except saying your prayers! And it is an unspeakable joy to have for your life−work that which you love, that which you would not be without. I should think authors who love their work must be very happy people!”

I need scarcely say that my uncle succeeded admirably with his painting. It was just the task for him. It was not too much for him in any way, and yet it required so much care and taste as to make him feel that he was, after all, engaged in no mere child's play. Mr. Silver was delighted when I took back to him the six complete specimens. They were almost too well done, he said, for what they were; there was a softness and delicacy of touch, a finish about every drawing, which ought considerably to raise their value. He had contracted, however, with the publishers, or they had contracted with him, rather, and there could be no alteration in the price agreed on. But Mr. Silver himself paid a very fair sum for the work, and my uncle was more than satisfied.

“And I will make Mr. Silver's acquaintance,” he said. “I do not see why you should always fetch and carry, my dear; I am not ashamed to be a worker. Oh, I feel wonderfully better already; the sight of my own honest earnings makes me quite young again. And there is plenty to do, you say, for at least eight or nine months?”

“Plenty. Mr. Silver says he can keep you employed on various orders till quite late in the year, and by that time there will be something else to do.”

“My Chryssie! such a charming idea has struck me!”

“Pray communicate it! Charming ideas, like good books, should always be circulated.”

“Do you think, my dear, it would be possible to save enough money to go out somewhere in the autumn? To the seaside, of course—not to Brighton or Dover, you know, or any of those places, but to some quiet, inexpensive little nook, where we could get decent lodgings, and live cheaply for a few weeks. Could it be, do you think, my Chryssie?”

“If we continue as prosperous as we are now, uncle, I see no reason why it should not be. The very thought makes my heart leap up. I confess to you that I have had a great yearning for the sea for ever so many weeks! When one has once lived, as we have, in sight and in sound of the great salt waves, month by month and year by year, to leave the shore is like leaving a part of one's very life.”

“I feel it so,” he said, with a sigh. “I pine for the sea! I have seen it, calm and tranquil, grand and awful, sunlit and moonlit; and I have heard its glorious, never−ceasing hymn of praise for seventy years. Ihave not missed Elmwood, the home of my fathers, more than I have missed my sea!”

“And you have said nothing about it, my dear, good, brave, patient uncle! Well, please God, we will see the sea this year; and we will rejoice in its briny odour and its rollicking breezes; and we will listen to its sweet, silvery chiming, and to its grand 'for ever and for ever' chorus; and we will wander about like a pair of children, and be as happy, if we can, as children.”

And as happy as a child I thought he might be; for to good old people the child's happy, guileless, easily−satisfied heart comes back again. The old age of God's dear children is always lovely, always pure and holy, always a sweet and noble harmony that seems compounded of the *Te Deum* and the *Nunc Dimittis.*

“And then,” I said, pursuing the pleasant subject of our seaside sojourn—the frost was on the window−panes

now, and the streets were dry only because the mud was frozen, and a chill north−east wind was piping among the chimney−pots, to the intense discomfiture of the poor pouter pigeons; but summer days would come again!—“and then what a fine thing it is that we can take our work with us; we need not be quite idle even during our holiday. Nay! we may even catch effects and store up splendid ideas that will bring us fame and money afterwards. How much better we are off than those people who are obliged to leave their work behind them, whether they can afford it or not! It is the great blessing of author−craft and of artist−craft that it can be carried on anywhere, if need be. How good it was of God to create a world of art and a world of literature! And how kind He is to those who toil honestly and patiently in these same glorious worlds! Their work is to them its own exceedinh great reward!”

So we agreed to work away like busy bees through the dreary winter and the cold spring days, and to hoard up our savings. I did not mean to be too frugal−minded, forwhen economy degenerates into parsimony more is lost than gained; I have found that out, and know that it is an established fact. And we agreed to keep in view the great pleasure we promised ourselves in August or September; that would be something to look forward to indeed, and nothing sweetens labour like the prospect of a settled season of repose and innocent recreation.

Thank God we may always be so blessed. There is always, however weary the toil and heavy the burden, the “rest that remaineth,” the peace that endureth, the never−ending joy.

“Ever the richest, tenderest glow
Sets round th' autumnal sun—
But there sight fails; no heart may know
The bliss when life is done.”

Or rather, when our life is done here, for life itself is never done. The incident death once passed, who shall say how life unfolds itself in the new and genial atmosphere of another and a sinless world? I often think how, in the ages to come, we shall look back on that change which we now call death as a very slight parenthesis, a mere transition, that frightened us, because, like children, we were afraid of shadows, and because we did not trust as a child should trust in his father.

On New Year's Day Eleanor had said to me, “Another year, Chryssie! I wonder what the good new year will bring us?”

“The last year brought me great sorrow and loss,” I said, sighing; “but it brought me also richest blessings,greatest mercies!”

“I wonder what *changes* it will bring to us.”

“It will bring to you, in all probability, a dear husband and a happy home of your own. As for myself, I do not expect much change, and I think I am pretty well content to go on jog−trot again. I have had my changes; I think one's life generally flows on in successive cycles of mutation and monotony. The calm succeeds the storm.”

“And with the calm comes the sunshine, Chryssie. I am persuaded this will be an eventful year to you. Things will happen.”

“What makes you think so?”

“I do not know; I have presentiments sometimes. And you will see; it will not be monotonous, and dull, and unvaried—things will happen— *things will happen,* Chryssie.”

“Your name ought to be Sybil, not Eleanor. Well! I hope it will happen that I shall paint some really good pictures, and sell them advantageously. And I wish it might happen that the scraper at our door got mended; but I do not fancy it will. It has been broken these five years, Mrs. Betts tells me, and has been done without!”

“You may laugh at me, but things will happen. Remember what I say.”

So it came to pass, that when my uncle and Mr. Silver had amicably entered into arrangements, I wondered if that was one of the happening things which Eleanor had foretold. Also I wondered whether our going to the seaside would be another of the things that was to happen between the first of January and the thirty−first of December. And then early in February, to my intense astonishment, a man came and put us down a new scraper. Perhaps, after all, things were going to happen, even as Eleanor said. The fine new scraper, grandly black−leaded, looked like the herald of still more improbable and still more fortuitous events. I felt as if the thing were not quite canny when I scraped my feet upon it.

But in March something did happen—something of infinitely more importance than all the door−scrapers in London, something that surprised me more than I thought I could be surprised. I found out one of my relations!

One morning I got a curiously scrawled note front Mantie. A gentleman had been to see her, she said. He had come to her shop at Hoxton, and he had told her that he had had no end of trouble in discovering her residence and that he was Colonel Clarendon, my mother's first cousin, and that he *wanted me.* But whether she had given my kinsman my address, or whether I was expected to go to him, I could not make out. Mantie's orthography was not as good as once it was, and her style, to put it mildly, was extremely confused.

I could not paint any more that day, so I took an early dinner, and set off for Hoxton, and found Mantie on the very tenter−hooks of impatience.

“He is your blessed ma's own cousin,” said Mantie, emphatically. “Only to think of that now; but he isn't a bit like her.”

“What is he like?”

“He is very yellow and wrinkled, and he had a handkerchief the colour of his face. His hair is grey, and I should say he is hot−tempered. You see he has lived in India—I forget how many years—and it's a hot place. And they live there mostly on pepper, and curried rice, and brandy, and spices, and capsicums, and it naturally makes their natures fiery. He made me jump again, he was that sharp, when I didn't answer him quite straightforward.”

“Did you not give him my address?”

“Not I! I'm too old to be caught napping by a canary−coloured Nabob, let him have all the wealth of all the Ingies and 'rich Peru,' as the hymn says, in his pockets. Thinks I—I must know more about you, my fine gentleman, before I give you my confidence. How do I know whether you are not an impostor, and no Clarendon at all? You are not a bit like my poor dear sainted mistress, who was fair and blooming as the day when first she came to Bloomsbury, and to her dying hour she was as sweet a little creature as you could wish to see; even in her coffin she looked like a piece of waxwork. So I says, 'How am I to know you to be Mrs. Tyndale's first cousin?'“

'I've credentials,' says he; 'I can establish my claim. Don't be a foolish old jade'—yes, that was his word, *'jade,'* very polite, truly—'and stand in the young lady's way. When she sees me she will hear of something to her advantage, as the advertisements say. I'm rich, and I've neither kith nor kin, now my own poor lad is gone, except this child of my cousin Isabella's. 'However did you hear of her?' says I, 'for India, you know, is at the Antipodes, or something like it?' And he answered, 'The professor wrote to me eight or nine years ago; he found my address, I fancy, among his wife's papers. He said he wasn't long for this world, and he asked me to look after his child, who was also poor Bella's child.' 'And why didn't you?' says I, firmly; 'if it hadn't been for strangers, Miss Tyndale might have gone to the workhouse, or joined the gipsies.' And he makes answer, 'The letter didn't reach me for two years, for I had left the old station and gone up the country; and then, when I did get it, I didn't see why I should be troubled about other men's families, seeing that I had got a son of my own, and might have more children born to me. So I took no notice, and after a time I forgot all about the professor's letter. But my wife died, and left me only that one son; she left me a lac or two of rupees, and jewels worth a king's ransom, but she left me only that one child. And that was enough if only he had lived; but he didn't'; and he gives a sort of grunt that was half a sob. The lad was very dear to him, I reckon—we all have our feelings, even yellow old Nabobs. So he goes on: 'I meant to die out yonder, but somehow I got a longing to see Old England again, and being alone in the world I thought I might as well look after poor Bella's daughter.' So I says, 'Well, Colonel, I'll communicate with Miss Tyndale, for she's an uncommonly sensible young lady; so you just leave your address with me, and I'll see her and talk to her.'“

“Where is he living—this cousin of mine?”

“He's at Morley's Hotel. That is his card. What will you do, Miss Chryssie?”

“Go and see him, to be sure, and hear what he has to say for himself.”

“You will never go alone?”

“Why not? He will not hurt me.”

“Such a Nabob! I daresay he has black servants that he kicks about and swears at—most of them have. Perhaps he'll want to adopt you.”

“He will have to want, then. I am not going to be adopted a second time. Mr. Perren stands in the place of father to me. I can never belong to any one else while he lives.”

“Well, those Perrens have been downright good to you, I must say, brought you up like a lady of the land, and would have left you a fine fortune, no doubt, but for that plaguey bank. Why will people be so stupid as to put their money into banks when they are always breaking? But don't you go and stand in your own light now, Miss

Chryssie! I am sure I wish I'd a Nabob uncle or cousin come home from India with lots of money, and nobody to leave it to but me. I'd give in to him a bit. Bless you! the diamond ring on his finger would have bought up my stock and my household furniture, and left a tidy little bit behind. When will you go and see the Colonel?"

"To−morrow, if I can."

"And if he wants palaver, be sure to give it to him. But you never did play your cards as well as you might."

I went home with plenty to think about.

Yes! Eleanor was right; things had begun to happen!

Chapter 44. CINDERELLA'S CHARIOT

I left my uncle busy with his illustrations, and set out to visit my unknown relation; I had written to advise him of my coming. When I reached the hotel, and made known my business, I was treated with extreme deference.

“Oh, yes, ma'am, yes!” said the obsequious waiter, bowing himself into an elliptic curve. “The Colonel told us to expect a young lady, and he ordered luncheon. This way, ma'am, please.”

I followed him up the stairs and through the passages, till we came to what I felt must be one of the best, if not the very best suite of rooms in all the hotel. The waiter threw open the door with an air, and announced “Miss Tyndale.”

I found myself in a large, splendidly furnished apartment. It was not, however, in a very tidy state, being littered about with all sorts of articles. Magnificent cashmeres and Indian shawls, and tiger and lion skins lay upon every couch; wonderful feathers were tossing about from table to floor; an enormous red umbrella, edged with gold lace and spread out, occupied a prominent position; rich velvets, gold and silver embroidered robes, Decca muslins, huge gaudy ornamental fans, inlaid ivory and ebony caskets, sandalwood coffers, carved ivory chessmen, toys in jade, were scattered in all directions, as well as heaps of things, all rare and costly and splendid, which I had never seen before, and the use of which I could not even guess.

It seemed to be an Oriental museum, a sort of Exhibition Indian Court, with all its treasures unclassed and unarranged, and in the most heterogeneous and confused masses. Some immense travelling chests and packing−cases cumbered one quarter of the room, and over one of them bent two copper−coloured, Lascar−looking individuals, who were clad literally in purple and fine linen. When they saw me they made profound *salaams,* and vanished noiselessly through an opposite door. I looked round, half expecting to behold a white elephant; but, instead of that, a stuffed panther, horribly life−like, met my gaze, and I involuntarily stepped back a pace or two, lest the beast should spring. Though it was a mild day, singularly mild for the season, there was an enormous fire at each end of the room, the temperature being hot enough, if not moist enough, to rival that of the Palm House of Kew. For an instant I thought myself alone; but a moment afterwards I heard a rustle behind a folding screen, placed close to one of the fiery furnaces; and, before I could wonder, as I did afterwards, how it was the screen did not ignite, a middle−sized, shrivelled, shrunken, parchment−skinned gentleman emerged from a heap of furred rugs, and stood before me.

“Bless me!” said the Nabob, in a harsh and un−English voice; “are you Bell Clarendon's daughter?”

“I believe so—yes,” was my stupid, ill−assured answer. “I am Chrystabel Tyndale.”

“The—you are!” he exclaimed, shivering in the most extraordinary dressing−gown I had ever seen. It was yellow, and covered with blue and green and red pagodas and black elephants.

“Yes, I am Miss Tyndale, the person you wished to see.”

And I drew myself up rather haughtily; I was not accustomed to expletives, and I was startled, though Mantie had warned me that my cousin indulged in naughty words. At the same time I felt that I was behaving absurdly.

“You're not a bit like her,” he grunted, “ not a bit.Won't you sit down?”

I did sit down, as far from the fire as I decently couId, and said, quietly, “All daughters are not like their mothers. Mantie tells me I resemble my father, and from what I remember of him I should think I do.”

He took an enormous pinch of snuff out of a barbaric snuff−box, flourished a silk handkerchief rather yellower than himself, and replied, “Well, you can't help your looks. I wanted you to be like your mother, and she was such a pretty creature. You are a fine girl, a handsome girl, too, I dare say, and I'm sure you're a good girl. Don't think I wish to disparage you, but I never could take to black−browed beauties—I've had a surfeit of Indian princesses, I suppose. Still, I don't know that your complexion ought to stand in your way, swarthy as it is. There must be gipsy blood among the Tyndales.”

I felt exceedingly irritated; my girlish vanity was touched. I had been complimented more than once on my clear olive complexion, and pure carmine tints. I had been told, too, that we Tyndales inherited our dark eyes and hair and our southern complexion from an Andalusian ancestress of one of the best families in Spain. And here was this miserable, shivering little Nabob, who was himself the colour of his favourite curries, calling me *“swarthy,”* and inquiring whether I was a lineal descendant of the Zingari. It was very silly, I confess, but I did

feel unwarrantably cross. Perhaps my uncle's too partial estimate had spoilt me. I was certainly unused to such very candid criticism of my personal appearance.

“Your mother was like a lily or a blush−rose at your age!”he went on, still contemplating me with a dissatisfied air; “but, as I said, you can't help your looks. You might have been worse! you might have had freckles and a carroty poll, or you might have been pitted with the small−pox, or you might have squinted! Now, you know, I really could not overlook a squint.”

“Really, Colonel Clarendon,” I replied, “I never knew that one was answerable in any way to one's second or third cousin, least of all as regards one's looks. If I had squinted, it could not have made any difference to you.”

“Could it not? You mistake, Chrystabel; and please to call me *'cousin!'* I have an eye for beauty, I assure you, and anything out of drawing makes me really miserable. Now what is more out of drawing than a squint?

“But I do *not* squint, cousin! And if I did, it could not be helped; a person may squint and yet be very good.”

“Unquestionably! Only I could not tolerate the squinting good person in my presence. Oh; this wretched climate of yours! Why did I not delay my return until Midsummer; if you have any summer at all in this accursed island? The climate has changed for the worse since I went away—everything does change for the worse. Now tell me all about yourself. Won't you come nearer the fire?”

“No, thank you; I find the day unseasonably warm; but I will take off my bonnet, if you please?”

“Bless me, yes!—of course; take off all your outdoor wraps if you like. I'll ring the bell, and tell them to send an *ayah,* there must be plenty in the house.”

“Please do not. I will just put down my bonnet and my jacket here. There! that will do quite well. Now, what is it I am to tell you?”

“What have you been doing ever since your father went to 'Kingdom−come'—I beg pardon, I suppose you don't understand slang—I mean since he died, you know?”

“I was left quite destitute; I must have starved or have been taken to an orphan asylum, or, worse still, to the union, if some kind and truly excellent people had not proposed to adopt me. They took me away soon after the funeral to their home in the North. They bore with all my bad behaviour, for I was an unpleasant, violent−tempered, ignorant child; they forgave me when I provoked them by my base ingratitude; they educated me, gave me every advantage they could think of; they treated me as their own daughter; I was petted, indulged, allowed every reasonable liberty; and, but for the misfortune which has assailed the family, I should now be mistress of Elmwood, and heiress to the whole estate.”

“*Perren* is the name, I think?”

“Yes, Perren! a name I shall always love and reverence.”

“How many Perrens of them are there?”

“There were three when first I went to live with them, but Aunt Mona married, and we have seen little of her since. Dear Aunt Judith died at Rome last April. There is only my uncle now, and he is rather infirm; he needs all the tender care and affection I can bestow upon him. We have been all the world to each other since Aunt Judith's death, since our troubles began.”

“H'm! a pretty mess this old Perren must have made of it, if all I hear be true. That old woman who was once your *ayah* told me that he had absolutely given up every penny of his income to his creditors!”

“It is quite true, cousin! My uncle has stripped himself of everything; but he has a clear conscience—that counts for something!”

“He must be an old idiot, in his dotage, no doubt. Where were his friends that they did not interfere? Couldn't you influence him at all?”

“ I did not try. Besides, his view of the case was mine. There were widows and orphans who had lost their all by the breaking of the bank with which his name and credit were connected. His name had induced many people to trust their little property to the firm; if everybody gave up everything he said none of the depositors would be utterly ruined. I do not quite understand it; I only know that, legally speaking, my uncle was one of the most responsible persons, and that he sacrificed all he possessed to a sense of duty. He does not regret what he did last summer, neither do I. And we are really very happy in our poverty.”

“But something was left? What have you been living on since the beastly bank stopped payment?”

“We had some money in hand, which every one said we might justly keep; and the creditors generously allowed me to take what I liked of things that were supposed to be mine; of course, in a legal point of view, they

were my uncle's. I kept what I prized most, to furnish our lodgings in Eldon Street; other articles I sold, and so added to the fund which was all we had to depend upon."

"How much was it?"

"Really, Colonel—cousin—I have no right to enter upon my uncle's private affairs to a stranger."

"Are they not your own affairs, Miss Saucebox? Don't you sink or swim together?"

"My own affairs I object to discuss with one whom I have never seen before to−day." And I could have added—"and whom I sincerely hope I shall never see again!"

"Tut! tut!" he growled, taking snuff at a furious rate. "Don't be perverse; don't be a fool; don't quarrel with your luck! I mean no harm, though I am of the rough and ready squad. You see they never paid the twopence extra for learning manners when I went to school; so I never had any manners, except those of a bear, and it's too late to change now. A bear is not a bad sort of an animal, though, if you know how to deal with him."

Not having had any experience in the natural history of bears, save as I knew them in the street dancing at the end of a long chain, when they always looked extremely sulky, poor brutes!—and also as I knew them in the Zoological Gardens, stirred up with a pole—when they looked alternately ferocious and treacherous, I discreetly kept silence. I knew very well that "Nabobs" had peppery tempers, and must not be unduly provoked. I had gone quite as far as I dared. We were happily interrupted by the appearance of a procession of waiters with a clerical−looking gentleman at their head. They proceeded to lay luncheon for two.

For two, indeed! There was food enough for twenty people with keen appetites, to say nothing of what might remain in the shape of broken meats. I had grown so accustomed to frugality that the sight of all this profusion really gave me pain. I calculated that I could get excellent dinners for a fortnight out of the repast spread before me. Only neither my uncle nor myself were used to Indian cookery, and I doubted much whether half the dishes would be eatable, our unseasoned palates and stomachs being taken into consideration.

"Now, cousin Chrystabel," said the Colonel, "you need not be afraid of swallowing fire. I sent word to the cook that my visitor was an English lady, and must have dainty English dishes served up to her. If you don't like any of them say so, and these fellows shall bring you something else. Here, you fool!" this to the clerical head waiter, who only smiled at the complimentary appellative. "Here, I say! Don't stand staring like a mooncalf, or a stuck pig; hand that lady the *menu*."

"I beg your pardon, Colonel, but the *menu* is not here."

"And pray why not?" And of course my cousin expounded himself pretty liberally.

The waiters bore his intemperate harangue with so much calmness and graceful self−possession that I wondered where they got their breeding from, and concluded that the "twopence extra" must certainly have been paid on their behalf in the days of their early youth. The storm was soon lulled. I began to perceive that if my Anglo−Indian relative was only allowed full swing he speedily ran himself down. He subsided now with singular abruptness, and muttered something, which I took to be an apology for "grace." I was helped to a little *plat* of sweetbreads stewed with mushrooms; then I had something else equally good—I forget what, only it was *à la* something or somebody, and I enjoyed it exceedingly, to the intense satisfaction of my host, who was openly delighted at my practical appreciation of the good things before me. The luncheon passed off admirably in spite of the missing *menu*; the Colonel ate of several unpleasant−looking greenish and yellow compositions, and he drank enormous bumpers of hock and claret. I quite expected to be well scolded when I refused any wine, explaining that I never took it except as a needful restorative; but to my surprise my cousin only nodded, and after an acquiescent grunt, said, "Quite right! Quite right! I'd drink nothing but water and milk if I were a boy again! Best without it. Best without it! It's an enemy, and that's a fact!" And he looked at the tall hock−bottles as if he meant to demolish them there and then without further parley; but thinking better of it—or *worse*, perhaps—he filled his glass to the very brim, and drank it off at a single draught, nodding at me again, and saying, "Here's to your very good health, cousin Chrystabel, and confusion to all your enemies."

Presently came desert—all the luxuries of Covent Garden, and certain Indian sweetmeats besides. I contented myself with two splendid peaches. "They must be very expensive," I thought; "peaches in March cannot be had for nothing!" They were hot−house fruit, of course, and singularly fine for the season, which had not been till the last day or two very favourable for forcing. I ascertained afterwards that they were seven and sixpence *each*. Thus I had quietly eaten up fifteen shillings in a few minutes, to say nothing of the sumptuous banquet which preceded the peaches! I had devoured at one sitting more than my uncle and I spent in a fortnight!

When the fruit was on the table the well−bred waiters left us; and presently the Colonel drew up his chair to the fire, near which we sat, and which had been replenished during the repast. A *hookah* lay close at hand, and he looked at it approvingly, but he did not attempt to use it; he only took more snuff; and laid his *bandana* across his knees ready for instant action. Then, after a grunt or two, he commenced: “Cousin Chrystabel! you see all these trifles?” And he pointed to the Oriental treasures with which the large room was carelessly bestrewn. If those were his trifles, I wondered what his valuables might be! I could only say that I did see the “trifles,” and that I thought some of them must be very costly, as they were both curious and beautiful. And I laid my hand as I spoke on a sandal−wood *escritoire,* most exquisitely inlaid with silver and ivory.

“Oh, that! Pray do me the favour to accept it at once, if you like it. It's not in my line. It's a lady's *bagatelle.* I brought it home on purpose to give it away. It is yours if you will oblige me.”

“No, indeed,” I began, not knowing what to say.

How could I possibly take so valuable a present from a stranger, kinsman though he might be? But the Colonel would not listen to any excuse; all I could get from him was—“Tut, tut, stupid child! the thing is yours; say no more about it.”

After that I was careful how I expressed my admiration.

“You see all these trinkum−trankums?” he continued. “I have heaps more. I have lots of money. I don't know what to do with it, for I don't care about buying land. My money is a perfect incubus to me, and yet I don't care to make ducks and drakes of it, or to fling it away on worthless people, or to be plundered of it. I mean to have a house in or near London—form an establishment, you know; go in for pictures, perhaps, or bric−a−bracerie, or build a lunatic asylum, or something else. Now, will you come and be mistress of my house?”

“I cannot, indeed I cannot. I can never leave Mr. Perren while he lives. Think how much I owe him.”

“You do. I will not depreciate his claims. But what is there to hinder us paying him off? We will find some nice little snug box for him, and set him up with a careful housekeeper and one or two careful servants. And I'll take care an income more than ample for his needs shall be secured to him.”

The proposal was tempting, certainly; but then, was I to share the snug little box or the Colonel's mansion? The latter, undoubtedly, was what my kinsman intended. And then I wondered what I ought to do; it seemed to me that at least my uncle ought to have the choice between a guaranteed provision for his remaining years, and the advantage of my society. I could only repeat, “I must not think of leaving my uncle.”

“But he is not your uncle!” roared the Colonel, getting angry—and when he was really angry his yellow face became purple and fiery red—very fearful to behold. “You are my relative, and, as such my ward, naturally. I shall claim you. Your proper place is in my house, under my roof and my protection. Of course you shall have a chaperone; I know what is proper, though I have been used to Oriental ways so long. You may have two chaperones, if you like; only you must keep them out of my sight. And you shall have as many attendants as you please; you shall have horses and carriages, of course, and you shall have such jewels as Queen Victoria's daughters may long in vain for; as for shawls, fans, embroidered things, and such like rubbish, you may have any quantity; and, you may spend as much money as ever you like. I don t suppose you will care to curl your hair with banknotes; I think I should rather object to *that*; but you may do no end of good, like that Burdett−Coutts woman, whose benevolent deeds are talked of even in India and Japan. You shall do as you like, and have what you like. Come, now, what do you say? Don't say *no,* for I like you very much, Cousin Chrystabel, in spite of your dark eyes, and black hair, and swarthy skin. Splendid draperies and diamonds will become you well. You will look like an Eastern queen. I'll make the 'Arabian Nights' come true.”

“Cousin, I thank you with all my heart. I shall always remember your generous offers with gratitude, but I must end where I began; I cannot, and of my own free will I *will not,* leave my adopted uncle, who is to me as a beloved father. I suppose I ought to speak to him.”

“Then speak to him, and I will speak too. I will see him. Don't be afraid—I won't lose my temper with him. It's my liver that makes me so cross and waspish; you can't be sweetly amiable and your liver all but done for. Must you go? I will ring for your carriage.”

“I have none.” I smiled at the idea. “I came in the 'Mother Shipton' omnibus.”

“I'll 'Mother Shipton' you, if you go about in her omnibus, or anybody's omnibus. I ordered a proper brougham and two good horses to be ready to take you back.”

And so I was handed downstairs and out of the hotel and into “my carriage,” as if I had been a veritable

princess—I and my sandal−wood *escritoire,* and a shawl fit for a Begum, and several other articles that the Colonel swept up at random as I left the room.

As I drove home I thought of Cinderella, and wondered whether the luxurious brougham would turn into a pumpkin when it got to Eldon Street. In truth, things happened. Eleanor was right.

Chapter 45. GOOD NEWS, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

Though my chariot did not turn into a pumpkin, nor the sleek horses into lizards, I felt very much like Cinderella when I alighted at No. 25, Eldon Street. The coachman and the footman must both have perceived that the palace of the princess was rather an inferior sort of residence; and I felt half ashamed of myself, and then ashamed of myself for being ashamed, when the gorgeous creature in attendance handed me from the brougham, and my rich spoil into the keeping of Mrs. Betts's small maid−of−all−work, who stood staring at the door lost in astonishment, and diligently rubbing up her smeared face with an exceeding dirty and ragged apron. I was afraid Mary Ann would think I had been engaged in a freebooting expedition, and was returning with my own share of the general plunder.

But when all the properties were carried into the parlour, where, happily for his nerves, Mr. Perren was not, Mary Ann grinned and said, “Lors, miss! you've been and come home just like a fairy−tale!”

From which remark I inferred that the poor little drudge secretly indulged in classical literature.

“Where is my uncle?” I inquired.

“Mr. Perren, he have gone and lied down up−stairs, miss. He told me to keep the bit of 'ash he had left for you nice and 'ot. And I've kep' it in the oven ever since dinner. I heard it a−fizzing when I come up to answer the door. I'll bring it on a tray! you'll not want the tablecloth laid again?”

But I declined the tempting offer, and I told Mary Ann she might, if she liked, eat the “'ash” herself, which she immediately consented to do, reserving it, however, for a supper−banquet, to be privately enjoyed after she was shut in with the black−beetles for the night; for she had a turn−up bedstead in the kitchen. Hashed mutton, indeed! and after it had been baked and frizzled for two hours in the oven! And I had been lunching, *à la princesse,* on all the delicacies of the season, and devouring fifteen shillings' worth of peaches! Only the day before yesterday I had hesitated as to the prudence of buying three−penny worth of oranges! Why, if I liked, I might henceforth live on peaches and pine−apples; I might forget—can one forget such things, though?—that there was anything like cold mutton and short commons, except among beggars and the most indigent poor. I might fare sumptuously every day, and wear soft raiment, and have men servants and women servants at my disposal, and I might see beautiful Italy again; I might—there was no saying what I might not do as Colonel Clarendon's recognised “next of kin!” But the price to be paid for all this honour and glory! Ay, *the price*! that was the rub. All is not gold that glitters, and the game is not always worth the candle.

I had the tea ready for my uncle when he came down, rather poorly and depressed, as he often was when I had been long absent. I had not said anything to him about my Anglo−Indian cousin; he knew I went to Mantie, but that was nothing remarkable, for Mantie grumbled if I did not find my way to Hoxton once every now and then; and in the morning I had simply appeared in walking costume, and requested that dinner might not wait for me, as I was going out on business, and might be detained. And Mr. Perren, who was deep in Tennyson's new poem, which Mr. Mowbray had brought him, just nodded his head, and replied, “Very well; but don't tire yourself, my dear: and get something to eat at a pastry−cook's if you think you will be late. It is very bad for the health to go fasting too long.”

He supposed that I was simply going to Mr. Silver, as usual. Mr. Silver's brother had a studio in Newman Street, where I was always welcome; his wife, too, was an *artiste* of no mean pretensions, and I frequently found them together, often working at the same picture. And as I generally paid them a pretty long visit my uncle felt neither surprise nor uneasiness at my prolonged absence.

When Mr. Perren had stirred and tasted his tea, and eaten one of the little strips of cold toast which I invariably prepared for him, he began to be in better spirits, and to bethink himself of my morning's expedition. But first he said, “My dear, I told Mary Ann to keep some dinner for you; I hope she did, and that you had it.”

“No, I did not want it; I had already dined.”

“Ah! did the Silvers ask you to dinner?”

“I have not seen any of the Silvers to−day; I have not been nearer Newman Street than the corner of Tottenham Court Road.”

“Where *have* you been, then! You know no one else on this side of the water except the Mowbrays, and you

would hardly go to South Kensington by way of Tottenham Court Road. Mrs. Mantie you saw only yesterday."

"Nevertheless, Mantie was the cause of my journey today. Uncle, I went to Morley's Hotel."

"My Chryssie, what could take you there? Was it quite proper for you to go unattended to such a place?"

"I was not accused of any impropriety, but I was taken to task for going there in a 'Mother Shipton' omnibus. Also, I was reproved for not having a better complexion."

"My dear, you astonish me! Who could take such a liberty as to mention your personal appearance, which, if I am any judge, is all that it ought to be—and more! Who dared—who had the impertinence to speak to you about your complexion? Chryssie, surely it was not Madam?"

"No; but it was some one from India."

"It wasn't, no, it wasn't the 'Nabob cousin' that Mantie talked so much about when your father died—when the question of your adoption was being settled? She said he would certainly come back and claim you some day, because he was so fond of your mother when she was a little girl."

"And Mantie was right; it was Colonel Clarendon whom I went to see. Mantie spoke to me about him yesterday."

And then I told my uncle all that happened from first to last, and I showed him the presents I had received. He had a child's innocent delight in beautiful things, and he went into raptures over my sandal−wood desk, and Indian shawl, and lengths of flimsy embroidered muslin. But when he had duly examined and praised them all, he suddenly became very quiet, and looked grave, almost to sadness.

"What is the matter, uncle dear?" I asked, seeing how nervously his fingers twitched—a certain sign that he was sore troubled and exercised in his mind.

"My Chryssie, you must go to this Nabob. He is your nearest relation; he will do well for you. You will take your rightful place in society. No, my dear child, I shall not allow you to stay with me; I could not, faulty as I know I am, be so horribly, wickedly selfish."

"But you will not send me away from you, uncle?"

"Yes, I will even send you away, if need be, or run away myself, but I will never—never stand in your light, Chryssie."

"Uncle, are you sure that it would be standing in my light? It seemed all very fine at first, this vision of riches and splendour and power; I will not say how much I was tempted, for I am afraid I am naturally luxurious, and you brought me up in so much luxury. I felt as if I could easily live the life proposed to me, for my cousin said I might do good with my money; and I do not believe he would wish me to spend my time in fashionable idleness, or in frivolous amusements; but—"

"My Chryssie, you would be a lady of the land, for this Colonel Clarendon is well−born as well as rich."

"He is not particularly well−bred, uncle. He called the waiters of the hotel some very bad names. I have not heard so much abusive language since the day I lost my way in the bye streets of Shoreditch, trying to find a short cut to Hoxton."

"Bad language! Oh, that is shocking—so ungentlemanly as well as so wrong. Does he *swear*, Chryssie?"

"I am afraid he does. He said, 'What the—' as naturally as you say, 'Dear me!'"

"That is not quite swearing, my dear; though, mind, I think it is highly improper. I do not see what the devil has to do with us, unless, indeed, we are doing his work. And it is very bad taste, to say the least of it, to use his name so freely. It is next to invoking his help, though nobody, I suppose, means anything half so wicked. Still, I would not utterly condemn a man—a man who has had few religious privileges, and perhaps no religious training—because he makes use of such an expression. Habit goes a great way in such cases; and bad habits, I fear, become second nature far more easily than good ones."

"But, uncle, you do not defend such language?"

"Certainly not, my Chryssie; I never said such things, nor allowed any one in my employment to say them, if I knew it. I once dismissed a very satisfactory gardener because he used improper phrases. But then he took the sacred name of God in vain; that is much worse than appealing to the devil. There is a wide difference, my dear, between defending a custom which is undoubtedly reprehensible, and making allowances for those who have never been taught, or who have forgotten how to order their conversation aright. And I wonder whether it is more of a sin to say, 'What the *devil!*'—how dreadful it sounds !—than 'What the *dickens!*'—which sounds quite innocently? Though what thing or things the 'dickens' may be, I have not the least notion. I presume it does not

refer to Charles Dickens—'Boz,' you know. And 'What the mischief!' is only a polite way of referring to the author of mischief, I imagine. I do wonder whether it is worse—truly and morally worse—to say, 'What the devil!' than ' What the dickens!'"

And he seemed so lost in the philosophy of comparative swearing that for nearly five minutes I was left to my own reflections.

Then he said, "My dear, if this is the worst your cousin says, I am afraid it is no valid excuse for you refusing to live with him. For, you see, you might teach him better."

"Is he not too old to be taught?"

"Is he very old?"

"He looks *very* old. He is so dried up and so yellow. But I fancy he is not more than sixty."

"Ah, I have learned many things—some of the best things, too, since I was sixty. So, Chryssie, my child, you may be of great use to him."

"Let us say nothing more about him at present. I have told you now all that I know myself. Let us think over the subject quietly and prayerfully. We shall be 'guided' in this also if only we ask guidance. He said he was coming to see you, uncle! till then let us leave it. Too much talking never does any good."

My uncle assented, but I think he found it very difficult not to return to the subject. He tried to resume his reading, but the *poet laureate* had lost his charms; he set to work at his painting, but the light was rapidly failing, and he was on the point of using Prussian blue for sap green. "I will go out and take a turn, Chryssie," he said at length: "I'll go up the street, and round into the square, to see how the trees are getting on. The buds had visibly increased when I was last there. It is extremely mild this evening, and there will be another good hour of twilight, and what is more, there is a fine young moon. Yes, I'll go, my dear, the air will do me good; a walk, a solitary walk, is the best thing in the world when you are unsettled."

I thought so, too, especially in this case, for it was good for him to think the affair quietly over by himself. And the evening really was delightful, and there was, as he said, a crescent moon to lengthen out the twilight. And the streets in our quarter were very quiet at this hour; the square was as peaceful, if not as rural as the country, and the almond−trees in the enclosure were in beautiful blossom. Yes, a walk would do him good in every way. And so he went.

Left alone I sat down to think—to think, because I could not help it. I stirred up the fire, for in spite of the balmy atmosphere I felt chilly. I had made the room quite tidy; I had set my work−basket on the table ready for use as soon as the gas should be lighted. I wished there was something else to be done, for it was a relief to be ever so trivially occupied. I might have felt more desolate, more sorrowful, but I had never felt so perplexed, so anxious, since my secret betrothal to Louis Trafford, now nearly a year ago. Somehow, I could not help recalling—I know not by what subtle and electric chain of thought—that evening in the Borghese Gardens. Perhaps it was the tender glow in the clear western skies; or perhaps it was the magnetic breath of spring, which made even the London sparrows twitter in double−quick time; or it might be the faint sweet perfume of a little bunch of violets, which had lain beside my plate that day, at the ever−to−be−remembered luncheon at "Morley's." Except certain grassy terraces in the Protestant cemetery, there was no place in Rome—at that time, at least—that boasted such profusion of violets as the Borghese Gardens.

Alas for the Borghese Gardens! But they were nothing to me now, so far as associations went. That day—that encounter at Grosvenor Gate—had chased away the last dimness from my eyes. I saw Louis as he really was—clever, handsome, fascinating, debonair—but vain, weak, selfish, sordid, and false. The real Louis, who was then on the eve of marriage—poor deluded boy!—with Clementina Catherwood, I had never loved, for I had never known him. As for the ideal Louis who had been so dear to me, to whom I had given all my girlish heart, he had lived only in my imagination. He was a myth and splendid creation of my own, though he wore the outward semblance of the real living youth. I had been a miserable woman had I married Louis Trafford; I knew that now. What a blessing to me on this account had been the loss of Elmwood; for, had things remained as they were, I suppose—I don't know—but I suppose the engagement would have terminated in the usual way. I could not possibly determine how far Clementina's golden charms might have influenced my prudent lover; still, I do think he would have preferred the heiress of Elmwood, though her portion might be inferior; but, as he said to his mother, "he could not be expected to throw himself away on a girl without a sixpence, not if she had the pedigree of a Vere de Vere, and were as beautiful as Helen of Troy." So it was well for me, after all, that my heiress−ship

had vanished away. Were it not for my uncle and poor Mona, who wrote us the most dismal letters, I could be quite happy without it.

But thinking of my uncle and the unlucky Mrs. Dashwood Danvers brought me back again to the Nabob difficulty, and I was wondering whether any compromise would be possible, when there came the knock at the door that always now filled my heart with gladness. James Lascelles came in with so radiant a face, and so buoyant an air, that I felt sure that to him also something had happened, and something, too, on which he felicitated himself.

“What, all alone, Chryssie?” he said, before he took the seat I offered him.

“Yes; my uncle is gone for a stroll into Adelaide Square.”

“I am glad of it; I wanted to speak to you alone, Chryssie. I meant to ask you to come out with me, for the evening is most inviting. I have something to tell you.”

“My instinct told me that the moment you spoke. Something good, is it not?”

“Very good! good almost beyond belief! But *how* good it is depends very much upon you, Chryssie.”

“Upon me! But first tell the news.”

“I am taken into the firm of Devereux and Mowbray. Mr. Devereux is going out of it at the end of the year. Of course I am only junior partner, and shall have nothing like an equal share of the profits; but I have enough to live very comfortably and even handsomely. By−and−by, if I am prospered, my income will be larger—much larger. There is no reason why in a few years my position should not be as good as Mr. Mowbray's. If you were still the heiress of Elmwood, Chryssie, I should not dare to ask you to be my wife, as I do ask you now, feeling that the best part of my earthly happiness depends upon your answer. Chryssie! can you trust your life to me?”

My answer was, “I can, James; there is no one in the world whom I could so fully, so securely trust; but you know the one impediment—I cannot leave my uncle.”

“I shall not ask you to do so. He will have two instead of one to care for him, and to minister to him; that will be all the difference.”

“But I am not sure that he will like to be dependent even upon you.”

“You may work for him still if you like, Chryssie. I quite understand that a man can take from his own child what he could not possibly take from any other person. We will contrive not to wound his delicacy in any way. Only, my dear, my home and yours, if you will share it, shall be Mr. Perren's home so long as he lives.”

“And your mother, James?”

“I come to you, dearest, with my mother's blessings and her prayers for my success. She has been in my confidence for long. She is more than ready to call you daughter; she has always wished that you should be my wife. And strange to say—you will not be offended, Chryssie—but she has always believed that such would be the case. She says we exactly harmonise; we are made for each other. I hope you agree with her.”

“Since when have you cared for me, James?”

“Since I first knew you. And excepting for one brief period never lost hope. I should have spoken months ago, but my mother, who is as wise as she is good, counselled delay. Your heart was too sore, she said. I must wait till you had ceased to feel the cruel pain of desertion.”

“Are you content with second love?”

“More than content, darling. Second love is very often the best, though I am obliged to confess that mine is first, for my affections have never wandered nor wavered since—a mere lad of nineteen—I first saw you at Cuppage, and I said to myself very soon after that first meeting, 'if ever I marry, Chrystabel Tyndale shall be my wife.' And now, dear, I will keep my word, and redeem my promise to myself as soon as ever you please.”

Then we had a long quiet talk; those who have enjoyed similar “talks" will know all about it. Those who have not would perhaps think our conversation uninteresting, not to say foolish. At any rate, I am not going to repeat any part of it. Only I forgot all about the Nabob.

Yes, I actually forgot the occurrence of the morning, but suddenly it came back to me, and I began to tell James all about it.

“Then I am courting an heiress after all,” he said, with a real quiver of disappointment.

“By no means. I had partly made up my mind before; now I have quite made it up. I will not have the Nabob's money, nor any part of it, if I am to pay for it so dearly. I had rather be your wife, James, and remain my dear uncle's adopted child, than inherit all the wealth that has been promised me.”

And then we had a further talk about this matter, which I need not recount. Suffice to say that I succeeded in convincing James that I was not to be “jilted” a second time because a wealthy kinsman, whom I had never seen before to−day, wanted me at the head of his establishment. I had lost one lover for the want of money; I was not going to lose another for the sake of it.

What a story we had to tell my uncle, when at last he returned from his stroll! It was settled that James should at once see Colonel Clarendon; as my nearest and only relation, we all felt that so much was due to him.

Chapter 46. THE DEPUTATION

The next day Eleanor came to see me. It would be her farewell visit as Miss Mowbray, for she was to be married in three weeks' time. I told her how truly she had prophesied as regarded “things happening,” and that I should not now be greatly surprised at any event which might befal me. I was getting quite accustomed to startling incidents.

“Well, you know,” she said, in her own vivacious tone which was as sweet as it was lively, “I told you that your clouds would turn out their silver linings for you this year; but I did not know that anything so very extraordinary had as yet transpired. Is there anything fresh since I met you last at Hugo Silver's studio?”

“A great deal. Guess, Eleanor.”

“How can I guess? It can scarcely be that Elmwood has come back to you, for I know—that is, my brother has had some business at Northborough. He only returned last night, and he sent me here to−day to tell you something—something that would *please* you. But I will hear your news first. Have you had a fortune left to you, or have you received an unexceptional offer of marriage?”

“Both! That is to say, I have had a fortune offered me—on conditions which I could not accept. And I am engaged to be married.”

“My dear Chryssie, I am so glad! I wanted you to be as happy as I am myself. And who is the fortunate man?”

“Surely you must know, Eleanor?”

“I suppose I do. Of course I am aware of what has been taking place in the firm—my Uncle Devereux going out of business, and Mr. Lascelles coming in as junior partner. And I said to Walter, 'Now James Lascelles will marry, I should think.' And Walter said there was no reason why he should not; he would be quite justified in taking a wife; his income would be sufficient if he were not too ambitious. And then I remarked that I knew who James Lascelles would like, and who he would ask if he dared.”

“If he *dared*, Eleanor?”

“Yes, my dear. He knew as well as I did how you had vowed to live a single life, troubling yourself never more about the male part of creation. He knew how you were set against matrimony, how thoroughly you distrusted men, how you had prematurely used up your whole life−stock of affection, and were bankrupt in the inmost recesses of your heart, how—”

“For mercy's sake, Eleanor, stop! do not remind me of all the foolish speeches I have made. When I said I would never marry, of course I thought I never should. I fancied I had loved and lost; I felt as if all that sort of thing was over and done with. My love for Louis Trafford was dead—dead, and cold, and stark, and I buried it out of sight, and I made the grave deep, and I beat down the earth upon what was hidden there, left to moulder into dust; and I came away, feeling that I should never want to go back to it any more. And I thought—I felt sure that my heart, though it ached with its sense of emptiness, would never, never be filled again as it was filled in the old happy days before disenchantment came.”

“And is it filled in the same way?”

“No, thank God, no! This love is as unlike the other—which, after all, never was love, only a hectic phantom calling itself by love's name—as unlike my romantic sentiment for Louis Trafford as—as—the sun is unlike a solar lamp. That pseudo−love grew out of childish fascination, and out of an intense admiration—an inexperienced girl's admiration for mere outward beauty and versatility of talent. Then I believe it is so natural to a woman to love any one whom she thinks loves her, and to regard with especial favour the person who first awakens in her that affection which she imagines is to influence her whole career. *This* love—and now I know the true from the false—is founded on respect, esteem, and reverence. *This* love I took—I seized myself; *this* love God gives me. And I thank Him for it, as for the most precious gift, save one, which He has ever bestowed upon me.”

“And that one?”

“Is the knowledge of Himself through the faith and love which He and only He gave.”

“You are right. Oh, Chryssie, the love which God Himself gives and blesses must be very sweet and rich. I too, have learnt by painful experience to know the fine gold from the mere electroplate. When you have once had base

coin passed upon you, you are sure to learn past doubting how the true metal rings. Ah, I knew the prince, the veritable prince would come!”

“But I have another story to tell you; James said might tell *you*, for I was doubtful whether I should be justified in speaking about the affair, so I asked him.” And then I related the story of my late experiences at Morley's Hotel.

“Well, my dear,” said Eleanor, when we had talked the matter well over, “I hope your Nabob cousin will not throw you over entirely because you will not sacrifice yourself to him. He should have claimed you years ago; if he had done his duty then, you would now be bound to him by all the ties which link you to Mr. Perren. 'Bluid's thicker na' water,' the Scotch say, but I am sure I could not love a kinsman at first sight just because we were akin. I can understand Mr. Perren's little difficulty; he would feel as if he were a monster of selfishness to keep you in poverty and obscurity for his own comfort's sake, when you had only to stretch out your hand and take all that heart could wish, so far as this world's goods are concerned. But this marriage settles it all most delightfully. It is as good as the end of a story—'and they lived happy ever afterwards.'“

“That remains to be proved. James has promised never to separate me from my uncle; my home, be it a mansion or a cottage, is always to be his; and he will allow me still to go on with my painting in order that I may earn enough for all my uncle's little needs. It will not be much that he will require, for a man of simpler habits one could scarcely find; but much as he likes and respects James, he would not be quite comfortable to depend upon him, as he depends on me, save for the small income he earns by means of Mr. Silver. And that cannot go on long, his sight fails very fast, and he could not quite manage without a little help from me. I shall count it a privilege to be allowed to provide by my own labour for one to whom I owe all the ability I possess.”

“Suppose I tell you there will be no need of it, that Mr. Perren will not in future be dependent upon any one for anything except for that love and tenderness which you will so surely yield him?”

“You speak in riddles, Eleanor?”

“I don't want to be mysterious; and, after all, there is not much to recount. After your wonderful narrations, mine sinks into little more than nothing. I came here charged, as I fancied, with great and good news; I am not sure that you will think so much of it, as if I had brought it the day before yesterday, or before Mantie's letter reached you.”

“Nevertheless, I am getting impatient. Is it Northborough news?”

“That is just what it is. Walter has been to Northborough, as you know, and he found that the Bank affairs were just being finally adjusted. Your uncle's noble conduct had greatly facilitated so speedy a settlement, and it was agreed on all hands that out of the thousands which he had relinquished, something ought to be returned to him. The most eminent men of the town and of the county, the chief creditors—everybody, indeed—rich and poor, high and low—to whom the subject was mentioned, fell in with the idea. There was not one dissentient voice. It was voted unanimously, and carried with applause, at a meeting that was very much like a town's meeting, Walter said, that the honourable and upright conduct of Mr. Matthew Perren, late of Elmwood, called not merely for respectful and hearty commendation, but for some substantial tribute, which should attest the hearty esteem and the admiration of his friends and neighbours. And so it was settled that the county of Northshire, and especially the town of Northborough, should present him with an annuity of £100 per annum. Mr. Perren will receive formal notification of this to−morrow morning, and also an address signed by—I forget how many people, testifying their regard and esteem, and the sincere pleasure it gives them to render to one so worthy some slight expression of the public sentiment towards him. That is not exactly how it is put, but that is what it means. And Walter thought I had better come to you to−day and tell you all about it, that you might prepare your uncle for what is coming upon him. For even a happy surprise is a sort of shock, and when a man is as old as Mr. Perren such surprises are better avoided. At any rate, dear, both Walter and I thought you ought to know, and you can judge for yourself as to the expediency of forestalling to−morrow morning's post. Walter will tell Mr. Lascelles—he has told him by this time; perhaps he will come in this evening and help you with the disclosure.”

I thought it so probable that I determined not to tell my uncle of his good fortune till James was present to share the pleasure with us. Indeed, I knew James would come unless prevented by business, for the deeds of partnership, already drawn up, were to be signed that morning at the office of Devereux and Mowbray's lawyer in Lincoln's Inn Fields; and he had promised to run in, if only for a quarter of an hour, that we might be among the first to congratulate him as junior partner. The whole affair had really been concluded several days before, only

they had to wait for Mr. Mowbray's return from the North in order to complete the final act.

I need scarcely tell you how overpowered the dear old man was, when, as quietly as we could, we told him what the Northborough folk had been doing. I think we all felt that the money was little in comparison with the testimony rendered to his name.

“For once,” said James, “simple truth and inviolable integrity win the day; the world is better than cynics say.”

“There is no reason why I should not accept this annuity, is there?” said Mr. Perren, turning to James.

“On the contrary, there is every reason why you should accept it. It comes to you unsolicited, unexpected even. Every one to whom the affair was mentioned responded so heartily, Mr. Mowbray tells me, that a much larger sum might have been secured; but those who were your oldest and truest friends thought that it would be better, for many reasons, simply to do what was first intended; and they thought, too, it would be more in accordance with your own wish.”

“They thought truly. A hundred a year seems to me now quite a magnificent income, for I have found out how little I really need to keep me in health and happiness. And I have found out many other things besides, the best thing of all being the peace and joy that God gives to those who trust in Him, and are willing to take just as much or as little of outward comfort as He pleases. Now I *know* that God is faithful, for I have proved it. He has brought me through sore troubles, and now He sets me once more in a wealthy place. I thank my friends at Northborough—how heartily I thank them words of mine can never tell; but above all and before all I thank my heavenly Father from whom the blessing really comes; for it was He who inclined the hearts of the people to do me this unlooked−for honour and service. It is the joy of joys to take all things from His hand. Even the bitter is sweet when He stands by and bids us drink of the cup which He once, through His Son, drained to the dregs for us. Oh, yes, children, it is better far to

'Walk in the dark with God,

Than go alone in the light.'

“'Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him'“

Next morning arrived the important letter. The address was to come later in the day; and was to be presented by two gentlemen, old friends of the Elmwood family, who were taking the journey up to town chiefly that they might have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Perren, and the honour of placing in his hands the testimonial which he so well deserved. They would be with us by four o'clock.

So I had to hold an immediate cabinet council with Mrs. Betts, for a luncheon of some sort must be composed for the worthy gentlemen who travelled so far on our account. And there was nothing for it but setting to work myself, for Mrs. Betts's notions of what was “genteel" were rather eccentric, and savoured, as gentility always does, more or less of vulgarity. So I sent Mr. Perren out to give the necessary orders, and took upon myself the *onus* of preparation. Of course I did not buy peaches and pineapples, or try to serve up any of the wonderful little *plats* which had charmed me so much at the Colonel's banquet; but I managed to extemporise a simple yet dainty repast, which might serve either for dinner or luncheon, as the exigencies of our friends required, and which Mrs. Betts declared was as beautiful as the Lord Mayor's feast at Guildhall—a sight once seen by her in the days of her long past youth, and still remembered with much pride.

“For you see, Miss Tyndale,” she said, “it showed me what was what, and I've knowed a elegant set−out since!”

We spent a very pleasant afternoon with our welcome guests, and Mr. Mowbray and James and Eleanor joined us before the dessert was set on the table, and therefore in time to hear the *address* read by Mr. Whittingham, the elder of the two gentlemen, who called themselves “the deputation”! But the address was not all, though it was a very handsome affair, being beautifully engrossed on parchment, and contained in a substantial, velvet−lined oaken case, with ormolu clamps and lock and hinges. There was still another box, over which Mr. Clough kept zealous watch and ward. Mr. Whittingham, as the head of “the deputation,” had read the address, but he had bargained for the honour and pleasure of presenting the contents of the case before him. And the address having been formally placed in my uncle's hands, the business of the meeting proceeded. Mr. Clough rose and said that a few friends had felt that by no means had enough been done to express the unqualified feeling which had prompted the idea, so happily carried out, of proving to Mr. Perren the respect and sympathy and affection of those with whom he had been so many years associated. No words could speak their sorrow at seeing Elmwood, for centuries the home of the Perrens, pass into alien hands; but on so painful a subject they would not dwell. Mr.

Perren, in common with others, who, however, had suffered less than he, was the victim of a series of fraudulent and complicated speculations, which had brought to grief and shame some of the most honoured and hitherto trusted names in the county. It only remained to present him with a small token of their regard, which he could keep constantly in sight, and which should frequently remind him of the kindly feeling of his old neighbours, and testify to the affectionate and honourable remembrance in which his name was held.

Mr. Clough then solemnly opened the case, and took therefrom a handsome and massive silver inkstand, of most chaste and exquisite workmanship, and bearing on it a suitable inscription, which, as it only embodied the sentiments already referred to, need not be given here. Also a gold *snuff−box*, the gift of the Stanbridge folk, who, hearing of the inkstand, resolved not to be behind the Northborough people. This offering, though smaller than the other, was a very costly one; it was richly embossed and chased; my uncle's crest was engraved on the lid, inside of which was fixed a charmingly executed little landscape—or seascape—on ivory, of the bay and its headlands, as seen from the garden−terraces of Elmwood; the only drawback being that my uncle never took snuff, and hated it about as much as my Indian cousin seemed to like it. It would be, however, a very precious memento of the days when “gathering clouds” were around us, and when we imagined not only that the days were dark, but that “friends were few.” Involuntarily, as I handled the splendid gifts, I thought of the evening when, cold, wearied, desolate, despairing, I had sat on the doorstep in the fog, feeling that “all these things were against me.” That was the dark hour before dawn! Surely I should never, never distrust my gracious Father more; for, in spite of all my apprehensions, no real harm had ever come near me, no trouble greater than I could bear had ever befallen me.

I resolved that the snuff−box should stand always on my uncle's dressing−table, when once we were settled in the new home, about which James and I had already begun to think and talk.

Late in the evening our kind friends left us, and my uncle was far less exhausted than I had feared he would be after the unexampled excitement of the last twenty−four hours. He slept well, he told me next morning, and, indeed, he looked better and more like the Matthew Perren of Elmwood than he had been since Aunt Judith's fatal illness. We were so happy conversing about past events and forming our plans that we quite forgot all about the Nabob cousin, who had promised to come and see us, till I was reminded of him by the sandal−wood desk, which was rather in the way in our small parlour.

I wished he would either come or let us know that he meant to stay away; for I was most anxious to get to Clapham to see Mrs. Trafford, who had not yet ventured far from home. Now at last I was going to have a mother of my own, and the very one I should have chosen had I been permitted the choice of all the mothers of Christendom. And then I bethought myself of Louis's taunt, that I was more in love with his mother than with himself and that I might even yet become her daughter−in−law. It was a bitter jest as Louis spoke it; but it was a true word for all that. I wondered what Louis would say when heard that James and I were to be married. He would not like it I fancied; for, though he had rejected me himself he would not wish me to belong to his brother, whom he so greatly despised, and towards whom he entertained so unaccountable an antipathy. It mattered not at all, however, whether he approved or disapproved. The only two persons whom we had to consult−James's mother and my adopted father—were rejoicing in the thought of our union. Our own hearts spoke out to us that we were doing well, and, above all, we trusted that we had God's blessing.

James had called on Colonel Clarendon and found him out; but we did not much concern ourselves about that. It was merely as a matter of courtesy that James intended in person to announce the engagement. We only wished he would pay us the promised, or, as it seemed to us, rather the threatened visit, and then leave us in peace to go our own way as he went his.

I was the more annoyed as the days went on, and no Colonel appeared, because James had seen a house at Clapham that he thought would suit us, and he wanted me to go over it before he commenced negotiations with the agent; and to leave my uncle to encounter the enemy alone was not to be thought of.

At length came a polite note from Colonel Clarendon. He had been confined to his room with an attack of gout, and he was so far recovered that he would wait upon us next day soon after noon. And now that the formidable interview was fixed and close at hand, I began to be afraid of my kinsman's fiery temper, and most heartily I wished it were all over. The same evening I learned that in three days' time Louis and Miss Catherwood would be married at St. George's, Hanover Square; and I determined to go with Eleanor, and, unseen myself, behold the ceremony, which was to be conducted on the most magnificent scale and with unexampled brilliancy. An earl's daughter was to be married in the same place on the same morning an hour earlier, and Clementina had

announced her intention of “outshining Lady Lucy.” Mrs. Trafford was invited to the wedding, but she excused herself. James was not asked at all.

Chapter 47. A CHAPTER OF WEDDINGS

The Colonel came in great state, bringing with him two native servants, who thundered at our door till all the street was roused, and our own house—according to Mary Ann—shaken to the foundations. My uncle received our visitor rather ceremoniously, as was his habit with strangers; for my own part I had scarcely made up my mind how to behave, when, to my extreme consternation, I was seized and kissed as freely as if my kinsman and I were father and daughter.

Mr. Perren stood aghast, and was about to protest, when the Colonel exclaimed, “Did you think I had thrown you over, eh, gipsy? Had a sharp touch this time, I can tell you! Threw a boot−jack, and a glass of water, and an Indian god at my fellow's head—all the fault of your confounded climate. Well, now you puss, how did you get home the other day?”

Whether the climate was confounded or not I was, for the exceeding freedom of my cousin's address fairly took away my breath. He had evidently begun to look upon me as personal property, and never dreamed of my resisting the appropriation.

“Well, now!” he continued, after a pause, “what have you and this most excellent old gentleman settled between yourselves? When are you coming to me, my princess? I am bargaining for a house in Park Lane. Now, you sir, what will you take to relinquish your claim, taking it for granted that you have a claim upon my cousin Chrystabel?”

My dear uncle drew himself up with the gesture I knew so well, and replied with dignity, “I make no pretensions to any claim upon Miss Tyndale. She has been the source of much happiness to me, and I will not in any way interfere with her interests. Miss Tyndale has been accustomed to judge and to act for herself; she will now determine for herself.”

“Very sensibly spoken!” returned the Colonel; “of course you have no real claim, but then you have been very good to the girl, there's no denying, and you'll find me generous. A few hundreds a year, more or less, are nothing to me. I'll settle a handsome sum upon you, sir; and you can live near us, and see Chrystabel pretty often. So that's all happily arranged!”

And he rubbed his yellow hands with a complacent air that took away all my patience.

“I beg your pardon, cousin,” I said, “but I have not consented to any arrangement. And, indeed, putting Mr. Perren out of the question, it is quite impossible for me to accede to your proposition. I cannot take up my residence with you; I have another engagement.”

“What sort of an engagement, Cousin Chrystabel?”

“I am going to be married!”

“Going to be married!” he roared, as he had roared at the hotel−waiters. “Why, I have made up my mind, fully made it up, *to marry you myself!* I thought the chaperone system might be inconvenient, and I didn't see why I shouldn't have a handsome young wife of my own to head my table, and wear the richest dresses and the finest jewels in London. You shall be presented on your marriage, and I'll undertake that no lady at court shall be able to vie with you in any one particular. The Queen and the princesses will turn pale when they see your diamonds—Mrs. Colonel Clarendon's diamonds!”

He spoke with so much earnestness, and seemed so thoroughly to ignore anything like scruples on my part, that I could not help laughing. And then the idea of marrying that dried−up, shrivelled anatomy, who looked as if he had been nourished from his infancy on sovereigns and ingots of the precious metal, and who would probably throw the clothes−brush or any other convenient missile at me as soon as ever he had grown accustomed to his bride! I felt greatly inclined to enact the lady in “the Laird o' Cockpen”; and I did make a curtsey and thank him for the honour he purposed conferring on me, but I was compelled to refuse his offer.

“I am not accustomed to be refused,” he said, sturdily, his face growing very purple. “You can't be such an absolute idiot as to *refuse* what nine−tenths of the women in London would jump at. Mr. Perren, you are not romantic, I presume; you must know something of the ways of the world; use your influence with this infatuated young woman who flings away such a chance as she will *never* have again; persuade her to be reasonable.”

“You must forgive me, Colonel,” replied my uncle, “if I say that her refusal *is* perfectly reasonable. Such a

marriage would be preposterous, even were there no impediments!”

“And why preposterous, sir?” asked my cousin so fiercely that Mr. Perren nearly jumped off his chair. But he held to his text, nevertheless.

“Because, sir, of the immense disparity of years; you are old enough to be my Chryssie's grandfather; also—”

“And what are you, I should like to know, you miserable old driveller? You are older than I am by a couple of lustres, I'll swear!”

“You need not swear, Colonel; I shall not deny my age. I am probably ten or a dozen years older than yourself. But then I am not aspiring to the hand of a young lady of eighteen. I might be Miss Tyndale's grandfather, but she is good enough to give me the affection of a daughter.”

“Disparity be hanged!” growled the incensed Nabob. “What's disparity on the husband's side, I should like to know? What's forty or fifty years between man and wife, when the marriage settlements are all that can be wished? Dear me! the girls come out to India on purpose to marry money, and they don't mind about age, or any such nonsense. Better be an old man's darling, Miss Chryssie, than a young man's snarling!”

“But, cousin, even if I could prevail upon myself to make a mere marriage of expediency, I am engaged to another person.”

“I'll buy him off!”

“Thank you; but I prefer that he should not be bought off. I love him, and I mean to marry him.”

“Love—bosh—utter bosh—rubbish!”

“Did you not love your wife, Colonel Clarendon?”

His face changed a little, and he made no reply. After a few minutes' silence he resumed.

“Then you will not have me, Cousin Chrystabel? Think well what you say, for this is the last time of asking.”

“No, cousin, I will not have you, for I love James Lascelles, and even if he did not exist, I could never love you as a wife should love her husband. I am sorry to displease you, but I cannot give you any other answer.”

“You never told me the other day that you were going to be married. You said nothing about a sweetheart then! You women can't be candid.”

“I could not tell you, because there was then no engagement between Mr. Lascelles and myself.”

And I told him exactly how things had happened. I was determined that he should find at least one woman who could be candid.

“I wish I had seen the young fellow!” he grumbled. “Of course he's a pauper?”

“Not a pauper certainly, but I dare say you would consider him very poor. We, however, are quite content; we do not care about being rich.”

“The more fools you! And to think you live in such a hole as this, and refuse to be at the head of my establishment! Are you going to set up housekeeping here, or are you going into some other out−of−the−way hole?”

“We are going into a much nicer house than this, and into a much better neighbourhood. Here we are only in apartments, though most of the furniture is our own.”

“Ugh!” And the Nabob looked round with an expression of intensest disgust. “Well! there's no accounting for tastes, '*chacun à son goût* ' as the French folk say, and your *goût* seems to be for penury, obscurity, and everything else that is disagreeable. Well, good−bye, Cousin Chrystabel. I wish you would have said *'yes!'* for I do really like you; I know I shall not find any one else nearly so much to my mind! I don't bear you malice, though; and if you and the young fellow fancy you can't live without each other, the best thing you can do is to marry, and to go in for squalling children, all the washing done at home, and perpetual cold mutton without pickles! That is the middle−class matrimonial Elysium in England, I believe! *Ugh!*“

“I do not feel that I have any right to keep this,” I said, touching the *escritoire;* “nor yet the other presents, with which I returned laden the other day.”

“Madam!” And he looked now really angry. “I never take back what once I have presented. You insult me! Do you suppose I was such a miserable cur as to give you *bribes*? You will be good enough to keep your own. If you returned the trash I should burn it, destroy it, somehow.”

I begged his pardon, and remarked that I had not intended to insult him, only to act in accordance with the usages of English society, which made a point of honour of returning presents given under false impressions. He immediately consigned English society to a place which shall be nameless, and denied having given me “the

rubbish" under any impressions whatever. "And what is more," he continued, "I shall give you whatever I please! Things are come to a pretty pass if I can't give my cousin's only child—and she my only relative in all the wide world—a few trumpery shawls, and muslins, and ornaments. So I shall send you your wedding−dress, mind! I've got some worked muslin that a duchess might cry her eyes out for; and I've got some dragon china that I detest, I'll give it you; and there are some gauzes you may as well have, they are only in my way. I give them, and you take them, to prove that we neither of us bear malice. Good−bye, cousin; tell your young man to come and see me. If he isn't good enough for you I'll shoot him!"

And he hobbled off to his carriage, growling all the way he went.

And that very night quite late came an immense package addressed to Miss Tyndale. It contained the promised "wedding−dress"—a muslin robe fit for a princess; a lot of inferior, but still beautiful, muslins, and costly gold and silver tissues, fabrics of various sorts, two more shawls, a lot of embroidered pocket−handkerchiefs, several gold chains, a magnificent *parure* of emeralds, carved ivory toys, inlaid boxes, and a moss−agate tazza, which I thought particularly beautiful. Mrs. Betts, I think, came to the conclusion that I must be a princess in disguise. There was a note accompanying the chest, which said: "Cousin Chrystabel! if you return anything I send you, I'll burn it in the middle of Trafalgar Square! I only send you what I don't want, and what I brought over on purpose for you. You are quite right not to marry me; it is I who am the fool, not you. If you won't have me for a husband, perhaps you will take me for 'uncle' No. 2? That sounds better than 'cousin,' considering the *disparity* of years between us."

"The Colonel's bark is far worse than his bite," said my uncle, when he had read my eccentric relative's note. "You'll have to keep these things, my Chryssie; but really I do not know where we shall put them all."

"What do you say to our taking the drawing−room apartments, which are just empty? That would give us plenty of room, and it would be better than moving altogether, as we planned last night. It seems scarcely worth while to make the change for so short a time; and really Mrs. Betts has been very kind to us. I do not know that we could have fallen into better hands."

So we agreed to take the "drawing−room set," as Mrs. Betts called the first−floor and part of the second, greatly to that lady's satisfaction; for her husband—an obscure individual, who cleaned the knives and boots, and ran on errands, and made himself generally useful—had prophesied our speedy exodus.

"But, uncle," I said, the last thing before we went to bed, "do you not think I might give Eleanor some of these robes, and one of the shawls? I shall feel like a dog in the manger if I keep them all to myself."

And my uncle thought I might so dispose of the superfluity of my treasures: and I began to feel quite in charity with my Nabob cousin. It would be delightful to make presents to Eleanor, and I knew she had a tremendous *penchant* for real Indian muslins.

I had written to Eleanor to meet me at St. George's, and there I found her at the appointed time. We took our places in the gallery, where we could see the whole pageant, without much probability of ourselves being seen, or, at least, recognised, among the throng of spectators. We had not long to wait; the bridegroom's party soon appeared, and I heard all around me speculations as to which of the gentlemen was the "happy man." Louis himself looked wretched, disgusted with himself, and with everybody and everything about him; also he looked ridiculously youthful to be taking upon himself the responsibilities of a husband. His "best man," whom I had never seen before, looked far sprightlier and far more bridegroom−like than himself. In another minute came the bride's procession. Up the aisle came Clementina, leaning on the arm of an improvised father. I scarcely know what she wore, but I think her dress was white lace over white satin, and of course there were the inevitable orange blossoms and other bridal flowers, and the bridal veil, which I knew represented a considerable sum of money. Really, Clementina looked a great deal better in her usual showy array than in her snowy bridal finery. White evidently misbecame her, for she looked old, and worn, and faded enough to be her bridegroom's mother. She looked plainer, too, than ever, and so vulgar that she vulgarised the elegant attire, which was quite in *Madame Elise'*s best style. No wonder. *Madame* had had *carte blanche,* and she had exerted herself accordingly; and it was no fault of hers that the bride appeared in the costume suitable to eighteen years of age, rather than that of thirty−five. But then *Madame* had not seen the bridegroom.

And Clementina looked every inch forty as she stood by the side of the boy to whom she was about to vow love, honour, and subjection.

It was altogether a melancholy sight; and so every one thought it, and most uncomplimentary were the remarks

and comments we overheard from the crowd as the bridal party passed away. “A man may not marry his grandmother,” said one woman, significantly, as the newly−made wife swept by. “He's bin and sold hisself, I guess,” said a pert young crossing−sweeper. “Won't she be jealous of him?” was another speech from one nursemaid to another; “won't she lead him a life? what a shame to marry such a lad as that; he ought to be at school learning his lessons!” I forgot to say that Madam was present, looking hideous in a modern bonnet and a rich Persian shawl; and, as every one injuriously supposed, in a wig! the unlucky old woman's hair *would not* turn grey; and the contrast between the wizened face and the dark curls was something so unnatural as to be horrible. When I pointed her out to Eleanor, she said, “What a hideous old lady! and you say she was a beauty once! and oh, what an evil expression; I should think Catherine de' Medici was like that, only handsome.”

So Louis was married, and I had seen him married without a pang of regret, save on his own account. I should have rejoiced had he married suitably, and for no unworthy motives.

Eleanor returned home with me, and as the day turned out wet, and her brother was from home, she stayed all night with me. Next morning we had all the Indian treasures spread out in the drawing−room, and Eleanor was selecting the embroidered muslin, and the shawl she liked best, when “Mrs. Trafford” was announced! Of course I expected to see my mother−in−law elect, though I rather wondered at her temerity in venturing so far on so unfavourable a day—for about every half hour the rain came down in floods.

Fancy my astonishment, my dismay, when Madam made her appearance. That she had come to plague us I was certain, but happily I was past her plaguing now.

“Well, Matthew Perren, I am come to see how you are getting on,” said Madam, in her harshest voice.

“I am getting on very well, thank you, Mrs. Trafford,” replied my uncle, looking earnestly into the world−weary face of his old love.

I knew that he was thinking that it was well for us both that we were fairly quit of the Cuppage Traffords.

“I am glad to hear it, Matthew,” said “Julia.” Oh, what a Julia! Then turning to me, “Well, Chryssie, my dear, and how are you, too? I did hear you were gone out for a governess or a ladies'−maid, or something of that sort.”

“You were wrongly informed. I have not been out in any capacity, though I did think seriously of keeping a crockery shop.”

“A crockery shop! Why not go into the greengrocery line at once?”

“Because I do not understand greengrocery, and I have a taste for pottery and old china.”

“Why, that's real dragon china! Is that part of your stock? You look as if you had been to Japan and China, and returned by way of India! What a set−out! Oh, that muslin! I never saw one like it all the time I was in India. It's fit for a princess! What are *you* going to do with it?”

“I am going to be married in it, I believe.”

“*Married!* to whom? Louis *is* married, and past praying for.”

“Past praying for!” I thought so indeed.

“Of course I was not thinking of Louis. That boy and girl folly came to nothing a year ago, as I need not tell you. I am truly thankful that it did. If, as I believe was the case, you interfered, I am most grateful; my best friend could not have done me a greater kindness. I am going to marry James Lascelles.”

She burst into a discordant laugh. “Well, now, that really is amusing! And are you going to be married in that dress?”

“I really am. It looks incongruous, you think, in my position, and with my prospects? But it is a present—as is everything else you are wondering at; my cousin, Colonel Clarendon, has returned from India, and these are his wedding gifts!”

Her face fell. “You don't mean to tell me you are related to Colonel Clarendon?”

“I am his nearest—nay! I am his only relative.”

“He had a son!”

“He is dead. Of the Clarendons, only he and I remain.”

“Why, I knew him very well years ago; and he was so rich then, he did not know what to do with his money. Since then, they said, he has gone on getting richer and richer. I should not wonder if he is worth several millions!”

“Nor I either! He seems to be fabulously wealthy; it is like living in the 'Arabian Nights' to talk to him.”

“And are you to have all his money?”

“He has not said so. I do not expect it. Probably these presents are all I shall receive from him.”

“You know better than that!” she hissed; “why, these things are worth hundreds!” She had not seen the emeralds. “He would never load you with such costly gifts if he didn't mean to make you his heiress. And your fortune will be *twice* as much as Clementina's, and she's ugly and ill−tempered, and has that vulgar mother! Oh! I wish I had known! Why did you not say you had expectations? And I *hate James Lascelles!* Do give me a glass of wine or a little brandy, if you have any. I feel ill.”

And, indeed, she looked so. I flew to fetch my little stock of Cognac, which I kept in a medicine−bottle for purely medicinal purposes. The bottle, which had already lasted us for nearly twelve months, was not half emptied; Madam finished it as if it were water. “I hate falseness!” she said, as she swept from the room, with her most evil glance. And we saw her no more for that season.

Eleanor Mowbray became Mrs. Maynard on the 15th April, and I was one of her six bridesmaids. Hers has been a truly blessed married life. Then I began seriously to consider my own affairs. We took the house at Clapham—it bordered on the Common—and we set to work to furnish it. But I would not have my uncle disappointed of his seaside trip, and I was resolved that he should have me all to himself once more. So we went down to Littlehampton early in June, and had a quiet month there, James coming to us regularly on Saturday afternoon, and going back to town on Monday morning. Oh! it was good to see the glorious sea once more, though it was not our own broad, restless German Ocean.

It was late in August when we were married at a certain Congregational church in Camden Town. My uncle gave me away, and the Colonel came to the wedding and gave me “more of his rubbish.” And when we went away into Cornwall for our wedding tour, he tossed a packet into my lap, growling out that the Clarendons never went into anybody's house empty−handed, and never should while he lived to uphold the dignity of the family.

That packet contained £5,000!

Chapter 48. CONCLUSION

Two quiet, uneventful years followed. Mrs. James Trafford refused to live entirely with us; but she took lodgings at so short a distance that she could come to us or we could go to her at any hour, without concerning ourselves very much about the weather. The new firm of “Mowbray and Lascelles” prospered. James always did thoroughly what he set himself to do, and I heard on all hands that he was an excellent man of business, and would undoubtedly, should life and health be granted, be one day a wealthy man. As it was we had enough and to spare, and we did not pretend to make a grand appearance. I began housekeeping with only one servant, though before the year was quite out I had to engage a second. Neither did my dear husband give up the work in which he had been engaged almost from his boyhood. Some hours in every week he set apart for his poor people, and there were few Sunday evenings in which he did not preach to some motley assembly who would never have been persuaded to enter any regular place of worship—lost sheep in the wilderness of the great metropolis!

“Why don't you have a place for yourself, Mr. Lascelles?” asked a good man of my husband one day.

“Because,” he replied, “I believe in a settled and appointed ministry, and I think I do more good as general purveyor than if I took my standing as an authorised preacher of the Gospel. I go to those who would regard me with suspicion if I came to them with a white necktie or put Rev. before my name, and I reach a class that ministers, as such, scarcely ever reach. There is abundance of church−room for these London heathen, if they can only be prevailed upon to occupy it; and I find, as a rule, that no sooner is the first faint flame of a higher life kindled in their souls—no sooner, indeed, do they begin to consider themselves as creatures with souls—than they fall into church−going habits, and connect themselves regularly or irregularly with some settled congregation. And so they are gathered into the appointed folds, and I and my brother evangelists still look after the lost, stolen, and strayed. It seems to me that God's cause is best served by the minister and the evangelist each doing his own work, and the idea, which in some quarters prevails, that the evangelist should ever supersede the pastor, whose whole life is devoted to the flock, is, I feel assured, erroneous and fraught with mischief.”

During these two years we were on very good terms with Colonel Clarendon; we were not *intimately* associated, because we necessarily revolved in very different spheres. But he came sometimes to Clapham, and he took a great liking to my husband, and once he said to me, “Now, Chryssie, I really believe there is a *something* in Christianity which I never suspected before. I begin to see that it has in it that which it professes to have—a hidden strength, an inner and indestructible life, which has its source in God Himself.”

Very quietly, but I trust very deeply, James's influence told on the irascible Nabob. It was too late now to correct the habits of a lifetime, but they were greatly modified. The rage of anger was suppressed, the fiery will was curbed; fewer and fewer expletives garnished his conversation, and at length they entirely disappeared. When my first baby was born the Colonel was one of my earliest visitors, and he asked at once to see “the little squaller.” Now I had discreetly sent my tiny son out of the way, for I thought my Nabob cousin—I never could get into the way of calling him uncle—would not take much pleasure in an infant whose age was to be counted more by days than by weeks. “Baby” was an inestimable jewel to his father and to myself, but I wished to guard against the infatuation which sometimes converts fond parents into patent nuisances, I tried to remember that there were thousands of babies in the world, and that mine was only one of a multitude, and that, excepting to ourselves, he could not possibly become the centre of attraction. And I inwardly resolved to do my “baby−worship” in private.

But as soon as Colonel Clarendon had satisfied himself that I was getting well as fast as possible he asked for the “squaller.”

“You will not care to see him,” said I; “tiny babies are only interesting to their mammas and papas; and ours, I suppose, is nothing out of the common way, though, of course, nurse assures me she has not had a finer child in her arms these ten years. And I am quite inclined to believe her, but then I shall try not to be angry with any indifferent person who pooh−poohs the assertion.”

“Nevertheless, I want to see the young gentleman, Cousin Chrystabel.”

So the young gentleman was brought in, and to my extreme distress the Colonel took him from his nurse into his own arms.

“Bless you, ma'am, don't you be frightened!” said nurse, beholding my pale, apprehensive countenance; “the gentleman knows how to handle a child.”

And so indeed he did! The old man held my baby in right fatherly fashion—far more naturally, indeed, than James held him; for of course my husband could not be expected to understand that of which he had as yet no experience, and the instincts of paternity and maternity are, in the beginning, of a very different type and complexion. But Colonel Clarendon nursed my baby as deftly as he smoked his hookah; and then I remembered that he was not a crusty old bachelor, but a widower, and that he had once had a fair−haired laddie of his own. And I took courage, and felt that there was no cause to fear.

“Chryssie!” he said at length, “have you decided upon a name for this little fellow?”

“Of course, we shall call him *James.*“

“There is no 'of course' that I can see. Call your next boy James, and let this one be christened 'Francis Richard Clarendon,' and call him 'Frank'—that is what I was called, as long as there was any one in the world who had a right to call me by my Christian name.”

“I must ask my husband,” I replied, for already we had agreed that the beloved paternal appellation must be perpetuated. And I could not be quite sure that James would willingly forego his right.

“Well, my dear, I will not press it,” said the Colonel; “but you will greatly please me by letting the boy bear my name. And may he be, as I doubt not he will be, a far better man than his namesake. For, you see, Chryssie, I never had godly parents; and I went out to India in my youth, when India was not to Englishmen what it is today, and I came under certain influences that were not of the best sort; and so I grew to be a fiery, ill−conditioned, pagan old Nabob. Thank God, I know a little better now, though I am still half a heathen, I am afraid.”

James did not object, and our boy was accordingly baptized “Francis Richard Clarendon.” When he grew out of babyhood—and that was when his brother came—he was promoted from “baby” to “Frank.” But the poor Nabob never heard him answer to the name, and was in his grave when our second boy, James, was born. I inherited a large portion, though not the whole, of his great wealth; some of it was left to charitable institutions in London, and a goodly sum was devoted to certain schools in India. But we were so rich that at first James and I felt fairly frightened and greatly concerned for our responsibilities.

A few more months passed, and we got used to our position. We had a well−appointed, though not magnificent establishment, and we left the house in which we had lived since our marriage for one far larger and more convenient, and having the advantage of extensive gardens and grounds. I had missed the dear Elmwood gardens and orchard more than aught else which had fallen from me in those days of tribulation; and the joy I felt at having green lawns, and shady nooks, and flowery pastures once more at my own disposal was more perhaps than some people would understand.

One morning I was walking out with my little Frank, who could now toddle by my side. We did not go beyond the gates, and we kept, for the most part, in the shade of a great old cedar, for the May days just then were of the very brightest and hottest. And I saw between the trees a shabby−looking old woman going up the drive towards the house. I scarcely knew why, but she made me think of Elmwood. There was something in her gait and general air that seemed to me familiar; and yet she could only be some one going round to the servants' entrance on business. Just then Frank tumbled down in trying to catch the kitten which was frollicking about, and for the next two minutes I was fully occupied in drying up my boy's tears, and rubbing the little knee that was a little scratched. When I looked again the woman was out of sight, and soon I forgot all about her.

I was not, however, to forget her for very long. Frank and I had scarcely resumed our game with pussy when I heard my name called between the trees, and there was my uncle looking strangely disturbed and hurried.

“Chryssie, Chryssie, my dear!” he cried; “oh, who do you think has come?”

My thoughts flew instantly to the shabby woman I had seen going up to the house. Could she be any one whom I had formerly known? My uncle seemed distressed and excited both. His voice trembled, and there were tears in his eyes. I began to feel painfully anxious myself.

“Tell me who it is, uncle.”

“It is Mona, poor Mona! And oh, in such a plight! stripped and robbed of everything, and at last deserted by that rascally husband of hers.”

I was more grieved than surprised; we had heard nothing of Mona for three years, and we had wondered greatly what could have become of her, for she had disappeared from the neighbourhood of Northborough, and all

our inquiries respecting her had been in vain. My uncle had even made a journey to the old place, for the express purpose of hunting out his hapless sister's whereabouts; but all that he gained was a vague report of her having accompanied her husband to America. And now Mona was come back to tell her tale.

Poor Aunt Mona; she was indeed in a miserable plight. She was clothed more scantily and more shabbily than any servant in my house; and the man who opened the door to her had taken her for a mendicant, and had chidden her for coming to the front entrance. Had I met her in the street I might have made the same mistake, for there was no trace in her of the gay, affected, fashionably−dressed woman of other days.

Her story was a very sad one; but I will not enter into it here. Suffice it to say Mr. Danvers Dashwood had proved himself a mere adventurer and a veritable scamp. Slowly he made his unfortunate wife understand that he scorned and despised her, that he had married her solely for her money, and that, that being gone, he regarded her only as “a detestable incumbrance!” To neglect and reproach quickly succeeded ill−usage.

“Oh! my dear,” said poor Mona, “you cannot fancy what I went through, and I could not tell you. I am too proud, even yet, to let anybody know how utterly I was cheated, how I was wronged, insulted, and trampled upon by my own husband! And I did love him—indeed I did,” sobbed the poor creature; “he was so handsome, and so sprightly, and he pretended so well, that I really thought he must care for me. I loved him till he crushed the love out of me, till he outraged me by flourishing his infidelities in my very face. He actually gloried in showing me how unfaithful he could be; he wanted to drive me away; he told me so. He said he was sick of my painted old face, and my silly airs and graces; he said he hated old women, and he was always boasting that people took him for my son. And I am afraid they really did, Chryssie; for I got to look very old and worn, I know I did; and somehow I lost heart, and I did not care any longer for my toilet. One day there came a crash, a general 'smash up,' he called it, and he said we must 'mizzle' without an hour's delay. To 'mizzle' means to go to America, I suppose, for we went there. Oh! it was horrible! we were steerage passengers, and I got to the other side more dead than alive. I wondered why he took me to America, but I soon found out; I had jewels and some old plate, and he wanted all I had. He took everything I had—my beautiful lace, even that piece of point that had been so long in the family. He took my Cashmere shawl, my best dresses, and by−and−by, as money got scarce, things that were of no great value, except to me, for I could no more replace them than I could buy white elephants and Koh−i−noor diamonds. He grumbled, he swore, he abused me whenever we were together, which was not often, for I kept out of his way as much as ever I could; for I tell you, Chryssie”—and she lowered her voice to a whisper—“I was a *fraid of him.* He told me often *'he would do for me;'* and I believe he tried to poison me, for he gave me some coffee with such a queer taste I scarcely touched it; but the two or three sips I took made me feel very ill. At last he got into a quarrel—a regular rowdy New York scuffle it was, in some disreputable haunt, where only the worst characters lived, and he was killed. I sold everything I had left, which was not much, and a kind man gave me a free passage in a sailing vessel. And, Chryssie, I have almost begged my way from Liverpool, where we landed nearly a week ago.”

Poor Aunt Mona! We kept her with us for some months, but as she gradually recovered her spirits her old vanity returned, and she often made us extremely uncomfortable. She had fallen into such strange habits, and talked so oddly, that we could not always introduce her to our friends. She made both James and Mr. Perren unhappy, and at the same time she was far from satisfied herself. Our way of living did not suit her; it was so dull, she complained, and she was devoured by *ennui.* And, worst of all, she hated children, and did not hesitate to show her dislike in many modes, which pained and irritated me sadly.

At length Mona found out that the air of Clapham Common was extremely insalubrious, and she was sure if she remained anywhere near London she would become a confirmed invalid. She thought Cheltenham would suit her, and she determined to try it for awhile.

It suited her so well that she is there to this day, living in a stylish boarding−house much frequented by gay widows and dissipated spinsters. James behaved very liberally in money matters, for of course she had nothing of her own; but she regularly exceeds her income, and writes to us the most piteous and urgent appeals; “for,” she says, “a hundred pounds are nothing to you now, Chryssie; living as you do, you must be as rich as Jews.” I am glad to say a hundred pounds more or less is not of any great account in our yearly expenditure. I can spend that sum more freely now than in the old Eldon Street days I could lay out a shilling. Still neither of us could feel it right to supply funds that would be wasted at the card−table, for Mrs. Dashwood had joined a frivolous worldly set, which divided its time chiefly between the promenade and interminable card−parties.

About the time my aunt settled in Cheltenham my uncle took upon himself the office of honorary Scripture reader, or lay curate to our respected minister. His health was now re−established, and he had regained strength surprisingly, considering his age.

"And I ought to be doing something, you know, my dear," he said. "I have done little or nothing for God all my life. It is late in the day to begin; still, I know my work and service of love will be accepted, tardy and imperfect though it be. I want to do some little good before I go home and be no more seen."

He soon found the sphere he sought—work, and plenty of it, and of the kind he wished for. James and he often labour together, strengthening each other's hands. And, strange to say, the rather arduous employment seems to make him quite young again. He has found his vocation at last, he says, and we all believe that he really has. He rejoices in the "service of the poor," and they whom he serves rejoice in him. There are certain haunts—not so very far away from our own wealthy and select neighbourhood—where he is always welcome, and where men, women, and children pray for him daily, and ask God to spare his valued life, and to strengthen him for the sacred warfare in which he is engaged. For he fights hand to hand with misery and sin; he has gone forth, he says, on *The White Crusade,* and he is verily a soldier of the Cross. Long may it be ere the Master shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Once a year he goes to Cheltenham, and he corresponds regularly with his sister; and I know how he prays for her. I think all these prayers and efforts cannot be in vain.

I forgot to say that when, after the Colonel's demise, we became rich people, I sent for Hagar to come and live with us. Of course we require from her no active service, and she has her own room at her own disposal. But she spends much time with the children, and her influence over them is something for which both James and I constantly thank the Father of all mercies.

After Mona's departure time again slipped peacefully by, and for a year or more nothing happened worth recording if I except the finding out of "Silly Johnny" by means of my uncle, and our sending him to live in the country, where he has regained his health, and finds himself happier than ever. Also, the migration of the Hamiltons from Northborough to London, James having found for Mr. Hamilton an excellent situation, so that Mrs. Hamilton and I often see each other and talk over the days when we first looked for the silver lining to our clouds.

I met Louis one day looking miserably wretched and *blasé.* Clementina's fortune had not been nearly so large as was imagined; nevertheless she had inherited £80,000. Where it was all gone nobody seemed to know, for a very small residue remained—a mere pittance to people who had been in the habit of spending lavishly, sparing nothing on themselves. It had "melted away," Madam declared, piteously. She was living now in London, in very inferior lodgings, for Clementina would not have her at Cuppage. Mrs. Louis Trafford inaugurated her reign by driving Madam fairly off the field. For the first time in her life Mrs. Julia Trafford found herself entirely beaten; she was no match for Clementina. All she could do was to retire worsted from the conflict, and console herself with constant lamentation and abuse of her granddaughter−in−law.

When I asked Louis how his wife was, he replied with a sneer that he knew nothing about her; he and she had been two people for many a day; he would be delighted to think they would never meet again. He was a poor man, he said; and, in truth, we found that he was so reduced, and in circumstances so straitened, that he accepted with eagerness the help which James offered him.

"Ah! you have had all the luck, old fellow," said Louis to my dear husband, pocketing a supply of cash at the same time. "I always knew you had the best wife in England; but I thought I had the money and I was fool enough to prefer money to connubial bliss. Now it turns out you have both the wife and the money. I suppose in the long run it *is* best to be disinterested."

"I certainly did not marry my Chryssie for her money," said James, with one of his kind, good smiles. "I took her because I loved her; she was the one woman in all the world whom I coveted for my own, and God gave her to me; I had need of her, and she had need of me—that is about how it was."

Louis groaned, and went away. Soon afterwards we heard that Cuppage was to be sold, and James asked me if I would like to buy it, as we had no country house, and we had been looking out for an eligible property. And so I became mistress of Cuppage at last. Our dear mother did all in her power to win back her prodigal son to her home and heart; but it was in vain. Perhaps in time to come what seems so hopeless now may be accomplished. It may be through suffering—perhaps through shame, even; but I think poor Louis will come home at last—home to

his Father's house. God can do a harder thing than this.

How intensely thankful I am that I did not marry Louis, and that I did marry my own dear James, words can never tell. But Louis can never be to me like any other person; besides, he is my brother, and I shall never rest contented till our prayers for him are answered.

His loss and seeming ruin—we do not know where he is now; he wrote last for money from Homburg—is the heaviest cloud on the horizon of my happy life; but that that too will turn out a pure silver lining in God's own good time I feel well assured.

I have finished my story, and I need not conclude by moralising: I have told my tale very badly if the lesson I fain would teach has not manifested itself throughout.

There were seasons when the clouds above my head were black as black could be—when they poured down tempests upon me. That was because I sought not the Lord in my distress—because I *did not trust in Him* to do that for me which would be for my final good. But when I called to my Father He heard me, and when I could not see His face I could feel His hand holding mine through all the darkness; and the clouds grew silver−edged, and golden and rosy tinted, and by−and−by passed away into the clear and glorious sunshine. And now, in bidding you all farewell, I say, Look ever for the silver lining! The cloud, perhaps, comes through your own sin and faithlessness; the silver lining, the beautiful promise of the coming brightness, is of God's own mercy. Clouds *will* gather while we live this life of ours here on earth; but in the fairer, sweeter, higher life to which we pass through the gates of death, there will be no more darkness, no more clouds. For the perfect joy we must wait until *"the day break, and the shadows flee away."*

"Oh, taste, and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him! Oh, fear the Lord, ye His saints, for there is no want to them that fear Him. They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."