YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

THE TRIAL; OR, MORE LINKS OF THE DAISY CHAIN

Charlotte Yonge

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

Quand on veut dessecher un marais, on ne fait pas voter les grenouilles.
—Mme. EMILE. DE GIRADIN

'Richard? That's right! Here's a tea-cup waiting for you,' as the almost thirty-year-old Incumbent of Cocksmoor, still looking like a young deacon, entered the room with his quiet step, and silent greeting to its four inmates.

'Thank you, Ethel. Is papa gone out?'

'I have not seen him since dinner-time. You said he was gone out with Dr. Spencer, Aubrey?'

'Yes, I heard Dr. Spencer's voice—"I say, Dick"—like three notes of consternation,' said Aubrey; 'and off they went. I fancy there's some illness about in the Lower Pond Buildings, that Dr. Spencer has been raging so long to get drained.'

'The knell has been ringing for a little child there,' added Mary; 'scarlatina, I believe—'

'But, Richard,' burst forth the merry voice of the youngest, 'you must see our letters from Edinburgh.'

'You have heard, then? It was the very thing I came to ask.'

'Oh yes! there were five notes in one cover,' said Gertrude. 'Papa says they are to be laid up in the family archives, and labelled "The Infants' Honeymoon."'

'Papa is very happy with his own share,' said Ethel. 'It was signed, "Still his own White Flower," and it had two Calton Hill real daisies in it. I don't know when I have seen him more pleased.'

'And Hector's letter—I can say that by heart,' continued Gertrude. '"My dear Father, This is only to say that she is the darlint, and for the pleasure of subscribing myself—Your loving SON,"—the son as big as all the rest put together.'

'I tell Blanche that he only took her for the pleasure of being my father's son,' said Aubrey, in his low lazy voice.

'Well,' said Mary, 'even to the last, I do believe he had as soon drive papa out as walk with Blanche. Flora was quite scandalized at it.'

'I should not imagine that George had often driven my father out,' said Aubrey, again looking lazily up from balancing his spoon.

Ethel laughed; and even Richard smiled; then recovering herself, she said, 'Poor Hector, he never could call himself son to any one before.'

'He has not been much otherwise here,' said Richard.

'No,' said Ethel; 'it is the peculiar hardship of our weddings to break us up by pairs, and carry off two instead of one. Did you ever see me with so shabby a row of tea-cups? When shall I have them come in riding double again?'

The recent wedding was the third in the family; the first after a five years' respite. It ensued upon an attachment that had grown up with the young people, so that they had been entirely one with each other; and there had been little of formal demand either of the maiden's affection or her father's consent; but both had been implied from the first. The bridegroom was barely of age, the bride not seventeen, and Dr. May had owned it was very shocking, and told Richard to say nothing about it! Hector had coaxed and pleaded, pathetically talked of his great empty house at Maplewood, and declared that till he might take Blanche away, he would not leave Stoneborough; he would bring down all sorts of gossip on his courtship, he would worry Ethel, and take care she finished nobody's

education. What did Blanche want with more education? She knew enough for him. Couldn't Ethel be satisfied with Aubrey and Gertrude? or he dared say she might have Mary too, if she was insatiable. If Dr. May was so unnatural as to forbid him to hang about the house, why, he would take rooms at the Swan. In fact, as Dr. May observed, he treated him to a modern red-haired Scotch version of 'Make me a willow cabin at your gate;' and as he heartily loved Hector and entirely trusted him, and Blanche's pretty head was a wise and prudent one, what was the use of keeping the poor lad unsettled?

So Mrs. Rivers, the eldest sister and the member's wife, had come to arrange matters and help Ethel, and a very brilliant wedding it had been. Blanche was too entirely at home with Hector for flutterings or agitations, and was too peacefully happy for grief at the separation, which completed the destiny that she had always seen before her. She was a picture of a bride; and when she and Hector hung round the Doctor, insisting that Edinburgh should be the first place they should visit, and calling forth minute directions for their pilgrimage to the scenes of his youth, promising to come home and tell him all, no wonder he felt himself rather gaining a child than losing one. He was very bright and happy; and no one but Ethel understood how all the time there was a sensation that the present was but a strange dreamy parody of that marriage which had been the theme of earlier hopes.

The wedding had taken place shortly after Easter; and immediately after, the Rivers family had departed for London, and Tom May had returned to Cambridge, leaving the home party at the minimum of four, since, Cocksmoor Parsonage being complete, Richard had become only a daily visitor instead of a constant inhabitant.

There he sat, occupying his never idle hands with a net that he kept for such moments, whilst Ethel sat behind her urn, now giving out its last sighs, profiting by the leisure to read the county newspaper, while she continually filled up her cup with tea or milk as occasion served, indifferent to the increasing pallor of the liquid.

Mary, a 'fine young woman,' as George Rivers called her, of blooming face and sweet open expression, had begun, at Gertrude's entreaty, a game of French billiards. Gertrude had still her childish sunny face and bright hair, and even at the trying age of twelve was pleasing, chiefly owing to the caressing freedom of manner belonging to an unspoilable pet. Her request to Aubrey to join the sport had been answered with a half petulant shake of the head, and he flung himself into his father's chair, his long legs hanging over one arm—an attitude that those who had ever been under Mrs. May's discipline thought impossible in the drawing-room; but Aubrey was a rival pet, and with the family characteristics of aquiline features, dark gray eyes, and beautiful teeth, had an air of fragility and easy languor that showed his exercise of the immunities of ill-health. He had been Ethel's pupil till Tom's last year at Eton, when he was sent thither, and had taken a good place; but his brother's vigilant and tender care could not save him from an attack on the chest, that settled his public-school education for ever, to his severe mortification, just when Tom's shower of honours was displaying to him the sweets of emulation and success. Ethel regained her pupil, and put forth her utmost powers for his benefit, causing Tom to examine him at each vacation, with adjurations to let her know the instant he discovered that her task of tuition was getting beyond her. In truth, Tom fraternally held her cheap, and would have enjoyed a triumph over her scholarship; but to this he had not attained, and in spite of his desire to keep his brother in a salutary state of humiliation, candour wrung from him the admission that, even in verses, Aubrey did as well as other fellows of his standing.

Conceit was not Aubrey's fault. His father was more guarded than in the case of his elder sons, and the home atmosphere was not such as to give the boy a sense of superiority, especially when diligently kept down by his brother. Even the half year at Eton had not produced superciliousness, though it had given Eton polish to the home-bred manners; it had made sisters valuable, and awakened a desire for masculine companionship. He did not rebel against his sister's rule; she was nearly a mother to him, and had always been the most active president of his studies and pursuits; and he was perfectly obedient and dutiful to her, only asserting his equality, in imitation of Harry and Tom, by

a little of the good-humoured raillery and teasing that treated Ethel as the family butt, while she was really the family authority.

'All gone, Ethel,' he said, with a lazy smile, as Ethel mechanically, with her eyes on the newspaper, tried all her vessels round, and found cream-jug, milk-jug, tea-pot, and urn exhausted; 'will you have in the river next?'

'What a shame!' said Ethel, awakening and laughing. 'Those are the tea-maker's snares.'

'Do send it away then,' said Aubrey, 'the urn oppresses the atmosphere.'

'Very well, I'll make a fresh brew when papa comes home, and perhaps you'll have some then. You did not half finish to-night.'

Aubrey yawned; and after some speculation about their father's absence, Gertrude went to bed; and Aubrey, calling himself tired, stood up, stretched every limb portentously, and said he should go off too. Ethel looked at him anxiously, felt his hand, and asked if he were sure he had not a cold coming on. 'You are always thinking of colds,' was all the satisfaction she received.

'What has he been doing?' said Richard.

'That is what I was thinking. He was about all yesterday afternoon with Leonard Ward, and perhaps may have done something imprudent in the damp. I never know what to do. I can't bear him to be a coddle; yet he is always catching cold if I let him alone. The question is, whether it is worse for him to run risks, or to be thinking of himself.'

'He need not be doing that,' said Richard; 'he may be thinking of your wishes and papa's.'

'Very pretty of him and you, Ritchie; but he is not three parts of a boy or man who thinks of his womankind's wishes when there is anything spirited before him.'

'Well, I suppose one may do one's duty without being three parts of a boy,' said Richard, gravely.

'I know it is true that some of the most saintly characters have been the more spiritual because their animal frame was less vigorous; but still it does not content me.'

'No, the higher the power, the better, of course, should the service be. I was only putting you in mind that there is compensation. But I must be off. I am sorry I cannot wait for papa. Let me know what is the matter to-morrow, and how Aubrey is.'

Richard went; and the sisters took up their employments—Ethel writing to the New Zealand sister-in-law her history of the wedding, Mary copying parts of a New Zealand letter for her brother, the lieutenant in command of a gun-boat on the Chinese coast. Those letters, whether from Norman May or his wife, were very delightful, they were so full of a cheerful tone of trustful exertion and resolution, though there had been perhaps more than the natural amount of disappointments. Norman's powers were not thought of the description calculated for regular mission work, and some of the chief aspirations of the young couple had had to be relinquished at the voice of authority without a trial. They had received the charge of persons as much in need of them as unreclaimed savages, but to whom there was less apparent glory in ministering. A widespread district of very colonial colonists, and the charge of a college for their uncultivated sons, was quite as troublesome as the most ardent self-devotion could desire; and the hardships and disagreeables, though severe, made no figure in history—nay, it required ingenuity to gather their existence from Meta's bright letters, although, from Mrs. Arnott's accounts, it was clear that the wife took a quadruple share. Mrs. Rivers had been heard to say that Norman need not have gone so far, and sacrificed so much, to obtain an under-bred English congregation; and even the Doctor had sighed once or twice at having relinquished his favourite son to what was dull and distasteful; but Ethel could trust that this unmurmuring acceptance of the less striking career, might be another step in the discipline of her brother's ardent and ambitious nature. It is a great thing to sacrifice, but a greater to consent not to sacrifice in one's own way.

Ethel sat up for her father, and Mary would not go to bed and leave her, so the two sisters waited till they heard the latch-key. Ethel ran out, but her father was already on the stairs, and waved her back.

'Here is some tea. Are you not coming, papa?—it is all here.'

'Thank you, I'll just go and take off this coat;' and he passed on to his room.

'I don't like that,' said Ethel, returning to the drawing-room, where Mary was boiling up the kettle, and kneeling down to make some toast.

'Why, what's the matter?'

'I have never known him go and change his coat but when some infectious thing has been about. Besides, he did not wait to let me help him off with it.'

In a few seconds the Doctor came down in his dressing-gown, and let himself be put into his easy-chair; his two daughters waiting on him with fond assiduity, their eyes questioning his fagged weary face, but reading there fatigue and concern that made them—rather awe-struck—bide their time till it should suit him to speak. Mary was afraid he would wait till she was gone; dear old Mary, who at twenty-two never dreamt of regarding herself as on the same footing with her three years' senior, and had her toast been browner, would have relieved them of her presence at once. However, her father spoke after his first long draught of tea.

'Well! How true it is that judgments are upon us while we are marrying and giving in marriage!'

'What is it, papa? Not the scarlatina?'

'Scarlatina, indeed!' he said contemptuously. 'Scarlet fever in the most aggravated form. Two deaths in one house, and I am much mistaken if there will not be another before morning.'

'Who, papa?' asked Mary.

'Those wretched Martins, in Lower Pond Buildings, are the worst. No wonder, living in voluntary filth; but it is all over the street—will be all over the town unless there's some special mercy on the place.'

'But how has it grown so bad,' said Ethel, 'without our having even heard of it!'

'Why—partly I take shame to myself—this business of Hector and Blanche kept Spencer and me away last dispensary day; and partly it was that young coxcomb, Henry Ward, thought it not worth while to trouble me about a simple epidemic. Simple epidemic indeed!' repeated Dr. May, changing his tone from ironical mimicry to hot indignation. 'I hope he will be gratified with its simplicity! I wonder how long he would have gone on if it had not laid hold on him.'

'You don't mean that he has it?'

'I do. It will give him a practical lesson in simple epidemics.'

'And Henry Ward has it!' repeated Mary, looking so much dismayed that her father laughed, saying—

'What, Mary thinks when it comes to fevers being so audacious as to lay hold of the doctors, it is time that they should be put a stop to.'

'He seems to have petted it and made much of it,' said Ethel; 'so no wonder! What could have possessed him?'

'Just this, Ethel; and it is only human nature after all. This young lad comes down, as Master Tom will do some day, full of his lectures and his hospitals, and is nettled and displeased to find his father content to have Spencer or me called in the instant anything serious is the matter.'

'But you are a physician, papa,' said Mary.

'No matter for that, to Mr. Henry I'm an old fogie, and depend upon it, if it were only the giving a dose of salts, he would like to have the case to himself. These poor creatures were parish patients, and I don't mean that his treatment was amiss. Spencer is right, it was an atmosphere where there was no saving anyone, but if he had not been so delighted with his own way, and I had known what was going on, I'd have got the Guardians and the Town Council and routed out the place. Seventeen cases, and most of them the worst form!'

'But what was Mr. Ward about?

'"Says I to myself, here's a lesson for me;
This man's but a picture of what I shall be,"

'when Master Tom gets the upper hand of me,' returned Dr. May. 'Poor Ward, who has run to me in all his difficulties these thirty years, didn't like it at all; but Mr. Henry was so confident with his simple epidemic, and had got him in such order, that he durst not speak.'

'And what brought it to light at last?'

'Everything at once. First the clerics go to see about the family where the infant died, and report to Spencer; he comes after me, and we start to reconnoitre. Then I am called in to see Shearman's daughter—a very ugly case that—and coming out I meet poor Ward himself, wanting me to see Henry, and there's the other boy sickening too. Then I went down and saw all those cases in the Lower Ponds, and have been running about the town ever since to try what can be done, hunting up nurses, whom I can't get, stirring dishes of skim milk, trying to get the funerals over to-morrow morning by daybreak. I declare I have hardly a leg to stand on.'

'Where was Dr. Spencer?'

'I've nearly quarrelled with Spencer. Oh! he is in high feather! he will have it that the fever rose up bodily, like Kuhleborn, out of that unhappy drain he is always worrying about, when it is a regular case of scarlet fever, brought in by a girl at home from service; but he will have it that his theory is proved. Then I meant him to keep clear of it. He has always been liable to malaria and all that sort of thing, and has not strength for an illness. I told him to mind the ordinary practice for me; and what do I find him doing the next thing, but operating upon one of the worst throats he could find! I told him he was as bad as young Ward; I hate his irregular practice. I'll tell you what,' he said, vindictively, as if gratified to have what must obey him, 'you shall all go off to Cocksmoor to-morrow morning at seven o'clock.'

'You forget that we two have had it,' said Mary.

'Which of you?'

'All down to Blanche.'

'Never mind for that. I shall have enough to do without a sick house at home. You can perform quarantine with Richard, and then go to Flora, if she will have you. Well, what are you dawdling about? Go and pack up.'

'Papa,' said Ethel, who had been abstracted through all the latter part of the conversation, 'if you please, we had better not settle my going till to-morrow morning.'

'Come, Ethel, you have too much sense for panics. Don't take nonsense into your head. The children can't have been in the way of it.'

'Stay, papa,' said Ethel, her serious face arresting the momentary impatience of fatigue and anxiety, 'I am afraid Aubrey was a good while choosing fishing-tackle at Shearman's yesterday with Leonard Ward; and it may be nothing, but he did seem heavy and out of order to-night; I wish you would look at him as you go up.'

Dr. May stood still for a few moments, then gave one long gasp, made a few inquiries, and went up to Aubrey's room. The boy was fast asleep; but there was that about him which softened the weary sharpness of his father's manner, and caused him to desire Ethel to look from the window whence she could see whether the lights were out in Dr. Spencer's house. Yes, they were.

'Never mind. It will make no real odds, and he has had enough on his hands to-day. The boy will sleep quietly enough to-night, so let us all go to bed.'

'I think I can get a mattress into his room without waking him, if you will help me, Mary,' said Ethel.

'Nonsense,' said her father, decidedly. 'Mary is not to go near him before she takes Gertrude to Cocksmoor; and you, go to your own bed and get a night's rest while you can.'

'You won't stay up, papa.'

'I—why, it is all I can do not to fall asleep on my feet. Good night, children.'

'He does not trust himself to think or to fear,' said Ethel. 'Too much depends on him to let himself be unstrung.'

'But, Ethel, you will not leave, dear Aubrey.'

'I shall keep his door open and mine; but papa is right, and it will not do to waste one's strength. In case I should not see you before you go—'

'Oh, but, Ethel, I shall come back! Don't, pray don't tell me to stay away. Richard will have to keep away for Daisy's sake, and you can't do all alone—nurse Aubrey and attend to papa. Say that I may come back.'

Well, Mary, I think you might,' said Ethel, after a moment's thought. 'If it were only Aubrey, I could manage for him; but I am more anxious about papa.'

'You don't think he is going to have it?'

'Oh no, no,' said Ethel, 'he is what he calls himself, a seasoned vessel; but he will be terribly overworked, and unhappy, and he must not come home and find no one to talk to or to look cheerful. So, Mary, unless he gives any fresh orders, or Richard thinks it will only make things worse, I shall be very glad of you.'

Mary had never clung to her so gratefully, nor felt so much honoured. 'Do you think he will have it badly?' she asked timidly.

'I don't think at all about it,' said Ethel, something in her father's manner. 'If we are to get through all this, Mary, it must not be by riding out on perhapses. Now let us put Daisy's things together, for she must have as little communication with home as possible.'

Ethel silently and rapidly moved about, dreading to give an interval for tremblings of heart. Five years of family prosperity had passed, and there had been that insensible feeling of peace and immunity from care which is strange to look back upon when one hour has drifted from smooth water to turbid currents. There was a sort of awe in seeing the mysterious gates of sorrow again unclosed; yet, darling of her own as Aubrey was, Ethel's first thoughts and fears were primarily for her father. Grief and alarm seemed chiefly to touch her through him, and she found herself praying above all that he might be shielded from suffering, and might be spared a renewal of the pangs that had before wrung his heart.

By early morning every one was astir; and Gertrude, bewildered and distressed, yet rather enjoying the fun of staying with Richard, was walking off with Mary.

Soon after, Dr. Spencer was standing by the bedside of his old patient, Aubrey, who had been always left to his management.

'Ah, I see,' he said, with a certain tone of satisfaction, 'for once there will be a case properly treated. Now, Ethel, you and I will show what intelligent nursing can do.'

'I believe you are delighted,' growled Aubrey.

'So should you be, at the valuable precedent you will afford.'

'I've no notion of being experimented on to prove your theory,' said Aubrey, still ready for lazy mischief.

For be it known that the roving-tempered Dr. Spencer had been on fire to volunteer to the Crimean hospitals, and had unwillingly sacrificed the project, not to Dr. May's conviction that it would be fatal in his present state of health, but to Ethel's private entreaty that he would not add to her father's distress in the freshness of Margaret's death, and the parting with Norman. He had never ceased to mourn over the lost opportunity, and to cast up to his friend the discoveries he might have made; while Dr. May declared that if by any strange chance he had come back at all, he would have been so rabid on improved nursing and sanatory measures, that there would have been no living with him.

It must be owned that Dr. May was not very sensible to what his friend called Stoneborough stinks. The place was fairly healthy, and his 'town councillor's conservatism,' and hatred of change, as well as the amusement of skirmishing, had always made him the champion of things as they were; and in the present emergency the battle whether the enemy had travelled by infection, or was the product of the Pond Buildings' miasma, was the favourite enlivenment of the disagreeing doctors, in

their brief intervals of repose in the stern conflict which they were waging with the fever—a conflict in which they had soon to strive by themselves, for the disease not only seized on young Ward, but on his father; and till medical assistance was sent from London, they had the whole town on their hands, and for nearly a week lived without a night's rest.

The care of the sick was a still greater difficulty. Though Aubrey was never in danger, and Dr. Spencer's promise of the effects of 'intelligent nursing' was fully realized, Ethel and Mary were so occupied by him, that it was a fearful thing to guess how it must fare with those households where the greater number were laid low, and in want of all the comforts that could do little.

The clergy worked to the utmost; and a letter of Mr. Wilmot's obtained the assistance of two ladies from a nursing sisterhood, who not only worked incredible wonders with their own hands among the poor, but made efficient nurses of rough girls and stupid old women. Dr. May, who had at first, in his distrust of innovation, been averse to the importation—as likely to have no effect but putting nonsense into girls' heads, and worrying the sick poor—was so entirely conquered, that he took off his hat to them across the street, importuned them to drink tea with his daughters, and never came home without dilating on their merits for the few minutes that intervened between his satisfying himself about Aubrey and dropping asleep in his chair. The only counter demonstration he reserved to himself was that he always called them 'Miss What-d'ye-call-her,' and 'Those gems of women,' instead of Sister Katherine and Sister Frances.

CHAPTER II

Good words are silver, but good deeds are gold.—Cecil and Mary

'It has been a very good day, papa; he has enjoyed all his meals, indeed was quite ravenous. He is asleep now, and looks as comfortable as possible,' said Ethel, five weeks after Aubrey's illness had begun.

'Thank God for that, and all His mercy to us, Ethel;' and the long sigh, the kiss, and dewy eyes, would have told her that there had been more to exhaust him than his twelve hours' toil, even had she not partly known what weighed him down.

'Poor things!' she said.

'Both gone, Ethel, both! both!' and as he entered the drawing-room, he threw himself back in his chair, and gasped with the long-restrained feeling.

'Both!' she exclaimed. 'You don't mean that Leonard—'

'No, Ethel, his mother! Poor children, poor children!'

'Mrs. Ward! I thought she had only been taken ill yesterday evening.'

'She only then gave way—but she never had any constitution—she was done up with nursing—nothing to fall back on—sudden collapse and prostration—and that poor girl, called every way at once, fancied her asleep, and took no alarm till I came in this morning and found her pulse all but gone. We have been pouring down stimulants all day, but there was no rousing her, and she was gone the first.'

'And Mr. Ward—did he know it?'

'I thought so from the way he looked at me; but speech had long been lost, and that throat was dreadful suffering. Well, "In their death they were not divided."'

He shaded his eyes with his hand; and Ethel, leaning against his chair, could not hinder herself from a shudder at the longing those words seemed to convey. He felt her movement, and put his arm round her, saying, 'No, Ethel, do not think I envy them. I might have done so once—I had not then learnt the meaning of the discipline of being without her—no, nor what you could do for me, my child, my children.'

Ethel's thrill of bliss was so intense, that it gave her a sense of selfishness in indulging personal joy at such a moment; and indeed it was true that her father had over-lived the first pangs of change and separation, had formed new and congenial habits, saw the future hope before him; and since poor Margaret had been at rest, had been without present anxiety, or the sight of decay and disappointment. Her only answer was a mute smoothing of his bowed shoulders, as she said, 'If I could be of any use or comfort to poor Averil Ward, I could go to-night. Mary is enough for Aubrey.'

'Not now, my dear. She can't stir from the boy, they are giving him champagne every ten minutes; she has the nurse, and Spencer is backwards and forwards; I think they will pull him through, but it is a near, a very near touch. Good, patient, unselfish boy he is too.'

'He always was a very nice boy,' said Ethel; 'I do hope he will get well. It would be a terrible grief to Aubrey.'

'Yes, I got Leonard to open his lips to-day by telling him that Aubrey had sent him the grapes. I think he will get through. I hope he will. He is a good friend for Aubrey. So touching it was this morning to hear him trying to ask pardon for all his faults, poor fellow—fits of temper, and the like.'

'That is his fault, I believe,' said Ethel, 'and I always think it a wholesome one, because it is so visible and unjustifiable, that people strive against it. And the rest? Was Henry able to see his father or mother?'

'No, he can scarcely sit up in bed. It was piteous to see him lying with his door open, listening. He is full of warm sound feeling, poor fellow. You would like to have heard the fervour with which he

begged me to tell his father to have no fears for the younger ones, for it should be the most precious task of his life to do a parent's part by them.'

'Let me see, he is just of Harry's age,' said Ethel, thoughtfully, as if she had not the strongest faith in Harry's power of supplying a parent's place.

'Well,' said her father, 'remember, a medical student is an older man than a lieutenant in the navy. One sees as much of the interior as the other does of the surface. We must take this young Ward by the hand, and mind he does not lose his father's practice. Burdon, that young prig that Spencer got down from London, met me at Gavin's, when I looked in there on my way home, and came the length of Minster Street with me, asking what I thought of an opening for a medical man—partnership with young Ward, &c. I snubbed him so short, that I fancy I left him thinking whether his nose was on or off his face.'

'He was rather premature.'

'I've settled him any way. I shall do my best to keep the town clear for that lad; there's not much more for him, as things are now, and it will be only looking close after him for a few years, which Spencer and I can very well manage.'

'If he will let you.'

'There! that's the spitefulness of women! Must you be casting up that little natural spirit of independence against him after the lesson he has had? I tell you, he has been promising me to look on me as a father! Poor old Ward! he was a good friend and fellow-worker. I owe a great deal to him.'

Ethel wondered if he forgot how much of the unserviceableness of his maimed arm had once been attributed to Mr. Ward's dulness, or how many times he had come home boiling with annoyance at having been called in too late to remedy the respectable apothecary's half measures. She believed that the son had been much better educated than the father, and after the fearful lesson he had received, thought he might realize Dr. May's hopes, and appreciate his kindness. They discussed the relations.

'Ward came as assistant to old Axworthy, and married his daughter; he had no relations that his son knows of, except the old aunt who left Averil her £2000.'

'There are some Axworthys still,' said Ethel, 'but not very creditable people.'

'You may say that,' said Dr. May emphatically. 'There was a scapegrace brother that ran away, and was heard of no more till he turned up, a wealthy man, ten or fifteen years ago, and bought what they call the Vintry Mill, some way on this side of Whitford. He has a business on a large scale; but Ward had as little intercourse with him as possible. A terrible old heathen.'

'And the boy that was expelled for bullying Tom is in the business.'

'I hate the thought of that,' said the Doctor. 'If he had stayed on, who knows but he might have turned out as well as Ned Anderson.'

'Has not he?'

'I'm sure I have no right to say he has not, but he is a flashy slang style of youth, and I hope the young Wards will keep out of his way.'

'What will become of them? Is there likely to be any provision for them?'

'Not much, I should guess. Poor Ward did as we are all tempted to do when money goes through our hands, and spent more freely than I was ever allowed to do. Costly house, garden, greenhouses —he'd better have stuck to old Axworthy's place in Minster Street—daughter at that grand school, where she cost more than the whole half-dozen of you put together.'

'She was more worth it,' said Ethel; 'her music and drawing are first-rate. Harry was frantic about her singing last time he was at home—one evening when Mrs. Anderson abused his good-nature and got him to a tea-party—I began to be afraid of the consequences.'

'Pish!' said the Doctor.

'And really they kept her there to enable her to educate her sisters,' said Ethel. 'The last time I called on poor Mrs. Ward, she told me all about it, apologizing in the pretty way mothers do, saying

she was looking forward to Averil's coming home, but that while she profited so much, they felt it due to her to give her every advantage; and did not I think—with my experience—that it was all so much for the little ones' benefit? I assured her, from my personal experience, that ignorance is a terrible thing in governessing one's sisters. Poor thing! And Averil had only come home this very Easter.'

'And with everything to learn, in such a scene as that! The first day, when only the boys were ill, there sat the girl, dabbling with her water-colours, and her petticoats reaching half across the room, looking like a milliner's doll, and neither she nor her poor mother dreaming of her doing a useful matter.'

'Who is spiteful now, papa? That's all envy at not having such an accomplished daughter. When she came out in time of need so grandly, and showed all a woman's instinct—'

'Woman's nonsense! Instinct is for irrational brutes, and the more you cultivate a woman, the less she has of it, unless you work up her practical common sense too.'

'Some one said she made a wonderful nurse.'

'Wonderful? Perhaps so, considering her opportunities, and she does better with Spencer than with me; I may have called her to order impatiently, for she is nervous with me, loses her head, and knocks everything down with her petticoats. Then—not a word to any one, Ethel—but imagine her perfect blindness to her poor mother's state all yesterday, and last night, not even calling Burdon to look at her; why, those ten hours may have made all the difference!'

'Poor thing, how is she getting on now?'

'Concentrated upon Leonard, too much stunned to admit another idea—no tears—hardly full comprehension. One can't take her away, and she can't bear not to do everything, and yet one can't trust her any more than a child.'

'As she is,' said Ethel, 'but as she won't be any longer. And the two little ones?'

'It breaks one's heart to see them, just able to sit by their nursery fire, murmuring in that weary, resigned, sick child's voice, 'I wish nurse would come.' 'I wish sister would come.' 'I wish mamma would come.' I went up to them the last thing, and told them how it was, and let them cry themselves to sleep. That was the worst business of all. Ethel, are they too big for Mary to dress some dolls for them?'

'I will try to find out their tastes the first thing to-morrow,' said Ethel; 'at any rate we can help them, if not poor Averil.'

Ethel, however, was detained at home to await Dr. Spencer's visit, and Mary, whose dreams had all night been haunted by the thought of the two little nursery prisoners, entreated to go with her father, and see what could be done for them.

Off they set together, Mary with a basket in her hand, which was replenished at the toy-shop in Minster Street with two china-faced dolls, and, a little farther on, parted with a couple of rolls, interspersed with strata of cold beef and butter, to a household of convalescents in the stage for kitchen physic.

Passing the school, still taking its enforced holiday, the father and daughter traversed the bridge and entered the growing suburb known as Bankside, where wretched cottages belonging to needy, grasping proprietors, formed an uncomfortable contrast to the villa residences interspersed among them.

One of these, with a well-kept lawn, daintily adorned with the newest pines and ornamental shrubs, and with sheets of glass glaring in the sun from the gardens at the back, was the house that poor Mr. and Mrs. Ward had bought and beautified; 'because it was so much better for the children to be out of the town.' The tears sprang into Mary's eyes at the veiled windows, and the unfeeling contrast of the spring glow of flowering thorn, lilac, laburnum, and, above all, the hard, flashing brightness of the glass; but tears were so unlike Ethel that Mary always was ashamed of them, and disposed of them quietly.

They rang, but in vain. Two of the servants were ill, and all in confusion; and after waiting a few moments among the azaleas in the glass porch, Dr. May admitted himself, and led the way up-stairs with silent footfalls, Mary following with breath held back. A voice from an open door called, 'Is that Dr. May?' and he paused to look in and say, 'I'll be with you in one minute, Henry; how is Leonard?'

'No worse, they tell me; I say, Dr. May—'

'One moment;' and turning back to Mary, he pointed along a dark passage. 'Up there, first door to the right. You can't mistake;' then disappeared, drawing the door after him.

Much discomfited, Mary nevertheless plunged bravely on, concluding 'there' to be up a narrow, uncarpeted stair, with a nursery wicket at the top, in undoing which, she was relieved of all doubts and scruples by a melancholy little duet from within. 'Mary, Mary, we want our breakfast! We want to get up! Mary, Mary, do come! please come!'

She was instantly in what might ordinarily have been a light, cheerful room, but which was in all the dreariness of gray cinders, exhausted night-light, curtained windows, and fragments of the last meal. In each of two cane cribs was sitting up a forlorn child, with loose locks of dishevelled hair, pale thin cheeks glazed with tears, staring eyes, and mouths rounded with amaze at the apparition. One dropped down and hid under the bed-clothes; the other remained transfixed, as her visitor advanced, saying, 'Well, my dear, you called Mary, and here I am.'

'Not our own Mary,' said the child, distrustfully.

'See if I can't be your own Mary.'

'You can't. You can't give us our breakfast.'

'Oh, I am so hungry!' from the other crib; and both burst into the feeble sobs of exhaustion. Recovering from fever, and still fasting at half-past nine! Mary was aghast, and promised an instant supply.

'Don't go;' and a bird-like little hand seized her on either side. 'Mary never came to bed, and nobody has been here all the morning, and we can't bear to be alone.'

'I was only looking for the bell.'

'It is of no use; Minna did jump out and ring, but nobody will come.'

Mary made an ineffectual experiment, and then persuaded the children to let her go by assurances of a speedy return. She sped down, brimming over with pity and indignation, to communicate to her father this cruel neglect, and as she passed Henry Ward's door, and heard several voices, she ventured on a timid summons of 'papa,' but, finding it unheard, she perceived that she must act for herself. Going down-stairs, she tried the sitting-room doors, hoping that breakfast might be laid out there, but all were locked; and at last she found her way to the lower regions, guided by voices in eager tones of subdued gossip.

There, in the glow of the huge red fire, stood a well-covered table, surrounded by cook, charwoman, and their cavaliers, discussing a pile of hot-buttered toast, to which the little kitchen-maid was contributing large rounds, toasted at the fire.

Mary's eyes absolutely flashed, as she said, 'The children have had no breakfast.'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' and the cook rose, 'but it is the nurse-maid that takes up the young ladies' meals.'

Mary did not listen to the rest; she was desperate, and pouncing on the bread with one hand, and the butter with the other, ran away with them to the nursery, set them down, and rushed off for another raid. She found that the commotion she had excited was resulting in the preparation of a tray.

'I am sure, ma'am, I am very sorry,' said the cook, insisting on carrying the kettle, 'but we are in such confusion; and the nurse-maid, whose place it is, has been up most of the night with Mr. Leonard, and must have just dropped asleep somewhere, and I was just giving their breakfast to the undertaker's young men, but I'll call her directly, ma'am.'

'Oh, no, on no account. I am sure she ought to sleep,' said Mary. 'It was only because I found the little girls quite starving that I came down. I will take care of them now. Don't wake her, pray.

Only I hope,' and Mary looked beseechingly, 'that they will have something good for their dinner, poor little things.'

Cook was entirely pacified, and talked about roast chicken, and presently the little sisters were sitting up in their beds, each in her wrapper, being fed by turns with delicately-buttered slices, Mary standing between like a mother-bird feeding her young, and pleased to find the eyes grow brighter and less hollow, the cheeks less wan, the voices less thin and pipy, and a little laugh breaking out when she mistook Minna for Ella.

While tidying the room, she was assailed with entreaties to call their Mary, and let them get up, they were so tired of bed. She undertook to be still their Mary, and made them direct her to the house-maid's stores, went down on her knees at the embers, and so dealt with matches, chips, and coal, that to her own surprise and pride a fire was evoked.

'But,' said Ella, 'I thought you were a Miss May.'

'So I am, my dear.'

'But ladies don't light fires,' said Minna, in open-eyed perplexity.

'Oh,' exclaimed the younger sister, 'you know Henry said he did not think any of the Miss Mays were first-rate, and that our Ave beat them all to nothing.'

The elder, Minna, began hushing; and it must be confessed that honest Mary was not superior to a certain crimson flush of indignation, as she held her head into the grate, and thought of Ethel, Flora, and Blanche, criticized by Mr. Henry Ward. Little ungrateful chit! No, it was not a matter of laughing, but of forgiveness; and the assertion of the dignity of usefulness was speedily forgotten in the toilette of the small light skin-and-bone frames, in the course of which she received sundry compliments—'her hands were so nice and soft,' 'she did not pull their hair like their own Mary,' 'they wished she always dressed them.'

The trying moment was when they asked if they might kneel at her lap for their prayers. To Mary, the twelve years seemed as nothing since her first prayers after the day of terror and bereavement, and her eyes swam with tears as the younger girl unthinkingly rehearsed her wonted formula, and the elder, clinging to her, whispered gravely, 'Please, what shall I say?'

With full heart, and voice almost unmanageable, Mary prompted the few simple words that had come to her in that hour of sorrow. She looked up, from stooping to the child's ear, to see her father at the door, gazing at them with face greatly moved. The children greeted him fondly, and he sat down with one on each knee, and caressed them as he looked them well over, drawing out their narration of the wonderful things 'she' had done, the fingers pointing to designate who she was. His look at her over his spectacles made Mary's heart bound and feel compensated for whatever Mr. Henry Ward might say of her. When the children had finished their story, he beckoned her out of the room, promising them that he would not keep her long.

'Well done, Molly,' he said smiling, 'it is well to have daughters good for something. You had better stay with them till that poor maid has had her sleep out, and can come to them.'

'I should like to stay with them all day, only that Ethel must want me.'

'You had better go home by dinner-time, that Ethel may get some air. Perhaps I shall want one of you in the evening to be with them at the time of the funeral.'

'So soon!'

'Yes, it must be. Better for all, and Henry is glad it should be so. He is out on the sofa to-day, but he is terribly cut up.'

'And Leonard?'

'I see some improvement—Burdon does not—but I think with Heaven's good mercy we may drag him through; the pulse is rather better. Now I must go. You'll not wait dinner for me.'

Mary spent the next hour in amusing the children by the fabrication of the dolls' wardrobe, and had made them exceedingly fond of her, so that there was a very poor welcome when their own Mary at length appeared, much shocked at the duration of her own slumbers, and greatly obliged to Miss

May. The little girls would scarcely let Mary go, though she pacified them by an assurance that she or her sister would come in the evening.

'Don't let it be your sister. You come, and finish our dolls' frocks!' and they hung about her, kissing her, and trying to extract a promise.

After sharing the burthen of depression, it was strange to return home to so different a tone of spirits when she found Aubrey installed in Ethel's room as his parlour, very white and weak, but overflowing with languid fun. There was grief and sympathy for the poor Wards, and anxious inquiries for Leonard; but it was not sorrow brought visibly before him, and after the decorous space of commiseration, the smiles were bright again, and Mary heard how her father had popped in to boast of his daughter being 'as good as a house-maid, or as Miss What's-her-name;' and her foray in the kitchen was more diverting to Aubrey than she was as yet prepared to understand. 'Running away with the buttered toast from under the nose of a charwoman! let Harry never talk of taking a Chinese battery after that!' her incapacity of perceiving that the deed was either valiant or ludicrous, entertaining him particularly. 'It had evidently hit the medium between the sublime and ridiculous.'

When evening came, Mary thought it Ethel's privilege to go, as the most efficient friend and comforter; but Ethel saw that her sister's soul was with the Wards, and insisted that she should go on as she had begun.

'O, Ethel, that was only with the little ones. Now you would be of use to poor Averil.'

'And why should not you? and of more use?'

'You know I am only good for small children; but if you tell me—'

'You provoking girl,' said Ethel. 'All I tell you is, that you are twenty-three years old, and I won't tell you anything, nor assist your unwholesome desire to be second fiddle.'

'I don't know what you mean, Ethel; of course you always tell me what to do, and how to do it.'

Ethel quite laughed now, but gave up the contest, only saying, as she fondly smoothed back a little refractory lock on Mary's smooth open brow, 'Very well then, go and do whatever comes to hand at Bankside, my dear. I do really want to stay at home, both on Aubrey's account, and because papa says Dr. Spencer is done up, and that I must catch him and keep him quiet this evening.'

Mary was satisfied in her obedience, and set off with her father. Just as they reached Bankside, a gig drove up containing the fattest old man she had ever beheld; her father whispered that it was old Mr. Axworthy, and sent her at once to the nursery, where she was welcomed with a little shriek of delight, each child bounding in her small arm-chair, and pulling her down between them on the floor for convenience of double hugging, after which she was required to go on with the doll-dressing.

Mary could not bear to do this while the knell was vibrating on her ear, and the two coffins being borne across the threshold; so she gathered the orphans within her embrace as she sat on the floor, and endeavoured to find out how much they understood of what was passing, and whether they had any of the right thoughts. It was rather disappointing. The little sisters had evidently been well and religiously taught, but they were too childish to dwell on thoughts of awe or grief, and the small minds were chiefly fixed upon the dolls, as the one bright spot in the dreary day. Mary yielded, and worked and answered their chatter till twilight came on, and the rival Mary came up to put them to bed, an operation in which she gave her assistance, almost questioning if she were not forgotten, but she learnt that her father was still in the house, the nurse believed looking at papers in Mr. Henry's room with the other gentlemen.

'And you will sit by us while we go to sleep. Oh! don't go away!'

The nurse was thankful to her for so doing, and a somewhat graver mood had come over Minna as she laid her head on her pillow, for she asked the difficult question, 'Can mamma see us now?' which Mary could only answer with a tender 'Perhaps,' and an attempt to direct the child to the thought of the Heavenly Father; and then Minna asked, 'Who will take care of us now?'

'Oh, will you?' cried Ella, sitting up; and both little maids, holding out their arms, made a proffer of themselves to be her little children. They would be so good if she would let them be—

Mary could only fondle and smile it off, and put them in mind that they belonged to their brother and sister; but the answer was, 'Ave is not so nice as you. Oh, do let us—'

'But I can't, my dears. I am Dr. May's child, you know. What could I say to him?'

'Oh! but Dr. May wouldn't mind! I know he wouldn't mind! Mamma says there was never any one so fond of little children, and he is such a dear good old gentleman.'

Mary had not recognized him as an old gentleman at fifty-eight, and did not like it at all. She argued on the impracticability of taking them from their natural protectors, and again tried to lead them upwards, finally betaking herself to the repetition of hymns, which put them to sleep. She had spent some time in sitting between them in the summer darkness, when there was a low tap, and opening the door, she saw her father. Indicating that they slept, she followed him out, and a whispered conference took place as he stood below her on the stairs, their heads on a level.

'Tired, Mary? I have only just got rid of old Axworthy.'

'The nurse said you were busy with papers in Henry's room.'

'Ay—the Will. Henry behaves very well; and is full of right feeling, poor fellow!'

'What becomes of those dear little girls? They want to make themselves a present to me, and say they know you would like it.'

'So I should, the darlings! Well, as things are left, it all goes to Henry, except the £10,000 Ward had insured his life for, which divides between the five. He undertakes, most properly, to make them a home—whether in this house or not is another thing; he and Averil will look after them; and he made a most right answer when Mr. Axworthy offered to take Leonard into his office,' proceeded the communicative Doctor, unable to help pouring himself out, in spite of time and place, as soon as he had a daughter to himself. 'Settle nothing now—education not finished; but privately he tells me he believes his mother would as soon have sent Leonard to the hulks as to that old rascal, and the scamp, his grand-nephew.'

Mary's answer to this, as his tones became incautiously emphatic, was a glance round all the attic doors, lest they should have ears.

'Now then, do you want to get home?' said the Doctor, a little rebuked.

'Oh no, not if there is anything I can do.'

'I want to get this girl away from Leonard. He is just come to the state when it all turns on getting him off to sleep quietly, and not disturbing him, and she is too excited and restless to do anything with her; she has startled him twice already, and then gets upset—tired out, poor thing! and will end in being hysterical if she does not get fed and rested, and then we shall be done for! Now I want you to take charge of her. See, here's her room, and I have ordered up some tea for her. You must get her quieted down, make her have a tolerable meal, and when she has worked off her excitement, put her to bed—undressed, mind—and you might lie down by her. If you can't manage her, call me. That's Leonard's door, and I shall be there all night; but don't if you can help it. Can you do this, or must I get Miss "What-d'ye-call-her" the elder one, if she can leave the Greens in Randall's Alley?

Well was it that Mary's heart was stout as well as tender; and instead of mentally magnifying the task, and diminishing her own capabilities, she simply felt that she had received a command, and merely asked that Ethel should be informed.

'I am going to send up to her.'

'And shall I give Averil anything to take?'

'Mutton-chops, if you can.'

'I meant sal-volatile, or anything to put her to sleep.'

'Nonsense! I hate healthy girls drugging themselves. You don't do that at home, Mary!'

Mary showed her white teeth in a silent laugh at the improbability, there being nothing Ethel more detested than what she rather rudely called nervous quackeries. Her father gave her a kiss of grateful approbation, and was gone.

There was a light on the table, and preparations for tea; and Mary looked round the pretty room, where the ornamental paper, the flowery chintz furniture, the shining brass of the bedstead, the frilled muslin toilet, and et ceteras, were more luxurious than what she ever saw, except when visiting with Flora, and so new as to tell a tale of the mother's fond preparation for the return of the daughter from school. In a few moments she heard her father saying, in a voice as if speaking to a sick child, 'Yes, I promise you, my dear. Be good, be reasonable, and you shall come back in the morning. No, you can't go there. Henry is going to bed. Here is a friend for you. Now, Mary, don't let me see her till she has slept.'

Mary took the other hand, and between them they placed her in an arm-chair, whose shining fresh white ground and gay rose-pattern contrasted with her heated, rumpled, over-watched appearance, as she sank her head on her hand, not noticing either Mary's presence or the Doctor's departure. Mary stood doubtful for a few seconds, full of pity and embarrassment, trying to take in the needs of the case.

Averil Ward was naturally a plump, well-looking girl of eighteen, with clearly-cut features, healthy highly-coloured complexion, and large bright hazel eyes, much darker than her profuse and glossy hair, which was always dressed in the newest and most stylish fashion, which, as well as the whole air of her dress and person, was, though perfectly lady like, always regarded by the Stoneborough world as something on the borders of presumption on the part of the entire Ward family.

To Mary's surprise, the five weeks' terrible visitation, and these last fearful five days of sleepless exertion and bereavement, had not faded the bright red of the cheek, nor were there signs of tears, though the eyes looked bloodshot. Indeed, there was a purple tint about the eyelids and lips, a dried-up appearance, and a heated oppressed air, as if the faculties were deadened and burnt up, though her hand was cold and trembling. Her hair, still in its elaborate arrangement, hung loose, untidy, untouched; her collar and sleeves were soiled and tumbled; her dress, with its inconvenient machinery of inflation, looked wretched from its incongruity, and the stains on the huge hanging sleeves. Not a moment could have been given to the care of her own person, since the sole burthen of nursing had so grievously and suddenly descended on her.

Mary's first instinct was to pour out some warm water, and bringing it with a sponge, to say, 'Would not this refresh you?'

Averil moved petulantly; but the soft warm stream was so grateful to her burning brow, that she could not resist; she put her head back, and submitted like a child to have her face bathed, saying, 'Thank you.'

Mary then begged to remove her tight heavy dress, and make her comfortable in her dressing-gown.

'Oh, I can't! Then I could not go back.'

'Yes, you could; this is quite a dress; besides, one can move so much more quietly without crinoline.'

'I didn't think of that;' and she stood up, and unfastened her hooks. 'Perhaps Dr. May would let me go back now!' as a mountain of mohair and scarlet petticoat remained on the floor, upborne by an over-grown steel mouse-trap.

'Perhaps he will by and by; but he said you must sleep first.'

'Sleep—I can't sleep. There's no one but me. I couldn't sleep.'

'Then at least let me try to freshen you up. There. You don't know what good it used to do my sister Blanche, for me to brush her hair. I like it.'

And Mary obtained a dreamy soothed submission, so that she almost thought she was brushing her victim to sleep in her chair, before the maid came up with the viands that Dr. May had ordered.

'I can't eat that,' said Averil, with almost disgust. 'Take it away.'

'Please don't,' said Mary. 'Is that the way you use me, Miss Ward, when I come to drink tea with you?'

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' was the mechanical answer.

Mary having made the long hair glossy once more, into a huge braid, and knotted it up, came forth, and insisted that they were to be comfortable over their grilled chickens' legs. She was obliged to make her own welcome, and entertain her hostess; and strenuously she worked, letting the dry lips imbibe a cup of tea, before she attempted the solids; then coaxing and commanding, she gained her point, and succeeded in causing a fair amount of provisions to be swallowed; after which Averil seemed more inclined to linger in enjoyment of the liquids, as though the feverish restlessness were giving place to a sense of fatigue and need of repose.

'This is all wrong,' said she, with a faint bewildered smile, as Mary filled up her cup for her. 'I ought to be treating you as guest, Miss May.'

'Oh, don't call me Miss May! Call me Mary. Think me a sister. You know I have known something of like trouble, only I was younger, and I had my sisters.'

'I do not seem to have felt anything yet,' said Averil, passing her hands over her face. 'I seem to be made of stone.'

'You have done: and that is better than feeling.'

'Done! and how miserably! Oh, the difference it might have made, if I had been a better nurse!'

'Papa and Dr. Spencer both say you have been a wonderful nurse, considering—' the last word came out before Mary was aware.

'Oh, Dr. May has been so kind and so patient with me, I shall never forget it. Even when I scalded his fingers with bringing him that boiling water—but I always do wrong when he is there—and now he won't let me go back to Leonard.'

'But, Averil, the best nurse in the world can't hold out for ever. People must sleep, and make themselves fit to go on.'

'Not when there is only one:' and she gasped.

'All the more reason, when there is but one. Perhaps it is because you are tired out that you get nervous and agitated. You will be quite different after a rest.'

'Are you sure?' whispered Averil, with her eyes rounded, 'are you sure that is all the reason?'

'What do you mean?' said Mary.

Averil drew in her breath, and squeezed both hands tight on her chest, as she spoke very low: 'They sent me away from mamma—they told me papa wanted me: then they sent me from him; they said I was better with Leonard; and—and I said to myself, nothing should make me leave Leonard.'

'It was not papa—my father—that sent you without telling you,' said Mary, confidently.

'No,' said Averil.

'No; I have heard him say that he would take all risks, rather than deceive anybody,' said Mary, eagerly. 'I have heard him and Dr. Spencer argue about what they called pious frauds, and he always said they were want of faith. You may trust him. He told me Leonard was in the state when calm sleep was chiefly wanted. I know he would think it cruel not to call you if there were need; and I do not believe there will be need.'

Something like this was reiterated in different forms; and though Averil never regularly yielded, yet as they sat on, there came pauses in the conversation, when Mary saw her nodding, and after one or two vibrations in her chair, she looked up with lustreless glassy eyes. Mary took one of these semi-wakened moments, and in the tone of caressing authority that had been already found effectual, said she must sleep in bed; took no notice of the murmur of refusal, but completed the undressing, and fairly deposited her in her bed.

Mary's scrupulous conscience was distressed at having thus led to the omission of all evening orisons; but if her own simple-hearted loving supplications at the orphan's bedside could compensate for their absence, she did her utmost. Then, as both the room-door and that of the sick-chamber had

been left open, she stole into the passage, where she could see her father, seated at the table, and telegraphed to him a sign of her success. He durst not move, but he smiled and nodded satisfaction; and Mary, after tidying the room, and considering with herself, took off her more cumbrous garments, wrapped herself in a cloak, and lay down beside Averil, not expecting to sleep, but passing to thoughts of Harry, and of that 23rd Psalm, which they had agreed to say at the same hour every night. By how many hours was Harry beforehand with her? That was a calculation that to Mary was always like the beads of the chaplain of Norham Castle. Certain it is, that after she had seen Harry lighting a fire to broil chickens' legs in a Chinese temple, under the willow-pattern cannon-ball tree, and heard Henry Ward saying it was not like a lieutenant in the navy, she found herself replying, 'Use before gentility;' and in the enunciation of this—her first moral sentiment—discovered that it was broad daylight.

What o'clock it was she could not guess. Averil was sound asleep, breathing deeply and regularly, so that it was; a pleasure to listen to her; and Mary did not fear wakening her by a shoeless voyage of discovery to the place whence Dr. May was visible.

He turned at once, and with his noiseless tread came to her. 'Asleep still? So is he. All right. Here, waken me the moment he stirs.'

And rather by sign than word, he took Mary into the sickroom, indicated a chair, and laid himself on a sofa, where he was instantaneously sound asleep, before his startled daughter had quite taken everything in; but she had only to glance at his haggard wearied face, to be glad to be there, so as to afford him even a few moments of vigorous slumber with all his might.

In some awe, she looked round, not venturing to stir hand or foot. Her chair was in the full draught of the dewy morning breeze, so chilly, that she drew her shawl tightly about her; but she knew that this had been an instance of her father's care, and if she wished to make the slightest move, it was only to secure a fuller view of the patient, from whom she was half cut off by a curtain at the foot of the bed. A sort of dread, however, made Mary gaze at everything around her before she brought her eyes upon him—her father's watch on the table, indicating ten minutes to four, the Minster Tower in the rising sunlight—nay, the very furniture of the room, and Dr. May's position, before she durst familiarize herself with Leonard's appearance—he whom she had last seen as a sturdy, ruddy, healthful boy, looking able to outweigh two of his friend Aubrey.

The original disease had long since passed into typhus, and the scarlet eruption was gone, so that she only saw a yellow whiteness, that, marked by the blue veins of the bared temples, was to her mind death-like. Mary had not been sheltered from taking part in scenes of suffering; she had seen sickness and death in cottages, as well as in her own home, and she had none of the fanciful alarms, either of novelty or imagination, to startle her in the strange watch that had so suddenly been thrust on her but what did fill her with a certain apprehension, was the new and lofty beauty of expression that sat on that sleeping countenance. 'A nice boy,' 'rather a handsome lad,' 'a boy of ingenuous face,' they had always called Leonard Ward, when animated with health and spirits; and the friendship between him and Aubrey had been encouraged, but without thinking of him as more than an ordinary lad of good style. Now, however, to Mary's mind, the broad brow and wasted features in their rest had assumed a calm nobility that was like those of Ethel's favourite champions—those who conquered by 'suffering and being strong.' She looked and listened for the low regular breath, almost doubting at one moment whether it still were drawn, then only reassured by its freedom and absence from effort, that it was not soon to pass away. There was something in that look as if death must set his seal on it, rather than as if it could return to the flush of health, and the struggle and strife of school-boy life and of manhood.

More than an hour had passed, and all within the house was as still as ever; and through the window there only came such sounds as seem like audible silence—the twittering of birds, the humming of bees, the calls of boys in distant fields, the far-away sound of waggon-wheels—when there was a slight move, and Mary, in the tension of all her faculties, had well-nigh started, but

restrained herself; and as she saw the half-closed fingers stretch, and the head turn, she leant forward, and touched her father's hand.

Dr. May was on his feet even before those brown eyes of Leonard's had had time to unclose; and as Mary was silently moving to the door, he made a sign to her to wait.

She stood behind the curtain. 'You are better for your sleep.'

'Yes, thank you—much better.'

The Doctor signed towards a tray, which stood by a spirit-lamp, on a table in the further corner. Mary silently brought it, and as quietly obeyed the finger that directed her to cordial and spoon—well knowing the need—since that unserviceable right arm always made these operations troublesome to her father.

'Have you been here all night, Dr. May?'

'Yes; and very glad to see you sleeping so well.'

'Thank you.' And there was something that made Mary's eyes dazzle with tears in the tone of that 'Thank you.' The Doctor held out his hand for the spoon she had prepared, and there was another 'Thank you;' then, 'Is Ave there?'

'No, I made her go to bed. She is quite well; but she wanted sleep sorely.'

'Thank you,' again said the boy; then with a moment's pause, 'Dr. May, tell me now.'

Mary would have fled as breaking treacherously in upon such tidings; but a constraining gesture of her father obliged her to remain, and keep the cordial ready for immediate administration.

'My dear, I believe you know,' said Dr. May, bending over him—and Mary well knew what the face must be saying.

'Both?' the faint tones asked.

'Recollect the sorrow that they have been spared,' said Dr. May in his lowest, tenderest tones, putting his hand out behind him, and signing to Mary for the cordial.

'She could not have borne it;' and the feebleness of those words made Mary eager to put the spoon once more into her father's hands.

'That is right, my boy. Think of their being together;' and Mary heard tears in her father's voice.

'Thank you,' again showed that the cordial was swallowed; then a pause, and in a quiet, sad, low tone, 'Poor Ave!'

'Your mending is the best thing for her.'

Then came a long sigh; and then, after a pause, the Doctor knelt down, and said the Lord's Prayer—the orphan's prayer, as so many have felt it in the hour of bereavement.

All was quite still, and both he and Mary knelt on for some short space; then he arose in guarded stillness, hastily wiped away the tears that were streaming over his face, and holding back the curtain, showed Mary the boy, again sunk into that sweet refreshing sleep. 'That is well over,' he said, with a deep sigh of relief, when they had moved to a safe distance. 'Poor fellow! he had better become used to the idea while he is too weak to think.'

'He is better?' asked Mary, repressing her agitation with difficulty.

'I believe the danger is over; and you may tell his sister so when she wakes.'

CHAPTER III

And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathize.—Miss Waring

Recovery had fairly set in, and 'better' was the universal bulletin, eating and drinking the prevailing remedy.

Henry Ward had quickly thrown off his illness. The sense that all depended on him, acted as a stimulus to his energies; he was anxious to be up and doing, and in a few days was down-stairs, looking over his father's papers, and making arrangements. He was eager and confident, declaring that his sisters should never want a home while he lived; and, when he first entered his brother's room, his effusion of affection overwhelmed Leonard in his exceeding weakness, and the thought of which during the rest of the day often brought tears to his eyes.

Very grateful to Dr. May, Henry declared himself anxious to abide by his advice; and discussed with him all his plans. There had been no will, but the house and land of course were Henry's. The other property gave about £2000 to each of the family; and Averil had about as much again from the old aunt, from whom she had taken her peculiar name. The home of all should, of course, still be their present one; Averil would teach her sisters, and superintend the house, and Leonard continue at the school, where he had a fair chance of obtaining the Randall scholarship in the course of a year or two. 'And if not,' said Henry, 'he may still not lose his University education. My father was proud of Leonard; and if he would have sent him there, why should not I?'

And when Dr. May thought how his own elder sons had insisted on greater advantages of education for their juniors than they had themselves enjoyed, he felt especially fatherly towards the young surgeon. On only one point was he dissatisfied, and that he could not press. He thought the establishment at Bankside too expensive, and counselled Henry to remove into the town, and let the house; but this was rejected on the argument of the uncertainty of finding a tenant, and the inexpediency of appearing less prosperous; and considering that Mr. and Mrs. Ward had themselves made the place, Dr. May thought his proposal hard-hearted. He went about impressing every one with his confidence in Henry Ward, and fought successfully at the Board of Guardians to have him considered as a continuation of his father, instead of appointing a new union doctor; and he watched with paternal solicitude that the young man's first return to his practice should be neither too soon for his own health or his patients' fears; giving him no exhortation more earnest, nor more thankfully accepted, than that he was to let no scruple prevent his applying to himself in the slightest difficulty; calling him in to pauper patients, and privately consulting in cases which could not be visited gratis. The patronage of Henry Ward was one of the hobbies that Dr. May specially loved, and he cantered off upon it with vehemence such as he had hardly displayed for years.

Aubrey recovered with the tardiness of a weakly constitution, and was long in even arriving at a drive in the brougham; for Dr. May had set up a brougham. As long as Hector Ernescliffe's home was at Stoneborough, driving the Doctor had been his privilege, and the old gig had been held together by diligent repairs; but when Maplewood claimed him, and Adams was laid aside by rheumatism, Flora would no longer be silenced, and preached respectability and necessity. Dr. May did not admit the plea, unless Adams were to sit inside and drive out of window; but then he was told of the impropriety of his daughters going out to dinner in gigs, and the expense of flies. When Flora talked of propriety in that voice, the family might protest and grumble, but were always reduced to obedience; and thus Blanche's wedding had been the occasion of Ethel being put into a hoop, and the Doctor into a brougham. He was better off under the tyranny than she was, in spite of the solitude he had bewailed.

Young Adams was not the companion his father had been, and was no loss; and he owned that he now got through a great deal of reading, and at times a great deal of sleep; and mourned for nothing but his moon and stars—so romantic a regret, that Dr. Spencer advised him not to mention it.

After Aubrey's first drives, Dr. Spencer declared that the best way of invigorating him would be to send him for a month to the sea-side, while the house could be thoroughly purified before Gertrude's return. Dr. Spencer and Mary would take care of Dr. May; and Ethel had begun to look forward to a tete-a-tete with Aubrey by the sea, which they had neither of them ever seen, when her anticipations were somewhat dashed by her father's exclaiming, that it would be the best thing for Leonard Ward to go with them. She said something about his not being well enough to travel so soon.

'Oh, yes, he will,' said Dr. May; 'he only wants stimulus to get on fast enough. I declare I'll ask Henry about it; I'm just going to meet him at the hospital.'

And before another word could be said, he let himself out at the back door of the garden, in which they had been meeting Richard, who was now allowed to come thus far, though both for Daisy's sake and his flock's, he had hitherto submitted to a rigorous quarantine; and the entire immunity of Cocksmoor from the malady was constantly adduced by each doctor as a convincing proof of his own theory.

'Well, I do hope that will go off!' exclaimed Ethel, as soon as her father was out of hearing. 'It will be a terrible upset to all one's peace and comfort with Aubrey!'

'Indeed—what harm will the poor boy do?' asked Richard.

'Make Aubrey into the mere shame-faced, sister-hating, commonplace creature that the collective boy thinks it due to himself to be in society,' said Ethel, 'and me from an enjoying sister, into an elderly, care-taking, despised spinster—a burden to myself and the boys.'

'But why, Ethel, can't you enjoy yourself!'

'My dear Richard, just imagine turning loose a lot of boys and girls, with no keeper, to enjoy themselves in some wild sea place! No, no: the only way to give the arrangement any shade of propriety, will be to be elderly, infuse as much vinegar as possible into my countenance, wear my spectacles, and walk at a staid pace up and down the parade, while my two sons disport themselves on the rocks.'

'If you really think it would not be proper,' said Richard, rather alarmed, 'I could run after my father.'

'Stuff, Richard; papa must have his way; and if it is to do the boy good, I can sacrifice a crab—I mean myself—not a crustacean. I am not going to be such a selfish wretch as to make objections.'

'But if it would not be the correct thing? Or could not you get some one to stay with you?'

'I can make it the correct thing. It is only to abstain from the fun I had hoped for. I meant to have been a girl, and now I must be a woman, that's all; and I dare say Aubrey will be the happier for it—boys always are.'

'If you don't like it, I wish you would let me speak to papa.'

'Richard, have you these five years been the safety-valve for my murmurs without knowing what they amount to?'

'I thought no one complained unless to get a thing remedied.'

'Exactly so. That is man! And experience never shows man that woman's growls relieve her soul, and that she dreads nothing more than their being acted on! All I wish is, that this scheme may die a natural death; but I should be miserable, and deserved to be so, if I raised a finger to hinder it. What, must you go? Rule Daisy's lines if she writes to Meta, please.'

'I did so. I have been trying to make her write straighter.'

'Of course you have. I expect I shall find her organ of order grown to a huge bump when she comes home. Oh! when will our poor remnants be once more a united family? and when shall I get into Cocksmoor school again?'

When Dr. May came home, his plan was in full bloom. Henry had gratefully accepted it, and answered for his brother being able to travel by the next Monday; and Dr. May wanted Ethel to walk with him to Bankside, and propose it there—talking it over with the sister, and making it her own invitation. Ethel saw her fate, and complied, her father talking eagerly all the way.

'You see, Ethel, it is quite as much for his spirits as his health that I wish it. He is just the age that our Norman was.'

That was the key to a great deal. Ethel knew that her father had never admitted any of the many excuses for the neglect of Norman's suffering for the three months after his mother's death; but though it thrilled her all over, she was not prepared to believe that any one, far less any Ward, could be of the same sensitive materials as Norman. To avoid answering, she went more than half-way, by saying, 'Don't you think I might ask those poor girls to come with him?'

'By no manner of means,' said the Doctor, stopping short. 'It is just what I want, to get him away from his sister. She minds nothing else; and if it were not for Mary, I don't know what the little ones would do; and as to Henry, he is very good and patient; but it is the way to prevent him from forming domestic tastes to have no mistress to his house. He will get into mischief, or marry, if she does not mind what she is about.'

'That must come to an end when Leonard is well, and goes back to school.'

'And that won't be till after the holidays. No, some break there must be. When he is gone, Mary can put her into the way of doing things; she is anxious to do right; and we shall see them do very well. But this poor boy—you know he has been always living at home, while the others were away; he was very fond of his mother, and the first coming out of his room was more than he could bear. I must have him taken from home till he is well again, and able to turn to other things.'

And before Ethel's eyes came a vision of poor Mrs. Ward leaning on her son's arm, on Saturday afternoon walks, each looking fond and proud of the other. She felt her own hardness of heart, and warmed to the desire of giving comfort.

Bankside was basking in summer sunshine, with small patches of shade round its young shrubs and trees, and a baking heat on the little porch.

The maid believed Miss Ward was in the garden. Mr. Leonard had been taken out to-day; and the Doctor moving on, they found themselves in the cool pretty drawing-room, rather overcrowded with furniture and decoration, fresh and tasteful, but too much of it, and a contrast to the Mays' mixture of the shabby and the curious, in the room that was so decidedly for use, and not for show.

What arrested the attention was, however, the very sweetest singing Ethel had ever heard. The song was low and sad, but so intensely sweet, that Dr. May held up his hand to silence all sound, and stood with restrained breath and moistened eyes. Ethel, far less sensitive to music, was nevertheless touched as she had never before been by sound; and the more, as she looked through the window and saw in the shade of a walnut-tree, a sofa, at the foot of which sat Averil Ward in her deep mourning, her back to the window, so that only her young figure and the braids of her fair hair were to be seen; and beyond, something prostrate, covered with wrappers. The sweet notes ended, Dr. May drew a deep sigh, wiped his spectacles, and went on; Ethel hung back, not to startle the invalid by the sight of a stranger; but as Averil rose, she saw him raising himself, with a brightening smile on his pale face, to hold out his hand to the Doctor. In another minute Averil had come to her, shaken hands, and seated herself where she could best command a view of her brother.

'I am glad to see him out of doors,' said Ethel.

'Henry was bent on it; but I think the air and the glare of everything is too much for him; he is so tired and oppressed.'

'I am sure he must like your singing,' said Ethel.

'It is almost the only thing that answers,' said Averil, her eyes wistfully turning to the sofa; 'he can't read, and doesn't like being read to.'

'It is very difficult to manage a boy's recovery,' said Ethel. 'They don't know how to be ill.'

'It is not that,' replied the sister, as if she fancied censure implied, 'but his spirits. Every new room he goes into seems to beat him down; and he lies and broods. If he could only talk!'

'I know that so well!' said Ethel. But to Averil the May troubles were of old date, involved in the mists of childhood. And Ethel seeing that her words were not taken as sympathy, continued, 'Do not the little girls amuse him?'

'Oh no! they are too much for him; and I am obliged to keep them in the nursery. Poor little things! I don't know what we should do if your sister Mary were not so kind.'

'Mary is very glad,' began Ethel, confusedly. Then rushing into her subject: 'Next week, I am to take Aubrey to the seaside; and we thought if Leonard would join us, the change might be good for him.'

'Thank you,' Averil answered, playing with her heavy jet watch-guard. 'You are very good; but I am sure he could not move so soon.'

'Ave,' called Leonard at that moment; and Ethel, perceiving that she likewise was to advance, came forth in time to hear, 'O, Ave! I am to go to the sea next week, with Aubrey May and his sister. Won't it—'

Then becoming aware of the visitor, he stopped short, threw his feet off the sofa, and stood up to receive her.

'I can't let you come if you do like that,' she said, shaking his long thin hand; and he let himself down again, not, however, resuming his recumbent posture, and giving a slight but effective frown to silence his sister's entreaties that he would do so. He sat, leaning back as though exceedingly feeble, scarcely speaking, but his eyes eloquent with eagerness. And very fine eyes they were! Ethel remembered her own weariness, some twelve or fourteen years back, of the raptures of her baby-loving sisters about those eyes; and now in the absence of the florid colouring of health, she was the more struck by the beauty of the deep liquid brown, of the blue tinge of the white, and of the lustrous light that resided in them, but far more by their power of expression, sometimes so soft and melancholy, at other moments earnest, pleading, and almost flashing with eagerness. It was a good mouth too, perhaps a little inclined to sternness of mould about the jaw and chin; but that might have been partly from the absence of all softening roundness, aging the countenance for the time, just as illness had shrunk the usually sturdy figure.

'Has Ethel told you of our plan?' asked Dr. May of the sister.

'Yes,' she hesitated, in evident confusion and distress. 'You are all very kind, but we must see what Henry says.'

'I have spoken to Henry! He answers for our patching Leonard up for next week; and I have great faith in Dr. Neptune.'

Leonard's looks were as bright as Averil's were disturbed.

'Thank you, thank you very much! but can he possibly be well enough for the journey?'

Leonard's eyes said 'I shall.'

'A week will do great things,' said Dr. May, 'and it is a very easy journey—only four hours' railway, and a ten miles' drive.'

Averil's face was full of consternation; and Leonard leant forward with hope dancing in his eyes.

'You know the place,' continued Dr. May, 'Coombe Hole. Quite fresh, and unhackneyed. It is just where Devon and Dorset meet. I am not sure in which county; but there's a fine beach, and beautiful country. The Riverses found it out, and have been there every autumn; besides sending their poor little girl and her governess down when London gets too hot. Flora has written to the woman of the lodgings she always has, and will lend them the maid she sends with little Margaret; so they will be in clover.'

'Is it not a very long way!' said Averil, thinking how long those ten yards of lawn had seemed.

'Not as things go,' said Dr. May. 'You want Dr. Spencer to reproach you with being a Stoneborough fungus. There are places in Wales nearer by the map, but without railway privilege; and as to a great gay place, they would all be sick of it.'

'Do you feel equal to it? as if you should like it, Leonard?' asked his sister, in a trembling would-be grateful voice.

'Of all things,' was the answer.

Ethel thought the poor girl had suffered constraint enough, and that it was time to release the boy from his polite durance, so she rose to take leave, and again Leonard pulled himself upright to shake hands.

'Indeed,' said Ethel, when Averil had followed them into the drawing-room, 'I am sorry for you. It would go very hard with me to make Aubrey over to any one! but if you do trust him with me, I must come and hear all you wish me to do for him.'

'I cannot think that he will be able or glad to go when it comes to the point,' said Averil, with a shaken tone.

Dr. May was nearer than she thought, and spoke peremptorily. 'Take care what you are about! You are not to worry him with discussions. If he can go, he will; if not, he will stay at home; but pros and cons are prohibited. Do you hear, Averil!'

'Yes; very well.'

'Papa you really are very cruel to that poor girl,' were Ethel's first words outside.

'Am I? I wouldn't be for worlds, Ethel. But somehow she always puts me in a rage. I wish I knew she was not worrying her brother at this moment!'

No, Averil was on the staircase, struggling, choking with the first tears she had shed. All this fortnight of unceasing vigilance and exertion, her eyes had been dry, for want of time to realize, for want of time to weep, and now she was ashamed that hurt feeling rather than grief had opened the fountain. She could not believe that it was not a cruel act of kindness, to carry one so weak as Leonard away from home to the care of a stranger. She apprehended all manner of ill consequences; and then nursing him, and regarding his progress as her own work, had been the sedative to her grief, which would come on her 'like an armed man,' in the dreariness of his absence. Above all, she felt herself ill requited by his manifest eagerness to leave her who had nursed him so devotedly—her, his own sister—for the stiff, plain Miss May whom he hardly knew. The blow from the favourite companion brother, so passionately watched and tended, seemed to knock her down; and Dr. May, with medical harshness, forbidding her the one last hope of persuading him out of the wild fancy, filled up the measure.

Oh, those tears! How they would swell up at each throb of the wounded heart, at each dismal foreboding of the desponding spirit. But she had no time for them! Leonard must not be left alone, with no one to cover him up with his wrappers.

The tears were strangled, the eyes indignantly dried. She ran out at the garden door. The sofa was empty! Had Henry come home and helped him in? She hurried on to the window; Leonard was alone in the drawing-room, resting breathlessly on an ottoman within the window.

'Dear Leonard! Why didn't you wait for me!'

'I thought I'd try what I could do. You see I am much stronger than we thought.' And he smiled cheerfully, as he helped himself by the furniture to another sofa. 'I say, Ave, do just give me the map —the one in Bradshaw will do. I want to find this place.'

'I don't think there is a Bradshaw,' said Averil, reluctantly.

'Oh yes, there is—behind the candlestick, on the study chimney-piece.'

'Very well—' There were more tears to be gulped down—and perhaps they kept her from finding the book.

'Where's the Bradshaw?'

'I didn't see it.'

'I tell you I know it was there. The left-hand candlestick, close to the letter-weight. I'll get it myself.'

He was heaving himself up, when Averil prevented him by hastening to a more real search, which speedily produced the book.

Eagerly Leonard unfolded the map, making her steady it for his shaking hand, and tracing the black toothed lines.

'There's Bridport—ten miles from there. Can you see the name, Ave?'

'No, it is not marked.'

'Never mind. I see where it is; and I can see it is a capital place; just in that little jag, with famous bathing. I wonder if they will stay long enough for me to learn to swim?'

'You are a good way from that as yet,' said poor Averil, her heart sinking lower and lower.

'Oh, I shall be well at once when I get away from here!'

'I hope so.'

'Why, Ave!' he cried, now first struck with her tone, 'don't you know I shall?'

'I don't know,' she said, from the soreness of her heart; 'but I can't tell how to trust you with strangers.'

'Strangers! You ungrateful child!' exclaimed Leonard, indignantly. 'Why, what have they been doing for you all this time?'

'I am sure Miss May, at least, never came near us till to-day.'

'I'm very glad of it! I'm sick of everything and everybody I have seen!'

Everybody! That was the climax! Averil just held her tongue; but she rushed to her own room, and wept bitterly and angrily. Sick of her after all her devotion! Leonard, the being she loved best in the world!

And Leonard, distressed and hurt at the reception of his natural expression of the weariness of seven weeks' sickness and sorrow, felt above all the want of his mother's ever-ready sympathy and soothing, and as if the whole world, here, there, and everywhere, would be an equally dreary waste. His moment of bright anticipation passed into heavy despondency, and turning his head from the light, he dropped asleep with a tear on his cheek.

When he awoke it was at the sound of movements in the room, slow and cautious, out of regard to his slumbers—and voices, likewise low—at least one was low, the other that whisper of the inaudibility of which Averil could not be disabused. He lay looking for a few moments through his eyelashes, before exerting himself to move. Averil, her face still showing signs of recent tears, sat in a low chair, a book in her lap, talking to her brother Henry.

Henry was of less robust frame than Leonard promised to be, and though on a smaller scale, was more symmetrically made, and had more regular features than either his brother or sister, but his eyes were merely quick lively black beads, without anything of the clear depths possessed by the others. His hair too was jet black, whereas theirs was a pale nut brown; and his whiskers, long and curling, so nearly met under his chin, as to betray a strong desire that the hirsute movement should extend to the medical profession. Always point-device in apparel, the dust on his boot did not prevent its perfect make from being apparent; and the entire sit of his black suit would have enabled a cursory glance to decide that it never came out of the same shop as Dr. May's.

'O, Henry!' were the words that he first heard distinctly.

'It will be much better for every one—himself and you included.'

'Yes, if—'

'If—nonsense. I tell you he will be quite well enough. See how well I am now, how fast I got on as soon as I took to tonics.—Ha, Leonard, old fellow! what, awake? What do you say to this plan of old May's?'

'It is very kind of him; and I should be very glad if I am well enough; but next week is very soon,' said Leonard, waking in the depression in which he had gone to sleep.

'Oh, next week! That is as good as next year in a matter like this, as May agreed with me, here, let us have your pulse. You have let him get low, Averil. A basin of good soup will put more heart into you, and you will feel ready for anything.'

'I have got on to-day, said Leonard, briskly raising himself, as though the cheerful voice had been cordial in itself.

'Of course you have, now that you have something to look forward to; and you will be in excellent hands; the very thing I wanted for you, though I could not see how to manage it. I am going to dress. I shall tell them to send in dinner; and if I am not down, I shall be in the nursery. You won't come in to dinner, Leonard?'

'No, said Leonard, with a shudder.

'I shall send you in some gravy soup, that you may thank me for. Ave never would order anything but boiled chickens for you, and forgets that other people ever want to eat. There will be a chance of making a housekeeper of her now.'

How selfish, thought Averil, to want to get rid of poor Leonard, that I may attend to his dinners. Yet Henry had spoken in perfect good-humour.

Henry came down with a little sister in each hand. They were his especial darlings; and with a touch of fatherly fondness, he tried to compensate to them for their sequestration from the drawing-room, the consequence of Averil not having established her authority enough to keep their spirits from growing too riotous for Leonard's weakness. Indeed, their chatter was Henry's sole enlivenment, for Averil was constantly making excursions to ask what her patient would eat, and watch its success; and but for his pleasure in the little girls popping about him, he would have had a meal as dull as it was unsettled. As soon as the strawberries were eaten, he walked out through the window with them clinging to him, and Averil returned to her post.

'Some music, Ave,' said Leonard, with an instinctive dread of her conversation.

She knew her voice was past singing, and began one of her most renowned instrumental pieces, which she could play as mechanically as a musical-box.

'Not that jingling airified thing!' cried Leonard, 'I want something quiet and refreshing. There's an evening hymn that the Mays have.'

'The Mays know nothing of music,' said Averil.

'Stay, this is it:' and he whistled a few bars.

'That old thing! Of course I know that. We had it every Sunday at Brighton.'

She began it, but her eyes were full of tears, partly because she hated herself for the irritation she had betrayed. She was a sound, good, honest-hearted girl; but among all the good things she had learned at Brighton, had not been numbered the art of ruling her own spirit.

CHAPTER IV

Griefs hidden in the mind like treasures,
Will turn with time to solemn pleasures.

On the Monday morning, the two convalescents shook hands in the waiting-room at the station, surveying each other rather curiously; while Ethel, trying to conquer her trepidation, gave manifold promises to Averil of care and correspondence.

Dr. Spencer acted escort, being far more serviceable on the railway than his untravelled friend, whose lame arm, heedless head, and aptitude for missing trains and mistaking luggage, made him a charge rather than an assistant. He was always happiest among his patients at home; and the world was still ill enough to employ him so fully, that Ethel hoped to be less missed than usual. Indeed, she believed that her absence would be good in teaching him Mary's full-grown worth, and Mary would be in the full glory of notability in the purification of the house.

The change was likewise for Dr. Spencer's good. He had almost broken down in the height of the labour, and still looked older and thinner for it; and after one night at Coombe, he was going to refresh himself by one of his discursive tours.

He was in high spirits, and the pink of courtesy; extremely flattered by the charge of Ethel, and making her the ostensible object of his attention, to the relief of the boys, who were glad to be spared the sense of prominent invalidism. The change was delightful to them. Aubrey was full of life and talk, and sat gazing from the window, as if the line from Stoneborough to Whitford presented a succession of novelties.

'What's that old place on the river there, with crow-stepped gables and steep roofs, like a Flemish picture?'

'Don't you know?' said Leonard, 'it is the Vintry mill, where my relative lives, that wants to make a dusty miller of me.'

'No fear of that, old fellow,' said Aubrey, regarding him in some dismay, 'you've got better things to grind at.'

'Ay, even if I don't get the Randall next time, I shall be sure of it another.'

'You'll have it next.'

'I don't know; here is a quarter clean gone, and the other fellows will have got before me.'

'Oh, but most of them have had a spell of fever!'

'Yes, but they have not had it so thoroughly,' said Leonard. 'My memory is not properly come back yet; and your father says I must not try it too soon.'

'That's always his way,' said Aubrey. 'He would not let Ethel so much as pack up my little Homer.'

Leonard's quick, furtive glance at Ethel was as if he suspected her of having been barely prevented from torturing him.

'Oh, it was not her doing,' said Aubrey, 'it was I! I thought Tom would find me gone back; and, you know, we must keep up together, Leonard, and be entered at St. John's at the same time.'

For Aubrey devoutly believed in Tom's college at Cambridge, which had recovered all Dr. May's allegiance.

The extra brightness was not of long duration. It was a very hot day, such as exactly suited the salamander nature of Dr. Spencer; but the carriage became like an oven. Aubrey curled himself up in a corner and went to sleep, but Leonard's look of oppressed resignation grieved Ethel, and the blue

blinds made him look so livid, that she was always fancying him fainting, and then his shyness was dreadful—it was impossible to elicit from him anything but 'No, thank you.'

He did nearly faint when they left the train; and while Aubrey was eagerly devouring the produce of the refreshment room, had to lie on a bench under Dr. Spencer's charge, for Ethel's approach only brought on a dangerous spasm of politeness. How she should get on with him for a month, passed her imagination.

There was a fresher breeze when they drove out of the station, up a Dorset ridge of hill, steep, high, terraced and bleak; but it was slow climbing up, and every one was baked and wearied before the summit was gained, and the descent commenced. Even then, Ethel, sitting backwards, could only see height develop above height, all green, and scattered with sheep, or here and there an unfenced turnip-field, the road stretching behind like a long white ribbon, and now and then descending between steep chalk cuttings in slopes, down which the carriage slowly scrooped on its drag, leaving a broad blue-flecked trail. Dr. Spencer was asleep, hat off, and the wind lifting his snowy locks, and she wished the others were; but Aubrey lamented on the heat and the length, and Leonard leant back in his corner, past lamentation.

Down, down! The cuttings were becoming precipitous cliffs, the drag made dismal groans; Aubrey, after a great slip forward, looking injured, anchored himself, with his feet against the seat, by Ethel; and Dr. Spencer was effectually wakened by an involuntary forward plunge of his opposite neighbour. 'Can this be safe?' quoth Ethel; 'should not some of us get out?'

'Much you know of hills, you level landers!' was the answer; and just then they were met and passed by four horses dragging up a stage coach, after the fashion of a fly on a window-pane—a stage coach! delightful to the old-world eyes of Dr. Spencer, recalling a faint memory to Ethel, and presenting a perfect novelty to Aubrey.

Then came a sudden turn upon flat ground, and a short cry of wonder broke from Aubrey. Ethel was sensible of a strange salt weedy smell, new to her nostrils, but only saw the white-plastered, gray-roofed houses through which they were driving; but, with another turn, the buildings were only on one side—on the other there was a wondrous sense of openness, vastness, freshness—something level, gray, but dazzling; and before she could look again, the horses stopped, and close to her, under the beetling, weather-stained white cliff, was a low fence, and within it a verandah and a door, where stood Flora's maid, Barbara, in all her respectability.

Much wit had been expended by Aubrey on being left to the tender mercy of cruel Barbara Allen, in whom Ethel herself anticipated a tyrant; but at the moment she was invaluable. Every room was ready and inviting, and nothing but the low staircase between Leonard and the white bed, which was the only place fit for him; while for the rest, the table was speedily covered with tea and chickens; Abbotstoke eggs, inscribed with yesterday's date; and red mail-clad prawns, to prove to touch and taste that this was truly sea-side. The other senses knew it well: the open window let in the indescribable salt, fresh odour, and the entire view from it was shore and sea, there seemed nothing to hinder the tide from coming up the ridge of shingle, and rushing straight into the cottage; and the ear was constantly struck by the regular roll and dash of the waves. Aubrey, though with the appetite of recovery and sea-air combined, could not help pausing to listen, and, when his meal was over, leant back in his chair, listened again, and gave a sigh of content. 'It is one constant hush, hushaby,' he said; 'it would make one sleep pleasantly.'

His companions combined their advice to him so to use it; and in less than half an hour Ethel went to bid him good night, in the whitest of beds and cleanest of tiny chambers, where he looked the picture of sleepy satisfaction, when she opened his window, and admitted the swell and dash that fascinated his weary senses.

'My child is all right,' said Ethel, returning to Dr. Spencer; 'can you say the same of yours?'

'He must rest himself into the power of sleeping. I must say it was a bold experiment; but it will do very well, when he has got over the journey. He was doing no good at home.'

'I hope he will here.'

'Depend on it he will. And now what are you intending?'

'I am thirsting to see those waves near. Would it be against the manners and customs of sea-places for me to run down to them so late?'

'Sea-places have no manners and customs.'

Ethel tossed on her hat with a feeling of delight and freedom. 'Oh, are you coming, Dr. Spencer? I did not mean to drag you out. You had rather rest, and smoke.'

'This is rest,' he answered.

The next moment, the ridge of the shingle was passed, and Ethel's feet were sinking in the depth of pebbles, her cheeks freshened by the breeze, her lips salted by the spray tossed in by the wind from the wave crests. At the edge of the water she stood—as all others stand there—watching the heaving from far away come nearer, nearer, curl over in its pride of green glassy beauty, fall into foam, and draw back, making the pebbles crash their accompanying 'frsch.' The repetition, the peaceful majesty, the blue expanse, the straight horizon, so impressed her spirit as to rivet her eyes and chain her lips; and she receded step by step before the tide, unheeding anything else, not even perceiving her companion's eyes fixed on her, half curiously, half sadly.

'Well, Ethel,' at last he said.

'I never guessed it!' she said, with a gasp. 'No wonder Harry cannot bear to be away from it. Must we leave it?' as he moved back.

'Only to smooth ground,' said Dr. Spencer; 'it is too dark to stay here among the stones and crab-pots.'

The summer twilight was closing in; lights shining in the village under the cliffs, and looking mysterious on distant points of the coast; stars were shining forth in the pale blue sky, and the young moon shedding a silver rippled beam on the water.

'If papa were but here!' said Ethel, wakening from another gaze, and recollecting that she was not making herself agreeable.

'So you like the expedition?'

'The fit answer to that would be, "It is very pretty," as the Cockney said to Coleridge at Lodore.'

'So I have converted a Stoneborough fungus!'

'What! to say the sea is glorious? A grand conversion!'

'To find anything superior to Minster Street.'

'Ah, you are but half reclaimed! You are a living instance that there is no content unless one has begun life as a fungus.'

She was startled by his change of tone. 'True, Ethel. Content might have been won, if there had been resolution to begin without it.'

'I beg your pardon,' she faltered, 'I ought not to have said it. I forgot there was such a cause.'

'Cause—you know nothing about it.'

She was silent, distressed, dismayed, fearing that she had spoken wrongly, and had either mistaken or been misunderstood.

'Tell me, Ethel,' he presently said, 'what can you know of what made me a wanderer?'

'Only what papa told me.'

'He—he was the last person to know.'

'He told me,' said Ethel, hurrying it out in a fright, 'that you went away—out of generosity—not to interfere with his happiness.'

Then she felt as if she had done a shocking thing, and waited anxiously, while Dr. Spencer deliberately made a deep hole in the shingle with his stick. 'Well,' at last he said, 'I thought that matter was unknown to all men—above all to Dick!'

'It was only after you were gone, that he put things together and made it out.'

'Did—she—know?' said Dr. Spencer, with a long breath.

'I cannot tell,' said Ethel.

'And how or why did he tell you?' (rather hurt.)

'It was when first you came. I am sure no one else knows it. But he told me because he could not help it; he was so sorry for you.'

They walked the whole length of the parade, and had turned before Dr. Spencer spoke again; and then he said, 'It is strange! My one vision was of walking on the sea-shore with her; and that just doing so with you should have brought up the whole as fresh as five-and-thirty years ago!'

'I wish I was more like her,' said Ethel.

No more was wanting to make him launch into the descriptions, dear to a daughter's heart, of her mother in her sweet serious bloom of young womanhood, giving new embellishments to the character already so closely enshrined in his hearer's heart, the more valuable that the stream of treasured recollection flowed on in partial oblivion of the person to whom it was addressed, or, at least, that she was the child of his rival; for, from the portrait of the quiet bright maiden, he passed to the sufferings that his own reserved nature had undergone from his friend's outspoken enthusiasm. The professor's visible preference for the youth of secure prospects, had not so much discouraged as stung him; and in a moment of irritation at the professor's treatment, and the exulting hopes of his unconscious friend, he had sworn to himself, that the first involuntary token of regard from the young lady towards one or the other, should decide him whether to win name and position for her sake, or to carry his slighted passion to the utmost parts of the earth, and never again see her face.

'Ethel,' he said, stopping short, 'never threaten Providence—above all, never keep the threat.'

Ethel scarcely durst speak, in her anxiety to know what cast the die, though with all Dr. Spencer's charms, she could not but pity the delusion that could have made him hope to be preferred to her father—above all, by her mother. Nor could she clearly understand from him what had dispelled his hopes. Something it was that took place at the picnic on Arthur's Seat, of which she had previously heard as a period of untold bliss. That something, still left in vague mystery, had sealed the fate of the two friends.

'And so,' said Dr. Spencer, 'I took the first foreign appointment that offered. And my poor father, who had spent his utmost on me, and had been disappointed in all his sons, was most of all disappointed in me. I held myself bound to abide by my rash vow; loathed tame English life without her, and I left him to neglect in his age.'

'You could not have known or expected!' exclaimed Ethel.

'What right had I to expect anything else? It was only myself that I thought of. I pacified him by talk of travelling, and extending my experience, and silenced my conscience by intending to return when ordinary life should have become tolerable to me—a time that never has come. At last, in the height of that pestilential season in India, came a letter, warning me that my brother's widow had got the mastery over my poor father, and was cruelly abusing it, so that only my return could deliver him. It was when hundreds were perishing, and I the only medical man near; when to have left my post would have been both disgraceful and murderous. Then I was laid low myself; and while I was conquering the effects of cholera, came tidings that made it nothing to me whether they or I conquered. This,' and he touched one of his white curling locks, 'was not done by mere bodily exertion or ailment.'

'You would have been too late any way,' said Ethel.

'No, not if I had gone immediately. I might have got him out of that woman's hands, and made his life happy for years. There was the sting, but the crime had been long before. You know the rest. I had no health to remain, no heart to come home; and then came vagrancy indeed. I drifted wherever restlessness or impulse took me, till all my working years were over, and till the day when the sight of your father's wedding-ring showed me that I should not break my mad word by accepting the only welcome that any creature gave me.'

'And, oh! surely you have been comforted by him?'

'Comforted! Cut to the heart would be truer. One moment, I could only look at him as having borne off my treasure to destroy it; but then there rose on me his loving, patient, heartbroken humility and cheerfulness; and I saw such a character, such a course, as showed me how much better he had deserved her, and filled me with shame at having ever less esteemed him. And through all, there was the same dear Dick May, that never, since the day we first met at the pump in the school court, had I been able to help loving with all my heart—the only being that was glad to see me again. When he begged me to stay and watch over your sister, what could I do but remain while she lived?'

'So he bound you down! Oh, you know how we thank you! no, you can't, nor what you have been to him, and to all of us, through the worst of our sad days. And though it was a sacrifice, I do not think it was bad for you.'

'No, Ethel. When you implored me to give up my Crimean notion, to spare your father pain, I did feel for once that you at least thought me of value to some one.'

'I cannot bear you to speak so,' cried Ethel. 'You to talk of having been of no use!'

'No honest man of principle and education can be utterly useless; but when, three days ago, I recollected that it was my sixtieth birthday, I looked back, and saw nothing but desultory broken efforts, and restless changes. Your father told me, when I thought him unaware of the meaning of his words, that if I had missed many joys, I had missed many sorrows; but I had taken the way to make my one sorrow a greater burden than his many.'

'But you do not grieve for my mother still?' said Ethel, anxiously. 'Even his grief is a grave joy to him now; and one is always told that such things, as it was with you, are but a very small part of a man's life.'

'I am not one of the five hundred men, whom any one of five hundred women might have equally pleased,' said Dr. Spencer; 'but it is so far true, that the positive pain and envy wore out, and would not have interfered with my after life, but for my own folly. No, Ethel; it was not the loss of her that embittered and threw away my existence; it was my own rash vow, and its headstrong fulfilment, which has left me no right to your father's peaceful spirit.'

'How little we guessed!' said Ethel. 'So cheerful and ready as you always are.'

'I never trouble others, he said abruptly. 'Neither man nor woman ever heard a word of all this; and you would not have heard it now, but for that sea; and you have got your mother's voice, and some of her ways, since you have grown older and more sedate.'

'Oh, I am so glad!' said Ethel, who had been led to view her likeness to her father as natural, that to her mother as acquired.

Those were the last words of the conversation; but Ethel, leaning from her window to listen to the plash of the waves, suspected that the slowly moving meteor she beheld, denoted that a cigar was soothing the emotions excited by their dialogue. She mused long over that revelation of the motives of the life that had always been noble and generous in the midst of much that was eccentric and wayward, and constantly the beat of the waves repeated to her the half-comprehended words, 'Never threaten Providence.'

After superintending Aubrey's first bath, and duly installing the vice-M. D. and her charges, Dr. Spencer departed; and Ethel was launched on an unknown ocean, as pilot to an untried crew. She had been told to regard Leonard's bashfulness as a rare grace; but it was very inconvenient to have the boy wretchedly drooping, and owning nothing amiss, apparently unacquainted with any English words, except 'Thank you' and 'No, thank you.' Indeed, she doubted whether the shyness were genuine, for stories were afloat of behaviour at Stoneborough parties which savoured of audacity, and she vainly consulted Aubrey whether the cause of his discomfiture were her age or her youth, her tutorship or her plain face. Even Aubrey could not elicit any like or dislike, wish or complaint; and shrugging up his shoulders, decided that it was of no use to bother about it; Leonard would come to his senses in time. He was passive when taken out walking, submissive when planted on a three-cornered camp-stool that expanded from a gouty walking-stick, but seemed so inadequately perched, and made so

forlorn a spectacle, that they were forced to put him indoors out of the glare of sea and sky, and hoping that he would condescend to the sofa when Ethel was out of sight.

Punctilio broke down the next morning; and in the midst of breakfast, he was forced to lie down, and allow Ethel to bathe his face with vinegar and water; while she repented of the 'make-the-best-of-it' letter of the yesterday, and sent Aubrey out on a secret commission of inquiry about medical men, in case of need. Aubrey was perfectly well, and in such a state of desultory enjoyment and sea-side active idleness, that he was quite off her mind, only enlivening her morning of nursing by his exits and entrances, to tell of fresh discoveries, or incidents wonderful to the inland mind.

After dinner, which had driven Leonard to lie on his bed, Aubrey persuaded his sister to come to see his greatest prize; a quaint old local naturalist, a seafaring man, with a cottage crammed with pans of live wonders of the deep in water, and shelves of extinct ones, 'done up in stane pies,' not a creature, by sea or land, that had haunted Coombe for a few million of ages, seemed to have escaped him. Such sea-side sojourns as the present, are the prime moments for coquetries with the lighter branches of natural science, and the brother and sister had agreed to avail themselves of the geological facilities of their position, the fascinations of Hugh Miller's autobiography having entirely gained them during Aubrey's convalescence. Ethel tore herself away from the discussion of localities with the old man, who was guide as well as philosopher, boatman as well as naturalist, and returned to her patient, whom she found less feverish, though sadly low and languid.

'I wish I knew what to do for you,' she said, sitting down by him. 'What would your sister do for you?'

'Nothing,' he wearily said, 'I mean, a great deal too much.' The tone so recalled Norman's dejected hopelessness, that she could not help tenderly laying her cold hands on the hot brow, and saying, 'Yes, I know how little one can do as a sister—and the mockery it is to think that one place can ever be taken!'

The brown eyes looked at her with moist earnestness that she could hardly bear, but closed with a look of relief and soothing, as she held her hand on his forehead. Presently, however, he said, 'Don't let me keep you in.'

'I have been out, thank you. I am so glad to try to do anything for you.'

'Thank you. What o'clock is it, please? Ah, then I ought to take that draught! I forgot it in the morning.'

He permitted her to fetch it and pour it out, but as she recognized a powerful tonic, she exclaimed, 'Is this what you are taking? May it not make you feverish?'

'No doubt it does,' he said, lying down again; 'it was only Henry—'

'What! did not my father know of it?'

'Of course he does not, as it seems to be poison.'

'Not exactly that,' said Ethel; 'but I was surprised, for it was talked of for Aubrey; but they said it wanted watching.'

'Just like Henry,' observed Leonard.

'Well,' said Ethel, repressing her indignation, 'I am glad, at least, to find a possible cause for your bad night. We shall see you refreshed to-morrow, and not wishing yourself at home.'

'Don't think that I wish that. Home is gone for ever.'

'Home may be gone higher—up to the real Home,' said Ethel, blushing with the effort at the hint, and coming down to earthlier consolations, 'but even the fragments will grow into home again here, and you will feel very differently.'

Leonard did not answer; but after a pause said, 'Miss May, is not it a horrid pity girls should go to school?'

'I am no judge, Leonard.'

'You see,' said the boy, 'after the little girls were born, my mother had no time for Ave, and sent her to Brighton, and there she begged to stay on one half after another, learning all sorts of

things; but only coming home for short holidays, like company, for us to wonder at her and show her about, thinking herself ever so much in advance of my poor mother, and now she knows just nothing at all of her!'

'You cannot tell, Leonard, and I am sure she has been devoted to you.'

'If she had stayed at home like you, she might have known how to let one alone. Oh, you can't think what peace it was yesterday!'

'Was it peace? I feared it was desertion.'

'It is much better to be by oneself, than always worried. To have them always at me to get up my spirits when the house is miserable—'

'Ah,' said Ethel, 'I remember your mother rejoicing that she had not to send you from home, and saying you were always so kind and gentle to her.'

'Did she!' cried the boy, eagerly. 'Oh, but she forgot—' and he hid his face, the features working with anguish.

'So pleased and proud she used to look, walking with you on Saturday afternoons.'

'Those Saturdays! They were the only walks she ever would take; but she would always come with me.'

More followed in the same strain, and Ethel began to gather more distinct impressions of the Ward family. She saw that her present charge was warm and sound-hearted, and that the strength of his affections had been chiefly absorbed by the homely housewifely mother, comparatively little esteemed by the modernized brother and sister. Of the loss of his father he seemed to think less; it seemed, indeed, rather to reconcile him to that of his mother, by the grief it spared her; and it confirmed Ethel's notion, that Mr. Ward, a busy and dull man, paid no great attention to his children between the plaything period and that of full development. The mother was the home; and Averil, though Leonard showed both love for and pride in her, had hitherto been a poor substitute, while as to Henry, there was something in each mention of him which gave Ethel an undefined dread of the future of the young household, and a doubt of the result of her father's kind schemes of patronage.

At any rate, this conversation had the happy effect of banishing constraint, and satisfying Ethel that the let-alone system was kindness, not neglect. She was at ease in discussing fossils, though he contributed no word, and she let him sleep or wake as he best liked; whilst Aubrey read to her the 'Cruise of the Betsey.'

Henry's prescription was sent to invigorate the fishes, when its cessation was found to be followed by the recovery of sleep and appetite, and in the cool of the evening, by a disposition to stroll on the beach, and lie under the lee of a rock upon a railway rug, which Ethel had substituted for the 'three-legged delusion.'

There he was left, while his companions went fossil-hunting, and stayed so long as to excite their compunction, and quicken their steps when they at length detached themselves from the enticing blue lias.

'What has he got there?' cried Aubrey. 'Hillo, old fellow! have you fallen a prey to a black cat?'

'Cat!' returned Leonard, indignantly; 'don't you see it is the jolliest little dog in the world?'

'You call that a dog?' said the other boy with redoubled contempt; 'it is just big enough for little Margaret's Noah's Ark!'

'It really is a beauty!' said Ethel. 'I have known one of Flora's guests bring a bigger one in her muff.'

'It is the most sensible little brute,' added Leonard. 'See; beg, my man, beg!'

And the beauteous little black-coated King Charles erected itself on its hind legs, displaying its rich ruddy tan waistcoat and sleeves, and beseeching with its black diamond eyes for the biscuit, dropped and caught in mid-air. It was the first time Leonard had looked bright.

'So you expect us to sanction your private dog stealing?' said Aubrey.

'I have been watching for his mistress to come back,' said Leonard; 'but she must have passed an hour ago, and she does not deserve to have him, for she never looked back for him; and he had run up to me, frisking and making much of me, as if he had found an old friend.'

'Perhaps it will run home when we move.'

No such thing; it trotted close at Leonard's heels, and entered the house with them. Barbara was consulted, and on Leonard's deposition that the dog's mistress was in deep mourning, opined that she could be no other than the widow of an officer, who during his lingering illness had been often laid upon the beach, and had there played with his little dogs. This one, evidently very young, had probably, in the confusion of its puppy memory, taken the invalid for its lost master.

'Stupid little thing,' said Aubrey; 'just like an undersized lady's toy.'

'It knows its friends. These little things have twice the sense of overgrown dogs as big and as stupid as jackasses.'

A retort from Leonard was welcome in Ethel's ears, and she quite developed his conversational powers, in an argument on the sagacity of all canine varieties. It was too late to send the little animal home; and he fondled and played with it till bed-time, when he lodged it in his own room; and the attachment was so strong, that it was with a deep sigh, that at breakfast he accepted Aubrey's offer of conveying it home.

'There she is! he exclaimed in the midst, gazing from the window.

'And see the perfection of the animal!' added Aubrey, pointing to a broad-backed waddling caricature of the little black fairy.

'Restitution must be made, little as she deserves you, you little jewel,' said Leonard, picking up the object of his admiration. 'I'll take you out.'

'No, no; I am not so infectious,' said Ethel, tying on her hat; 'I had better do it.'

And after Leonard's parting embrace to his favourite, she received it; and quickly overtaking the pensive steps of the lady, arrested her progress with, 'I beg your pardon, but I think this is your dog.'

'Poor little Mab! as the dog struggled to get to her, and danced gladly round her. 'I missed her last night, and was coming to look for her.'

'She joined one of our party,' said Ethel; 'and he was not strong enough to follow you. Indeed, he has had scarlet fever, so perhaps it was better not. But he has taken great care of the little dog, and hopes it is not the worse.'

'Thank you. I wish poor Mab may always meet such kind friends,' said the lady, sadly.

'She secured her welcome,' said Ethel. 'We were very grateful to her, for it was the first thing that has seemed to interest him since his illness; and he has just lost both his parents.'

'Ah! Thank you.'

Ethel wondered at herself for having been so communicative; but the sweet sad face and look of interest had drawn her words out; and on her return she made such a touching history of the adventure, that Leonard listened earnestly, and Aubrey looked subdued.

When they went out Leonard refused to spread his rug in that only bed of pulverized shingle; and Ethel respected his avoidance of it as delicacy to her whose husband had no doubt often occupied that spot.

'He is a thorough gentleman,' said she, as she walked away with Aubrey.

'He might be an Eton fellow,' was the significant reply.

'I wonder what made him so!' said Ethel, musingly.

'Looking at Tom,' returned Aubrey, not in jest.

'Even with that advantage, I don't quite see where he learnt that refined consideration.'

'Pshaw, Ethel! The light of nature would show that to any one but a stupex.'

Ethel was not sorry that such were Aubrey's views of courtesy, but all thought of that subject was soon lost in the pursuit of ammonites.

'I wonder what Leonard will have picked up now?' they speculated, as they turned homewards with their weighty baskets, but what was their amazement, when Leonard waved his hand, pointing to the little black dog again at his feet!

'She is mine!' he exclaimed, 'my own! Mrs. Gisborne has given her to me; and she is to be the happiest little mite going!'

'Given!'

'Yes. She came as soon as you were gone, and sat by me, and talked for an hour, but she goes to-morrow to live with an old hag of an aunt.'

'Really, you seem to have been on confidential terms.'

'I mean that she must be a nuisance, because she doesn't like dogs; so that Mrs. Gisborne can only take the old one, which she could never part with. So she wanted to give Mab to some one who would be kind to her; and she has come to the right shop; hasn't she, my little queen?'

'I thought she almost wished it this morning,' said Ethel, 'when she heard how you and Mab had taken to each other: but it is a very choice present; the creature looks to me to be of a very fine sort.'

'Now, Miss May, how could you know that?'

'Why, by her own deportment! Don't you know the aristocratic look that all high-bred animals have—even bantams?'

Leonard looked as if this were the most convincing proof of Ethel's wisdom, and proceeded. 'Well, she is descended from a real King Charles, that Charles II. brought from France, and gave to Mrs. Jane Lane; and they have kept up the breed ever since.'

'So that Mab will have the longest pedigree in Stoneborough; and we must all respect her!' said Ethel, stroking the black head.

'I am only surprised at Leonard's forgetting his place,' said Aubrey. 'Walking before her majesty, indeed!'

'Oh, attendants do come first sometimes.'

'Then it should be backwards! I have a mind to try lying on the beach to-morrow, looking interesting, to see what will descend upon me!'

'A great yellow mongrel,' said Ethel, 'as always befalls imitators in the path of the hero.'

'What? You mean that it was all the work of Leonard's beaux yeux?'

Leonard gave a sort of growl, intimating that Aubrey was exciting his displeasure; and Ethel was glad to be at home, and break off the conversation; but in a few minutes Aubrey knocked at her door, and edging himself in, mysteriously said, 'Such fun! So it was your beaux yeux, not Leonard's, that made the conquest!'

'I suppose she was touched with what I said of poor Leonard's circumstances, and the pleasure the creature gave him.'

'That is as prosy as Mary, Ethel. At any rate, the woman told Leonard yours was the most irresistibly attractive countenance she ever saw, short of beauty; and that's not the best of it, for he is absolutely angry.

'No wonder,' laughed Ethel.

'No, but it's about the beauty! He can't conceive a face more beautiful than yours.'

'Except the gargoyle on the church tower,' said Ethel, gaping into as complete a model of that worthy as flesh and blood could perpetrate.

'But he means it,' persisted Aubrey, fixing his eyes critically on his sister's features, but disturbed by the contortions into which she threw them. 'Now don't, don't. I never saw any fellow with a hundredth part of your gift for making faces,' he added, between the unwilling paroxysms of mirth at each fresh grimace; but I want to judge of you; and—oh! that solemn one is worse than all; it is like Julius Caesar, if he had ever been photographed!—but really, when one comes to think about it, you are not so very ugly after all; and are much better looking than Flora, whom we were taught to believe in.'

'Poor Flora! You were no judge in her blooming days, before wear and tear came.'

'And made her like our Scotch grandfather.'

'But Blanche! your own Blanche, Aubrey? She might have extended Leonard's ideas of beauty.'

'Blanche has a pretty little visage of her own; but it's not so well worth looking at as yours,' said Aubrey. 'One has seen to the end of it at once; and it won't light up. Hers is just the May blossom; and yours the—the—I know—the orchis! I have read of a woman with an orchidaceous face!'

Teeth, tongue, lips, eyes, and nose were at once made to serve in hitting off an indescribable likeness to an orchis blossom, which was rapturously applauded, till Ethel, relaxing the strain and permitting herself to laugh triumphantly at her own achievement, said, 'There! I do pride myself on being of a high order of the grotesque.'

'It is not the grotesque that he means.' said Aubrey, 'he is very cracked indeed. He declares that when you came and sat by him the day before yesterday, you were perfectly lovely.'

'Oh, then I understand, and it is no matter,' said Ethel.

CHAPTER V

They stwons, they stwons, they stwons, they stwons.

—Scouring of the White Horse

'So' (wrote Ethel in her daily letter to her father) 'mine is at present a maternal mission to Leonard, and it is highly gratifying. I subscribe to all your praise of him, and repent of my ungracious murmurs at his society. You had the virtue, and I have the reward (the usual course of this world), for his revival is a very fresh and pleasant spectacle, burning hot with enthusiasm. Whatever we do, he overdoes, till I recollect how Wilkes said he had never been a Wilkite. Three days ago, a portentous-looking ammonite attracted his attention; and whereas he started from the notion that earth was dirt, and stones were stones, the same all over the world, he has since so far outstripped his instructors, that as I write this he is drawing a plan of the strata, with the inhabitants dramatically arranged, Aubrey suggesting tragic scenes and uncomplimentary likenesses. His talent for drawing shows that Averil's was worth culture. If our geology alarm Richard, tell him that I think it safer to get it over young, and to face apparent discrepancies with revelation, rather than leave them to be discovered afterwards as if they had been timidly kept out of sight. And whether Hugh Miller's theory be right or wrong, his grand fervid language leaves the conviction that undoubting confidence in revelation consists with the clearest and most scientific mind.'

'June 30th.—I consider my boys as returned to their normal relations. I descended on them as they were sparring like lion-cubs at play, Leonard desisted in confusion at my beholding such savage doings, but cool and easy, not having turned a hair; Aubrey, panting, done up, railing at him as first cousin to Hercules, all as a delicate boast to me of his friend's recovered strength. Aubrey's forte is certainly veneration. His first class of human beings is a large one, though quizzing is his ordinary form of adoration. For instance, he teases Mab and her devoted slave some degrees more than the victim can bear, and then relieves his feelings in my room by asseverations that the friendship with Leonard will be on the May and Spencer pattern. The sea is the elixir of life to both; Leonard looks quite himself again, "only more so," and Aubrey has a glow never seen since his full moon visage waned, and not all tan, though we are on the high road to be coffee-berries. Aubrey daily entertains me with heroic tales of diving and floating, till I tell them they will become enamoured of some "lady of honour who lives in the sea," grow fishes' tails, and come home no more. And really, as the time wanes, I feel that such a coast is Elysium—above all, the boating. The lazy charm, the fresh purity of air, the sights and sounds, the soft summer wave when one holds one's hand over the tide, the excitement of sea-weed catching, and the nonsense we all talk, are so delicious and such new sensations, (except the nonsense, which loses by your absence, O learned doctor!) that I fully perceive how pleasures untried cannot even be conceived. But ere the lotos food has entirely depraved my memory, I give you warning to come and fetch us home, now that the boys are in full repair. Come yourself, and be feasted on shrimps and mackerel, and take one sail to the mouth of the bay. I won't say who shall bring you; it would be fun to have Daisy, and Mary ought to have a holiday, but then Richard would take better care of you, and Tom would keep you in the best order. Could you not all come? only if you don't yourself, I won't promise not to take up with a merman.'

'July 4th.—Very well. If this is to make a strong man of Aubrey, tant mieux, and even home and Cocksmoor yearnings concern me little in this Castle of Indolence, so don't flatter yourself that I shall grumble at having had to take our house on again. Let us keep Leonard; we should both miss him extremely, and Aubrey would lose half the good without some one to swim, scramble, and fight with. Indeed, for the poor fellow's own sake, he should stay, for though he is physically as strong

as a young megalosaur, and in the water or on the rocks all day, I don't think his head is come to application, nor his health to bearing depression; and I see he dreads the return, so that he had better stay away till school begins again.'

'July 7th.—Oh! you weak-minded folks! Now I know why you wanted to keep me away—that you might yield yourselves a prey to Flora. Paper and chintz forsooth! All I have to say is this, Miss Mary—as to my room, touch it if you dare! I leave papa to protect his own study, but for the rest, think, Mary, what your feelings would be if Harry were to come home, and not know what room he was in! If I am to choose between the patterns of chintz, I prefer the sea-weed variety, as in character with things in general, and with the present occasion; and as to the carpet, I hope that Flora, touched with our submission, will not send us anything distressing.'

'July 17th.—Can you send me any more of the New Zealand letters? I have copied out the whole provision I brought with me for the blank book, and by the way have inoculated Leonard with such a missionary fever as frightens me. To be sure, he is cut out for such work. He is intended for a clergyman (on grounds of gentility, I fear), and is too full of physical energy and enterprise to take readily to sober parochial life. His ardour is a gallant thing, and his home ties not binding; but it is not fair to take advantage of his present inflammable state of enthusiasm, and the little we have said has been taken up so fervently, that I have resolved on caution for the future. It is foolish to make so much of a boy's eagerness, especially when circumstances have brought him into an unnatural dreamy mood; and probably these aspirations will pass away with the sound of the waves, but they are pretty and endearing while they last in their force and sincerity.

'"Just at the age 'twixt boy and youth,
When thought is speech, and speech is truth;"

'and one's heart beats at the thought of what is possible to creatures of that age.'

'July 21st.—You, who taught us to love our Walter Scott next to our "Christian Year," and who gave us half-crowns for rehearsing him when other children were learning the Robin's Petition, what think you of this poor boy Leonard knowing few of the novels and none of the poems? No wonder the taste of the day is grovelling lower and lower, when people do not begin with the pure high air of his world! To take up one of his works after any of our present school of fiction is like getting up a mountain side after a feverish drawing-room or an offensive street. If it were possible to know the right moment for a book to be really tasted—not thrust aside because crammed down—no, it would not be desirable, as I was going to say, we should only do double mischief. We are not sent into the world to mould people, but to let them mould themselves; and the internal elasticity will soon unmake all the shapes that just now seem to form under my fingers like clay.

'At any rate, the introduction of such a congenial spirit to Sir Walter was a real treat; Leonard has the very nature to be fired by him, and Aubrey being excessively scandalized at his ignorance, routed a cheap "Marmion" out of the little bookshop, and we beguiled a wet afternoon with it; Aubrey snatching it from me at all the critical passages, for fear I should not do them justice, and thundering out the battle, which stirred the other boy like a trumpet sound. Indeed, Leonard got Mab into a corner, and had a very bad cold in the head when De Wilton was re-knighted; and when "the hand of Douglas was his own," he jumped up and shouted out, "Well done, old fellow!" Then he took it to himself and read it all over again, introductions and all, and has raved ever since. I wish you could see Aubrey singing out some profane couplet of "midnight and not a nose," or some more horrible original parody, and then dodging apparently in the extremity of terror, just as Leonard furiously charges him.

'But you would have been struck with their discussions over it. Last night, at tea, they began upon the woeful result of the Wager of Battle, which seemed to oppress them as if it had really happened. Did I believe in it? Was I of the Lady Abbess's opinion, that

'"Perchance some form was unobserved,
Perchance in prayer or faith he swerved"?

'This from Aubrey, while Leonard rejoined that even if De Wilton had so done, it was still injustice that he should be so cruelly ruined, and Marmion's baseness succeed. It would be like a king wilfully giving wrong judgment because the right side failed in some respectful observance. He was sure such a thing could never be. Did I ever know of a real case where Heaven did not show the right? It was confusing and alarming, for both those boys sat staring at me as if I could answer them; and those wonderful searching eyes of Leonard's were fixed, as if his whole acquiescence in the dealings of Providence were going to depend on the reply, that could but be unsatisfactory. I could only try plunging deep. I said it was Job's difficulty, and it was a new light to Leonard that Job was about anything but patience. He has been reading the Book all this Sunday evening; and is not De Wilton a curious introduction to it? But Aubrey knew that I meant the bewilderment of having yet to discover that Divine Justice is longer-sighted than human justice, and he cited the perplexities of high-minded heathen. Thence we came to the Christian certainty that "to do well and suffer for it is thankworthy;" and that though no mortal man can be so innocent as to feel any infliction wholly unmerited and disproportioned, yet human injustice at its worst may be working for the sufferer an exceeding weight of glory, or preparing him for some high commission below. Was not Ralph de Wilton far nobler and purer as the poor palmer, than as Henry the Eighth's courtier! And if you could but have heard our sequel, arranging his orthodoxy, his Scripture reading, and his guardianship of distressed monks and nuns, you would have thought he had travelled to some purpose, only he would certainly have been burnt by one party, and beheaded by the other. On the whole, I think Leonard was a little comforted, and I cannot help hoping that the first apparently cruel wrong that comes before him may be the less terrible shock to his faith from his having been set to think out the question by "but half a robber and but half a knight."'

'August 1st.—Yesterday afternoon we three were in our private geological treasury, Leonard making a spread-eagle of himself in an impossible place on the cliff side, trying to disinter what hope, springing eternal in the human breast, pronounced to be the paddle of a saurian; Aubrey, climbing as high as he durst, directing operations and making discoveries; I, upon a ledge half-way up, guarding Mab and poking in the debris, when one of the bridal pairs, with whom the place is infested, was seen questing about as if disposed to invade our premises. Aubrey, reconnoitring in high dudgeon, sarcastically observed that all red-haired men are so much alike, that he should have said yonder was Hec—. The rest ended in a view halloo from above and below, and three bounds to the beach, whereon I levelled my glass, and perceived that in very deed it was Mr. and Mrs. Ernescliffe who were hopping over the shingle. Descending, I was swung off the last rock in a huge embrace, and Hector's fiery moustache was scrubbing both my cheeks before my feet touched the ground, and Blanche with both arms round my waist. They were ready to devour us alive in their famine for a Stoneborough face; and as Flora and Mary are keeping home uninhabitable, found themselves obliged to rush away from Maplewood in the middle of their county welcomes for a little snatch of us, and to join us in vituperating the new furniture. If Mary could only hear Hector talk of a new sofa that he can't put his boots upon—he says it is bad enough at Maplewood, but that he did hope to be still comfortable at home. They have to get back to dine out to-morrow, but meantime the fun is more fast and furious than ever, and as soon as the tide serves, we are to fulfil our long-cherished desire of boating round to Lyme. I won't answer for the quantity of discretion added to our freight, but at least there is six feet more of valour, and Mrs. Blanche for my chaperon. Bonnie Blanche is little changed by her four months' matrimony, and only looks prettier and more stylish, but she is painfully meek and younger-sisterish, asking my leave instead of her husband's, and distressed at her smartness in her pretty shady hat and undyed silk, because I was in trim for lias-grubbing. Her appearance ought to be an example to all the brides in the place with skirts in the water, and nothing on to keep off eyes, sun, or wind

from their faces. I give Flora infinite credit for it. Blanche and Aubrey walk arm in arm in unceasing talk, and that good fellow, Hector, has included Leonard in the general fraternity. They are highly complimentary, saying they should have taken Aubrey for Harry, he is so much stouter and rosier, and that Leonard is hugely grown. Here come these three boys shouting that the boat is ready; I really think Hector is more boyish and noisy than ever.

"Five precious souls, and all agog
To dash through thick or thin."

I'll take the best care of them in my power. Good-bye.'

'August 2nd.—Safe back, without adventure, only a great deal of enjoyment, for which I am doubly thankful, as I almost fancied we were fey, one of the many presentiments that come to nothing, but perhaps do us rather good than harm for all that. I hope I did not show it in my letter, and communicate it to you. Even when safe landed, I could not but think of the Cobb and Louisa Musgrove, as I suppose every one does. We slept at the inn; drove with the Ernescliffes to the station this morning, and came back to this place an hour ago, after having been steeped in pleasure. I shall send the description of Lyme to Daisy to-morrow, having no time for it now, as I want an answer from you about our going to Maplewood. The "married babies" are bent upon it, and Hector tries to demonstrate that it is the shortest way home, to which I can't agree; but as it may save another journey, and it will be nice to see them in their glory, I told them that if you could spare us, we would go from the 29th to the 4th of September. This will bring Leonard home four days before the end of the holidays, for he has been most warmly invited, Hector adopting him into the brotherhood of papa's pets. I am glad he is not left out; and Mary had better prove to Averil that he will be much happier for having no time at home before the half year begins. He still shrinks from the very name being brought before him. Let me know, if you please, whether this arrangement will suit, as I am to write to Blanche. Dear little woman, I hope Hector won't make a spoilt child of her, they are so very young, and their means seem so unlimited to them both, Hector wanting to make her and us presents of whatever we admired, and when she civilly praised Mab, vehemently declaring that she should have just such another if money could purchase, or if not, he would find a way. "Thank you, Hector dear, I had rather not," placidly responds Blanche, making his vehemence fall so flat, and Leonard's almost exulting alarm glide into such semi-mortification, that I could have laughed, though I remain in hopes that her "rather not" may always be as prudent, for I believe it is the only limit to Hector's gifts.'

'29th, 8 A. M.—Farewell to the Coombe of Coombes. I write while waiting for the fly, and shall post this at Weymouth, where we are to be met. We have been so happy here, that I could be sentimental, if Leonard were not tete-a-tete with me, and on the verge of that predicament. "Never so happy in his life," quoth he, "and never will be again—wonders when he shall gee this white cliff again." But, happily, in tumbles Aubrey with the big claw of a crab, which he insists on Leonard's wearing next his heart as a souvenir of Mrs. Gisborne; he is requited with an attempt to pinch his nose therewith, And—

2.30. P. M. Weymouth.—The result was the upset of my ink, whereof you see the remains; and our last moments were spent in reparations and apologies. My two squires are in different plight from what they were ten weeks ago, racing up hills that it then half killed them to come down, and lingering wistfully on the top for last glimpses of our bay. I am overwhelmed with their courtesies, and though each is lugging about twenty pounds weight of stones, and Mab besides in Leonard's pocket, I am seldom allowed to carry my own travelling bag. Hector has been walking us about while his horses are resting after their twenty miles, but we think the parade and pier soon seen, and are tantalized by having no time for Portland Island, only contenting ourselves with an inspection of shop fossils, which in company with Hector is a sort of land of the "Three Wishes," or worse; for on my chancing to praise a beautiful lump of Purbeck stone, stuck as full of paludinae as a pudding with plums, but

as big as my head and much heavier, he brought out his purse at once; and when I told him he must either enchant it on to my nose, or give me a negro slave as a means of transport, Leonard so earnestly volunteered to be the bearer, that I was thankful for my old rule against collecting curiosities that I do not find and carry myself.

'August 30th. Maplewood.—I wonder whether these good children can be happier, unless it may be when they receive you! How much they do make of us! and what a goodly sight at their own table they are! They are capable in themselves of making any place charming, though the man must have been enterprising who sat down five-and-twenty years ago to reclaim this park from irreclaimable down. I asked where were the maples? and where was the wood? and was shown five stunted ones in a cage to defend them from the sheep, the only things that thrive here, except little white snails, with purple lines round their shells. "There now, isn't it awfully bleak?" says Hector, with a certain comical exultation. "How was a man ever to live here without her?" And the best of it is, that Blanche thinks it beautiful—delicious free air, open space, view over five counties, &c. Inside, one traces Flora's presiding genius, Hector would never have made the concern so perfect without her help; and Blanche is no child in her own house, but is older and more at home than Hector, so that one would take her for the heiress, making him welcome and at ease. Not that it is like the Grange, Blanche is furious if I remark any little unconscious imitation or similarity—"As if we could be like Flora and George indeed!" Nor will they. If Blanche rules, it will be unawares to herself. And where Hector is, there will always be a genial house, overflowing with good-humour and good-nature. He has actually kept the 1st of September clear of shooting parties that he may take these two boys out, and give them a thorough day's sport in his turnip-fields. "License? Nonsense, he thought of that before, and now Aubrey may get some shooting out of George Rivers." After such good-nature my mouth is shut, though, ay di me, all the world and his wife are coming here on Monday evening, and unless I borrow of Blanche, Mrs. Ernescliffe's sister will "look like ane scrub."'

'September 2nd.—Train at Stoneborough, 6.30. That's the best news I have to give. Oh, it has been a weary while to be out of sight of you all, though it has been pleasant enough, and the finale is perfectly brilliant. Blanche, as lady of the house, is a sight to make a sister proud; she looks as if she were born to nothing else, and is a model of prettiness and elegance. Hector kept coming up to me at every opportunity to admire her. "Now, old Ethel, look at her? Doesn't she look like a picture? I chose that gown, you know;" then again after dinner, "Well, old Ethel, didn't it go off well? Did you ever see anything like her? There, just watch her among the old ladies. I can't think where she learnt it all, can you?" And it certainly was too perfect to have been learnt. It was not the oppression that poor dear Flora gives one by doing everything so well, as if she had perfectly balanced what was due to herself and everybody else; it was just Blanche, simple and ready, pleasing herself by doing what people liked, and seeing what they did like. It was particularly pretty to see how careful both she and Hector were not to put Leonard aside—indeed, they make more of him than of Aubrey, who is quite able to find his own level. Even his tender feelings as to Mab are respected, and Blanche always takes care to invite her to a safe seat on a fat scarlet cushion on the sofa (Mrs. Ledwich's wedding present), when the footmen with the tea might be in danger of demolishing her. Leonard, and his fine eyes, and his dog, were rather in fashion yesterday evening. Blanche put out his Coombe sketches for a company trap, and people talked to him about them, and he was set to sing with Blanche, and then with some of the young ladies. He seemed to enjoy it, and his nice, modest, gentlemanlike manner told. The party was not at all amiss in itself. I had a very nice clerical neighbour, and it is a very different thing to see and hear Hector at the bottom of the table from having poor dear George there. But oh! only one dinner more before we see our own table again, and Tom at the bottom of it. Hurrah! I trust this is the last letter you will have for many a day, from

'Your loving and dutiful daughter,

'ETHELDRED MAY.'

CHAPTER VI

The XII statute remember to observe
For all the paine thou hast for love and wo
All is too lite her mercie to deserve
Thou musten then thinke wher er thou ride or go
And mortale wounds suffre thou also
All for her sake, and thinke it well besette
Upon thy love, for it maie not be bette.

—Chaucer's 'Court of Love'

'Good-bye, Leonard,' said Ethel, as the two families, after mustering strong at the station, parted at the head of Minster Street; and as she felt the quivering lingering pressure of his hand, she added with a smile, 'Remember, any Saturday afternoon. And you will come for the books.'

Glad as she was to be anchored on her father's arm, and clustered round with rejoicing brothers and sisters, she could not be devoid of a shade of regret for the cessation of the intimate intercourse of the last nine weeks, and a certain desire for the continuance of the confidential terms that had arisen. The moment's pang was lost in the eager interchange of tidings too minute for correspondence, and in approval of the renovation of the drawing-room, which was so skilful that her first glance would have detected no alteration in the subdued tones of paper, carpet, and chintz, so complete was their loyalty to the spirit of perpetuity. Flora told no one of the pains that, among her many cares, she had spent upon those tints, not so much to gratify Ethel, as because her own wearied spirit craved the repose of home sameness, nor how she had finally sent to Paris for the paper that looked so quiet, but was so exquisitely finished, that the whole room had a new air of refinement.

The most notable novelty was a water-coloured sketch, a labour of love from the busy hands in New Zealand, which had stolen a few hours from their many tasks to send Dr. May the presentment of his namesake grandson. Little Dickie stood before them, a true son of the humming-bird sprite, delicately limbed and featured, and with elastic springiness, visible even in the pencilled outline. The dancing dark eyes were all Meta's, though the sturdy clasp of the hands, and the curl that hung over the brow, brought back the reflection of Harry's baby days.

It would have been a charming picture, even if it had not been by Meta's pencil, and of Norman's child, and it chained Ethel for more than one interval of longing loving study.

Tom interrupted her in one of these contemplations. 'Poor Flora,' he said, with more feeling than he usually allowed to affect his voice, 'that picture is a hard trial to her. I caught her looking at it for full ten minutes, and at last she turned away with her eyes full of tears.'

'I do not wonder,' said Ethel. 'There is a certain likeness to that poor little Leonora, and I think Flora misses her more every year.'

'Such a child as Margaret is just the thing to cause the other to be missed.'

'What do you think of Margaret this time?' said Ethel, for Tom alone ever durst seriously touch on the undefined impression that all entertained of Flora's only child.

'If Flora were only silly about her,' said Tom, 'one might have some hope; but unluckily she is as judicious there as in everything else, and the child gets more deplorable every year. She has got the look of deformity, and yet she is not deformed; and the queer sullen ways of deficiency, but she has more wit than her father already, and more cunning.'

'As long as there is a mind to work on, one hopes' said Ethel.

'I could stand her better if she were foolish!' exclaimed Tom, 'but I can't endure to see her come into the room to be courted by every one, and be as cross as she dares before her mother. Behind

Flora's back, I don't know which she uses worst, her father or her grandfather. I came down upon little Miss at last for her treatment of the Doctor, and neither he nor Rivers have forgiven me.'

'Poor child! I don't believe she has ever known a moment's thorough health or comfort! I always hope that with Flora's patience and management she may improve.'

'Pshaw, Ethel! she will always be a misfortune to herself and everybody else.'

'I have faith in good coming out of misfortunes.'

'Illustrated, I suppose, by ravings about your young Ward. Mary is crazy about his sister, and the Doctor lunatic as to the brother, who will soon kick at him for his pains.'

'I own to thinking Leonard capable of great things.'

Tom made a grimace equal to what Ethel could do in that way, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and philosophically observed, 'Behold the effects of patronage! Blind Cupid is nothing to him.'

Ethel let it pass, caring too much for Leonard to set him up as a mark for Tom's satire, which was as different from Aubrey's as quinine from orange-peel, though properly used, it was a bracing tonic, such as she often found wholesome. A cynical younger brother is a most valuable possession to a woman who has taken a certain position in her own world.

Tom was a sterling character, highly and deeply principled, though not demonstrative, and showing his Scots descent. None of the brothers had been extravagant, but Tom, with the income of his lately achieved fellowship, performed feats of economy, such as attaining to the purchase of an ultra perfect microscope, and he was consistently industrious, so exactly measuring his own powers that to undertake was with him to succeed, and no one suffered anxiety on his account. As Dr. Spencer said, he was as sure to fall on his legs as a sandy cat, and so nobody cared for him. At home he was sufficient to himself, properly behaved to his father, civil to Richard, unmerciful in ridicule, but merciful in dominion over the rest, except Ethel, whom he treated as an equal, able to retort in kind, reserving for her his most highly-flavoured sallies, and his few and distant approaches to such confidence as showed her how little she knew him. His father esteemed but did not 'get on with' him, and his chief and devoted adherent was Aubrey, to whom he was always kind and helpful. In person Tom was tall and well-made, of intelligent face, of which his spectacles seemed a natural feature, well-moulded fine-grained hand, and dress the perfection of correctness, though the precision, and dandyism had been pruned away.

Ethel would have preferred that Leonard and Averil should not have walked in on the Saturday after her return, just when Tom had spread his microscope apparatus over the table, and claimed Mary's assistance in setting up objects; and she avoided his eye when Mary and Averil did what he poetically called rushing into each other's arms, whilst she bestowed her greetings on Leonard and Mab.

'Then she may come in?' said Leonard. 'Henry has banished her from the drawing-room, and we had much ado to get her allowed even in the schoolroom.'

'It is so tiresome,' said his sister, 'just one of Henry's fancies.' Ethel, thinking this disloyal, remarked that those who disliked dogs in the house could not bear them, and did not wonder that Tom muttered 'Original.'

'But such a little darling as this!' cried Averil, 'and after Mrs. Ernescliffe had been so kind. Mary, you must see how clever she is. Leonard is teaching her to play on the piano.'

'I congratulate you,' quietly said Tom; and somehow Ethel felt that those three words were a satire on her 'capable of great things;' while Leonard drew up, and Averil coloured, deferring the exhibition of Mab's accomplishments till 'another time,' evidently meaning out of Tom's presence.

'Aubrey is gone to the Grange with papa,' Ethel said, glad to lead away from Mab.

'He told me he was going,' said Leonard, 'but he said you would be at home.'

Ethel knew that the intonation of that 'you' had curled Tom's lip with mischief, and dreading that Leonard should discover and resent his mood, she said, 'We think one of your sea eggs has got among ours; will you come to the schoolroom and see?'

And leaving Tom to tease and be bored by the young ladies, she led the way to the schoolroom, where Aubrey's fossils, each in its private twist of paper, lay in confusion on the floor, whence they were in course of being transferred to the shelf of a cupboard.

Leonard looked at the disorder with astonished admiration.

'Yes,' said Ethel, 'it is a great mess, but they are to have a regular cabinet, when Richard has time, or Aubrey has money, two equally unlikely chances.'

'How much does a cabinet cost?'

'Jones would make a plain deal one for about five-and-twenty shillings.'

'I can't unpack mine properly,' said Leonard, disconsolately. 'Ave is going to make a place for them, but Henry votes them rubbish.'

'They are dreadful rubbish,' said Ethel. 'It goes against my conscience to guard them from the house-maid, and if my sister Flora came in here, I should be annihilated.'

'Of course one expects that in women.'

'Oh, Richard would be as much distracted! It is a provision of Nature that there should be some tidy ones, or what would the world come to?'

'It would be a great deal less of a bore.'

'Not at all; we should stifle ourselves at last if we had our own way. Never mind, Leonard, we make them go through quite as much as they make us.'

'I am sure I hope so.'

'No, no, Leonard,' she said, becoming less playful, 'we must not do it on purpose. Even unconsciously, we plague the spirits of order quite enough, and they have the right on their side after all.'

'I think a lady is the person to say what one may do or not in the drawing-room; don't you?' said Leonard.

'That depends.'

'And you let your brother spread his things all over yours!'

'So I do; but I would not if papa minded it, or even if this were Richard's house, and he did not like it. Don't begin with worries about trifles, pray, Leonard.'

'It is not I that care about trifles,' returned the boy. 'How was one to reckon on a man setting up a monomania about dogs' paws in the hall?'

'I have feared we were rather foolish; I ought to have reminded you to ask whether Mab would be welcome.'

'I was not going to ask leave, I have no one whose leave to ask,' said Leonard, in tones at first proud, then sad.

'That's a bad beginning,' returned Ethel. 'As master of the house, your brother has a right to your compliance, and if you do not all give way to each other, you will have nothing but dissension and misery.'

'All to each other; yes, that is fair.'

'He must have given way to you in letting you keep the dog at all in the house' said Ethel. 'It is a real instance of kindness, and you are bound to let her be as little in his way as possible.'

'He does mean well, I suppose,' said Leonard; 'but he is an awful bother, and poor Ave gets the worst of it. One has no patience with finikin ways in a man.'

'There's no telling how much I owe to my finikin brother Richard,' said Ethel; 'and if you teach Ave to be loyal to the head of your family, you will do her as much good as you will do harm by chafing against his ordinances.'

'Don't you hate such nonsense, Miss May?'

'I can't love order as much as I honour it. Set tastes aside. The point is, that if you are to hold together, Leonard, it must be by bearing and forbearing, and above all, to your elder brother.'

'Well, it is a blessing that I shall be in school on Monday.'

'So it is,' said Ethel; 'but, barring these fidgets, Leonard, tell me,' and she looked kindly at him, 'how is it at home? Better than you expected, I hope.'

'Blank enough' said Leonard; 'I didn't think I should have minded the sound of the surgery door so much.'

'You will have Sunday to help you.'

'Yes, Ave and I have been down to the churchyard; Ave does care, poor girl. She knows better what it is now, and she was glad to have me to talk to again, though Miss Mary has been so kind to her.'

'Oh, nobody can be so much to her as you.'

'Poor Ave!' said Leonard, tenderly. 'And look here, this is my father's watch, and she made me this chain of my mother's hair. And they have given me a photograph of my mother's picture; Henry had it done long ago, but thought it would upset me to give it before I went away. If he could but have guessed how I lay and wished for one!'

'Those are the things one never can guess, even when one would give worlds to do so.'

'You—O, Miss May, you always know the thing that is comfortable.'

'Well,' said Ethel, 'what will be comfortable now is that you should be the man above being affronted by other people's nonsense—the only way to show we did not all spoil each other at Coombe. Now, here is Woodstock for you, and tell me if this be not your Cidaris. Oh, and we have found out the name of your funny spiked shell.'

Ten minutes of palaeontology ensued; and she was leading the way back to the drawing-room, when he exclaimed, 'Have you heard about the match, Miss May?'

'Match? Oh, the cricket match?'

'Stoneborough against All England, on St. Matthew's Day, so I shall have got my hand in.'

'All England meaning every one that can be scraped up that is not Stoneborough,' returned Ethel. 'George Larkins has been over here canvassing Tom and Aubrey. But you can't be going to play, Leonard; papa does not half like it for Aubrey.'

'Perhaps not for Aubrey,' said Leonard; 'but I am as well as ever, and luckily they can't make up a decent eleven without me. You will come and see us, Miss May? I'll find you the jolliest place between the old lime and the cloister door.'

'As if I had not known the meads ages before your time!' said Ethel.

'I thought you never came to the matches?'

'Ah! you don't remember my brothers' Stoneborough days, when Norman was cricket mad, and Harry after him, and my father was the best cricketer in Stoneborough till his accident.

'Yes, Dr. May always comes to see the matches,' said Leonard. 'You will, won't you now, Miss May? I didn't think you knew anything about cricket, but it will be all the better now.'

Ethel laughed, and half promised.

Cocksmoor existed without Ethel on that holiday; and indeed she was self-reproachful, though pleased, at finding her presence so great a treat to her father. Leonard might do the honours of the lime-tree nook, but she spent but little time there, for Dr. May made her walk about with him as he exchanged greetings with each and all, while Gertrude led Richard about at her will, and Mary consorted with the Ward girls. With no one on her mind, Ethel could give free attention to the smoothly-shaven battle-field, where, within the gray walls shaded by the overhanging elms, the young champions were throwing all the ardour and even the chivalry of their nature into the contest.

The annual game had been delayed by the illness in the spring, and the school had lost several good players at the end of the half year; but, on the other hand, the holidays being over, George Larkins had been unable to collect an eleven either in full practice or with public school training; and the veteran spectators were mourning the decay of cricket, and talking of past triumphs. The school

had the first innings, which resulted in the discomfiture of Fielder, one of their crack champions, and with no great honour to any one except Folliot, the Dux, and Leonard Ward, who both acquitted themselves so creditably, that it was allowed that if others had done as well, Stoneborough might have had a chance.

But when 'All England' went in, the game seemed to be more equally balanced. Aubrey May, in spite of devoted practice under Tom's instructions, was, from nervous eagerness, out almost as soon as in, and in his misery of shame and despair felt like the betrayer of his cause. But in due time, with the sun declining, and the score still low, Tom May came forward, as the last hope of 'All England,' lissom, active, and skilled, walking up to his wicket with the easy confidence of one not greatly caring, but willing to show the natives what play might be.

And his play was admirable; the fortunes of the day began to tremble in the balance; every one, spectators and all, were in a state of eager excitement; and Aubrey, out of tone and unable to watch for the crisis, fairly fled from the sight, rushed through the cloister door, and threw himself with his face down upon the grass, shivering with suspense. There he lay till a sudden burst of voices and cheers showed that the battle was over.

The result? He could not believe eyes or ears as he opened the door, to behold the triumphant gestures of Stoneborough, and the crestfallen air of his own side, and heard the words, 'Folliot missed two chances of long-leg—Ward—tremendous rush—caught him out—with only one run to tie.'

Dr. May was shaking hands with Leonard in congratulation, not solely generous, for let his sons be where they would, Stoneborough triumphs were always the Doctor's, and he was not devoid of gratitude to any one who would defeat Tom. Noting, however, the flitting colour, fluttering breath, and trembling limbs, that showed the effect of the day's fatigue and of the final exertion, he signed back the boys, and thrust Leonard within the cloister door, bidding Aubrey fetch his coat, and Ethel keep guard over him, and when he was rested and cooled, to take him home to the High Street, where his sisters would meet him.

'But—sir—the—supper!' gasped Leonard, leaning against the door-post, unable to stand alone.

'I dare say. Keep him safe, Ethel.'

And the Doctor shut the door, and offered himself to appease the lads who were clamouring for the hero of their cause; while Leonard sank back on the bench, past words or looks for some moments.

'You have redeemed your pennon with your last gasp,' said Ethel, half reproachfully.

'I was determined,' panted the boy. 'I don't know how I did it. I couldn't fail with you looking on. You did it by coming.'

Reply was spared by Aubrey's return, with the coat in one hand, and a glass of ale in the other. 'You are to go home with Ethel at once,' he pronounced with the utmost zest, 'that is, as soon as you are rested. My father says you must not think of the supper, unless you particularly wish to be in bed for a week; but we'll all drink your health, and I'll return thanks—the worst player for the best.'

This was the first time Aubrey had been considered in condition for such festivities, and the gratification of being superior to somebody might account for his glee in invaliding his friend.

Cricket suppers were no novelties to Leonard; and either this or his exhaustion must have made him resign himself to his fate, and walk back with Ethel as happily as at Coombe.

The sisters soon followed, and were detained to drink tea. The cricketers' mirth must have been fast and furious if it exceeded that at home, for the Doctor thought himself bound to make up for the loss to Leonard, put forth all his powers of entertainment, and was comically confidential about 'these Etonians that think so much of themselves.'

Averil was lively and at ease, showing herself the pleasant well-informed girl whom Ethel had hitherto only taken on trust, and acting in a pretty motherly way towards the little sisters. She was more visibly triumphant than was Leonard, and had been much gratified by a request from the Bankside curate that she would entirely undertake the harmonium at the chapel. She had been playing on it

during the absence of the schoolmaster, and with so much better effect than he could produce, that it had been agreed that he would be best in his place among the boys.

'Ah!' said the Doctor, 'two things in one are apt to be like Aubrey's compromise between walking-stick and camp-stool—a little of neither.'

'I don't mean it to be a little of neither with me, Dr. May,' said Averil. 'I shall have nothing to do with my choir on week-days, till I have sent these pupils of mine to bed.'

'Are you going to train the choir too?' asked Leonard.

'I must practise with them, or we shall not understand one another; besides, they have such a horrid set of tunes, Mr. Scudamour gave me leave to change them. He is going to have hymnals, and get rid of Tate and Brady at once.'

'Ah! poor Nahum!' sighed the Doctor with such a genuine sigh, that Averil turned round on him in amazement.

'Yes,' said Ethel, 'I'm the only one conservative enough to sympathize with you, papa.'

'But does any one approve of the New Version?' cried Averil, recovering from her speechless wonder.

'Don't come down on me,' said the Doctor, holding up his hands. 'I know it all; but the singing psalms are the singing psalms to me—and I can't help my bad taste—I'm too old to change.'

'Oh! but, papa, you do like those beautiful hymns that we have now?' cried Gertrude.

'Oh! yes, yes, Gertrude, I acquiesce. They are a great improvement; but then, wasn't it a treat when I got over to Woodside Church the other day, and found them singing, "No change of times shall ever shock"!' and he began to hum it.

'That is the Sicilian Mariners' hymn,' said Averil. 'I can sing you that whenever you please.'

'Thank you; on condition you sing the old Tate and Brady, not your "O Sanctissma, O Purissima,"' said the Doctor, a little mischievously.

'Which is eldest, I wonder?' said Ave, smiling, pleased to comply with any whim of his; though too young to understand the associations that entwine closely around all that has assisted or embodied devotion.

The music went from the sacred to the secular; and Ethel owned that the perfectly pronounced words and admirable taste made her singing very different from that which adorned most dinner-parties. Dr. May intensely enjoyed, and was between tears and bravos at the charge of the Six Hundred, when the two brothers entered, and stood silently listening.

That return brought a change. Aubrey was indeed open and bright, bursting out with eager communications the moment the song ceased, then turning round with winning apologies, and hopes that he was not interrupting; but Tom looked so stiff and polite as to chill every one, and Averil began to talk of the children's bed-time.

The Doctor and Aubrey pressed for another song so earnestly that she consented; but the spirit and animation were gone, and she had no sooner finished than she made a decided move to depart, and Dr. May accompanied the party home.

'Is my father going to put that fellow to bed?' said Tom, yawning, as if injured by the delay of bed-time thus occasioned.

'Your courtesy does not equal his,' said Ethel.

'Nor ever will,' said Tom.

'Never,' said Ethel, so emphatically that she nettled him into adding,

'He is a standing warning against spoiling one's patients. I wouldn't have them and their whole tag-rag and bobtail about my house for something!'

'O, Tom, for shame!' cried Mary, bursting out in the wrath he had intended to excite.

'Ask him which is tag, which rag, and which bobtail,' suggested Ethel.

'Mab, I suppose,' said Gertrude, happily closing the discussion, but it was re-animated by her father's arrival.

'That's a nice girl,' he said, 'very nice; but we must not have her too often in the evening, Mary, without Henry. It is not fair to break up people's home party.'

'Bobber than bobtail,' murmured Tom, with a gesture only meant for Ethel.

'Ave said he would be out till quite late, papa,' said Mary, in self-defence.

'She ought to have been back before him,' said Dr. May. 'He didn't seem best pleased to have found her away, and let me tell you, young woman, it is hard on a man who has been at work all day to come home and find a dark house and nobody to speak to.'

Mary looked melancholy at this approach to reproof, and Tom observed in an undertone,

'Never mind, Mary, it is only to give papa the opportunity of improving his pupil, while you exchange confidence with your bosom friend. I shall be gone in another month, and there will be nothing to prevent the perfect fusion of families.'

No one was sorry that the evening here came to an end.

'I hope,' said Dr. May at the Sunday's dinner, 'that the cricket match has not done for that boy; I did not see him among the boys.'

'No,' said Mary, 'but he has met with some accident, and has the most terrible bruised face. Ave can't make out how he did it. Do you know, Aubrey?'

The Doctor and his two sons burst out laughing.

'I thought,' said Ethel, rather grieved, 'that those things had gone out of fashion.'

'So Ethel's protege, or prodigy, which is it?' said Tom, 'is turning out a muscular Christian on her hands.'

'Is a muscular Christian one who has muscles, or one who trusts in muscles?' asked Ethel.

'Or a better cricketer than an Etonian?' added the Doctor.

Tom and Aubrey returned demonstrations that Eton's glory was untarnished, and the defeat solely owing to 'such a set of sticks.'

'Aubrey,' said Ethel, in their first private moment, 'was this a fight in a good cause? for if so, I will come down with you and see him.'

Aubrey made a face of dissuasion, ending in a whistle.

'Do at least tell me it is nothing I should be sorry for,' she said anxiously.

He screwed his face into an intended likeness of Ethel's imitation of an orchis, winked one eye, and looked comical.

'I see it can't be really bad,' said Ethel, 'so I will rest on your assurance, and ask no indiscreet questions.'

'You didn't see, then?' said Aubrey, aggrieved at the failure of his imitation. 'You don't remember the beauty he met at Coombe?'

'Beauty! None but Mab.'

'Well, they found it out and chaffed him. Fielder said he would cut out as good a face out of an old knob of apple wood, and the doctor in petticoats came up again; he got into one of his rages, and they had no end of a shindy, better than any, they say, since Lake and Benson fifteen years ago; but Ward was in too great a passion, or he would have done for Fielder long before old Hoxton was seen mooning that way. So you see, if any of the fellows should be about, it would never do for you to be seen going to bind up his wounds, but I can tell him you are much obliged, and all that.'

'Obliged, indeed!' said Ethel. 'What, for making me the laughing-stock of the school?'

'No, indeed,' cried Aubrey, distressed. 'He said not a word—they only found it out—because he found that seat for you, and papa sent him away with you. They only meant to poke fun, and it was his caring that made it come home to him. I wonder you don't like to find that such a fellow stood up for you.'

'I don't like to be made ridiculous.'

'Tom does not know it, and shall not,' eagerly interposed Aubrey.

'Thank you,' said she, with all her heart.

'Then don't be savage. You know he can't help it if he does think you so handsome, and it is very hard that you should be affronted with him, just when he can't see out of one of his eyes.'

'For that matter,' said Ethel, her voice trembling, 'one likes generosity in any sort of a cause; but as to this, the only way is to laugh at it.'

Aubrey thought this 'only way' hardly taken by the cachinnation with which she left him, for he was sure that her eyes were full of tears; and after mature consideration he decided that he should only get into a fresh scrape by letting Leonard know that she was aware of the combat and its motive.

'If I were ten years younger, this might be serious,' meditated Ethel. 'Happily, it is only a droll adventure for me in my old age, and I have heard say that a little raving for a grown-up woman is a wholesome sort of delusion, at his time of life. So I need not worry about it, and it is pretty and touching while it lasts, good fellow!'

Ethel had, in fact, little occasion to worry herself; for all special manifestations of Leonard's devotion ceased. Whether it were that Tom with his grave satirical manner contrived to render the house disagreeable to both brother and sister, or whether Leonard's boyish bashfulness had taken alarm, and his admiration expended itself in the battle for her charms, there was no knowing. All that was certain was, that the Wards seldom appeared at Dr. May's, although elsewhere Mary and Aubrey saw a great deal of their respective friends, and through both, Ethel heard from time to time of Leonard, chiefly as working hard at school, but finding that his illness had cost him not only the last half year's learning, but some memory and power of application. He was merging into the ordinary schoolboy—a very good thing for him no doubt, though less beautiful than those Coombe fancies. And what were they worth?

CHAPTER VII

Little specks of daily trouble—
Petty grievance, petty strife—
Filling up with drops incessant
To the brim the cup of life.

Deeper import have these trifles
Than we think or care to know:
In the air a feather floating,
Tells from whence the breezes blow.—REV. G. MONSELL

The first brightening of the orphaned house of Bankside had been in Leonard's return. The weeks of his absence had been very sore ones to Averil, while she commenced the round of duties that were a heavy burthen for one so young, and became, instead of the petted favourite, the responsible head of the house.

She was willing and glad to accept the care of her little sisters—docile bright children—who were pleased to return to the orderly habits so long interrupted, and were so intelligent, that her task of teaching was a pleasant one; and almost motherly love towards them grew up as she felt their dependence on her, and enjoyed their caresses.

With Henry she had less in common. He expected of her what she had not learnt, and was not willing to acquire. A man interfering in the woman's province meets little toleration; and Henry was extremely precise in his requirements of exact order, punctuality, and excellence, in all the arrangements of his house. While breaking her in to housekeeping, he made himself appear almost in the light of a task-master—and what was worse, of a despised task-master. Averil thought she could not respect a brother whose displeasure was manifested by petulance, not sternness, and who cared not only about his dinner, but about the tidy appearance of the drawing-room—nay, who called that tasty which she thought vulgar, made things stiff where she meant them to be easy and elegant, and prepared the place to be the butt of Tom May's satire.

Henry was not a companion to her. His intellect was lower, his education had not been of the same order, and he had not the manly force of character that makes up for everything in a woman's eyes. Where she had talents, he had pretensions—just enough to make his judgments both conceited and irritating; and where her deeper thoughts and higher aspirations were concerned, she met either a blank or a growing jealousy of the influence of the clergy and of the May family.

Yet Henry Ward was really a good brother, sacrificing much to his orphan sisters, and living a moral and religious life—such as gained for him much credit, and made Mrs. Ledwich congratulate Averil on the great excellence and kindness of her incomparable brother.

Averil assented, and felt it a dreary thing to have an incomparable brother.

But when Leonard came home, the face of the house was changed. Now she had something to look forward to. Now there was something to hear that stirred her deeper feelings—some one who would understand and respond—some one to make common cause with. Little as she saw of the schoolboy, there was life in her day, for sympathy and comprehension had come home with him.

After all, there were recesses in Leonard's confidence to which Ave did not penetrate; but there was quite enough to be very happy upon, especially those visions that had been built on the Melanesian letters. They were not near enough to terrify her with the thought of separation, and she was sufficiently imbued with Mary May's sentiments to regard mission-work as the highest ambition.

Leonard's strong will and manly disposition would have obtained her homage and affection, even without the lofty sentiments and the lesser graces that made the brother and sister thoroughly suited to one another; and the bond of union was unfortunately cemented by equal annoyance at Henry's peculiarities.

It certainly was rather hard on a young head of a family to have a younger brother his superior in every respect, and with an inseparable sister. That Henry had not found out Leonard's superiority was no reason that it should not gall him; and his self-assertions were apt to be extremely irritating. Even in the first flush of welcome, he had made it plain that he meant to be felt as master of the house, and to enforce those petty regulations of exact order that might be easily borne from a mother, or played with in a sister—would be obeyed grudgingly from a father, but could be intolerable in a brother.

The reception of Mab and the ammonites was but an earnest of similar ungracious acts on the one hand, and aggressions on the other, often unintentional. Averil did, indeed, smooth matters, but she shared Leonard's resentment, and outward submission was compensated by murmur and mockery in private.

Still the household worked on fairly; and Mrs. Ledwich was heard to declare, with tears in her eyes, that it was beautiful to see such a happy family of love as those dear young Wards!

'The happy family—in Trafalgar Square!' muttered Dr. Spencer.

The confidence of the happy family was on this wise. When Leonard came home with his unpresentable face, he baffled all Ave's anxious questions, and she was only enlightened by Henry's lamentations, in his absence, over the hopelessness of a brother who was so low and vulgar as to box! Her defence being met by a sneer, she flew to tell Leonard of the calumny, and was laughed at for her innocence, but extorted that he had fought with a fellow that talked impudently of some of the Mays —cause fully sufficient in her eyes; nor did Henry utter any open reproof, though he contrived to exasperate his brother into fierce retort and angry gesture by an unnecessary injunction not to show that ungentlemanly face.

Full consciousness of the difficulties presented by the characters of the two brothers would have been far too oppressive; and perhaps it was better for Averil that she had it not, but had her own engrossing interests and employments drawing off her attention and enlivening her spirits. Her church music was her object in life—the dedication of the talent that had been cultivated at so much time and cost, and the greatest honour and enjoyment she could imagine, and she had full participation from Leonard, who had a hearty love for sacred music, readily threw himself into her plans, and offered voice and taste to assist her experiments. Nor had her elder brother any objection to her being thus brought forward: he was proud of her performance, and gratified with the compliments it elicited; and all went well till the new hymnals arrived, and books upon books, full of new tunes, anthems, and chants, were accumulating on the music-stand.

'What are you about there all the evening, not opening your lips?'

'Leonard is writing out his verses, and I am copying music.'

'I wonder you neither of you will remember that that table was never meant to be littered over with all sorts of rubbish!'

'I thought tables were to put things on,' returned Leonard coolly.

'Drawing-room tables were not made to be inked! That cover will be ruined in a day or two!'

'Very well—then we'll pay for it!' said Leonard, in the same aggravating tone.

'Here are newspapers spread between it and the ink,' said Averil, displaying them with an air of injured innocence that made Henry subside; but he presently exclaimed:

'Is that copying to go on all night? Can't you speak, nor play anything, to send one off to sleep?'

With a martyr look, yet a satirical glance, Averil opened the piano; and Henry settled himself in the master's arm-chair, as one about to enjoy well-earned rest and entertainment after a hard day's work.

'I say, what doleful drone have you there!'

'I am trying a new chant for the "Nunc Dimittis".'

'Nothing but that day and night! Give us something worth hearing.'

'I thought you only wanted to go to sleep.'

'I don't want to dream myself into church, listening to Scudamour's proses: I've quite enough of that on Sunday.'

Ave began to play one of her school waltzes; and the touch of her fingers on the keys had so sharp-edged and petulant a tone, that Leonard smiled to himself as he ran his fingers through his hair over his books. Nor was it soothing to Henry, who, instead of going to sleep, began to survey the room, and get food for annoyance.

'I say,' said he, looking across at a little brass-barred bookcase of ornamental volumes on the opposite chiffonniere, 'what book is out there?'

'Scott's "Lay",' said Leonard; 'it is up in my room.'

'I told you, Ave, not to let the drawing-room books be carried about the house to be spoilt!' said Henry, who seldom reproved his brother direct, but generally through Ave.

'You'd better get some made of wood then,' said Leonard.

'Remember then, Ave, I say I will not have my books taken out, and left about over the house.'

Leonard dashed out of the room passionately, and presently came thundering down again, every step audible the whole way, and threw the book on the table, bringing in a whirlwind, and a flaring sloping candle dropping upon the precious cloth. Henry started up and pointed.

'I'm glad of it!' exclaimed Leonard; 'it will be a little amusement for you. Good night, Ave! I'm going to finish up-stairs, since one can't read, write, or touch a book without your being rowed!'

He was gone, and Averil, though rather frightened, gave him infinite credit for keeping his temper; and perhaps he deserved it, considering the annoyance and the nature of the provocation; but she did not reflect how much might have been prevented by more forethought and less pre-occupation. She said not a word, but quietly returned to her copying; and when Henry came with paper and poker to remove the damage, she only shoved back her chair, and sat waiting, pen in hand, resigned and ironical.

'I declare,' grumbled Henry, as he examined the remaining amount of damage, 'these day-schools are a great inconvenience; there's no keeping a place fit to be seen with a great uncivilized lad always hanging about!'

'Leonard is considered particularly gentlemanlike,' said Ave, with lips compressed, to keep back something about old bachelors.

'Now, I should have thought a lady would have some regard to her own drawing-room, and object to slovenliness—elbows on table, feet everywhere!'

'Nothing is in worse taste than constraint,' said Ave from the corners of her mouth—'at least for those that can trust their manners without it.'

'I tell you, Ave, you are spoiling the boy. He is more conceited than ever since the Mays noticed him.'

'Leonard conceited!'

'Yes; he is getting as stuck up as Tom May himself—your model I believe!'

'I thought he was yours!'

'Mine?'

'Yes; you always seem to aim at a poor imitation of him.'

There was a blushing angry stammer in reply; and she suppressed her smile, but felt triumphant in having hit the mark. Unready at retort, he gathered himself up, and said: 'Well, Ave, I have only this to say, that if you choose to support that boy in his impertinences, there will be no bearing it; and I shall see what I shall do.'

Seeing what shall be done is a threat stimulating to some, but appalling to others; and Averil was of the latter class, with no desire for such a spectacle, be it what it might. She did not apologize

for the trifle—possible ink, a spot of wax, a borrowed book, were far beneath an apology; but she made up her mind to humour Henry's follies magnanimously, and avoid collisions, like an admirable peace-maker. As soon as bed-time came, she repaired to Leonard's room; and Henry, as he went along the passage, heard the two young voices ringing with laughter! Her retort had been particularly delightful to Leonard. 'That's right, Ave! I'm glad you set him down, for I thought afterwards whether I ought not to have stood by you, only his way of pitching into me through you puts me into such a rage: I shall do something desperate some day!'

'Never mind it, Leonard; it does not hurt me; and if it did, I should like to bear a great deal for you.'

'That's all the wrong way,' said Leonard, smiling affectionately.

'No; men do and women suffer.'

'That's trite!' said Leonard, patting her fondly. 'I like you to do—as you call it—Miss May does, and every one that is worth anything. I say, Ave, when I go out to the islands, you are coming too?'

'Oh yes! I know I could do a great deal. If nothing else, I could sing; and they have a great aptitude for singing, Mary was telling me. But that reminds me I must finish copying the hymn for next Sunday; Henry hindered me, and I have six copies more to do.'

'I'll do some of them,' said Leonard. 'Let us go down now the coast is clear, if the fire is not out.'

They went down softly, Mab and all, nursed up the fire that Henry had raked out; and if Saturnalia could be held over the writing out of a hymn tune, they did it! At any rate, it had the charm of an assertion of independence; and to Averil it was something like a midnight meeting of persecuted Christians—to Leonard it was 'great fun.'

That evening was not a solitary specimen.

Averil and Leonard intended to obviate causes of offence; but they were young and heedless, and did not feel bound to obedience. A very little temptation made them forget or defy Henry's fancies; and Leonard was easily lashed into answers really unbecoming and violent, for which he could not bring himself to be sorry, when he thought over the petty interference and annoyance that had caused them.

These small tyrannies and frets made Averil the more devoted to the music, which was her rest, her delight, and not only exalted her above cares, but sanctioned her oblivion of them. The occupation grew upon her, never ending, still beginning, with fresh occasions for practice and new lessons, but though Bankside boys were willing to be taught, yet it was chiefly in hope of preferment as choristers at the Minster; and she soon found that a scholar no sooner proved his voice good for anything, than he went off to be trained for the choir on the foundation, which fed, clothed, and apprenticed its young singers. She found she must betake herself to an elder race if she wanted a reliable staff of voices; and some young men and women showing themselves willing, a practice, with Mr. Scudamour to keep order, was organized for late evenings, twice in the week. This was rather much! Henry opposed at first, on the ground that the evening would be broken up; to which she answered that for such a purpose they ought to be willing to sacrifice a little domestic comfort; and when he muttered a petulant 'Pshaw,' looked at him in reproof for sacrilege. She was not going to be one of the womankind sitting up in a row till their lords and masters should be pleased to want them!

Next, he insisted that he would not have her going about the place after dark, but she was fortified by the curate's promise to escort her safely, and reduced him to a semi-imprecation which she again viewed as extremely wicked. The existence of that meek little helpless Mrs. Scudamour, always shut up in a warm room with her delicate baby, cut off Henry from any other possible objection, and he was obliged to submit.

Leonard would gladly have been his sister's companion on her expeditions, but he must remain at home and prepare for the morrow's school-work, and endure the first hour of dreariness unenlivened by her smile and greeting, and, what was worse, without the scanty infusion of peace produced by her presence. Her rapid departure after dinner always discomposed Henry; and the

usual vent for his ill-humour was either a murmur against the clergy and all their measures, or the discovery of some of Leonard's transgressions of his code. Fretted and irritable at the destruction of evening comfort, he in his turn teased the fiery temper of his brother. If there were nothing worse, his grumbling remarks interrupted, and too often they were that sort of censure that is expressively called nagging. Leonard would reply angrily, and the flashes of his passion generally produced silence. Neither brother spoke to Averil of these evening interludes, which were becoming almost habitual, but they kept Leonard in a constant sore sense of injury, yet of uneasy conscience. He looked to the Randall scholarship as his best hope of leaving home and its torments, but his illness had thrown him back: he had not only lost the last quarter, but the acquirements of the one before it were obscured; and the vexations themselves so harassed and interrupted his evening studies, that he knew it was unreasonable to hope for it at the next examination, which, from various causes, was to come after the Christmas holidays; and it would be well if he could even succeed in the summer.

Innocent as the Mays were of the harmonium business, Henry included them in the annoyance it gave. It was the work of the curate—and was not Dr. May one in everything with the clergy? had he not been instrumental in building the chapel? was it not the Mays and the clergy who had made Ave inconveniently religious and opinionative, to say nothing of Leonard? The whole town was priest—led and bigoted; and Dr. May was the despot to whom all bowed down.

This was an opinion Henry would hardly have originated: it was the shaft of an abler man than he—no other than Harvey Anderson, who had lately become known to the world by a book proving King John to have been the most enlightened and patriotic of English sovereigns, enduring the Interdict on a pure principle of national independence, and devising Magna Charta from his own generous brain—in fact, presenting a magnificent and misunderstood anticipation of the most advanced theories of the nineteenth century. The book had made so much noise in the world, that the author had been induced to quit his college tutorship, and become editor of a popular magazine. He lived in London, but often came down to spend Sunday with his mother, and had begun to be looked on as rather the lion of the place. Henry took in his magazine, and courted his notice, often bringing him into Averil's way that she might hear her heroes treated with irony more effectual than home-made satire; but Ave was staunch. She hated the sight of Mr. Anderson; never cut the leaves of his magazine; and if driven to sing to him, took as little pains as her musical nature would let her do. But the very strength of her dislike gave it an air of prejudice, and it was set down less to principle than to party spirit and May influence.

There was another cause for Henry's being soured. He was not of the nature to be filial with Dr. May; and therefore gratitude oppressed, and patronage embittered him. The first months of warm feeling at an end, the old spirit of independence revived, and he avoided consulting the physician as much as possible. More than once his management of a case was not approved by Dr. May; and the strong and hasty language, and the sharp reproofs that ensued, were not taken as the signs of the warm heart and friendly interest, but as the greatest offences—sullenly, but not the less bitterly endured.

Moreover, one of the Whitford surgeons had been called in by a few of the out-lying families who had hitherto been patients of the Wards; and worse than all, Mrs. Rivers took her child up to London for three days in November, and it became known—through a chain of tongues—that it was for the enlargement of tonsils, on which Mr. Ward had operated a year before.

'Old May was playing him false!' was Henry's cry. 'His professions were humbug. He would endure no one who did not submit to his dictation; and he would bring in a stranger to ruin them all!'

Little did Henry know of Dr. May's near approach to untruth in denying that he had a house to let to the opposition surgeon—of his attestations to his daughter that young Ward was a skilful operator—or of his vexation when she professed herself ready to undergo anything for his pleasure, but said that little Margaret's health was another thing.

Yet even this might have been forgiven, but for that worst rub of all—Tom May's manners. His politeness was intense—most punctilious and condescending in form—and yet provoking beyond

measure to persons who, like Henry and Averil, had not playfulness enough to detect with certainty whether they were being made game of or not, nor whether his smoothly-uttered compliments were not innuendoes. Henry was certain of being despised, and naturally chafed against the prospect of the future connection between the two medical men of the town; and though Tom was gone back to Cambridge, it was the rankling remembrance of his supercilious looks that, more than any present offence or independence of spirit, made the young surgeon kick against direction from the physician. Here, too, Averil was of the same mind. She had heard Tom May observe that his sister Gertrude would play quite well enough for a lady; for the mission of a lady's music was to put one to sleep at home, and cover conversation at a party; as to the rest—unprofessionals were a mistake!

After that, the civil speeches with which Tom would approach the piano only added insult to injury.

CHAPTER VIII

Ne'er readier at alarm-bell's call,
Thy burghers rose to man thy wall,
Than now in danger shall be thine,
Thy dauntless voluntary line.—Marmion

'Drive fast, Will,' said Dr. May, hastily stepping into his carriage in the early darkness of a December evening. 'Five already, and he is to be there by 5.25.'

'He' was no other than Harry May, and 'there' was the station. With the tidings of the terrible fight of Peiho had come a letter from a messmate of Harry's with an account of his serious wound in the chest, describing it as just short of immediately dangerous. Another letter had notified his amendment, and that he was invalided home, a few cheery words from Harry himself scrawled at the end showing that his power was far less than his good-will: and after two months' waiting and suspense, a telegram had come from Plymouth, with the words, 'Stoneborough, 5.25.'

In ignorance as to the state of the traveller, and expecting to find him in a condition requiring great care and watching, Dr. May had laid his injunctions on the eager family not to rush up to the station en masse to excite and overwhelm, but to leave the meeting there entirely to himself and his brougham. He had, therefore, been exceedingly annoyed that one of Henry Ward's pieces of self-assertion had delayed him unnecessarily at a consultation; and when at last he had escaped, he spent most of his journey with his body half out of the window, hurrying Will Adams, and making noises of encouragement to the horse; or else in a strange tumult of sensation between hope and fear, pain and pleasure, suspense and thankfulness, the predominant feeling being vexation at not having provided against this contingency by sending Richard to the station.

After all the best efforts of the stout old chestnut, he and the train were simultaneously at the station, and the passengers were getting out on the opposite platform. The Doctor made a dash to cross in the rear of the train, but was caught and held fast by a porter with the angry exclamation, 'She's backing, sir;' and there he stood in an agony, feeling all Harry's blank disappointment, and the guilt of it besides, and straining his eyes through the narrow gaps between the blocks of carriages.

The train rushed on, and he was across the line the same instant, but the blank was his. Up and down the gas-lighted platform he looked in vain among the crowd, only his eye suddenly lit on a black case close to his feet, with the three letters MAY, and the next moment a huge chest appeared out of the darkness, bearing the same letters, and lifted on a truck by the joint strength of a green porter, and a pair of broad blue shoulders. Too ill to come on—telegraph, mail train—rushed through the poor Doctor's brain as he stepped forward as if to interrogate the chest. The blue shoulders turned, a ruddy sun-burnt face lighted up, and the inarticulate exclamation on either side was of the most intense relief and satisfaction.

'Where are the rest?' said Harry, holding his father's hand in no sick man's grasp.

'At home, I told them not to come up; I thought—'

'Well, we'll walk down together! I've got you all to myself. I thought you had missed my telegram. Hollo, Will, how d'ye do? what, this thing to drive down in?'

'I thought you were an invalid, Harry,' said Dr. May, with a laughing yet tearful ring in his agitated tone, as he packed himself and his son in.

'Ay! I wished I could have let you know sooner how well I had got over it,' said Harry, in the deep full voice of strong healthy manhood. 'I am afraid you have been very anxious.'

'We are used to it, my boy,' said the Doctor huskily, stroking the great firm fingers that were lying lovingly on his knee, 'and if it always ends in this way, it ought to do us more good than harm.'

'It has not done harm, I hope,' said Harry, catching him up quick. 'Not to old Mary?'

'No, Mary works things off, good girl. I flatter myself you will find us all in high preservation.'

'All—all at home! That's right.'

'Yes, those infants from Maplewood and all. You are sure you are all right, Harry?'

'As sure as my own feelings can make me, and the surgeon of the Dexter to back them,' said Harry. 'I don't believe my lungs were touched after all, but you shall all sit upon me when you like—Tom and all. It was a greater escape than I looked for,' he added, in a lower voice. 'I did not think to have had another Christmas here.'

The silence lasted for the few moments till the carriage drew up behind the limes; the doors were thrown open, and the Doctor shouted to the timid anxious figure that alone was allowed to appear in the hall, 'Come and lift him out, Mary.'

The drawing-room was a goodly sight that evening; and the Doctor, as he sat leaning back in weary happiness, might be well satisfied with the bright garland that still clustered round his hearth, though the age of almost all forbade their old title of Daisies. The only one who still asserted her right to that name was perched on the sailor's knee, insisting on establishing that there was as much room for her there as there had been three years ago; though, as he had seated himself on a low foot-stool, her feet were sometimes on the ground, and moreover her throne was subject to sudden earthquakes, which made her, nothing loth, cling to his neck, draw his arm closer round her, and lean on his broad breast, proud that universal consent declared her his likeness in the family; and the two presenting a pleasant contrasting similarity—the open honest features, blue eyes, and smile, expressive of hearty good-will and simple happiness, were so entirely of the same mould in the plump, white-skinned, rosy-cheeked, golden-haired girl, and in the large, powerful, bronzed, ruddy sailor, with the thick mass of curls, at which Tom looked with hostility as fixed, though less declared, than that of his Eton days.

Those were the idle members upon the hearth-rug. On the sofa, with a small table to herself, and a tall embroidery frame before her, nearly hiding her slight person, sat Mrs. Ernescliffe, her pretty head occasionally looking out over the top of her work to smile an answer, and her artistically arranged hair and the crispness of her white dress and broad blue ribbons marking that there was a step in life between her and her sisters; her husband sat beside her on the sofa, with a red volume in his hand, with 'Orders,' the only word visible above the fingers, one of which was keeping his place. Hector looked very happy and spirited, though his visage was not greatly ornamented by a moustache, sandier even than his hair, giving effect to every freckle on his honest face. A little behind was Mary, winding one of Blanche's silks over the back of a chair, and so often looking up to revel in the contemplation of Harry's face, that her skein was in a wild tangle, which she studiously concealed lest the sight should compel Richard to come and unravel it with those wonderful fingers of his.

Richard and Ethel were arranging the 'sick albums' which they had constructed—one of cheap religious prints, with texts and hymns, to be lent in cases of lingering illness; the other, commonly called the 'profane,' of such scraps as might please a sick child, pictures from worn-out books or advertisements, which Ethel was colouring—Aubrey volunteering aid that was received rather distrustfully, as his love of effect caused him to array the model school-children in colours gaudy enough, as Gertrude complained, 'to corrupt a saint.' Nor was his dilettante help more appreciated at a small stand, well provided with tiny drawers, and holding a shaded lamp, according to Gertrude, 'burning something horrible ending in gen, that would kill anybody but Tom, who managed it,' but which threw a beautiful light upon the various glass dishes, tubes, and slides, and the tall brass microscope that Tom was said to love better than all his kith and kin, and which afforded him occupation for his leisure moments.

'I say, Harry,' he asked, 'did you get my letter?'

'Your letter—of what date? I got none since Mary's of the second of May, when every one was down in the fever. Poor old Ward, I never was more shocked; what is become of the young ones?'

'Oh! you must ask Mary, Miss Ward is a bosom friend of hers.'

'What! the girl that sang like the lark? I must hear her again. But she won't be in tune for singing now, poor thing! What are they doing? Henry Ward taken to the practice? He used to be the dirtiest little sneak going, but I hope he is mended now.'

'Ask my father,' said mischievous Tom; and Dr. May answered not, nor revealed his day's annoyance with Henry.

'He is doing his best to make a home for his brother and sisters,' said Richard.

'My letter,' said Tom, 'was written in Whitsun week; I wish you had had it.'

'Ay, it would have been precious from its rarity,' said Harry. 'What commission did it contain, may I ask?'

'You have not by good luck brought me home a Chinese flea?'

'He has all the fleas in creation,' said Daisy confidentially, 'cats' and dogs', and hedgehogs', and human; and you would have been twice as welcome if you had brought one.'

'I've brought no present to nobody. I'd got my eye on a splendid ivory junk, for Blanche's wedding present, at Canton, but I couldn't even speak to send any one after it. You have uncommon bad luck for a sailor's relatives.'

'As long as you bring yourself home we don't care,' said Blanche, treating the loss of the junk with far more resignation than did Tom that of the flea.

'If you only had a morsel of river mud sticking anywhere,' added Tom, 'you don't know the value the infusoria might be.'

'I had a good deal more than a morsel sticking to me once,' said Harry; 'it was owing to my boat's crew that I am not ever so many feet deep in it now, like many better men. They never lost sight of me, and somehow hauled me out.'

Gertrude gave him a hug, and Mary's eyes got so misty, that her skein fell into worse entanglements than ever.

'Were you conscious?' asked Ethel.

'I can't say. I'm clear of nothing but choking and gasping then, and a good while after. It was a treacherous, unlucky affair, and I'm afraid I shall miss the licking of rascally John Chinaman. If all I heard at Plymouth is true, we may have work handy to home.'

'At home you may say,' said his father, 'Dulce et, &c. is our motto. Didn't you know what a nest of heroes we have here to receive you? Let me introduce you to Captain Ernescliffe, of the Dorset Volunteer Rifle Corps; Private Thomas May, of the Cambridge University Corps; and Mr. Aubrey Spencer May, for whom I have found a rifle, and am expected to find a uniform as soon as the wise heads have settled what colour will be most becoming.'

'Becoming! No, papa!' indignantly shouted Aubrey: 'it is the colour that will be most invisible in skirmishing.'

'Gray, faced with scarlet,' said Hector, decidedly.

'Yes, that is the colour of the invincible Dorsets,' said Dr. May. 'There you see our great authority with his military instructions in his hand.'

'No, sir,' replied Hector, 'it's not military instructions, it is Crauford's General Orders.'

'And,' added the Doctor, 'there's his bride working the colours, and Mary wanting to emulate her.'

'I don't think George will ever permit us to have colours,' said Ethel; 'he says that Rifles have no business with them, for that they are of no use to skirmishers.'

'The matter has been taken out of George's hands,' said Aubrey; 'there would not have been a volunteer in the country if he had his way.'

'Yes,' explained Ethel, 'the real soldier can't believe in volunteers, nor cavalry in infantry; but he is thoroughly in for it now.'

'Owing to his Roman matron' quoth Tom. 'It was a wonderful opening for public spirit when Lady Walkinghame insisted on Sir Henry refusing the use of the park for practice, for fear we should make targets of the children. So the Spartan mother at Abbotstoke, gallantly setting Margaret aside, sent for the committee at once to choose the very best place in the park.'

'Papa is chairman of the committee,' added Aubrey, 'he is mayor this year, so we must encourage it.'

'And Aubrey hit four times at a hundred yards,' triumphantly declared Gertrude, 'when Edward Anderson and Henry Ward only got a ball in by accident.'

'Henry Ward ought to be shot at himself,' was Aubrey's sentiment, 'for not letting Leonard be in the corps.'

'The fellow that you brought to Maplewood?' asked Hector. 'I thought he was at school.'

'Didn't you know that old Hoxton has given leave to any of the sixth form to drill and practise? and that trumpery fellow, Henry, says he can't afford the outfit, though his sister would have given the uniform.'

'Let me tell you, young folks,' said the Doctor, 'that you are not to suppose it always hails crack rifles on all sorts of improved systems, as it does when Captain Hector is in the house.'

'They are only on trial, sir,' apologized Hector.

'Very odd then that they all have an eagle and H. E. on them,' observed the Doctor dryly.

'Oh! they'll take them again, or I shall find a use for them,' said Hector.

'Well, if Henry can't afford two,' said Aubrey, holding to his point, 'he ought to give up to his brother; he knows no more how to handle a rifle—'

'That's the very reason,' muttered Tom.

'And Flora is going to give a great party,' proceeded Gertrude, 'as soon as the uniform is settled, and they are enrolled. Blanche and Hector are to stay for it, and you'll have to wear your lieutenant's uniform, Harry.'

'I can't be going to balls till I've been up to report myself fit for service,' said Harry.

'It is not to be a ball,' said Blanche's soft, serious voice over her green silk banner; 'it is to be a breakfast and concert, ending in a dance, such as we had at Maplewood.'

'Hollo!' said Harry, starting, 'now I begin to believe in Mrs. Ernescliffe, when I hear her drawing down herself as an example to Flora.'

'Only a precedent,' said Blanche, blushing a little, but still grave. 'We have had some experience, you know. Our corps was one of the earliest enrolled, and Hector managed it almost entirely. It was the reason we have not been able to come here sooner, but we thought it right to be foremost, as the enemy are sure to attempt our coast first.'

'I believe the enemy are expected on every coast at first,' was Ethel's aside, but it was not heard; for Harry was declaring,

'Your coast! they will never get the length of that. I was talking to an old messmate of mine in the train, who was telling me how we could burn their whole fleet before it could get out of Cherbourg.'

'If they should slip by,' began Hector.

'Slip by!' and Harry had well-nigh dislodged Daisy by his vehemence in demonstrating that they were welcome to volunteer, but that the Channel Fleet would prevent the rifles from being seriously put to the proof—a declaration highly satisfactory to the ladies, and heartily backed up by the Doctor, though Blanche looked rather discomfited, and Hector argued loud for the probability of active service.

'I say, Aubrey,' said Tom, rather tired of the land and sea debate, 'do just reach me a card, to take up some of this sand upon.'

Aubrey obeyed, and reading the black-edged card as he handed it, said, 'Mrs. Pug. What? Pug ought to have been calling upon Mab.'

'Maybe she will, in good earnest,' observed Tom again in Ethel's ear; while the whole room rang with the laughter that always befalls the unlucky wight guilty of a blunder in a name.

'You don't mean that you don't know who she is, Aubrey!' was the cry.

'I—how should I?'

'What, not Mrs. Pugh?' exclaimed Daisy.

'Pew or Pug—I know nothing of either. Is this edge as mourning for all the old pews that have been demolished in the church?'

'For shame, Aubrey,' said Mary seriously. 'You must know it is for her husband.'

Aubrey set up his eyebrows in utter ignorance.

'How true it is that one half the world knows nothing of the other!' exclaimed Ethel. 'Do you really mean you have never found out the great Mrs. Pugh, Mrs. Ledwich's dear suffering Matilda?'

'I've seen a black lady sitting with Mrs. Ledwich in church.'

'Such is life,' said Ethel. 'How little she thought herself living in such an unimpressible world!'

'She is a pretty woman enough,' observed Tom.

'And very desirous of being useful,' added Richard. 'She and Mrs. Ledwich came over to Cocksmoor this morning, and offered any kind of assistance.'

'At Cocksmoor!' cried Ethel, much as if it had been the French.

'Every district is filled up here, you know,' said Richard, 'and Mrs. Ledwich begged me as a personal favour to give her some occupation that would interest her and cheer her spirits, so I asked her to look after those new cottages at Gould's End, quite out of your beat, Ethel, and she seemed to be going about energetically.'

Tom looked unutterable things at Ethel, who replied with a glance between diversion and dismay.

'Who is the lady?' said Blanche. 'She assaulted me in the street with inquiries and congratulations about Harry, declaring she had known me as a child, a thing I particularly dislike:' and Mrs. Ernescliffe looked like a ruffled goldfinch.

'Forgetting her has not been easy to the payers of duty calls,' said Ethel. 'She was the daughter of Mrs. Ledwich's brother, the Colonel of Marines, and used in old times to be with her aunt; there used to be urgent invitations to Flora and me to drink tea there because she was of our age. She married quite young, something very prosperous and rather aged, and the glories of dear Matilda's villa at Bristol have been our staple subject, but Mr. Pugh died in the spring, leaving his lady five hundred a year absolutely her own, and she is come to stay with her aunt, and look for a house.'

'Et cetera,' added Tom.

'What, in the buxom widow line?' asked Harry.

'No, no!' said Richard, rather indignantly.

'No, in the pathetic line,' said Ethel; 'but that requires some self-denial.'

'Our tongues don't lose their venom, you see, Harry,' put in the Doctor.

'No indeed, papa,' said Ethel, really anxious to guard her brothers. 'I was very sorry for her at first, and perhaps I pity her more now than even then. I was taken with her pale face and dark eyes, and I believe she was a good wife, and really concerned for her husband; but I can't help seeing that she knows her grief is an attraction.'

'To simple parsons,' muttered Tom along the tube of his microscope.

'The sound of her voice showed her to be full of pretension,' said Blanche. 'Besides, Mrs. Ledwich's trumpeting would fix my opinion in a moment.'

'Just so,' observed the Doctor.

'No, papa,' said Ethel, 'I was really pleased and touched in spite of Mrs. Ledwich's devotion to her, till I found out a certain manoeuvring to put herself in the foreground, and not let her sorrow hinder her from any enjoyment or display.'

'She can't bear any one to do what she does not.'

'What! Mary's mouth open against her too?' cried Dr. May.

'Well, papa,' insisted Mary, 'nobody wanted her to insist on taking the harmonium at Bankside last Sunday, just because Averil had a cold in her head; and she played so fast, that every one was put out, and then said she would come to the practice that they might understand one another. She is not even in the Bankside district, so it is no business of hers.'

'There, Richard, her favours are equally distributed,' said Aubrey, 'but if she would take that harmonium altogether, one would not mind—it makes Henry Ward as sulky as a bear to have his sister going out all the evening, and he visits it on Leonard. I dare say if she stayed at home he would not have been such a brute about the rifle.'

'I should not wonder,' said Dr. May. 'I sometimes doubt if home is sweetened to my friend Henry.'

'O, papa!' cried Mary, bristling up, 'Ave is very hard worked, and she gives up everything in the world but her church music, and that is her great duty and delight.'

'Miss Ward's music must be a sore trial to the Pug,' said Tom, 'will it be at this affair at Abbotstoke?'

'That's the question,' said Ethel. 'It never goes out, yet is to be met everywhere, just over-persuaded at the last moment. Now Flora, you will see, will think it absolutely improper to ask her; and she will be greatly disappointed not to have the chance of refusing, and then yielding at the last minute.'

'Flora must have her,' said Harry.

'I trust not,' said Blanche, shrinking.

'Flora will not ask her,' said Tom, 'but she will be there.'

'And will dance with me,' said Harry.

'No, with Richard,' said Tom.

'What!' said Richard, looking up at the sound of his name. All laughed, but were ashamed to explain, and were relieved that their father rang the bell.

'At that unhappy skein still, Mary?' said Mrs. Ernescliffe, as the good nights were passing. 'What a horrid state it is in!'

'I shall do it in time,' said Mary, 'when there is nothing to distract my attention. I only hope I shall not hurt it for you.'

'Chuck it into the fire at once; it is not worth the trouble,' said Hector.

Each had a word of advice, but Mary held her purpose, and persevered till all had left the room except Richard, who quietly took the crimson tangle on his wrists, turned and twisted, opened passages for the winder, and by the magic of his dexterous hands, had found the clue to the maze, so that all was proceeding well, though slowly, when the study door opened, and Harry's voice was heard in a last good night to his father. Mary's eyes looked wistful, and one misdirection of her winder tightened an obdurate loop once more.

'Run after Harry,' said Richard, taking possession of the ivory. 'Good night; I can always do these things best alone. I had rather—yes, really—good night:' and his kiss had the elder brother's authority of dismissal.

His Maimouna was too glad and grateful for more than a summary 'Thank you,' and flew up-stairs in time to find Harry turning, baffled, from her empty room. 'What, only just done that interminable yarn?' he said.

'Richard is doing it. I could not help letting him, this first evening of you.'

'Good old Richard! he is not a bit altered since I first went to sea, when I was so proud of that,' said Harry, taking up his midshipman's dirk, which formed a trophy on Mary's mantelshelf.

'Are we altered since you went last?' said Mary.

'The younger ones, of course. I was in hopes that Aubrey would have been more like old June, but he'll never be so much of a fellow.'

'He is a very dear good boy,' said Mary, warmly.

'Of course he is,' said Harry, 'but, somehow, he will always have a woman-bred way about him. Can't be helped, of course; but what a pair of swells Tom and Blanche are come out!' and he laughed good-naturedly.

'Is not Blanche a beautiful dear darling?' cried Mary, eagerly. 'It is so nice to have her. They could not come at first because of the infection, and then because of the rifle corps, and now it is delicious to have all at home.'

'Well, Molly, I'm glad it wasn't you that have married. Mind, you mustn't marry till I do.'

And Harry was really glad that Mary's laugh was perfectly 'fancy free,' as she answered, 'I'm sure I hope not, but I won't promise, because that might be unreasonable, you know.'

'Oh, you prudent, provident Polly! But,' added Harry, recalled to a sense of time by a clock striking eleven, 'I came to bring you something, Mary. You shall have it, if you will give me another.'

Mary recognized, with some difficulty, a Prayer-Book with limp covers that Margaret had given him after his first voyage. Not only was it worn by seven years' use, but it was soiled and stained with dark brownish red, and a straight round hole perforated it from cover to cover.

'Is it too bad to keep?' said Harry. 'Let me just cut out my name in Margaret's hand, and the verse of the 107th Psalm; luckily the ball missed that.'

'The ball?' said Mary, beginning to understand.

'Yes. Every one of those circles that you see cut out there, was in here,' said Harry, laying his hand over his chest, 'before the ball, which I have given to my father.'

'O, Harry!' was all Mary could say, pointing to her own name in a pencil scrawl on the fly-leaf.

'Yes, I set that down because I could not speak to tell what was to be done with it, when we didn't know that that book had really been the saving of my life. That hair's-breadth deviation of the bullet made all the difference.'

Mary was kissing the blood-stained book, and sobbing.

'Why, Mary, what is there to cry for? It is all over now, I tell you. I am as well as man would wish, and there's no more about it but to thank God, and try to deserve His goodness.'

'Yes, yes, I know, Harry; but to think how little we knew, or thought, or felt—going on in our own way when you were in such danger and suffering!'

'Wasn't I very glad you were going on in your own way!' said Harry. 'Why, Mary, it was that which did it—it has been always that thought of you at the Minster every day, that kept me to reading the Psalms, and so having the book about me. And did not it do one good to lie and think of the snug room, and my father's spectacles, and all as usual? When they used to lay me on the deck of the Dexter at night, because I could not breathe below, I used to watch old Orion, who was my great friend in the Loyalty Isles, and wish the heathen name had not stuck to the old fellow, he always seemed so like the Christian warrior, climbing up with his shield before him and his. A home like this is a shield to a man in more ways than one, Mary. Hollo, was that the street door?'

'Yes; Ritchie going home. Fancy his being at the silk all this time! I am so sorry!'

Maugre her sorrow, there were few happier maidens in England than Mary May, even though her service was distracted by the claims of three slave-owners at once, bound as she was, to Ethel, by habitual fidelity, to Harry, by eager adoration, to Blanche, by willing submission. Luckily, their requisitions (for the most part unconscious) seldom clashed, or, if they did, the two elders gave way, and the bride asserted her supremacy in the plenitude of her youthful importance and prosperity.

Thus she carried off Mary in her barouche to support her in the return of bridal calls, while the others were organizing a walk to visit Flora and the rifle target. Gertrude's enthusiasm was not equal to walking with a weapon that might be loaded, nor to being ordered out to admire the practice, so she accompanied the sisters; Tom was reading hard; and Ethel found herself, Aubrey, and the sailor, the only ones ready to start.

This was a decided treat, for Aubrey and she were so nearly one, that it was almost a tete-a-tete with Harry, though it was not his way to enter by daylight, and without strong impulse, on what regarded himself, and there were no such confidences as those to Mary on the previous night; but in talking over home details, it was easier to speak without Tom's ironical ears and caustic tongue.

Among other details, the story of the summer that Ethel and Aubrey had spent at Coombe was narrated, and Aubrey indulged himself by describing what he called Ethel's conquest.

'It is more a conquest of Norman's, and of Melanesia,' said Ethel. 'If it were not nonsense to build upon people's generous visions at seventeen, I should sometimes hope a spark had been lit that would shine some day in your islands, Harry.'

Going up that hill was not the place for Etheldred May to talk of the futility of youthful aspirations, but it did not so strike either of the brothers, to whom Cocksmoor had long been a familiar fact. Harry laughed to hear the old Ethel so like herself; and Aubrey said, 'By the bye, what did you do, the day you walked him to Cocksmoor? he was fuller of those islands than ever after it.'

'I did not mean it,' said Ethel; 'but the first day of the holidays I came on him disconsolate in the street, with nothing to do, and very sore about Henry's refusal to let him volunteer; he walked on with me till we found ourselves close to Cocksmoor, and I found he had never seen the church, and would like to stay for evening service, so I put him into the parsonage while I was busy, and told him to take a book.'

'I know,' said Aubrey; 'the liveliest literature you can get in Richard's parlour are the Missionary Reports.'

'Exactly so; and he got quite saturated with them; and when we walked home, I was so thankful that the rifle grievance should be a little displaced, that I led him on to talk and build castles rather more than according to my resolutions.'

'Hollo, Ethel!' said Harry.

'Yes, I think spontaneous castles are admirable, but I mistrust all timber from other people's woods.'

'But isn't this a horrid shame of Henry?' said Aubrey. 'Such a little prig as he is, to take the place of such a fellow as Leonard, a capital shot already.'

'I wish Henry had been magnanimous,' said Ethel.

'I'd as soon talk of a magnanimous weasel, from what I recollect,' said Harry.

'And he is worse now, Harry,' continued Aubrey. 'So spruce and silky out of doors, and such a regular old tyrannical bachelor indoors. He is jealous of Leonard, any one can see, and that's the reason he won't give him his due.'

'You observe,' said Ethel, 'that this boy thinks the youngest brother's due is always to come first.'

'So it is, in this family,' said Harry. 'No one comes so last as old Ritchie.'

'But of course,' said Aubrey, rather taken aback, 'if I were not youngest, I should have to knock under to some one.'

Ethel and Harry both laughed heartily; one congratulating him on not having carried the principle into the cockpit, the other adding, 'Don't indoctrinate Leonard with it; there is enough already to breed bitterness between those brothers! Leonard ought to be kept in mind that Henry has so much to harass him, that his temper should be borne patiently with.'

'He!'

'I don't think papa's best endeavours have kept all his father's practice for him, and I am sure their rate of living must make him feel pinched this Christmas.'

'Whew! He will be in a sweeter humour than ever!'

'I have been trying to show Leonard that there's room for magnanimity on his side at least; and don't you go and upset it all by common-place abuse of tutors and governors.'

'I upset it!' cried Aubrey: 'I might as well try to upset the Minster as a word from you to Leonard.'

'Nonsense! What's that?' For they were hailed from behind, and looking round saw two tall figures, weapon in hand, in pursuit. They proved to be Hector Ernescliffe and Leonard Ward, each bearing one of what Dr. May called the H. E. rifles; but Leonard looked half shy, half grim, and so decidedly growled off all Aubrey's attempts at inquiry or congratulation, that Ethel hazarded none, and Aubrey looked discomfited, wearing an expression which Harry took to mean that the weight of his rifle fatigued him, and insisted on carrying it for him, in, spite of his rather insulted protests and declarations that the sailor was an invalid; Ethel had walked forwards, and found Leonard at her side, with a darkening brow as he glanced back at the friendly contest.

'Harry spoils Aubrey as much as all the others do,' said Ethel lightly, deeming it best to draw out the sting of the rankling thought.

'Ay! None of them would leave him to be pitied and offered favours by some chance person,' said Leonard.

'You don't call my brother Hector a chance person?'

'Did you say anything to him, Miss May?' said Leonard, turning on her a flushed face, as if he could almost have been angered with her.

'I said not one word.'

'Nor Aubrey?'

'The volunteer politics were discussed last night, and Henry got abused among us; but papa defended him, and said it did not rain rifles. That's all—whatever Hector may have done was without a word to either of us—very likely on the moment's impulse. Did he go to Bankside after you?'

'No. I was looking in at Shearman's window,' said Leonard, rather sheepishly, 'at the locks of the new lot he has got in, and he came and asked if I were going to choose one, for he had got a couple down from London, and the man had stupidly put his cipher on both, so he would be glad if I would take one off his hands. I didn't accept—I made that clear—but then he begged, as if it was to oblige him, that I would come out to Abbotstoke and help him try the two, for he didn't know which he should keep.'

'Very ingenious of him,' said Ethel laughing.

'Now, Miss May, do tell me what I ought to do. It is such a beauty, better than any Shearman ever dreamt of; just look: at the finish of the lock.'

'By the time you have shot with it—'

'Now don't, pray,' said Leonard, 'I haven't any one to trust for advice but you.'

'Indeed, Leonard, I can see no objection. It is a great boon to you, and no loss to Hector, and he is quite enough my father's son for you to look on him as a friend. I can't but be very glad, for the removal of this vexation ought to make you get on all the better with your brother.'

'Ave would be delighted,' said Leonard; 'but somehow—'

'Somehow' was silenced by a coalescing of the party at a gate; and Hector and Harry were found deep in an argument in which the lieutenant's Indian reminiscences of the Naval Brigade were at issue with the captain's Southdown practice, and the experiences of the one meeting the technicalities of the other were so diverting, that Leonard forgot his scruples till at the entrance of the park he turned off towards the target with Hector and Aubrey, while the other two walked up to the house.

The Grange atmosphere always had a strange weight of tedium in it, such as was specially perceptible after the joyous ease of the house in the High Street. No one was in the drawing-room, and Harry gazed round at the stiff, almost petrified, aspect of the correct and tasteful arrangement of the tables and furniture, put his hands in his pockets, and yawned twice, asking Ethel why she did not go in search of Flora. Ethel shook her head; and in another moment Flora appeared in eager

welcome; she had been dressing for a drive to Stoneborough to see her brother, little expecting him to be in a state for walking to her. With her came her little girl, a child whose aspect was always a shock to those who connected her with the two Margarets whose name she bore. She had inherited her father's heavy mould of feature and dark complexion, and the black eyes had neither sparkle in themselves nor relief from the colour of the sallow cheek; the pouting lips were fretful, the whole appearance unhealthy, and the dark bullet-shaped head seemed too large for the thin bony little figure. Worn, fagged, and aged as Flora looked, she had still so much beauty, and far more of refinement and elegance, as to be a painful foil and contrast to the child that clung to her, waywardly refusing all response to her uncle's advances.

Flora made a sign to him to discontinue them, and talked of her husband, who was hunting, and heard the history of Harry's return and recovery. In the midst, little Margaret took heart of grace, crossed the room, and stood by the sailor, and holding up a great India-rubber ball as large as her own head, asked, 'Uncle Harry, were you shot with a cannon-ball as big as this?'

Thereupon she was on his knee, and as he had all his father's fascination for children, he absolutely beguiled her into ten minutes of genuine childish mirth, a sight so rare and precious to her mother, that she could not keep up her feint of talking to Ethel. The elderly dame, part nurse, part nursery governess, presently came to take Miss Rivers out, but Miss Rivers, with a whine in her voice, insisted on going nowhere but to see the shooting, and Uncle Harry must come with her; and come he did, the little bony fingers clasping tight hold of one of his large ones.

'Dear Harry!' said Flora, 'he wins every one! It is like a cool refreshing wind from the sea when he comes in.'

In Flora's whole air, voice, and manner, there was apparent a relaxation and absence of constraint such as she never allowed herself except when alone with Ethel. Then only did she relieve the constant strain, then only did the veritable woman show herself, and the effort, the toil, the weariness, the heart-ache of her life become visible; but close together as the sisters lived, such tete-a-tetes were rare, and perhaps were rather shunned than sought, as perilous and doubtful indulgences. Even now, Flora at once fixed a limit by ordering the carriage to meet her in a quarter of an hour at the nearest point to the rifle-ground, saying she would walk there, and then take home Ethel and any brother who might be tired.

'And see that Margaret does not come to harm,' said Ethel.

'I am not afraid of that,' said Flora, something in her eye belying her; 'but she might be troublesome to Harry, and I had rather he did not see one of her fights with Miss Morton.'

'How has she been? I thought her looking clearer and better to-day,' said Ethel, kindly.

'Yes, she is pretty well just now,' said Flora, allowing herself in one of her long deep sighs, before descending into the particulars of the child's anxiously-watched health. If she had been describing them to her father, there would have been the same minuteness, but the tone would have implied cheerful hope; whereas to Ethel she took no pains to mask her dejection. One of the points of anxiety was whether one shoulder were not outgrowing the other, but it was not easy to discover whether the appearance were not merely owing to the child's feeble and ungainly carriage. 'I cannot torment her about that,' said Flora. 'There are enough miseries for her already without making more, and as long as it does not affect her health, it matters little.'

'No, certainly not,' said Ethel, who had hardly expected this from Flora.

Perhaps her sister guessed her thought, for she said, 'Things are best as they are, Ethel; I am not fit to have a beautiful admired daughter. All the past would too easily come over again, and my poor Margaret's troubles may be the best balance for her.'

'Yes,' said Ethel, 'it is bad enough to be an heiress, but a beautiful heiress is in a worse predicament.'

'Health would improve her looks,' began the maternal instinct of defence, but then breaking off. 'We met Lord H– yesterday, and the uniform is to be like the northern division. Papa will hear it officially to-morrow.'

'The northern has gray, and green facings.'

'You are more up in it than I. All we begged for was, that it might be inexpensive, for the sake of the townspeople.'

'I hear of little else,' said Ethel, laughing; 'Dr. Spencer is as hot on it as all the boys. Now, I suppose, your party is to come off!'

'Yes, it ought,' said Flora, languidly, 'I waited to see how Harry was, he is a great element towards making it go off well. I will talk it over with Blanche, it will give somebody pleasure if she thinks she manages it.'

'Will it give George no pleasure?'

'I don't know; he calls it a great nuisance, but he would not like not to come forward, and it is quite right that he should.'

'Quite right,' said Ethel; 'it is every one's duty to try to keep it up.'

With these words the sisters came within sight of the targets, and found Margaret under Harry's charge, much interested, and considerably in the way. The tidings of the colour of the uniform were highly appreciated; Aubrey observed that it would choke off the snobs who only wanted to be like the rifle brigade, and Leonard treated its inexpensiveness as a personal matter, having apparently cast off his doubts, under Hector's complimentary tuition. Indeed, before it grew too dark for taking aim, he and the weapon were so thoroughly united, that no further difficulty remained but of getting out his thanks to Mr. Ernescliffe.

Averil was sitting alone over the fire in the twilight, in a somewhat forlorn mood, when the door was pushed ajar, and the muzzle of a gun entered, causing her to start up in alarm, scarcely diminished by the sight of an exultant visage, though the words were, 'Your money or your life.'

'Leonard, don't play with it, pray!'

'It's not loaded.'

'Oh! but one never can tell:' then, half ashamed of her terror, 'Pray put it back, or we shall have an uproar with Henry.'

'This is none of Henry's. He will never own such a beauty as this.'

'Whose is it? Not yours? Is it really a rifle! H. E.? What's that?'

'Hector Ernescliffe! Didn't I tell you he was a princely fellow?'

'Given it to you? Leonard, dear, I am so happy! Now I don't care for anything! What a gallant volunteer you will make!' and she kissed him fondly. We will order the uniform as soon as ever it is settled, and I hope it will be a very handsome one.'

'It will be a cheap one, which is more to the purpose. I could get part myself, only there's the tax for Mab, and the subscription to the cricket club.'

'I would not have you get any of it! You are my volunteer, and I'll not give up my right to any one, except that Minna and Ella want to give your belt.'

'Where are those children?' he asked.

'Henry has taken them to Laburnum Grove, where I am afraid they are being crammed with cake and all sorts of nonsense.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.