YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

THE YOUNG STEP-MOTHER; OR, A CHRONICLE OF MISTAKES

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

'Have you talked it over with her?' said Mr. Ferrars, as his little slender wife met him under the beeches that made an avenue of the lane leading to Fairmead vicarage.

'Yes!' was the answer, which the vicar was not slow to understand.

'I cannot say I expected much from your conversation, and perhaps we ought not to wish it. We are likely to see with selfish eyes, for what shall we do without her?'

'Dear Albinia! You always taunted me with having married your sister as much as yourself.'

'So I shall again, if you cannot give her up with a good grace.'

'If I could have had my own way in disposing of her.'

'Perhaps the hero of your own composition might be less satisfactory to her than is Kendal.'

'At least he should be minus the children!'

'I fancy the children are one great attraction. Do you know how many there are?'

'Three; but if Albinia knows their ages she involves them in a discreet haze. I imagine some are in their teens.'

'Impossible, Winifred, he is hardly five-and-thirty.'

'Thirty-eight, he said yesterday, and he married very early. I asked Albinia if her son would be in tail-coats; but she thought I was laughing at her, and would not say. She is quite eager at the notion of being governess to the girls.'

'She has wanted scope for her energies,' said Mr. Ferrars. 'Even spoiling her nephew, and being my curate, have not afforded field enough for her spirit of usefulness.'

'That is what I am afraid of.'

'Of what, Winifred?'

'That it is my fault. Before our marriage, you and she were the whole world to each other; but since I came, I have seen, as you say, that the craving for work was strong, and I fear it actuates her more than she knows.'

'No such thing. It is a case of good hearty love. What, are you afraid of that, too?'

'Yes, I am. I grudge her giving her fresh whole young heart away to a man who has no return to make. His heart is in his first wife's grave. Yes, you may smile, Maurice, as if I were talking romance; but only look at him, poor man! Did you ever see any one so utterly broken down? She can hardly beguile a smile from him.'

'His melancholy is one of his charms in her eyes.'

'So it may be, as a sort of interesting romance. I am sure I

pity the poor man heartily, but to see her at three-and-twenty, with her sweet face and high spirits, give herself away to a man who looks but half alive, and cannot, if he would, return that full first love—have the charge of a tribe of children, be spied and commented on by the first wife's relations—Maurice, I cannot bear it.'

'It is not what we should have chosen,' said her husband, 'but it has a bright side. Kendal is a most right-minded, superior man, and she appreciates him thoroughly. She has great energy and cheerfulness, and if she can comfort him, and rouse him into activity, and be the kind mother she will be to his poor children, I do not think we ought to grudge her from our own home.'

'You and she have so strong a feeling for motherless children!'

'Thinking of Kendal as I do, I have but one fear for her.'

'I have many—the chief being the grandmother.'

'Mine will make you angry, but it is my only one. You, who have only known her since she has subdued it, have probably never guessed that she has that sort of quick sensitive temper—'

'Maurice, Maurice! as if I had not been a most provoking, presuming sister-in-law. As if I had not acted so that if Albinia ever had a temper, she must have shown it.'

'I knew you would not believe me, and I really am not afraid of her doing any harm by it, if that is what you suspect me of. No, indeed; but I fear it may make her feel any trials of her position more acutely than a placid person would.'

'Oho! so you own there will be trials!'

'My dear Winifred, as if I had not sat up till twelve last night laying them before Albinia. How sick the poor child must be of our arguments, when there is no real objection, and she is so much attached! Have you heard anything about these connexions of his? Did you not write to Mrs. Nugent? I wish she were at home.'

'I had her answer by this afternoon's post, but there is nothing to tell. Mr. Kendal has only been settled at Bayford Bridge a few years, and she never visited any one there, though Mr. Nugent had met Mr. Kendal several times before his wife's death, and liked him. Emily is charmed to have Albinia for a neighbour.'

'Does she know nothing of the Meadows' family?'

'Nothing but that old Mrs. Meadows lives in the town with one unmarried daughter. She speaks highly of the clergyman.'

'John Dusautoy? Ay, he is admirable—not that I have done more than see him at visitations when he was curate at Lauriston.'

'Is he married?'

'I fancy he is, but I am not sure. There is one good friend for Albinia any way!'

'And now for your investigations. Did you see Colonel Bury?'

'I did, but he could say little more than we knew. He says nothing could be more exemplary than Kendal's whole conduct in India, he only regretted that he kept so much aloof from others, that his principle and gentlemanly feeling did not tell as much as could have been wished. He has always been wrapped up in his own pursuits—a perfect dictionary of information.'

'We had found out that, though he is so silent. I should think him a most elegant scholar.'

'And a deep one. He has studied and polished his acquirements to the utmost. I assure you, Winifred, I mean to be proud of my brother-in-law.'

'What did you hear of the first wife?'

'It was an early marriage. He went home as soon as he had sufficient salary, married her, and brought her out. She was a brilliant dark beauty, who became quickly a motherly, housewifely, common-place person—I should think there had been a poet's love, never awakened from.'

'The very thing that has always struck me when, poor man, he has tried to be civil to me. Here is a man, sensible himself, but who has never had the hap to live with sensible women.'

'When their children grew too old for India, she came into some little property at Bayford Bridge, which enabled him to retire. Colonel Bury came home in the same ship, and saw much of them, liked him better and better, and seems to have been rather wearied by her. A very good woman, he says, and Kendal most fondly attached; but as to comparing her with Miss Ferrars, he could not think of it for a moment. So they settled at Bayford, and there, about two years ago, came this terrible visitation of typhus fever.'

'I remember how Colonel Bury used to come and sigh over his friend's illness and trouble.'

'He could not help going over it again. The children all fell ill

together—the two eldest were twin boys, one puny, the other a very fine fellow, and his father's especial pride and delight. As so often happens, the sickly one was spared, the healthy one was taken.'

'Then Albinia will have an invalid on her hands!'

'The Colonel says this Edmund was a particularly promising boy, and poor Kendal felt the loss dreadfully. He sickened after that, and his wife was worn out with nursing and grief, and sank under the fever at once. Poor Kendal has never held up his head since; he had a terrible relapse.'

'And,' said Winifred, 'he no sooner recovers than he goes and marries our Albinia!'

'Two years, my dear.'

'Pray explain to me, Maurice, why, when people become widowed in any unusually lamentable way, they always are the first to marry again.'

'Incorrigible. I meant to make you pity him.'

'I did, till I found I had wasted my pity. Why could not these Meadowses look after his children! Why must the Colonel bring him here? I believe it was with malice prepense!'

'The Colonel went to see after him, and found him so drooping and wretched, that he insisted on bringing him home with him, and old Mrs. Meadows and her daughter almost forced him to accept the invitation.'

'They little guessed what the Colonel would be at!'

'You will be better now you have the Colonel to abuse,' said

her husband.

'And pray what do you mean to say to the General?'

'Exactly what I think.'

'And to the aunts?' slyly asked the wife.

'I think I shall leave you all that correspondence. It will be too edifying to see you making common cause with the aunts.'

'That comes of trying to threaten one's husband; and here they come,' said Winifred. 'Well, Maurice, what can't be cured must be endured. Albinia'a heart is gone, he is a very good man, and spite of India, first wife, and melancholy, he does not look amiss!'

Mr. Ferrars smiled at the chary, grudging commendation of the tall, handsome man who advanced through the beech-wood, but it was too true that his clear olive complexion had not the line of health, that there was a world of oppression on his broad brow and deep hazel eyes, and that it was a dim, dreamy, reluctant smile that was awakened by the voice of the lady who walked by his side, as if reverencing his grave mood.

She was rather tall, very graceful, and well made, but her features were less handsome than sweet, bright, and sensible. Her hair was nut-brown, in long curled waves; her eyes, deep soft grey, and though downcast under the new sympathies, new feelings, and responsibilities that crowded on her, the smile and sparkle that lighted them as she blushed and nodded to her brother and sister, showed that liveliness was the natural expression of that engaging face.

Say what they would, it was evident that Albinia Ferrars had

cast in her lot with Edmund Kendal, and that her energetic spirit and love of children animated her to embrace joyfully the cares which such a choice must impose on her.

As might have been perceived by one glance at the figure, step, and bearing of Mr. Ferrars, perfectly clerical though they were, he belonged to a military family. His father had been a distinguished Peninsular officer, and his brother, older by many years, held a command in Canada. Maurice and Albinia, early left orphans, had, with a young cousin, been chiefly under the charge of their aunts, Mrs. Annesley and Miss Ferrars, and had found a kind home in their house in Mayfair, until Maurice had been ordained to the family living of Fairmead, and his sister had gone to live with him there, extorting the consent of her elder brother to her spending a more real and active life than her aunts' round of society could offer her.

The aunts lamented, but they could seldom win their darling to them for more than a few weeks at a time, even after their nephew Maurice had—as they considered—thrown himself away on a little lively lady of Irish parentage, no equal in birth or fortune, in their opinion, for the grandson of Lord Belraven.

They had been very friendly to the young wife, but their hopes had all the more been fixed on Albinia; and even Winifred could afford them some generous pity in the engagement of their favourite niece to a retired East India Company's servant—a widower with three children.

CHAPTER II

The equinoctial sun had long set, and the blue haze of March east wind had deepened into twilight and darkness when Albinia Kendal found herself driving down the steep hilly street of Bayford. The town was not large nor modern enough for gas, and the dark street was only lighted here and there by a shop of more pretension; the plate-glass of the enterprising draper, with the light veiled by shawls and ribbons, the 'purple jars,' green, ruby, and crimson of the chemist; and the modest ray of the grocer, revealing busy heads driving Saturday-night bargains.

'How well I soon shall know them all,' said Albinia, looking at her husband, though she knew she could not see his face, as he leant back silently in his corner, and she tried to say no more. She was sure that coming home was painful to him; he had been so willing to put it off, and to prolong those pleasant seaside days, when there had been such pleasant reading, walking, musing, and a great deal of happy silence.

Down the hill, and a little way on level ground—houses on one side, something like hedge or shrubbery on the other—a stop—a gate opened—a hollow sound beneath the carriage, as though crossing a wooden bridge—trees—bright windows—an open door—and light streaming from it.

'Here is your home, Albinia,' said that deep musical voice that she loved the better for the subdued melancholy of the tones, and

the suppressed sigh that could not be hidden.

'And my children,' she eagerly said, as he handed her out, and, springing to the ground, she hurried to the open door opposite, where, in the lamp-light, she saw, moving about in shy curiosity and embarrassment, two girls in white frocks and broad scarlet sashes, and a boy, who, as she advanced, retreated with his younger sister to the fireplace, while the elder one, a pretty, and rather formal looking girl of twelve, stood forward.

Albinia held out her arms, saying, 'You are Lucy, I am sure,' and eagerly kissed the girl's smiling, bright face.

'Yes, I am Lucy,' was the well-pleased answer, 'I am glad you are come.'

'I hope we shall be very good friends,' said Albinia, with the sweet smile that few, young or old, could resist. 'And this is Gilbert,' as she kissed the blushing cheek of a thin boy of thirteen —'and Sophia.'

Sophia, who was eleven, had not stirred to meet her. She alone inherited her father's fine straight profile, and large black eyes, but she had the heaviness of feature that sometimes goes with very dark complexions. The white frock did not become her brown neck and arms, her thick black hair was arranged in too womanly a manner, and her head and face looked too large; moreover, there was no lighting-up to answer the greeting, and Albinia was disappointed.

Poor child, she thought, she is feeling deeply that I am an interloper, it will be different now her father is coming.

Mr. Kendal was crossing the hall, and as he entered he took the hand and kissed the forehead of each of the three, but Sophia stood with the same half sullen indifference—it might be shyness, or sensibility.

'How much you are grown!' he said, looking at the children with some surprise.

In fact, though Albinia knew their ages, they were all on a larger scale than she had expected, and looked too old for the children of a man of his youthful appearance. Gilbert had the slight look of rapid growth; Lucy, though not so tall, and with a small, clear, bright face, had the air of a little woman, and Sophia's face might have befitted any age.

'Yes, papa,' said Lucy; 'Gilbert has grown an inch-and-a-half since October, for we measured him.'

'Have you been well, Gilbert?' continued Mr. Kendal, anxiously.

'I have the toothache, said Gilbert, piteously.

'Happily, nothing more serious,' thrust in Lucy; 'Mr. Bowles told Aunt Maria that he considers Gilbert's health much improved.'

Albinia asked some kind questions about the delinquent tooth, but the answers were short; and, to put an end to the general constraint, she asked Lucy to show her to her room.

It was a pretty bay-windowed room, and looked cheerful in the firelight. Lucy's tongue was at once unloosed, telling that Gilbert's tutor, Mr. Salsted, had insisted on his having his tooth

extracted, and that he had refused, saying it was quite well; but Lucy gave it as her opinion that he much preferred the toothache to his lessons.

'Where does Mr. Salsted live?'

'At Tremblam, about two miles off; Gilbert rides the pony over there every day, except when he has the toothache, and then he stays at home.'

'And what do you do?'

'We went to Miss Belmarche till the end of our quarter, and since that we have been at home, or with grandmamma. Do you *really* mean that we are to study with you?'

'I should like it, my dear. I have been looking forward very much to teaching you and Sophia.'

'Thank you, mamma.'

The word was said with an effort as if it came strangely, but it thrilled Albinia's heart, and she kissed Lucy, who clung to her, and returned the caress.

'I shall tell Gilbert and Sophy what a dear mamma you are,' she said. 'Do you know, Sophy says she shall never call you anything but Mrs. Kendal; and I know Gilbert means the same.'

'Let them call me whatever suits them best,' said Albinia; 'I had rather they waited till they feel that they like to call me as you have done—thank you for it, dear Lucy. You must not fancy I shall be at all hurt at your thinking of times past. I shall want you to tell me of them, and of your own dear mother, and what will suit papa best.'

Lucy looked highly gratified, and eagerly said, 'I am sure I shall love you just like my own mamma.'

'No,' said Albinia, kindly; 'I do not expect that, my dear. I don't ask for any more than you can freely give, dear child. You must bear with having me in that place, and we will try and help each other to make your papa comfortable; and, Lucy, you will forgive me, if I am impetuous, and make mistakes.'

Lucy's little clear black eyes looked as if nothing like this had ever come within her range of observation, and Albinia could sympathize with her difficulty of reply.

Mr. Kendal was not in the drawing-room when they re-entered, there was only Gilbert nursing his toothache by the fire, and Sophy sitting in the middle of the rug, holding up a screen. She said something good-natured to each, but neither responded graciously, and Lucy went on talking, showing off the room, the chiffonieres, the ornaments, and some pretty Indian ivory carvings. There was a great ottoman of Aunt Maria's work, and a huge cushion with an Arab horseman, that Lucy would uncover, whispering, 'Poor mamma worked it,' while Sophy visibly winced, and Albinia hurried it into the chintz cover again, lest Mr. Kendal should come. But Lucy had full time to be communicative about the household with such a satisfied, capable manner, that Albinia asked if she had been keeping house all this time.

'No; old Nurse kept the keys, and managed till now; but she went this morning.'

Sophy's mouth twitched.

'She was so very fond—' continued Lucy.

'Don't!' burst out Sophy, almost the first word Albinia had heard from her; but no more passed, for Mr. Kendal came in, and Lucy's conversation instantly was at an end.'

Before him she was almost as silent as the others, and he seldom addressed himself to her, only inquiring once after her grandmamma's health, and once calling Sophy out of the way when she was standing between the fire and—He finished with the gesture of command, whether he said 'Your mamma,' none could tell.

It was late, and the meal was not over before bed-time, when Albinia lingered to find remedies for Gilbert's toothache, pleased to feel herself making a commencement of motherly care, and to meet an affectionate glance of thanks from Mr. Kendal's eye. Gilbert, too, thanked her with less shyness than before, and was hopeful about the remedy; and with the feeling of having made a beginning, she ran down to tell Mr. Kendal that she thought he had hardly done justice to the children—they were fine creatures—something so sweet and winning about Lucy—she liked Gilbert's countenance—Sophy must have something deep and noble in her.

He lifted his head to look at her bright face, and said, 'They are very much obliged to you.'

'You must not say that, they are my own.'

'I will not say it again, but as I look at you, and the home to

which I have brought you, I feel that I have acted selfishly.'

Albinia timidly pressed his hand, 'Work was always what I wished,' she said, 'if only I could do anything to lighten your grief and care.'

He gave a deep, heavy sigh. Albinia felt that if he had hoped to have lessened the sadness, he had surely found it again at his own door. He roused himself, however, to say, 'This is using you ill, Albinia; no one is more sensible of it than I am.'

'I never sought more than you can give,' she murmured; 'I only wish to do what I can for you, and you will not let me disturb you.'

'I am very grateful to you,' was his answer; a sad welcome for a bride. 'And these poor children will owe everything to you.'

'I wish I may do right by them,' said Albinia, fervently.

'The flower of the flock'—began Mr. Kendal, but he broke off at once.

Albinia had told Winifred that she could bear to have his wife's memory first with him, and that she knew that she could not compensate to him for his loss, but the actual sight of his dejection came on her with a chill, and she had to call up all her energies and hopes, and, still better, the thought of strength not her own, to enable her to look cheerfully on the prospect. Sleep revived her elastic spirits, and with eager curiosity she drew up her blind in the morning, for the first view of her new home.

But there was a veil—moisture made the panes resemble ground glass, and when she had rubbed that away, and secured a clear corner, her range of vision was not much more extensive.

She could only see the grey outline of trees and shrubs, obscured by the heavy mist; and on the lawn below, a thick cloud that seemed to hang over a dark space which she suspected to be a large pond.

'There is very little to be gained by looking out here!' Albinia soliloquized. 'It is not doing the place justice to study it on a misty, moisty morning. It looks now as if that fever might have come bodily out of the pond. I'll have no more to say to it till the sun has licked up the fog, and made it bright! Sunday morning—my last Sunday without school-teaching I hope! I famish to begin again—and I will make time for that, and the girls too! I am glad he consents to my doing whatever I please in that way! I hope Mr. Dusautoy will! I wish Edmund knew him better—but oh! what a shy man it is!'

With a light step she went down-stairs, and found Mr Kendal waiting for her in the dining-room, his face brightening as she entered.

'I am sorry Bayford should wear this heavy cloud to receive you,' he said.

'It will soon clear,' she answered, cheerfully. 'Have you heard of poor Gilbert this morning?'

'Not yet.' Then, after a pause, 'I have generally gone to Mrs. Meadows after the morning service,' he said, speaking with constraint.

'You will take me?' said Albinia. 'I wish it, I assure you.'

It was evidently what he wished her to propose, and he added,

'She must never feel herself neglected, and it will be better at once.'

'So much more cordial,' said Albinia. 'Pray let us go!'

They were interrupted by the voices of the girls—not unpleasing voices, but loud and unsubdued, and with a slight tone of provincialism, which seemed to hurt Mr. Kendal's ears, for he said, 'I hope you will tune those voices to something less unlike your own.'

As he spoke, the sisters appeared in the full and conscious rustling of new lilac silk dresses, which seemed to have happily carried off all Sophy's sullenness, for she made much more brisk and civil answers, and ran across the room in a boisterous manner, when her father sent her to see whether Gilbert were up.

There was a great clatter, and Gilbert chased her in, breathless and scolding, but the tongues were hushed before papa, and no more was heard than that the tooth was better, and had not kept him awake. Lucy seemed disposed to make conversation, overwhelming Albinia with needless repetitions of 'Mamma dear,' and plunging into what Mrs. Bowles and Miss Goldsmith had said of Mr. Dusautoy, and how he kept so few servants, and the butcher had no orders last time he called. Aunt Maria thought he starved and tyrannized over that poor little sickly Mrs. Dusautoy.

Mr. Kendal said not one word, and seemed not to hear. Albinia felt as if she had fallen into a whirlpool of gossip; she looked towards him, and hoped to let the conversation drop, but Sophy

answered her sister, and, at last, when it came to something about what Jane heard from Mrs. Osborn's Susan, Albinia gently whispered, 'I do not think this entertains your papa, my dear,' and silence sank upon them all.

Albinia's next venture was to ask about that which had been her Sunday pleasure from childhood, and she turned to Sophy, and said, 'I suppose you have not begun to teach at the school yet!'

Sophy's great eyes expanded, and Lucy said, 'Oh dear mamma! nobody does that but Genevieve Durant and the monitors. Miss Wolte did till Mr. Dusautoy came, but she does not approve of him.'

'Lucy, you do not know what you are saying,' said Mr. Kendal, and again there was an annihilating silence, which Albinia did not attempt to disturb.

At church time, she met the young ladies in the hall, in pink bonnets and sea-green mantillas over the lilac silks, all evidently put on for the first time in her honour, an honour of which she felt herself the less deserving, as, sensible that this was no case for bridal display, she wore a quiet dark silk, a Cashmere shawl, and plain straw bonnet, trimmed with white.

With manifest wish for reciprocity, Lucy fell into transports over the shawl, but gaining nothing by this, Sophy asked if she did not like the mantillas? Albinia could only make civility compatible with truth by saying that the colour was pretty, but where was Gilbert? He was on a stool before the dining-room fire, looking piteous, and pronouncing his tooth far too bad for

going to church, and she had just time for a fresh administration of camphor before Mr. Kendal came forth from his study, and gave her his arm.

The front door opened on a narrow sweep, the river cutting it off from the road, and crossed by two wooden bridges, beside each of which stood a weeping-willow, budding with fresh spring foliage. Opposite were houses of various pretentious, and sheer behind them rose the steep hill, with the church nearly at the summit, the noble spire tapering high above, and the bells ringing out a cheerful chime. The mist had drawn up, and all was fresh and clear.

'There go Lizzie and Loo!' cried Lucy, 'and the Admiral and Mrs. Osborn. I'll run and tell them papa is come home.'

Sophy was setting off also, but Mr. Kendal stopped them, and lingered a moment or two, making an excuse of looking for a needless umbrella, but in fact to avoid the general gaze. As if making a desperate plunge, however, and looking up and down the broad street, so as to be secure that no acquaintance was near, he emerged with Albinia from the gate, and crossed the road as the chime of the bells changed.

'We are late,' he said. 'You will prefer the speediest way, though it is somewhat steep.'

The most private way, Albinia understood, and could also perceive that the girls would have liked the street which sloped up the hill, and thought the lilac and green insulted by being conducted up the steep, irregular, and not very clean bye-lane

that led directly up the ascent, between houses, some meanly modern, some picturesquely ancient, with stone steps outside to the upper story, but all with far too much of pig-stye about them for beauty or fragrance. Lucy held up her skirts, and daintily picked her way, and Albinia looked with kindly eyes at the doors and windows, secretly wondering what friends she should find there.

The lane ended in a long flight of more than a hundred shallow steps cut out in the soft stone of the hill, with landing-places here and there, whence views were seen of the rich meadow-landscape beyond, with villages, orchards, and farms, and the blue winding river Baye in the midst, woods rising on the opposite side under the soft haze of distance. On the other side, the wall of rock was bordered by gardens, with streamers of ivy or periwinkle here and there hanging down.

The ascent ended in an old-fashioned stone stile; and here Sophy, standing on the step, proclaimed, with unnecessary loudness, that Mr. Dusautoy was carrying Mrs. Dusautoy across the churchyard. This had the effect of making a pause, but Albinia saw the rector, a tall, powerful man, rather supporting than actually carrying, a little fragile form to the low-browed door leading into the chancel on the north side. The church was handsome, though in the late style, and a good deal misused by eighteenth-century taste; and Albinia was full of admiration as Mr. Kendal conducted her along the flagged path.

She was rather dismayed to find herself mounting the gallery

stairs, and to emerge into a well-cushioned abode, with the shield-bearing angel of the corbel of an arch all to herself, and a very good view of the cobwebs over Mr. Dusautoy's sounding-board. It seemed to suit all parties, however, for Lucy and Sophia took possession of the forefront, and their father had the inmost corner, where certainly nobody could see him.

Just opposite to Albinia was a mural tablet, on which she read what revealed to her more of the sorrows of her household than she had guessed before:

‘To the memory of Lucy, the beloved wife of Edmund Kendal

Died February 18th, 1845, aged 35 years

Edmund Meadows Kendal, born January 20th, 1834

Died February 10th, 1845

Maria Kendal, born September 5th, 1840

Died September 14th, 1840

Sarah Anne Kendal, born October 3rd, 1841

Died November 20th, 1843

live, ye shall live also.'

Four infants! how many hopes laid here! All the English-born children of the family had died in their cradles, and not only did compassion for the past affect Albinia, as she thought of her husband's world of hidden grief, but a shudder for the future came over her, as she remembered having read that such mortality is a test of the healthiness of a locality. What could she think of Willow Lawn? It was with a strong effort that she brought her attention back to Him Who controlleth the sickness that destroyeth at noon-day.

But Mr. Dusautoy's deep, powerful intonations roused her wandering thoughts, and she was calmed and reassured by the holy Feast, in which she joined with her husband.

Mr. Kendal's fine face was calm and placid, as best she loved to look upon it, when they came out of church, and she was too happy to disturb the quiet by one word. Lively and animated as she was, there was a sort of repose and enjoyment in the species of respect exacted by his grave silent demeanour.

If this could only have lasted longer! but he was taking her along an irregular street, and too soon she saw a slight colour flit across his cheek, and his eyebrows contract, as he unlatched a green door in a high wall, and entered a little flagged court, decorated by a stand destined for flowers.

Albinia caught the blush, and felt more bashful than she had believed was in her nature, but she had a warm-hearted determination that she would work down prejudices, and like

and be liked by all that concerned him and his children. So she smiled at him, and went bravely on into the matted hall and up the narrow stairs, and made a laughing sign when he looked back at her ere he tapped at the sitting-room door.

It was opened from within before he could turn the handle, and a shrill voice, exaggerating those of the girls, showered welcomes with such rapidity, that Albinia was seated at the table, and had been helped to cold chicken, before she could look round, or make much answer to reiterations of 'so very kind.'

It was a small room, loaded with knicknacks and cushions, like a repository of every species of female ornamental handiwork in vogue for the last half century, and the luncheon-tray in the middle of all, ready for six people, for the two girls were there, and though Mr. Kendal stood up by the fire, and would not eat, he and his black image, reflected backwards and forwards in the looking-glass and in the little round mirror, seemed to take up more room than if he had been seated.

Mrs. Meadows was slight, shrunken, and gentle-looking, with a sweet tone in her voice, great softness of manner, and pretty blue eyes. Albinia only wished that she had worn mourning, it would have been so much more becoming than bright colours, but that was soon overlooked in gratitude for her affectionate reception, and in the warmth of feeling excited by her evident fondness and solicitude for Mr. Kendal.

Miss Meadows was gaily dressed in youthful fashion, such as evidently had set her off to advantage when she had been a bright,

dark, handsome girl; but her hair was thin, her cheeks haggard, the colour hardened, and her forty years apparent, above all, in an uncomfortable furrow on the brow and round the mouth; her voice had a sharp distressed tone that grated even in her lowest key, and though she did not stammer, she could never finish a sentence, but made half-a-dozen disjointed commencements whenever she spoke. Albinia pitied her, and thought her nervous, for she was painfully assiduous in waiting on every one, scarcely sitting down for a minute before she was sure that pepper, or pickle, or new bread, or stale bread, or something was wanted, and squeezing round the table to help some one, or to ring the bell every third minute, and all in a dress that had a teasing stiff silken rustle. She offered Mr. Kendal everything in the shape of food, till he purchased peace by submitting to take a hard biscuit, while Albinia was not allowed her glass of water till all manner of wines, foreign and domestic, had been tried upon her in vain.

Conversation was not easy. Gilbert was inquired after, and his aunt spoke in her shrill, injured note, as she declared that she had done her utmost to persuade him to have the tooth extracted, and began a history of what the dentist ought to have done five years ago.

His grandmother softly pitied him, saying poor little Gibbie was such a delicate boy, and required such careful treatment; and when Albinia hoped that he was outgrowing his ill-health, she was amused to find that desponding compassion would have been more pleasing.

There had been a transaction about a servant in her behalf: and Miss Meadows insisted on hunting up a note, searching all about the room, and making her mother and Sophy move from the front of two table-drawers, a disturbance which Sophy did not take with such placid looks as did her grandmother.

The name of the maid was Eweretta Dobson, at which there was a general exclamation.

'I wonder what is the history of the name,' said Albinia; 'it sounds like nothing but the diminutive of ewer. I hope she will not be the little pitcher with long ears.'

Mr. Kendal looked as much amused as he ever did, but no one else gave the least token of so much as knowing what she meant, and she felt as if she had been making a foolish attempt at wit.

'You need not call her so,' was all that Mrs. Meadows said.

'I do not like calling servants by anything but their true names,' answered Albinia; 'it does not seem to me treating them with proper respect to change their names, as if we thought them too good for them. It is using them like slaves.

Lucy exclaimed, 'Why! grandmamma's Betty is really named Philadelphia.'

Albinia laughed, but was disconcerted by finding that she had really given annoyance. 'I beg your pardon,' she said. 'It is only a fancy of my own. I am afraid that I have many fancies for my friends to bear with. You see I have so fine a name of my own, that I have a fellow-feeling for those under the same affliction; and I believe some servants like an alias rather than be teased

for their finery, so I shall give Miss Eweretta her choice between that and her surname.

The old lady looked good-natured, and that matter blew over; but Miss Meadows fell into another complication of pros and cons about writing for the woman's character, looking miserably harassed whether she should write, or Mrs. Kendal, before she had been called upon.

Albinia supposed that Mrs. Wolfe might call in the course of the week; but this Miss Meadows did not know, and she embarked in so many half speeches, and looked so mysterious and significant at her mother, that Albinia began to suspect that some dreadful truth was behind.

'Perhaps,' said the old lady, 'perhaps Mrs. Kendal might make it understood through you, my dear Maria, that she is ready to receive visits.'

'I suppose they must be!' said Albinia.

'You see, my dear, people would be most happy, but they do not know whether you have arrived. You have not appeared at church, as I may say.'

'Indeed,' said Albinia, much diverted by her new discoveries in the realms of etiquette, 'I was rather in a cupboard, I must allow. Ought we to have sailed up the aisle in state in the Grandison pattern? Are you ready?' and she glanced up at her husband, but he only half heard.

'No,' said Miss Meadows, fretfully; 'but you have not appeared as a bride. The straw bonnet—you see people cannot tell whether

you are not incog, as yet—'

To refrain from laughing was impossible. 'My tarn cap,' she exclaimed; 'I am invisible in it! What shall I do? I fear I shall never be producible, for indeed it is my very best, my veritable wedding-bonnet!'

Lucy looked as if she thought it not worth while to be married for no better a bonnet than that.

'Absurdity!' said Mr. Kendal.

If he would but have given a good hearty laugh, thought Albinia, what a consolation it would be! but she considered herself to have had a lesson against laughing in that house, and was very glad when he proposed going home. He took a kind, affectionate leave of the old lady, who again looked fondly in big face, and rejoiced in his having recovered his looks.

As they arrived at home, Lucy announced that she was just going to speak to Lizzie Osborn, and Sophy ran after her to a house of about the same degree as their own, but dignified as Mount Lodge, because it stood on the hill side of the street, while Mr. Kendal's house was for more gentility called 'Willow Lawn.' Gilbert was not to be found; but at four o'clock the whole party met at dinner, before the evening service.

Gilbert could eat little, and on going back to the fire to roast his cheek instead of going to church, was told by his father, 'I cannot have this going on. You must go to Mr. Bowles directly after breakfast to-morrow, have the tooth drawn, and then go on to Mr. Salsted's.

The tone was one that admitted of no rebellion. If Mr. Kendal interfered little, his authority was absolute where he did interfere, and Albinia could only speak a few kind words of encouragement, but the boy was vexed and moody, seemed half asleep when they came home, and went to bed as soon as tea was over.

Sophy went to bed too, Mr. Kendal went to his study, and Albinia, after this day of novelty and excitement, drew her chair to the fire, and as Lucy was hanging wearily about, called her to her side, and made her talk, believing that there was more use in studying the girl's character than even in suggesting some occupation, though that was apparently the great want of the whole family on Sunday.

Lucy's first confidence was that Gilbert had not been out alone, but with that Archibald Tritton. Mr. Tritton had a great farm, and was a sort of gentleman, and Gilbert was always after that Archy. She thought it 'very undesirable,' and Aunt Maria had talked to him about it, but he never listened to Aunt Maria.

Albinia privately thought that it must be a severe penance to listen to Aunt Maria, and took Gilbert's part. She supposed that he must be very solitary; it must be a melancholy thing to be a twin left alone.

'And Edmund, dear Edmund, was always so kind and so fond of Gilbert!' said Lucy. 'You would not have thought they were twins, Edmund was so much the tallest and strongest. It seemed so odd that Gilbert should have got over it, when he did not.

Should you like to hear all about it, mamma?'

It was Albinia's great wish to lift that dark veil, and Lucy began, with as much seriousness and sadness as could co-exist with the satisfaction and importance of having to give such a narration, and exciting emotion and pity. It was remarkable how she managed to make herself the heroine of the story, though she had been sent out of the house, and had escaped the infection. She spoke in phrases that showed that she had so often told the story as to have a set form, caught from her elders, but still it had a deep and intrinsic interest for the bride, that made her sit gazing into the fire, pressing Lucy's hand, and now and then sighing and shuddering slightly as she heard how there had been a bad fever prevailing in that lower part of the town, and how the two boys were both unwell one damp, hot autumn morning, and Lucy dwelt on the escape it had been that she had not kissed them before going to school. Sophy had sickened the same day, and after the tedious three weeks, when father and mother were spent with attendance on the three, Edmund, after long delirium, had suddenly sunk, just as they had hopes of him; and the same message that told Lucy of her brother's death, told her of the severe illness of both parents.

The disease had done the work rapidly on the mother's exhausted frame, and she was buried a week after her boy. Lucy had seen the procession from the window, and thought it necessary to tell how she had cried.

Mr. Kendal's had been a long illness; the first knowledge of

his loss had caused a relapse, and his recovery had long been doubtful. As soon as the children were able to move, they were sent with Miss Meadows to Ramsgate, and Lucy had joined them there.

'The day before I went, I saw papa,' she said. 'I had gone home for some things that I was to take, and his room door was open, so he saw me on the stairs, and called me, for there was no fear of infection then. Oh, he was so changed! his hair all cut off, and his cheeks hollow, and he was quite trembling, as he lay back on pillows in the great arm-chair. You can't think what a shock it was to me to see him in such a state. He held out his arms, and I flung mine round his neck, and sobbed and cried. And he just said, so faintly, "Take her away, Maria, I cannot bear it." I assure you I was quite hysterical.'

'You must have wished for more self-command,' said Albinia, disturbed by Lucy's evident pleasure in having made a scene.

'Oh, but it was such a shock, and such a thing to see the house all empty and forlorn, with the windows open, and everything so still! Miss Belmarche cried too, and said she did not wonder my feelings overcame me, and *she* did not see papa.'

'Ah! Lucy,' said Albinia, fervently, 'how we must try to make him happy after all that he has gone through!'

'That is what grandmamma said when she got his letter. "I would be glad of anything," she said, "that would bring back a smile to him." And Aunt Maria said she had done her best for him, but he must consult his own happiness; and so I say. When

people talk to me, I say that papa is quite at liberty to consult his own happiness.'

'Thank you.'

Lucy did not understand the tone, and went on patronizing. 'And if they say you look younger than they expected, I don't object to that at all. I had rather you were not as old as Aunt Maria, or Miss Belmarche.'

'Who thinks me so young?'

'Oh! Aunt Maria, and grandmamma, and Mrs. Osborn, and all; but I don't mind that, it is only Sophy who says you look like a girl. Aunt Maria says Sophy has an unmanageable temper.'

'Don't you think you can let me find that out for myself?'

'I thought you wanted me to tell you about everybody.'

'Ah! but tell me of the good in your brother and sister.'

'I don't know how,' said Lucy. 'Gilbert is so tiresome, and so is Sophy. I heard Mary telling Jane, "I'm sure the new missus will have a heavy handful of those two."'

'And what of yourself?' said Albinia.

'Oh! I don't know,' said Lucy, modestly.

Mr. Kendal came in, and as Albinia looked at his pensive brow, she was oppressed by the thought of his sufferings in that dreary convalescence. At night, when she looked from her window, the fog hung white, like mildew over the pond, and she could not reason herself out of a spectral haunting fancy that sickness lurked in the heavy, misty atmosphere. She dreamt of it and the four babies, started, awoke, and had to recall all

her higher trust to enable her vigour to chase off the oppressive imagination.

CHAPTER III

Fog greeted Mrs. Kendal's eyes as she rose, and she resolved to make an attack on the pond without loss of time. But Mr. Kendal was absorbed nearly all breakfast-time in a letter from India, containing a scrap in some uncouth character. As he finished his last cup of tea, he looked up and said, 'A letter from my old friend Penrose, of Bombay—an inscription in the Salsette caves.'

'Have you seen the Salsette caves?

'Yes.'

She was longing to hear about them, but his horse was announced.

'You said you would be engaged in the morning while I ride out, Albinia?' he said, 'I shall return before luncheon. Gilbert, you had better go at once to Mr. Bowles. I shall order your pony to be ready when you come back.'

There was not a word of remonstrance, though the boy looked very disconsolate, and began to murmur the moment his father had gone. Albinia, who had regarded protection at a dentist's one of the offices of the head of a family, though dismayed at the task, told Gilbert that she would come with him in a moment. The girls exclaimed that no one thought of going with him, and fearing she had put an affront on his manliness, she asked what he would like, but could get no answer, only when Lucy scolded him for lingering, he said, 'I thought *she* was going with me.'

‘Amiable,’ thought Albinia, as she ran up to put on her bonnet; ‘but I suppose toothache puts people out of the pale of civilization. And if he is thankless, is not that treating me more like a mother?’

Perhaps he had accepted her escort in hopes of deferring the evil hour, for he seemed discomfited to see her so quickly ready, and not grateful to his sisters, who hurried them by saying that Mr. Bowles would be gone out upon his rounds.

Mr. Bowles was amazed at the sight of Mrs. Kendal, and so elaborate in compliments and assurances that Mrs. Bowles would do herself the honour of calling, that Albinia, pitying Gilbert, called his attention back.

With him the apothecary was peremptory and facetious. ‘He had expected that he should soon see him after his papa’s return!’ And with a ‘soon be over,’ he set him down, and Albinia bravely stood a desperate wringing of her hand at the tug of war. She was glad she had come, for the boy suffered a good deal, and was faint, and Mr. Bowles pronounced his mouth in no state for a ride to Tremblam.

‘I must go,’ said Gilbert, as they walked home, ‘I wish papa would listen to anything.’

‘He would not wish you to hurt yourself.’

‘When papa says a thing—’ began Gilbert.

‘Well, Gilbert, you are quite right, and I hope you don’t think I mean to teach you disobedience. But I do desire you, on my own responsibility, not to go and catch an inflammation in your

jaw. I'll undertake papa.'

Gilbert at once became quite another creature. He discoursed so much, that she had to make him restore the handkerchief to his mouth; he held open the gate, showed her a shoal of minnows, and tried to persuade her to come round the garden before going in, but she clapped her hands at him, and hunted him back into the warm room, much impressed and delighted by his implicit obedience to his father. With Lucy and Sophy, his remaining seemed likewise to make a great sensation; they looked at Mrs. Kendal and whispered, and were evidently curious as to the result of her audacity. Albinia, who had grown up with her brother Maurice and cousin Frederick, was more used to boys than to girls, and was already more at ease with her son than her daughters.

Gilbert lent a ready hand with hammer and chisel, and boxes were opened, to the great delight and admiration of the girls. They were all very happy and busy setting things to rights, but Albinia was in difficulty how to bestow her books. There was an unaccountable scarcity both of books and book-cases; none were to be seen except that, in a chiffoniere in the drawing-room, there was a row in gilded bindings, chiefly Pope, Gray, and the like; and one which Albinia took out had pages which stuck together, a little pale blue string, faded at the end, and in the garlanded fly-leaf the inscription, 'To Miss Lucy Meadows, the reward of good conduct, December 20th, 1822.' The book seemed rather surprised at being opened, and Albinia let it close itself as Lucy

said, 'Those are poor mamma's books, all the others are in the study. Come in, and I'll show you.'

She threw open the door, and Albinia entered. The study was shaded with a mass of laurels that kept out the sun, and made it look chill and sad, and the air in it was close. The round library-table was loaded with desks, pocket-books, and papers, the mantelpiece was covered with letters, and book-shelves mounted to the ceiling, filled with the learned and the poetical of new and old times.

Over the fireplace hung what it needed not Lucy's whisper to point out, as 'Poor mamma's picture.' It represented a very pretty girl, with dark eyes, brilliant colour, and small cherry mouth, painted in the exaggerated style usually called 'ridiculously like.'

Albinia's first feeling was that there was nothing in herself that could atone for the loss of so fair a creature, and the thought became more oppressive as she looked at a niche in the wall, holding a carved sandal-wood work-box, with a silver watch lying on it.

'Poor Edmund's watch,' said Lucy. 'It was given to him for a reward just before he was ill.'

Albinia tried to recover composure by reading the titles of the books. Suddenly, Lucy started and exclaimed, 'Come away. There he is!'

'Why come away?' said Albinia.

'I would not have him find me there for all the world.'

In all her vexation and dismay, Albinia could not help thinking

of Bluebeard's closet. Her inclination was to stay where she was, and take her chance of losing her head, yet she felt as if she could not bear to be found invading a sanctuary of past recollections, and was relieved to find that it was a false alarm, though not relieved by the announcement that Admiral and Mrs. Osborn and the Miss Osborns were in the drawing-room.

'Before luncheon—too bad!' she exclaimed, as she hurried upstairs to wash off the dust of unpacking.

Ere she could hurry down, there was another inundation streaming across the hall, Mrs. Drury and three Miss Drurys, who, as she remembered, when they began to kiss her, were some kind of cousins.

There was talk, but Albinia could not give entire attention; she was watching for Mr. Kendal's return, that she might guard Gilbert from his displeasure, and the instant she heard him, she sprang up, and flew into the hall. He could not help brightening at the eager welcome, but when she told him of Mr. Bowles' opinion, he looked graver, and said, 'I fear you must not always attach credit to all Gilbert's reports.'

'Mr. Bowles told me himself that he must run no risk of inflammation.'

'You saw Mr. Bowles?'

'I went with Gilbert.'

'You? I never thought of your imposing so unpleasant a task on yourself. I fear the boy has been trespassing on your kindness.'

'No, indeed, he never asked me, but—' with a sort of laugh to

hide the warmth excited by his pleased, grateful look, 'I thought it all in the day's work, only natural—'

She would have given anything to have had time to enjoy his epanchement de coeur at those words, bit she was obliged to add, 'Alas! there's all the world in the drawing-room!'

'Who?'

'Osborns and Drurys.'

'Do you want me?'

'I ran away on the plea of calling you.'

'I'll never do so again,' was her inward addition, as his countenance settled into the accustomed fixed look of abstraction, and as an unwilling victim he entered the room with her, and the visitors were 'dreadful enough' to congratulate him.

Albinia knew that it must be so unpleasant to him, that she blushed up to the roots of her hair, and could not look at anybody.

When she recovered, the first comers were taking leave, but the second set stayed on and on till past luncheon-time, and far past her patience, before the room was at last cleared.

Gilbert hurried in, and was received by his father with, 'You are very much obliged to her!'

'Indeed I am,' said Gilbert, in a winning, pleasant manner.

'I don't want you to be,' said Albinia, affectionately laying her arm on his shoulder. 'And now for luncheon—I pitied you, poor fellow; I thought you must have been famished.'

'Anything not to have all the Drurys at luncheon,' said Gilbert, confidentially, 'I had begun to wish myself at Tremblam.'

'By the bye,' said Mr. Kendal, waking as he sat down at the bottom of the table, 'how was it that the Drurys did not stay to luncheon?'

'Was that what they were waiting for?' exclaimed Albinia. 'Poor people, I had no notion of that.'

'They do have luncheon here in general,' said Mr. Kendal, as if not knowing exactly how it came to pass.

'O yes,' said Lucy; 'Sarah Anne asked me whether we ate wedding-cake every day.'

'Poor Miss Sarah Anne!' said Albinia, laughing. 'But one cannot help feeling inhospitable when people come so unconscionably early, and cut up all one's morning.'

The door was again besieged by visitors, just as they were all going out to make the round of the garden, and it was not till half-past four that the succession ceased, and Albinia was left to breathe freely, and remember how often Maurice had called her to order for intolerance of morning calls.

'And not the only people I cared to see,' she said, 'the Dusautoys and Nugents. But they have too much mercy to call the first day.'

Mr. Kendal looked as if his instinct were drawing him study-wards, but Albinia hung on his arm, and made him come into the garden. Though devoid of Winifred's gardening tastes, she was dismayed at the untended look of the flower-beds. The laurels were too high, and seemed to choke the narrow space, and the turf owed its verdant appearance to damp moss. She had made

but few steps before the water squished under her feet, and impelled her to exclaim, 'What a pity this pond should not be filled up!'

'Filled up!—'

'Yes, it would be so much less damp. One might drain it off into the river, and then we should get rid of the fog.'

And she began actively to demonstrate the convenient slope, and the beautiful flower-bed that might be made in its place. Mr. Kendal answered with a few assenting sounds and complacent looks, and Albinia, accustomed to a brother with whom to assent was to act, believed the matter was in train, and that pond and fever would be annihilated.

The garden opened into a meadow with a causeway leading to a canal bank, where there was a promising country walk, but the cruel visitors had left no time for exploring, and Albinia had to return home and hurry up her arrangements before there was space to turn round in her room—even then it was not what Winifred could have seen without making a face.

Mr. Kendal had read aloud to his wife in the evening during the stay at the sea-side, and she was anxious not to let the habit drop. He liked it, and read beautifully, and she thought it good for the children. She therefore begged him to read, catching him on the way to his study, and coaxing him to stay no longer than to find a book. He brought Schlegel's Philosophy of History. She feared that it was above the young ones, but it was delightful to herself, and the custom had better be established before it

was perilled by attempts to adapt it to the children. Lucy and Sophy seemed astonished and displeased, and their whispers had to be silenced, Gilbert learnt his lessons apart. Albinia rallied her spirits, and insisted to herself that she did not feel discouraged.

Monday had gone, or rather Albinia had been robbed of it by visitors—now for a vigorous Tuesday. Her unpacking and her setting to rights were not half over, but as the surface was habitable, she resolved to finish at her leisure, and sacrifice no more mornings of study.

So after she had lingered at the door, to delight Gilbert by admiring his pony, she returned to the dining-room, where the girls were loading a small table in the window with piles of books and exercises, and Lucy was standing, looking all eagerness to show off her drawings.

'Yes, my dear, but first we had better read. I have been talking to your papa, and we have settled that on Wednesdays and Fridays we will go to church; but on these days we will begin by reading the Psalms and Lessons.'

'Oh,' said Lucy, 'we never do that, except when we are at grandmamma's.'

'Pray are you too old or too young for it?' said Albinia.

'We did it to please grandmamma,' said Sophy.

'Now you will do it to please me,' said Albinia, 'if for no better reason. Fetch your Bibles and Prayerbooks.'

'We shall never have time for our studies, I assure you, mamma,' objected Lucy.

'That is not your concern,' said Albinia, her spirit rising at the girls' opposition. 'I wish for obedience.'

Lucy went, Sophy leant against the table like a post. Albinia regretted that the first shot should have been fired for such a cause, and sat perplexing herself whether it were worse to give way, or to force the girls to read Holy Scripture in such a mood.

Lucy came flying down with the four books in her hands, and began officiously opening them before her sister, and exhorting her not to give way to sullenness—she ought to like to read the Bible—which of course made Sophy look crosser. The desire to establish her authority conquered the scruple about reverence. Albinia set them to read, and suffered for it. Lucy road flippantly; Sophy in the hoarse, dull, dogged voice of a naughty boy. She did not dare to expostulate, lest she should exasperate the tempers that she had roused.

'Never mind,' she thought, 'when the institution is fixed, they will be more amenable.'

She tried a little examination afterwards, but not one answer was to be extracted from Sophy, and Lucy knew far less than the first class at Fairmead, and made her replies wide of the mark, with an air of satisfaction that nearly overthrew the young step-mother's patience.

When Albinia took her Bible upstairs, she gave Sophy time to say what Lucy reported instantly on her entrance.

'Dear me, mamma, here is Sophy declaring that you ought to be a charity-schoolmistress. You wont be angry with her, but it

is so funny!'

'If you were at my charity school, Lucy,' said Albinia, 'the first lesson I should give you would be against telling tales.'

Lucy subsided.

Albinia turned to Sophy. 'My dear,' she said, 'perhaps I pressed this on when you were not prepared for it, but I have always been used to think of it as a duty.'

Sophy made no answer, but her moody attitude relaxed, and Albinia took comfort in the hope that she might have been gracious if she had known how to set about it.

'I suppose Miss Belmarche is a Roman Catholic,' she said, wishing to account for this wonderful ignorance, and addressing herself to Sophy; but Lucy, whom she thought she had effectually put down, was up again in a moment like a Jack-in-a-box.

'O yes, but not Genevieve. Her papa made it his desire that she should be brought up a Protestant. Wasn't it funny? You know Genevieve is Madame Belmarche's grand-daughter, and Mr. Durant was a dancing-master.'

'Madame Belmarche's father and brother were guillotined,' continued Sophy.

'Ah! then she is an emigrant?'

'Yes. Miss Belmarche has always kept school here. Our own mamma, and Aunt Maria went to school to her, and Miss Celeste Belmarche married Mr. Durant, a dancing-master—she was French teacher in a school in London where he taught, and Madame Belmarche did not approve, for she and her husband

were something very grand in France, so they waited and waited ever so long, and when at last they did marry, they were quite old, and she died very soon; and they say he never was happy again, and pined away till he really did die of grief, and so Genevieve came to her grandmamma to be brought up.'

'Poor child! How old is she?'

'Fifteen,' said Lucy. 'She teaches in the school. She is not at all pretty, and such a queer little thing.'

'Was her father French?'

'No,' said Sophy.

'Yes,' said Lucy. 'You know nothing about it, Sophy. He was French, but of the Protestant French sort, that came to England a great many years ago, when they ran away from the Sicilian Vespers, or the Edict of Nantes, I don't remember which; only the Spitalfields weavers have something to do with it. However, at any rate Genevieve has got something in a drawer up in her own room that she is very secret about, and wont show to anybody.'

'I think it is something that somebody was killed with,' said Sophy, in a low voice.

'Dear me, if it is, I am sure it is quite wicked to keep it. I shall be quite afraid to go into her room, and you know I slept there all the time of the fever.'

'It did not hurt you,' said Sophy.

Albinia had been strongly interested by the touching facts, so untouchingly narrated, and by the characteristic account of the Huguenot emigration, but it suddenly occurred to her that

she was promoting gossip, and she returned to business. Lucy showed off her attainments with her usual self-satisfaction. They were what might be expected from a second-rate old-fashioned young ladies' school, where nothing was good but the French pronunciation. She was evidently considered a great proficient, and her glib mediocrity was even more disheartening than the ungracious carelessness or dulness—there was no knowing which—that made her sister figure wretchedly in the examination. However, there was little time—the door-bell rang at a quarter to twelve, and Mrs. Wolfe was in the drawing-room.

'I told you so,' whispered Lucy, exultingly.

'This is unbearable,' cried Albinia. 'I shall give notice that I am always engaged in the morning.'

She desired each young lady to work a sum in her absence, and left them to murmur, if they were so disposed. Perhaps it was Lucy's speech that made her inflict the employment; at any rate, her spirit was not as serene as she could have desired.

Mr. Kendal was quite willing that she should henceforth shut her door against company in the morning; that is to say, he bowed his head assentingly. She was begging him to take a walk with her, when, at another sound of the bell, he made a precipitate retreat into his study. The visitors were the Belmarche family. The old lady was dark and withered, small, yet in look and air, with a certain nobility and grandeur that carried Albinia back in a moment to the days of hoops and trains, of powder and high-heeled shoes, and made her feel that the sweeping courtesy

had come straight from the days of Marie Antoinette, and that it was an honour and distinction conferred by a superior—superior, indeed, in all the dignity of age, suffering, and constancy.

Albinia blushed, and took her hand with respect very unlike the patronizing airs of Bayford Bridge towards 'poor old Madame Belmarche,' and with downcast eyes, and pretty embarrassment, heard the stately compliments of the ancien regime.

Miss Belmarche was not such a fine specimen of Sevres porcelain as her mother. She was a brown, dried, small woman, having lost, or never possessed, her country's taste in dress, and with a rusty bonnet over the tight, frizzly curls of her front, too thin and too scantily robed to have any waist, and speaking English too well for the piquant grace of her mother's speech. Poor lady! born an exile, she had toiled, and struggled for a whole lifetime to support her mother; but though care had worn her down, there was still vivacity in her quick little black eyes, and though her teeth were of a dreadful colour, her laugh was so full of life and sweetness, that Albinia felt drawn towards her in a moment.

Silent and demure, plainly dressed in an old dark merino, and a white-ribboned faded bonnet, sat a little figure almost behind her grandmother. Her face had the French want of complexion, but the eyes were of the deepest, most lustrous hue of grey, almost as dark as the pupils, and with the softness of long dark eyelashes—beautiful eyes, full of light and expression—and as she moved towards the table, there was a finish and delicacy

about the whole form and movements, that made her a most pleasing object.

But Albinia could not improve her acquaintance, for in flowed another party of visitors, and Madame curtsied herself out again, Albinia volunteering that she would soon come to see her, and being answered, 'You will do me too much honour.'

Another afternoon devoured by visitors! Every one seemed to have come except the persons who would have been most welcome, Mr. Dusautoy, and Winifred's friends, the Nugents.

When, at four o'clock, she had shaken hands with the last guest, she gave a hearty yawn, jumped up and shook herself, as she exclaimed, 'There! There! that is done! I wonder whether your papa would come out now?'

'He is in his study,' said the girls.

Albinia thought of knocking and calling at the door, but somehow it seemed impossible, and she decided on promenading past his window to show that she was ready for him. But alas! those evergreens! She could not see in, and probably he could not see out.

'Ha!' cried Lucy, as they pursued their walk into the kitchen garden, 'here are some asparagus coming up. Grandmamma always has our first asparagus.'

Albinia was delighted to find such an opening. Out came her knife—they would cut the heads and take them up at once; but when the tempting white-stalked, pink-tipped bundle had been made up and put into a basket, a difficulty arose.

'I'll call the boy to take it,' said Lucy.

'What, when we are going ourselves?' said Albinia.

'Oh! but we can't.'

'Why? Do you think we shall break down under the weight?'

'O no, but people will stare.'

'Why—what should they stare at?'

'It looks *so* to carry a basket—'

Albinia burst into one of her merriest peals of laughing.

'Not carry a basket! My dear, I have looked *so* all the days of my life. Bayford must endure the spectacle, so it may as well begin at once.'

'But, dear mamma—'

'I'm not asking you to carry it. O no, I only hope you don't think it too ungenteel to walk with me. But the notion of calling a boy away from his work, to carry a couple of dozen asparagus when an able-bodied woman is going that way herself!'

Albinia was so tickled that she could hardly check herself, even when she saw Lucy looking distressed and hurt, and little laughs would break out every moment as she beheld the young lady keeping aloof, as if ashamed of her company, turning towards the steep church steps, willing at least to hide the dreadful sight from the High Street.

Just as they had entered the narrow alley, they heard a hasty tread, and almost running over them with his long strides, came Mr. Dusautoy. He brought himself up short, just in time, and exclaimed, 'I beg your pardon—Mrs. Kendal, I believe. Could

you be kind enough to give me a glass of brandy?'

Albinia gave a great start, as well she might.

'I was going to fetch one,' quickly proceeded Mr. Dusautoy, 'but your house is nearer. A poor man—there—just come home—been on the tramp for work—quite exhausted—' and he pointed to one of the cottages.

'I'll fetch it at once,' cried Albinia.

'Thank you,' he said, as they crossed the street. 'This poor fellow has had nothing all day, has walked from Hadminster—just got home, sank down quite worn out, and there is nothing in the house but dry bread. His wife wants something nearly as much as he does.'

In the excitement, Albinia utterly forgot all scruples about 'Bluebeard's closet.' She hurried into the house, and made but one dash, standing before her astonished husband's dreamy eyes, exclaiming, 'Pray give me the key of the cellaret; there's a poor man just come home, fainting with exhaustion, Mr. Dusautoy wants some brandy for him.'

Like a man but half awake, obeying an apparition, Mr. Kendal put his hand into his pocket and gave her the key. She was instantly opening the cellaret, seeking among the bottles, and asking questions all the time. She proposed taking a jug of the kitchen-tea then in operation, and Mr. Dusautoy caught at the idea, so that poor Lucy beheld the dreadful spectacle of the vicar bearing a can full of steaming tea, and Mrs. Kendal a small cup with the 'spirituous liquor.' What was the asparagus to this?

Albinia told her to go on to Mrs. Meadows', and that she should soon follow. She intended to have gone the moment that she had carried in the cup, leaving Mr. Dusautoy in the cottage, but the poor trembling frightened wife needed woman's sympathy and soothing, and she waited to comfort her, and to see the pair more able to enjoy the meeting, in their tidy, but bare and damp-looking cottage. She promised broth for the morrow, and took her leave, the vicar coming away at the same time.

'Thank you,' he said, warmly, as they came out, and turned to mount the hill together.

'May I go and call on them again?'

'It will be very kind in you. Poor Simkins is a steady, good sort of fellow, but a clumsy workman, down-hearted, and with poor health, and things have been untoward with him.'

'People, who do not prosper in the world are not always the worst,' said Albinia.

'No, indeed, and these are grateful, warm-hearted people that you will like, if you can get over the poor woman's lackadaisical manner. But you are used to all that,' he added, smiling. 'I see you know what poor folk are made of.'

'I have been living among them nearly all my days,' said Albinia. 'I hope you will give me something to do, I should be quite forlorn without it;' and she looked up to his kind, open face, as much at home with him as if she had known, him for years.

'Fanny—my wife—shall find work for you,' he said. 'You must excuse her calling on you, she is never off the sofa, but—'

And what a bright look he gave! as much as to say that his wife *on* the sofa was better than any one else *off*. 'I was hoping to call some of these afternoons,' he continued, 'but I have had little time, and Fanny thought your door was besieged enough already.'

'Thank you,' said Albinia; 'I own I thought it was your kindness in leaving me a little breathing time. And would Mrs. Dusautoy be able to see me if I were to call?'

'She would be delighted. Suppose you were to come in at once.'

'I wish I could, but I must go on to Mrs. Meadows'. If I were to come to-morrow?'

'Any time—any time,' he said. 'She is always at home, and she has been much better since we came here. We were too much in the town at Lauriston.'

Mr. Dusautoy, having a year ago come out of the diocese where had been Albinia's home, they had many common friends, and plunged into 'ecclesiastical intelligence,' with a mutual understanding of the topics most often under discussion, that made Albinia quite in her element. 'A great Newfoundland dog of a man in size, and countenance, and kindness,' thought she. 'If his wife be worthy of him, I shall reck little of all the rest.'

Her tread the gayer for this resumption of old habits, she proceeded to Mrs. Meadows', where the sensation created by her poor little basket justified Lucy's remonstrance. There were regrets, and assurances that the girl could have come in a moment, and that she need not have troubled herself, and her

laughing declarations that it was no trouble were disregarded, except that the old lady said, in gentle excuse to her daughter, that Mrs. Kendal had always lived in the country, where people could do as they pleased.

'I mean to do as I please here,' said Albinia, laughing; but the speech was received with silent discomfiture that made her heartily regret it. She disdained to explain it away; she was beginning to hold Mrs. and Miss Meadows too cheap to think it worth while.

'Well,' said Mrs. Meadows, as if yielding up the subject, 'things may be different from what they were in my time.'

'Oh! mamma—Mrs. Kendal—I am sure—' Albinia let Maria flounder, but she only found her way out of the speech with 'Well! and is not it the most extraordinary!—Mr. Dusautoy—so rude—'

'I should not wonder if you found me almost as extraordinary as Mr. Dusautoy,' said Albinia.

Why would Miss Meadows always nettle her into saying exactly the wrong thing, so as to alarm and distress the old lady? That want of comprehension of playfulness was a strangely hard trial. She turned to Mrs. Meadows and tried to reassure her by saying, 'You know I have been always in the clerical line myself, so I naturally take the part of the parson.'

'Yes, my dear,' said Mrs. Meadows. 'I dare say Mr. Dusautoy is a very good man, but I wish he would allow his poor delicate wife more butcher's meat, and I don't think it looks well to see

the vicarage without a man-servant.'

Albinia finally made her escape, and while wondering whether she should ever visit that house without tingling with irritation with herself and with the inmates, Lucy exclaimed, 'There, you see I was right. Grandmamma and Aunt Maria were surprised when I told them that you said you were an able-bodied woman.'

What would not Albinia have given for Winifred to laugh with her? What to do now she did not know, so she thought it best not to hear, and to ask the way to a carpenter's shop to order some book-shelves.

She was more uncomfortable after she came home, for by the sounds when Mr. Kendal next emerged from his study, she found that he had locked himself in, to guard against further intrusion. And when she offered to return to him the key of the cellaret, he quietly replied that he should prefer her retaining it,—not a formidable answer in itself, but one which, coupled with the locking of the door, proved to her that she might do anything rather than invade his privacy.

Now Maurice's study was the thoroughfare of the household, the place for all parish preparations unpresentable in the drawing-room, and Albinia was taken by surprise. She grew hot and cold. Had she done anything wrong? Could he care for her if he could lock her out?

'I will not be morbid, I will not be absurd,' said she to herself, though the tears stood in her eyes. 'Some men do not like to be rushed in upon! It may be only habit. It may have been needful

here. It is base to take petty offences, and set up doubts.'

And Mr. Kendal's tender manner when they were again together, his gentle way of addressing her, and a sort of shy caress, proved that he was far from all thought of displeasure; nay, he might be repenting of his momentary annoyance, though he said nothing.

Albinia went to inquire after the sick man at her first leisure moment, and while talking kindly to the wife, and hearing her troubles, was surprised at the forlorn rickety state of the building, the broken pavement, damp walls, and door that would not shut, because the frame had sunk out of the perpendicular.

'Can't you ask your landlord to do something to the house?'

'It is of no use, ma'am, Mr. Pettilove never will do nothing. Perhaps if you would be kind enough to say a word to him, ma'am —'

'Mr. Pettilove, the lawyer? I'll try if Mr. Kendal can say anything to him. It really is a shame to leave a house in this condition.'

Thanks were so profuse, that she feared that she was supposed to possess some power of amelioration. The poor woman even insisted on conducting her up a break-neck staircase to see the broken ceiling, whence water often streamed in plentifully from the roof.

Her mind full of designs against the cruel landlord, she speeded up the hill, exhilarated by each step she took into the fresh air, to the garden-gate, which she was just unhasping when

the hearty voice of the Vicar was heard behind her. 'Mrs. Kendal! I told Fanny you would come.'

Instead of taking her to the front door he conducted her across a sloping lawn towards a French window open to the bright afternoon sunshine.

'Here she is, here is Mrs. Kendal!' he said, sending his voice before him, as they came in sight of the pretty little drawing-room, where through the gay chintz curtains, she saw the clear fire shining upon half-a-dozen school girls, ranged opposite to a couch. 'Ah!' as he perceived them, 'shall I take her for a turn in the garden while you finish your lesson?'

'One moment, if you please. I did not know it was so late,' and a face as bright as all the rest was turned towards the window.

'Ah! give her her scholars, and she never knows how time passes,' said Mr. Dusautoy. 'But step this way, and I'll show you the best view in Bayford.' He took her up a step or two, to a little turfed mound, where there was a rustic seat commanding the whole exquisite view of river, vale, and woodland, with the church tower rising in the foreground. The wind blew pleasantly, chasing the shadows of the clouds across the open space. Albinia was delighted to feel it fan her brow, and her eager exclamations contented Mr. Dusautoy. 'Yes,' he said, 'it was all Fanny's notion. She planned it all last summer when I took her round the garden. It is wonderful what an eye she has! I only hope when the dry weather comes, that I shall be able to get her up there to enjoy it.'

On coming down they found that Mrs. Dusautoy had

dismissed her class, and come out to a low, long-backed sloping garden-seat at the window. She was very little and slight, a mere doll in proportion to her great husband, who could lift her as easily and tenderly as a baby, paying her a sort of reverential deference and fond admiration that rendered them a beautiful sight, in such full, redoubled measure was his fondness repaid by the little, clever, fairy-looking woman, with her playful manner, high spirits, keen wit, and the active habits that even confirmed invalidism could not destroy. She had small deadly white hands, a fair complexion, that varied more than was good for her, pretty, though rather sharp and irregular features, and hazel eyes dancing with merriment, and face and figure at some years above thirty, would have suited a girl of twenty. To see Mr. Dusautoy bringing her footstools, shawls, and cushions, and to remember the accusation of starvation, was almost irresistibly ludicrous.

'Now, John, you had better have been giving Mrs. Kendal a chair all this time.'

'Mrs. Kendal will excuse,' said Mr. Dusautoy, as he brought her a seat.

'Mrs. Kendal has excused,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, bursting into a merry fit of laughter. 'Oh, I never heard anything more charming than your introduction! I beg your pardon, but I laughed last evening till I was worn out, and waked in the night laughing again.'

It was exhilarating to find that any one laughed at Bayford, and Albinia partook of the mirth with all her heart. 'Never was

an address more gratifying to me!' she said.

'It was like him! so unlike Bayford! So bold a venture!' continued Mrs. Dusautoy amid peals of laughter.

'What is there to laugh at?' said Mr. Dusautoy, putting on a look between merriment and simplicity. 'What else could I have done? I should have done the same whoever I had met.'

'Ah! now he is afraid of your taking it as too great a compliment! To do him justice I believe he would, but the question is, what answer he would have had.'

'Nobody could have refused—' began Albinia.

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Dusautoy. 'Little you know Bayford.

'Fanny! Fanny! this is too bad. Madame Belmarche—'

'Would have had nothing but eau sucre! No, John, decidedly you and Simkins fell upon your legs, and you had better take credit for your "admirable sagacity."'.

'I like the people,' said Albinia, 'but they never can be well while they live in such a shocking place. It is quite a disgrace to Bayford.'

'It is in a sad state,' said Mr. Dusautoy.

'I know I should like to set my brother upon that Mr. Pettilove, who they say will do nothing,' exclaimed Albinia.

The Vicar was going to have said something, but a look from his wife checked him. Albinia was sorry for it, as she detected a look of suppressed amusement on Mrs. Dusautoy's face. 'I mean to ask Mr. Kendal what can be done,' she said; 'and in the meantime, to descend from what we can't do to what we can. Mr.

Dusautoy told me to come to you for orders.'

'And I told Mr. Dusautoy that I should give you none.'

'Oh! that is hard.'

'If you could have heard him! He thought he *had* got a working lady at last, and he would have had no mercy upon you. One would have imagined that Mr. Kendal had brought you here for his sole behoof!'

'Then I shall look to you, Mr. Dusautoy.'

'No, I believe she is quite right,' he said. 'She says you ought to undertake nothing till you have had time to see what leisure you have to give us.'

'Nay, I have been used to think the parish my business, home my leisure.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, 'but then you were the womankind of the clergy, now you are a laywoman.'

'I think you have work at home,' said the Vicar.

'Work, but not work *enough!*' cried Albinia. 'The girls will help me; only tell me what I may do.'

'I say, "what you can,"' said Mrs. Dusautoy. 'You see before you a single-handed man. Only two of the ladies here can be called coadjutors, one being poor little Genevieve Durant, the other the bookseller's daughter, Clarissa Richardson, who made all the rest fly off. All the others do what good they mean to do according to their own sweet will, free and independent women, and we can't have any district system, so I think you can only do what just comes to hand.'

Most heartily did Albinia undertake all that Mrs. Dusautoy would let her husband assign to her.

'Yes, John is a strong temptation,' said the bright little invalid, 'but you must let Mrs. Kendal find out in a month's time whether she has work enough.'

'I could think my wise brother Maurice had been cautioning you,' said Albinia, taking leave as of an old friend, for indeed she felt more at home with Mrs. Dusautoy than with any acquaintance she had made in Bayford.

Albinia told her husband of the state of the cottages, and railed at Mr. Pettilove much to her own satisfaction. Mr. Kendal answered, 'He would see about it,' an answer of which Albinia had yet to learn the import.

CHAPTER IV

There are some characters so constituted, that of them the old proverb, that Love is blind, is perfectly true; they can see no imperfection in the mind or body of those dear to them. There are others in whom the strongest affections do not destroy clearness of vision, who see their friends on all sides, and perceive their faults and foibles, without loving them the less.

Albinia Kendal was a person of the latter description. It might almost be called her temptation, that her mind beheld all that came before it in a clear, and a humorous light, such as only a disposition overflowing with warm affection and with the energy of kindness, could have prevented from bordering upon censoriousness. She had imagination, but it was not such as to make an illusion of the present, or to interfere with her almost satirical good sense. Happily, religion and its earthly manifestation—charity regulated her, taught her to fear to judge lest she should be judged, strengthened her naturally fond affections, and tempered the keenness that disappointment might soon have turned to sourness. The tongue, the temper, and the judgment knew their own tendencies, and a guard was set over them; and if the sentinel were ever torpid or deceived, repentance paid the penalty.

She had not long seen her husband at home before she had involuntarily completed her view of his character. Nature must

have designed him for a fellow of a college, where, apart from all cares, he might have collected fragments of forgotten authors, and immortalized his name by some edition of a Greek Lyric poet, known by four poems and a half, and two-thirds of a line quoted somewhere else. In such a controversy, lightened by perpetually polished poems, by a fair amount of modern literature, select college friendships, and methodical habits, Edmund Kendal would have been in his congenial element, lived and died, and had his portrait hung up as one of the glories of his college.

But he had been carried off from school, before he had done more than prove his unusual capacity. All his connexions were Indian, and his father, who had not seen him since his earliest childhood, offered him no choice but an appointment in the civil service. He had one stimulus; he had seen Lucy Meadows in the radiant glory of girlish beauty, and had fastened on her all a poet's dreams, deepening and becoming more fervid in the recesses of a reserved heart, which did not easily admit new sensations. That stimulus carried him out cheerfully to India, and quickened his abilities, so that he exerted himself sufficiently to obtain a lucrative situation early in life. He married, and his household must have been on the German system, all the learning on one side, all the domestic cares on the other. The understanding and refinement wanting in his wife, he believed to be wanting in all women. As resident at a small remote native court in India, he saw no female society such as could undeceive

him; and subsequently his Bayford life had not raised his standard of womankind. A perfect gentleman, his superiority was his own work, rather than that of station or education, and so he had never missed intercourse with really ladylike or cultivated, female minds, expected little from wife, or daughters, or neighbours; had a few learned friends, but lived within himself. He had acquired a competence too soon, and had the great misfortune of property without duties to present themselves obviously. He had nothing to do but to indulge his naturally indolent scholarly tastes, which, directed as they had been to Eastern languages, had even less chance of sympathy among his neighbours than if they had been classical. Always reserved, and seldom or never meeting with persons who could converse with him, he had lapsed into secluded habits, and learnt to shut himself up in his study and exclude every one, that he might have at least a refuge from the gossip and petty cares that reigned everywhere else. So seldom was anything said worth his attention, that he never listened to what was passing, and had learnt to say 'very well'—'I'll see about it,' without even knowing what was said to him.

But though his wife had been no companion, the illusion had never died away, he had always loved her devotedly, and her loss had shattered all his present rest and comfort; as entirely as the death of his son had taken from him hope and companionship.

What a home it must have been, with Lucy reigning over it in her pert self-sufficiency, Gilbert and Sophy running riot and squabbling, and Maria Meadows coming in on them with her

well-meant worries and persecutions!

When taken away from the scene of his troubles, his spirits revived; afraid to encounter his own household alone, he had thought Albinia the cure for everything. But at home, habit and association had proved too strong for her presence—the grief, which he had tried to leave behind, had waited ready to meet him on the threshold, and the very sense that it was a melancholy welcome added to his depression, and made him less able to exert himself. The old sorrows haunted the walls of the house, and above all the study, and tarried not in seizing on their unresisting victim. Melancholy was in his nature, his indolence gave it force, and his habits were almost ineffaceable, and they were habits of quiet selfishness, formed by a resolute, though inert will, and fostered by an adoring wife. A youth spent in India had not given him ideas of responsibilities beyond his own family, and his principles, though sound, had not expanded the views of duty with which he had started in life.

It was a positive pleasure to Albinia to discover that there had been an inefficient clergyman at Bayford before Mr. Dusautoy, and to know that during half the time that the present vicar had held the living, Mr. Kendal had been absent, so that his influence had had no time to work. She began to understand her line of action. It must be her effort, in all loving patience and gentleness, to raise her husband's spirits and rouse his faculties; to make his powers available for the good of his fellow-creatures, to make him an active and happy man, and to draw him and his children

together. This was truly a task to make her heart throb high with hope and energy. Strong and brave was that young heart, and not self-confident—the difficulty made her only the more hopeful, because she saw it was her duty. She was secure of her influence with him. If he did exclude her from his study, he left her supreme elsewhere, and though she would have given the world that their sovereignty might be a joint one *everywhere*, still she allowed much for the morbid inveterate habit of dreading disturbance. When he began by silence and not listening, she could always rouse him, and give him animation, and he was so much surprised and pleased whenever she entered into any of his pursuits, that she had full hope of drawing him out.

One day when the fog, instead of clearing off had turned to violent rain, Albinia had been out on parish work, and afterwards enlivening old Mrs. Meadows by dutifully spending an hour with her, while Maria was nursing a nervous headache—she had been subject to headaches ever since…an ominous sigh supplied the rest.

But all the effect of Albinia's bright kindness was undone, when the grandmother learnt that Gilbert was gone to his tutor, and would have to come home in the rain, and she gave such an account of his exceeding delicacy, that Albinia became alarmed, and set off at once that she might consult his father about sending for him.

Her opening of the hall door was answered by Mr. Kendal emerging from his study. He was looking restless and anxious,

came to meet her, and uncloaked her, while he affectionately scolded her for being so venturesome. She told him where she had been, and he smiled, saying, 'You are a busy spirit! But you must not be too imprudent.'

'Oh, nothing hurts me. It is poor Gilbert that I am anxious about.'

'So am I. Gilbert has not a constitution fit for exposure. I wish he were come home.'

'Could we not send for him? Suppose we sent a fly.'

He was consenting with a pleased smile, when the door opened, and there stood the dripping Gilbert, completely wet through, pale and chilled, with his hair plastered down, and his coat stuck all over with the horse's short hair.

'You must go to bed at once, Gilbert,' said his father. 'Are you cold?'

'Very. It was such a horrid driving wind, and I rode so fast,' said Gilbert; violently shivering, as they helped to pull him out of his great coat; he put his hand to his mouth, and said that his face ached. Mr. Kendal was very anxious, and Albinia hurried the boy up to bed, and meantime ordered quickly a basin of the soup preparing for dinner, warmed some worsted socks at the fire, and ran upstairs with them.

He seemed to have no substance in him; he had hardly had energy to undress himself, and she found him with his face hidden on the pillow, shivering audibly, and actually crying. She was aghast.

The boys with whom she had been brought up, would never have given way so entirely without resistance; but between laughing, cheering, scolding, covering him up close, and rubbing his hands with her own, she comforted him, so that he could be grateful and cheerful when his father himself came up with the soup. Albinia noticed a sort of shudder pass over Mr. Kendal as he entered, and he stood close by Gilbert, turning his back on everything else, while he watched the boy eat the soup, as if restored by every spoonful. 'That was a good thought,' was his comment to his wife, and the look of gratitude brought a flush of pleasure into her cheek.

Of all the dinners, this was the most pleasant; he was more gentle and affectionate, and she made him tell her about the Persian poets, and promise to show her some specimens of the Rose Garden of Saadi—she had never before been so near having his pursuits opened to her.

'What a favourite Gilbert is!' Lucy said to Sophia, as Albinia lighted a candle and went up to his room.

'He makes such a fuss,' said Sophy. 'What is there in being wet through to cry about?'

Albinia heard a little shuffle as she opened the door, and Gilbert pushed a book under his pillow. She asked him what he had been reading. 'Oh,' he said, 'he had not been doing it long, for the flickering of the candle hurt his eyes.'

'Yes, you had better not,' said Albinia, moving the flaring light to a less draughty part of the dingy whitewashed attic. 'Or shall

I read to you?'

'Are you come to stay with me?' cried the boy, raising himself up to look after her, as she moved about the room and stood looking from the window over the trees at the water meadows, now flooded into a lake, and lighted by the beams of a young moon.

'I can stay till your father is ready for tea,' said Albinia, coming nearer. 'Let me see whether your hands are hot.'

She found her own hand suddenly clasped, and pressed to his lips, and then, as if ashamed, he turned his face away; nor would she betray her pleasure in it, but merely said, 'Shall I go on with your book!'

'No,' said he, wearily turning his reddened cheek to the other side. 'I only took it because it is so horrid lying here thinking.'

'I am very sorry to hear it. Do you know, Gibbie, that it is said there is nothing more lamentable than for a man not to like to have his own thoughts for his company,' said she, gaily.

'Ah! but—!' said Gilbert. 'If I lie here alone, I'm always looking out there,' and he pointed to the opposite recess. She looked, but saw nothing. 'Don't you know?' he said.

'Edmund?' she asked.

He grasped her hands in both his own. 'Aye! Ned used to sleep there. I always look for him there.'

'Do you mean that you would rather have another room? I would manage it directly.'

'O no, thank you, I like it for some things. Take the candle—

look by the shutter—cut out in the wood.'

The boys' scoring of 'E. & G. K.,' was visible there.

'Papa has taken all he could of Edmund's,' said Gilbert, 'but he could not take that! No, I would not have any other room if you were to give me the best in the house.'

'I am sure not! But, my dear, considering what Edmund was, surely they should be gentle, happy thoughts that the room should give you.'

He shuddered, and presently said, 'Do you know what?' and paused; then continued, with an effort, getting tight hold of her hand, 'Just before Edmund died—he lay out there—I lay here—he sat up all white in bed, and he called out, clear and loud, "Mamma, Gilbert"—I saw him—and then—he was dead! And you know mamma did die—and I'm sure I shall!' He had worked himself into a trembling fit, hid his face and sobbed.

'But you have not died of the fever.'

'Yes—but I know it means that I shall die young! I am sure it does! It was a call! I heard Nurse say it was a call!'

What was to be done with such a superstition? Albinia did not think it would be right to argue it away. It might be in truth a warning to him to guard his ways—a voice from the twin-brother, to be with him through life. She knelt down by him, and kissed his forehead.

'Dear Gilbert,' she said, 'we all shall die.'

'Yes, but I shall die young.'

'And if you should. Those are happy who die young. How

much pain your baby-brother and sisters have missed! How happy Edmund is now!'

'Then you really think it meant that I shall" he cried, tremblingly. 'O don't! I can't die!'

'Your brother called on what he loved best,' said Albinia. 'It may mean nothing. Or rather, it may mean that your dear twin-brother is watching for you, I am sure he is, to have you with him, for what makes your mortal life, however long, seem as nothing. It was a call to you to be as pure on earth as he is in heaven. O Gilbert, how good you should be!'

Gilbert did not know whether it frightened him or soothed him to see his superstition treated with respect—neither denied, nor reasoned away. But the ghastliness was not in the mere fear that death might not be far off.

The pillow had turned a little on one side—Albinia tried to smooth it—the corner of a book peeped out. It was a translation of The Three Musqueteers, one of the worst and most fascinating of Dumas' romances.

'You wont tell papa!' cried Gilbert, raising himself, in far more real and present terror than he had previously shown.

'How did you get it? Whose is it?'

'It is my own. I bought it at Richardson's. It is very funny. But you wont tell papa? I never was told not; indeed I was not.'

'Now, Gilbert dear, will you tell me a few things? I do only wish what is good for you. Why don't you wish that papa should hear of this book?'

Gilbert writhed himself.

'You know he would not like it?'

'Then why did you take to reading it?'

'Oh!' cried the boy, 'if you only did know how stupid and how miserable it has been! More than half myself gone, and Sophy always glum, and Lucy always plaguing, and Aunt Maria always being a torment, you would not wonder at one's doing anything to forget it!'

'Yes, but why do what you knew to be wrong?'

'Nobody told me not.'

'Disobedience to the spirit, then, if not to the letter. It was not the way to be happier, my poor boy, nor nearer to your brother and mother.'

'Things didn't use to be stupid when Ned was there!' sobbed Gilbert, bursting into a fresh flood of tears.

'Ah! Gilbert, I grieved most of all for *you* when first I heard your story, before I thought I should ever have anything to do with you,' said Albinia, hanging over him fondly. 'I always thought it must be so forlorn to be a twin left solitary. But it is sadder still than I knew, if grief has made you put yourself farther from him instead of nearer.'

'I shall be good again now that I have you,' said Gilbert, as he looked up into that sweet face.

'And you will begin by making a free confession to your father, and giving up the book.'

'I don't see what I have to confess. He would be so angry, and

he never told me not. Oh! I cannot tell him.'

She felt that this was not the right way to begin a reformation, and yet she feared to press the point, knowing that the one was thought severe, the other timid.

'At least you will give up the book,' she said.

'O dear! if you would let me see whether d'Artagnan got to England. I must know that! I'm sure there can't be any harm in that. Do you know what it is about?'

'Yes, I do. My brother got it by some mistake among some French books. He read some of the droll unobjectionable parts to my sister and me, but the rest was so bad, that he threw it into the fire.'

'Then you think it funny?'

'To be sure I do.'

'Do you remember the three duels all at once, and the three valets? Oh! what fun it is. But do let me see if d'Artagnan got the diamonds.'

'Yes, he did. But will this satisfy you, Gilbert? You know there are some exciting pleasures that we must turn our backs on resolutely. I think this book is one of them. Now you will let me take it? I will tell your father about it in private, and he cannot blame you. Then, if he will give his consent, whenever you can come home early, come to my dressing-room, out of your sisters' way, and I will read to you the innocent part, so as to get the story out of your brain.'

'Very well,' said Gilbert, slowly. 'Yes, if you will not let papa

be angry with me. And, oh dear! must you go?'

'I think you had better dress yourself and come down to tea. There is nothing the matter with you now, is there?'

He was delighted with the suggestion, and promised to come directly; and Albinia carried off her prize, exceedingly hopeful and puzzled, and wondering whether her compromise had been a right one, or a mere tampering with temptation—delighted with the confidence and affection bestowed on her so freely, but awe-struck by the impression which the boy had avowed, and marvelling how it should be treated, so as to render it a blessed and salutary restraint, rather than the dim superstitious terror that it was at present. At least there was hope of influencing him, his heart was affectionate, his will on the side of right, and in consideration of feeble health and timid character, she would overlook the fact that he had not made one voluntary open confession, and that the partial renunciation had been wrung from him as a choice of evils. She could only feel how much he was to be pitied, and how he responded to her affection.

She was crossing the hall next day, when she heard a confusion of tongues through the open door of the dining-room, and above all, Gilbert's. 'Well, I say there are but two ladies in Bayford. One is Mrs. Kendal, and the other is Genevieve Durant!'

'A dancing-master's daughter!' Lucy's scornful tone was unmistakeable, and so was the ensuing high-pitched querulous voice, 'Well, to be sure, Gilbert might be a little more—a little more civil. Not that I've a word to say against—against your—

your mamma. Oh, no!—glad to see—but Gilbert might be more civil.'

'I think so indeed,' said Albinia. 'Good morning, Miss Meadows. You see Gilbert has come home quite alive enough for mischief.'

'Ah! I thought I might be excused. Mamma was so uneasy—though I know you don't admit visitors—my just coming to see—We've been always so anxious about Gilbert. Gibbie dear, where is that flannel I gave you for your throat?'

She advanced to put her finger within his neck-tie and feel for it. Gilbert stuck his chin down, and snapped with his teeth like a gin. Lucy exclaimed, 'Now, Gilbert, I know mamma will say that is wrong.'

'Ah! we are used to Gilbert's tricks. Always bear with a boy's antics,' said Miss Meadows, preventing whatever she thought was coming out of Mrs. Kendal's month. Albinia took the unwise step of laughing, for her sympathies were decidedly with resistance both to flannels and to the insertion of that hooked finger.

'Mr. Bowles has always said it was a case for great care. Flannel next the skin—no exposure,' continued Miss Meadows, tartly. 'I am sure—I know I am the last person to wish to interfere—but so delicate—You'll excuse—but my mother was uneasy; and people who go out in all weathers—'

'I hope Mrs. Meadows had my note this morning.'

'O yes! I am perfectly aware. Thank you. Yes, I know the rule, but you'll excuse—My mother was still anxious—I know you

exclude visitors in lesson-time. I'm going. Only grandmamma would be glad—not that she wishes to interfere—but if Gilbert had on his piece of flannel—'

'Have you, Gilbert?' said Albinia, becoming tormented.

'I have been flannel all over all my life,' said Gilbert, sulkily, 'one bit more or less can make no odds.'

'Then you have not that piece? said Albinia.

'Oh, my dear! Think of that! New Saxony! I begged it of Mr. Holland. A new remnant—pink list, and all! I said it was just what I wanted for Master Gilbert. Mr. Holland is always a civil, feeling man. New Saxony—three shillings the yard—and trimmed with blue sarsenet! Where is it, Gilbert?'

'In a soup dish, with a crop of mustard and cress on it,' said Gilbert, with a wicked wink at Albinia, who was unable to resist joining in the girls' shout of laughing, but she became alarmed when she found that poor Miss Meadows was very near crying, and that her incoherency became so lachrymose as to be utterly incomprehensible.

Lucy, ashamed of her laughter, solemnly declared that it was very wrong of Gilbert, and she hoped he would not suffer from it, and Albinia, trying to become grave, judicial, and conciliatory, contrived to pronounce that it was very silly to leave anything off in an east wind, and hoping to put an end to the matter, asked Aunt Maria to sit down, and judge how they went on with their lessons.

O no, she could not interrupt. Her mother would want her.

She knew Mrs. Kendal never admitted visitors. She had no doubt she was quite right. She hoped it would be understood. She would not intrude. In fact, she could neither go nor stay. She would not resume her seat, nor let anything go on, and it was full twenty minutes before a series of little vibrating motions and fragmentary phrases had borne her out of the house.

'Well!' cried Gilbert, 'I hoped Aunt Maria had left off coming down upon us.'

'O, mamma!' exclaimed Lucy, 'you never sent your love to grandmamma.'

'Depend upon it she was waiting for that,' said Gilbert.

I'm sure I wish I had known it,' said Albinia, not in the most judicious manner. 'Half-past eleven!'

'Aunt Maria says she can't think how you can find time for church when you can't see visitors in the morning,' said Lucy. 'And oh! dear mamma, grandmamma says gravy soup was enough to throw Gilbert into a fever.'

'At any rate, it did not,' said Albinia.

'Oh! and, dear mamma, Mrs. Osborn is so hurt that you called on Mrs. Dusautoy before returning her visit; and Aunt Maria says if you don't call to-day you will never get over it, and she says that—'

'What business has Mrs. Osborn to ask whom I called on?' exclaimed Albinia, impatiently.

'Because Mrs. Osborn is the leading lady in the town,' said Lucy. 'She told Miss Goldsmith that she had no notion of not

being respected.'

'And she can't bear the Dusautoys. She left off subscribing to anything when they came; and he behaved very ill to the Admiral and everybody at a vestry-meeting.'

'I shall ask your papa before I am in any hurry to call on the Osborns!' cried Albinia. 'I have no desire to be intimate with people who treat their clergyman in that way.'

'But Mrs. Osborn is quite the leader!' exclaimed Lucy. They keep the best society here. So many families in the county come and call on them.'

'Very likely—'

'Ah! Mrs. Osborn told Aunt Maria that as the Nugents called on you, and you had such connexions, she supposed you would be high. But you wont make me separate from Lizzie, will you? I suppose Miss Nugent is a fashionable young lady.'

'Miss Nugent is five years old. Don't let us have any more of this nonsense.'

'But you wont part me from Lizzie Osborn,' said Lucy, hanging her head pathetically on one side.

'I shall talk to your father. He said, the other day, he did not wish you to be so much with her.'

Lucy melted into tears, and Albinia was conscious of having been first indiscreet and then sharp, hurt at the comments, feeling injured by Lucy's evident habit of reporting whatever she said, and at the failure of the attempt to please Mrs. Meadows. She was so uneasy about the Osborn question, that she waylaid Mr.

Kendal on his return from riding, and laid it before him.

'My dear Albinia,' he said, as if he would fain have avoided the appeal, 'you must manage your own visiting affairs your own way. I do not wish to offend my neighbours, nor would I desire to be very intimate with any one. I suppose you must pay them ordinary civility, and you know what that amounts to. As to the leadership in society here, she is a noisy woman, full of pretension, and thus always arrogates the distinction to herself. Your claims will establish themselves.'

'Oh, you don't imagine me thinking of that!' cried Albinia, laughing. 'I meant their behaving ill to Mr. Dusautoy.'

'I know nothing about that. Mr. Dusautoy once called to ask for my support for a vestry meeting, but I make it a rule never to meddle with parish skirmishes. I believe there was a very unbecoming scene, and that Mr. Dusautoy was in the minority.'

'Ah, Edmund, next time you'll see if a parson's sister can sit quietly by to see the parson beaten!'

He smiled, and moved towards his study.

'Then I am to be civil?'

'Certainly.'

'But is it necessary to call to-day?'

'I should suppose not;' and there he was, shut up in his den. Albinia went back, between laughing and vexation, and Lucy looked up from her exercise to say, 'Does papa say you must call on the Osborns?'

It was undignified! She bit her lip, and felt her false position,

as with a quiver of the voice she replied, 'We shall make nothing but mischief if we talk now. Go on with your business.'

The sharp, curious eyes did not take themselves off her face. She leant over Sophy, who was copying a house, told her the lines were slanting, took the pencil from her hand, and tried to correct them, but found herself making them over-black, and shaky. She had not seen such a line since the days of her childhood's ill-temper. She walked to the fireplace and said, 'I am going to call on Mrs. Osborn to-day. Not that your father desires it, but because I have been indulging in a wrong feeling.'

'I'm sure you needn't,' cried Gilbert. 'It is very impertinent of Mrs. Osborn. Why, if he is an admiral, she was the daughter of an old lieutenant of the Marines, and you are General Sir Maurice Ferrars' first cousin.'

'Hush, hush, Gilbert!' said Albinia, blushing and distressed. 'Mrs. Osborn's standing in the place entitles her to all attention. I was thinking of nothing of the kind. It was because I gave way to a wrong feeling that I mean to go this afternoon.'

On the Sunday, when Mr. and Mrs. Kendal went to pay their weekly visit to Mrs. Meadows, they found the old lady taking a turn in the garden. And as they were passing by the screen of laurels, Gilbert's voice was heard very loud, 'That's too bad, Lucy! Grandmamma, don't believe one word of it!'

'Gilbert, you—you are, I'm sure, very rude to your sister.'

'I'll not stand to hear false stories of Mrs. Kendal!'

'What is all this?' said Mr. Kendal, suddenly appearing, and

discovering Gilbert pirouetting with indignation before Lucy.

Miss Meadows burst out with a shower of half sentences, grandmamma begged that no notice might be taken of the children's nonsense, Lucy put on an air of injured innocence, and Gilbert was beginning to speak, but his father put him aside, saying, 'Tell me what has happened, Sophia. From you I am certain of hearing the exact truth.'

'Only,' growled Sophy, in her hoarse boy's voice, 'Lucy said mamma said she would not call on Mrs. Osborn unless you ordered her, and when you did, she cried and flew into a tremendous passion.'

'Sophy, what a story,' exclaimed Lucy, but Gilbert was ready to corroborate his younger sister's report.

'You know Lucy too well to attach any importance to her misrepresentations,' said Mr. Kendal, turning to Mrs. Meadows, 'but I know not what amends she can make for this most unprovoked slander. Speak, Lucy, have you no apology to make?'

For Lucy, in self-defence, had begun to cry, and her grandmother seemed much disposed to do the same. Miss Meadows had tears in her eyes, and incoherencies on her lips. The distress drove away all Albinia's inclination to laugh, and clasping her two hands over her husband's arm, she said, 'Don't, Edmund, it is only a misunderstanding of what really happened. I did have a silly fit, you know, so it is my fault.'

'I cannot forgive for you as you do for yourself,' said Mr. Kendal, with a look that was precious to her, though it might

have given a pang to the Meadowses. 'I did not imagine that my daughter could be so lost to the sense of your kindness and forbearance. Have you nothing to say, Lucy?'

'Poor child! she cannot speak,' said her grandmother. 'You see she is very sorry, and Mrs. Kendal is too kind to wish to say any more about it.'

'Go home at once, Lucy,' said her father. 'Perhaps solitude may bring you to a better state of feeling. Go!'

Direct resistance to Mr. Kendal was never thought of, and Lucy turned to go. Her aunt chose to accompany her, and though this was a decided relief to the company she left, it was not likely to be the best thing for the young lady herself.

Mr. Kendal gave his arm to Mrs. Meadows, saying gravely that Lucy must not be encouraged in her habit of gossiping and inaccuracy. Mrs. Meadows quite agreed with him, it was a very bad habit for a girl, she was very sorry for it, she wished she could have attended to the dear children better, but she was sure dear Mrs. Kendal would make them everything desirable. She only hoped that she would remember their disadvantages, have patience, and not recollect this against poor Lucy.

The warm indignation and championship of her husband and his son were what Albinia chiefly wished to recollect; but it was impossible to free herself from a sense of pain and injury in the knowledge that she lived with a spy who would exaggerate and colour every careless word.

Mr. Kendal returned to the subject as they walked home.

'I hope you will talk seriously to Lucy about her intolerable gossiping,' he said. 'There is no safety in mentioning any subject before her; and Maria Meadows makes her worse. Some stop must be put to it.'

'I should like to wait till next time,' said Albinia.

'What do you mean?'

'Because this is too personal to myself.'

'Nay, your own candour is an example to which Lucy can hardly be insensible. Besides, it is a nuisance which must be abated.'

Albinia could not help thinking that he suffered from it as little as most people, and wondering whether it were this which had taught him silence.

They met Miss Meadows at their own gate, and she told them that dear Lucy was very sorry, and she hoped they would take no more notice of a little nonsense that could do no one any harm; she would be more on her guard next time.

Mr. Kendal made no answer. Albinia ventured to ask him whether it would not be better to leave it, since her aunt had talked to her.

'No,' he said; 'Maria has no influence whatever with the children. She frets them by using too many words about everything. One quiet remonstrance from you would have far more effect.'

Albinia called the culprit and tried to reason with her. Lucy tried at first to battle it off by saying that she had made a mistake,

and Aunt Maria had said that she should hear no more about it. 'But, my dear, I am afraid you must hear more. It is not that I am hurt, but your papa has desired me to talk to you. You would be frightened to hear what he says.'

Lucy chose to hear, and seemed somewhat struck, but she was sure that she meant no harm; and she had a great deal to say for herself, so voluble and so inconsequent, that argument was breath spent in vain; and Albinia was obliged to wind up, as an ultimatum, with warning her, that till she should prove herself trustworthy, nothing interesting would be talked of before her.

The atmosphere of gossip certainly had done its part in cultivating Mr. Kendal's talent for silence. When Albinia had him all to herself, he was like another person, and the long drives to return visits in the country were thoroughly enjoyable. So, too, were the walks home from the dinner parties in the town, when the husband and wife lingered in the starlight or moonlight, and felt that the weary gaiety of the constrained evening was made up for.

Great was the offence they gave by not taking out the carriage!

It was disrespect to Bayford, and one of the airs of which Mrs. Kendal was accused. As granddaughter of a Baron, daughter of one General Officer and sister of another, and presented at Court, the Bayford ladies were prepared to consider her a fine lady, and when they found her peculiarly simple, were the more aggrieved, as if her contempt were ironically veiled. Her walks, her dress, her intercourse with the clergy, were all airs, and Lucy

spared her none of the remarks. Albinia might say, 'Don't tell me all Aunt Maria says,' but it was impossible not to listen; and whether in mirth or vexation, she was sure to be harmed by what she heard.

And yet, except for the tale-bearing, Lucy was really giving less trouble than her sister, she was quick, observant, and obliging, and under Albinia's example, the more salient vulgarities of speech and manner were falling off. There had seldom been any collision, since it had become evident that Mrs. Kendal could and would hold her own; and that her address and air, even while criticised, were regarded as something superior, so that it was a distinction to belong to her. How many of poor Albinia'a so-called airs should justly have been laid to Lucy's account?

On the other hand, Sophy would attend to a word from her father, where she had obstinately opposed her step-mother's wishes, making her obedience marked, as if for the very purpose of enforcing the contrast. It was a character that Albinia could not as yet fathom. In all occupations and amusements, Sophy followed the lead of her elder sister, and in her lessons, her sole object seemed to be to get things done with as little trouble as possible, and especially without setting her mind to work, and yet in the very effort to escape diligence or exertion, she sometimes showed signs of so much ability as to excite a longing desire to know of what she would be capable when once aroused and interested; but the surly, ungracious temper rendered this

apparently impossible, and whatever Albinia attempted, was sure, as if for the very reason that it came from her, to be answered with a redoubling of the growl of that odd hoarse voice.

On Lucy's birthday, there was an afternoon party of her young friends, including Miss Durant. Albinia, who, among the girlhood of Fairmead and its neighbourhood, had been so acceptable a playmate, that her marriage had caused the outcry that 'there would never be any fun again without Miss Ferrars,' came out on the lawn with the girls, in hopes of setting them to enjoy themselves. But they looked at her almost suspiciously, retained their cold, stiff, company manners, and drew apart into giggling knots. She relieved them of her presence, and sitting by the window, watched Genevieve walking up and down alone, as if no one cared to join her. Presently Lucy and Lizzie Osborn spoke to her, and she went in. Albinia went to meet her in the hall; she coloured and said, 'She was only come to fetch Miss Osborn's cloak.'

Albinia saw her disposing it over Lizzie's shoulders, and then running in again. This time it was for Miss Louisa's cloak, and a third time for Miss Drury's shawl, which Albinia chose to take out herself, and encountering Sophia, said, 'Next time, you had better run on errands yourself instead of sending your guests.'

Sophy gave a black look, and she retreated, but presently the groups coalesced, and Maria Drury and Sophy ran out to call Genevieve into the midst. Albinia hoped they were going to play, but soon she beheld Genevieve trying to draw back, but evidently

imprisoned, there was an echo of a laugh that she did not like; the younger girls were skipping up in the victim's face in a rude way; she hastily turned round as in indignation, one hand raised to her eyes, but it was instantly snatched down by Maria Drury, and the pitiless ring closed in. Albinia sprang to her feet, exclaiming aloud, 'They are teasing her!' and rushed into the garden, hearing on her way, 'No, we wont let you go!—you shall tell us—you shall promise to show us—my papa is a magistrate, you know—he'll come and search—Jenny, you shall tell!'

Come with me, Genevieve,' said Albinia, standing in the midst of the tormentors, and launching a look of wrath around her, as she saw tears in the young girl's eyes, and taking her hand, found it trembling with agitation. Fondling it with both her own, she led Genevieve away, turning her back upon Lucy and her, 'We were only—'

The poor girl shook more and more, and when they reached the shelter of the house, gave way to a tightened, oppressed sob, and at the first kind words a shower of tears followed, and she took Albinia's hand, and clasped it to her breast in a manner embarrassing to English feelings, though perfectly natural and sincere in her. 'Ah! si bonne! si bonne! pardonnes-moi, Madame!' she exclaimed, sobbing, and probably not knowing that she was speaking French; 'but, oh, Madame, you will tell me! Is it true—can he?'

'Can who? What do you mean, my dear?'

'The Admiral,' said Genevieve, looking about frightened, and

sinking her voice to a whisper. 'Miss Louisa said so, that he could send and search—'

'Search for what, my dear?'

'For my poor little secret. Ah, Madame, assuredly I may tell you. It is but a French Bible, it belonged to my martyred ancestor, Francois Durant, who perished at the St. Barthelemi —it is stained with his blood—it has been handed on, from one to the other—it was all that Jacques Durant rescued when he fled from the Dragonnades—it was given to me by my own dear father on his death-bed, with a charge to keep it from my grandmother, and not to speak of it—but to guard it as my greatest treasure. And now—Oh, I am not disobeying him,' cried Genevieve, with a fresh burst of tears. 'You can feel for me, Madame, you can counsel me. Can the magistrates come and search, unless I confess to those young ladies?'

'Most decidedly not,' said Albinia. 'Set your mind at rest, my poor child; whoever threatened you played you a most base, cruel trick.'

'Ah, do not be angry with them, Madame; no doubt they were in sport. They could not know how precious that treasure was to me, and they will say much in their gaiety of heart.'

'I do not like such gaiety,' said Albinia. 'What, they wished to make you confess your secret?'

'Yes. They had learnt by some means that I keep one of my drawers locked, and they had figured to themselves that in it was some relic of my Huguenot ancestors. They thought it was some

instrument of death, and they said that unless I would tell them the whole, the Admiral had the right of search, and, oh! it was foolish of me to believe them for a moment, but I only thought that the fright would, kill my grandmother. Oh, you were so good, Madame, I shall never forget; no, not to the end of my life, how you rescued me!'

'We did not bring you here to be teased,' said Albinia, caressing her. 'I should like to ask your pardon for what they have made you undergo.'

'Ah, Madame!' said Genevieve, smiling, 'it is nothing. I am well used to the like, and I heed it little, except when it falls on such subjects as these.'

She was easily drawn into telling the full history of her treasure, as she had learnt from her father's lips, the Huguenot shot down by the persecutors, and the son who had fled into the mountains and returned to bury the corpse, and take the prized, blood-stained Bible from the breast; the escapes and dangers of the two next generations; the few succeeding days of peace; and, finally, the Dragonnade, when the children had been snatched from the Durant family, and the father and mother had been driven at length to fly in utter destitution, and had made their way to England in a wretched, unprovisioned open boat. The child for whose sake they fled, was the only one rescued from the hands of these enemies, and the tradition of their sufferings had been handed on with the faithfully preserved relic, down to the slender girl, their sole descendant, and who in early childhood had drunk

in the tale from the lips of her father. The child of the persecutors and of the persecuted, Genevieve Durant did indeed represent strangely the history of her ancestral country; and as Albinia said to her, surely it might be hoped that the faith in which she had been bred up, united what was true and sound in the religion of both Reformed and Romanist.

The words made the brown cheek glow. 'Ah, Madame, did I not say I could talk with you? You, who do not think me a heretic, as my dear grandmother's friends do, and who yet can respect my grandmother's Church.'

Assuredly little Genevieve was one of the most interesting and engaging persons that Albinia had ever met, and she listened earnestly to her artless history, and pretty enthusiasms, and the story which she could not tell without tears, of her father's care, when the reward of her good behaviour had been the reading one verse in the quaint black letter of the old French Bible.

The conversation lasted till Gilbert made his appearance, and Albinia was glad to find that his greeting to Genevieve was cordial and affectionate, and free from all that was unpleasant in his sisters' manner, and he joined himself to their company when Albinia proposed a walk along the broad causeway through the meadows. It was one of the pleasantest walks that she had taken at Bayford, with both her companions so bright and merry, and the scene around in all the beauty of spring. Gilbert, with the courtesy that Albinia's very presence had infused into him, gathered a pretty wild bouquet for each, and Albinia talked of

cowslip-balls, and found that neither Gilbert nor Genevieve had ever seen one; then she pitied them, and owned that she did not know how to get through a spring without one; and Gilbert having of course a pocketful of string, a delicious ball was constructed, over which Genevieve went into an inexpressible ecstasy.

All the evening, Gilbert devoted himself to Genevieve, though more than one of the others tried to attract him, playing off the follies of more advanced girlhood, to the vexation of Albinia, who could not bear to see him the centre of attention to silly girls, when he ought to have been finding his level among boys.

'Gilbert makes himself so ridiculous about Jenny Durant,' said his sisters, when he insisted on escorting her home, and thus they brought on themselves Albinia's pent-up indignation at their usage of their guest. Lucy argued in unsatisfactory self-defence, but Sophy, when shown how ungenerous her conduct had been, crimsoned deeply, and though uttering no word of apology, wore a look that gave her step-mother for the first time a hope that her sullenness might not be so much from want of compunction, as from want of power to express it.

Oh! for a consultation with her brother. But he and his wife were taking a holiday among their kindred in Ireland, and for once Albinia could have echoed the aunts' lamentation that Winifred had so many relations!

CHAPTER V

Albinia needed patience to keep alive hope and energy, for a sore disappointment awaited her. Whatever had been her annoyances with the girls, she had always been on happy and comfortable terms with Gilbert, he had responded to her advances, accommodated himself to her wishes, adopted her tastes, and returned her affection. She had early perceived that his father and sisters looked on him as the naughty one of the family, but when she saw Lucy's fretting interference, and, Sophia's wrangling contempt, she did not wonder that an unjust degree of blame had often fallen to his share; and under her management, he scarcely ever gave cause for complaint. That he was evidently happier and better for her presence, was compensation for many a vexation; she loved him with all her heart, made fun with him, told legends of the freaks of her brother Maurice and cousin Fred, and grudged no trouble for his pleasure.

As long as The Three Musqueteers lasted, he had come constantly to her dressing-room, and afterwards she promised to find other pleasant reading; but after such excitement, it was not easy to find anything that did not appear dry. As the daughter of a Peninsular man, she thought nothing so charming as the Subaltern, and Gilbert seemed to enjoy it; but by the time he had heard all her oral traditions of the war by way of notes,

his attendance began to slacken; he stayed out later, and always brought excuses—Mr. Salsted had kept him, he had been with a fellow, or his pony had lost a shoe. Albinia did not care to question, the evenings were light and warm, and the one thing she desired for him was manly exercise: she thought it much better for him to be at play with his fellow-pupils, and she could not regret the gain of another hour to her hurried day.

One morning, however, Mr. Kendal called her, and his look was so grave and perturbed, that she hardly waited till the door was shut to ask in terror, what could be the matter.

'Nothing to alarm you,' he said. 'It is only that I am vexed about Gilbert. I have reason to fear that he is deceiving us again; and I want you to help us to recollect on which days he should have been at Tremblam. My dear, do not look so pale!'

For Albinia had turned quite white at hearing that the boy, on whom she had fixed her warm affection, had been carrying on a course of falsehood; but a moment's hope restored her. 'I did keep him at home on Tuesday,' she said, 'it was so very hot, and he had a headache. I thought I might. You told me not to send him on doubtful days.'

'I hope you may be able to make out that it is right,' said Mr. Kendal, 'but I am afraid that Mr. Salsted has too much cause of complaint. It is the old story!'

And so indeed it proved, when Albinia heard what the tutor had come to say. The boy was seldom in time, often altogether missing, excusing himself by saying he was kept at home by

fears of the weather; but Mr. Salsted was certain that his father could not know how he disposed of his time, namely, in a low style of sporting with young Tritton, the son of a rich farmer or half-gentleman, who was the pest of Mr. Salsted's parish. Ill-learnt, slurred-over lessons, with lame excuses, were nothing as compared with this, and the amount of petty deceit, subterfuge, and falsehood, was frightful, especially when Albinia recollected the tone of thought which the boy had seemed to be catching from her. Unused to duplicity, except from mere ignorant, unmanageable school-children, she was excessively shocked, and felt as if he must be utterly lost to all good, and had been acting a lie from first to last. After the conviction had broken on her, she hardly spoke, while Mr. Kendal was promising to talk to his son, threaten him with severe punishment, and keep a strict account of his comings and goings, to be compared weekly with Mr. Salsted's notes of his arrival. This settled, the tutor departed, and no sooner was he gone, than Albinia, hiding her face in her hands, shed tears of bitter grief and disappointment. 'My dearest,' said her husband, fondly, 'you must not let my boy's doings grieve you in this manner. You have been doing your utmost for him, if any one could do him good, it would be you.'

'O no, surely I must have made some dreadful mistake, to have promoted such faults.'

'No, I have long known him not to be trustworthy. It is an evil of long standing.'

'Was it always so?'

'I cannot tell,' said he, sitting down beside her, and shading his brow with one hand; 'I have only been aware of it since he has been left alone. When the twins were together, they were led by one soul of truth and generosity. What this poor fellow was separately no one could know, while he had his brother to guide and shield him. The first time I noticed the evil was when we were recovering. Gilbert and Sophia were left together, and in one of their quarrels injured some papers of mine. I was very weak, and had little power of self-control; I believe I terrified him too much. There was absolute falsehood, and the truth was only known by Sophia's coming forward and confessing the whole. It was ill managed. I was not equal to dealing with him, and whether the mischief began then or earlier, it has gone on ever since, breaking out every now and then. I had hoped that with your care —But oh! how different it would have been with his brother! Albinia, what would I not give that you had but seen *him!* Not a fault was there; not a moment's grief did he give us, till—O what an overthrow of hope!' And he gave way to an excess of grief that quite appalled her, and made her feel herself powerless to comfort. She only ventured a few words of peace and hope; but the contrast between the brothers, was just then keen agony, and he could not help exclaiming how strange it was, that Edmund should be the one to be taken.

'Nay,' he said, 'was not he ripe for better things? May not poor Gilbert have been spared that longer life may train him to be like his brother?'

'He never will be like him,' cried Mr. Kendal. 'No! no! The difference is evident in the very countenance and features.'

'Was he like you?'

'They said so, but you could not gather an idea of him from me,' said Mr. Kendal, smiling mournfully, as he met her gaze. 'It was the most beautiful countenance I ever saw, full of life and joy; and there were wonderful expressions in the eyes when he was thinking or listening. He used to read the Greek Testament with me every morning, and his questions and remarks rise up before me again. That text—You have seen it in church.'

'Because I live, ye shall live also,' Albinia repeated.

'Yes. A little before his illness we came to that. He rested on it, as he used to do on anything that struck him, and asked me, "whether it meant the life hereafter, or the life that is hidden here?" We went over it with such comments as I could find, but his mind was not satisfied; and it must have gone on working on it, for one night, when I had been thinking him delirious, he called me, and the light shone out of those bright dark eyes of his as he said, joyfully, "It is both, papa! It is hidden here, but it will shine out there," and as I did not catch his meaning, he repeated the Greek words.'

'Dear boy! Some day we shall be glad that the full life and glory came so soon.'

He shook his head, the parting was still too recent, and it was the first time he had been able to speak of his son. It was a great satisfaction to her that the reserve had once been broken;

it seemed like compensation for the present trouble, though that was acutely felt, and not softened by the curious eyes and leading questions of the sisters, when she returned to give what attention she could to their interrupted lessons.

Gilbert returned, unsuspicious of the storm, till his father's stern gravity, and her depressed, pre-occupied manner, excited his attention, and he asked her anxiously whether anything were the matter. A sad gesture replied, and perhaps revealed the state of the case, for he became absolutely silent. Albinia left them together. She watched anxiously, and hurried after Mr. Kendal into the study, where his manner showed her not to be unwelcome as the sharer of his trouble. 'I do not know what to do,' he said, dejectedly. 'I can make nothing of him. It is all prevarication and sulkiness! I do not think he felt one word that I said.'

'People often feel more than they show.'

He groaned.

'Will you go to him?' he presently added. 'Perhaps I grew too angry at last, and I believe he loves you. At least, if he does not, he must be more unfeeling than I can think him. You do not dislike it, dearest.'

'O no, no! If I only knew what would be best for him!'

'He may be more unreserved with you,' said Mr. Kendal; and as he was anxious for her to make the attempt, she moved away, though in perplexity, and in the revulsion of feeling, with a sort of disgust towards the boy who had deceived her so long.

She found him seated on a wheelbarrow by the pond, chucking

pebbles into the still black water, and disturbing the duckweed on the surface. His colour was gone, and his face was dark and moody, and strove not to relax, as she said, 'O Gilbert, how could you?'

He turned sharply away, muttering, 'She is coming to bother, now!'

It cut her to the heart. 'Gilbert!' was all she could exclaim, but the tone of pain made him look at her, as if in spite of himself, and as he saw the tears he exclaimed in an impatient voice of rude consolation, 'There's nothing to take so much to heart. No one thinks anything of it!'

'What would Edmund have thought?' said Albinia; but the appeal came too soon, he made an angry gesture and said, 'He was nearly three years younger than I am now! He would not have been kept in these abominable leading-strings.'

She was too much shocked to find an answer, and Gilbert went on, 'Watched and examined wherever I go—not a minute to myself—nothing but lessons at Tremblam, and bother at home; driven about hither and thither, and not allowed a friend of my own, nor to do one single thing! There's no standing it, and I won't!'

'I am very sorry,' said Albinia, struggling with choking tears. 'It has been my great wish to make things pleasant to you. I hope I have not teased or driven you to—'

'Nonsense!' exclaimed Gilbert, disrespectfully indeed, but from the bottom of his heart, and breaking at once into a flood

of tears. 'You are the only creature that has been kind to me since I lost my mother and Ned, and now they have been and turned you against me too;' and he sobbed violently.

'I don't know what you mean, Gilbert. If I stand in your mother's place, I can't be turned against you, any more than she could,' and she stroked his brow, which she found so throbbing as to account for his paleness. 'You can grieve and hurt me, but you can't prevent me from feeling for you, nor for your dear father's grief.'

He declared that people at home knew nothing about boys, and made an uproar about nothing.

'Do you call falsehood nothing?'

'Falsehood! A mere trifle now and then, when I am driven to it by being kept so strictly.'

'I don't know how to talk to you, Gilbert,' said Albinia, rising; 'your conscience knows better than your tongue.'

'Don't go;' and he went off into another paroxysm of crying, as he caught hold of her dress; and when he spoke again his mood was changed; he was very miserable, nobody cared for him, he did not know what to do; he wanted to do right, and to please her, but Archie Tritton would not let him alone; he wished he had never seen Archie Tritton. At last, walking up and down with him, she drew from him a full confidence, and began to understand how, when health and strength had come back to him in greater measure than he had ever before enjoyed, the craving for boyish sports had awakened, just after he had been deprived

of his brother, and was debarred from almost every wholesome manner of gratifying it. To fall in with young Tritton was as great a misfortune as could well have befallen a boy, with a dreary home, melancholy, reserved father, and wearisome aunt. Tritton was a youth of seventeen, who had newly finished his education at an inferior commercial school, and lived on his father's farm, giving himself the airs of a sporting character, and fast hurrying into dissipation.

He was really good-natured, and Gilbert dwelt on his kindness with warmth and gratitude, and on his prowess in all sporting accomplishments with a perfect effervescence of admiration. He evidently patronized Gilbert, partly from good-natured pity, and partly as flattered by the adherence of a boy of a grade above him; and Gilbert was proud of the notice of one who seemed to him a man, and an adept in all athletic games. It was a dangerous intimacy, and her heart sank as she found that the pleasures to which he had been introducing Gilbert, were not merely the free exercise, the rabbit-shooting and rat-hunting of the farm, nor even the village cricket-match, all of which, in other company, would have had her full sympathy. But there had been such low and cruel sports that she turned her head away sickened at the notion of any one dear to her having been engaged in such amusements, and when Gilbert in excuse said that every one did it, she answered indignantly, 'My brothers never!'

'It is no use talking about what swells do that hunt and shoot and go to school,' answered Gilbert.

'Do you wish you went to school?' asked Albinia.

'I wish I was out of it all!'

He was in a very different frame. He owned that he knew how wrong it had been to deceive, but he seemed to look upon it as a sort of fate; he wished he could help it, but could not, he was so much afraid of his father that he did not know what he said; Archie Tritton said no one could get on without.—There was an utter bewilderment in his notions, here and there showing a better tone, but obscured by the fancies imbibed from his companion, that the knowledge and practice of evil were manly. At one moment he cried bitterly, and declared that he was wretched; at another he defended each particular case with all his might, changing and slipping away so that she did not know where to take him. However, the conclusion was far more in pity than anger, and after receiving many promises that if she would shield him from his father and bear with him, he would abstain from all she disapproved, she caressed and soothed the aching head, and returned to his father hopeful and encouraged, certain that the evil had been chiefly caused by weakness and neglect and believing that here was a beginning of repentance. Since there was sorrow and confession, there surely must be reformation.

For a week Gilbert went on steadily, but at the end of that time his arrivals at home became irregular, and one day there was another great aberration. On a doubtful day, when it had been decided that he might go safely between the showers, he never came to Tremblam at all, and Mr. Salsted sent a note

to Mr. Kendal to let him know that his son had been at the races—village races, managed by the sporting farmers of the neighbourhood. There was a sense of despair, and again a talk, bringing at once those ever-ready tears and protestations, sorrow genuine, but fruitless. 'It was all Archie's fault, he had overtaken him, persuaded him that Mr. Salsted would not expect him, promised him that he should see the celebrated 'Blunderbuss,' Sam Shepherd's horse, that won the race last year. Gilbert had gone 'because he could not help it.'

'Not help it!' cried Albinia, looking at him with her clear indignant eyes. 'How can you be such a poor creature, Gilbert?'

'It is very hard!' exclaimed Gilbert; 'I must go past Robble's Leigh twice every day of my life, and Archie will come out and be at me.'

'That is the very temptation you have to resist,' said Albinia. 'Fight against it, pray against it, resolve against it; ride fast, and don't linger and look after him.'

He looked desponding and miserable. If she could only have put a spirit into him!

'Shall I walk and meet you sometimes before you get to Robbie's Leigh!'

His face cleared up, but the cloud returned in a moment.

'What is it?' she asked. 'Only tell me. You know I wish for nothing so much as to help you.'

He did confess that there was nothing he should like better, if Archie would not be all the worse another time, whenever he

should catch him alone.

'But surely, Gilbert, he is not always lying in ambush for you, like a cat for a mouse. You can't be his sole game.'

'No, but he is coming or going, or out with his gun, and he will often come part of the way with me, and he is such a droll fellow!'

Albinia thought that there was but one cure. To leave Gilbert daily exposed to the temptation must be wrong, and she laid the case before Mr. Kendal with so much earnestness, that he allowed that it would be better to send the boy from home; and in the meantime, Albinia obtained that Mr. Kendal should ride some way on the Tremblam road with his son in the morning, so as to convoy him out of reach of the tempter; whilst she tried to meet him in the afternoon, and managed so that he should be seldom without the hope of meeting her.

Albinia's likings had taken a current absolutely contrary to all her preconceived notions; Sophia, with her sullen truth, was respected, but it was not easy to like her even as well as Lucy, who, though pert and empty, had much good-nature and good-temper, and was not indocile; while Gilbert, in spite of a weak, shallow character, habits of deception, and low ungentlemanly tastes, had won her affection, and occupied the chief of her time and thoughts; and she dreaded the moment of parting with him, as removing the most available and agreeable of her young companions.

That moment of parting, though acknowledged to be expedient, did not approach. Gilbert, could not be sent to a public

school without risk and anxiety which his father did not like, and which would have been horror to his grandmother; and Albinia herself did not feel certain that he was fit for it, nor that it was her part to enforce it. She wrote to her brother, and found that he likewise thought a tutor would be a safe alternative; but then he must be a perfect man in a perfect climate, and Mr. Kendal was not the man to make researches. Mr. Dusautoy mentioned one clergyman who took pupils, Maurice Ferrars another, but there was something against each. Mr. Kendal wrote four letters, and was undecided—a third was heard of, but the locality was doubtful, and the plan went off, because Mr. Kendal could not make up his mind to go thirty miles to see the place, and talk to a stranger.

Albinia found that her power did not extend beyond driving him from 'I'll see about it,' to 'Yes, by all means.' Action was a length to which he could not be brought. Mr. Nugent was very anxious that he should qualify as a magistrate since a sensible, highly-principled man was much wanted counterbalance Admiral Osborn's misdirected, restless activity and the lower parts of the town were in a dreadful state. Mrs. Nugent talked to Albinia, and she urged it in vain. To come out of his study, examine felons, contend with the Admiral, and to meet all the world at the quarter sessions, was abhorrent to him, and he silenced her almost with sternness.

She was really hurt and vexed, and scarcely less so by a discovery that she made shortly after. The hot weather had

made the houses beneath the hill more close and unwholesome than ever, Simkins's wife had fallen into a lingering illness, and Albinia, visiting her constantly, was painfully sensible of the dreadful atmosphere in which she lived, under the roof, with a window that would not open. She offered to have the house improved at her own expense, but was told that Mr. Pettilove would raise the rent if anything were laid out on it. She went about talking indignantly of Mr. Pettilove's cruelty and rapacity, and when Mr. Dusautoy hinted that Pettilove was only agent, she exclaimed that the owner was worse, since ignorance alone could be excused. Who was the wretch? Some one, no doubt, who never came near the place, and only thought of it as money.

'Fanny,' said Mr. Dusautoy, 'I really think we ought to tell her.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, 'I think it would be better. The houses belonged to old Mr. Meadows.'

'Oh, if they are Mrs. Meadows's, I don't wonder at anything.'

'I believe they are Gilbert Kendal's.'

They were very kind; Mr. Dusautoy strode out at the window, and his wife would not look at Albinia during the minute's struggle to regain her composure, under the mortification that her husband should have let her rave so much and so long about what must be in his own power. Her only comfort was the hope that he had never heard what she said, and she knew that he so extremely disliked a conference with Pettilove, that he would consent to anything rather than have a discussion.

She was, for the first time in her life, out of spirits. Gilbert

was always upon her mind; and the daily walk to meet him was a burthen, consuming a great deal of time, and becoming trying on hot summer afternoons, the more so as she seldom ventured to rest after it, lest dulness should drive Gilbert into mischief, or, if nothing worse, into quarrelling with Sophia. If she could not send him safely out fishing, she must be at hand to invent pleasures and occupations for him; and the worst of it was, that the girls grudged her attention to their brother, and were becoming jealous. They hated the walk to Robble's Leigh, and she knew that it was hard on them that their pleasure should be sacrificed, but it was all-important to preserve him from evil. She had wished to keep the tutor-negotiations a secret, but they had oozed out, and she found that Mrs. and Miss Meadows had been declaring that they had known how it would be—whatever people said beforehand, it always came to the same thing in the end, and as to its being necessary, poor dear Gibbie was very different before the change at home.

Albinia could not help shedding a few bitter tears. Why was she to be always misjudged, even when she meant the best? And, oh! how hard, well-nigh impossible, to forgive and candidly to believe that, in the old lady, at least, it was partiality, and not spite.

In September, Mr. and Mrs. Ferrars returned from their journey. Albinia was anxious to see them, for if there was a sense that she had fallen short of her confident hopes of doing prosperously, there was also a great desire for their sympathy and

advice. But Maurice had been too long away from his parish to be able to spare another day, and begged that the Kendals would come to Fairmead. Seeing that Albinia's heart was set on it, Mr. Kendal allowed himself to be stirred up to appoint a time for driving her over to spend a long day at Fairmead.

For her own pleasure and ease of mind, Albinia made a point of taking Gilbert, and the girls were to spend the day with their grandmother.

'Pretty old Fairmead!' she cried, as the beech-trees rose before her; and she was turning round every minute to point out to Gilbert some of the spots of which she had told him, and nodding to the few scattered children who were not at school, and who looked up with mouths from ear to ear, and flushed cheeks, as they curtsied to 'Miss Ferrars.' The 'Miss Ferrars' life seemed long ago.

They came to the little green gate that led to what had been 'home' for the happiest years of Albinia's life, and from the ivy porch there was a rush of little Willie and Mary, and close at hand their mamma, and Maurice emerging from the school. It was very joyous and natural. But there were two more figures, not youthful, but of decided style and air, and quiet but fashionable dress, and Albinia had only time to say quickly to her husband, 'my aunts,' before she was fondly embraced.

It was not at all what she had intended. Mrs. Annesley and Miss Ferrars were very kind aunts, and she had much affection for them; but there was an end of the hope of the

unreserve and confidence that she wanted. She could get plenty of compassion and plenty of advice, but her whole object would be to avoid these; and, besides, Mr. Kendal had not bargained for strangers. What would become of his opportunity of getting better acquainted with Maurice and Winifred, and of all the pleasures that she had promised Gilbert?

At least, however, she was proud that her aunts should see what a fine-looking man her husband was, and they were evidently struck with his appearance and manner. Gilbert, too was in very good looks, and was altogether a bright, gentlemanly boy, well made, though with the air of growing too fast, and with something of uncertainty about his expression.

It was quickly explained that the aunts had only decided, two days before, on coming to Fairmead at once, some other engagement having failed them, and they were delighted to find that they should meet their dear Albinia, and be introduced to Mr. Kendal. Setting off before the post came in, Albinia had missed Winifred's note to tell her of their arrival.

'And,' said Winifred, as she took Albinia upstairs, 'if I did suspect that would be the case, I wont say I regretted it. I did not wish to afford Mr. Kendal the pleasures of anticipation.'

'Perhaps it was better,' said Albinia, smiling, 'especially as I suppose they will stay for the next six weeks, so that the days will be short before you will be free.'

'And now let me see you, my pretty one,' said Winifred, fondly. 'Are you well, are you strong? No, don't wriggle your

head away, I shall believe nothing but what I read for myself.'

'Don't believe anything you read without the notes,' said Albinia. 'I have a great deal to say to you, but I don't expect much opportunity thereof.'

Certainly not, for Miss Ferrars was knocking at the door. She had never been able to suppose that the sisters-in-law could be more to each other than she was to her own niece.

So it became a regular specimen of a 'long day' spent together by relations, who, intending to be very happy, make themselves very weary of each other, by discarding ordinary occupations, and reducing themselves to needlework and small talk. Albinia was bent on liveliness, and excelled herself in her droll observations; but to Winifred, who knew her so well, this brilliancy did not seem like perfect ease; it was more like effort than natural spirits. This was no wonder, for not only had the sight of new people thrown Mr. Kendal into a severe access of shyness and silence, but he was revolving in fear and dread the expediency of asking them to Willow Lawn, and considering whether Albinia and propriety could make the effort bearable. Silent he sat, while the aunts talked of their wishes that one nephew would marry, and that the other would not, and no one presumed to address him, except little Mary, who would keep trotting up to him, to make him drink out of her doll's tea-cups.

Mr. Ferrars took pity on him, and took him and Gilbert out to call upon Colonel Bury; but this did not lessen his wife's difficulties, for there was a general expectation that she

would proceed to confidences; whereas she would do nothing but praise the Dusautoys, ask after all the parishioners of Fairmead one by one, and consult about French reading-books and Italian grammars. Mrs. Annesley began a gentle warning against overtaxing her strength, and Miss Ferrars enforced it with such vehemence, that Winifred, who had been rather on that side, began to take Albinia's part, but perceived, with some anxiety, that her sister's attempts to laugh off the admonition almost amounted to an admission that she was working very hard. As to the step-daughters, no intelligence was attainable, except that Lucy would be pleased with a new crochet pattern, and that Sophy was like her father, but not so handsome.

The next division of time passed better. Albinia walked out at the window to meet the gentlemen when they came home, and materially relieved Mr. Kendal's mind by saying to him, 'The aunts are settled in here till they go to Knutsford. I hope you don't think—there is not the least occasion for asking them to stay with us.'

'Are you sure you do not wish it?' said Mr. Kendal, with great kindness, but an evident weight removed.

'Most certain!' she exclaimed, with full sincerity; 'I am not at all ready for them. What should I do with them to entertain?'

'Very well,' said Mr. Kendal, 'you must be the judge. If there be no necessity, I shall be glad to avoid unsettling our habits, and probably Bayford would hardly afford much enjoyment to your aunts.'

Albinia glanced in his face, and in that of her brother, with her own arch fun. It was the first time that day that Maurice had seen that peculiarly merry look, and he rejoiced, but he was not without fear that she was fostering Mr. Kendal's retiring habits more than was good for him. But it was not only on his account that she avoided the invitation, she by no means wished to show Bayford to her fastidious aunts, and felt as if to keep them satisfied and comfortable would be beyond her power.

Set free from this dread, and his familiarity with his brother-in-law renewed, Mr. Kendal came out to great advantage at the early dinner. Miss Ferrars was well read and used to literary society, and she started subjects on which he was at home, and they discussed new books and criticised critics, so that his deep reading showed itself, and even a grave, quiet tone of satire, such as was seldom developed, except under the most favourable circumstances. He and Aunt Gertrude were evidently so well pleased with each other, that Albinia almost thought she had been precipitate in letting him off the visit.

Gilbert had, fortunately, a turn for small children, and submitted to be led about the garden by little Willie; and as far as moderate enjoyment went, the visit was not unsuccessful; but as for what Albinia came for, it was unattainable, except for one little space alone with her brother.

'I meant to have asked a great deal,' she said, sighing.

'If you, want me, I would contrive to ride over,' said Maurice.

'No, it is not worth that. But, Maurice, what is to be done when

one sees one's duty, and yet fails for ever for want of tact and temper! Ah, I know what you will say, and I often say it to myself, but whatever I propose, I always do either the wrong thing or in the wrong way!'

'You fall a hundred times a day, but are raised up again,' said Maurice.

'Maurice, tell me one thing. Is it wrong to do, not the best, but only the best one can?'

'It is the wrong common to us all,' said Maurice.

'I used to believe in "whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well." Now, I do everything ill, rather than do nothing at all.'

'There are only two ways of avoiding that.'

'And they are—?'

'Either doing nothing, or admiring all your own doings.'

'Which do you recommend?' said Albinia, smiling, but not far from tears.

'My dear,' said Maurice, 'all I can dare to recommend, is patience and self-control. Don't fret and agitate yourself about what you can't do, but do your best to do calmly what you can. It will be made up, depend upon it.'

There was no time for more, but the sound counsel, the sympathy, and playfulness had done Albinia wonderful good, and she was almost glad there had been no more privacy, or her friends might have guessed that she had not quite found a counsellor at home.

CHAPTER VI

The Christmas holidays did indeed put an end to the walks to meet Gilbert, but only so as to make Albinia feel responsible for him all day long, and uneasy whenever he was not accounted for. She played chess with him, found books, and racked her brains to seek amusements for him; but knowing all the time that it was hopeless to expect a boy of fourteen to be satisfied with them. One or two boys of his age had come home for the holidays, and she tried to be relieved by being told that he was going out with Dick Wolfe or Harry Osborn, but it was not quite satisfactory, and she began to look fagged and unwell, and had lost so much of her playfulness, that even Mr. Kendal was alarmed.

Sophia's birthday fell in the last week before Christmas, and it had always been the family custom to drink tea with Mrs. Meadows. Albinia made the engagement with a sense of virtuous resignation, though not feeling well enough for the infliction, but Mr. Kendal put a stop to all notion of her going. She expected to enjoy her quiet solitary evening, but the result was beyond her hopes, for as she was wishing Gilbert good-bye, she heard the click of the study lock, and in came Mr. Kendal.

'I thought you were gone,' she said.

'No. I did not like to leave you alone for a whole evening.'

If it were only an excuse to himself for avoiding the Meadows' party, it was too prettily done for the notion to occur to his wife,

and never had she spent a happier evening. He was so unusually tender and unreserved, so desirous to make her comfortable, and, what was far more to her, growing into so much confidence, that it was even better than what she used last year to picture to herself as her future life with him. It even came to what he had probably never done for any one. She spoke of a beautiful old Latin hymn, which she had once read with her brother, and had never seen adequately translated, and he fetched a manuscript book, where, written out with unrivalled neatness, stood a translation of his own, made many years ago, full of scholarly polish. She ventured to ask leave to copy it. 'I will copy it for you,' he said, 'but it must be for yourself alone.'

She was grateful for the concession, and happy in the promise. She begged to turn the page, and it was granted. There were other translations, chiefly from curious oriental sources, and there were about twenty original poems, elaborated in the same exquisite manner, and with a deep melancholy strain of thought, and power of beautiful description, that she thought finer and more touching than almost anything she had read.

'And these are all locked up for ever. No one has seen them.'

'So. When I was a young lad, my poor father put some lines of mine into a newspaper. That sufficed me,' and he shut the clasped book as if repenting of having revealed the contents.

'No, I was not thinking of anything you would dislike with regard to those verses. I don't like to let in the world on things precious, but (how could she venture so far!) I was thinking how

many powers and talents are shut up in that study! and whether they might not have been meant for more. I beg your pardon if I ought not to say so.'

'The time is past,' he replied, without displeasure; 'my youth is gone, and with it the enterprise and hopefulness that can press forward, insensible to annoyance. You should have married a man with freshness and energy more responsive to your own.'

'Oh, Edmund, that is a severe reproach for my impertinent speech.'

'You must not expect too much from me,' he continued. 'I told you that I was a broken, grief-stricken man, and you were content to be my comforter.'

'Would that I could be so!' exclaimed Albinia, 'but to try faithfully, I must say what is on my mind. Dear Edmund, if you would only look out of your books, and see how much good you could do, here in your own sphere, how much the right wants strengthening, how much evil cries out to be repressed, how sadly your own poor suffer—oh! if you once began, you would be so much happier!'

She trembled with earnestness, and with fear of her own audacity, but a resounding knock at the door prevented her from even discovering whether he were offended. He started away to secure his book, and the two girls came in. Albinia could hardly believe it late enough for their return, but they accounted for having come rather earlier by saying that Gilbert had been making himself so ridiculous when he had come at last, that

grandmamma had sent him home.

'At last!' said Albinia. 'He set off only ten minutes after you, as soon as he found that papa was not coming.'

'All I know,' said Lucy, 'is, that he did not come till half-past nine, and said he had come from home.'

'And where can he be now?'

'Gone to bed,' growled Sophy.

'I don't know what he has been doing,' said Lucy, who since the suspicion of favouritism, had seemed to find especial pleasure in bringing forward her brother's faults; 'but he came in laughing like a plough-boy, and talking perfect nonsense. And when Aunt Maria spoke to him, he answered quite rudely, that he wasn't going to be questioned and called to order, he had enough of petticoat government at home.'

'No,' said Sophy, breaking in with ungracious reluctance, as if against her will conveying some comfort to her step-mother for the sake of truth, 'what he said was, that if he bore with petticoat government at home, it was because Mrs. Kendal was pretty and kind, and didn't torment him out of his life for nothing, and what he stood from her, he would not stand from any other woman.'

'But, Sophy, I am sure he did say Mrs. Kendal knew what she was going to say, and said it, and it was worth hearing, and he laughed in Aunt Maria's face, and told her not to make so many bites at a cherry.'

'He must have been beside himself,' said Albinia, in a bewilderment of consternation, but Mr. Kendal's return put a

stop to all, for the sisters never told tales before him, and she would not bring the subject under his notice until she should be better informed. His suffering was too great, his wrath too stern, to be excited without serious cause; but she spent a wakeful, anxious night, revolving all imaginable evils into which the boy could have fallen, and perplexing herself what measures to take, feeling all the more grieved and bound to him by the preference that, even in this dreadful mood, he had expressed for her. She fell into a restless sleep in the morning, from which she wakened so late as to have no time to question Gilbert before breakfast. On coming down, she found that he had not made his appearance, and had sent word that he had a bad headache, and wanted no breakfast. His father, who had made a visit of inspection, said he thought it was passing off, smiling as he observed upon Mrs. Meadows's mince-pie suppers and home-made wine.

Lucy said nothing, but glanced knowingly at her sister and at Albinia, from neither of whom did she get any response.

Albinia did not dare to take any measures till Mr. Kendal had ridden out, and then she went up and knocked at Gilbert's door. He was better, he said, and was getting up, he would be downstairs presently. She watched for him as he came down, looking still very pale and unwell. She took him into her room, made him sit by the fire, and get a little life and warmth into his chilled hands before she spoke. 'Yes, Gilbert, I don't wonder you cannot lift up your head while so much is on your mind.'

Gilbert started and hid his face.

'Did you think I did not know, and was not grieved?'

'Well,' he cried, peevishly, 'I'm sure I have the most ill-natured pair of sisters in the world.'

'Then you meant to deceive us again, Gilbert.'

He had relapsed into the old habit—as usual, a burst of tears and a declaration that no one was ever so badly off, and he did not know what to do.

'You *do* know perfectly well what to do, Gilbert. There is nothing for it but to tell me the whole meaning of this terrible affair, and I will see whether I can help you.'

It was always the same round, a few words would always bring the confession, and that pitiful kind of helpless repentance, which had only too often given her hope.

Gilbert assured her that he had fully purposed following his sisters, but that on the way he had unluckily fallen in with Archie Tritton and a friend, who had driven in to hear a man from London singing comic songs at the King's Head, and they had persuaded him to come in. He had been uneasy and tried to get away, but the dread of being laughed at about his grandmother's tea had prevailed, and he had been supping on oysters and porter, and trying to believe himself a fast man, till Archie, who had assured him that he was himself going home in 'no time,' had found it expedient to set off, and it had been agreed that he should put a bold face on it, and profess that he had never intended to do more than come and fetch his sisters home.

That the porter had anything to do with his extraordinary

manner to his grandmother and aunt, was so shocking a notion, and the very hint made him cry so bitterly, and protest so earnestly that he had only had one pint, which he did not like, and only drank because he was afraid of being teased, that Albinia was ready to believe that he had been so elevated by excitement as to forget himself, and continue the style of the company he had left. It was bad enough, and she felt almost overpowered by the contemplation of the lamentable weakness of the poor boy, of the consequences, and of what was incumbent on her.

She leant back and considered a little while, then sighed heavily, and said, 'Gilbert, two things must be done. You must make an apology to your grandmother and aunt, and you must confess the whole to your father.'

He gave a sort of howl, as if she were misusing his confidence.

'It must be,' she said. 'If you are really sorry, you will not shrink. I do not believe that it could fail to come to your father's knowledge, even if I did not know it was my duty to tell him, and how much better to confess it yourself.'

For this, however, Gilbert seemed to have no force; he cried piteously, bewailed himself, vowed incoherently that he would never do so again, and if she had not pitied him so much, would have made her think him contemptible.

She was inexorable as to having the whole told, though dreading the confession scarcely less than he did; and he finally made a virtue of necessity, and promised to tell, if only she would not desert him, declaring, with a fresh flood of tears, that he

should never do wrong when she was by. Then came the apology. It was most necessary, and he owned that it would be much better to be able to tell his father that his grandmother had forgiven him; but he really had not nerve to set out alone, and Albinia, who had begun to dread having him out of sight, consented to go and protect him.

He shrank behind her, and she had to bear the flood of Maria's surprises and regrets, before she could succeed in saying that he was very sorry for yesterday's improper behaviour, and had come to ask pardon.

Grandmamma was placable; Gilbert's white face and red eyes were pleading enough, and she was distressed at Mrs. Kendal having come out, looking pale and tired. If she had been alone, the only danger would have been that the offence would be lost in petting; but Maria had been personally wounded, and the jealousy she already felt of the step-mother, had been excited to the utmost by Gilbert's foolish words. She was excessively grieved, and a great deal more angry with Mrs. Kendal than with Gilbert; and the want of justification for this feeling, together with her great excitement, distress, and embarrassment, made her attempts to be dry and dignified ludicrously abortive. She really seemed to have lost the power of knowing what she said. She was glad Mrs. Kendal could walk up this morning, since she could not come at night.

'It was not my fault,' said Albinia, earnestly; 'Mr. Kendal forbade me. I am sure I wish we had come.'

The old lady would have said something kind about not reproaching herself, but Miss Meadows interposed with, 'It was very unlucky, to be sure—Mr. Kendal never failed them before, not that she would wish—but she had always understood that to let young people run about late in the evening by themselves—not that she meant anything, but it was very unfortunate—if she had only been aware—Betty should have come down to walk up with them.'

Gilbert could not forbear an ashamed smile of intense affront at this reproach to his manliness.

'It was exceedingly unfortunate,' said Albinia, trying to repress her vexation; 'but Gilbert must learn to have resolution to guard himself. And now that he is come to ask your forgiveness, will you not grant it to him?'

'Oh, yes, yes, certainly, I forgive him from my heart. Yes, Gilbert, I do, only you must mind and beware—it is a very shocking thing—low company and all that—you've made yourself look as ill—and if you knew what a cake Betty had made—almond and citron both—"but it's for Master Gilbert," she said, "and I don't grudge"—and then to think—oh, dear!'

Albinia tried to express for him some becoming sorrow at having disappointed so much kindness, but she brought Miss Meadows down on her again.

'Oh, yes—she grudged nothing—but she never expected to meet with gratitude—she was quite prepared—' and she swallowed and almost sobbed, 'there had been changes. She was

ready to make every excuse—she was sure she had done her best—but she understood—she didn't want to be assured. It always happened so—she knew her homely ways were not what Mrs. Kendal had been used to—and she didn't wonder—she only hoped the dear children—' and she was absolutely crying.

'My dear Maria,' said her mother, soothingly, 'you have worked yourself into such a state, that you don't know what you are saying. You must not let Mrs. Kendal think that we don't know that she is leading the dear children to all that is right and kind towards as.'

'Oh, no, I don't accuse any one. Only if they like to put me down under their feet and trample on me, they are welcome. That's all I have to say.'

Albinia was too much annoyed to be amused, and said, as she rose to take leave, 'I think it would be better for Gilbert, as well as for ourselves, if we were to say no more till some more cool and reasonable moment.'

'I am as cool as possible,' said Miss Meadows, convulsively clutching her hand; 'I'm not excited. Don't excite yourself, Mrs. Kendal—it is very bad for you. Tell her not, Mamma—oh! no, don't be excited—I mean nothing—I forgive poor dear Gibbie whatever little matters—I know there was excuse—boys with unsettled homes—but pray don't go and excite yourself—you see how cool I am—'

And she pursued Albinia to the garden-gate, recommending her at every step not to be excited, for she was as cool as possible,

trembling and stammering all the time, with flushed cheeks, and tears in her eyes.

'I wonder who she thinks is excited?' exclaimed Albinia, as they finally turned their backs on her.

It was hardly in human nature to help making the observation, but it was not prudent. Gilbert took licence to laugh, and say, 'Aunt Maria is beside herself.'

'I never heard anything so absurd or unjust!' cried Albinia, too much irritated to remember anything but the sympathy of her auditor. 'If I am to be treated in this manner, I have done striving to please them. Due respect shall be shown, but as to intimacy and confidence—'

'I'm glad you see it so at last!' cried Gilbert. 'Aunt Maria has been the plague of my life, and I'm glad I told her a bit of my mind!'

What was Albinia's consternation! Her moment's petulance had undone her morning's work.

'Gilbert,' she said, 'we are both speaking very wrongly. I especially, who ought to have helped you.'

Spite of all succeeding humility the outburst had been fatal, and argue and plead as she might, she could not restore the boy to anything like the half satisfactory state of penitence in which she had led him from home. The giving way to her worse nature had awakened his, and though he still allowed that she should prepare the way for his confession to his father, all real sense of his outrageous conduct towards his aunt was gone.

Disheartened and worn out, Albinia did not feel equal even to going to take off her walking things, but sat down in the drawing-room on the sofa, and tried to silence the girls' questions and chatter, by desiring Lucy to read aloud.

By-and-by Mr. Kendal was heard returning, and she rose to arrest him in the hall. Her looks began the story, for he exclaimed, 'My dear Albinia, what is the matter?'

'Oh, Edmund, I have such things to tell you! I have been doing so wrong.'

She was almost sobbing, and he spoke fondly. 'No, Albinia, I can hardly believe that. Something has vexed you, and you must take time to compose yourself.'

He led her up to her own room, tried to soothe her, and would not listen to a word till she should be calm. After lying still for a little while, she thought she had recovered, but the very word 'Gilbert' brought such an expression of anxiety and sternness over his brow as overcame her again, and she could not speak without so much emotion that he silenced her; and finding that she could neither leave the subject, nor mention it without violent agitation, he said he would leave her for a little while, and perhaps she might sleep, and then be better able to speak to him. Still she held him, and begged that he would say nothing to Gilbert till he had heard her, and to pacify her he yielded, passed his promise, and quitted her with a kiss.

CHAPTER VII

There was a messenger at Fairmead Parsonage by sunrise the next morning, and by twelve o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Ferrars were at Willow Lawn.

Mr. Kendal's grave brow and depressed manner did not reassure Winifred as he met her in the hall, although his words were, 'I hope she is doing well.'

He said no more, for the drawing-room door was moving to and fro, as if uneasy on the hinges, and as he made a step towards it, it disclosed a lady with black eyes and pinched features, whom he presented as 'Miss Meadows.'

'Well, now—I think—since more efficient—since I leave Mrs. Kendal to better—only pray tell her—my love and my mother's—if I could have been of any use—or shall I remain?—could I be of any service, Edmund?—I would not intrude when—but in the house—if I could be of any further use.'

'Of none, thank you,' said Mr. Kendal, 'unless you would be kind enough to take home the girls.'

'Oh, papa!' cried Lucy, I've got the keys. You wont be able to get on at all without me. Sophy may go, but I could not be spared.'

'Let it be as you will,' said Mr. Kendal; 'I only desire quiet, and that you should not inconvenience Mrs. Ferrars.'

'You will help me, will you not!' said Winifred, smiling, though she did not augur well from this opening scene. 'May I

go soon to Albinia?'

'Presently, I hope,' said Mr. Kendal, with an uneasy glance towards Miss Meadows, 'she has seen no one as yet, and she is so determined that you cannot come till after Christmas, that she does not expect you.'

Miss Meadows began one of her tangled skeins of words, the most tangible of which was excitement; and Mr. Kendal, knowing by long experience that the only chance of a conclusion was to let her run herself down, held his tongue, and she finally departed.

Then he breathed more freely, and said he would go and prepare Albinia to see her sister, desiring Lucy to show Mrs. Ferrars to her room, and to take care not to talk upon the stairs.

This, Lucy, who was in high glory, obeyed by walking upon creaking tip-toe, apparently borrowed from her aunt, and whispering at a wonderful rate about her eagerness to see dear, dear mamma, and the darling little brother.

The spare room did not look expectant of guests, and felt still less so. It struck Winifred as very like the mouth of a well, and the paper showed patches of ancient damp. One maid was hastily laying the fire, the other shaking out the curtains, in the endeavour to render it habitable, and Lucy began saying, 'I must apologize. If papa had only given us notice that we were to have the pleasure of seeing you,' and then she dashed at the maid in all the pleasure of authority. 'Eweretta, go and bring up Mrs. Ferrars's trunks directly, and some water, and some towels.'

Winifred thought the greatest mercy to the hunted maid would be to withdraw as soon as she had hastily thrown off bonnet and cloak, and Lucy followed her into the passage, repeating that papa was so absent and forgetful, that it was very inconvenient in making arrangements. Whatever was ordinarily repressed in her, was repaying itself with interest in the pleasure of acting as mistress of the house.

Mrs. Ferrars beheld Gilbert sitting listlessly on the deep window-seat at the end of the passage, resting his head on his hand.

'Well!' exclaimed Lucy, 'if he is not there still! He has hardly stirred since breakfast! Come and speak to Mrs. Ferrars, Gilbert. Or,' and she simpered, 'shall it be Aunt Winifred?'

'As you please,' said Mrs. Ferrars, advancing towards her old acquaintance, whom she would hardly have recognised, so different was the pale, downcast, slouching figure, from the bright, handsome lad she remembered.

'How cold your hand is!' she exclaimed; 'you should not sit in this cold passage.'

'As I have been telling him all this morning,' said Lucy.

'How is she?' whispered the boy, rousing himself to look imploringly in Winifred's face.

'Your father seems satisfied about her.'

At that moment a door at some distance was opened, and Gilbert seemed to thrill all over as for the moment ere it closed a baby's cry was heard. He turned his face away, and rested it

on the window. 'My brother! my brother!' he murmured, but at that moment his father turned the corner of the passage, saying that Albinia had heard their arrival, and was very eager to see her sister.

Still Winifred could not leave the boy without saying, 'You can make Gilbert happy about her, can you not? He is waiting here, watching anxiously for news of her.'

'Gilbert himself best knows whether he has a right to be made happy,' said Mr. Kendal, gravely. 'I promised to ask no questions till she is able to explain, but I much fear that he has been causing her great grief and distress.'

He fixed his eyes on his son, and Winifred, in the belief that she was better out of their way, hurried to Albinia's room, and was seen very little all the rest of the day.

She was spared, however, to walk to church the next morning with her husband, Lucy showing them the way, and being quiet and agreeable when repressed by Mr. Ferrars's presence. After church, Mr. Dusautoy overtook them to inquire after Mrs. Kendal, and to make a kind proposal of exchanging Sunday duty. He undertook to drive the ponies home on the morrow, begged for credentials for the clerk, and messages for Willie and Mary, and seemed highly pleased with the prospect of the holiday, as he called it, only entreating that Mrs. Ferrars would be so kind as to look in on 'Fanny,' if Mrs. Kendal could spare her.

'I thought,' said Winifred to her husband, 'that you would rather have exchanged a Sunday when Albinia is better able to

enjoy you?'

'That may yet be, but poor Kendal is so much depressed, that I do not like to leave him.'

'I have no patience with him!' cried Winifred; 'he does not seem to take the slightest pleasure in his baby, and he will hardly let poor Albinia do so either! Do you know, Maurice, it is as bad as I ever feared it would be. No, don't stop me, I must have it out. I always said he had no business to victimize her, and I am sure of it now! I believe this gloom of his has broken down her own dear sunny spirits! There she is—so unlike herself—so anxious and fidgety about her baby—will hardly take any one's word for his being as healthy and stout a child as I ever saw! And then, every other moment, she is restless about that boy—always asking where he is, or what he is doing. I don't see how she is ever to get well, while it goes on in this way! Mr. Kendal told me that Gilbert had been worrying and distressing her; and as to those girls, the eldest of them is intolerable with her airs, and the youngest—I asked her if she liked babies, and she growled, "No." Lucy said Gilbert was waiting in the passage for news of mamma, and she grunted, "All sham!" and that's the whole I have heard of her! He is bad enough in himself, but with such a train! My poor Albinia! If they are not the death of her, it will be lucky!'

'Well done, Winifred!'

'But, Maurice,' said his impetuous wife, in a curiously altered tone, 'are not you very unhappy about Albinia?'

'I shall leave you to find that out for me.'

'Then you are not?'

'I think Kendal thoroughly values and appreciates her, and is very uncomfortable without her.'

'I suppose so. People do miss a maid-of-all-work. I should not so much mind it, if she had been only *his* slave, but to be so to all those disagreeable children of his too! And with so little effect. Why can't he send them all to school?'

'Propose that to Albinia.'

'She did want the boy to go somewhere. I should not care where, so it were out of her way. What creatures they must be for her to have produced no more effect on them!'

'Poor Albinia! I am afraid it is a hard task: but these are still early days, and we see things at a disadvantage. We shall be able to judge whether there be really too great a strain on her spirits, and if so, I would talk to Kendal.'

'And I wonder what is to come of that. It seems to me like what John Smith calls singing psalms to a dead horse.'

'John Smith! I am glad you mentioned him; I shall desire Dusautoy to bring him here on Monday.'

'What! as poor Albinia would say, you can't exist a week without John Smith.'

'Even so. I want him to lay out a plan for draining the garden. That pond is intolerable. I suspect that all, yourself included, will become far more good-tempered in consequence.'

'A capital measure, but do you mean that Edmund Kendal is going to let you and John Smith drain his pond under his very

nose, and never find it out? I did not imagine him quite come to that.'

'Not *quite*,' said Maurice; 'it is with his free consent, and I believe he will be very glad to have it done without any trouble to himself. He said that Albinia *thought it damp*, and when I put a few sanatory facts before him, thanked me heartily, and seemed quite relieved. If they had only been in Sanscrit, they would have made the greater impression.'

'One comfort is, Maurice, that however provoking you are at first, you generally prove yourself reasonable at last, I am glad you are not Mr. Kendal.'

'Ah! it will have a fine effect on you to spend your Christmas-day tete-a-tete with him.'

Mrs. Ferrars's views underwent various modifications, like all hasty yet candid judgments. She took Mr. Kendal into favour when she found him placidly submitting to Miss Meadows's showers of words, in order to prevent her gaining access to his wife.

'Maria Meadows is a very well-meaning person,' he said afterwards; 'but I know of no worse infliction in a sick-room.'

'I wonder,' thought Winifred, 'whether he married to get rid of her. I should have thought it justifiable had it been any one but Albinia!'

The call on Mrs. Dusautoy was consoling. It was delightful to find how Albinia was loved and valued at the vicarage. Mrs. Dusautoy began by sending her as a message, John's first

exclamation on hearing of the event. 'Then she will never be of any more use.' In fact, she said, it was much to him like having a curate disabled, and she believed he could only be consoled by the hopes of a pattern christening, and of a nursery for his school-girls; but there Winifred shook her head, Fairmead had a prior claim, and Albinia had long had her eye upon a scholar of her own.

'I told John that she would! and he must bear it as he can,' laughed Mrs. Dusautoy; and she went on more seriously to say that her gratitude was beyond expression, not merely for the actual help, though that was much, but for the sympathy, the first encouragement they had met among their richer parishioners, and she spoke of the refreshment of the mirthfulness and playful manner, so as to convince Winifred that they had neither died away nor been everywhere wasted.

Winifred had no amenable patient. Weak and depressed as Albinia was, her restlessness and air of anxiety could not be appeased. There was a look of being constantly on the watch, and once, when her door was ajar, before Winifred was aware she exerted her voice to call Gilbert!

Pushing the door just wide enough to enter, and treading almost noiselessly, he came forward, looking from side to side as with a sense of guilt. She stretched out her hand and smiled, and he obeyed the movement that asked him to bend and kiss her, but still durst not speak.

'Let me have the baby,' she said.

Mrs. Ferrars laid it beside her, and held aloof. Gilbert's eyes were fixed intently on it.

'Yes, Gilbert,' Albinia said, 'I know what you will feel for him. He can't be what you once had—but oh, Gilbert, you will do all that an elder brother can to make him like Edmund!'

Gilbert wrung her fingers, and ventured to stoop down to kiss the little red forehead. The tears were running down his cheeks, and he could not speak.

'If your father might only say the same of him! that he never grieved him!' said Albinia; 'but oh, Gilbert—example,' and then, pausing and gazing searchingly in his face, 'You have not told papa.'

'No,' whispered Gilbert.

'Winifred,' said Albinia, 'would you be so kind as to ask papa to come?'

Winifred was forced to obey, though feeling much to blame as Mr. Kendal rose with a sigh of uneasiness. Gilbert still stood with his hand clasped in Albinia's, and she held it while her weak voice made the full confession for him, and assured his father of his shame and sorrow. There needed no such assurance, his whole demeanour had been sorrow all these dreary days, and Mr. Kendal could not but forgive, though his eye spoke deep grief.

'I could not refuse pardon thus asked,' he said. 'Oh, Gilbert, that I could hope this were the beginning of a new course!'

Albinia looked from Gilbert to his little brother, and back again to Gilbert.

'It *shall* be,' she said, and Gilbert's resolution was perhaps the more sincere that he spoke no word.

'Poor boy,' said Albinia, half to herself and half aloud, 'I think I feel more strong to love and to help him!'

That interview was a dangerous experiment, and she suffered for it. As her brother said, instead of having too little life, she had too much, and could not let herself rest; she had never cultivated the art of being still, and when she was weak, she could not be calm.

Still the strength of her constitution staved off the nervous fever of her spirits, and though she was not at all a comfortable patient, she made a certain degree of progress, so that though it was not easy to call her better, she was not quite so ill, and grew less irrational in her solicitude, and more open to other ideas. 'Do you know, Winifred,' she said one day, 'I have been thinking myself at Fairmead till I almost believed I heard John Smith's voice under the window.'

Winifred was obliged to look out at the window to hide her smile. Maurice, who was standing on the lawn with the very John Smith, beckoned to her, and she went down to hear his plans. He was wanted at home the next day, and asked whether she thought he had better take Gilbert with him. 'It is the wisest thing that has been said yet!' exclaimed she. 'Now I shall have a chance for Albinia!' and accordingly, Mr. Kendal having given a gracious and grateful consent, Albinia was informed; but Winifred thought her almost perverse when a perturbed look

came over her, and she said, 'It is very kind in Maurice, but I must speak to him.'

He was struck by the worn, restless expression of her features, so unlike the calm contented repose of a young mother, and when she spoke to him, her first word was of Gilbert. 'Maurice, it is so kind, I know you will make him happy—but oh! take care—he is so delicate—indeed, he is—don't let him get wet through.'

Maurice promised, but Albinia resumed with minutiae of directions, ending with, 'Oh! if he should get hurt or into any mischief, what should we do? Pray, take care, Maurice, you are not used to such delicate boys.'

'My dear, I think you may rely on me.'

'Yes, but you will not be too strict with him—' and more was following, when her brother said, 'I promise you to make him my special charge. I like the boy very much. I think you may be reasonable, and trust him with me, without so much agitation. You have not let me see my own nephew yet.'

Albinia looked with her wistful piteous face at her brother as he took in his arms her noble-looking fair infant.

'You are a great fellow indeed, sir,' said his uncle. 'Now if I were your mamma, I would be proud of you, rather than—'

'I am afraid!' said Albinia, in a sudden low whisper.

He looked at her anxiously.

'Let me have him,' she said; then as Maurice bent over her, and she hastily gathered the babe into her arms, she whispered in quick, low, faint accents, 'Do you know how many children have

been born in this house?'

Mr. Ferrars understood her, he too had seen the catalogue in the church, and guessed that the phantoms of her boy's dead brethren dwelt on her imagination, forbidding her to rejoice in him hopefully. He tried to say something encouraging of the child's appearance, but she would not let him go on. 'I know,' she said, 'he is so now—but—' then catching her breath again and speaking very low, 'his father does not dare look at him—I see that he is sorry for me—Oh, Maurice, it will come, and I shall be able to do nothing!'

Maurice felt his lip quivering as his sister's voice became choked—the sister to whom he had once been the whole world, and who still could pour out her inmost heart more freely to him than to any other. But it was a time for grave authority, and though he spoke gently, it was almost sternly.

'Albinia, this is not right. It is not thankful or trustful. No, do not cry, but listen to me. Your child is as likely to do well as any child in the world, but nothing is so likely to do him harm as your want of composure.'

'I tell myself so,' said Albinia, 'but there is no helping it.'

'Yes, there is. Make it your duty to keep yourself still, and not be troubled about what may or may not happen, but be glad of the present pleasure.'

'Don't you think I am?' said Albinia, half smiling; 'so glad, that I grow frightened at myself, and—' As if fain to leave the subject, she added, 'And it is what you don't understand, Maurice, but he

can't be the first to Edmund as he is to me—never—and when I get almost jealous for him, I think of Gilbert and the girls—and oh! there is so much to do for them—they want a mother so much—and Winifred wont let me see them, or tell me about them!'

She had grown piteous and incoherent, and a glance from Winifred told him, 'this is always the way.'

'My dear,' he said, 'you will never be fit to attend to them if you do not use this present time rightly. You may hurt your health, and still more certainly, you will go to work fretfully and impetuously. If you have a busy life, the more reason to learn to be tranquil. Calm is forced on you now, and if you give way to useless nervous brooding over the work you are obliged to lay aside for a time, you have no right to hope that you will either have judgment or temper for your tasks.'

'But how am I to keep from thinking, Maurice? The weaker I am, the more I think.'

'Are you dutiful as to what Winifred there thinks wisest? Ah! Albinia, you want to learn, as poor Queen Anne of Austria did, that docility in illness may be self-resignation into higher Hands. Perhaps you despise it, but it is no mean exercise of strength and resolution to be still.'

Albinia looked at him as if receiving a new idea.

'And,' he added, bending nearer her face, and speaking lower, 'when you pray, let them be hearty faithful prayers that God's hand may be over your child—your children, not half-hearted faithless ones, that He may work out your will in them.'

'Oh, Maurice, how did you know? But you are not going? I have so much to talk over with you.'

'Yes, I must go; and you must be still. Indeed I will watch over Gilbert as though he were mine. Yes, even more. Don't speak again, Albinia, I desire you will not. Good-bye.'

That lecture had been the most wholesome treatment she had yet received; she ceased to give way without effort to restless thoughts and cares, and was much less refractory.

When at last Lucy and Sophia were admitted, Winifred found perils that she had not anticipated. Lucy was indeed supremely and girlishly happy: but it was Sophy whose eye Albinia sought with anxiety, and that eye was averted. Her cheek was cold like that of a doll when Albinia touched it eagerly with her lips; and when Lucy admonished her to kiss the dear little brother, she fairly turned and ran out of the room.

'Poor Sophy!' said Lucy. 'Never mind her, mamma, but she is odder than ever, since baby has been born. When Eweretta came up and told us, she hid her face and cried; and when grandmamma wanted to make us promise to love him with all our hearts, and not make any difference, she would only say, "I wont!"'

'We will leave him to take care of that, Lucy,' said Albinia. But though she spoke cheerfully, Winifred was not surprised, after a little interval, to hear sounds like stifled weeping.

Almost every home subject was so dangerous, that whenever Mrs. Ferrars wanted to make cheerful, innocent conversation,

she began to talk of her visit to Ireland and the beautiful Galway coast, and the O'Mores of Ballymakilty, till Albinia grew quite sick of the names of the whole clan of thirty-six cousins, and thought, with her aunts, that Winifred was too Irish. Yet, at any other time, the histories would have made her sometimes laugh, and sometimes cry, but the world was sadly out of joint with her.

There was a sudden change when, for the first time her eye rested on the lawn, and she beheld the work of drainage. The light glanced in her eye, the colour rose on her cheek, and she exclaimed, 'How kind of Edmund!'

Winifred must needs give her husband his share. 'Ah! you would never have had it done without Maurice.'

'Yes,' said Albinia, 'Edmund has been out of the way of such things, but he consented, you know.' Then as her eyes grew liquid, 'A duck pond is a funny subject for sentiment, but oh! if you knew what that place has been to my imagination from the first, and how the wreaths of mist have wound themselves into spectres in my dreams, and stretched out white shrouds now for one, now for the other!' and she shuddered.

'And you have gone through all this and never spoken. No wonder your nerves and spirits were tried.'

'I did speak at first,' said Albinia; 'but I thought Edmund did not hear, or thought it nonsense, and so did I at times. But you see he did attend; he always does, you see, at the right time. It was only my impatience.'

'I suspect Maurice and John Smith had more to do with it,'

said Winifred.

'Well, we wont quarrel about that,' said Albinia. 'I only know that whoever brought it about has taken the heaviest weight off my mind that has been there yet.'

In truth, the terror, half real, half imaginary, had been a sorer burthen than all the positive cares for those unruly children, or their silent, melancholy father; and the relief told in all ways—above all, in the peace with which she began to regard her child. Still she would provoke Winifred by bestowing all her gratitude on Mr. Kendal, who began to be persuaded that he had made an heroic exertion.

Winifred had been somewhat scandalized by discovering Albinia's deficiencies in the furniture development. She was too active and stirring, and too fond of out-of-door occupation, to regard interior decoration as one of the domestic graces, 'her nest was rather that of the ostrich than the chaffinch,' as Winifred told her on the discovery that her morning-room had been used for no other purpose than as a deposit for all the books, wedding presents, lumber, etc., which she had never had leisure to arrange.

'You might be more civil,' answered Albinia. 'Remember that the ringdove never made half such a fuss about her nest as the magpie.'

'Well, I am glad you have found some likeness in yourself to a dove,' rejoined Winifred.

Mrs. Ferrars set vigorously to work with Lucy, and rendered the room so pretty and pleasant, that Lucy pronounced that it

must be called nothing but the boudoir, for it was a perfect little bijou.

Albinia was laid on the sofa by the sparkling fire, by her side the little cot, and in her hand a most happy affectionate letter from Gilbert, detailing the Fairmead Christmas festivities. She felt the invigoration of change of room, admired and was grateful for Winifred's work, and looked so fair and bright, so tranquil and so contented, that her sister and husband could not help pausing to contemplate her as an absolutely new creature in a state of quiescence.

It did not last long, and Mrs. Ferrars felt herself the unwilling culprit. Attracted by sounds in the hall, she found the two girls receiving from the hands of Genevieve Durant a pretty basket choicely adorned with sprays of myrtle, saying mamma would be much obliged, and they would take it up at once; Genevieve should take home her basket, and down plunged their hands regardless of the garniture.

Genevieve's disappointed look caught Winifred's attention, and springing forward she exclaimed, 'You shall come to Mrs. Kendal yourself, my dear. She must see your pretty basket,' and yourself, she could have added, as she met the grateful glitter of the dark eyes.

Lucy remonstrated that mamma had seen no one yet, not even Aunt Maria, but Mrs. Ferrars would not listen, and treading airily, yet with reverence that would have befitted a royal palace, Genevieve was ushered upstairs, and with heartfelt sweetness,

and timid grace, presented her etrennes.

Under the fragrant sprays lay a small white-paper parcel, tied with narrow blue satin bows, such as no English fingers could accomplish, and within was a little frock-body, exquisitely embroidered, with a breastplate of actual point lace in a pattern like frostwork on the windows. It was such work as Madame Belmarche had learnt in a convent in times of history, and poor little Genevieve had almost worn out her black eyes on this piece of homage to her dear Mrs. Kendal, grieving only that she had not been able to add the length of robe needed to complete her gift.

Albinia's kiss was recompense beyond her dreams, and she fairly cried for joy when she was told that she should come and help to dress the babe in it for his christening. Mrs. Ferrars would walk out with her at once to buy a sufficiency of cambric for the mighty skirts.

That visit was indeed nothing but pleasure, but Mrs. Ferrars had not calculated on contingencies and family punctilios. She forgot that it would be a mortal offence to let in any one rather than Miss Meadows; but the rest of the family were so well aware of it, that when she returned she heard a perfect sparrow's-nest of voices—Lucy's pert and eager, Miss Meadows's injured and shrill, and Albinia's, alas! thin and loud, half sarcasm, half fret.

There sat Aunt Maria fidgeting in the arm-chair; Lucy stood by the fire; Albinia's countenance sadly different from what it had been in the morning—weary, impatient, and excited, all that it ought not to be!

Winifred would have cleared the room at once, but this was not easy, and poor Albinia was so far gone as to be determined on finishing that endless thing, an altercation, so all three began explaining and appealing at once.

It seemed that Mrs. Osborn was requiting Mrs. Kendal's neglect in not having inquired after her when the Admiral's sister's husband died, by the omission of inquiries at present; whereat Albinia laughed a feeble, overdone giggle, and observed that she believed Mrs. Osborn knew all that passed in Willow Lawn better than the inmates; and Lucy deposed that Sophy and Loo were together every day, though Sophy knew mamma did not like it. Miss Meadows said if reparation were not made, the Osborns had expressed their intention of omitting Lucy and Sophy from their Twelfth-day party.

To this Albinia pettishly replied that the girls were to go to no Christmas parties without her; Miss Meadows had taken it very much to heart, and Lucy was declaiming against mamma making any condescension to Mrs. Osborn, or herself being supposed to care for 'the Osborn's parties,' where the boys were so rude and vulgar, the girls so boisterous, and the dancing a mere romp. Sophy might like it, but she never did!

Miss Meadows was hurt by her niece's defection, and had come to 'Oh, very well,' and 'things were altered,' and 'people used to be grateful to old friends, but there were changes.' And thereby Lucy grew personal as to the manners of the Osborns, while Albinia defended herself against the being grand

or exclusive, but it was her duty to do what she thought right for the children! Yes, Miss Meadows was quite aware—only grandmamma was so nervous about poor dear Gibbie missing his Christmas dinner for the first time—being absent—Mrs. Ferrars would take great care, but damp stockings and all—

Winifred endeavoured to stem the tide of words, but in vain, between the meandering incoherency of the one, and the nervous rapidity of the other, and they had both set off again on this fresh score, when in despair she ran downstairs, rapped at the study door, and cried, 'Mr. Kendal, Mr. Kendal, will you not come! I can't get Miss Meadows out of Albinia's room.'

Forth came Mr. Kendal, walked straight upstairs, and stood in full majesty on the threshold. Holding out his hand to Maria with grave courtesy, he thanked her for coming to see his wife, but at the same time handed her down, saw her out safely at the hall door, and Lucy into the drawing-room.

It was a pity that he had not returned to Albinia's room, for she was too much excited to be composed without authority. First, she scolded Winifred; 'it was the thing she most wished to avoid, that he should fancy her teased by anything the Meadowses could say,' and she laughed, and protested she never was vexed, such absurdity did not hurt her in the least.

'It has tired you, though,' said Winifred. 'Lie quite down and sleep.'

Of course, however, Albinia would not believe that she was tired, and began to talk of the Osborns and their party—she was

annoyed at the being thought too fine. 'If it were not such a penance, and if you would not be gone home, I really would ask you to take the girls, Winifred.'

'I shall not be gone home.'

'Yes, you will. I am well, and every one wants you.'

'Did you not hear Willie's complimentary message, that he is never naughty now, because Gilbert makes him so happy?'

'But, Winifred, the penny club! The people must have their things.'

'They can wait, or—'

'It is very well for us to talk of waiting,' cried Albinia, 'but how should we like a frosty night without cloaks, or blankets, or fire? I did not think it of you, Winifred. It is the first winter I have been away from my poor old dames, and I did think you would have cared for them.'

And thereupon her overwrought spirits gave way in a flood of tears, as she angrily averted her face from her sister, who could have cried too, not at the injustice, but with compassion and perplexity lest there should be an equally violent reaction either of remorse or of mirth.

It must be confessed that Albinia was very much the creature of health. Never having been ill before, the depression had been so new that it broke her completely down; convalescence made her fractious.

Recovery, however, filled her with such an ecstasy of animal spirits that her time seemed to be entirely passed in happiness

or in sleep, and cares appeared to have lost all power. It was so sudden a change that Winifred was startled, though it was a very pleasant one, and she did not reflect that this was as far from the calm, self-restrained, meditative tranquillity enjoined by Maurice, as had been the previous restless, querulous state. Both were body more than mind, but Mrs. Ferrars was much more ready to be merry with Albinia than to moralize about her. And it was droll that the penny club was one of the first stages in her revival.

'Oh, mamma,' cried Lucy, flying in, 'Mr. Dusautoy is at the door. There is such a to do. All the women have been getting gin with their penny club tickets, and Mrs. Brock has been stealing the money, and Mr. Dusautoy wants to know if you paid up three-and-fourpence for the Hancock children.'

Albinia instantly invited Mr. Dusautoy to explain in person, and he entered, hearty and pleasant as ever, but in great haste, for he had left his Fanny keeping the peace between five angry women, while he came out to collect evidence.

The Bayford clothing-club payments were collected by Mrs. Brock, the sexton's wife, and distributed by tickets to be produced at the various shops in the town. Mrs. Brock had detected some women exchanging their tickets for gin, and the offending parties retaliated by accusing her of embezzling the subscriptions, both parties launching into the usual amount of personalities and exaggerations.

Albinia's testimony cleared Mrs. Brock as to the three-and-

fourpence, but she 'snuffed the battle from afar,' and rushed into a scheme of taking the clothing-club into her own hands, collecting the pence, having the goods from London, and selling them herself—she would propose it on the very first opportunity to the Dusautoys. Winifred asked if she had not a good deal on her hands already.

'My dear, I have the work in me of a young giant.'

'And will Mr. Kendal like it?'

'He would never find it out unless I told him, and very possibly not then. Six months hence, perhaps, he may tell me he is glad that Lucy is inclined to useful pursuits, and that *is* approval, Winifred, much more than if I went and worried him about every little petty woman's matter.'

'Every one to her taste,' thought Winifred, who had begun to regard Mr. and Mrs. Kendal in the same relation as the king and queen at chess.

The day before the christening, Mr. Ferrars brought back Gilbert and his own little Willie.

Through all the interchange of greetings, Gilbert would hardly let go Albinia's hand, and the moment her attention was free, he earnestly whispered, 'May I see my brother?'

She took him upstairs at once. 'Let me look a little while,' he said, hanging over the child with a sort of hungry fondness and curiosity. 'My brother! my brother!' he repeated. 'It has rung in my ears every morning that I can say my brother once more, till I have feared it was a dream.'

It was the sympathy Albinia cared for, come back again! 'I hope he will be a good brother to you,' she said.

'He must be good! he can't help it! He has you!' said Gilbert. 'See, he is opening his eyes—oh! how blue! May I touch him?'

'To be sure you may. He is not sugar,' said Albinia, laughing. 'There—make an arm; you may have him if you like. Your left arm, you awkward man. Yes, that is right. You will do quite as well as I, who never touched a baby till Willie was born. There, sir, how do you like your brother Gilbert?'

Gilbert held him reverently, and gave him back with a sigh when he seemed to have satiated his gaze and touch, and convinced himself that his new possession was substantial. 'I say,' he added wistfully, 'did you think *that* name would bring ill-luck?

She knew the name he meant, and answered, 'No, but your father could not have borne it. Besides, Gibbie, we would not think him *instead* of Edmund. No, he shall learn, to look up to his other brother as you do, and look to meeting and knowing him some day.'

Gilbert shivered at this, and made no opposition to her carrying him downstairs to his uncle, and then Gilbert hurried off for the basket of snowdrops that he had gathered early, from a favourite spot at Fairmead. That short absence seemed to have added double force to his affection; he could hardly bear to be away from her, and every moment when he could gain her ear, poured histories of the delights of Fairmead, where Mr. Ferrars had devoted himself to his amusement, and had made

him happier than perhaps he had ever been in his life—he had had a taste of shooting, of skating, of snowballing—he had been useful and important in the village feasts, had dined twice at Colonel Bury's, and felt himself many degrees nearer manhood.

To hear of her old haunts and friends from such enthusiastic lips, delighted Albinia, and her felicity with her baby, with Mr. Kendal, with her brother and his little son, was one of the brightest things in all the world—the fresh young loving bloom of her matronhood was even sweeter and more beautiful than her girlish days.

Poor little frail, blighted Mrs. Dusautoy! Winifred could not help wondering if the contrast pained her, when in all the glory of her motherly thankfulness, Albinia carried her beautiful newly-christened Maurice Ferrars Kendal to the vicarage to show him off, lying so open-chested and dignified, in Genevieve's pretty work, with a sort of manly serenity already dawning on his baby brow.

Winifred need not have pitied the little lady. She would not have changed with Mrs. Kendal—no, not for that perfect health, usefulness, value—nor even for such a baby as that. No, indeed! She loved—she rejoiced in all her friend's sweet and precious gifts—but Mrs. Dusautoy had one gift that she prized above all.

Even grandmamma and Aunt Maria did justice to Master Maurice's attractions, at least in public, though it came round that Miss Meadows did not admire fat children, and when he had once been seen in Lucy's arms, an alarm arose that Mrs. Kendal would

allow the girls to carry him about, till his weight made them crooked, but Albinia was too joyous to take their displeasure to heart, and it only served her for something to laugh at.

They had a very happy christening party, chiefly juvenile, in honour of little Willie and of Francis and Emily Nugent. Albinia was so radiantly lively and good-natured, and her assistants, Winifred, Maurice, and Mr. Dusautoy, so kind, so droll, so inventive, that even Aunt Maria forgot herself in enjoyment and novelty, and was like a different person. Mr. Kendal looked at her with a pleased sad wonder, and told his wife it reminded him of what she had been when she was nearly the prettiest girl at Bayford. Gilbert devoted himself as usual to making Genevieve feel welcome; and she had likewise Willie Ferrars and Francis Nugent at her feet. Neither urchin would sit two inches away from her all the evening, and in all games she was obliged to obviate jealousies by being partner to both at once. Where there was no one to oppress her, she came out with all her natural grace and vivacity, and people of a larger growth than her little admirers were charmed with her.

Lucy was obliging, ready, and useful, and looked very pretty, the only blot was the heavy dulness of poor Sophy, who seemed resolved to take pleasure in nothing. Winifred varied in opinion whether her moodiness arose from ill-health, or from jealousy of her little brother. This latter Albinia would not believe, especially as she saw that little Maurice's blue eyes were magnets that held the silent Sophy fast, but surly denials silenced her interrogations

as to illness, and made her content to acquiesce in Lucy's explanation that Sophy was only cross because the Osborns and Drurys were not asked.

Albinia did her duty handsomely by the two families a day or two after, for whatever reports might come round, they were always ready to receive her advances, and she only took notice of what she saw, instead of what she heard. Her brother helped Mr. Kendal through the party, and Winifred made a discovery that excited her more than Albinia thought warranted by any fact relating to the horde of Irish cousins.

'Only think, Albinia, I have found out that poor Ellen O'More is Mr. Goldsmith's sister!'

'Indeed! But I am afraid I don't remember which Ellen O'More is. You know I never undertake to recollect any but your real cousins out of the thirty-six.'

'For shame, Albinia, I have so often told you about Ellen. I'm sure you can't forget. Her husband is my sister's brother-in-law's cousin.'

'Oh, Winifred, Winifred!'

'But I tell you, her husband is the third son of old Mr. O'More of Ballymakilty, and was in the army.'

'Oh! the half-pay officer with the twelve children in the cottage on the estate.'

'There now, I did think you would care when I told you of a soldier, a Waterloo man too, and you only call him a half-pay officer!'

'I do remember,' said Albinia, taking a little pity, 'that you used to be sorry for his good little English wife.'

'Of course. I knew she had married him very imprudently, but she has struggled gallantly with ill-health, and poverty, and Irish recklessness. I quite venerate her, and it seems these Goldsmiths had so far cast her off that they had no notion of the extent of her troubles.'

'Just like them,' said Albinia. 'Is that the reason you wish me to make the most of the connexion? Let me see, my sister-in-law's sister's wife—no, husband's brother's uncle, eh?'

'I don't want you to do anything,' said Winifred, a little hurt, 'only if you had seen Ellen's patient face you would be interested in her.'

'Well, I am interested, you know I am, Winifred. I hope you interested our respected banker, which would be more to the purpose.'

'I think I did,' said Winifred; 'at least he said "poor Ellen" once or twice. I don't want him to do anything for the captain, you might give him a thousand pounds and he would never be the better for it: but that fourth, boy, Ulick, is without exception the nicest fellow I ever saw in my life—so devoted to his mother, so much more considerate and self-denying than any of the others, and very clever. Maurice examined him and was quite astonished. We did get him sent to St. Columba for the present, but whether they will keep him there no one can guess, and it is the greatest pity he should run to waste. I told Mr. Goldsmith all

this, and I really think he seemed to attend. I wonder if it will work.'

Albinia was by this time anxious that it should take effect, and they agreed that an old bachelor banker and his sister, both past sixty, were the very people to adopt a promising nephew.

What had become of the multitude of things which Albinia had to discuss with her brother? The floodtide of bliss had floated her over all the stumbling-blocks and shoals that the ebb had disclosed, and she had absolutely forgotten all the perplexities that had seemed so trying. Even when she sought a private interview to talk to him about Gilbert, it was in full security of hearing the praises of her darling.

'A nice boy, a very nice boy,' returned Maurice; 'most amiable and intelligent, and particularly engaging, from his feeling being so much on the surface.'

'Nothing can be more sincere and genuine,' she cried, as if this fell a little flat.

'Certainly not, at the time.'

'Always!' exclaimed Albinia. 'You must not distrust him because he is not like you or Fred, and has never been hardened and taught reserve by rude boys. Nothing was ever more real than his affection, poor dear boy,' and the tears thrilled to her eyes.

'No, and it is much to his credit. His love and gratitude to you are quite touching, poor fellow; but the worst of it is that I am afraid he is very timid, both physically and morally.'

Often as she had experienced this truth, the soldier's daughter

could not bear to avow it, and she answered hastily, 'He has never been braced or trained; he was always ill till within the last few years—coddling at first, neglect afterwards, he has it all to learn, and it is too late for school.'

'Yes, he is too old to be laughed at or bullied out of cowardice. Indeed, I doubt whether there ever would have been substance enough for much wear and tear.'

'I know you have a turn for riotous, obstinate boys! You want Willie to be another Fred,' said Albinia, like an old hen, ruffling up her feathers. 'You think a boy can't be good for anything unless he is a universal plague!'

'I wonder what you will do with your own son,' said Maurice, amused, 'since you take Gilbert's part so fiercely.'

'I trust my boy will never be as much to be pitied as his brother,' said Albinia, with tenderness that accused her petulance. 'At least he can never be a lonely twin with that sore spot in his heart. Oh, Maurice, how can any one help dealing gently with my poor Gibbie?'

'Gentle dealing is the very thing he wants,' said Mr. Ferrars; 'and I am thinking how to find it for him. How did his going to Traversham fail?'

'I don't know; Edmund did not like to send him without having seen Traversham, and I could not go. But I don't think there is any need for his going away. His father has been quite enough tormented about it, and I can manage him very well now. He is always good and happy with me. I mean to try to ride with him,

and I have promised to teach him music, and we shall garden. Never fear, I will employ him and keep him out of mischief—it is all pleasure to me.'

'And pray what are your daughters and baby to do, while you are galloping after Gilbert?'

'Oh! I'll manage. We can all do things together. Come, Maurice, I wont have Edmund teased, and I can't bear parting with any of them, or think that any strange man can treat Gibbie as I should.'

Maurice was edified by his sister's warm-hearted weakness, but not at all inclined to let 'Edmund' escape a 'teasing.'

Mr. Kendal's first impulse always was to find a sufficient plea for doing nothing. If Gilbert was to go to India, it was not worth while to give him a classical education.

'Is he to go to India? Albinia had not told me so.'

'I thought she was aware of it; but possibly I may not have mentioned it. It has been an understood thing ever since I came home. He will have a good deal of the property in this place, but he had better have seen something of the world. Bayford is no place for a man to settle down in too young.'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Ferrars, repressing a smile. 'Then are you thinking of sending him to Haileybury?'

He was pronounced too young, besides, it was explained that his destination in India was unfixed. On going home it had been a kind of promise that one of the twin brothers should have an appointment in the civil service, the other should enter the

bank of Kendal and Kendal, and the survivor was unconsciously suspended between these alternatives, while the doubt served as a convenient protection to his father from making up his mind to prepare him for either of these or for anything else.

The prompt Ferrars temper could bear it no longer, and Maurice spoke out. 'I'll tell you what, Kendal, it is time to attend to your own concerns. If you choose to let your son run to ruin, because you will not exert yourself to remove him from temptation, I shall not stand by to see my sister worn out with making efforts to save him. She is willing and devoted, she fancies she could work day and night to preserve him, and she does it with all her heart; but it is not woman's work, she cannot do it, and it is not fit to leave it to her. When Gilbert has broken her heart as well as yours, and left an evil example to his brother, then you will feel what it is to have kept a lad whom you know to be well disposed, but weak as water, in the very midst of contamination, and to have left your young, inexperienced wife to struggle alone to save him. If you are unwarned by the experience of last autumn and winter, I could not pity you, whatever might happen.'

Maurice, who had run on the longer because Mr. Kendal did not answer immediately, was shocked at his own impetuosity; but a rattling peal of thunder was not more than was requisite.

'I believe you are right,' Mr. Kendal said. 'I was to blame for leaving him so entirely to Albinia; but she is very fond of him, and is one who will never be induced to spare herself, and

there were considerations. However, she shall be relieved at once. What do you recommend?'

Mr. Ferrars actually made Mr. Kendal promise to set out for Traversham with him next morning, thirty miles by the railway, to inspect Mr. Downton and his pupils.

Albinia had just sense enough not to object, though the discovery of the Indian plans was such a blow to her that she could not be consoled by all her husband's representations of the advantages Gilbert would derive there, and of his belief that the Kendal constitution always derived strength from a hot climate, and that to himself going to India seemed going home. She took refuge in the hope that between the two Indian stools Gilbert might fall upon one of the professions which she thought alone worthy of man's attention, the clerical or the military.

Under Maurice's escort, Mr. Kendal greatly enjoyed his expedition; liked Traversham, was satisfied with the looks of the pupils, and very much pleased with the tutor, whom he even begged to come to Bayford for a conference with Mrs. Kendal, and this was received by her as no small kindness. She was delighted with Mr. Downton, and felt as if Gilbert could be safely trusted in his charge; nor was Gilbert himself reluctant. He was glad to escape from his tempter, and to begin a new life, and though he hung about Mrs. Kendal, and implored her to write often, and always tell him about his little brother—nay, though he cried like a child at the last, yet still he was happy and satisfied to go, and to break the painful fetters which had held him so long.

And though Albinia likewise shed some parting tears, she could not but own that she was glad to have him in trustworthy hands; and as to the additional time thus gained, it was disposed of in a million of bright plans for every one's service—daughters, baby, parish, school, classes, clubs, neighbours. It almost made Winifred giddy to hear how much she had undertaken, and yet with what zest she talked and acted.

'There's your victim, Winifred,' said Maurice, as they drove away, and looked back at Albinia, scandalizing Bayford by standing in the open gateway, her face all smiles of cheerful parting, the sun and wind making merry with her chestnut curls, her baby in one arm, the other held up to wave her farewell.

'That child will catch cold,' began Winifred, turning to sign her to go in. 'Well,' she continued, 'after all, I believe some people like an idol that sits quiet to be worshipped! To be sure she must want to beat him sometimes, as the Africans do their gods. But, on the whole, her sentiment of reverence is satisfied, and she likes the acting for herself, and reigning absolute. Yes, she is quite happy—why do you look doubtful? Don't you admire her?'

'From my heart.'

'Then why do you doubt? Do you expect her to do anything?'

'A little too much of everything.'

CHAPTER VIII

Yes! Albinia was excessively happy. Her naturally high spirits were enhanced by the enjoyment of recovery, and reaction, from her former depression. Since the great stroke of the drainage, every one looked better, and her pride in her babe was without a drawback. He seemed to have inherited her vigour and superabundance of life, and 'that first wondrous spring to all but babes unknown,' was in him unusually rapid, so that he was a marvel of fair stateliness, size, strength, and intelligence, so unlike the little blighted buds which had been wont to fade at Willow Lawn, that his father watched him with silent, wondering affection, and his eldest sister was unmerciful in her descriptions of his progress; while even Sophia had not been proof against his smiles, and was proud to be allowed to carry him about and fondle him.

Neither was Mr. Kendal's reserve the trial that it had once been. After having become habituated to it as a necessary idiosyncrasy, she had become rather proud of his lofty inaccessibility. Besides, her brother's visit, her recovery, and the renewed hope and joy in this promising child, had not been without effect in rousing him from his apathy. He was less inclined to shun his fellow-creatures, had become friendly with the Vicar, and had even let Albinia take him into Mrs. Dusautoy's drawing-room, where he had been fairly happy. Having once

begun taking his wife out in the carriage, he found this much more agreeable than his solitary ride, and was in the condition to which Albinia had once imagined it possible to bring him, in which gentle means and wholesome influence might lead him imperceptibly out of his morbid habits of self-absorption.

Unfortunately, in the flush of blitheness and whirl of activity, Albinia failed to perceive the relative importance of objects, and he had taught her to believe herself so little necessary to him that she had not learnt to make her pursuits and occupations subservient to his convenience. As long as the drive took place regularly, all was well, but he caught a severe cold, which lasted even to the setting in of the east winds, the yearly misery of a man who hardly granted that India was over-hot. Though Albinia had removed much listing, and opened various doors and windows, he made no complaints, but did his best to keep the obnoxious fresh air out of his study, and seldom crossed the threshold thereof but with a shiver.

His favourite atmosphere was quite enough to account for a return of the old mood, but Albinia had no time to perceive that it might have been prevented, or at least mitigated.

Few even of the wisest women are fit for authority and liberty so little restrained, and happily it seldom falls to the lot of such as have not previously been chastened by a life-long affliction. But Mrs. Kendal, at twenty-four, with the consequence conferred by marriage, and by her superiority of manners and birth, was left as unchecked and almost as irresponsible as if she had been

single or a widow, and was solely guided by the impulses of her own character, noble and highly principled, but like most zealous dispositions, without balance and without repose.

Ballast had been given at first by bashfulness, disappointment, and anxiety, but she had been freed from her troubles with Gilbert, had gained confidence in herself, and had taken her position at Bayford. She was beloved, esteemed, and trusted in her own set, and though elsewhere she might not be liked, yet she was deferred to, could not easily be quarrelled with, so that she met with little opposition, and did not care for such as she did meet. In fact, very few persons had so much of their own way as Mrs. Kendal.

She was generally in her nursery at a much earlier hour than an old-established nurse would have tolerated, but the little Susan, promoted from Fairmead school and nursery, was trained in energetic habits. In passing the doors of the young ladies' rooms, Albinia gave a call which she had taught them not to resist, for, like all strong persons, she thought 'early to rise' the only way to health, wealth, or wisdom. Much work had been despatched before breakfast, after which, on two days in the week, Albinia and Lucy went to church. Sophy never volunteered to accompany them, and Albinia was the less inclined to press her, because her attitudes and attention on Sunday were far from satisfactory. On Tuesday and Thursday Albinia had a class at school, and so, likewise, had Lucy, who kept a jealous watch over every stray necklace and curl, and had begun thoroughly to enjoy the

importance and bustle of charity. She was a useful assistant in the penny club and lending library, which occupied Albinia on other mornings in the week, until the hour when she came in for the girls' studies. After luncheon, she enjoyed the company of little Maurice, who indeed pervaded all her home doings and thoughts, for she had a great gift of doing everything at once.

A sharp constitutional walk was taken in the afternoon. She thought no one could look drooping or dejected but from the air of the valley, and that no cure was equal to rushing straight up one hill and on to the next, always walking rapidly, with a springy buoyant step, and surprised at any one who lagged behind. Parochial cares, visits, singing classes, lessons to Sunday-school teachers, &c., filled up the rest of the day. She had an endless number of 'excellent plans,' on which she always acted instantly, and which kept her in a state of perpetual haste. Poor Mrs. Dusautoy had almost learnt to dread her flashing into the room, full of some parish matter, and flashing out again before the invalid felt as if the subject had been fairly entered on, or her sitting down to impress some project with overpowering eagerness that generally carried away the Vicar into grateful consent and admiring approval, while his wife was feeling doubtful, suspecting her hesitation of being ungracious, or blaming herself for not liking the little she could do to be taken out of her hands.

There was nothing more hateful to Albinia than dawdling. She left the girls' choice of employments, but insisted on their being

veritably occupied, and many a time did she encounter a killing glance from Sophia for attacking her listless, moody position in her chair, or saying, in clear, alert tones, 'My dear, when you read, read, when you work, work. When you fix your eye in that way, you are doing neither.'

Lucy's brisk, active disposition, and great good-humour, had responded to this treatment; she had been obliging, instead of officious; repeated checks had improved her taste; her love of petty bustle was directed to better objects, and though nothing could make her intellectual or deep, she was a really pleasant assistant and companion, and no one, except grandmamma, who thought her perfect before, could fail to perceive how much more lady-like her tones, manners, and appearance had become.

The results with Sophy had been directly the reverse. At first she had followed her sister's lead, except that she was always sincere, and often sulky; but the more Lucy had yielded to Albinia's moulding, the more had Sophy diverged from her, as if out of the very spirit of contradiction. Her intervals of childish nonsense had well nigh disappeared; her indifference to lessons was greater than ever, though she devoured every book that came in her way in a silent, but absorbed manner, a good deal like her father. Tales and stories were not often within her reach, but her appetite seemed to be universal, and Albinia saw her reading old-fashioned standard poetry—such as she had never herself assailed—and books of history, travels, or metaphysics. She wondered whether the girl derived any pleasure

from them, or whether they were only a shield for doing nothing; but no inquiry produced an answer, and if Sophy remembered anything of them, it was not with the memory used in lesson-time. The attachment to Louisa Osborn was pertinacious and unaccountable in a person who could have so little in common with that young lady, and there was nothing comfortable about her except her fondness for her little brother, and that really seemed to be against her will. Her voice was less hoarse and gruff since the pond had been no more, and she had acquired an expression, so suffering, so concentrated, so thoughtful, that, together with her heavy black eyebrows, large face, profuse black hair, and unlustrous eyes, it gave her almost a dwarfish air, increased by her awkward deportment, which concealed that she was in reality tall, and on a large scale. She looked to so little advantage in bright delicate colours, that Albinia was often incurring her displeasure, and risking that of Lucy, by the deep blues and sober browns which alone looked fit to be seen with those beetle brows and sallow features. Her face looked many years older than that of her fair, fresh, rosy stepmother; nay, her father's clear olive complexion and handsome countenance had hardly so aged an aspect; and Gilbert, when he came home at Midsummer, declared that Sophy had grown as old as grandmamma.

The compliment could not be returned; Gilbert was much more boy-like in a good sense. He had brought home an excellent character, and showed it in every look and gesture. His father was

pleased to have him again, took the trouble to talk to him, and received such sensible answers, that the habit of conversing was actually established, and the dinners were enlivened, instead of oppressed, by his presence. Towards his sisters he had become courteous, he was fairly amiable to Aunt Maria, very attentive to grandmamma, overflowing with affection to Mrs. Kendal, and as to little Maurice, he almost adored him, and awakened a reciprocity which was the delight of his heart.

At Midsummer came the grand penny-club distribution, the triumph for which Albinia had so long been preparing. One of Mrs. Dusautoy's hints as to Bayford tradesmen had been overruled, and goods had been ordered from a house in London, after Albinia and Lucy had made an incredible agitation over their patterns of calico and flannel. Mr. Kendal was just aware that there was a prodigious commotion, but he knew that all ladies were subject to linen-drapery epidemics, and Albinia's took a more endurable form than a pull on his purse for the sweetest silk in the world, and above all, it neither came into his study nor even into his house.

It was a grand spectacle, when Mr. Dusautoy looked in on Mrs. Kendal and her staff, armed with their yard-wands.

A pile of calico was heaped in wild masses like avalanches in one corner, rapidly diminishing under the measurements of Gilbert, who looked as if he took thorough good-natured delight in the frolic. Brown, inodorous materials for petticoats, blouses, and trowsers were dealt out by the dextrous hands of

Genevieve, a mountain of lilac print was folded off by Clarissa Richardson, Lucy was presiding joyously over the various blue, buff, brown, and pink Sunday frocks, the schoolmistress helping with the other goods, the customers—some pleased with novelty, or hoping to get more for their money, others suspicious of the gentry, and secretly resentful for favourite dealers, but, except the desperate grumblers, satisfied with the quality and quantity of the wares—and extremely taken with the sellers, especially with Gilbert's wit, and with Miss Durant's ready, lively persuasions, varied to each one's taste, and extracting a smile and 'thank you, Miss,' from the surliest. And the presiding figure, with the light on her sunny hair, and good-natured, unfailing interest in her countenance, was at her central table, calculating, giving advice, considering of complaints, measuring, folding—here, there, and everywhere—always bright, lively, forbearing, however complaining or unreasonable her clients might be.

Mr. Dusautoy went home to tell his Fanny that Mrs. Kendal was worth her weight in gold; and the workers toiled till luncheon, when Albinia took them home for food and wine, to restore them for the labours of the afternoon.

'What have you been about all the morning, Sophy? Yes, I see your translation—very well—I wish you would come up and help this afternoon, Miss Richardson is looking so pale and tired that I want to relieve her.'

'I can't,' said Sophy,

'I don't order you, but you are losing a great deal of fun.

Suppose you came to look on, at least.'

'I hate poor people.'

'I hope you will change your mind some day, but you must do something this afternoon. You had better take a walk with Susan and baby; I told her to go by the meadows to Horton.'

'I don't want to walk.'

'Have you anything to do instead? No, I thought not, and it is not at all hot to signify.—It will do you much more good. Yes, you must go.'

In the course of the summer an old Indian friend was staying at Fairmead Park, and Colonel Bury wrote to beg for a week's visit from the whole Kendal family. Even Sophy vouchsafed to be pleased, and Lucy threw all her ardour into the completion of a blue braided cape, which was to add immensely to little Maurice's charms; she declared that she should work at it the whole of the last evening, while Mr. and Mrs. Kendal were at the dinner that old Mr. and Mrs. Bowles annually inflicted on themselves and their neighbours, a dinner which it would have been as cruel to refuse as it was irksome to accept.

There was a great similarity in those Bayford parties, inasmuch as the same cook dressed them all, and the same waiters waited at them, and the same guests met each other, and the principal variety on this occasion was, that the Osborns did not come, because the Admiral was in London.

The ladies had left the dining-room, when Albinia's ear caught a sound of hurried opening of doors, and sound of steps, and

saw Mrs. and Miss Bowles look as if they heard something unexpected. She paused, and forgot the end of what she was saying. The room door was pushed a little way open, but then seemed to hesitate. Miss Bowles hastened forward, and opening it, admitted a voice that made Albinia hurry breathlessly from the other side of the room, and push so that the door yielded, and she saw it had been Mr. Dusautoy who had been holding it while there was some kind of consultation round Gilbert. The instant he saw her, he exclaimed, 'Come to the baby, Sophy has fallen down with him.'

People pressed about her, trying to speak cheeringly, but she understood nothing but that her husband and Mr. Bowles were gone on, and she had a sense that there had been hardness and cruelty in hesitating to summon her. Without knowing that a shawl was thrown round her, or seeing Mr. Dusautoy's offered arm, she clutched Gilbert's wrist in her hand, and flew down the street.

The gates and front door were open, and there was a throng of people in the hall. Lucy caught hold of her with a sobbing, 'Oh, Mamma!' but she only framed the words with her lips—'where?'

They pointed to the study. The door was shut, but Albinia broke from Lucy, and pushed through it, in too much haste to dwell on the sickening doubt what it might conceal.

Two figures stood under the window. Mr. Kendal, who was holding the little inanimate form in his arms for the doctor to examine, looking up as she entered, cast on her a look of mute,

pleading, despairing agony, that was as the bitterness of death. She sprang forward herself to clasp her child, and her husband yielded him in broken-hearted pity, but at that moment the little limbs moved, the features worked, the eyes unclosed, and clinging tightly to her, as she strained him to her bosom, the little fellow proclaimed himself alive by lusty roars, more welcome than any music. Partly stunned, and far more terrified, he had been in a sort of swoon, without breath to cry, till recalled to himself by feeling his mother's arms around him. Every attempt of Mr. Bowles to ascertain whether he were uninjured produced such a fresh panic and renewal of screams, that she begged that he might be left to her. Mr. Kendal took the doctor away, and gradually the terror subsided, though the long convulsive sobs still quivered up through the little frame, and as the twilight darkened on her, she had time to realize the past alarm, and rejoice in trembling over the treasure still her own.

The opening of the door and the gleaming of a light had nearly brought on a fresh access of crying, but it was his father who entered, and Maurice knew the low deep sweetness of his voice, and was hushed. 'I believe there is no harm done,' Albinia said; and the smile that she fain would have made reassuring gave way as her eyes filled with tears, on feeling the trembling of the strong arm that was put round her, when Mr. Kendal bent to look into the child's eyes.

'I thought my blight had fallen on you,' was all he said.

'Oh! the thankfulness—' she said; but she could not go on, she

must stifle all that swelled within her, for the babe felt each throb of her beating heart; and she could barely keep from bursting into tears as his father kissed him; then, as he marked the still sobbing breath, said, 'Bowles must see him again.'

'I don't know how to make him cry again! I suppose he must be looked at, but indeed I think him safe.—See, this little bruise on his forehead is the only mark I can find. What was it? How did it happen?'

'Sophia thought proper to take him herself from the nursery to show him to Mrs. Osborn. In crossing the street, she was frightened by a party of men coming out of a public-house in Tibbs's Alley, and in avoiding them, slipped down and struck the child's head against a gate-post. He was perfectly insensible when I took him—I thought him gone. Albinia, you must let Bowles see him again!'

'Is any one there?' she said.

'Every one, I think,' he replied, looking oppressed—'Maria, and Mrs. Osborn, and Dusautoy—but I will call Bowles.'

Apparently the little boy had escaped entirely unhurt, but the surgeon still spoke of the morrow, and he was so startled and restless, that Albinia feared to move, and felt the dark study a refuge from the voices and sounds that she feared to encounter, lest they should again occasion the dreadful screaming. 'Oh, if they would only go home!' she said.

'I will send them,' said Mr. Kendal; and presently she heard sounds of leave-taking, and he came back, as if he had been

dispersing a riot, announcing that the house was clear.

Gilbert and Lucy were watching at the foot of the stairs, the one pale, and casting anxious, imploring looks at her; the other with eyes red and swollen with crying, neither venturing near till she spoke to them, when they advanced noiselessly to look at their little brother, and it was not till they had caught his eye and made him smile, that Lucy bethought herself of saying she had known nothing of his adventure, and Albinia, thus recalled to the thought of the culprit, asked where Sophy was.

'In her own room,' said Mr. Kendal. 'I could not bear the sight of her obduracy. Even her aunt was shocked at her want of feeling.'

Low as he spoke, the sternness of his voice frightened the baby, and she was obliged to run away to the nursery, where she listened to the contrition of the little nursemaid, who had never suspected Miss Sophy's intention of taking him out of the house.

'And indeed, ma'am,' she said, 'there is not one of us servants who dares cross Miss Sophy.'

It was long before Albinia ventured to lay him in his cot, and longer still before she could feel any security that if she ceased her low, monotonous lullaby, the little fellow would not wake again in terror, but the thankfulness and prayer, that, as she grew more calm, gained fuller possession of her heart, made her recur the more to pity and forgiveness for the poor girl who had caused the alarm. Yet there was strong indignation likewise, and she could not easily resolve on meeting the hard defiance

and sullen indifference which would wound her more than ever. She was much inclined to leave Sophy to herself till morning, but suspecting that this would be vindictive, she unclasped the arm that Lucy had wound round her waist, whispered to her to go on singing, and moved to Sophy's door. It was fastened, but before she could call, it was thrown violently back, and Sophy stood straight up before her, striving for her usual rigidity, but shaking from head to foot; and though there were no signs of tears, she looked with wistful terror at her step-mother's face, and her lips moved as if she wished to speak.

'Baby is gone quietly to sleep,' began Albinia in a low voice, beginning in displeasure; but as she spoke, the harshness of Sophy's face gave way, she sank down on the floor, and fell into the most overpowering fit of weeping that Albinia had ever witnessed. Kneeling beside her, she would have drawn the girl close to her, but a sharp cry of pain startled her, and she found the right arm, from elbow to wrist, all one purple bruise, the skin grazed, and the blood starting.

'My poor child! how you have hurt yourself!'

Sophy turned away pettishly.

'Let me look! I am sure it must be very bad. Have you done anything to it?'

'No, never mind. Go back to baby.'

'Baby does not want me. You shall come and see how comfortably he is asleep, if you will leave off crying, and let me see that poor arm. Did you hurt it in the fall?'

'The corner of the wall,' said Sophy. 'Oh! did it not hurt him?' but then, just as it seemed that she was sinking on that kind breast in exhaustion, she collected herself, and pushing Albinia off, exclaimed, 'I did it, I took him out, I fell down with him, I hurt his head, I've killed him, or made him an idiot for life. I did.'

'Who said so?' cried Albinia, transfixed.

'Aunt Maria said so. She said I did not feel. Oh, if I could only die before he grows up to let one see it. Why wont you begin to hate me?'

'My dear,' said Albinia, consoled on hearing the authority, 'people often say angry things when they are shocked. Your aunt had not seen Mr. Bowles, and we all think he was not in the least hurt, only terribly frightened. Dear, dear child, I am more distressed for you than for him!'

Sophy could hold out no longer, she let her head drop on the kind shoulder, and seemed to collapse, with burning brow, throbbing pulses, and sobs as deep and convulsive as had been those of her little brother. Hastily calling Lucy, who was frightened, subdued, and helpful, Albinia undressed the poor child, put her to bed, and applied lily leaves and spirits to her arm. The smart seemed to refresh her, but there had been a violent strain, as well as bruise, and each touch visibly gave severe pain, though she never complained. Lucy insisted on hearing exactly how the accident had happened, and pressed her with questions, which Albinia would have shunned in her present condition, and it was thus elicited that she had taken Maurice across the street to

how him to Mrs. Osborn. He had resented the strange place, and strange people, and had cried so much that she was obliged to run home with him at once. A knot of bawling men came reeling out of one of the many beer shops in Tibbs's Alley, and in her haste to avoid them, she tripped, close to the gate-post of Willow Lawn, and fell, with only time to interpose her arm between Maurice's head and the sharp corner. She was lifted up at once, in the horror of seeing him neither cry nor move, for, in fact, he had been almost stifled under her weight, and all had since been to her a frightful phantom dream. Albinia was infinitely relieved by this history, showing that Maurice could hardly have received any real injury, and in her declarations that Sophy's presence of mind had saved him, was forgetting to whom the accident was owing. Lucy wanted to know why her sister could have taken him out of the house at all, but Albinia could not bear to have this pressed at such a moment, and sent the inquirer down to order some tea, which she shared with Sophy, and then was forced to bid her good-night, without drawing out any further confessions. But when the girl raised herself to receive her kiss, it was the first real embrace that had passed between them.

In the very early morning, Albinia was in the nursery, and found her little boy bright and healthy. As she left him in glad hope and gratitude, Sophy's door was pushed ajar, and her wan face peeped out. 'My dear child, you have not been asleep all night!' exclaimed Albinia, after having satisfied her about the baby.

'No.'

'Does your arm hurt you?'

'Yes.'

'Does your head ache?'

'Rather.'

But they were not the old sulky answers, and she seemed glad to have her arm freely bathed, her brow cooled, her tossed bed composed, and her window opened, so that she might make a fresh attempt at closing her weary eyes.

She was evidently far too much shaken to be fit for the intended expedition, even if her father had not decreed that she should be deprived of it. Albinia had never seen him so much incensed, for nothing makes a man so angry as to have been alarmed; and he was doubly annoyed when he found that she thought Sophy too unwell to be left, as he intended, to solitary confinement.

He would gladly have given up the visit, for his repugnance to society was in full force on the eve of a party; but Albinia, by representing that it would be wrong to disappoint Colonel Bury, and very hard on the unoffending Gilbert and Lucy, succeeded in prevailing on him to accept his melancholy destiny, and to allow her to remain at home with Sophy and the baby—one of the greatest sacrifices he or she had yet made. He was exceedingly vexed, and therefore the less disposed to be lenient. The more Albinia told him of Sophy's unhappiness, the more he hoped it would do her good, and he could not be induced to see her, nor

to send her any message of forgiveness, for in truth it was less the baby's accident that he resented, than the eighteen months of surly resistance to the baby's mother, and at present he was more unrelenting than the generous, forgiving spirit of his wife could understand, though she tried to believe it manly severity and firmness.

'It would be time to pardon,' he said, 'when pardon was asked.'

And Albinia could not say that it had been asked, except by misery.

'She has the best advocate in you,' said Mr. Kendal, affectionately, 'and if there be any feeling in her, such forbearance cannot fail to bring it out. I am more grieved than I can tell you at your present disappointment, but it shall not happen again. If you can bring her to a better mind, I shall be the more satisfied in sending her from home.'

'Edmund! you do not think of it!'

'My mind is made up. Do you think I have not watched your patient care, and the manner in which it has been repaid? You have sufficient occupation without being the slave of those children's misconduct.'

'Sophy would be miserable. Oh! you must not! She is the last girl in the world fit to be sent to school.'

'I will not have you made miserable at home. This has been a long trial, and nothing has softened her.'

'Suppose this was the very thing.'

'If it were, what is past should not go unrequited, and the

change will teach her what she has rejected. Hush, dearest, it is not that I do not think that you have done all for her that tenderness or good sense could devise, but your time is too much occupied, and I cannot see you overtasked by this poor child's headstrong temper. It is decided, Albinia; say no more.'

'I have failed,' thought Albinia, as he left the room. 'He decides that I have failed in bringing up his children. What have I done? Have I been mistaken? have I been careless? have I not prayed enough? Oh! my poor, poor Sophy! What will she do among strange girls? Oh! how wretched, how harsh, how misunderstood she will be! She will grow worse and worse, and just when I do think I might have begun to get at her! And it is for my sake! For me that her father is set against her, and is driving her out from her home! Oh! what shall I do? Winifred will promote it, because they all think I am doing too much! I wonder what put that in Edmund's head? But when he speaks in that way, I have no hope!'

Mr. Kendal's anger took a direction with which she better sympathized when he walked down Tibbs's Alley, and counted the nine beer shops, which had never dawned on his imagination, and which so greatly shocked it, that he went straight to the astonished Pettilove, and gave him a severe reprimand for allowing the houses to be made dens of iniquity and disorder.

He was at home in time to meet the doctor, and hear that Maurice had suffered not the smallest damage; and then to make another ineffectual attempt to persuade Albinia to consign Sophy

to imprisonment with Aunt Maria; after which he drove off very much against his will with Lucy and Gilbert, both declaring that they did not care a rush to go to Fairmead under the present circumstances.

Albinia had a sad, sore sense of failure, and almost of guilt, as she lingered on the door-step after seeing them set off. The education of 'Edmund's children' had been a cherished vision, and it had resulted so differently from her expectations, that her heart sank. With Gilbert there was indeed no lack of love and confidence, but there was a sad lurking sense of his want of force of character, and she had avowedly been insufficient to preserve him from temptation; Lucy, whom externally she had the most altered, was not of a nature accordant enough with her own for her to believe the effects deep or permanent; and Sophia —poor Sophia! Had what was kindly called forbearance been really neglect and want of moral courage? Would a gentler, less eager person have won instead of repelling confidence? Had her multiplicity of occupations made her give but divided attention to the more important home duty. Alas! alas! she only knew that her husband thought his daughter beyond her management, and for that very reason she would have given worlds to retain the uncouth, perverse girl under her charge.

She stood loitering, for the sound of the river and the shade of the willows were pleasant on the glowing July day, and having made all her arrangements for going from home, she had no pressing employment, and thus she waited, musing as she

seldom allowed herself time to do, and thinking over each phase of her conduct towards Sophy, in the endeavour to detect the mistake; and throughout came, not exactly answering her query, but throwing a light upon it, her brother's warning, that if she did not resign herself to rest quietly when rest was forced upon her, she would work amiss when she did work.

Just then came a swinging of the gate, a step on the walk, and Miss Meadows made her appearance. A message had been sent up in the morning, but grandmamma was so nervous, that Maria had trotted down in the heat so satisfy her.

Albinia was surprised to find that womanhood had thrown all their instincts on the baby's side, and was gratified by the first truly kind fellow-feeling they had shown her. She took Maria into the morning room, where she had left Sophy lying on the sofa, and ran up to fetch Maurice from the nursery.

When she came down, having left the nurse adorning him, she found that she had acted cruelly. Sophy was standing up with her hardest face on, listening to her aunt's well-meant rebukes on her want of feeling, and hopes that she did regret the having endangered her brother, and deprived 'her dear mamma of the party of pleasure at Fairmead; but Aunt Maria knew it was of no use to talk to Sophy, none—!'

'Pray don't, Aunt Maria,' said Albinia, gently drawing Sophy down on the sofa again; 'this poor child is in no state to be scolded.'

'You are a great deal too good to her, Mrs. Kendal—after

such wilfulness as last night—carrying the dear baby out in the street—I never heard of such a thing—But what made you do it, Sophy, wont you tell me that? No, I know you won't; no one ever can get a word from her. Ah! that sulky disposition—it is a very nasty temper—can't you break through it, Sophy, and confess it all to your dear mamma? You would be so much better. But I know it is of no use, poor child, it is just like her father.'

Albinia was growing very angry, and it was well that Maurice's merry crowings were heard approaching. Miss Meadows was delighted to see him, but as he had a great aversion to her, the interview was not prolonged, since he could not be persuaded to keep the peace by being held up to watch a buzzing fly, as much out of sight of her as possible, wrinkling up his nose, and preparing to cry whenever he caught sight of her white bonnet and pink roses.

Miss Meadows bethought her that grandmamma was anxious, so she only waited to give an invitation to tea, but merely to Mrs. Kendal; she would say nothing about Sophy since disgrace —well-merited—if they could only see some feeling.

'Thank you,' said Albinia, 'some evening perhaps I may come, since you are so kind, but I don't think I can leave this poor twisted arm to itself.'

Miss Meadows evaporated in hopes that Sophy would be sensible of—and assurances that Mrs. Kendal was a great deal too—with finally, 'Good-bye, Sophy, I wish I could have told grandmamma that you had shown some feeling.'

'I believe,' said Albinia, 'that you would only be too glad if you knew how.'

Sophy gasped.

Albinia could not help feeling indignant at the misjudged persecution; and yet it seemed to render the poor child more entirely her own, since all the world besides had turned against her. 'Kiss her, Maurice,' she said, holding the little fellow towards her. That scratched arm of hers has spared your small brains from more than you guess.'

Sophy's first impulse was to hide her face, but he thought it was bo-peep, caught hold of her fingers, and laughed; then came to a sudden surprised stop, and looked up to his mother, when the countenance behind the screen proved sad instead of laughing.

'Ah! baby, you had better have done with me,' Sophy said, bitterly; 'you are the only one that does not hate me yet, and you don't know what I have done to you.'

'I know some one else that cares for you, my poor Sophy,' said Albinia, 'and who would do anything to make you feel it without distressing you. If you knew how I wish I knew what to do for you!'

'It is no use,' said Sophy, moodily; 'I was born to be a misery to myself and every one else.'

'What has put such a fancy in your head, my dear?' said Albinia, nearly smiling.

'Grandmamma's Betty said so, she used to call me Peter Grievous, and I know it is so. It is of no good to bother yourself

about me. It can't be helped, and there's an end of it.'

'There is not an end of it, indeed!' cried Albinia. 'Why, Sophy, do you suppose I could bear to leave you so?'

'I'm sure I don't see why not.'

'Why not?' continued Albinia, in her bright, tender voice. 'Why, because I must love you with all my heart. You are your own dear papa's child, and this little man's sister. Yes, and you are yourself, my poor, sad, lonely child, who does not know how to bring out the thoughts that prey on her, and who thinks it very hard to have a stranger instead of her own mother. I know I should have felt so.'

'But I have behaved so ill to you,' cried Sophy, as if bent on repelling the proffered affection. 'I would not like you, and I did not like you. Never! and I have gone against you every way I could.'

'And now I love you because you are sorry for it.'

'I'm not'—Sophy had begun, but the words turned into 'Am I?'

'I think you are,' and with the sweetest of tearful smiles, she put an arm round the no longer resisting Sophy, and laying her cheek against the little brother's, she kissed first one and then the other.

'I can't think why you are so,' said Sophy, still struggling against the undeserved love, though far more feebly. 'I shall never deserve it.'

'See if you don't, when we pull together instead of contrary ways.'

'But,' cried Sophy, with a sudden start from her, as if remembering a mortal offence, 'you drained the pond!'

'I own I earnestly wished it to be drained; but had you any reason for regretting it, my dear?'

'Ah! you did not know,' said Sophy. 'He and I used to be always there.'

'He—?'

'Why, will you make me say it?' cried Sophy. 'Edmund! I mean Edmund! We always called it his pond. He made the little quay for his boats—he used to catch the minnows there. I could go and stand by it, and think he was coming out to play; and now you have had it dried up, and his dear little minnows are all dead,' and she burst into a passion of tears, that made Maurice cry till Albinia hastily carried him off and returned.

'My dear, I am sorry it seemed so unkind. I do not think we could have let the pond stay, for it was making the house unhealthy; but if we had talked over it together, it need not have appeared so very cruel and spiteful.'

'I don't believe you are spiteful,' said Sophy, 'though I sometimes think so.'

The filial compliment was highly gratifying.

'And now, Sophy,' she said, 'that I have told you why we were obliged to have the pond drained, will you tell me what you wanted with baby at Mrs. Osborn's?'

'I will tell,' said Sophy, 'but you wont like it.'

'I like anything better than concealment.'

'Mrs. Osborn said she never saw him. She said you kept him close, and that nobody was good enough to touch him; so I promised I would bring him over, and I kept my word. I know it was wrong—and—I did not think you would ever forgive me.'

'But how could you do it?'

'Mrs. Osborn and all used to be so kind to us when there was nobody else. I wont cast them off because we are too fine and grand for them.'

'I never thought of that. I only was afraid of your getting into silly ways, and your papa did not wish us to be intimate there. And now you see he was right, for good friends would not have led you to such disobedience—and by stealth, too, what I should have thought you would most have hated.'

Albinia had been far from intending these last words to have been taken as they were. Sophy hid her face, and cried piteously with an utter self-abandonment of grief, that Albinia could scarcely understand; but at last she extracted some broken words. 'False! shabby! yes—Oh! I have been false! Oh! Edmund! Edmund! Edmund! the only thing I thought I still was! I thought I was true! Oh, by stealth! Why couldn't I die when I tried, when Edmund did?'

'And has life been a blank ever since?'

'Off and on,' said Sophy. 'Well, why not? I am sure papa is melancholy enough. I don't like people that are always making fun, I can't see any sense in it.'

'Some sorts of merriment are sad, and hollow, and wrong,

indeed,' said Albinia, 'but not all, I hope. You know there is so much love and mercy all round us, that it is unthankful not to have a cheerful spirit. I wish I could give you one, Sophy.'

Sophy shook her head. 'I can't understand about mercy and love, when Edmund was all I cared for.'

'But, Sophy, if life is so sad and hard to you, don't you see the mercy that took Edmund away to perfect joy? Remember, not cutting you off from him, but keeping him safe for you.'

'No, no,' cried Sophy, 'I have never been good since he went. I have got worse and worse, but I did think I was true still, that that one thing was left me—but now—' The sense of having acted a deception seemed to produce grief under which the stubborn pride was melting away, and it was most affecting to see the child weeping over the lost jewel of truth, which she seemed to feel the last link with the remarkable boy whose impress had been left so strongly on all connected with him.

'My dear, the truth is in you still, or you could not grieve thus over your failure,' said Albinia. 'I know you erred, because it did not occur to you that it was not acting openly by me; but oh! Sophy, there is something that would bring you nearer to Edmund than hard truth in your own strength.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Sophy.

'Did you ever think what Edmund is about now?'

'I don't know,' said Sophy.

'I only know that the one thing which is carried with us to the other world is love, Sophy, and love that becomes greater than we

can yet imagine. If you would think of Him who redeemed and saved your dear Edmund, and who is his happiness, his exceeding great reward, your heart would warm, and, oh! what hope and peace would come!'

'Edmund was good,' said Sophy, in a tone as if to mark the hopeless gulf between.

'And you are sorry. All human goodness begins from sorrow. It had even to be promised first for baby at his christening, you know. Oh, Sophy, God's blessing can make all these tears come to joy.'

Albinia's own tears were flowing so fast, that she broke off to hide them in her own room, her heart panting with hope, and yet with grief and pity for the piteous disclosure of so dreary a girlhood. After all, childhood, if not the happiest, is the saddest period of life—pains, griefs, petty tyrannies, neglects, and terrors have not the alleviation of the experience that 'this also shall pass away;' time moves with a tardier pace, and in the narrower sphere of interests, there is less to distract the attention from the load of grievances. Hereditary low spirits, a precocious mind, a reserved temper, a motherless home, the loss of her only congenial companion, and the long-enduring effect of her illness upon her health, had all conspired to weigh down the poor girl, and bring on an almost morbid state of gloomy discontent. Her father's second marriage, by enlivening the house, had rendered her peculiarities even more painful to herself and others, and the cultivation of mind that was forced upon her, made her

more averse to the trifling and playfulness, which, while she was younger, had sometimes brightened and softened her. And this was the girl whom her father had resolved upon sending to the selfish, inconsiderate, frivolous world of school-girls, just when the first opening had been made, the first real insight gained into her feelings, the first appearance of having touched her heart! Albinia felt baffled, disappointed, almost despairing. His stern decree, once made, was, she knew, well-nigh unalterable; and though resolved to use her utmost influence, she doubted its power after having seen that look of decision. Nay, she tried to think he might be right. There might be those who would manage Sophy better. Eighteen months had been a fair trial, and she had failed. She prayed earnestly for whatever might be best for the child, and for herself, that she might take it patiently and submissively.

Sophy felt the heat of the day a good deal, but towards the evening she revived, and seemed so much cheered and refreshed by her tea, that, as the sound of the church bell came sweetly down in the soft air, Albinia said, 'Sophy, I am going to take advantage of my holiday and go to the evening service. I suppose you had rather not come?'

'I think I will,' returned Sophy, somewhat glumly, but Albinia hailed the answer joyfully, as the first shamefaced effort of a reserved character wishing to make a new beginning, and she took care that no remark, not even a look, should rouse the sullen sensitiveness that could so easily be driven back for ever.

Slowly they crept up the steps on the shady side of the hill, watching how, beyond the long shadow it cast over the town and the meadows, the trees revelled in the sunset light, and windows glittered like great diamonds, where in the ordinary daylight the distance was too great for distinct vision.

The church was cool and quiet, and there was something in Sophy's countenance and reverent attitude that seemed as if she were consecrating a newly-formed resolution; her eye was often raised, as though in spite of herself, to the name of the brother whose short life seemed inseparably interwoven with all the higher aspirations of his home.

In the midst of the Thanksgiving, a sudden movement attracted Albinia, and she saw Sophy resting her head, and looking excessively pale. She put her arm round her, and would have led her out, but could not persuade her to move, and by the time the Blessing was given, the power was gone, and she had almost fainted away, when a tall strong form stooped over her, and Mr. Dusautoy gathered her up in his arms, and bore her off as if she had been a baby, to the open window of his own drawing-room.

'Put me down! The floor, please!' said Sophy, feebly, for all her remaining faculties were absorbed in dislike to the mode of conveyance.

'Yes, flat on the floor,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, rising with full energy, and laying a cushion under Sophy's head, reaching a scent-bottle, and sending her husband for cold water and sal

volatile; with readiness that astonished Albinia, unused to illness, and especially to faintings, and remorseful at having taken Sophy out. 'Was it the pain of her arm that had overcome her?'

'No,' said Sophy, 'it was only my back.'

'Indeed! you never told me you had hurt your back;' and Albinia began describing the fall, and declaring there must be a sprain.

'Oh, no,' said Sophy, 'kneeling always does it.'

'Does what, my dear?' said Albinia, sitting on the floor by her, and looking up to Mrs. Dusautoy, exceedingly frightened.

'Makes me feel sick,' said Sophy; 'I thought it would go off, as it always does, it didn't; but it is better now.'

'No, don't get up yet,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, as she was trying to move; 'I would offer you the sofa, it would be more hospitable, but I think the floor is the most comfortable place.'

'Thank you, *much*,' said Sophy, with an emphasis.

'Do you ever lie down on it when you are tired?' asked the lady, looking anxiously at Sophy.

'I always wish I might.'

Albinia was surprised at the interrogations that followed; she did not understand what Mrs. Dusautoy was aiming at, in the close questioning, which to her amazement did not seem to offend, but rather to be gratifying by the curious divination of all sensations. It made Albinia feel as if she had been carrying on a deliberate system of torture, when she heard of a pain in the back, hardly ever ceasing, aggravated by sitting upright, growing severe

with the least fatigue, and unless favoured by day, becoming so bad at night as to take away many hours of sleep.

'Oh! Sophy, Sophy,' she cried, with tears in her eyes, 'how could you go on so? Why did you never tell me?'

'I did not like,' began Sophy, 'I was used to it.'

Oh, that barrier! Albinia was in uncontrollable distress, that the girl should have chosen to undergo so much suffering rather than bestow any confidence. Sophy stole her hand into hers, and said in her odd, short way, 'Never mind, it did not signify.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, 'those things are just what one does get so much used to, that it seems much easier to bear them than to speak about them.'

'But to let oneself be so driven about,' cried Albinia. 'Oh! Sophy, you will never do so again! If I had ever guessed—'

'Please hush! Never mind!' said Sophy, almost crossly, and getting up from the floor quickly, as though resolved to be well.

'I have never minded long enough,' sighed Albinia. 'What shall I do, Mrs. Dusautoy? What do you think it is?'

This was the last question Mrs. Dusautoy wished to be asked in Sophy's presence. She had little doubt that it was spine complaint like her own, but she had not intended to let her perceive the impression, till after having seen Mrs. Kendal alone. However, Albinia's impetuosity disconcerted all precautions, and Sophy's two great black eyes were rounded with suppressed terror, as if expecting her doom. 'I think that a doctor ought to answer that question,' Mrs. Dusautoy began.

'Yes, yes,' exclaimed Albinia, 'but I never had any faith in old Mr. Bowles, I had rather go to a thorough good man at once.'

'Yes, certainly, by all means.'

'And then to whom! I will write to my Aunt Mary. It seems exactly like you. Do you think it is the spine?'

'I am afraid so. But, my dear,' holding out her hand caressingly to Sophy, 'you need not be frightened—you need not look at me as an example of what you will come to—I am only an example of what comes of never speaking of one's ailments.'

'And of having no mother to find them out!' cried Albinia.

'Indeed,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, anxious to console and encourage, as well as to talk the young step-mother out of her self-reproach, 'I do not think that if I had been my good aunt's own child, she would have been more likely to find out that anything was amiss. It was the fashion to be strong and healthy in that house, and I was never really ill—but I came as a little stunted, dwining cockney, and so I was considered ever after—never quite comfortable, often forgetting myself in enjoyment, paying for it afterwards, but quite used to it. We all thought it was "only Fanny," and part of my London breeding. Yes, we thought so in good faith, even after the largest half of my life had been spent in Yorkshire.'

'And what brought it to a crisis? Did they go on neglecting you?' exclaimed Albinia.

'Why, my dear,' said the little lady, a glow lighting on her cheek, and a smile awakening, 'my uncle took a new curate,

whom it was the family custom to call "the good-natured giant," and whose approach put all of us young ladies in a state of great excitement. It was all in character with his good-nature, you know, to think of dragging the poor little shrimp up the hill to church, and I believe he did not know how she would get on without his strong arm; for do you know, when he had the curacy of Lauriston given him, he chose to carry the starveling off with him, instead of any of those fine, handsome prosperous girls. Dear Mary and Bessie! how good they were, and how kind and proud for me! I never could complain of not having sisters.'

'Well, and Mr. Dusautoy made you have advice?'

'Not he! Why, we all believed it cockneyism, you know, and besides, I was so happy and so well, that when we went to Scotland, I fairly walked myself off my legs, and ended the honeymoon laid up in a little inn on Loch Katrine, where John used regularly to knock his head whenever he came into the room. It was a fortnight before I could get to Edinburgh, and the journey made me as bad as ever. So the doctors were called in, and poor John learnt what a crooked stick he had chosen; but they all said that if I had been taken in hand as a child, most likely I should have been a sound woman. The worst of it was, that I was so thoroughly knocked up that I could not bear the motion of a carriage; besides, I suppose the doctors wanted a little amusement out of me, for they would not hear of my going home. So poor John had to go to Lauriston by himself, and those were the longest, dreariest six months I ever spent in my life,

though Bessie was so good as to come and take care of me. But at last, when I had nearly made up my mind to defy the whole doctorhood, they gave leave, and between water and steam, John brought me to Lauriston, and ever since that, I don't see that a backbone would have made us a bit happier.'

Sophy had been intently reading Mrs. Dusautoy's face all through the narration, from under her thick black eyelashes, and at the end she drew a sigh of relief, and seemed to catch the smile of glad gratitude and affection. There was a precedent, which afforded incredible food to the tumultuous cravings of a heart that had been sinking in sullen gloom under the consciousness of an unpleasing exterior. The possibility of a 'good-natured giant' was far more present to her mind than the present probability of future suffering and restraint.

Ever rapid and eager, Albinia could think of nothing but immediate measures for Sophy's good, and the satisfaction of her own conscience. She could not bear even to wait for Mr. Kendal's return, but, as her aunts were still in London, she resolved on carrying Sophy to their house on the following day for the best advice. It was already late, and she knelt at the table to dash off two notes to put into the post-office as she went home. One to Mrs. Annesley, to announce her coming with Sophy, baby, and Susan, the other as follows:—

'July 10th, 9 p.m.

'Dearest Edmund,

'I find I have been cruelly neglectful. I have hunted and driven that poor child about till it has brought on spine complaint. The only thing I can do, is to take her to have the best advice without loss of time, so I am going to-morrow to my aunt's. It would take too long to write and ask your leave. You must forgive this, as indeed each word I have to say is, forgive! She is so generous and kind! You know I meant to do my best, but they were right, I was too young.

'Forgive yours,

'A. K.'

The Dusautoys were somewhat taken by surprise, but they knew too well the need of promptitude to dissuade her; and Sophia herself sat aghast at the commotion, excited by the habitual discomfort of which she had thought so little. The vicar, when he found Mrs. Kendal in earnest, offered to go with them and protect them; but Albinia was a veteran in independent railway travelling, and was rather affronted by being treated as a helpless female. Mrs. Dusautoy, better aware of what the journey might be to one at least of the travellers, gave advice, and lent air cushions, and Albinia bade her good night with an almost sobbing 'thank you,' and an entreaty that if Mr. Kendal came home before them, she would tell him all about it.

At home, she instantly sent the stupefied Sophy to bed, astonished the little nurse, ordered down boxes and bags, and spent half the night in packing, glad to be stirring and to tire herself into sleeping, for her remorse and her anticipations were so painful, that, but for fatigue, her bed would have been no

resting-place.

CHAPTER IX

Winifred Ferrars was surprised by Mr. Kendal's walking into her garden, with a perturbed countenance, begging her to help him to make out what could be the meaning of a note which he had just received. He was afraid that there was much amiss with the baby, and heartily wished that he had not been persuaded to leave home; but poor Albinia wrote in so much distress, that he could not understand her letter.

More accustomed to Albinia's epistolary habits, Winifred exclaimed at the first glance, 'What can you mean? There is not one word of the little one! It is only Sophy!'

The immediate clearing of his face was not complimentary to poor Sophy, as he said, 'Can you be quite sure? I had begun to hope that Albinia might at least have the comfort of seeing this little fellow healthy; but let me see—she says nursed and—and danced—is it? this poor child—'

'No, no; it is hunted and driven; that's the way she always *will* make her *h*'s; besides, what nonsense the other would be.'

'This poor child—' repeated Mr. Kendal, 'Going up to London for advice. She would hardly do that with Sophia.'

'Who ever heard of a baby of six months old having a spine complaint?' cried Mrs. Ferrars almost angrily.

'I have lost one in that way,' he replied.

A dead silence ensued, till Winifred, to her great relief, spied

the feminine pronoun, but could not fully satisfy Mr. Kendal that the ups and downs were insufficient for the word *him*; and each scrawl was discussed as though it had been a cuneiform inscription, until he had been nearly argued into believing in the lesser evil. He then was persuaded that the Meadowses had been harassing and frightening Albinia into this startling measure. It was so contrary to his own nature, that he hardly believed that it had actually taken place, and that she must be in London by this time, but at any rate, he must join her there, and know the worst. He would take the whole party to an hotel, if it were too great a liberty to quarter themselves upon Mrs. Annesley.

Winifred was as much surprised as if the chess-king had taken a knight's move, but she encouraged his resolution, assured him of a welcome at what the cousinhood were wont to call the Family Office, and undertook the charge of Gilbert and Lucy. The sorrowful, almost supplicating tone of his wife's letter, would have sufficed to bring him to her, even without his disquietude for his child, whichever of them it might be; and though Albinia's merry blue-eyed boy had brought a renewed spring of hope and life, his crashed spirits trembled at the least alarm.

Thus, though the cheerful Winifred had convinced his reason, his gloomy anticipations revived before he reached London; and with the stern composure of one accustomed to bend to the heaviest blows, he knocked at Mrs. Annesley's door. He was told that Mrs. Kendal was out; but on further inquiry, learnt that Sophy was in the drawing-room, where he found her curled up

in the corner of the sofa, reading intently.

She sprang to her feet with a cry of surprise, but did not approach, though he held out his arms, saying in a voice husky with anxiety, 'Is the baby well, Sophia?'

'Yes,' she cried, 'quite well; he is out in the carriage with them.' Then shrinking as he was stooping to kiss her, she reddened, reddening deeply, 'Papa, I did very wrong; I was sly and disobedient, and I might have killed him.'

'Do not let us speak of that now, my dear, I want to hear of —' and again he would have drawn her into his embrace, but she held out her hand, with her repelling gesture, and burst forth in her rude honesty, 'I can't be forgiven only because I am ill. Hear all about it, papa, and then say you forgive me if you can. I always was cross to mamma, because I was determined I would be; and I did not think she had any business with us. The more she was kind, the more I did not like it; and I thought it was mean in Gilbert and Lucy to be fond of her. No! I have not done yet! I grew naughtier and naughtier, till at last I have been false and sly, and—have done this to baby—and I would not have cared then —if—if she would not have been—oh! so good!'

Sophy made no farther resistance to the arm that was thrown round her, as her father said, 'So good, that she has overcome evil with good. My child, how should I not forgive when you are sensible of your mistake, and when she has so freely forgiven?'

Sophy did not speak, but she pressed his arm closer round her, and laid her cheek gratefully on his shoulder. She only wished

it could last for ever; but he soon lifted her, that he might look anxiously at her face, while he said, 'And what is all this, my dear! I am afraid you are not well.'

Her energies were recalled; and, squeezing his hand, she said, 'Mind, you will not let them say it was mamma's fault.'

'Who is accusing her, my dear?' What is the matter?'

'It is only my back,' said Sophy; 'there always was a stupid pain there; but grandmamma's Betty said I made a fuss, and that it was all laziness, and I would not let any one say so again, and I never told of it, and it went on till the other night I grew faint at church, and Mrs. Dusautoy put mamma in such a fright, that we all came here yesterday; and there came a doctor this morning, who says my spine is not straight, and that I must lie on my back for a long time; but never mind, papa, it will be very comfortable to lie still and read, and I shall not be cross now,' she added reassuringly, as his grasp pressed her close, with a start of dismay.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.