VARIOUS

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Содержание

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DANUBIAN DAYS

If it were not for the people, the journey by steamer from Belgrade to Pesth would be rather unromantic. When the Servian capital is reached in ascending the great stream from Galatz and Rustchuk, the picturesque cliffs, the mighty forests, the moss-grown ruins overhanging the rushing waters, are all left behind. Belgrade is not very imposing. It lies along a low line of hills bordering the Sava and the Danube, and contains only a few edifices which are worthy even of the epithet creditable. The white pinnacle from which it takes its name—for the city grouped around the fort was once called *Beograd* ("white city")—now looks grimy and gloomy. The Servians have placed the cannon which they took from the Turks in the recent war on the ramparts, and have become so extravagantly vain in view of their exploits that their conceit is quite painful to contemplate. Yet it is impossible to avoid sympathizing to some extent with

this little people, whose lot has been so hard and whose final emancipation has been so long in arriving. The intense affection which the Servian manifests for his native land is doubtless the result of the struggles and the sacrifices which he has been compelled to make in order to remain in possession of it. One day he has been threatened by the Austrian or the jealous and unreasonable Hungarian: another he has received news that the Turks were marching across his borders, burning, plundering and devastating. There is something peculiarly pathetic in the lot of these small Danubian states. Nearly every one of them has been the cause of combats in which its inhabitants have shed rivers of blood before they could obtain even a fragment of such liberty and peace as have long been the possessions of Switzerland and Belgium. It is not surprising that the small countries which once formed part of Turkey-in-Europe are anxious to grow larger and stronger by annexation of territory and consolidation of populations. They are tired of being feeble: it is not amusing. Servia once expected that she would be allowed to gain a considerable portion of Bosnia, her neighbor province, but the Austrians are there, and would speedily send forces to Belgrade if it were for a moment imagined that Prince Milan and his counsellors were still greedy for Serapevo and other fat towns of the beautiful Bosnian lands. Now and then, when a Servian burgher has had an extra flask of Negotin, he vapors about meeting the Austrians face to face and driving them into the Sava; but he never mentions it when he is in a normal condition.

The country which Servia has won from the Turks in the neighborhood of Nisch, and the quaint old city of Nisch itself, were no meagre prizes, and ought to content the ambition of the young prince for some time. It was righteous that the Servians should possess Nisch, and that the Turks should be driven out by violence. The cruel and vindictive barbarian had done everything that he could to make himself feared and loathed by the Servians. To this day, not far from one of the principal gates of the city, on the Pirot road, stands the "Skull Tower," in the existence of which, I suppose, an English Tory would refuse to believe, just as he denied his credence to the story of the atrocities at Batak. The four sides of this tower are completely covered, as with a barbarous mosaic, with the skulls of Servians slain by their oppressors in the great combat of 1809. The Turks placed here but a few of their trophies, for they slaughtered thousands, while the tower's sides could accommodate only nine hundred and fifty-two skulls. It is much to the credit of the Servians that when they took Nisch in 1877 they wreaked no vengeance on the Mussulman population, but simply compelled them to give up their arms, and informed them that they could return to their labors. The presence of the Servians at Nisch has already been productive of good: decent roads from that point to Sophia are already in process of construction, and the innumerable brigands who swarmed along the country-side have been banished or killed. Sophia still lies basking in the mellow sunlight, lazily refusing to be cleansed or improved. Nowhere else on the border-

line of the Orient is there a town which so admirably illustrates the reckless and stupid negligence of the Turk. Sophia looks enchanting from a distance, but when one enters its narrow streets, choked with rubbish and filled with fetid smells, one is only too glad to retire hastily. It would take a quarter of a century to make Sophia clean. All round the city are scattered ancient tumuli filled with the remains of the former lords of the soil, and they are almost as attractive as the hovels in which live the people of to-day. What a desolate waste the Turk has been allowed to make of one of the finest countries in Europe! He must be thrust out before improvement can come in. Lamartine, who was one of the keenest observers that ever set foot in Turkey, truly said "that civilization, which is so fine in its proper place, would prove a mortal poison to Islamism. Civilization cannot live where the Turks are: it will wither away and perish more quickly whenever it is brought near them. With it, if you could acclimate it in Turkey, you could not make Europeans, you could not make Christians: you would simply unmake Turks."

The enemies of progress and of the "Christian dogs" are receding, and railways and sanitary improvements will come when they are gone. Belgrade was a wretched town when the Turks had it: now it is civilized. Its history is romantic and picturesque, although its buildings are not. Servia's legends and the actual recitals of the adventurous wars which have occurred within her limits would fill volumes. The White City has been famous ever since the Ottoman conquest. Its dominant position

at the junction of two great rivers, at the frontier of Christian Europe, at a time when turbans were now and then seen in front of the walls of Vienna, gave it a supreme importance. The Turks exultingly named it "the Gate of the Holy War." Thence it was that they sallied forth on incursions through the fertile plains where now the Hungarian shepherd leads his flock and plays upon his wooden pipe, undisturbed by the bearded infidel. The citadel was fought over until its walls cracked beneath the successive blows of Christian and Mussulman. Suleiman the Lawgiver, the elector of Bavaria, Eugene of Savoy, have trod the ramparts which frown on the Danube's broad current. The Austrians have many memories of the old fortress: they received it in 1718 by the treaty of Passarowitz, but gave it up in 1749, to take it back again in 1789. The treaty of Sistova—an infamy which postponed the liberation of the suffering peoples in Turkey-in-Europe for nearly a hundred years—compelled the Austrians once more to yield it, this time to the Turks. In this century how often has it been fought over—from the time of the heroic Kara George, the Servian liberator, to the bloody riots in our days which resulted in driving Mussulmans definitely from the territory!

Everywhere along the upper Servian banks of the Danube traces of the old epoch are disappearing. The national costume, which was graceful, and often very rich, is yielding before the prosaic—the ugly garments imported from Jewish tailoring establishments in Vienna and Pesth. The horseman with his sack-

coat, baggy velvet trousers and slouch hat looks not unlike a rough rider along the shores of the Mississippi River. In the interior patriarchal costumes and customs are still preserved. On the Sava river-steamers the people from towns in the shadows of the primeval forests which still cover a large portion of the country are to be found, and they are good studies for an artist. The women, with golden ducats braided in their hair; the priests, with tall brimless hats and long yellow robes; the men, with round skull-caps, leathern girdles with knives in them, and waistcoats ornamented with hundreds of glittering buttons,—are all unconscious of the change which is creeping in by the Danube, and to which they will presently find themselves submitting. The railway will take away the lingering bits of romance from Servia; the lovely and lonely monasteries high among the grand peaks in the mountain-ranges will be visited by tourists from Paris, who will scrawl their names upon the very altars; and Belgrade will be rich in second-class caravanserais kept by Moses and Abraham. After the Austrians who have gone over into Bosnia will naturally follow a crowd of adventurers from Croatia and from the neighborhood of Pesth, and it would not be surprising should many of them find it for their interest to settle in Servia, although the government would probably endeavor to keep them out. Should the movement which Lord Beaconsfield is pleased to call the "Panslavic conspiracy" assume alarming proportions within a short time, the Servians would be in great danger of losing, for years at least, their autonomy.

The arrival by night at Belgrade, coming from below, is interesting, and one has a vivid recollection ever afterward of swarms of barefooted coal-heavers, clad in coarse sacking, rushing tumultuously up and down a gang-plank, as negroes do when wooding up on a Southern river; of shouting and swaggering Austrian customs officials, clad in gorgeous raiment, but smoking cheap cigars; of Servian gendarmes emulating the bluster and surpassing the rudeness of the Austrians; of Turks in transit from the Constantinople boat to the craft plying to Bosnian river-ports; of Hungarian peasants in white felt jackets embroidered with scarlet thread, or mayhap even with yellow; and of various Bohemian beggars, whose swart faces remind one that he is still in the neighborhood of the East. I had on one occasion, while a steamer was lying at Belgrade, time to observe the manners of the humbler sort of folk in a species of cabaret near the river-side and hard by the erratic structure known as the custom-house. There was a serious air upon the faces of the men which spoke well for their characters. Each one seemed independent, and to a certain extent careless, of his neighbor's opinion. It would have been impossible, without some knowledge of the history of the country, to have supposed that these people, or even their ancestors, had ever been oppressed. Gayety did not prevail, nor is there anywhere among the Danubian Slavs a tendency to the innocent and spontaneous jollity so common in some sections of Europe. The Servian takes life seriously. I was amused to see that each one of this numerous company of

swineherds or farmers, who had evidently come in to Belgrade to market, drank his wine as if it were a duty, and on leaving saluted as seriously as if he were greeting a distinguished company gathered to do him honor. That such men are cowards, as the English would have us believe, is impossible; and in 1877 they showed that the slander was destitute of even the slightest foundation in fact.

Morals in Belgrade among certain classes perhaps leave something to desire in the way of strictness; but the Danubian provinces are not supposed to be the abodes of all the virtues and graces. The Hungarians could not afford to throw stones at the Servians on the score of morality, and the Roumanians certainly would not venture to try the experiment. In the interior of Servia the population is pure, and the patriarchal manner in which the people live tends to preserve them so. There is as much difference between the sentiment in Belgrade and that in the provinces as would be found between Paris and a French rural district.

But let us drop details concerning Servia, for the brave little country demands more serious attention than can be given to it in one or two brief articles. The boat which bears me away from the Servian capital has come hither from Semlin, the Austrian town on the other side of the Sava River. It is a jaunty and comfortable craft, as befits such vessels as afford Servians their only means of communication with the outer world. If any but Turks had been squatted in Bosnia there would have

been many a smart little steamer running down the Sava and around up the Danube; but the baleful Mussulman has checked all enterprise wherever he has had any foothold. We go slowly, cleaving the dull-colored tide, gazing, as we sit enthroned in easy-chairs on the upper deck, out upon the few public institutions of Belgrade—the military college and the handsome road leading to the garden of Topschidere, where the Lilliputian court has its tiny summer residence. Sombre memories overhang this "Cannoneer's Valley," this Topschidere, where Michael, the son and successor of good Milosch as sovereign prince of the nation, perished by assassination in 1868. In a few minutes we are whisked round a corner, and a high wooded bluff conceals the White City from our view.

The Servian women—and more especially those belonging to the lower classes—have a majesty and dignity which are very imposing. One is inclined at first to believe these are partially due to assumption, but he speedily discovers that such is not the case. Blanqui, the French revolutionist, who made a tour through Servia in 1840, has given the world a curious and interesting account of the conversations which he held with Servian women on the subject of the oppression from which the nation was suffering. Everywhere among the common people he found virile sentiments expressed by the women, and the princess Lionbitza, he said, was "the prey of a kind of holy fever." M. Blanqui described her as a woman fifty years old, with a martial, austere yet dreamy physiognomy, with strongly-marked features, a proud

and sombre gaze, and her head crowned with superb gray hair braided and tied with red ribbon. "Ah!" said this woman to him, with an accent in her voice which startled him, "if all these men round about us here were not women, *or if they were women like me*, we should soon be free from our tormentors!" It was the fiery words of such women as this which awoke the Servian men from the lethargy into which they were falling after Kara George had exhausted himself in heroic efforts, and which sent them forth anew to fight for their liberties.

At night, when the moon is good enough to shine, the voyage up the river has charms, and tempts one to remain on deck all night, in spite of the sharp breezes which sweep across the stream. The harmonious accents of the gentle Servian tongue echo all round you: the song of the peasants grouped together, lying in a heap like cattle to keep warm, comes occasionally to your ears; and if there be anything disagreeable, it is the loud voices and brawling manners of some Austrian troopers on transfer. From time to time the boat slows her speed as she passes through lines or streets of floating mills anchored securely in the river. Each mill—a small house with sloping roof, and with so few windows that one wonders how the millers ever manage to see their grist—is built upon two boats.The musical hum of its great wheel is heard for a long distance, and warns one of the approach toward these pacific industries. The miller is usually on the lookout, and sometimes, when a large steamer is coming up, and he anticipates trouble from the "swell" which she may

create, he may be seen madly gesticulating and dancing upon his narrow platform in a frenzy of anxiety for the fruits of his toil. A little village on a neck of land or beneath a grove shows where the wives and children of these millers live. The mills are a source of prosperity for thousands of humble folk, and of provocation to hurricanes of profanity on the part of the Austrian, Italian and Dalmatian captains who are compelled to pass them. Stealing through an aquatic town of this kind at midnight, with the millers all holding out their lanterns, with the steamer's bell ringing violently, and with rough voices crying out words of caution in at least four languages, produces a curious if not a comical effect on him who has the experience for the first time.

Peaceable as the upper Danube shores look, Arcadian as seems the simplicity of their populations, the people are torn by contending passions, and are watched by the lynx-eyed authorities of two or three governments. The agents of the *Omladina*, the mysterious society which interests itself in the propagation of Pan-slavism, have numerous powerful stations in the Austrian towns, and do much to discontent the Slavic subjects of Francis Joseph with the rule of the Hapsburgs. There have also been instances of conspiracy against the Obrenovich dynasty, now in power in Servia, and these have frequently resulted in armed incursions from the Hungarian side of the stream to the other bank, where a warm reception was not long awaited. In the humblest hamlet there are brains hot with ambitious dreams daringly planning some scheme which is too audacious to be

realized.

The traveller can scarcely believe this when, as the boat stops at some little pier which is half buried under vines and blossoms, he sees the population indulging in an innocent festival with the aid of red and white wine, a few glasses of beer, and bread and cheese. Families mounted in huge yellow chariots drawn by horses ornamented with gayly-decorated harnesses, come rattling into town and get down before a weatherbeaten inn, the signboard above which testifies to respect and love for some emperor of long ago. Youths and maidens wander arm in arm by the foaming tide or sit in the little arbors crooning songs and clinking glasses. Officers strut about, calling each other loudly by their titles or responding to the sallies of those of their comrades who fill the after-deck of the steamer. The village mayor in a braided jacket, the wharfmaster in semi-military uniform, and the agent of the steamboat company, who appears to have a remarkable penchant for gold lace and buttons, render the throng still more motley. There is also, in nine cases out of ten, a band of tooting musicians, and as the boat moves away national Hungarian and Austrian airs are played. He would be indeed a surly fellow who should not lift his cap on these occasions, and he would be repaid for his obstinacy by the very blackest of looks.

Carlowitz and Slankamen are two historic spots which an Hungarian, if he feels kindly disposed toward a stranger, will point out to him. The former is known to Americans by name only, as a rule, and that because they have seen it upon bottle-

labels announcing excellent wine; but the town, with its ancient cathedral, its convents, and its "chapel of peace" built on the site of the structure in which was signed the noted peace of 1699, deserves a visit. Rumor says that the head-quarters of the Omladina are very near this town, so that the foreign visitor must not be astonished if the local police seem uncommonly solicitous for his welfare while he remains. At Slankamen in 1691 the illustrious margrave of Baden administered such a thrashing to the Turks that they fled in the greatest consternation, and it was long before they rallied again.

Thus, threading in and out among the floating mills, pushing through reedy channels in the midst of which she narrowly escapes crushing the boats of fishers, and carefully avoiding the moving banks of sand which render navigation as difficult as on the Mississippi, the boat reaches Peterwardein, high on a mighty mass of rock, and Neusatz opposite, connected with its neighbor fortress-town by a bridge of boats. Although within the limits of the Austria-Hungarian empire, Neusatz is almost entirely Servian in aspect and population, and Peterwardein, which marks the military confines of Slavonia, has a large number of Servian inhabitants. It was the proximity and the earnestness in their cause of these people which induced the Hungarians to agree to the military occupation of Bosnia and the Herzegovina. At one time the obstinate Magyars would have liked to refuse their adhesion to the decisions of the Berlin Congress, but they soon thought better of that. Peterwardein is the last really imposing

object on the Danube before reaching Pesth. It is majestic and solemn, with its gloomy castle, its garrison which contains several thousand soldiers, and its prison of state. The remembrance that Peter the Hermit there put himself at the head of the army with which the Crusades were begun adds to the mysterious and powerful fascination of the place. I fancied that I could see the lean and fanatical priest preaching before the assembled thousands, hurling his words down upon them from some lofty pinnacle. No one can blame the worthy Peter for undertaking his mission if the infidels treated Christians in the Orient as badly then as they do to-day. Centuries after Peter slept in consecrated dust the Turks sat down before Peterwardein to besiege it, but they had only their labor for their pains, for Prince Eugene drove them away. This was in 1716. It seems hard to believe that a hostile force of Turks was powerful enough to wander about Christendom a little more than a century and a half ago.

After passing Peterwardein and Neusatz the boat's course lies through the vast Hungarian plain, which reminds the American of some of the rich lands in the Mississippi bottom. Here is life, lusty, crude, seemingly not of Europe, but rather of the extreme West or East. As far as the eye can reach on either hand stretch the level acres, dotted with herds of inquisitive swine, with horses wild and beautiful snorting and gambolling as they hear the boat's whistle, and peasants in white linen jackets and trousers and immense black woollen hats. Fishers by hundreds balance in their little skiffs on the small whirlpool of waves made by the

steamer, and sing gayly. For a stretch of twenty miles the course may lie near an immense forest, where millions of stout trees stand in regular rows, where thousands of oaks drop acorns every year to fatten thousands upon thousands of pigs. Cattle stray in these woods, and sometimes the peasant-farmer has a veritable hunt before he can find his own. Afar in the wooded recesses of Slavonia many convents of the Greek religion are hidden. Their inmates lead lives which have little or no relation to anything in the nineteenth century. For them wars and rumors of wars, Russian aggression, Austrian annexation, conspiracies by Kara Georgewitch, Hungarian domination in the Cabinet at Vienna, and all such trivial matters, do not exist. The members of these religious communities are not like the more active members of the clergy of their Church, who unquestionably have much to do with promoting war and supporting it when it is in aid of their nationality and their religion.

One of the most remarkable sights in this region is a herd of the noble "cattle of the steppes," the beasts in which every Hungarian takes so much pride. These cattle are superb creatures, and as they stand eying the passers-by one regrets that he has not more time in which to admire their exquisite white skins, their long symmetrical horns and their shapely limbs. They appear to be good-tempered, but it would not be wise to risk one's self on foot in their immediate neighborhood.

As for the fishermen, some of them seem to prefer living on the water rather than on dry land. Indeed, the marshy borders of

the Danube are not very healthy, and it is not astonishing that men do not care to make their homes on these low lands. There are several aquatic towns between Pesth and the point at which the Drava (or Drau), a noble river, empties its waters into the Danube. Apatin is an assemblage of huts which appear to spring from the bosom of the current, but as the steamer approaches one sees that these huts are built upon piles driven firmly into the river-bed, and between these singular habitations are other piles upon which nets are stretched. So the fisherman, without going a hundred yards from his own door, traps the wily denizens of the Danube, prepares them for market, and at night goes peacefully to sleep in his rough bed, lulled by the rushing of the strong current beneath him. I am bound to confess that the fishermen of Apatin impressed me as being rather rheumatic, but perhaps this was only a fancy.

Besdan, with its low hills garnished with windmills and its shores lined with silvery willows, is the only other point of interest, save Mohacz, before reaching Pesth. Hour after hour the traveller sees the same panorama of steppes covered with swine, cattle and horses, with occasional farms—their outbuildings protected against brigands and future wars by stout walls—and with pools made by inundations of the impetuous Danube. Mohacz is celebrated for two tremendous battles in the past, and for a fine cathedral, a railway and a coaling-station at present. Louis II., king of Hungary, was there undone by Suleiman in 1526; and there, a hundred and fifty years later, did the Turks

come to sorrow by the efforts of the forces under Charles IV. of Lorraine.

Just as I was beginning to believe that the slow-going steamer on which I had embarked my fortunes was held back by enchantment—for we were half a day ascending the stream from Mohacz—we came in sight of a huge cliff almost inaccessible from one side, and a few minutes later could discern the towers of Buda and the mansions of Pesth. While nearing the landing-place and hastening hither and yon to look after various small bundles and boxes, I had occasion to address an Hungarian gentleman. In the course of some conversation which followed I remarked that Pesth seemed a thriving place, and that one would hardly have expected to find two such flourishing towns as Vienna and Pesth so near each other.

"Oh," said he with a little sneer which his slight foreign accent (he was speaking French) rendered almost ludicrous, "Vienna is a smart town, but it is nothing to this!" And he pointed with pride to his native city.

Although I could not exactly agree with this extravagant estimate of the extent of Pesth, I could not deny that it was vastly superior to my idea of it. When one arrives there from the south-east, after many wanderings among semi-barbaric villages and little cities on the outskirts of civilization, he finds Pesth very impressive. The Hungarian shepherds and the boatmen who ply between the capital and tiny forts below fancy that it is the end of the world. They have vaguely heard of Vienna,

but their patriotism is so intense and their round of life so circumscribed that they never succeed in forming a definite idea of its proportions or its location. Communication between the two chief towns of the Austria-Hungarian empire is also much less frequent than one would imagine. The Hungarians go but little to Vienna, even the members of the nobility preferring to consecrate their resources to the support of the splendors of their own city rather than to contribute them to the Austrian metropolis. Seven hours' ride in what the Austrians are bold enough to term an express-train covers the distance between Vienna and Pesth, yet there seems to be an abyss somewhere on the route which the inhabitants are afraid of. Pride, a haughty determination not to submit to centralization, and content with their surroundings make the Hungarians sparing of intercourse with their Austrian neighbors. "We send them prime ministers, and now and then we allow them a glimpse of some of our beauties in one of their palaces, but the latter does not happen very often," once said an Hungarian friend to me.

An American who should arrive in Pesth fancying that he was about to see a specimen of the dilapidated towns of "effete and decaying Europe" would find himself vastly mistaken. The beautiful and costly modern buildings on every principal street, the noble bridges across the vast river, the fine railway-stations, the handsome theatres, the palatial hotels, would explain to him why it is that the citizens of Pesth speak of their town as the "Chicago of the East." There was a time when it really seemed as

if Pesth would rival, if not exceed, Chicago in the extent of her commerce, the vivacity and boldness of her enterprises and the rapid increase of her population. Austria and Hungary were alike the prey of a feverish agitation which pervaded all classes. In a single day at Vienna as many as thirty gigantic stock companies were formed; hundreds of superb structures sprang up monthly; people who had been beggars but a few months before rode in carriages and bestowed gold by handfuls on whoever came first. The wind or some mysterious agency which no one could explain brought this financial pestilence to Pesth, where it raged until the *Krach*—the Crash, as the Germans very properly call it—came. After the extraordinary activity which had prevailed there came gloom and stagnation; but at last, as in America, business in Pesth and in Hungary generally is gradually assuming solidity and contains itself within proper bounds. The exciting period had one beneficial feature: it made Pesth a handsome city. There are no quays in Europe more substantial and elegant than those along the Danube in the Hungarian capital, and no hotels, churches and mansions more splendid than those fronting on these same quays. At eventide, when the whole population comes out for an airing and loiters by the parapets which overlook the broad rushing river, when innumerable lights gleam from the boats anchored on either bank, and when the sound of music and song is heard from half a hundred windows, no city can boast a spectacle more animated. At ten o'clock the streets are deserted. Pesth is exceedingly proper and decorous as soon as

the darkness has fallen, although I do remember to have seen a torchlight procession there during the Russo-Turkish war. The inhabitants were so enthusiastic over the arrival of a delegation of Mussulman students from Constantinople that they put ten thousand torches in line and marched until a late hour, thinking, perhaps, that the lurid light on the horizon might be seen as far as Vienna, and might serve as a warning to the Austrian government not to go too far in its sympathy with Russia.

Buda-Pesth is the name by which the Hungarians know their capital, and Buda is by no means the least important portion of the city. It occupies the majestic and rugged hill directly opposite Pesth—a hill so steep that a tunnel containing cars propelled upward and downward by machinery has been arranged to render Buda easy of access. Where the hill slopes away southward there are various large villages crowded with Servians, Croatians and Low Hungarians, who huddle together in a rather uncivilized manner. A fortress where there were many famous fights and sieges in the times of the Turks occupies a summit a little higher than Buda, so that in case of insurrection a few hot shot could be dropped among the inhabitants. Curiously enough, however, there are thousands of loyal Austrians, German by birth, living in Buda—or Ofen, as the Teutons call it—whereas in Pesth, out of the two hundred thousand inhabitants, scarcely three thousand are of Austrian birth. As long as troops devoted to Francis Joseph hold Buda there is little chance for the citizens of Pesth to succeed in revolt. Standing on the terrace of the rare old palace

on Buda's height, I looked down on Pesth with the same range of vision that I should have had in a balloon. Every quarter of the city would be fully exposed to an artillery fire from these gigantic hills.

Buda is not rich in the modern improvements which render Pesth so noticeable. I found no difficulty in some of the nooks and corners of this quaint town in imagining myself back in the Middle Ages. Tottering churches, immensely tall houses overhanging yawning and precipitous alleys, markets set on little shelves in the mountain, hovels protesting against sliding down into the valley, whither they seemed inevitably doomed to go, succeeded one another in rapid panorama. Here were costume, theatrical effect, artistic grouping: it was like Ragusa, Spalatro and Sebenico. Old and young women sat on the ground in the markets, as our negroes do in Lynchburg in Virginia: they held up fruit and vegetables and shrieked out the prices in a dialect which seemed a compound of Hungarian and German. Austrian soldiers and Hungarian recruits, the former clad in brown jackets and blue hose, the latter in buff doublets and red trousers, and wearing feathers in their caps, marched and countermarched, apparently going nowhere in particular, but merely keeping up discipline by means of exercise.

The emperor comes often to the fine palace on Buda hill, and sallies forth from it to hunt with some of the nobles on their immense estates. The empress is passionately fond of Hungary, and spends no small portion of her time there. The Hungarians

receive this consideration from their sovereign lady as very natural, and speak of her as a person of great good sense. The German and Slavic citizens of Austria say that there are but two failings of which Her Imperial Majesty can be accused—she loves the Hungarians and she is too fond of horses. Nothing delights the citizens of Pesth so much as to find that the Slavs are annoyed, for there is no love lost between Slav and Magyar. A natural antipathy has been terribly increased by the fear on the part of Hungary that she may lose her influence in the composite empire one day, owing to the Slavic regeneration.

At Pesth they do not speak of the "beautiful blue Danube," because there the river ceases to be of that color, which Johann Strauss has so enthusiastically celebrated. But between Vienna and Pesth the blue is clearly perceptible, and the current is lovely even a few miles from the islands in the stream near the Hungarian capital. The Margarethen-Insel, which is but a short distance above Pesth, is a little paradise. It has been transformed by private munificence into a rich garden full of charming shaded nooks and rare plants and flowers. In the middle of this pleasure-ground are extensive bath-houses and mineral springs. Morning, noon and night gypsy bands make seductive music, and the notes of their melodies recall the strange lands far away down the stream—Roumania, the hills and valleys of the Banat and the savage Servian mountains. Along the river-side there are other resorts in which, in these days, when business has not yet entirely recovered from the *Krach*, there are multitudes of loungers. In

midsummer no Hungarian need go farther than these baths of Pesth to secure rest and restore health. The Romans were so pleased with the baths in the neighborhood that they founded a colony on the site of Buda-Pesth, although they had no particular strategic reasons for doing so. As you sit in the pleasant shade you will probably hear the inspiring notes of the *Rakoczy*, the march of which the Hungarians are so passionately fond, which recalls the souvenirs of their revolutions and awakens a kind of holy exaltation in their hearts. The *Rakoczy* has been often enough fantastically described: some hear in it the gallop of horsemen, the clashing of arms, the songs of women and the cries of wounded men. A clever Frenchman has even written two columns of analysis of the march, and he found in it nearly as much as there is in Goethe's *Faust*. These harmless fancies are of little use in aiding to a veritable understanding of the wonderful march. It suffices to say that one cannot hear it played, even by a strolling band of gypsies, without a strange fluttering of the heart, an excitement and an enthusiasm which are beyond one's control. A nation with such a *Marseillaise* as the *Rakoczy* certainly ought to go far in time of war.

The Hungarians are a martial people, and are fond of reciting their exploits. Every old guide in Pesth will tell you, in a variegated English which will provoke your smiles, all the incidents of the Hungarian revolution, the events of 1848 and 1849—how the Austrians were driven across the great bridge over the Danube, etc.—with infinite gusto. The humblest wharf-

laborer takes a vital interest in the welfare of his country, even if he is not intelligent enough to know from what quarter hostilities might be expected. There is a flash in an Hungarian's eye when he speaks of the events of 1848 which is equalled only by the lightnings evoked from his glance by the magic echoes of the *Rakoczy*.

The peasantry round about Pesth, and the poor wretches, Slavic and Hungarian, who work on the streets, seem in sad plight. A friend one day called my attention to a number of old women, most miserably clad, barefooted and bent with age and infirmities, carrying stones and bricks to a new building. The spectacle was enough to make one's heart bleed, but my friend assured me that the old women were happy, and that they lived on bread and an occasional onion, with a little water for drink or sometimes a glass of adulterated white wine. The men working with them looked even worse fed and more degraded than the women. In the poor quarters of Pesth, and more especially those inhabited by the Jews, the tenements are exceedingly filthy, and the aroma is so uninviting that one hastens away from the streets where these rookeries abound. The utmost civility, not to say servility, may always be expected of the lower classes: some of them seize one's hand and kiss it as the Austrian servants do. Toward strangers Hungarians of all ranks are unfailingly civil and courteous. A simple letter of introduction will procure one a host of attentions which he would not have the right to expect in England or America.

The mound of earth on the bank of the Danube near the quays of Pesth represents the soil of every Hungarian province; and from that mound the emperor of Austria, when he was crowned king of Hungary, was forced to shake his sword against the four quarters of the globe, thus signifying his intention of defending the country from any attack whatsoever. Thus far he has succeeded in doing it, and in keeping on good terms with the legislative bodies of the country, without whose co-operation he cannot exercise his supreme authority. These bodies are a chamber of peers, recruited from the prelates, counts and such aristocrats as sit there by right of birth, and a second chamber, which is composed of four hundred and thirteen deputies elected from as many districts for the term of three years, and thirty-four delegates from the autonomous province of Croatia-Slavonia. The entrance to the diet is guarded by a frosty-looking servitor in an extravagant Hungarian uniform, jacket and hose profusely covered with brilliant braids, and varnished jack-boots. The deputies when in session are quiet, orderly and dignified, save when the word "Russian" is pronounced. It is a word which arouses all their hatred.

Buda-Pesth is about to undergo a formidable series of improvements notwithstanding the illusions which were dispersed by the *Krach*. One of the most conspicuous and charming municipal displays in the Paris Exposition is the group of charts and plans sent from Pesth. The patriot Deak is to have a colossal monument; the quays are to be rendered more

substantial against inundations than they are at present; and many massive public edifices are to be erected. The Danube is often unruly, and once nearly destroyed the city of Pesth, also doing much damage along the slopes of Buda. If an inundation should come within the next two or three years millions of florins' worth of property might be swept away in a single night. The opera, the principal halls of assembly and the hotels of Pesth will challenge comparison with those of any town of two hundred thousand population in the world; and the Grand Hotel Hungaria has few equals in cities of the largest size.

The Hungarians are a handsome race, and the people of Pesth and vicinity have especial claims to attention for their beauty. The men of the middle and upper classes are tall, slender, graceful, and their features are exceedingly regular and pleasing. The women are so renowned that a description of their charms is scarcely necessary. Beautiful as are the Viennese ladies in their early youth, they cannot rival their fellow-subjects of Hungary. The Austrian woman grows fat, matronly and rather coarse as she matures: the Hungarian lady of forty is still as willowy, graceful and capricious as she was at twenty. The peasant-women, poor things! are ugly, because they work from morning till night in the vineyards, toiling until their backs are broken. The wine which the beauties drink costs their humbler sisters their life-blood, their grace, their happiness. The sunshine of a thousand existences is imprisoned in the vintages of Pressburg and Carlowitz. Poor, homely toilers in the fields! Poor human

creatures transformed into beasts of burden! The Hungarian nation owes it to itself to emancipate these struggling women and show them the way to better things.

Edward King.

"FOR PERCIVAL."

CHAPTER XLVIII ENGAGEMENTS —HOSTILE AND OTHERWISE

The fairest season of the year, the debatable ground between spring and summer, had come round once more. There were leaves on the trees and flowers in the grass. The sunshine was golden and full, not like the bleak brightness of March. The winds were warm, the showers soft. Percival, always keenly affected by such influences, felt as if a new life had come to him with the spring. Now that the evenings had grown long and light, he could escape into the country, breathe a purer air and wander in fields and lanes. And as he wandered, musing, it seemed to him that he had awakened from a dream.

He looked back upon the past year, and he was more than half inclined to call himself a fool. He had taken up work for which he was not fit. He could see that now. He knew very well that his life was almost intolerable, and that it would never be more tolerable unless help came from without. He could never grow accustomed to his drudgery. He could work honestly, but he could never put his heart into it. And even if he could have displayed ten times as much energy, if his aptitude for business had been ten

times as great, if Mr. Ferguson had estimated him so highly as to take him as articled clerk, if he had passed all his examinations and been duly admitted, if the brightest possibilities in such a life as his had become realities and he had attained at last to a small share in the business,—what would be the end of this most improbable success? Merely that he would have to spend his whole life in Brenthill absorbed in law. Now, the law was a weariness to him, and he loathed Brenthill. Yet he had voluntarily accepted a life which could offer him no higher prize than such a fate as this, when Godfrey Hammond or Mrs. Middleton, or even old Hardwicke, would no doubt have helped him to something better.

Certainly he had been a fool; and yet, while he realized this truth, he sincerely respected—I might almost say he admired—his own folly. He had been sick of dependence, and he had gone down at once to the bottom of everything, taken his stand on firm ground and conquered independence for himself. He had gained the precious knowledge that he could earn his own living by the labor of his hands. He might have been a fool to reject the help that would have opened some higher and less distasteful career to him, yet if he had accepted it he would never have known the extent of his own powers. He would have been a hermit-crab still, fitted with another shell by the kindness of his friends. Had he clearly understood what he was doing when he went to Brenthill, it was very likely that he might never have gone. He was almost glad that he had not understood.

And now, having conquered in the race, could he go back and ask for the help which he had once refused? Hardly. The life in which we first gain independence may be stern and ugly, the independence itself—when we gather in our harvest—may have a rough and bitter taste, yet it will spoil the palate for all other flavors. They will seem sickly sweet after its wholesome austerity. Neither did Percival feel any greater desire for a career of any kind than he had felt a year earlier when he talked over his future life with Godfrey Hammond. If he were asked what was his day-dream, his castle in the air, the utmost limit of his earthly wishes, he would answer now as he would have answered then, "Brackenhill," dismissing the impossible idea with a smile even as he uttered it. Asked what would content him—since we can hardly hope to draw the highest prize in our life's lottery—he would answer now as then—to have an assured income sufficient to allow him to wander on the Continent, to see pictures, old towns, Alps, rivers, blue sky; wandering, to remain a foreigner all his life, so that there might always be something a little novel and curious about his food and his manner of living (things which are apt to grow so hideously commonplace in the land where one is born), to drink the wine of the country, to read many poems in verse, in prose, in the scenery around; and through it all, from first to last, to "dream deliciously."

And yet, even while he felt that his desire was unchanged, he knew that there was a fresh obstacle between him and its fulfilment. Heaven help him! had there not been enough before?

Was it needful that it should become clear to him that nowhere on earth could he find the warmth and the sunlight for which he pined while a certain pair of sad eyes grew ever sadder and sadder looking out on the murky sky, the smoke, the dust, the busy industry of Brenthill? How could he go away? Even these quiet walks of his had pain mixed with their pleasure when he thought that there was no such liberty for Judith Lisle. Not for her the cowslips in the upland pastures, the hawthorn in the hedges, the elm-boughs high against the breezy sky, the first dog-roses pink upon the briers. Percival turned from them to look at the cloud which hung ever like a dingy smear above Brenthill, and the more he felt their loveliness the more he felt her loss.

He had no walk on Sunday mornings. A few months earlier Mr. Clifton of St. Sylvester's would have claimed him as a convert. Now he was equally devout, but it was the evangelical minister, Mr. Bradbury of Christ Church, who saw him week after week a regular attendant, undaunted and sleepless though the sermon should be divided into seven heads. Mr. Bradbury preached terribly, in a voice which sometimes died mournfully away or hissed in a melodramatic whisper, and then rose suddenly in a threatening cry. Miss Macgregor sat in front of a gallery and looked down on the top of her pastor's head. The double row of little boys who were marshalled at her side grew drowsy in the hot weather, blinked feebly as the discourse progressed, and nodded at the congregation. Now and then Mr. Bradbury, who was only, as it were, at arm's length, turned a

little, looked up and flung a red-hot denunciation into the front seats of the gallery. The little boys woke up, heard what was most likely in store for them on the last day, and sat with eyes wide open dismally surveying the prospect. But presently the next boy fidgeted, or a spider let himself down from the roof, or a bird flew past the window, or a slanting ray of sunlight revealed a multitude of dusty dancing motes, and the little lads forgot Mr. Bradbury, who had forgotten them and was busy with somebody else. It might be with the pope: Mr. Bradbury was fond of providing for the pope. Or perhaps he was wasting his energy on Percival Thorne, who sat with his head thrown back and his upward glance just missing the preacher, and was quite undisturbed by his appeals.

Judith Lisle had accepted the offer of a situation at Miss Macgregor's with the expectation of being worked to death, only hoping, as she told Mrs. Barton, that the process would be slow. The hope would not have been at all an unreasonable one if she had undertaken her task in the days when she had Bertie to work for. She could have lived through much when she lived for Bertie. But, losing her brother, the mainspring of her life seemed broken. One would have said that she had leaned on him, not he on her, she drooped so pitifully now he was gone. Even Miss Macgregor noticed that Miss Lisle was delicate, and expressed her strong disapprobation of such a state of affairs. Mrs. Barton thought Judith looking very far from well, suggested tonics, and began to consider whether she might ask her to go to them for her summer

holidays. But to Percival's eyes there was a change from week to week, and he watched her with terror in his heart. Judith had grown curiously younger during the last few months. There had been something of a mother's tenderness in her love for Bertie, which made her appear more than her real age and gave decision and stateliness to her manner. Now that she was alone, she was only a girl, silent and shrinking, needing all her strength to suffer and hide her sorrow. Percival knew that each Sunday, as soon as she had taken her place, she would look downward to the pew where he always sat to ascertain if he were there. For a moment he would meet that quiet gaze, lucid, uncomplaining, but very sad. Then her eyes would be turned to her book or to the little boys who sat near her, or it might even be to Mr. Bradbury. The long service would begin, go on, come to an end. But before she left her place her glance would meet his once more, as if in gentle farewell until another Sunday should come round. Percival would not for worlds have failed at that trysting-place, but he cursed his helplessness. Could he do nothing for Judith but cheer her through Mr. Bradbury's sermons?

About this time he used deliberately to indulge in an impossible fancy. His imagination dwelt on their two lives, cramped, dwarfed and fettered. He had lost his freedom, but it seemed to him that Judith, burdened once with riches, and later with poverty, never had been free. He looked forward, and saw nothing in the future but a struggle for existence which might be prolonged through years of labor and sordid care. Why were

they bound to endure this? Why could they not give up all for just a few days of happiness? Percival longed intensely for a glimpse of beauty, for a little space of warmth and love, of wealth and liberty. Let their life thus blossom together into joy, and he would be content that it should be, like the flowering of the aloe, followed by swift and inevitable death. Only let the death be shared like the life! It would be bitter and terrible to be struck down in their gladness, but if they had truly lived they might be satisfied to die. Percival used to fancy what they might do in one glorious, golden, sunlit week, brilliant against a black background of death. How free they would be to spend all they possessed without a thought for the future! Nothing could pall upon them, and he pictured to himself how every sense would be quickened, how passion would gather strength and tenderness, during those brief days, and rise to its noblest height to meet the end. His imagination revelled in the minute details of the picture, adding one by one a thousand touches of beauty and joy till the dream was lifelike in its loveliness. He could pass in a moment from his commonplace world to this enchanted life with Judith. Living alone, and half starving himself in the attempt to pay his debts, he was in a fit state to see visions and dream dreams. But they only made his present life more distasteful to him, and the more he dreamed of Judith the more he felt that he had nothing to offer her.

He was summoned abruptly from his fairyland one night by the arrival of Mrs. Bryant. She made her appearance rather

suddenly, and sat down on a chair by the door to have a little chat with her lodger. "I came back this afternoon," she said. "I didn't tell Lydia: where was the use of bothering about writing to her? Besides, I could just have a look round, and see how Emma'd done the work while I was away, and how things had gone on altogether." She nodded her rusty black cap confidentially at Percival. It was sprinkled with bugles, which caught the light of his solitary candle.

"I hope you found all right," he said.

"Pretty well," Mrs. Bryant allowed. "It's a mercy when there's no illness nor anything of that kind, though, if you'll excuse my saying it, Mr. Thorne, you ain't looking as well yourself as I should have liked to see you."

"Oh, I am all right, thank you," said Percival.

Mrs. Bryant shook her head. The different movement brought out quite a different effect of glancing bugles. "Young people should be careful of their health," was her profound remark.

"I assure you there's nothing the matter with me."

"Well, well! we'll hope not," she answered, "though you certainly do look altered, Mr. Thorne, through being thinner in the face and darker under the eyes."

Percival smiled impatiently.

"What was I saying?" Mrs. Bryant continued. "Oh yes—that there was a many mercies to be thankful for. To find the house all right, and the times and times I've dreamed of fire and the engines not to be had, and woke up shaking so as you'd hardly

believe it! And I don't really think that I've gone to bed hardly one night without wondering whether Lydia had fastened the door and the little window into the yard, which is not safe if left open. As regular as clockwork, when the time came round, I'd mention it to my sister."

Percival sighed briefly, probably pitying the sister. "I think Miss Bryant has been very careful in fastening everything," he said.

"Well, it does seem so, and very thankful I am. And as I always say when I go out, 'Waste I *must* expect, and waste I *do* expect,' but it's a mercy when there's no thieving."

"Things will hardly go on quite the same when you are not here to look after them, Mrs. Bryant."

"No: how should they?" the landlady acquiesced. "Young heads ain't like old ones, as I said one evening to my sister when Smith was by. 'Young heads ain't like old ones,' said I. 'Why, no,' said Smith: 'they're a deal prettier.' I told him he ought to have done thinking of such things. And so he ought—a man of his age! But that's what the young men mostly think of, ain't it, Mr. Thorne? Though it's the old heads make the best housekeepers, I think, when there's a lot of lodgers to look after."

"Very likely," said Percival.

"I dare say you think there'd be fine times for the young men lodgers if it wasn't for the old heads. And I don't blame you, Mr. Thorne: it's only natural, and what we must expect in growing old. And if anything could make one grow old before one's time, and

live two years in one, so to speak, I do think it's letting lodgings."

Percival expressed himself as not surprised to hear it, though very sorry that lodgers were so injurious to her health.

"There's my drawing-room empty now, and two bedrooms," Mrs. Bryant continued. "Not but what I've had an offer for it this very afternoon, since coming back. But it doesn't do to be too hasty. Respectable parties who pay regular," she nodded a little at Percival as if to point the compliment, "are the parties for me."

"Of course," he said.

"A queer business that of young Mr. Lisle's, wasn't it?" she went on. "I should say it was about time that Miss Crawford did shut up, if she couldn't manage her young ladies better. I sent my Lydia to a boarding-school once, but it was one of a different kind to that. Pretty goings on there were at Standon Square, I'll be bound, if we only knew the truth. But as far as this goes there ain't no great harm done, that I can see. He hasn't done badly for himself, and I dare say they'll be very comfortable. She might have picked a worse—I will say that—for he was always a pleasant-spoken young gentleman, and good-looking too, though that's not a thing to set much store by. And they do say he had seen better times."

She paused. Percival murmured something which was quite unintelligible, but it served to start her off again, apparently under the impression that she had heard a remark of some kind.

"Yes, I suppose so. And as I was saying to Lydia—The coolness of them both! banns and all regular! But there now! I'm

talking and talking, forgetting that you were in the thick of it. You knew all about it, I've no doubt, and finely you and he must have laughed in your sleeves—"

"I knew nothing about it, Mrs. Bryant—nothing."

Mrs. Bryant smiled cunningly and nodded at him again. But it was an oblique nod this time, and there was a sidelong look to match it. Percival felt as if he were suffering from an aggravated form of nightmare.

"No, no: I dare say you didn't. At any rate, you won't let out if you did: why should you? It's a great thing to hold one's tongue, Mr. Thorne; and I ought to know, for I've found the advantage of being naturally a silent woman. And I don't say but what you are wise."

"I knew nothing," he repeated doggedly.

"Well, I don't suppose it was any the worse for anybody who *did* know," said Mrs. Bryant. "And though, of course, Miss Lisle lost her situation through it, I dare say she finds it quite made up to her."

"Not at all," said Percival shortly. The conversation was becoming intolerable.

"Oh, you may depend upon it she does," said Mrs. Bryant. "How should a gentleman like you know all the ins and outs, Mr. Thorne? It makes all the difference to a young woman having a brother well-to-do in the world. And very fond of her he always seemed to be, as I was remarking to Lydia."

Percival felt as if his blood were on fire. He dared not profess

too intimate a knowledge of Judith's feelings and position, and he could not listen in silence. "I think you are mistaken, Mrs. Bryant," he said, in a tone which would have betrayed his angry disgust to any more sensitive ear. Even his landlady perceived that the subject was not a welcome one.

"Well, well!" she said. "It doesn't matter, and I'll only wish you as good luck as Mr. Lisle; for I'm sure you deserve a young lady with a little bit of money as well as he did; and no reason why you shouldn't look to find one, one of these fine days."

"No, Mrs. Bryant, I sha'n't copy Mr. Lisle."

"Ah, you've something else in your eye, I can see, and perhaps one might make a guess as to a name. Well, people must manage those things their own way, and interfering mostly does harm, I take it. And I'll wish you luck, anyhow."

"I don't think there's any occasion for your good wishes," said Percival. "Thank you all the same."

"Not but what I'm sorry to lose Mr. and Miss Lisle," Mrs. Bryant continued, as if that were the natural end of her previous sentence, "for they paid for everything most regular."

"I hope these people who want to come may do the same," said Percival. Though he knew that he ran the risk of hearing all that Mrs. Bryant could tell him about their condition and prospects, he felt he could endure anything that would turn the conversation from the Lisles and himself.

But there was a different train of ideas in Mrs. Bryant's mind. "And, by the way," she said, "I think we've some little accounts

to settle together, Mr. Thorne." Then Percival perceived, for the first time, that she held a folded bit of paper in her hand. The moment that he feared had come. He rose without a word, went to his desk and unlocked it. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that Mrs. Bryant had approached the table, had opened the paper and was flattening it out with her hand. He stooped over his hoard —a meagre little hoard this time—counting what he had to give her.

Mrs. Bryant began to hunt in her purse for a receipt stamp. "It's a pleasure to have to do with a gentleman who is always so regular," she said with an approving smile.

Percival, who was steadying a little pile of coin on the sloping desk, felt a strong desire to tell her the state of affairs while he stooped in the shadow with his face turned away. Precisely because he felt this desire he drew himself up to his full height, walked to the table, looked straight into her eyes and said, "Not so very regular this time, Mrs. Bryant."

She stepped back with a perplexed and questioning expression, but she understood that something was wrong, and the worn face fell suddenly, deepening a multitude of melancholy wrinkles. He laid the money before her: "That's just half of what I owe you: I think you'll find I have counted it all right."

"Half? But where's the other half, Mr. Thorne?"

"Well, I must earn the other half, Mrs. Bryant. You shall have it as soon as I get it."

She looked up at him. "You've got to earn it?" she repeated.

Her tone would have been more appropriate if Percival had said he must steal it. There was a pause: Mrs. Bryant's lean hand closed over the money. "I don't understand this, Mr. Thorne—I don't understand it at all."

"It is very simple," he replied. "According to your wishes, I kept the rent for you, but during your absence there was a sudden call upon me for money, and I could not refuse to advance it. I regret it exceedingly if it puts you to inconvenience. I had hoped to have made it all right before you returned, but I have not had time. I can only promise you that you shall be paid all that I can put by each week till I have cleared off my debt."

"Oh, that's all very fine," said Mrs. Bryant. "But I don't think much of promises."

"I'm sorry to hear it," he answered gravely.

She looked hard at him, and said: "I did think you were quite the gentleman, Mr. Thorne. I didn't think you'd have served me so."

"No," said Percival. "I assure you I'm very sorry. If I could explain the whole affair to you, you would see that I am not to blame. But, unluckily, I can't."

"Oh, I don't want any explanations: I wouldn't give a thank-you for a cartload of 'em. Nobody ever is to blame who has the explaining of a thing, if it's ever so rascally a job."

"I am very sorry," he repeated. "But I can only say that you shall be paid."

"Oh, I dare say! Look here, Mr. Thorne: I've heard that sort

of thing scores of times. There's always been a sudden call for money; it's always something that never happened before, and it isn't ever to happen again; and it's always going to be paid back at once, but there's not one in a hundred who does pay it. Once you begin that sort of thing—"

"You'll find me that hundredth one," said Percival.

"Oh yes. To hear them talk you'd say each one was one in a thousand, at least. But I'd like you to know that though I'm a widow woman I'm not to be robbed and put upon."

"Mrs. Bryant"—Percival's strong voice silenced her querulous tones—"no one wants to rob you. Please to remember that it was entirely of your own free-will that you trusted me with the money."

"More fool I!" Mrs. Bryant ejaculated.

"It was to oblige you that I took charge of it."

"And a pretty mess I've made of it! It had better have gone so as to be some pleasure to my own flesh and blood, instead of your spending it in some way you're ashamed to own."

"If you had been here to receive it, it would have been ready for you," Percival went on, ignoring her last speech. "As it is, it has waited all these weeks for you. It isn't unreasonable that it should wait a little longer for me."

She muttered something to the effect that there was justice to be had, though he didn't seem to think it.

"Oh yes," he said, resting his arm on the chimney-piece, "there's the county court or something of that kind. By all means

go to the county court if you like. But I see no occasion for discussing the matter any more beforehand."

His calmness had its effect upon her. She didn't want any unpleasantness, she said.

"Neither do I," he replied: "I do not see why there need be any. If I live you will be paid, and that before very long. If I should happen to die first, I have a friend who will settle my affairs for me, and you will be no loser."

Mrs. Bryant suggested that it might be pleasanter for all parties if Mr. Thorne were to apply to his friend at once. She thought very likely there were little bills about in the town—gentlemen very often had little bills—and if there were any difficulties—gentlemen so often got into difficulties—it was so much better to have things settled and make a fresh start. She had no doubt that Mr. Lisle would be very willing.

"Mr. Lisle!" Percival exclaimed. "Do you suppose for one moment I should ask Mr. Lisle?"

Startled at his vehemence, Mrs. Bryant begged pardon, and substituted "the gentleman" for "Mr. Lisle."

"Thank you, no," said Percival. "I prefer to manage my own affairs in my own way. If I live I will not apply to any one. But if I must go to my grave owing five or six weeks' rent to one or other of you, I assure you most solemnly, Mrs. Bryant, that I will owe it to my friend."

The storm had subsided into subdued grumblings. Their purport was, apparently, that Mrs. Bryant liked lodgers who paid

regular, and as for those who didn't, they would have to leave, and she wished them to know it.

"Does that mean that you wish me to go?" the young man demanded with the readiness which was too much for his landlady. "I'll go to-night if you like. Do you wish it?" There was an air of such promptitude about him as he spoke that Mrs. Bryant half expected to see him vanish then and there. She had by no means made up her mind that she did wish to lose a lodger who had been so entirely satisfactory up to that time. And she preferred to keep her debtor within reach; so she drew back a little and qualified what she had said.

"Very well," said Percival, "just as you please."

Mrs. Bryant only hoped it wouldn't occur again. The tempest of her wrath showed fearful symptoms of dissolving in a shower of tears. "You don't know what work I have to make both ends meet, Mr. Thorne," she said, "nor how hard it is to get one's own, let alone keeping it. I do assure you, Mr. Thorne, me and Lydia might go in silks every day of our lives, and needn't so much as soil our fingers with the work of the house, if we had all we rightly should have. But there are folks who call themselves honest who don't think any harm of taking a widow woman's rooms and getting behindhand with the rent, running up an account for milk and vegetables and the like by the week together; and there's the bell ringing all day, as you may say, with the bills coming in, and one's almost driven out of one's wits with the worry of it all, let alone the loss, which is hard to bear. Oh, I

do hope, Mr. Thorne, that it won't occur again!"

"It isn't very likely," said Percival, privately thinking that suicide would be preferable to an existence in which such interviews with his landlady should be of frequent occurrence. Pity, irritation, disgust, pride and humiliation made up a state of feeling which was overshadowed by a horrible fear that Mrs. Bryant would begin to weep before he could get rid of her. He watched her with ever-increasing uneasiness while she attempted to give him a receipt for the money he had paid. She began by wiping her spectacles, but her hand trembled so much that she let them fall, and she, Percival and the candle were all on the floor together, assisting one another in the search for them. The rusty cap was perilously near the flame more than once, which was a cause of fresh anxiety on his part. And when she was once more established at the table, writing a word or two and then wiping her eyes, it was distracting to discover that the receipt-stamp, which Mrs. Bryant had brought with her, and which she was certain she had laid on the table, had mysteriously disappeared. It seemed to Percival that he spent at least a quarter of an hour hunting for that stamp. In reality about two minutes elapsed before it was found sticking to Mrs. Bryant's damp pocket handkerchief. It was removed thence with great care, clinging to her fingers by the way, after which it showed a not unnatural disinclination to adhere to the paper. But even that difficulty was at last overcome: a shaky signature and a date were laboriously penned, and Percival's heart beat high as he received

the completed document.

And then—Mrs. Bryant laid down the pen, took off her spectacles, shook her pocket handkerchief and deliberately burst into tears.

Percival was in despair. Of course he knew perfectly well that he was not a heartless brute, but equally of course he felt that he must be a heartless brute as he stood by while Mrs. Bryant wept copiously. Of course he begged her to calm herself, and of course a long-drawn sob was her only answer. All at once there was a knock at the door. "Come in," said Percival, feeling that matters could not possibly be worse. It opened, and Lydia stood on the threshold, staring at the pair in much surprise.

"Well, I never!" she said; and turning toward Percival she eyed him suspiciously, as if she thought he might have been knocking the old lady about. "And pray what may be the meaning of this?"

"Mrs. Bryant isn't quite herself this evening, I am afraid," said Percival, feeling that his reply was very feeble. "And we have had a little business to settle which was not quite satisfactory."

At the word "business" Lydia stepped forward, and her surprise gave place to an expression of half incredulous amusement—Percival would almost have said of delight.

"What! ain't the money all right?" she said. "You don't say so! Well, ma, you *have* been clever this time, haven't you? Oh I suppose you thought I didn't know what you were after when you were so careful about not bothering me with the accounts? Lor! I knew fast enough. Don't you feel proud of yourself for having

managed it so well?"

Mrs. Bryant wept. Percival, not having a word to say, preserved a dignified silence.

"Come along, ma: I dare say Mr. Thorne has had about enough of this," Lydia went on, coolly examining the paper which lay on the table. She arrived at the total. "Oh that's it, is it? Well, I like that, I do! Some people are so clever, ain't they? So wonderfully sharp they can't trust their own belongings! I do like that! Come along, ma." And Lydia seconded her summons with such energetic action that it seemed to Percival that she absolutely swept the old lady out of the room, and that the wet handkerchief, the rusty black gown and the bugle-sprinkled head-dress vanished in a whirlwind, with a sound of shrill laughter on the stairs.

For a moment his heart leapt with a sudden sense of relief and freedom, but only for a moment. Then he flung himself into his arm-chair, utterly dejected and sickened.

Should he be subject to this kind of thing all his life long? If he should chance to be ill and unable to work, how could he live for any length of time on his paltry savings? And debt would mean *this*! He need not even be ill. He remembered how he broke his arm once when he was a lad. Suppose he broke his arm now—a bit of orange-peel in the street might do it—or suppose he hurt the hand with which he wrote?

And this was the life which he might ask Judith to share with him! She might endure Mrs. Bryant's scolding and Lydia's

laughter, and pinch and save as he was forced to do, and grow weary and careworn and sick at heart. No, God forbid! And yet —and yet—was she not enduring as bad or worse in that hateful school?

Oh for his dream! One week of life and love, and then swift exit from a hideous world, where Mrs. Bryant and Miss Macgregor and Lydia and all his other nightmares might do their worst and fight their hardest in their ugly struggle for existence!

Percival had achieved something of a victory in his encounter with his landlady. His manner had been calm and fairly easy, and from first to last she had been more conscious of his calmness than Percival was himself. She had been silenced, not coaxed and flattered as she often was by unfortunate lodgers whose ready money ran short. Indeed, she had been defied, and when she recovered herself a little she declared that she had never seen any one so stuck up as Mr. Thorne. This was unkind, after he had gone down on his knees to look for her spectacles.

But if Percival had conquered, his was but a barren victory. He fancied that an unwonted tone of deference crept into his voice when he gave his orders. He was afraid of Mrs. Bryant. He faced Lydia bravely, but he winced in secret at the recollection of her laughter. He very nearly starved himself lest mother or daughter should be able to say, "Mr. Thorne might have remembered his debts before he ordered this or that." He had paid Lisle's bill at Mr. Robinson's, but he could not forget his own, and he walked past the house daily with his head high, feeling himself

a miserable coward.

There was a draper's shop close to it, and as he went by one day he saw a little pony chaise at the door. A girl of twelve or thirteen sat in it listlessly holding the reins and looking up and down the street. It was a great field-day for the Brenthill volunteers, and their band came round a corner not a dozen yards away and suddenly struck up a triumphant march. The pony, although as quiet a little creature as you could easily find, was startled. If it had been a wooden rocking-horse it might not have minded, but any greater sensibility must have received a shock. The girl uttered a cry of alarm, but there was no cause for it. Percival, who was close at hand, stepped to the pony's head, a lady rushed out of the shop, the band went by in a tempest of martial music, a crowd of boys and girls filled the roadway and disappeared as quickly as they came. It was all over in a minute. Percival, who was coaxing the pony as he stood, was warmly thanked.

"There is nothing to thank me for," he said. "That band was enough to frighten anything, but the pony seems a gentle little thing."

"So it is," the lady replied. "But you see, the driver was very inexperienced, and we really are very much obliged to you, Mr. Thorne."

He looked at her in blank amazement. Had some one from his former life suddenly arisen to claim acquaintance with him? He glanced from her to the girl, but recognized neither. "You know me?" he said.

She smiled: "You don't know me, I dare say. I am Mrs. Barton. I saw you one day when I was just coming away after calling on Miss Lisle." She watched the hero of her romance as she spoke. His dark face lighted up suddenly.

"I have often heard Miss Lisle speak of you and of your kindness," he said. "Do you ever see her now?"

"Oh yes. She comes to give Janie her music-lesson every Wednesday afternoon.—We couldn't do without Miss Lisle, could we, Janie?" The girl was shy and did not speak, but a broad smile overspread her face.

"I had no idea she still came to you. Do you know how she gets on at Miss Macgregor's?" he asked eagerly. "Is she well? I saw her at church one day, and I thought she was pale."

"She says she is well," Mrs. Barton replied. "But I am not very fond of Miss Macgregor myself: no one ever stays there very long." A shopman came out and put a parcel into the chaise. Mrs. Barton took the reins. "I shall tell Miss Lisle you asked after her," she said as with a bow and cordial smile she drove off.

It was Monday, and Percival's mind was speedily made up. He would see Judith Lisle on Wednesday.

Tuesday was a remarkably long day, but Wednesday came at last, and he obtained permission to leave the office earlier than usual. He knew the street in which Mrs. Barton lived, and had taken some trouble to ascertain the number, so that he could stroll to and fro at a safe distance, commanding a view of the door.

He had time to study the contents of a milliner's window:

it was the only shop near at hand, and even that pretended not to be a shop, but rather a private house, where some one had accidentally left a bonnet or two, a few sprays of artificial flowers and an old lady's cap in the front room. He had abundant leisure to watch No. 51 taking in a supply of coals, and No. 63 sending away a piano. He sauntered to and fro so long, with a careless assumption of unconsciousness how time was passing, that a stupid young policeman perceived that he was not an ordinary passer-by. Astonished and delighted at his own penetration, he began to saunter and watch him, trying to make out which house he intended to favor with a midnight visit. Percival saw quite a procession of babies in perambulators being wheeled home by their nurses after their afternoon airing, and he discovered that the nurse at No. 57 had a flirtation with a soldier. But at last the door of No. 69 opened, a slim figure came down the steps, and he started to meet it, leisurely, but with a sudden decision and purpose in his walk. The young policeman saw the meeting: the whole affair became clear to him—why, he had done that sort of thing himself—and he hurried off rather indignantly, feeling that he had wasted his time, and that the supposed burglar had not behaved at all handsomely.

And Percival went forward and held out his hand to Judith, but found that even the most commonplace greeting stuck in his throat somehow. She looked quickly up at him, but she too was silent, and he walked a few steps by her side before he said, "I did not know what day you were going away."

The rest of the conversation followed in a swift interchange of question and reply, as if to make up for that pause.

"No, but I thought I should be sure to have a chance of saying good-bye."

"And I was out. I was very sorry when I came home and found that you were gone. But since we have met again, it doesn't matter now, does it?" he said with a smile. "How do you get on at Miss Macgregor's?"

"Oh, very well," she answered. "It will do for the present."

"And Miss Crawford?"

"She will not see me nor hear from me. She is ill and low-spirited, and Mrs. Barton tells me that a niece has come to look after her."

"Isn't that rather a good thing?"

"No: I don't like it. I saw one or two of those nieces—there are seven of them—great vulgar, managing women. I can't bear to think of my dear little Miss Crawford being bullied and nursed by Miss Price. She couldn't endure them, I know, only she was so fond of their mother."

Percival changed the subject: "So you go to Mrs. Barton's still? I didn't know that till last Monday."

"When you rescued Janie from imminent peril. Oh, I have heard," said Judith with a smile.

"Please to describe me as risking my own life in the act. It would be a pity not to make me heroic while you are about it."

"Janie would readily believe it. She measures her danger by

her terror, which was great. But she is a dear, good child, and it is such a pleasure to me to go there every week!"

"Ah! Then you are not happy at Miss Macgregor's?"

"Well, not very. But it might be much worse. And I am mercenary enough to think about the money I earn at Mrs. Barton's," said Judith. "I don't mind telling you now that Bertie left two or three little bills unpaid when he went away, and I was very anxious about them. But, luckily, they were small."

"You don't mind telling me now. Are they paid, then?"

"Yes, and I have not heard of any more."

"You paid them out of your earnings?"

"Yes. You understand me, don't you, Mr. Thorne? Bertie and I were together then, and I could not take Emmeline's money to pay our debts."

"Yes, I understand."

"And I had saved a little. It is all right now, since they are all paid. I fancied there would be some more to come in, but it seems not, so I have a pound or two to spare, and I feel quite rich."

It struck Percival that Judith had managed better than he had. "Do you ever hear from him?" he asked.

"Yes. Mr. Nash has forgiven them."

"Already?"

Judith nodded: "He has, though I thought he never would. Bertie understood him better."

(The truth was, that she had taken impotent rage for strength of purpose. Mr. Nash was aware that he had neglected his

daughter, and was anxious to stifle the thought by laying the blame on every one else. And Bertie was quicker than Judith was in reading character when it was on his own level.)

"He has forgiven them," Percival repeated with a smile. "Well, Bertie is a lucky fellow."

"So is my father lucky, if that is luck."

"Your father?"

"Yes. He has written to me and to my aunt Lisle—at Rookleigh, you know. He has taken another name, and it seems he is getting on and making money: *he* wanted to send me some too. And my aunt is angry with me because I would not go to her. She has given me two months to make up my mind in."

"And you will not go?"

"I cannot leave Brenthill," said Judith. "She is more than half inclined to forgive Bertie too. So I am alone; and yet I am right." She uttered the last words with lingering sadness.

"No doubt," Percival answered. They were walking slowly through a quiet back street, with a blank wall on one side. "Still, it is hard," he said.

There was something so simple and tender in his tone that Judith looked up and met his eyes. She might have read his words in them even if he had not spoken. "Don't pity me, Mr. Thorne," she said.

"Why not?"

"Oh, because—I hardly know why. I can't stand it when any one is kind to me, or sorry for me, sometimes at Mrs. Barton's.

I don't know how to bear it. But it does not matter much, for I get braver and braver when people are hard and cold. I really don't mind that half as much as you would think, so you see you needn't pity me. In fact, you mustn't."

"Indeed, I think I must," said Percival. "More than before."

"No, no," she answered, hurriedly. "Don't say it, don't look it, don't even let me think you do it in your heart. Tell me about yourself. You listen to me, you ask about me, but you say nothing of what you are doing."

"Working." There was a moment's hesitation. "And dreaming," he added.

"But you have been ill?"

"Not I."

"You have not been ill? Then you are ill. What makes you so pale?"

He laughed: "Am I pale?"

"And you look tired."

"My work is wearisome sometimes."

"More so than it was?" she questioned anxiously. "You used not to look so tired."

"Don't you think that a wearisome thing must grow more wearisome merely by going on?"

"But is that all? Isn't there anything else the matter?"

"Perhaps there is," he allowed. "There are little worries of course, but shall I tell you what is the great thing that is the matter with me?"

"If you will."

"I miss you, Judith."

The color spread over her face like a rosy dawn. Her eyes were fixed on the pavement, and yet they looked as if they caught a glimpse of Eden. But Percival could not see that. "You miss me?" she said.

"Yes." He had forgotten his hesitation and despair. He had outstripped them, had left them far behind, and his words sprang to his lips with a glad sense of victory and freedom. "Must I miss you always?" he said. "Will you not come back to me, Judith? My work could never be wearisome then when I should feel that I was working for you. There would be long to wait, no doubt, and then a hard life, a poor home. What have I to offer you? But will you come?"

She looked up at him: "Do you really want me, or is it that you are sorry for me and want to help me? Are you sure it isn't that? We Lisles have done you harm enough: I won't do you a worse wrong still."

"You will do me the worst wrong of all if you let such fears and fancies stand between you and me," said Percival. "Do you not know that I love you? You must decide as your own heart tells you. But don't doubt me."

She laid her hand lightly on his arm: "Forgive me, Percival."

And so those two passed together into the Eden which she had seen.

CHAPTER XLIX.
HOW THE SUN ROSE IN GLADNESS, AND SET IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

The Wednesday which was so white a day for Judith and Percival had dawned brightly at Fordborough. Sissy, opening her eyes on the radiant beauty of the morning, sprang up with an exclamation of delight. The preceding day had been gray and uncertain, but this was golden and cloudless. A light breeze tossed the acacia-boughs and showed flashes of blue between the quivering sprays. The dew was still hanging on the clustered white roses which climbed to her open window, and the birds were singing among the leaves as if they were running races in a headlong rapture of delight. Sissy did not sing, but she said to herself, "Oh, how glad the Latimers must be!"

She was right, for at a still earlier hour the Latimer girls had been flying in and out of their respective rooms in a perfectly aimless, joyous, childishly happy fashion, like a flock of white pigeons. And the sum of their conversation was simply this: "Oh, what a day! what a glorious day!" Yet it sufficed for a Babel of bird-like voices. At last one more energetic than the rest, in her white dressing-gown and with her hair hanging loose, flew down the long oak-panelled corridor and knocked with might

and main at her brother's door: "Walter! Walter! wake up! do! You said it would rain, and it doesn't rain! It is a *lovely* morning! Oh, Walter!"

Walter responded briefly to the effect that he had been awake since half after three, and was aware of the fact.

Henry Hardwicke, who had been to the river for an early swim, stopped to discuss the weather with a laborer who was plodding across the fields. The old man looked at the blue sky with an air of unutterable wisdom, made some profound remarks about the quarter in which the wind was, added a local saying or two bearing on the case, and summed up to the effect that it was a fine day.

Captain Fothergill had no particular view from his window, but he inquired at an early hour what the weather was like.

Ashendale Priory was a fine old ruin belonging to the Latimers, and about six miles from Latimer's Court. Sissy Langton had said one day that she often passed it in her rides, but had never been into it. Walter Latimer was astonished, horrified and delighted all at once, and vowed that she must see it, and should see it without delay. This Wednesday had been fixed for an excursion there, but the project was nearly given up on account of the weather. As late as the previous afternoon the question was seriously debated at the Court by a council composed of Walter and three of his sisters. One of the members was sent to look at the barometer. She reported that it had gone up in the most extraordinary manner since luncheon.

The announcement was greeted with delight, but it was discovered late that evening that Miss Latimer had had a happy thought. Fearing that the barometer would be utterly ruined by the shaking and tapping which it underwent, she had screwed it up to a height at which her younger brothers and sisters could not wish to disturb it, had gone into the village, and had forgotten all about it. There was general dismay and much laughter.

"It will rain," said Walter: "it will certainly rain. I thought it was very queer. Well, it is too late to do anything now. We must just wait and see what happens."

And behold the morrow had come, the clouds were gone, and it was a day in a thousand, a very queen of days.

The party started for Ashendale, some riding, some driving, waking the quiet green lanes with a happy tumult of wheels and horse-hoofs and laughing voices. Captain Fothergill contrived to be near Miss Langton, and to talk in a fashion which made her look down once or twice when she had encountered the eagerness of his dark eyes. The words he said might have been published by the town-crier. But that functionary could not have reproduced the tone and manner which rendered them significant, though Sissy hardly knew the precise amount of meaning they were intended to convey. She was glad when the tower of the priory rose above the trees. So was Walter Latimer, who had been eying the back of Fothergill's head or the sharply-cut profile which was turned so frequently toward Miss Langton, and who was firmly persuaded that the captain ought to be shot.

Ashendale Priory was built nearly at the bottom of a hill. Part of it, close by the gateway, was a farmhouse occupied by a tenant of the Latimers. His wife, a pleasant middle-aged woman, came out to meet them as they dismounted, and a rosy daughter of sixteen or seventeen lingered shyly in the little garden, which was full to overflowing of old-fashioned flowers and humming with multitudes of bees. The hot sweet fragrance of the crowded borders made Sissy say that it was like the very heart of summer-time.

"A place to recollect and dream of on a November day," said Fothergill.

"Oh, don't talk of November now! I hate it."

"I don't want November, I assure you," he replied. "Why cannot this last for ever?"

"The weather?"

"Much more than the weather. Do you suppose I should only remember that it was a fine day?"

"What, the place too?" said Sissy. "It is beautiful, but I think you would soon get tired of Ashendale, Captain Fothergill."

"Do you?" he said in a low voice, looking at her with the eyes which seemed to draw hers to meet them. "Try me and see which will be tired first." And, without giving her time to answer, he went on: "Couldn't you be content with Ashendale?"

"For always? I don't think I could—not for all my life."

"Well, then, the perfect place is yet to find," said Fothergill. "And how charming it must be!"

"If one should ever find it!" said Sissy.

"One?" Fothergill looked at her again. "Not *one*! Won't you hope we may both find it?"

"Like the people who hunted for the Earthly Paradise," said Sissy hurriedly. "Look! they are going to the ruins." And she hastened to join the others.

Latimer noticed that she evidently, and very properly, would not permit Fothergill to monopolize her, but seemed rather to avoid the fellow. To his surprise, however, he found that there was no better fortune for himself. Fothergill had brought a sailor cousin, a boy of nineteen, curly-haired, sunburnt and merry, with a sailor's delight in flirtation and fun, and Archibald Carroll fixed his violent though temporary affections on Sissy the moment he was introduced to her at the priory. To Latimer's great disgust, Sissy distinctly encouraged him, and the two went off together during the progress round the ruins. There were some old fish-ponds to be seen, with swans and reeds and water-lilies, and when they were tired of scrambling about the gray walls there was a little copse hard by, the perfection of sylvan scenery on a small scale. The party speedily dispersed, rambling where their fancy led them, and were seen no more till the hour which had been fixed for dinner. Mrs. Latimer meanwhile chose a space of level turf, superintended the unpacking of hampers, and when the wanderers came dropping in by twos and threes from all points of the compass, professing unbounded readiness to help in the preparations, there was nothing left for them to do. Among

the latest were Sissy and her squire, a radiant pair. She was charmed with her saucy sailor-boy, who had no serious intentions or hopes, who would most likely be gone on the morrow, and who asked nothing more than to be happy with her through that happy summer day. People and things were apt to grow perplexing and sad when they came into her every-day life, but here was a holiday companion, arrived as unexpectedly as if he were created for her holiday, with no such thing as an afterthought about the whole affair.

Latimer sulked, but his rival smiled, when the two young people arrived. For—thus argued Raymond Fothergill, with a vanity which was so calm, so clear, so certain that it sounded like reason itself—it was not possible that Sissy Langton preferred Carroll to himself. Even had it been Latimer or Hardwicke! But Carroll—no! Therefore she used the one cousin merely to avoid the other. But why did she wish to avoid him? He remembered her blushes, her shyness, the eyes that sank before his own, and he answered promptly that she feared him. He triumphed in the thought. He had contended against a gentle indifference on Sissy's part, till, having heard rumors of a bygone love-affair, he had suspected the existence of an unacknowledged constancy. Then what did this fear mean? It was obviously the self-distrust of a heart unwilling to yield, clinging to its old loyalty, yet aware of a new weakness—seeking safety in flight because unable to resist. Fothergill was conscious of power, and could wait with patience. (It would have been unreasonable to expect him to

spend an equal amount of time and talent in accounting for Miss Langton's equally evident avoidance of young Latimer. Besides, that was a simple matter. He bored her, no doubt.)

When the business of eating and drinking was drawing to a close, little Edith Latimer, the youngest of the party, began to arrange a lapful of wild flowers which she had brought back from her ramble. Hardwicke, who had helped her to collect them, handed them to her one by one.

A green tuft which he held up caught Sissy's eye. "Why, Edie, what have you got there?" she said. "Is that maiden-hair spleenwort? Where did you find it?"

"In a crack in the wall: there's a lot more," the child answered; and at the same moment Hardwicke said, "Shall I get you some?"

"No: I'll get some," exclaimed Archie, who was lying at Sissy's feet. "Miss Langton would rather I got it for her, I know."

Sissy arched her brows.

"She has so much more confidence in me," Archie explained. "Please give me a leaf of that stuff, Miss Latimer: I want to see what it's like."

"My confidence is rather misplaced, I'm afraid, if you don't know what you are going to look for."

"Not a bit misplaced. You know very well I shall have a sort of instinct which will take me straight to it."

"Dear me! It hasn't any smell, you know," said Sissy with perfect gravity.

"Oh, how cruel!" said Carroll, "withering up my delicate

feelings with thoughtless sarcasm! Smell? no! My what-d'ye-call-it—sympathy—will tell me which it is. My heart will beat faster as I approach it. But I'll have that leaf all the same, please."

"And it might be as well to know where to look for it."

"We found it in the ruins—in the wall of the refectory," said Hardwicke.

Sissy looked doubtful, but Carroll exclaimed, "Oh, I know! That's where the old fellows used to dine, isn't it? And had sermons read to them all the time."

"What a bore!" some one suggested.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Archie. "Sermons always are awful bores, ain't they? But I don't think I should mind 'em so much if I might eat my dinner all the time." He stopped with a comical look of alarm. "I say, we haven't got any parsons here, have we?"

"No," said Fothergill smiling. "We've brought the surgeon, in case of broken bones, but we've left the chaplain at home. So you may give us the full benefit of your opinions."

"I thought there wasn't one," Archie remarked, looking up at Sissy, "because nobody said grace. Or don't you ever say grace at a picnic?"

"I don't think you do," Sissy replied. "Unless it were a very Low Church picnic perhaps. I don't know, I'm sure."

"Makes a difference being out of doors, I suppose," said Archie, examining the little frond which Edith had given him. "And this is what you call maiden-hair?"

"What should you call it?"

"A libel," he answered promptly. "Maiden—hair, indeed! Why, I can see some a thousand times prettier quite close by. What can you want with this? *You* can't see the other, but I'll tell you what it's like. It's the most beautiful brown, with gold in it, and it grows in little ripples and waves and curls, and nothing ever was half so fine before, and it catches just the edge of a ray of sunshine—oh, don't move your head!—and looks like a golden glory—"

"Dear me!" said Sissy. "Then I'm afraid it's very rough."

"—And the least bit of it is worth a cartload of this green rubbish."

"Ah! But you see it is very much harder to get."

"Of course it is," said Archie. "But exchange is no robbery, they say. Suppose I go and dig up some of this, don't you think—remembering that I am a poor sailor-boy, going to be banished from 'England, home and beauty,' and that I shall most likely be drowned on my next voyage—don't you think—"

"I think that, on your own showing, you must get me at least a cartload of the other before you have the face to finish that sentence."

"A cartload! I feel like a prince in a fairy-tale. And what would you do with it all?"

"Well, I really hardly know what I should do with it."

"There now!" said Archie. "And I could tell you in a moment what I would do with mine if you gave it me."

"Oh, but I could tell you that."

"Tell me, then."

"You would fold it up carefully in a neat little bit of paper, but you would not write anything on it, because you would not like it to look business-like. Besides, you couldn't possibly forget. And a few months hence you will have lost your heart to some foreign young lady—I don't know where you are going—and you would find the little packet in your desk, and wonder who gave it to you."

"Oh, how little you know me!" Archie exclaimed, and sank back on the turf in a despairing attitude. But a moment later he began to laugh, and sat up again. "There *was* a bit once," he said confidentially, "and for the life of me I couldn't think whose it could be. There were two or three girls I knew it couldn't possibly belong to, but that didn't help me very far. That lock of hair quite haunted me. See what it is to have such susceptible feelings! I used to look at it a dozen times a day, and I couldn't sleep at night for thinking of it. At last I said to myself, 'I don't care whose it is: she was a nice, dear girl anyhow, and I'm sure she wouldn't like to think that she bothered me in this way.' So I consigned it to a watery grave. I felt very melancholy when it went, I can tell you, and if my own hair had been a reasonable length I'd have sent a bit of it overboard with hers, just for company's sake. But I'd had a fever, and I was cropped like a convict, so I couldn't."

"You tell that little story very nicely," said Sissy when he paused. "Do you always mention it when you ask—"

"Why, no," Archie exclaimed. "I thought *you* would take it as it was meant—as the greatest possible compliment to yourself. But I suppose it's my destiny to be misunderstood. Don't you see that I *couldn't* tell that to any one unless I were quite sure that she was so much higher, so altogether apart, that she never, never could get mixed up with anybody else in my mind?"

"She had better have some very particular sort of curliness in her hair too," said Sissy. "Don't you think it would be safer?"

"Oh, this is too much!" he exclaimed. "It's sport to you, evidently, but you don't consider that it's death to me. I say, come away, and we'll look for this green stuff."

Fothergill smiled, but Latimer's handsome face flushed. He had made a dozen attempts to supplant Carroll, and had been foiled by the laughing pair. What was the use of being a good-looking fellow of six-and-twenty, head of one of the county families and owner of Latimer's Court and Ashendale, if he were to be set aside by a beggarly sailor-boy? What did Fothergill mean by bringing his poor relations dragging after him where they were not wanted? He sprang to his feet, and went away with long strides to make violent love to the farmer's rosy little daughter. He knew that he meant nothing at all, and that he was filling the poor child's head and heart with the vainest of hopes. He knew that he owed especial respect and consideration to the daughter of his tenant, a man who had dealt faithfully by him, and whose father and grandfather had held Ashendale under the Latimers. He felt that he was acting meanly even while he kissed

little Lucy by the red wall where the apricots were ripening in the sun. And he had no overmastering passion for excuse: what did he care for little Lucy? He was doing wrong, and he was doing it *because* it was wrong. He was in a fiercely antagonistic mood, and, as he could not fight Fothergill and Carroll, he fought with his own sense of truth and honor, for want of a better foe. And Lucy, conscious of her rosy prettiness, stood shyly pulling the lavender-heads in a glad bewilderment of vanity, wonder and delight, while Latimer's heart was full of jealous anger. If Sissy Langton could amuse herself, so could he.

But Sissy was too happily absorbed in her amusement to think of his. She had avoided him, as she had avoided Captain Fothergill, from a sense of danger. They were becoming too serious, too much in earnest, and she did not want to be serious. So she went gayly across the grass, laughing at Archie because he would look on level ground for her maiden-hair spleenwort. They came to a small enclosure.

"Here you are!" said Carroll. "This is what somebody said was the refectory. It makes one feel quite sad and sentimental only to think what a lot of jolly dinners have been eaten here. And nothing left of it all!"

"That's your idea of sentiment, Mr. Carroll? It sounds to me as if you hadn't had enough to eat."

"Oh yes, I had plenty. But we ought to pledge each other in a cup of sack, or something of the kind. And a place like this ought at least to smell deliciously of roast and boiled. Instead of

which it might as well be the chapel."

Sissy gazed up at the wall: "There's some maiden-hair! How was it I never saw it this morning? Surely, we came along the top and looked down into this place."

"No," said Archie. "That was the chapel we looked into. Didn't I say they were just alike?"

"Well, I can easily get up there," she said. "And you may stay down here if you like, and grow sentimental over the ghost of a dinner." And, laughing, she darted up a steep ascent of turf, slackening her pace when she came to a rough heap of fallen stones. Carroll was by her side directly, helping her. "Why, this is prettier than where we went this morning," she said when they reached the top: "you see the whole place better. But it's narrower, I think. This is the west wall, isn't it? Oh, Mr. Carroll, how much the sun has gone down already!"

"I wish I were Moses, or whoever it was, to make it stop," said the boy: "it would stay up there a good long time."

There was a black belt of shadow at the foot of the wall. Archie looked down as if to measure its breadth. A little tuft of green caught his eye, and stooping he pulled it from between the stones.

"Oh, how broken it is here! Doesn't it look as if a giant had taken a great bite out of it?" Sissy exclaimed, at the same moment that he called after her, "Is this right, Miss Langton?"

She turned her head, and for a second's space he saw her bright face, her laughing, parted lips. Then there was a terrible cry, stretched hands at which he snatched instinctively but in vain, and

a stone which slipped and fell heavily. He stumbled forward, and recovered himself with an effort. There was blank space before him—and what below?

Archie Carroll half scrambled down by the help of the ivy, half slid, and reached the ground. Thus, at the risk of his life, he gained half a minute, and spent it in kneeling on the grass—a yard away from that which he dared not touch—saying pitifully, "Miss Langton! Oh, won't you speak to me, Miss Langton?"

He was in the shadow, but looking across the enclosure he faced a broken doorway in the south-east corner. The ground sloped away a little, and the arch opened into the stainless blue. A sound of footsteps made Carroll look up, and through the archway came Raymond Fothergill. He had heard the cry, he had outrun the rest, and, even in his blank bewilderment of horror, Archie shrank back scared at his cousin's aspect. His brows and moustache were black as night against the unnatural whiteness of his face, which was like bleached wax. His eyes were terrible. He seemed to reach the spot in an instant. Carroll saw his hands on the stone which had fallen, and lay on her—O God!—or only on her dress?

Fothergill's features contracted in sudden agony as he noted the horribly twisted position in which she lay, but he stooped without a moment's hesitation, and, lifting her gently, laid her on the turf, resting her head upon his knee. There was a strange contrast between the tenderness with which he supported her and the fierce anger of his face. Others of the party came rushing on

the scene in dismay and horror.

"Water!" said Fothergill. "Where's Anderson?" (Anderson was the young doctor.) "Not here?"

"He went by the fish-ponds with Evelyn," cried Edith suddenly: "I saw him." Hardwicke darted off.

"Curse him! Playing the fool when he's wanted more than he ever will be again.—Mrs. Latimer!"

Edith rushed away to find her mother.

Some one brought water, and held it while Fothergill, with his disengaged hand, sprinkled the white face on his knee.

Walter Latimer hurried round the corner. He held a pink rosebud, on which his fingers tightened unconsciously as he ran. Coming to the staring group, he stopped aghast. "Good God!" he panted, "what has happened?"

Fothergill dashed more water on the shut eyes and bright hair.

Latimer looked from him to the others standing round: "What has happened?"

A hoarse voice spoke from the background: "She fell." Archie Carroll had risen from his knees, and, lifting one hand above his head, he pointed to the wall. Suddenly, he met Fothergill's eyes, and with a half-smothered cry he flung himself all along upon the grass and hid his face.

"Fothergill! is she much hurt?" cried Latimer. "Is it serious?"

The other did not look up. "I cannot tell," he said, "but I believe she is killed."

Latimer uttered a cry: "No! no! For God's sake don't say that!

It can't be!"

Fothergill made no answer.

"It isn't possible!" said Walter. But his glance measured the height of the wall and rested on the stones scattered thickly below. The words died on his lips.

"Is Anderson never coming?" said some one else. Another messenger hurried off. Latimer stood as if rooted to the ground, gazing after him. All at once he noticed the rose which he still held, and jerked it away with a movement as of horror.

The last runner returned: "Anderson and Hardwicke will be here directly: I saw them coming up the path from the fish-ponds. Here is Mrs. Latimer."

Edith ran through the archway first, eager and breathless. "Here is mamma," she said, going straight to Raymond Fothergill with her tidings, and speaking softly as if Sissy were asleep. A little nod was his only answer, and the girl stood gazing with frightened eyes at the drooping head which he supported. Mrs. Latimer, Hardwicke and Anderson all arrived together, and the group divided to make way for them. The first thing to be done was to carry Sissy to the farmhouse, and while they were arranging this Edith felt two hands pressed lightly on her shoulders. She turned and confronted Harry Hardwicke.

"Hush!" he said: "do not disturb them now, but when they have taken her to the house, if you hear anything said, tell them that I have gone for Dr. Grey, and as soon as I have sent him here I shall go on for Mrs. Middleton. You understand?" he added,

for the child was looking at him with her scared eyes, and had not spoken.

"Yes," she said, "I will tell them. Oh, Harry! will she die?"

"Not if anything you and I can do will save her—will she, Edith?" and Hardwicke ran off to the stables for his horse. A man was there who saddled it for him, and a rough farm-boy stood by and saw how the gentleman, while he waited, stroked the next one—a lady's horse, a chestnut—and how presently he turned his face away and laid his cheek for a moment against the chestnut's neck. The boy thought it was a rum go, and stood staring vacantly while Hardwicke galloped off on his terrible errand.

Meanwhile, they were carrying Sissy to the house. Fothergill was helping, of course. Latimer had stood by irresolutely, half afraid, yet secretly hoping for a word which would call him. But no one heeded him. Evelyn and Edith had hurried on to see that there was a bed on which she could be laid, and the sad little procession followed them at a short distance. The lookers-on straggled after it, an anxiously-whispering group, and as the last passed through the ruined doorway Archie Carroll lifted his head and glanced round. The wall, with its mosses and ivy, rose darkly above him—too terrible a presence to be faced alone. He sprang up, hurried out of the black belt of shadow and fled across the turf. He never looked back till he stood under the arch, but halting there, within sight of his companions, he clasped a projection with one hand as if he were giddy, and turning his head gazed intently at the crest of the wall. Every broken

edge, every tuft of feathery grass, every aspiring ivy-spray, stood sharply out against the sunny blue. The breeze had gone down, and neither blade nor leaf stirred in the hot stillness of the air. There was the way by which they had gone up, there was the ruinous gap which Sissy had said was like a giant's bite. Archie's grasp tightened on the stone as he looked. He might well feel stunned and dizzy, gazing thus across the hideous gulf which parted him from the moment when he stood upon the wall with Sissy Langton laughing by his side. Not till every detail was cruelly stamped upon his brain did he leave the spot.

By that time they had carried Sissy in. Little Lucy had been close by, her rosy face blanched with horror, and had looked appealingly at Latimer as he went past. She wanted a kind word or glance, but the innocent confiding look filled him with remorse and disgust. He would not meet it: he stared straight before him. Lucy was overcome by conflicting emotions, went off into hysterics, and her mother had to be called away from the room where she was helping Mrs. Latimer. Walter felt as if he could have strangled the pretty, foolish child to whom he had been saying sweet things not half an hour before. The rose that he had gathered for her was fastened in her dress, and the pink bud that she had given him lay in its first freshness on the turf in the ruins.

Some of the party waited in the garden. Fothergill stood in the shadow of the porch, silent and a little apart. Archie Carroll came up the path, but no one spoke to him, and he went straight to

his cousin. Leaning against the woodwork, he opened his lips to speak, but was obliged to stop and clear his throat, for the words would not come. "How is she?" he said at last.

"I don't know."

"Why do you look at me like that?" said the boy desperately.

Fothergill slightly changed his position, and the light fell more strongly on his face. "I don't ever want to look at you again," he said with quiet emphasis. "You've done mischief enough to last your lifetime if you lived a thousand years."

"It wasn't my fault! Ray, it wasn't!"

"Whose, then?" said Fothergill. "Possibly you think it would have happened if I had been there?"

"They said that wall—" the young fellow began.

"They didn't. No one told you to climb the most ruinous bit of the whole place. And she didn't even know where the refectory was."

Carroll groaned: "Don't, Ray: I can't bear it! I shall kill myself!"

"No, you won't," said Fothergill. "You'll go safe home to your people at the rectory. No more of this."

Archie hesitated, and then miserably dragged himself away. Fothergill retreated a little farther into the porch, and was almost lost in the shadow. No tidings, good or evil, had come from the inner room where Sissy lay, but his state of mind was rather despairing than anxious. From the moment when he ran across the grass and saw her lying, a senseless heap, at the foot of the

wall, he had felt assured that she was fatally injured. If he hoped at all it was an unconscious hope—a hope of which he never would be conscious until a cruel certainty killed it.

His dominant feeling was anger. He had cared for this girl—cared for her so much that he had been astonished at himself for so caring—and he felt that this love was the crown of his life. He did not for a moment doubt that he would have won her. He had triumphed in anticipation, but Death had stepped between them and baffled him, and now it was all over. Fothergill was as furious with Death as if it had been a rival who robbed him. He felt himself the sport of a power to which he could offer no resistance, and the sense of helplessness was maddening. But his fury was of the white, intense, close-lipped kind. Though he had flung a bitter word or two at Archie, his quarrel was with Destiny. No matter who had decreed this thing, Raymond Fothergill was in fierce revolt.

And yet, through it all, he knew perfectly well that Sissy's death would hardly make any outward change in him. He was robbed of his best chance, but he did not pretend to himself that his heart was broken or that his life was over. Walter Latimer might fancy that kind of thing, but Fothergill knew that he should be much such a man as he had been before he met her, only somewhat lower, because he had so nearly been something higher and missed it. That was all.

Mrs. Latimer came for a few moments out of the hushed mystery of that inner room. The tidings ran through the expectant

groups that Sissy had moved slightly, and had opened her eyes once, but there was little hopefulness in the news. She was terribly injured: that much was certain, but nothing more. Mrs. Latimer wanted her son. "Walter," she said, "you must go home and take the girls. Indeed you must. They cannot stay here, and I cannot send them back without you." Latimer refused, protested, yielded. "Mother," he said, as he turned to go, "you don't know —" His voice suddenly gave way.

"I do know. Oh, my poor boy!" She passed quickly to where Evelyn stood, and told her that Walter had gone to order the horses. "I would rather you were all away before Mrs. Middleton comes," she said: "Henry Hardwicke has gone for her."

This departure was a signal to the rest. The groups melted away, and with sad farewells to one another, and awestruck glances at the windows of the farmhouse, almost all the guests departed. The sound of wheels and horse-hoofs died away in the lanes, and all was very still. The bees hummed busily round the white lilies and the lavender, and on the warm turf of one of the narrow paths lay Archie Carroll.

He had a weight on heart and brain. There had been a moment all blue and sunny, the last of his happy life, when Sissy's laughing face looked back at him and he was a light-hearted-boy. Then had come a moment of horror and incredulous despair, and that black moment had hardened into eternity. Nightmare is hideous, and Archie's very life had become a nightmare. Of course he would get over it, like his cousin, though, unlike his cousin, he

did not think so; and their different moods had their different bitternesses. In days to come Carroll would enjoy his life once more, would be ready for a joke or an adventure, would dance the night through, would fall in love. This misery was a swift and terrible entrance into manhood, for he could never be a boy again. And the scar would be left, though the wound would assuredly heal. But Archie, stumbling blindly through that awful pass, never thought that he should come again to the light of day: it was to him as the blackness of a hopeless hell.

CHAPTER L.
THROUGH THE NIGHT

The village-clock struck five. As the last lingering stroke died upon the air there was the sound of a carriage rapidly approaching. Carroll raised his head when it stopped at the gate, and saw Hardwicke spring out and help a lady to alight. She was an old lady, who walked quickly to the house, looking neither to right nor left, and vanished within the doorway. Hardwicke stopped, as if to give some order to the driver, and then hurried after her. Archie stared vaguely, first at them, and then at the man, who turned his horses and went round to the stables. When they were out of sight he laid his head down again. The little scene had been a vivid picture which stamped itself with curious distinctness on his brain, yet failed to convey any meaning whatever. He had not the faintest idea of the agony of love and fear in Mrs. Middleton's heart as she passed him. To Archie, just then, the whole universe was *his* agony, and there was no room for more.

Ten minutes later came Dr. Grey's brougham. The doctor, as he jumped out, told his man to wait. He went from the gate to the house more hurriedly than Mrs. Middleton, and his anxiety was more marked, but he found time to look round as he went with keen eyes, which rested for an instant on the young sailor, though he lay half hidden by the bushes. He too vanished, as the

others had vanished.

About an hour later he came out again, and Fothergill followed him. The doctor started when he encountered his eager eyes. Fothergill demanded his opinion. He began some of the usual speeches in which men wrap up the ghastly word "death" in such disguise that it can hardly be recognized.

The soldier cut him short: "Please to speak plain English, Dr. Grey."

The doctor admitted the very greatest danger.

"Danger—yes," said Fothergill, "but is there any hope? I am not a fool—I sha'n't go in and scare the women: is there any hope?"

The answer was written on the doctor's face. He had known Sissy Langton from the time when she came, a tiny child, to Brackenhill. He shook his head, and murmured something about "even if there were no other injury, the spine—"

Fothergill caught a glimpse of a hideous possibility, and answered with an oath. It was not the profanity of the words, so much as the fury with which they were charged, that horrified the good old doctor. "My dear sir," he remonstrated gently, "we must remember that this is God's will."

"God's will! God's will! Are you sure it isn't the devil's?" said Fothergill. "It seems more like it. If you think it is God's will, you may persuade yourself it's yours, for aught I know. But I'm not such a damned hypocrite as to make believe it's mine."

And with a mechanical politeness, curiously at variance with

his face and speech, he lifted his hat to the doctor as he turned back to the farmhouse.

So Sissy's doom was spoken—to linger a few hours, more or less, in helpless pain, and then to die. The sun, which had dawned so joyously, was going down as serenely as it had dawned, but it did not matter much to Sissy now. She was sensible, she knew Mrs. Middleton. When the old lady stooped over her she looked up, smiled faintly and said, "I fell."

"Yes, my darling, I know," Aunt Harriet said.

"Can I go home?" Sissy asked after a pause.

"No, dear, you must not think of it: you mustn't ask to go home."

"I thought not," said Sissy.

Mrs. Middleton asked her if she felt much pain.

"I don't know," she said, and closed her eyes.

Later, Henry Hardwicke sent in a message, and the old lady came out to speak to him. He was standing by an open casement in the passage, looking out at the sunset through the orchard boughs. "What is it, Harry?" she said.

He started and turned round: "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Middleton, but I thought in case you wanted to send any telegrams—if—if—I mean I thought you might want to send some, and there is not very much time."

She put her hand to her head. "I ought to, oughtn't I?" she said. "Who should be sent for?"

"Mr. Hammond?" Hardwicke questioned doubtfully.

Something like relief or pleasure lighted her sad eyes: "Yes, yes! send for Godfrey Hammond. He will come." She was about to leave him, but the young fellow stepped forward: "Mrs. Middleton"—was it the clear red light from the window that suddenly flushed his face?—"Mrs. Middleton, shall I send for Mr. Percival Thorne?"

She stopped, looking strangely at him: something in his voice surprised her. "For Percival?" she said.

"May I? I think he ought to come." The hot color was burning on his cheeks. What right had he to betray the secret which he believed he had discovered? And yet could he stand by and not speak for her when she had so little time in which to speak for herself?

"Is it for his sake," said Mrs. Middleton, "or is it that you think —? Well, let it be so: send for Percival. Yes," she added, "perhaps I have misunderstood. Yes, send at once for Percival."

"I'll go," said Harry, hurrying down the passage. "The message shall be sent off at once. I'll take it to Fordborough."

"Must you go yourself?" Mrs. Middleton raised her voice a little as he moved away.

"No: let me go," said Captain Fothergill, turning the farther corner: "I am going to Fordborough. What is it? I will take it. Mrs. Middleton, you will let me be your messenger?"

"You are very good," she said.—"Harry, you will write—I can't. Oh, I must go back." And she vanished, leaving the two men face to face.

"I've no telegraph-forms," said Harry after a pause. "If you would take the paper to my father, he will send the messages."

Fothergill nodded silently, and went out to make ready for his journey. Hardwicke followed him, and stood in the porch pencilling on the back of an old letter. When Fothergill had given his orders he walked up to Carroll, touched the lad's shoulder with the tips of his fingers, and stood away. "Come," he said.

Archie raised himself from the ground and stumbled to his feet: "Come? where?"

"To Fordborough."

The boy started and stepped back. He looked at the farmhouse, he looked at his cousin. "I'll come afterward," he faltered.

"Nonsense!" said Fothergill. "I'm going now, and of course you go with me."

Archie shrank away, keeping his eyes fixed, as if in a kind of fascination, on his cousin's terrible eyes. The idea of going back alone with Raymond was awful to him. "No, I can't come, Ray—indeed I can't," he said. "I'll walk: I'd much rather—I would indeed."

"What for?" said Fothergill. "You are doing no good here. Do you know I have a message to take? I can't be kept waiting. Don't be a fool," he said in a lower but not less imperative voice.

Archie glanced despairingly round. Hardwicke came forward with the paper in his outstretched hand: "Leave him here, Captain Fothergill. I dare say I shall go to the inn in the village,

and he may go with me. He can take you the earliest news to-morrow morning."

Archie looked breathlessly from one to the other. "As you please," said Fothergill, and strode off without another word.

The boy tried to say something in the way of thanks. "Oh, it's nothing," Hardwicke replied. "You won't care what sort of quarters they may turn out to be, I know." And he went back to the house with a little shrug of his shoulders at the idea of having young Carroll tied to him in this fashion. He did not want the boy, but Hardwicke could never help sacrificing himself.

So Archie went to the gate and watched his cousin ride away, a slim black figure on his black horse against the burning sky. Fothergill never turned his head. Where was the use of looking back? He was intent only on his errand, and when that piece of paper should have been delivered into Mr. Hardwicke's hands the last link between Sissy Langton and himself would be broken. There would be no further service to render. Fothergill did not know that the message he carried was to summon his rival, but it would have made no difference in his feelings if he had. Nothing made any difference now.

Mrs. Middleton sat by Sissy's bedside in the clear evening light. Harry Hardwicke's words haunted her: why did he think that Sissy wanted Percival? They had parted a year ago, and she had believed that Sissy was cured of her liking for him. It was Sissy who had sent him away, and she had been brighter and gayer of late: indeed, Mrs. Middleton had fancied that Walter

Latimer— Well, that was over, but if Sissy cared for Percival—

A pair of widely-opened eyes were fixed on her: "Am I going to die, Aunt Harriet?"

"I hope not. Oh, my darling, I pray that you may live."

"I think I am going to die. Will it be very soon? Would there be time to send—"

"We will send for anything or any one you want. Do you feel worse, dear? Time to send for whom?"

"For Percival."

"Harry Hardwicke has sent for him already. Perhaps he has the message by now: it is an hour and a half since the messenger went."

"When will he come?"

"To-morrow, darling."

There was a pause. Then the faint voice came again: "What time?"

Mrs. Middleton went to the door and called softly to Hardwicke. He had been looking in Bradshaw, and she returned directly: "Percival will come by the express to-night. He will be at Fordborough by the quarter-past nine train, and Harry will meet him and bring him over at once—by ten o'clock, he says, or a few minutes later."

Sissy's brows contracted for a moment: she was calculating the time. "What is it now?" she said.

"Twenty minutes to eight."

Fourteen hours and a half! The whole night between herself

and Percival! The darkness must come and must go, the sun must set and must again be high in the heavens, before he could stand by her side. It seemed to Sissy as if she were going down into the blackness of an awful gulf, where Death was waiting for her. Would she have strength to escape him, to toil up the farther side, and to reach the far-off to-morrow and Percival? "Aunt Harriet," she said, "shall I live till then? I want to speak to him."

"Yes, my darling—indeed you will. Don't talk so: you will break my heart. Perhaps God will spare you."

"No," said Sissy—"no."

Between eight and nine Hardwicke was summoned again. Mrs. Latimer wanted some one to go to Latimer's Court, to take the latest news and to say that it was impossible she could return that night. "You see they went away before Dr. Grey came," she said. "I have written a little note. Can you find me a messenger?"

"I will either find one or I will go myself," he replied.

"Oh, I didn't mean to trouble you. And wait a moment, for Mrs. Middleton wants him to go on to her house. She will come and speak to you when I go back to the poor girl."

"How is Miss Langton?"

"I hardly know. I think she is wandering a little: she talked just now about some embroidery she has been doing—asked for it, in fact."

"When Dr. Grey was obliged to go he didn't think there would be any change before he came back, surely?" said Hardwicke anxiously.

"No. But she can't know what she is saying, can she? Poor girl! she will never do another stitch." Mrs. Latimer fairly broke down. The unfinished embroidery which never could be finished brought the truth home to her. It is hard to realize that a life with its interlacing roots and fibres is broken off short.

"Oh, Mrs. Latimer, don't! don't!" Harry exclaimed, aghast at her tears. "For dear Mrs. Middleton's sake!" He rushed away, and returned with wine. "If you give way what will become of us?"

She was better in a few minutes, and able to go back, while Harry waited in quiet confidence for Mrs. Middleton. He was not afraid of a burst of helpless weeping when she came. She was gentle, yielding, delicate, but there was something of the old squire's obstinacy in her, and in a supreme emergency it came out as firmness. She looked old and frail as she stepped into the passage and closed the door after her. Her hand shook, but her eyes met his bravely and her lips were firm.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.