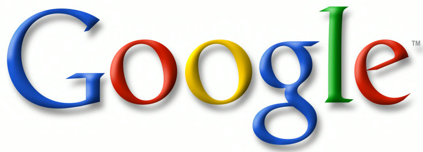

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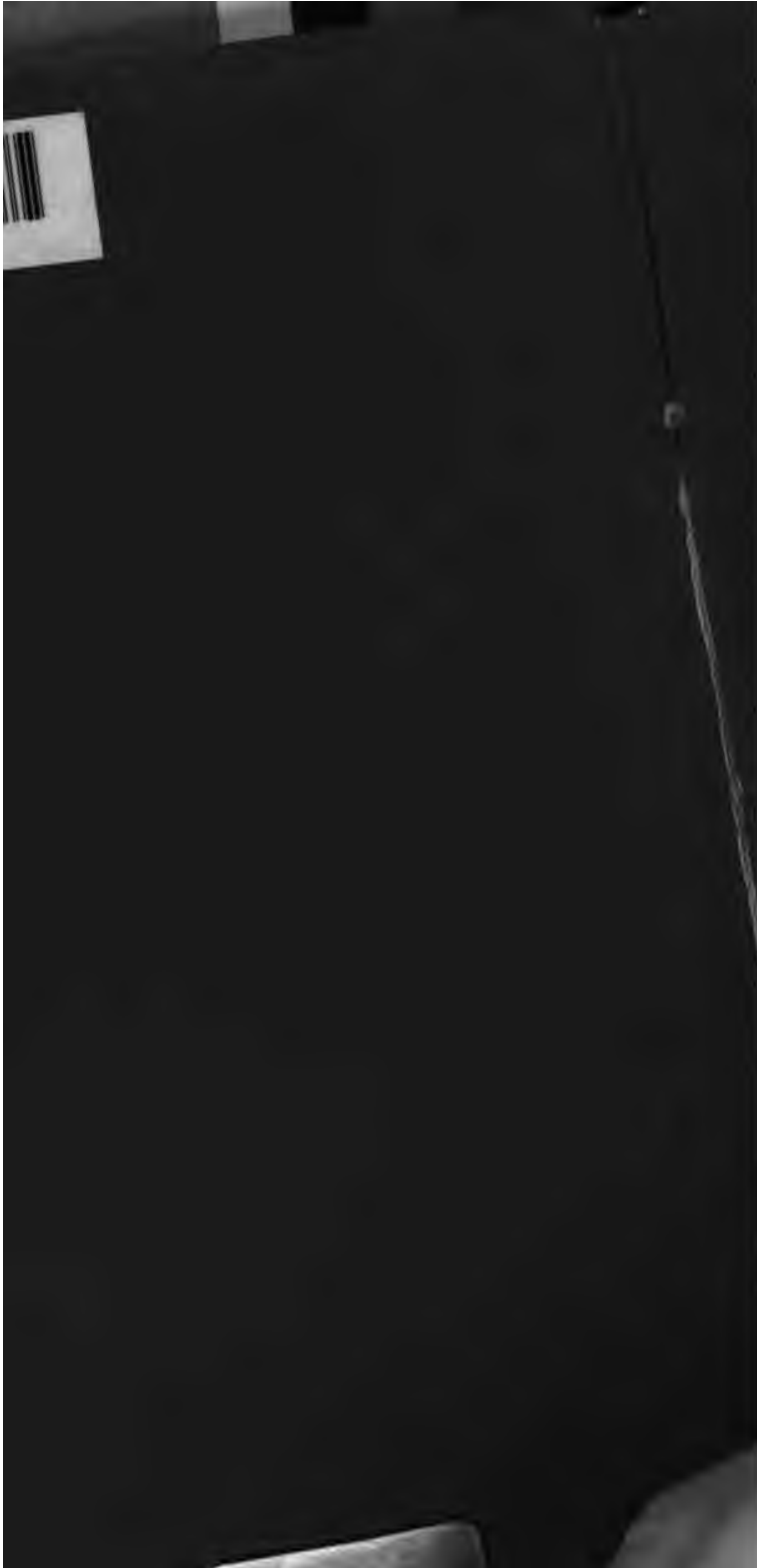
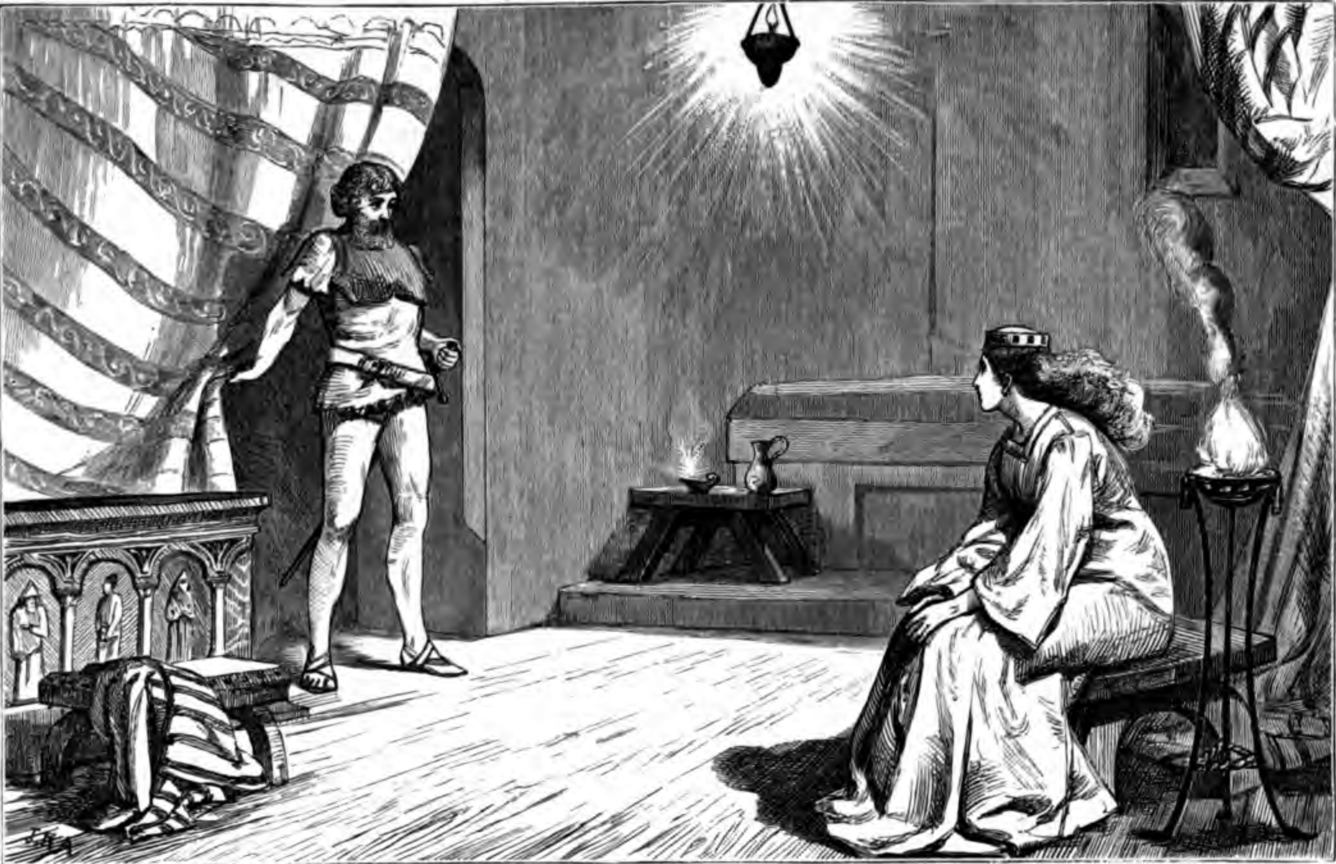


ROSAMUNDA. [*Frontispiece.*



"Slowly and cautiously the heavy folds of the tapestry were pushed apart, and the tall figure of a man discovered itself."—(*See p.* 43.)

ROSAMUNDA THE PRINCESS,

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE SIXTH CENTURY;

And other Tales.

BY

MRS. ALGERNON KINGSFORD.

WITH TWENTY-FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

Oxford and London:
JAMES PARKER AND CO.
1875.

251. a. 2.

To my Husband.

6000608400

PREFACE.

THESE Stories—all of which, save that which occupies the chief place on the title-page, have already appeared in various magazines—are now for the first time collected together and published under my name.

And since it has been supposed by some who saw "Rosamunda" in manuscript, that the legendary verses and rhymes introduced into its pages were obtained by me from extraneous sources, it may not perhaps be deemed ill-advised to admit, that, whether for praise or for blame, I alone am responsible for their existence.

In concluding, it is my pleasant duty to acknowledge the kindness and courtesy of the proprietors of "Macmillan's Magazine," "London Society," "The Churchman's Companion," and the "Penny Post," to whom I am indebted for permission to reprint the stories which originally saw the light in those periodicals.

NINON KINGSFORD.

HINTON HALL, SHREWSBURY,
New Year's Day, 1875.

famine ravaged the land before and around them, and still new herds of invaders followed, expelled, and routed their fierce predecessors, preying like savage beasts on their own kind. Distinctive titles applied by authors of that distracted age to several of the barbarian princes, mark the horror and dread which they inspired among the civilized nations. Epithets such as "The Scourge of the Lord," "The Destroyer of the peoples," are continually employed in contemporary records to designate these formidable chieftains. Beneath the blow of their irresistible battle-axe, the Roman power which had queened it so long over the kingdoms, sank and perished. New blood was infused into the veins of the world, and the old modes of government, policy and thought were swept from their foundation. An age of devastation, conflict, and excitement, shook the continent of Europe from end to end, and in a brief span changed its whole face and spirit. Art, science, and learning fell into disrepute among the laity; all skill save that of arms was reckoned contemptible; and deeds of the wildest daring, or of the cruellest revenge received the praise due to virtue and courage. It is therefore no matter for wonder that in the history of these turbulent centuries, when human life was valued only in respect of physical strength and prowess, when hatred, ambition, love, and vengeance tore the hearts of men with their keenest fangs, when womanhood knew no softness and manhood no remorse, many a strange adventure and wild pathetic romance are found interwoven with details of rapine and conquest,—like tears upon a blood-stained page; stray chords of eolian music borne to our ears by the blast of the angry storm-wind.

Courtly poets and minnesingers of old days perpetuated the memory of romances such as these in their songs and impromptu rhymes, some of which lived into succeeding ages, and finally incorporated themselves as popular legends, either to take lasting hold of the minds of men among other grim and sad realities of the past, or to fade away into the region of mythical story and national folk-lore.

Chief among the mighty names of the Teutonic heroes, and foremost in the annals of those wild and warlike episodes

which even so late as the reign of Charlemagne, the German minstrels still continued to celebrate in song, we find the name of the renowned Scandinavian warrior Alboin, and the story of the Gothic Princess,— proud and beautiful Rosamunda.

And it may be observed by way of tribute to the art of poetry, that we owe almost all our esoteric knowledge of this disturbed but important era in the formation and destiny of Europe, to the individual romances preserved by itinerant bards and monkish rhymers; so true it is that the biography of one great man or woman of an age presents a better picture of its politics, events, and manners, than the most minute and exhaustive general history.

Let us, then, eschewing further preface, employ the power which these poetic chroniclers have placed in our hands, and annihilate time and space by aid of the only magic wand which modern science knows, to reproduce, as on the table of a *camera obscura*, some few scenes of an old and terrible drama, first written with no inventive pen and sober ink, but with warm earnest blood at the point of many a terrible sword.

CHAPTER I.

IT was the first watch of a certain summer night in the year of our Lord 564. A fair, bright moon had risen over the ancient city of Sirmium, on the banks of the river Savus in Pannonia, a city Roman in name and in architecture, but now inhabited and governed by a fierce tribe of the Gothic race, the pagan Gepidæ. The broad paved streets, across which here and there were flung the black shadows of projecting porticoes, resounded no more with the sharp clang of Roman arms, nor did the sweet full song of Christian praise awake any longer the echoes of yonder marble-columned temple. Instead of these, the step of the barbarian Swede trod the thoroughfares, the flat blade of his rude battle-axe glinted under the white light, and snatches of wild hymns in praise of Odin or of Thor disturbed at intervals the serenity of the soft evening air. For the Gepidæ, singular in this respect among their kindred, still clung with a hardy fidelity to the faith of their early northern sires. Christianity had ratified its triumph in the world long since, through the conversion of the Emperor Constantine; and the great convocation held at Nice in 325, had secured the recognition of the Catholic Church as the only true institution of Almighty God. But as it is in these days, so it was then. Catholicity failed to content the whole world. Heresies without number sprang up among the nations, and the Christians, who before their emancipation had contended only with pagan persecutors, now found themselves attacked and challenged by their own brethren, insomuch that in a short time the dissension within the camp became as grievous as ever the conflict with secular authorities and heathen rule had proved in older days. At the time of which we write, Arianism was the most popular and widely-spread of these heretical outgrowths from the parent tree; and it was perhaps rather complimentary than otherwise to the Church Catholic and Apostolic, that nearly all the rough and bloodthirsty hordes which first ravaged and then occupied central Europe, when time and the pressure of association had obliged them to abandon their hereditary creed, disdained the pure milk of the Word as too refined and delicate a potion for their spiritual appetites, and adopted in preference the theological vagaries of Arius. The Gepidæ,

however, as we have seen, were, even in the latter part of the sixth century, still staunch to the old Gods. At once the proudest and the frankest of the barbaric clans, they scorned the pretence of conversion to any new beliefs, with good reason deeming the warlike religion of the Norse better fitted than the mild doctrines of a saintlier faith, to that adventurous and pitiless course of life which it was their pleasure to pursue. So their altars still smoked to Odin the Hero, and still they swore their most solemn vows before the shrine of the terrible Three, the changeless and cold-hearted Nornir; and ever at their festivals the mead-cup was emptied to the honour of the immortal dwellers in Asgard, and to the spirits of the valiant warriors feasting in the Valhalla of the gods.

To-night the gods were the theme of song in the pavilion of the Gepide king. He and his followers were encamped outside the city walls of Sirmium, for there had been a battle between the Gepidæ and their rivals, the Winili, or Langobards with whom they were at feud, and the Langobards had gained the victory. But the vanquished were a hardy race, and their ill-fortune did but serve to fortify their fierce and stedfast spirit. Death they dreaded not, and extinction itself was a slight evil in their eyes when compared with the shame of surrender to a foe, or the bitterness of relinquishing the chance of vengeance. So they comforted themselves with the prospect of speedy retaliation, and pledged themselves, as they wiped their blood-stained axes, to seek no rest and beget no heirs until they had humbled Audoin, the prince of the victorious tribe. Therefore, when their corselets were doffed and the shields were laid aside in the tents, a great feast was held in the pavilion of Turisend the Gepide chief, and many were the mighty warriors assembled about the board; but the face of the royal host was sad, and his courtiers ate and drank in silence, for the feast they kept that night was a feast of Death.

Eighty years of wild and martial life had knotted the brow and whitened the long beard of king Turisend, and his figure, though grand and sinewy as became his race and his station, was gaunt in its outline like that of an ancient forest-tree that has weathered many angry storms. Grim of aspect though he was, the face of the old chieftain was not devoid of that strange pathos which we are wont to find in the features of the aged, and the grey eyes, that shifted to and fro so restlessly under their shaggy overhanging fringes, were softened at times with a haze like that of tears. For the youngest son of King Turisend lay dead on the battle-field at Asfeld far away, and the heart of the old man was heavy for the sake of the youth who had been his pride and his best beloved.

Suddenly, in the midst of the silent guests uprose a tall

stalwart Goth, with bare brown arms and neck, round which were ornaments of gold. And the tones which rolled from his massive throat were deep as echoes of thunder from the bosom of a cavern.

"King Turisend," he said, "and ye his warriors, who feast with him to-night before the gods, give heed to me the minstrel Thorsen, for the spirit of the dwellers in Asgard has come upon me, filling my veins with fire, that this night I may sing in your ears a song of counsel and prophecy at the bidding of Odin the Mighty, Destroyer of armies, Avenger of the Gothic race!"

And straightway all the warriors at the king's table leapt to their feet and shouted together,

"It is well said! Give ear to the scalder Thorsen, the son of Knud, and to the prophecy of Odin the Hero, the Avenger of men!" So the king called a page, and bade him fetch a harp for the bard; and Thorsen swept its sonorous strings with his great broad hands, on which the corded sinews shewed like the gnarled branches of a leafless oak, and anon he lifted his mighty voice and sang his inspired rhyme.

"One even at his palace gate,
Like a marble column grand and tall,
Odin the War-god, the Hero stood,
Crisp was his hair and red as blood,
And his ample chest was broad and straight
As a city wall!

"North and south he spread his hands
Over all the Gothic lands;
Over camp, and moor, and glen
Stretched his mighty arms asunder
Far as their embrace could reach,
And like thunder
In the van of armèd men
Was the stirring of his speech.

"'I am the Hero-King of old,
Odin the Lord of Death, the Strong;
And in my courts of gold
Revel and rite I hold,
Banquet and song!
For there
Each in his brazen chair,
My warrior sons who fell in fight
Feast at my board to-night!

"'But apart in that vast hall
Nearest to Odin's throne,
Stands the chief seat of all
Vacant, alone!
Never was there hero meet
Yet to fill that royal seat,
Never yet have human feet

Those bright steps ascended ;
Yet must I find me one
Worthy to rule my feast
Ere night be ended,
Ere in the fruitful east
Reddens the sun !

" 'Thus above the Gothic lands
Spread I my hands ;
Thus from the south and north
Call I my children forth ;
Ye who have souls of flame,
  Sons of a mighty Sire,
Ye whom the thirst for fame
  Quickens like fire,
Chiefs, whose undaunted souls
Odin alone controls,
  Hear and obey ;
Dire the gift I ask,
God-like the mighty task,
  God-like will I repay !

" 'For by these ruddy hairs,
Red with ten thousand wars,
Odin, whom Heaven adores,
Odin the Hero swears ;
He shall be counted meet
That most exalted seat
Who to my throne shall bring
Deadliest offering !
Over my solemn feast
He shall be chosen priest,
Worthy renown and sway.
God-like the gift I ask,
God-like the mighty task,
  Like a God I repay !'

"Thus, with his arms asunder,
Cloud-like and grand,
Over all the northern land
Odin rolled his voice in thunder ;
And from the south and north
Slowly his sons came forth
  One by one ;
While in the amethyst
Splendour of sunset mist
  Sank the sun.

"Then to their sire's feet
Deadly gifts the heroes bore,
Wine that slays by smooth deceit,
Gold for bribes, and iron for war ;
But never a word and never a breath
Parted the lips of the Lord of Death.

"Silent evermore and dim,
Dread of form and vast of limb,
Odin sat unmoved and grim :

None of all his sons had grace
Worthy that exalted place,
Sadly, with averted face,
  Passed they all away,
None was found to rule the feast,
And already in the east
  Dawn was gray.

"Then against the sky behold
Moved a shape of awful seeming,
Fair and tall, with hair of gold
Down its marble bosom streaming.
Red its slender hands with blood,
Cold its eyes with bitter hate;
Pale as stone and proud it stood,
  Terrible as Fate.

" Rose the mighty God, and straightway
Bending from his brazen gateway
  Spoke with swift and bated breath:
'Who art Thou,—more dread than Odin?
Art thou mortal,—art thou human?'
'Yea,' she said, 'an angry Woman
  Stands before thee, Lord of Death!'

" Loudly then, as rolls the thunder,
Odin laughed with triumph dread,
And with both his giant hands
Whirled the brazen gates asunder!
'Enter thou, my child,' he said,
'Thou my best belovèd art,
For the gift thy Lord demands
Is the hate within thy heart!
Nothing knows the mighty Odin,
Curse divine or vengeance human,
Rage of God or mortal foeman,
Deadly as the wrath of woman!'

"Thus for the heroes' feast
Odin found a ruler meet;
And the champion's golden seat
  Thus was won,
Ere in the fruitful east
  Broke the sun!"

The song was ended, and as the minstrel's hand dropped from the strings of the harp, a low murmur arose among his audience. No one applauded, for the rhapsody was regarded by most of those present as a prophetic inspiration from a divine source, as, indeed, Thorsen himself had declared it; and to the less reverent of the company the sentiments set forth by the song were somewhat distasteful. One or two old veterans of the battle-field gnawed their grey beards in silence, indignant that either god or mortal should have presumed to assert thus emphatically the superiority of feminine over male malignity. But as Thorsen yet stood erect in his place, the fervour which had prompted his minstrelsy

still warm on his rugged brow, the eyes of all the guests moved with one accord towards the entrance of the pavilion. For there, one shapely hand raised high to push aside the heavy folds of the tent canvas, stood King Turisend's fair grand-daughter, Rosamunda. Her form was tall and majestic, passing the common height of woman-kind, and her bare rounded arms displayed such muscular development as no princess in Europe now-a-days can boast. Her hair, coarse in fibre and ruddy-gold in hue, streamed in crisp wavy masses to her waist, and about her head sparkled a bright circlet, significant of her noble station. Rosamunda's was not that high-bred type of beauty which in later times adorned the royal courts—delicate pink and white loveliness, with all the bloom, the sweetness and the fragility of the blush-rose,—but rather the grand outline of shape and the splendid cast of features which one imagines to have characterized Semiramis and Cleopatra; and which, if tales be true, is yet found in the women of some wild tribes.

"Rosamunda!" cried the old king. It was the first outspoken word which had been heard since the cessation of the song. And as if the utterance of that single name dissolved a spell, the guests with one impulse aroused themselves from meditation, and besought their chief that the princess might enter the pavilion.

"Come hither, my child," quoth Turisend, mildly; "sit thee here at my right hand, and drink from my cup. What brought thee to our tent to-night?"

"I stood alone in the moonlight without," she answered him, "and I heard the song of Thorsen the bard. My lord, take heart, the prophecy of Odin will not deceive."

"Alack, daughter!" sighed the white-haired king, looking fondly upon her, "when brave warriors fail to conquer, and iron harness to resist, when sword, and helm, and shield avail not to strengthen fierce hearts, what can the fair soft fingers of a woman do to avenge a nation disgraced?"

Rosamunda cast down her eyes.

"My father's sire," she said, "needs not that I should tell him how many and how strange are the chances of warfare."

"Nay, child," responded the aged chieftain, mournfully shaking his long beard, "for have I not this day beheld the death of thy brave uncle, my dear son Thurismund? Well and valiantly he fought, a true prince of the Gothic race that knows not fear of foe, but neither did his daring nor the might of Odin avail to save us from defeat. We are fallen!—fallen!"

"Alas, my Turisend!" groaned a husky old warrior, infected with the melancholy of his liege-lord, "times were otherwise with us when Ardarich, thy great ancestor, led

our fathers to combat against the tyrannous Hun! Were not the Gepidæ—the proud invincible Gepidæ—first of the Gothic race to cast off that hateful yoke? Ours was a nation of victors then, brooking no master save our own,—and now, woe the day!—we are like to become servants of Audoin the Langobard! Chances of warfare, these, princess,—the chances of all human things!"

Rosamunda's face brightened with new colour.

"Aye," she said, earnestly, "but the poet would have us know that chance is powerless to cheat or assuage the hatred of a wrathful woman! Her vengeance strikes as strike the lightnings of the high gods,—most true, most sure, unswerving, and unmoved by lapse of time. She, while inauspicious seasons pass, remains ever fixed in her purpose, patient and inflexible as heaven, eagle-eyed for the opportunity she desires. Your bribes may fail you, your fire may be quenched, the hand that guides your sword may err, the steel may snap asunder; a thousand fatalities may check the rage or baulk the skill of men. But he who dares a woman's anger grips the horny palm of Death himself, yea, even though she wear sweet smiles upon her lips, saluting that doomed man with words of love and favour. None of her wiles shall be sponsors for her faith; year after year she will hunt down her prey, till at last her hour comes; she marks it well, she strikes,—the man she hates is crushed to powder. What she conceives shall surely issue in her deed; nor gold, nor prayers, nor touch of children's lips, nor terror of steel shall buy compassion of her, if she be proud or injured, or oppressed. No guerdon which men or gods can pay shall prevail to abate a tiny measure of that woman's vengeance, though to wreak it she slay a hero. Her hand will not refrain from mixing the poison-cup because she hears her sucking child is dead, nor will her resolute fingers quiver on the dagger's hilt albeit kingdoms fall, and priests and prophets blaspheme their gods!"

Scarce had the princess pronounced these last words, her eyes dilated and her voice powerful with emotion, than there was heard the dull trampling of many feet upon the sward outside the tent, and the hand of a man suddenly raised the drapery which covered the opening to the pavilion. Rosamunda started from the board, and the chieftains about her rose uneasily. A tall and stately figure, habited as a warrior, entered the banquet-tent, and with uncovered head approached the king. The stranger, though but a youth in years, moved with so haughty a gait, and wore so ferocious an aspect, that the pages who stood by the chair of Turisend involuntarily recoiled, and shrank, with blanched cheeks, into the darkest corners available. Forty armed men flocked

into the pavilion behind the unexpected visitant, following him in well-ordered silence, as vassals wait upon their lord. Dignified and calm, the venerable Turisend arose and fastened his dim eyes earnestly on the face of the young man before him.

"Thou art Alboin, prince of the Langobardi," said he, in deep constrained tones, "thou art the slayer of my son Thurismund. It was thine arm that struck him to the earth, thy spear that cleft his heart! Wherefore comest thou hither to his father?"

"King Turisend," responded the Lombard heir, "thou sayest truly; and it is the deed whereof thou speakest that brings me into thy presence to-night. My father, the mighty Audoin, holds triumphant festival with his chiefs, rejoicing over the honour our arms have won, and over the fall of thy princely son, whose life the Christians' God delivered into these unworthy hands! But, albeit the glory of our successes on the plain of Asfeld be thus due in so great a measure to me, my father's warriors in vain besought him to permit me a place beside his own at the feast of victory. 'My chiefs are not unmindful,' said my royal sire, 'of those wise and honourable customs which our great ancestors inflexibly observed, and which I also will retain inviolate. Whatever merit or prowess may distinguish a prince of Scandinavian blood, whatever fame his skill or courage may have earned, ye know well that he cannot be admitted to sit at the table of the king until he shall have solemnly received his arms from a foreign and a royal hand. Go then, my son,' he added, 'depart in accordance with the dictates of our national law, and seek forthwith the honour thou lackest at some neighbouring court.' Thus my father dismissed me; and I, choosing from among his guests these forty companions of my fortunes in arms, sped hither straightway to thee, most venerable host, since in very sooth thy royal pavilion for the nonce stands nearer our own than any other, and I am in haste to take that promised seat at our board, which cannot be mine till I am invested with the rights of manhood. Do thou then, O Turisend, as becomes thine exalted station and warlike renown, extend to Alboin the favour he demands! As thy suppliant, and not as thine enemy, I present myself to-night in thy royal presence, to crave of thy courtesy a boon which no warrior of regal lineage dare for shame's sake refuse to one of equal rank. I kneel for thy grace, noble Gepide,—delay not the performance of thy part in the ceremony!"

So speaking, the heir of the Langobard monarchy sank upon his knee before the father of his victim, with eyelids

lowered and head abased, counterfeiting the gait of a decorous humility, although more than one spectator of the scene perceived a scornful and defiant curl upon his lip, which betrayed the true character of his emotions, and of the motives that had really impelled him thus to outrage the sorrowful court of King Turisend. That aged chieftain of a pagan race proved himself at least more generous and refined of heart than his Christian visitor. For, as we have seen, all the Scandinavian tribes which had settled in Lombardy professed some form, orthodox or heterodox, of the new creed, and the Langobard people over whom the fierce Audoin reigned, had long adopted the Arian perversion of the faith. Nor did this difference of religious opinion between the Winili and the Gepide nations tend to mitigate the bitterness of hatred which warlike rivalry had enkindled between them. The converts, albeit themselves in a state of enmity with Mother Church, regarded the adorers of Odin and Thor with all the disdainful rancour of theological pride; and the followers of the northern gods, returning scorn with scorn, contemned the renegades as a perjured and time-serving generation, unworthy the grand lineage and the ancient country whence they had sprung.

Angry reflections on this fruitful theme, awakened no doubt by the words of Alboin's address, swept through the perturbed minds of his hearers, and many a wrinkled brow in the assembly deepened its furrows bodingly above eyes that sparkled fire as the young man ceased speaking. For a brief space there was a pause, pregnant with awe, while the old Gepide king wrestled silently with the black wrath which rose in his desolate soul, and then, making no attempt to raise the petitioner from his knees, he gave answer thus in low, stern tones:—

"Prince, the favour and the hospitality thou claimest at our hands we freely bestow. Our honour demands that we receive this visit peaceably and in good faith; wherefore I bid thee welcome to our court and solemn festival. But, my son, where are the arms with which I must invest thee? Let thy followers produce them!"

Scarcely were the words uttered than Alboin suddenly leapt from the ground, and turned his face upon the forty warriors who had entered the tent behind him; and as though the action were recognised among them for a preconcerted signal, every right hand in the company sought the sword-hilt ominously, and every voice responded with one accord in a deep rough murmur:—

"The trophy! the trophy!"

Again the eyes of Alboin moved to the countenance of

his royal host, and extending towards him both his mailed arms and empty hands, he cried aloud in ringing tones: "King of the Gepidæ, thou hearest how my brave companions remind me that only half of my errand to thee is yet accomplished. The laws of our court and nation demand that I bear to my father's feet for token and for trophy of my valour, the helmet, the shield, and the sword of the man I have slain! It is with the arms of thy son that thou must invest thy suppliant; it is with his breastplate that my heart must be covered, his crest that must surmount my brow! Such is the sum of my petition, and of King Audoin's command, and such the favour, which, well I know, O Turisend, thy courtesy and thine honour will right royally accord!"

Words like these, spoken with so much audacity of manner and of phrase on an occasion of such sorrow and disappointment to the Gepidæ, were in the highest degree irritating to the proud spirits of their chiefs. A clamour of indignant expostulation arose from the throng which surrounded Turisend; and many of his followers, but for the obedient love and veneration they bore him, would straightway have thrown themselves upon the overbold intruder, like eager hounds upon a wild boar. This the old man well understood, as, looking round upon their strained and hungry faces, he waved them back with a steady hand.

"Norsemen," he said, addressing his own people rather than the Scandinavian prince who stood before him,—"ye know that in the years which are past, Wacho the predecessor of Audoin slew with his own hand Tatus, lord of these Winili, and Ildechis the only son of the dead man fled hither to me for refuge. And Wacho demanded him of me, that he might die as his father had died, threatening me and mine with implacable and powerful enmity if I should refuse to deliver up my guest. Then I called you, my chiefs, to judge between us in a national assembly, and I bade you decide whether it were wise in us for so small a matter, to risk the wrath of Wacho and of the Winili. And all of you answered me with one consent:—'It is better, O Turisend, to suffer annihilation, than to violate the laws of hospitality!' Goths, those words of yours were well and nobly spoken; be once again as brave and as just! Another son of the Winili comes to beg a favour at our hands, and if his request sound harshly in our ears, it is not because he asks a thing amiss, but because our hearts are wounded. Who of you all around me suffers so much as I, who have this day looked upon the face of my dead son? But we, who are men, must not endure the dominion of a childish spleen. Alboin does but ask his lawful guerdon, and Turisend will not withhold a spoil so

rightly won. Go, therefore, one of you, my chiefs, and bid my son Kunimond bring hither his brother's arms."

Then in the midst of a sullen hush, one tall gaunt figure arose and quitted the pavilion to do the will of Turisend, and none of the Gothic veterans spoke a word or moved a hand until the messenger returned. With him came Kunimond, the king's only remaining son, father of the beautiful Rosamunda; a man of ripe and vigorous years, stalwart in limb, huge of stature, and like all the rest of the Gepide chiefs, bareheaded. In either hand he carried the still blood-stained weapons of his brother Thurismund,—helm and targe, sword and corselet, and passing proudly by the heir of the Lombards, laid his burden at the feet of the aged king.

"Thou hast commanded, my father," he said, bending low, "and I have done thy bidding."

"Son Kunimond," returned the royal Goth, "the gods approve thy doing. And now I am glad that thou camest not hither sooner."

"Father," said the younger man, "the kingly office which thou holdest compelled thy presence at this feast of death; but as for me, I sought rather the stillness of mine own tent, for my heart was heavy in my bosom, and I cared not to drink wine."

"Foolishly spoken, dull Goth!" muttered the deep voice of a Langobard behind Alboin. "Wine in the skull makes mirth in the breast!"

"Darest thou jest with a foe?" cried Kunimond furiously, his fierce blood breaking over his face like flame. "Son of a hound! I tell thee I will make a goblet of thy dog's head, and drink thine own blood out of it[a]!" Uttering this taunt, he sprang towards a battle-axe which lay near at hand upon a pile of arms in a corner of the pavilion, but Turisend, calm and dignified still, interposed a stern rebuke.

"Son, thy vengeance forgets alike mine honour and thine own rank. Threats such as this which thou hast uttered are oftenest fulfilled upon him who makes them."

Kunimond paused and stood silent, trembling in every massive limb of his body under the force of arrested passion, but the thirsty heart of Alboin leapt high at the words, and he laid them up in his memory for a day of yet completer triumph and crueller achievement. And Rosamunda noted the vicious gleam that flashed in the steely, scornful eyes of the Lombard prince, and straightway, out of her untempered soul arose a wild and desperate anger, swift and strong as the biting sea-wind that rises out of the tameless deep at

[a] The Langobards, says Gibbon, propagated the belief that their heads were formed like the heads of dogs, and that they drank the blood of their vanquished enemies. Hence the significance of Kunimond's retort.

night. Strange and awful that the first sharp emotion which ever entered her fair bosom should be the passion, not of love, but of hate,—hate in all the mighty intensity and fiery impatience of a sudden and overwhelming desire. So fierce, so potent was the intoxication of her wrath, that as she stood and faced the man who had evoked it, her whole being sickened with revulsion, and half unconsciously she extended her tremulous hands, seeking some human support. Dizzily the torch-lights of the pavilion rocked before her eyes, the murmur of voices round her concentrated itself into a thin sharp whisper, and the agitated faces of the warriors fluctuated and mingled like the faces of phantoms in a fever-dream, till with a low sigh she recovered herself, touching the hand of her father.

"Rosamunda! why camest thou hither?"

But she answered nothing; she had no senses save for one. Alboin knelt again at the feet of Turisend, his own war-harness laid aside on the ground, and his limbs invested with the spoils of his victory, a demon incarnate in the iron frame which once had held the beating heart of Thurismund the Gepide. A shout of satisfaction arose from the forty Winili as their prince sprang deftly to his feet, belted and helmed; but the Gothic chieftains gave no response in sound. Bitterest rage, like deepest love, is mute.

The ceremony over, Turisend beckoned his self-invited guests to the banquet-table, with an austere courtesy of which they were not slow to avail themselves. One after one the Gepidæ resumed their seats, each tacitly taking his command from the eyes of the aged monarch, till but one place was unoccupied,—the stool upon which the ill-fated Thurismund had been wont to sit beside his father's royal chair. One man alone in the company yet remained standing, nor was the delay made without intention or significance. Alboin still waited by the side of his host, watching with tiger-like acuteness of gaze the shadow of contending passions that strove together in the old veteran's rugged face. The Gepidæ perceived the additional insult designed, and one of them, bolder or more privileged than the others, rose to yield his own seat to the Langobard hero. The action recalled Turisend to a vivid sense of the crisis; the hard ice of pride which had restrained the tide of his sorrow broke up beneath the stroke;—he raised his eyes, and looked full at the slayer of his child. That look Alboin answered as none but a savage could have done,—he seated himself in Thurismund's vacated place. Utterly unmanned, the poor old king turned away his head, and laid his quivering hands upon the arm of Kunimond, who sat at the right of the

throne. Tender remembrances, futile regrets, unutterable loathing rushed into his mind; the father was no longer a king, nor the aged man a warrior; tears darkened the sight which time had already dimmed; the staunch old heart found vent at last for its grief in words.

"Ye gods!" he cried with faltering lips, "how dear is that place,—how hateful is that person!"

Like the first blast of a long-brooding storm, the passionate exclamation swept the banquet-table, and provoked to speech the choler which devoured the souls of Kunimond and his companions. With a pagan oath the Gothic prince brought his giant fist as furiously down upon the oaken board before him as though he struck a Langobard in the forehead, and while the horn-cups reeled and clattered together, cried, "By the sinews of Odin and Thor, chieftains! we do ill to entertain in this goodly fashion such Christian curs as these! They pollute our meats, they poison our wine,—the very tent smells foully of their presence! Behold their unkempt manes and shaggy lengths of beard, look at the white bands with which they swathe their crooked legs, and say if they resemble not alike in form and odour the unclean steeds of our Sarmatian plains!"

"Thou hast aptly jested, rude Goth," responded Alboin, with ready asperity, "for like wild steeds the Winili can kick when they list! Go, visit the field of Asfeld, and mark the spot where thy dainty brother's corpse was trodden today in the dust beneath our prancing hoofs!"

Thus the tempest burst, and in a moment the pavilion was alive with flashing steel. The Gepidæ sprang to their feet, the swords of the Winili flew from their scabbards. Imprecations and cries of rage heightened the tumult, and the Feast of Death might indeed have doubly justified its name, had not the noble Turisend again interfered to save his own reputation and the lives of his guests.

"Depart, I pray you, Langobards!" he cried, raising his bare arms above the sea of swaying combatants, "and you, my Gepidæ, restrain your unseemly anger! Alboin, I have granted thee thy will, I have yielded to thee the trophy and the favour thou camest to seek; take now thy dismissal from a board whereat thou canst sit no longer in safety or in honour."

At the voice of the brave and ancient king the Goths were stung with shame, and hastily the older men stretched forth their brawny hands to check the choleric onslaught of their younger companions. "Peace, peace!" they shouted, "it is the will of Turisend!"

Then amid the subsiding uproar Alboin stood forward,

and intrepidly addressed his royal entertainer, his tall robust figure gleaming under the ruddy light in the dinted armour of Thurismund.

"King of the Gepidæ!" he cried, in a voice like the sound of a clarion, and all the pavilion stood hushed to sudden stillness, "well and proudly hast thou dealt with me and my people to-night! I own thine honour, though I hate thy tribe! But give me yet one further grace, and Alboin shall be henceforward foe of thine no longer, but friend and staunch ally for evermore. Refuse, and I will push my ire and the ire of my father's house against thee and thine, until no Gepide warrior shall remain alive to say to his peer—'Our name and nation have passed away.'

"I have seen Rosamunda, the daughter of Kunimond, present here to-night. Give her to me in marriage, and bind the souls of Winili and Gepidæ in one!"

He ceased, and fixing his eyes hard on the face of the princess, stepped rapidly to her side and stooped to kiss her lips. But the fiery Rosamunda, too horror-stricken for words, struck dumbly at him with her scornful hands, and with a gesture of supreme abhorrence spat her hatred into his smiling face, and fled!

Rout and confusion followed her. The Gepidæ were elated and triumphant, the Lombards maddened with the sting of insulted pride. Alboin alone prevailed to stem the torrent of impending conflict. With many an arrogant threat he drew his vassals forth from that fateful pavilion, where in his royal seat amid the Babel of arms and shouting, with the blood-red glare of the sinking torchlight upon his bowed and whitened head, Turisend the Gothic king sat weeping at the banquet-table of Death.

CHAPTER II.

DAYS and nights coursed slowly onward in the Gothic camp, which yet remained upon the hill slope outside the gates of Sirmium; troublous days of uncertainty and watchfulness; nights of anxious consultation and little rest. Turisend, stricken down by age and sorrow, lay sick upon his couch in the royal palace within the city, whither the Gepide chiefs had borne him, helpless and paralysed, from the pavilion which had been the theatre of the stormy scene recorded in the last chapter. Kunimond and the Gothic army still maintained their post, hourly expectant of the reprisal with which the last words of Alboin had so proudly

menaced them. All night the watch-fires shewed brightly against the clear summer sky, and the tall figures of the sentinels moved darkly to and fro among the white tents. At daybreak and at sunset it was Kunimond's custom to gather the wisest and most skilled of the warriors about him on the hill side, whence the distant camp of the Winili could be observed, to hold debate on the purpose of the foe, and on the surest plan for defeating it, whether by action or by wile. From these councils Rosamunda was never absent. Vainly had her father sought to hinder her sojourn in the camp; vainly had he endeavoured by entreaty and by argument to persuade her that her best and fittest asylum would be found in the palace of Sirmium. "Battle," he had told her, "is inevitable, and it may be a battle that will leave few of us alive. What wilt thou do amidst the dying and the dead when the waters of the Savus are red with blood, and the carrion birds darken the air above the corpses?" And she had answered between her teeth, "If I can do nothing else, I will at least be a hawk to pick out the dead eyes of Alboin!"

So he let her abide in the camp, dauntless and stately, with that black and bitter anger rankling in her woman's heart. And at night, when the fires burned and the sentinels kept watch, it was her wont to go out alone under the stars, and all night long to pace up and down between the tents and the signal-lights. But there were other eyes than those of her own people that noted these strange wanderings, —eyes impelled by love as hers by hate. For, from an outpost of the Langobard encampment, beneath the wing of a pine-wood coppice, the slayer of Thurismund watched the tents of the Gepidæ. There, through many a long hour of darkness, the solitary figure waited, leaning against the massive trunk of a black-plumed tree, wakeful and sharp-sighted as the night-birds upon its branches. Thus it chanced that he marked against the depths of transparent sky the outline of a woman's form, lithe and majestic, flitting constantly to and fro along the ridge of the opposite hill, and he knew well, by the fierce desire of love that throbbed with every pulse of his body, that the woman he saw was Rosamunda, —Rosamunda, who had bewitched him with her wild beauty, who had spit upon him in her savage rage, and who even now, while he was gazing thus upon her unseen, was meditating how best to wreak her vengeance upon him! Then a thought came into his head; a daring, cruel thought, on which he at once prepared to act. He resolved to make an ambuscade with a few of his trustiest adherents, and at the darkest and drowsiest hour of the next night, to take advantage of Rosamunda's rambles, and either entrap her by foul means, or carry her off by force of arms. Darkest and

most silent of all the night watches was the slow still hour before the early dawn. The camp-fires had smouldered down to ashes, the sentinels were weary of their monotonous patrol, the moon had driven her silver galleon ashore below the Claudian range. This was the time he chose, when the Gepide princess waited alone and sleepless upon the edge of a jutting crag, remote from the tents, and watched the distant lights grow faint in the camp of the Winili.

Suddenly, as she stood there, something stirred in a thicket beneath the height. She listened intently, holding her breath hard. It must be a snake dragging itself through the dry brittle grass; a snake,—or a man!

"Rosamunda!"

It was but one word spoken in a whisper; she could catch no tone, no inflexion by which to recognise the voice. Was it one she knew?"

"Who calls upon me?" she demanded, after a pause. "Speak again, Gepide!"

But she had already betrayed herself, and the answer she asked was not vouchsafed in words. In a moment a soft step scaled the crag, a black shape deepened the gloom around her. Then she felt the grasp of a man's hands, and something fell upon her, shutting out the air and the dim remote lights in the camp of the foe, closing thickly about her face, and stifling her voice in its heavy folds. Too late, she guessed what disaster had befallen her! . . .

CHAPTER III.

GREY and misty, an hour afterwards, the daybreak began to strike the crests of the Gothic tents. Warriors who had passed the night in broken sleep, in anxious thought, or in debate with their comrades, donned their harness and went forth to reconnoitre. Kunimond stretched his great limbs, devoured his morning's meal, tossed off a cup-full of Chian, and sent a messenger to summon his chiefs. "For," said he, gruffly, "we waste our time in waiting for these lazy Winili. To-day we must give them combat."

But when the messenger had departed on his errand, Kunimond remembered Rosamunda. "She will be angry," he thought, "if I bid her not to our council. Moreover her ready wit and shrewd advice may serve our dull heads some good turn."

So he strode out to his daughter's tent. But there he found the nest empty, the robes and the golden fillet that marked her rank lying upon the bear-skin which covered the ground, and her attendant maid crouching, alarmed and abject, by the pillows of the couch.

"Where is thy mistress, child?" cried Kunimond.

"My lord," replied the girl, "I have neither seen nor heard of her since midnight. She could not rest, and so went forth to walk awhile. And since she came not hither again, I thought that she must be with thee."

Kunimond let the canvas fold of the tent door drop from his hand, and stood a minute silent. Far from suspecting the truth, he concluded only that Rosamunda, exhausted at length by her long vigil, must have fallen asleep upon the soft sward of the hill-slope. But scarcely had this idea occurred to him, than there arose in the camp without a confused noise of voices, the rattle of arms, and the trampling of feet; a noise that swelled and grew momentarily, drawing nearer and nearer to the spot where he stood. Looking forth, he saw advancing a crowd of Gepide warriors, whose number was constantly augmented by new followers from the rows of tents between which the throng passed. With the foremost came a Langobard emissary, conspicuous by the rolls of white bandage upon his legs, and the ensign wrought upon his head-piece.

"It is a challenge that he bears," thought Kunimond; "Alboin then will fight with us to-day."

Not a pace from his daughter's tent the band of warriors halted, and the voice of the Langobard rang out clear and sharp through the expectant hush which sealed the lips of his audience.

"Hail, Kunimond!" he cried, "give me safe conduct before I deliver my message! For the tidings I bring thee are such, that when I have told them, my life may be in no small peril among thy Goths."

"Speak, herald," responded Kunimond, gloomily, "speak, and fear not. We do not war with unarmed men!"

Then said the Langobard: "My lord and the leader of the Winili, Alboin, son of our king, bade me give the message with which he has charged me to none other than thyself, O Kunimond! For he sends thee word that thy daughter, the beautiful Rosamunda, lies captive in his royal tent, whence no sword nor ransom shall buy her back. Three hours since, he bore her away from thy camp by force in the darkness, because she scorned his wooing when he would have won her like a lover. And now, if thou wilt yield her peaceably, my lord will retire from thy frontiers, and leave thee and thine in peace; moreover, there shall be a treaty

of alliance between him and thee. But if not, then upon thy head shall be the blood of all the Goths whom Alboin will slay; and thou shalt lie in the dust of the valley with thy brother Thurismund, and Rosamunda shall see thy face no more. For the rest, my lord bade me tell thee he is a servant of the true God, and intends thy daughter no offence save in the bond of Christian wedlock. And now, noble Gepide, it is thine to speak; what reply shall I bear from thee to the mighty Alboin?"

He ceased; and in agitated and angry silence the eyes and ears of the Goths hung thirstily upon their chief. Red flush and the pallor of death swept alternately over Kunimond's downcast face; he gnawed his long yellow moustache, and beat his buskined foot upon the ground. At length he slowly raised his head and answered shortly:—

"Say to Alboin, that I and my Gepidæ will meet him and his dogs in the vale of the Savus at noon to-day."

But as the last word left his lips, a Goth of splendid build and noble gait stepped forward from the ranks of the warriors surrounding Kunimond, and making obeisance, thus addressed the prince:—

"Kunimond, champion of the Gepidæ, and ye my peers who stand in his presence, I pray you pardon my temerity in proffering advice which is unasked. But I beseech my prince that he will permit the herald of the Winili to retire for a space while I lay before you that which is in my mind."

Kunimond bent his head in acquiescence, and turning to the messenger of Alboin, bade him withdraw for a brief interval. "And now," he said, when the Langobard, conducted by two Gepide guards, had retired, "unloose thy tongue, Helmichis, and shew us this advice of thine." Then the Gothic men gathered closely together, and Helmichis spoke.

"Comrades," said he, "it is my counsel that we be not over-hasty in this affray. My years do not number those which most of you can count, nor do I boast of many scars, for I have not yet passed my seventh lustre. Yet, methinks that the advice I mean to give you savours of a discretion which is worthier a riper age than mine. Thou knowest well, O Kunimond, that our troops are but weak and pitiful when measured by the strength of the enemy. Mighty though we be in valour and in hate, we rank but as a handful of men before an army of wild beasts. Thou needest not, my prince, that I should remind thee of our late defeat, nor of that shameful loss which cost the life of Thurismund. Again to suffer rout or to flee before these barbarous Scandinavians would be a disaster well-nigh fatal to our life as a nation. I counsel, therefore, that rather than encounter the superior

numbers of the Winili unaided, we send with all speed to Cibalæ and to Mursa, where some three cohorts of Roman soldiery are garrisoned. With them we still hold friendly relations; but their emperor, Justinian, secretly mistrusts the growing Lombard power, and the policy of the eunuch Narses. The troops at Mursa are attached to Belisarius, the scourge of the Vandal race, and we shall not solicit their succour in vain. Leaged with these men whose nation was once so mighty, we cannot miss our triumph, nor fail to compel the restitution of Rosamunda. For consider, that should we attempt an enterprise against Alboin unassisted, and be overcome, his wrath and his disdain may cost our princess both her honour and her life. It is to rescue her that we must now contend; so long as she remains in the tent of the Langobard, so long we endure an intolerable injury and disgrace. In the name of Odin, then, let us strike the blow with no uncertain hand! Better to delay our reprisal awhile with the assurance of ultimate victory, than to hurl ourselves like impulsive children on a powerful foe, and again, like children, be humbled and dispersed!"

Thus he spoke, and for a minute none of the throng about him uttered a word. Then Kunimond, glancing round upon the ring of thoughtful, harassed faces, fetched a sigh like that of a man who yields perforce to some bitter ordeal of pain that is to save his life, and made response in few and earnest phrases.

"Helmichis, I thank thee. Goths, he hath well said. Shall I know the taste of meat or the blessing of rest, until Rosamunda be given back to me? Who of you will go to Mursa on our errand?"

So the herald of the Winili was recalled, and dismissed in safety to his master, bearing with him the defiance of the Goths, and a fierce warning that their vengeance should not tarry long. And before the tuft of his helm had dipped below the brow of the height, six of the most astute and honourable men among the Gepidæ were already on their way with their message to the Romans at Mursa and Cibalæ.

CHAPTER IV.

As yet Turisend the king knew not of the loss of Rosamunda. The sunset of that fateful day found him in the grasp of death. Bare of ornament and rude of fashion was the royal chamber, simple and rough the bed of goatskin which supported the nerveless limbs of the aged hero.

But the withered face that lay upturned and white on its hard unrestful pillows, was grand and patient as the visage of a marble Prometheus. Fit ending, fit death-bed for the sturdy pagan chief whose greatest joys had ever been found upon the battle-plain, and whose eighty years had known neither the soft delights of idle civilization, nor the wild excesses of a corrupt and luxurious court. Beside the couch knelt his only son Kunimond, unhelmed, unarmed, his hauberk and quiver upon the ground at his feet; and in the darkness by the portal a drowsy guard kept solitary ward.

And as the twilight deepened into mystery, and the shadows into substance, father and son, with voices half inaudible, held converse together for the last time.

Kunimond knew that the old man's life was ebbing with the day. The loss of his boy,—the Benjamin of his heathen soul,—the cruel insult which his wounded love had received at the hands of Alboin, and the bitter remembrance that the treasured arms of the dead Thurismund had become the trophy and boast of his enemy, these were thrusts which the proud and tender heart of the old warrior could not parry. Still, lying there upon his rude and hardy death-bed, the feeble tide of his thoughts set all in one current. Some day, he told himself, the time of reckoning would surely come, and Alboin should fall before the sword of an avenging Gepide. Then, recalling painfully every incident of that direful banquet-night in the pavilion, he bethought himself of the bard Thorsen's inspired verse, and of his fair granddaughter's panegyric upon the power of womanly wrath. And his blood for a moment grew warm, and his faint pulse throbbed with the hope that perchance by the favour of Odin, the prophecy might be fulfilled, and to her it might be given to compass the ruin of the man whose heel was set on the necks of the Goths.

So he rolled his grey filmy eyes upon his son, and asked in a quavering whisper for Rosamunda.

"Let her come to me, Kunimond! Bid thy vassals fetch her hither! Let me lay my hands but once upon her hair of gold,—of gold which no day's sun shall warm and redden again for me! . . . Thou movest not. My son, bring hither Rosamunda!"

The tall figure of the kneeling man quivered. And Turisend, blind with the mists of Death, felt the tremor of the bed, and stretched forth his weak and wandering hands towards his son.

"Rosamunda," he repeated, "my grandchild Rosamunda. Bring her hither to me before I die!"

Kunimond bowed his head upon the drapery of the couch, and answered in a slow whisper,—

"Father, I cannot. My daughter is a captive in the tent of Alboin the Langobard."

And he wept aloud.

But the old king neither spoke nor stirred again, he lay stark and dumb upon the goat-skin, with a rigid face of stone, and open sightless eyes, in which the dim light of hope and love was quenched for evermore. For the shock of that last ill news had stricken him to death, and the staunch old pagan soul had gone forth amid the darkness of the night to seek the Valhalla of its wild and hardy race.

CHAPTER V.

THE messengers of Kunimond sped well. The Romans, as Helmichis had prognosticated, were distrustful of the Vandal race, and suspicious in particular of the dauntless Alboin, in whom Justinian saw but too clearly the future invader of Italy. With the briefest possible delay, therefore, the imperial legions garrisoned at Mursa marched into Sirmium, filing in martial order past the closed gates of the palace wherein the Gothic chieftain lay dead. But twelve hours ago the thunder of their even tread and the clang of their war-harness would have thrilled his veins with eager hope, and kindled fire in his dying eyes,—and now, were his beloved Gepidæ to achieve the sovereignty of all the world, it would seem less than the play of a little child to the spirit that moved beyond the sun!

Alboin still continued to make his post of observation under the shadow of the pines. And now he started as he saw issuing forth from the gates of Sirmium a force which he knew to be not that of the Gepidæ; for as file after file tramped by into the camp with the regular step and absolute silence of perfect discipline, he saw that he had no longer Gepidæ but Romans against him. There was no time to be lost; hastening back to his camp he roused his sleeping warriors, and bade them prepare to start forthwith on their retreat to their own capital.

"Let despatch and stillness be your watchwords," said he, "let no sound be heard, no light seen. Once back within the walls of Leuphāna, we may defy the legions of Rome! Our prize and prisoner, the Gepide princess, shall lead the way, and we, her escort, will follow close."

So there was no battle in the valley of the Savus the next day, for by the dawn the plains which fronted the city of Sirmium were bare, and nothing remained to mark the place

where the Winili had lain, save the blackened circles of their extinct watch-fires, and the brown lines of furrowed sod which the hoofs of their horses had left along the turf. Then began a long and tedious march over the wastes and fen-lands of Pannonia, six hundred miles of retreat and pursuit through a wild champaign of many devious ways, a land which the vagrant Langobards knew well, but with which their enemies were unfamiliar. Against this superior luck of the Winili, combined with the advantage of an earlier start and the unrivalled generalship of Alboin, the Gepidæ and their allies had no chance of success in the race; they wandered continually out of the right track, were often forced to retrace their steps, and oftener at a loss for pioneers, so that the pursued were fast and sound within the walls of their capital before the pursuers sighted its outermost hamlet.

And yet this vast expanse of desolated territory had once been all included in the dominion of mighty Rome, and her armies had known and had trodden proudly every fruitful league between the northern ocean and the tideless central sea. But these men who marched side by side with the Goths were no sons of the old triumphant city which had held half the globe in fee, whose muscular grip all the nations had dreaded, whose iron thongs had bound heroes and kings, whose awful voice had claimed obedient hearing alike in Gaul, in Britain, in Germania. Fallen was that rich and splendid Western Empire, faded were the glories of the godlike Cæsar, a weak and degenerate race of princes swayed the sceptre which had once been second in might only to the winged bolt of immortal Jove; and the warriors of the new Valentia were strangers and vagabonds in the country which their fathers had trodden with the confident step of the conqueror.

At length Leuphāna was reached; not however until Alboin and his fair captive were already within its gates. Then the allies, pitching their camp before the city, as the Winili had done so lately in sight of Sirmium, sent their summons to the Lombard chief. He must surrender the Gepide princess unharmed to her people, or Leuphāna should be stormed forthwith. But Alboin and his inflexible father returned for all reply a message of defiance couched in the most arrogant and disdainful terms. The Goths, indignant, began the assault without further parley or ado. On one side were passion and insulted pride, on the other despair and fear, and the sharp hunger for revenge.

Kunimond and Helmichis directed all the efforts of the Gepidæ. From dawn till sunset they were found at their posts beneath the buttresses, encouraging and commanding by turns.

Steadily and bravely the enterprize progressed; dauntlessly men and generals alike performed their respective parts. For, before the eyes of every warrior in the pagan host, rose the vision of a beautiful damsel threatened with dishonour and doom, who stretched her white arms towards her people and cried to them for release from the thrall of the man she hated. And day and night at the heart of every Goth burnt the one fierce resolve, that come what might for them, that cry should not be uttered in vain! So they were strong, every man of them; and the Romans finding them so brave and earnest, took heart and energy from theirs and helped them well.

Then at last came the struggle, and its crown.

Kunimond, wounded in the thigh by an arrow from the city walls, had retired for a space to his tent, and left the storming of the gates to roll and roar on under the command of Helmichis and the chiefs. It was high noon, and the glare of the summer sun beating sharply down on the bald dusty plain, had so quickened the galling of his wound that he had feared to remain longer astride his horse, lest pain and loss of blood should overcome him with some sudden swoon. He threw himself on the mantle which served him by night for a couch, and demanded a goblet of tempered wine, which his leech permitted him to swallow while the hurt was washed and bandaged. Then lying back in silence, and leaning his head upon some cushions which his attendants had provided, the king presently seemed to sleep.

Sigvald the physician softly withdrew, and stood in the tent-door, shading his eyes from the scorching light, and watching as best he could the progress of the attempt on the Langobard city. He could see little, however, for the swirling wreaths of dust which eddied high over the scene, and the misty scintillation of the quivering heated air above the level. Confused cries, the dull thud of charging and rallying companies, and the clang of steel, mingling in one hoarse continual din, came to his ear unbroken and monotonous, till it seemed to his fancy like the incessant booming of a stormy sea upon a rocky shore. How long he stood watching and listening he knew not. The heat and the light both lessened, and the sun verged considerably towards the west. Sigvald had many times turned his gaze upon the King, but Kunimond, worn out with bodily fatigue and mental exhaustion, slumbered heavily. Suddenly across the open came a new sound, like a peal of thunder—roll upon roll; a volume of thick grey dust rose into the air like smoke; there was a moment's hush, and then a wild jubilant cry, the cry of a triumphant host, that was caught up from rank to rank like the echoing notes of a clarion-call.

"A breach! a breach!" shouted Sigvald aloud in his excitement. "The wall has fallen! praise be to Thor the Hammerer!"

His fervid ejaculation dispelled the torpor which had so long wrapt the brain of the King. He raised himself on his elbow, and looked earnestly at the animated face of his attendant. "Who praises the gods?" he asked, in deep husky tones: "Sigvald, how goes the battery?"

"Noble Kunimond," responded the leech, with an elated smile, "the Hammer of Thor has fallen on the Winili! It was I who praised the god,—the Gepide troops already muster in the streets of Leuphāna!"

"Thy hand, good Sigvald! give me thy hand!" cried Kunimond. "I must needs rise and be gone! Ill, indeed, that when at last the way is opened, my Goths should enter the city of the foe without their chief! Sigvald—my horse!"

But the physician entreated him to be patient. "Thou wilt but tear thine hurt afresh," he argued, "thou wilt faint in the fray, and be pounded to death in the crowded breach. Helmichis and the chiefs Hogen and Eric are doing their stoutest; thy presence will distract them with a new anxiety. Rest, rest, my chief, and at dawn to-morrow thine own hand shall plant the Gothic ensign on the walls of the Vandal!"

"By all the Dwellers in Asgard it is hard!" muttered Kunimond surlily. "Send, then, some scout to learn how the fight goes within the city! the Winili are strong, strong and desperate! Bid them send me tidings of Rosamunda! Oh, that my own hand were on the bridle!"

Slowly the hot day declined, and the red sun, his golden armour flecked as if with blood, brake open the burnished portals of heaven and entered victorious within them. All around his path in the western reaches lay broken spears and shafts of light, ruddy-tipped and feathered with cloud; beneath him lay scattered in dark level bars the shattered pillars of heaven's colossal gates.

Fast over the plain from the Langobard city a body of Gothic horsemen came spurring through the mellow glory, towards the tent of the wounded chief.

Sigvald, straining his sight to recognise them, saw that the foremost steed carried a double burden. It was the charger of Helmichis, jaded, foam-plashed and battle-stained, but mighty yet in his paces, out-stripping with pride and vivacious mettle the hoofs of his companions, singly ridden. Nearer and nearer he drew with flying main and thundering gallop, bearing the comely forms of his master and his master's prize of victory, the fair and queenly Rosamunda!

Rosamunda! free and undishonoured!

A minute later the noble war-horse stood riderless, shaking his steamy flanks at the king's tent-door, while Rosamunda, proud and triumphant, stood clasped in her father's embrace, with her fair face hidden upon his sturdy breast! It seemed to them then, that such a moment of meeting was well bought by all the fear and shame that had foregone it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Gepide tribe of the Gothic settlers in Europe possessed the range of country including and surrounding the Dacian or Transylvanian mountains and plains. Their fastnesses were the old Roman cities of Sirmium and Singidunum, on the site of which latter place is built the modern town of Belgrade.

It was in Singidunum that Kunimond resolved to establish his court, if 'court' that can fairly be called which was but a mere unpolished circle of rough chieftains and barbarous vassals, unconstrained by etiquette, and undistinguished by meretricious splendour or corrupt living. All that these hardy Northmen knew of regal state, all that they prized of august rank, they had seen and honoured in Turisend, and now they rejoiced to find in his son that heritage alike of prowess and of strength which made for them the only glory of kingship. Power was their measure of a Master, —power, not of possessions, nor of pageantry, nor even of crafty government, but of the inherent might of manhood; the power of the brave warrior, and of the successful champion. Nothing else, nothing less was able to win their rude love, or to move their admiration. Ignorant of all arts save that of warfare, and entertaining a steady contempt for luxurious surroundings and personal adornments, their garb was of the homeliest and most unæsthetic description, their songs and pastimes were all indissolubly connected with the national passion for conquest. The rooms of Kunimond's palace, high-sounding epithet for the ancient tenement which the Gepide prince had chosen to appropriate, were utterly devoid of all those many graces of ornament which we are wont to imagine indispensable to the lodgment of royalty. In the principal apartment there were only the barest necessaries of board and settle. The massive stone walls were ungarnished save by scattered clusters of spears and other items of battle-gear, the pavement uncarpeted but for a few roughly dressed goat-hides which here and there covered the

floor before the seat of a chieftain. All that marked the dignity of the place was to be found, not in the appointments of the room, but in the men who occupied it. Men they were who needed no trappings of wealth or of art to enhance their grand individuality, men whose forms and faces made their greatness; men of iron limbs and thews like flexible steel; mighty in war, impatient of disaster, unrelenting in victory, fearless of death. These were the heroes whose blood moved through the veins and impelled the heart of the hardy dauntless world of the early Middle Age. And of such a race came the Gepide virgin, Rosamunda, exemplar and model of the true strong-minded woman. Born and reared in the lap of a nation whose customs made but small distinction in the training of the sexes, and whose laws permitted any able-bodied person,—man or maid,—to carry arms, the daughter of Kunimond was from childhood an Amazon in heart and physique. Not the less a woman, because so unlike the feminine portraiture of our emasculated times; but such a woman as suited most fitly that age of iron, a woman who would have deemed the reproach of cowardice and fear as great a disgrace to her womanhood as the charge of falsehood or of wantonness. Such, as please God, the return of virile strength to the heart of our palsied world may again bring forth in the good days to come, but then with purer and higher aspirations than were possible to the pagan Rosamunda.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of her father she would have seemed better had she been a man. In the eyes of Helmichis she could never have seemed better than herself. Brief had been the interval of peace between Kunimond and the Winili, since the restitution of the Gepide princess; and although Leuphāna still remained in the hands of the Langobard tribe, the pride and passion of Alboin had sustained a wound which sorely chafed his imperious spirit, and he steadfastly directed all his hopes and purposes towards the accomplishment of future vengeance. Nevertheless, while Audoin lived and reigned, the fire of this revenge was perforce starved into patience, for the politic old Lombard monarch obliged his son to epouse Chlotswinda, daughter of a Keltic king whose friendship seemed far more desirable for the welfare of a growing dominion than the alliance of a paltry tribe like the Gepidæ. But Chlotswinda was no happy wife. Alboin's love was elsewhere, and he had no soft words for the Frankish woman whom his father had forced into his reluctant arms. So for a short space she languished and grieved after the home she had left, and then, neglected and unwept, she died, giving birth to a girl whom her husband named Albswinda. But before that birth

and death took place, the soul of Audoin himself passed away into the land of shadows; and the majesty of the Langobards devolved on the slayer of Thurismund.

Chlotswinda had barely drawn her last breath when the new king of the Lombards despatched an ambassador to Kunimond's abode at Singidunum. Curt and pregnant was the announcement which Alboin thus transmitted to his hereditary enemy.

"I am," said he, "sole ruler of the Langobardi, and the wife of my youth is dead. Give me thy daughter Rosamunda to fill her place, else I will bring against thee all the strength and flower of my people to beleaguer thy strongholds, and to sweep thy tribe away from the face of the earth for ever."

Such were the words which the emissary spoke in the hall of Kunimond's palace. And Rosamunda, sitting at the feet of her father, heard them. Then, before the Gepide chief could make reply, she had leapt to her feet and answered the herald proudly and scornfully out of the fulness of her wild and dauntless soul.

"Go back, and tell your master that Rosamunda the princess flings his challenge in his face! Tell him the Goths will perish to the last man of them rather than yield to his embrace the daughter of that house whose blood is red upon his hands! Tell him that the heart which beats here," she touched her bosom lightly as she spoke, "is none of a craven's nor of a traitor's, and that if he triumph over my people and carry me again to captivity within his palace, I and his death-warrant will enter its doors together! Let him force his love upon me if he dare, and the hand of a woman and not of a warrior shall compass shamefully the overthrow of your hero-king!"

Standing erect and defiant before the Langobard she waved her queenly hand in sign of dismissal with such an air as a goddess might have fitly assumed toward some ignoble suppliant after pronouncing an adverse and irrevocable oracle.

The envoy hesitated, and glanced furtively at Kunimond, as though reluctant to depart without a direct message of reply from the Gepide lord himself. But Kunimond's face was averted, and his brow was heavy and lowering.

"She hath spoken, Langobard," he said, in a voice that shook with the tremor of wrath; "get thee hence, obey her bidding, and prepare for war as ye may list." And without gesture or word of salutation he suffered the ambassador to depart.

Kunimond then relapsed into a long and moody silence, out of which he at length roused himself by a sudden effort,

and called the warrior Helmichis, who sat with others of his chiefs at the further end of the great hall.

"Helmichis," he said, "my daughter hath greatly praised to me thy valour and thy noble daring in conflict. It was the strength of thine arm and the skill of thy brain which alone availed to rescue her from thraldom, and to restore her untouched to the hearth whence she was stolen so basely. With thee therefore, preferred above thine elders, will I share the command of the Gepide host in this new campaign. Be gallant and undismayed as hitherto, and perchance some higher dignity, some worthier guerdon of thy prowess may be thine in the day of victory and of vengeance!"

Thus he spoke, and as Helmichis, hopeful and exultant, bent the knee before his prince, the eyes of maid and warrior met.

CHAPTER VII.

ALBOIN'S inveterate hatred of the Gepidæ, no less than his burning desire for the possession of beautiful Rosamunda, impelled him to the speedy resumption of hostilities against Kunimond. The Langobard envoy did not fail to recount with stinging exactitude the circumstances of his reception at the Gothic court, and the defiant message with which the princess herself had answered his lord's rough wooing.

Prompt of action as terse in speech, the Lombard chief lost no time in setting about the fulfilment of his threat, while yet he did not suffer impatience to over-ride military discretion. For, recalling the disaster he had suffered at Leuphāna, a disaster mainly owing, as it seemed, to Roman intervention, Alboin resolved, in imitation of Kunimond's policy, to augment the already powerful hosts of his own subjects with the troops of the Avari, a neighbouring tribe of Huns, whose Chagan, or prince, had held amicable relations with the court of Audoin. His overtures were prosperous. The Chagan, proud to be leagued with the Lombard hero, consented with alacrity to the proposals submitted to him; and with little delay, the combined armament started for the Gepide frontier under the guidance and generalship of Alboin.

Meantime, on the other side, Kunimond and Helmichis were no idlers. Singidunum was fortified and garrisoned with such men as could be spared for the purpose, but, as before at Sirmium, the Gepide king desired first to encounter the enemy in open plain, with the flower of his troops, rather than risk the danger of siege and slow starvation within city walls.

"The gates are behind us," he said, "at the worst we can retreat within them. But before that, let a push be made to rout the invaders in a fair field." There was no foreign aid this time for the Gepidæ, for the Roman garrisons of Mursa and of Cibalæ had been recalled, and both the towns abandoned to the ever-increasing hordes of barbarians, as it had fared in like fashion, one by one, with all the northern possessions of the fallen Empire. And to the seat of the Byzantine Empire itself the Goths demurred to appeal, for the Emperor Justinian was dead, and the sway of their enemy, the crafty eunuch Narses, now at its zenith.

Gallantly, notwithstanding, the warriors of Sirmium and Singidunum prepared to resist the approaching foe, ignorant of the precaution which that foe had taken to enhance his prospect of victory.

But Kunimond, to whose vision the death of Thurismund and the abduction of Rosamunda were ever present, forbade his daughter to imperil herself a second time by sojourn in the Gepide camp. He assigned her instead an apartment on the wall of the city, whence the distant tents of her tribe could be well descried, and whence she might, perchance, look forth upon the inevitable contest and calculate its issues.

Here, therefore, in the midst of her Gepide maidens, the brave princess found herself compelled to await, with unutterable suspense and heart-rending agitation, the result of the struggle which should decide her own fate and the fortunes of a whole nation.

But of that momentous conflict she was destined to witness neither the end nor the beginning.

A detachment of the vast army of Lombards and Avari, directed by the wile of Alboin, manœuvring to a remote side of the city, led the deluded Goths to follow, and as soon as the latter were well away from their entrenchments, a prodigious swarm of Huns and Vandals rising from ambush on every hand fell upon the Gepide flank and rear like the closing waves of a mighty and tumultuous sea.

And Rosamunda, where she sat disconsolate and watchful in view of the deserted tents, caught dim snatches of the noise and shouting in the valley far away, and feverishly wrung her hands and wondered what it meant. So that one of the women who stood by, seeing her mistress so distraught, and being fain to divert the current of her troublous fancies, sat down to a tapestry frame, and cast the ivory shuttle through the bright meshes, while she lifted her voice and sang :—

" If the web of my life were unwoven,
And the weaving to me were consign'd,
If the hue of the years to be proven
Were left to my mind,

"Would I weave such a tissue as this is,
With a heart for the shuttle I hold,
With garlands of laughter and kisses
And centre of gold?"

Then straightway another maid, who knelt beside her combing a fleece, took up the burden of the music, and answered, singing :—

"Ah no! for the world's bitter weather,
The sun and the wind and the rain,
Would blend your fair colours together
With tarnish and stain!

"Better broider in dyes that are lasting,
With shuttle of stone or of steel,
For a heart may get broke in the casting
Too sorely to heal!"

And anon, both sweet voices glided thus together into the dainty measure of the rhyme :—

"Sing shuttle! my fingers shall follow
Obedient, the track that you make,
Flying this way and that, as the swallow
Skims over the lake!

"Plick-pleck! now he dips to the subtle
Sleek water, and cleaves it apart ;—
Plick-pleck! now he rises! sing shuttle,
Sing swallow, sing heart!"

But in the intervals of the song, the noise and the shouting of the distant medley floated in, confused and discordant, through the open narrow loop-hole of the turret-chamber, and Rosamunda, standing there upon the watch, lifted her hand imperiously to silence the voices of her maidens.

"Girls," she said, "I pray you hold your peace. Your singing jars upon my heart! No more of singing within the walls of our city until the king return to us, rich with spoil of gold and gear from the ravished pavilion of Alboin! Then in your song you shall hail our Gepide chieftain Lord of two nations, heir new-born of blood to sudden splendor,—Kunimond the strong, Avenger of the noble Dead! O my father!" she cried, with passionate gesture and utterance, turning her wild shining eyes from the wondering maids towards the valley where the battle raged unseen, "remember Thurismund! Remember the fair stripling who fell on the bare Sarmatian plain, fighting there hand to hand with the Langobard, while the roll of war thundered behind him like the sonorous tramp of our martial gods, and the shrill shriek of arrows cleft the air above his dying head! Father, to-day avenge thy name and his, and that dire disgrace which struck the heart of our land through his breast, waking wrath in women, and tears in the eyes of men for the dear sake of the

royal boy they loved! O Master! father! king! remember my thrall in Leuphāna, and the cursed love of Alboin! Remember the palace of the Langobard whence the hand of Helmichis plucked me back yet virgin from the imminent embrace of Audoin's heir, this vampire of our house, this baneful carrion-hound that preys upon human loves,—this Alboin whom I hate! Ah, dearest Chief! here, here I await thy triumph! my hands are fain to clasp thy knees, thy feet, thy throat; my heart is fain to leap against thine own; my fervent lips are athirst to hail thee lord and conqueror; king whom one fair and gracious day hath doubly crowned, alike with the adoring love of thy Goths and with the guerdon of the invader's despair and fear!"

Her bosom heaved tumultuously, she hid her face in her clasped hands, and leaned trembling against the stone ledge of the tiny window.

"Pray Heaven!" cried one of her attendants, "that the chances of the day may be as thou sayest, princess!" Then another, who had taken her mistress's post of watch by the casement, answered quickly, "Heaven shall tell us soon in sooth, be fortune what it will! For hither comes one of our men, running up from the valley as though the three Nornir themselves were behind him! Doubtless he carries tidings for us!"

And at that, Rosamunda looked out again and saw the Gepide of whom her maiden spoke, pass on rapidly beneath the wall toward the city gates, and there with frantic gesticulations demand admittance. But of what passed in words nothing reached the lofty turret-window where the women were listening so eagerly. Only, a wild commotion ensued, a panic-stricken rush of feet and rattle of arms, and then the terrible sound of a mighty despairing wail, in which the voices alike of men and women shared. Then over the plain without came another and another Gepide, with flying feet, and fearsome eyes that glared in their widened sockets, hurrying towards the city like men pursued in delirium by some dreadful spectre. At the sight of them Rosamunda's brave hope gave way.

"O my heart!" she cried, "I fear some awful evil! See how our people fly! O my King, my father,—the gods preserve thee! Helga! Thorelil! some one approaches, some messenger who would speak with us! Be noble, heart of Rosamunda the princess,—quit you well, unsteady knees of Rosamunda! He is coming, this bearer of ill-news!"

Pale as some fair ghost might stand, she stood motionless while the Gepide messenger entered,—a gallant warrior whose face she knew well. She had last seen him passing out through the gates of Singidunum at sunrise, in command of

a troop, bold and intrepid of bearing, his face brightened with the light of confidence and courage. And now he stood before her downcast and gloomy, with eyes that did not dare to meet her own, self-confessed before he spoke, as the bringer of disastrous tidings!

Nevertheless, there was no tremor in the voice with which Rosamunda bade him tell his errand.

"Welcome, Hogen," she said, as he paused in the doorway. "Thou hast news for me, I doubt not."

"Alas, princess!" answered the miserable Gepide, "forgive me the words I must speak. All is lost to us! Kunimond is slain, the Goths are overthrown, the greater number of them dead or dying; Helmichis has turned traitor to save his life, and sworn allegiance to Alboin!"

Still white and unblenching, the daughter of Kunimond faced the Gepide warrior.

"Say on!" she cried, "thou hast further news to tell! I am a princess born, I will not wonder nor weep at thy tidings! Hogen, sayest thou this Alboin whom we smote so lately hath made himself our master? Sayest thou that a Gothic chief hath paid him fealty and sworn him service?"

"Aye, madam," responded the warrior, "Alboin truly is master, but wile and not valour earned him his victory. Thou hast yet to learn the history of this day's calamity. Know then that our conqueror came against us leagued with the hosts of the Avari! Our legions stood alone before the camp at sunrise, but the light that fell upon the targes of Alboin's armament discovered the war-harness of the Hun as well as that of the Langobard! This I saw, and told thy father, but he bade me hold my peace, lest our troops should be discouraged and fainthearted. But when Helmichis led the van across the glen yonder, I knew we were marching on our deaths. And straightway, on every side of us, Huns and Vandals rose by hundreds from their ambush in the copses, all the covers were alive with them; hopelessly outnumbered we were beaten down like grass under the hail,—the valley is sown with our flesh and watered with our blood!"

There were bitter tears in the eyes of the Gothic warrior as he told the news. But not in the eyes of the woman he addressed. Scarcely she seemed to note his presence, or to heed the sobbing, heart-stricken girls who surrounded her. Not hers to weep, or to yield to weak despair, when father, country, freedom and love fell smitten into the dust of death at her feet. The power of a hatred and pride such as would have made common natures base, ennobled her soul and lifted it beyond the touch of meaner passions. For her, all the sting, all the bitterness of the day's disaster was in the

shame of it. The sorrow, the desolation of her own ruined life,—for these, as yet, she cared nothing.

Standing upright, with clenched fingers and marble face, she uttered aloud the monody of her wounded spirit. Not as though addressing her attendants, but rather like one who by spoken words struggles to realize conviction of some awful truth, incredible by means of thought alone.

"So," she cried, "ends a noble dynasty! Our nation, our name, and our lord have passed this day for ever into nothingness! Henceforth the deeds of our past are writ in water, no jot of that which once we held,—renown, honour, success, shall stand to prop our story up and make a landmark of it for the unborn world! We are fallen, we are dead, crushed, cast out; our glory is no more than extinguished flame! And I, who should have filled my father's place years hence, chief and queen of the Gepidæ,—I am the most degraded and dishonoured slave in Alboin's court; while *these* —O ye gods—*these* are no more Goths but Langobards, and their master is lord of the accursed Winili—Alboin—the conqueror of our race,—Alboin whom Helmichis serves!"

Then one of the serving-girls,—she who an hour since had chanted the first stanzas of the shuttle-song,—Thorelil, fairest and tenderest of all the maids in the Gothic court,—rose from her place, and drew softly within her own the clenched, defiant hands of the princess.

"Sweet," she whispered, "be not so strange of speech! Look upon us whose eyes are fruitful with womanly tears; not barren as thine are! O Rosamunda, be gracious to thy sorrow, and to theirs who mourn for thy father! Let thine hands rest here in mine, lean thine head upon the bosom wherein my heart waits to give thee comfort! I love thee well, my noble princess! What, no word, no tear? Speak for me, Gudrun!"

"Alack!" cried the girl whom she adjured, "pray the gods rather to be tender with her and smite her dead! Who now comes this way to augment our grief with more of ill news? Holy heaven, defend us!"

For, as she uttered the cry, Alboin himself stood in the open doorway. In his hand he carried the spear of Thurismund, and the barb of it was wet and red with Gepide blood. Behind him pressed a throng of his retainers, whose evil-omened faces Rosamunda remembered to have seen once before under the ruddy torch-light of Turisend's royal tent. Then they and their lord had come as suppliants to the Gepide king; now they trod the floors of the Gepide palace, masters and disposers of all within or around it!

On the threshold of Rosamunda's chamber the Lombard prince halted, and stood surveying her.

"Sweet lady," he said, "grace be with you!"

"Sweet lord," she answered bitterly, "I give you thanks! Is that my father's blood upon your hands? Reach them hither to me, and I will kiss them!"

But with the word "my father's blood," the salt springs of her grief suddenly overflowed her sterile eyes; she sobbed, reeled, and fell swooning at the feet of Alboin.

CHAPTER VIII.

THUS was the vaunt of the Lombard champion redeemed by his deed. For the death of Kunimond, last of the Gepide chiefs, and the loss of his entire army in the fatal valley of the Ister and the Savus, struck so dire a chill of despair to the hearts of the garrison left within the walls of Singidunum that when the conqueror appeared at its gates and demanded immediate surrender, the resistance he encountered was of the feeblest. Dejection had seized upon every man in the city, not one of whom but had lost some of his dearest in that day's terrible rout, not one of whom but felt that the life and name of his tribe had passed away with the breath of his king. Moreover, all the sturdiest and noblest of the Goths had gone out to battle in the train of Kunimond and Helmichis. They were all dead, and the few hundred veterans and youths who remained to guard the walls of Singidunum, could make but paltry defence against the assaults of a vast host, directed with unerring leadership and flushed with success. Not that the garrison gave in tamely to their doom. Broken-spirited, heart-sore though they were, they launched their handful of arrows bravely on the beleaguers, and when Alboin forced the gates of the city, their dead bodies lay bloody and stark about the trenches and along the silent streets.

That struggle, that last slaughter, was the death-throe of the Gepide tribe, and the anguish of it, though sharp and hard, was brief enough. Scarce an hour after Hogen had delivered his budget of melancholy news to Rosamunda in the turret-chamber, Alboin was master of Singidunum, and of the fair princess for whose sake he had stormed its ramparts. No Gothic warriors now to fight for the honour of their darling,—no Helmichis to bear her away triumphant upon his gallant war-horse! The brave charger lay dead in the glen among the corpses of the Gepidæ, his great sides crusted with blood, and the javelin of an Avar through the mighty, silent heart that had known no fear nor weariness in life.

And his master, Helmichis the Goth, was a renegade in the camp of the Huns and Vandals!

Now Alboin, though a heretic, was still a Christian, and had Christian scruples—at proper seasons—upon the score of unlawful love. Rosamunda was a princess, the daughter of a proud and fierce-tempered race, a woman whose favour he was fain to conciliate, as well for love's sake as for that of safety. Policy, therefore, combined with religion in this instance to restrain the precipitancy of his passion. He resolved to give her no cause for reproaching him with dishonourable conduct towards herself, and hoped that when once the crown and the ring had bound her his lawful spouse, she would speedily forget the ruin which her house and her nation had sustained at his hands.

So little Alboin knew the heart of Rosamunda!

But for a brief season he judged it prudent to leave his captive in peace with her maidens within the precincts of the Langobard palace, to which she and they had been newly conveyed. Well the princess understood that her marriage with the Lombard champion was inevitable, unless, indeed, she should choose to evade it by a voluntary death. But no such hysterical intent disturbed the mind of this hardy maid. Another and more vengeful purpose nerved her with strange unwomanly calmness in the teeth of the doomful wedlock to which she was destined, giving to all her words and ways so stern and unblenching a courage, that her damsels took it for the insensibility of madness.

So, on a night, as the princess sat with them in one of the rooms of the Langobard palace, the maidens, to try her mind, made doleful lamentation over the fallen fortunes of their race. They wept for the two brave sons of Turisend, slain both by one detested hand; they spoke in low, hushed voices of the treacherous stratagem by means of which Alboin conquered the Gepidæ; they told piteous tales of the slaughter in the valley of the rivers, and bitterly deplored their own shameful servitude, and the bondage of her who should have been their queen.

But Rosamunda, sitting apart and silent, neither wept with them, nor reproved their weeping. And when one of the maidens said to her, "Princess, heedest thou nought of all these things?" she only retorted fiercely, "Did I not speak once on the day when my father was slain, and when Singidunum fell?"

At last said Gudrun, a girl of more discernment than the rest, "Let us talk together of the warrior Helmichis, and of his dishonourable surrender to the foeman."

So they told one another softly the whole shameful story, how he to whom above all men the Gepidæ had looked for

valiant example, had basely yielded himself and his legion to Alboin, preferring ignoble safety to a glorious death.

And one said, "He feared when he saw the Huns, and the trap into which the Goths were drawn."

And another, "They say he was bold enough at first, until he knew that the tide of fate was against us. It was the death of the king that appalled his spirit. He could not fight alone."

And a third, "Yea, and he hath done well, for Alboin favours him, and hath made him his armour-bearer."

Then the red colour spread over the face of Rosamunda, and her fair limbs trembled. But for all the sorrow and the wrath at her heart, she uttered not a word nor a sigh, until the flame of the lamp in the chamber grew dim, and the maidens weary of their talk. Then she rose and dismissed them to their sleeping-room, and remained alone, standing in the silence.

Upon a stone pedestal fronting the threshold of the chamber, Alboin,—to convert or to insult his prisoner,—had placed a sacred image, such as Christians, both orthodox and heretic, were wont to set up in their houses, as of old the Greeks and Romans had set up on the family hearth the effigies of their Lares and Penates. Above this image hung the brazen oil-lamp, its fitful, sickly light making the painted face and limbs of the figure seem to writhe and quiver in ghastly pantomime. A moment Rosamunda glanced at it, half in wrath, half in scorn; then turning away she passed on to the window, and stood in the gleam of the starlight, looking out across the wide purpled landscape, and away towards the region of the North, where, over dark seas lay the wild home of the Goths and Vikings, the land of Odin and his warlike Jarls. And the free breath of the great earth-mother touched her lips, the power of speech awoke within her; she stretched out her white hands to the night, and poured forth her heart in a river of swift and ardent prayer.

"Ah! grand and awful gods of the North!" she cried, "vast spirits who dwell in the crystal pavilions of the stars,—Genii of Asgard and of Æser, hear the voice and the oath of Rosamunda the princess! Of all the faithful Goths who served you and swore by your mighty names, I alone remain,—I alone, a maid and a bond-slave! But the soul within me is strong and free, and the woman's hands I raise to your thrones have grasped spear and bow in the day of battle! Give me power to redeem the honour of the Goths, give me might to avenge the shame that lies upon the glory of my father's race! We must die, we must perish,—I and my people, yea we must perish; but like the sun, let us go down in blood! Ye also, gods of the

Norse, are passing away from our world; already your mighty shapes grow dim and shadowy in the upper air,—obscured by the incense smoke of Christian altars. Weaker deities with beardless faces, mild and childlike, usurp the thrones your giant forms so long have filled! Where once the majestic form of the war-god Odin towered in huge divinity, stand the feeble and lacerated feet of the pale Christ! Where once we beheld a stately and fertile goddess,—Hertha, the life-giving mother and queen,—there kneels a slender and timorous maiden with downcast eyes and wounded heart, a vestal, unmated and sorrow-stricken! These are the new divinities, these,—the rejected, the mean, the suffering; and to give these place, O grand and sturdy gods of the ancient faith, are ye and yours dethroned! But for me ye still live, for me ye reign as of old. Stoop from your eternal seats, steel my hungry spirit, strengthen my eager hands! Grant me my fill of the bitter vengeance I seek, let me drink a rich draught of the Christian blood of the Langobard! Strike through me, through me, dread Nornir, three-formed Destiny, weavers of human doom, pitiless Udr, Verthandi and Skulld! To this end only I live, to this I devote my virginity; may Vara and Synia witness my oath, and, if I fail, avenge with double curse the broken faith of Rosamunda! For all whom my soul found worthy have passed away, save one; and that one lives to bear the name and to carry the heart of a traitor!"

Angry and tearless, she tossed her bare gleaming arms aloft, and sank upon her knees in the glint of the star-light. Behind her the lamp had spent its puny flame, and the image of the deity she disdained was shrouded in darkness. Around and beneath the earth lay sleeping yet, the pulses of her great heart beating out the hours of silence, one by one; above, the passionless stars swept on in their glittering courses. But beyond the faint reaches of the eastward hills lay a single narrow streak of grey light, hazy and indistinct, the lifting eye of the new dawn. And first to know and to herald its coming would be the wild birds of the air, Nature's poets, types of the singers and missioners whose voices warn the world, whose spirits float on wings of freedom, untamed and unafraid; the ichor of whose wondrous strength is the pure element of the open heaven!

CHAPTER IX.

THE sun had set upon Rosamunda's marriage-day. The new queen of the Lombards sat alone in her bridal chamber, meditative and gloomy. She had not yet laid aside the jewels of her unaccustomed regalia, and the folds of her

broidered wedding-robe lay glittering about her feet. What a melancholy fate was hers; and yet neither her face nor her attitude would have aroused the pity of a spectator. Rosamunda was not a lovable woman; she lacked the charm of pathos even in situations of the profoundest misfortune.

By-and-by, while she sat there, moody and immobile, a faint stir made itself audible behind the arras at the further end of her apartment. Slowly and cautiously the heavy folds of the tapestry were pushed apart, and the tall figure of a man discovered itself under the uncertain flicker of the cresset lights which illumined the bridal chamber. Becoming aware of a new presence, Rosamunda lifted her head and turned her eyes with some curiosity on the intruder. Immediately a sharp spasm convulsed her whole frame, she started to her feet and uttered a sudden cry: "Helmichis!"

The man whom she named darted forward, threw himself before her, and seizing the hem of her robe covered it with passionate kisses.

For a moment Rosamunda looked down on the kneeling Goth with an expression of deep and strangely mingled emotions. Then all that was tender, all that was regretful in the glance disappeared, her beautiful face took upon it only a gaze of hard contempt, and she recoiled as though from some noxious or ignoble thing.

Helmichis was not slow to note or to interpret the silent significance of her action.

"Rosamunda," he said, "my princess, my queen, be patient with me! I am here at the peril of my life, and my time for speech with thee is short."

"Speak," she answered coldly, and with averted eyes. "I know well that life is dear to thee; that thou hast already amply proved."

"Not dear for mine own sake, Rosamunda," he said.

He had taken her taunt mildly, as some men take such things of women. This stung her the more.

"How," she retorted, angrily, "art thou not Alboin's armour-bearer,—thou, a Gepide chief?"

He answered slowly, looking full at her knitted brows, and speaking with almost a smile upon his lips: "Art not thou Alboin's wife,—thou, a Gepide princess?"

She would not deign, he knew, to defend herself by pleading, as some women would have done, the weakness or the helplessness of her sex; she would answer him as man to man. But to his surprise no answer reached him. Rosamunda reddened, and stood silent. The Goth rose from the kneeling posture he had retained throughout the brief dialogue, and confronted her, endeavouring by closer scrutiny

of her face to gain, if possible, some indication of the thoughts which filled her brain. At length, dreading the return of Alboin, he resolved again to address her.

"Rosamunda, think not that I am unaware of the purpose thou hast at heart in consenting to a marriage which is hateful to thee. I am not come hither to insult my princess with the display of a traitor's malice, rejoicing in her misfortunes. But I have chosen this night—this hour, as most befitting the defence which I have to make to thee. Rosamunda, thou believest me guilty of an infamous perfidy, thou believest that I sold my honour and my service into the hands of Alboin for the paltry meed of life as a vassal in the hire of the Langobard. It would have been the part of a noble Goth to have died spear in hand with his face toward the foe. A chief of the Gepidæ should rather have slain himself with his own hand than have suffered the thong of his adversary to bind him. None but a craven or a traitor could be so unmindful of the stern traditions of Odin's sons, as to prefer a voluntary servitude to the glorious death of a free warrior. Thus didst thou reason, my princess, and in thine eyes the name of Helmichis was shamed as the name of a dastard and a renegade. But now hear the truth.—On the day of that miserable slaughter I knew not that Alboin had brought the Huns against us in his train. Not one of us knew of their presence in the field until too late. Thinking to close upon the rear of Alboin's army while engaged in fight with the men under Hogen's command, I led my troop of horse into the defile of the glen. There the wily Lombard had packed his Huns in ambush. In the thick of the struggle which followed I contrived to send one of our company for aid, to Kunimond. Instead of help he brought me back the dire tidings of thy father's death. He had seen the king fall under the hoofs of his own steed,—had seen him lie prone in the dust of the plain, his head stricken from his neck by the hand of Alboin. Then I raised myself in my stirrups and beheld the height covered with corpses, the Lombards everywhere triumphant and spreading fast to the walls of Singidunum. In that moment too my horse was mortally thrust, he reeled beneath me and fell, his huge frame crashing like a hurled rock among the thick branches of the coppice trees. The voice of the Avar who had struck us down rose harshly over the din of the fray; 'Yield, chief of the Goths, give up thine arms, and I spare thy life!' He deemed me such a prize as might secure him favour with Alboin. Quickly, as the sword flashes overhead ere it descends, a sudden wave of thoughts swept through my mind.

"The king is dead—Alboin marches on our city. For aught I know, our chiefs are all slain save myself, and for me

there is no chance of rescue or of escape at this crisis. By my death Rosamunda will be left unchampioned, she will be borne captive to the Lombard palace, no man of her race will remain to watch over her destiny, or, if need arise, to avenge her honour. I will go into thraldom with her, I will become for her sake her master's vassal! Princess, I surrendered my arms to the Hun, I entered the service of the Langobard; and I have striven so successfully for his favour, that to-night my fortune gives me this happy chance of speaking alone with my queen! For thee, Rosamunda, for thee, and for the great love I bear thee, have I chosen to forego the glory of the warrior for the collar of the serf! Use me now in thy designs, appoint me any part thou mayst list, bid me undertake in thy service whatever enterprize thou dost meditate against our Vandal lord, and thou shalt find the heart within me at least as brave and as dauntless as when it beat against thine own in the flight from the fallen walls of Leuphāna!"

The earnestness of his voice, if not the longing in his eyes, would have convinced any woman under heaven of his truth.

Rosamunda slowly extended her hands towards him, and clasped his firmly and softly within them. Frank she was in acknowledging an error, as fierce in resenting an injury.

"I have wronged thee, Helmichis," she said. "But yet I was not wholly blameful, for I knew not until now of the love thou bearest me. Had I known it earlier, I might have read thine actions by its light."

He caught her quickly in his arms.

"O Rosamunda!" he cried, "thou hast seen it in my face, thou hast heard it in my voice a hundred times and more! Could I ever look on thee, my sweet, as on another woman, or didst thou ever hear in my speech to another the passion that made every word I spoke to thee like a beat of my heart?"

"Nay" she said, putting him from her gently, "maidens seek not for such signs as these!"

But she trembled and faltered a little as she spoke.

"Yet, Rosamunda," he murmured, gazing earnestly at her, "I think, too, that thou lovest me?" She gave him no answer in words; only she lifted her eyes and looked him full in the face. There she let him read the reply he sought; and in silence she dropped her head upon his breast. Thus had love power to make even this woman lovable!

CHAPTER X.

ALBOIN'S marriage with Rosamunda was, for the Lombard monarchy, the inauguration of a series of fresh and brilliant conquests. For the next year destiny favoured our Vandal hero with the powerful alliance of Narses the Roman general, a stroke of fortune which was brought about in the following manner.

A quarrel had arisen between the eunuch, then exarch of Ravenna, and the Empress Sophia, Justin's wife. Narses was deposed from his vice-royalty and a new governor appointed, but the transaction did not end there. Sophia added to the letters of recall addressed to the fallen statesman these insulting words: "Let Narses leave to men the exercise of arms and the dignities of political administration. His proper place is among the maidens of my palace, where a distaff shall be placed in his hands." Narses, stung to the quick, retorted, "I will spin the empress such a thread as she shall not easily unravel!" And from his enforced retirement at Naples he sent messages to Alboin, inviting him to undertake the invasion of the Roman territory in Italy, and proffering his own assistance to the enterprise.

The ambitious warrior-king snatched eagerly at this brilliant chance of conquest. On the 22nd of April, 568, the whole nation of the Lombards, with twenty thousand confederates gathered from the kindred tribes of Germania, abandoned their northern plains and crossed the Julian Alps. From the snowy heights of these majestic mountains they first beheld with exultation the fair and fruitful region which was destined to become their own.

With the consummate wit of a born general, Alboin controlled his vast host. In military tactics no man before or since ever surpassed him. By his wise direction, the Lombards and their allies used every available means of conciliating the inhabitants of the country upon which they descended. No plunder, no devastation was permitted; villages, orchards and vineyards were respected; order and peace everywhere followed the march of the wily barbarian. Thus he traversed the whole inland district without once meeting an army in the field. Milan (Mediolanum) opened her gates to the invaders on the 4th of September, 569. Pavia (Ticinum) succumbed latest of the imperial strongholds, and at length only Rome and Ravenna remained to the Byzantine empire. The mastery of the whole of North Italy was thus secured to the Lombards; and their chief, who had hitherto

controlled a mere rough tribe of Vandals in the wilds of Pannonia, beheld himself the despotic governor of a vast and beautiful territory, rich in cultivation and inhabitants. Success being thus assured, Alboin resolved to celebrate his conquest with feast and revelry, and to hold at Verona a triumphant banquet, on a scale becoming the resourccs of so great a prince.

The night chosen for the carousal was in the balmiest and most enchanting season of the year. The palace banquet-hall was opened to the soft twilight of a sky which the sun seemed loth to quit, and the faint evening breeze mingled freely with the rich odours of the flowers and wine which covered the glittering tables of the festival. At the head of one of these stood the throne of the hero Alboin; about him were grouped the chiefs of the Langobard race, and of the allies who had assisted to bring their mighty enterprise to its splended issue. Fronting the royal seat, at the further end of the hall, and surrounded by her women, sat Rosamunda, diademed and robed like a goddess, the fairest and most regal spectacle amid all the magnificent pageantry.

Midnight was near at hand, and the guests had already drunk deeply, when the voice of Alboin suddenly rose high above the songs and the laughter of the festival.

"Bring hither," he cried, "our cup of victory! It is time we should taste together the crowning libation of the feast!"

Then, turning to the assembly, he added, "Chiefs, this is the night of the Langobard's triumph. I have reserved till now the fulfilment of an oath I swore long since. To-night I drink a draught of my richest Falernian from the skull of the man who once vowed to do the like with mine! Ill he judged to make such boasts in the ear of Alboin! Now let his pagan ghost bear witness to my revenge, and see with shame the lips of the man he dared to menace rest on the jewelled brim which once contained his own lack-lustre brain!"

And rising in his place, he held aloft before the guests a strange goblet which one of his attendants had filled with Falernian wine. It was a human skull, hollowed, set in gold, and studded with costly gems.

"Comrades!" cried Alboin in exultant tones, as the warriors about him sprang from their seats,—"I drink to the lasting dominion of the Lombard dynasty, from the skull of Kunimond the Gepide!" Then, wiping his beard after the draught, he called Helmichis, who, as his duty demanded, stood behind his lord.

"Here, Goth," said he, placing the skull in his retainer's hands, "carry thy master's head to thy master's daughter!

Bid our lovely Rosamunda do equal honour to our triumph, and rejoice while she drinks with her departed sire!"

Helmichis trembled, and threw a fearful glance towards the face of his proud mistress; but the look he met there determined him on a mute obedience. Amid a profound silence Rosamunda rose, took the dreadful goblet steadily in her hands, and setting her lips upon its brim, she kissed it, drank, and said aloud: "The will of my lord is done." And none but Helmichis as he bent before her, heard the fierce words she added low to herself: "Dog of a Langobard! though I die for it, this insult shall cost thee thy life to-night!"

The celebration of the toast thus savagely inaugurated, was the closing episode of the banquet. Rosamunda retired first, taking with her the train of waiting-women; soon after the chiefs dispersed, and the remains of the feast were left to the greed of Alboin's barbaric serfs.

But when the Lombard hero had stumbled, heavy with wine, to his bed-chamber, and the vast stone court of the palace was deserted and silent, Helmichis, lying restless on his couch, distinguished the sound of a footstep approaching his room. Noiselessly he rose, and lifting the tapestry which covered the threshold, perceived Rosamunda advancing along the corridor which led from the women's apartments. As she came stealthily forward, her long bright hair falling unbound about her neck, her face stern and unnaturally pallid under the white glint of the moonlight that flooded the narrow gallery, Helmichis involuntarily recalled the prophecy of Thorsen the Gothic Scalder:—

> "Then against the sky behold
> Moved a shape of awful seeming,
> Fair and tall, with hair of gold,
> Down its marble bosom streaming.
> 'Who art Thou,—more dread than Odin?
> Art thou mortal—art thou human?'
> 'Yea,' she said, 'an angry Woman
> Stands before thee, Lord of Death!'"

Low and eager the tones of Rosamunda's voice broke in on his musings.

"Helmichis," she said, looking fixedly upon him, "the time has come for the performance of thy promise. Dost thou still love me, and art thou as willing to do me service now, as thou wert on my bridal night?"

"My queen," responded the armour-bearer with worship in his eyes as he drank in with them her glorious beauty, "I am ready to die for the sake of but one hour of thy love! Why hast thou so long denied it to me,—thou who hatest me not?"

He would have fallen at her feet, but with a rapid gesture she restrained him.

"Stand up," said she, "I doubt not thy devotion. But it is not vows nor prayers which I ask of thee to-night,—it is work,—work which shall earn thee the reward thou seekest. Thou wert witness of the indignity Alboin put upon me an hour since before all his guests at the banquet; nay, thou thyself wert forced to endure the keen edge of his grim jesting. Give me thine aid, Helmichis, to wash out these insults in the blood of their perpetrator,—the Langobard who slew my father and my father's brother! Refuse me, and I will hazard the attempt alone, rather than remain longer unavenged; comply, and so soon as Alboin's corpse lies at our feet, I will yield myself into thine arms! Helmichis, wilt thou win me so? Is thine heart as brave as was thy boast?"

She spoke in a rapid intense whisper, searching his face meanwhile with a gaze of the deepest earnestness. He hastened to answer her in the same hushed tone.

"Have I not told thee, my sweet, that I would gladly risk any death for thy sake? But I like not that *thou* shouldst be sharer in this adventure. There is great danger—."

She interrupted him angrily.

"Long ago I vowed to the Nornir that Alboin should die by no other hand than mine! I seek only thine assistance, Helmichis; when once he is in our power it is *I* who must strike!"

Looking into her wrathful eyes, and hearing the decision of her tones, the Goth resolved not to contest the point. But he urged instead a new proposition.

"If such be thine intent, Rosamunda, we cannot—we dare not attempt the exploit, unless Alboin's henchman, Peredeus, be gained at least to secrecy. Dost thou not know that he guards the sleeping-room of his lord? How shall I protect thee against both master and vassal? Doubtless he would arouse Alboin, or even fly to summon men from the guard-chamber. Think me not over cautious; my timely advice once saved our nation from ruin."

"What, then, wilt thou have me do?" asked the queen impatiently. "My wrath admits of no delay; Alboin must not look upon the rising of another sun! Speak, hast thou no scheme to propose?"

For a few moments he reflected, and then answered slowly, "Aye, Rosamunda, and it shall be briefly told. Peredeus hath a passion for thy maid, Thorelil; she is coy as women will be, and he eager as becomes a lover. Write here on thy tablets a message which I will carry to Peredeus, appoint

a meeting with him alone, an hour hence, in the ward-room of the western gallery, and sign, not thine own name, but the name of her whom he loves. I will charge myself to remove his possible scruples. 'It is but for a brief space,' I will tell him, 'and the king is oppressed with heavy sleep.' And further, I will offer to take office as his substitute, till he return, and should need arise, to excuse him satisfactorily to Alboin. All this is easy enough. Your part, my sweet, is worthier of your better skill. The eastern ward-room is disused and utterly dark; its window is masoned up, the passage that leads to it is buried in absolute gloom. Peredeus will not be able to see thee, but he will hear the rustle of thy garments and take thee for Thorelil. Be silent until he embrace thee, or seek to use some such endearment. Then discover thyself in terms of indignation, resent his insolence, discredit his excuses, and threaten him with the anger of his lord. When he implores thy clemency and describes the letter he has received, begin to waver, and seeming but half to relent, depart as if to question thy maid. But ere thou leavest him be careful to exact his promise to remain there till thou return, warning him that if he escape thou wilt certainly acquaint Alboin with his offence against thee. The rest remains with us, Rosamunda; only give me the tablets quickly."

She placed them in his outstretched hands.

"Helmichis, thy wit almost equals a woman's," she said. "But how shall I account to Peredeus for my presence at such an hour in the ward-room?"

"That, my queen," he answered, "I leave to wit which is quite a woman's."

CHAPTER XI.

IN the thick darkness of the ward-chamber upon the eastern wing of the palace, Rosamunda awaited the coming of Peredeus. Her suspense was brief enough, for the ardour of love gave speed to his feet, and the rattle of steel harness soon made itself heard in the vaulted passage without. Pausing at length, and groping for the arched open entrance of the ward-room, he gave vent to a low anxious exclamation.

"My beloved! art thou here?"

There was no reply; only the rustling sound of a woman's [illegible]pery sweeping past the stone walls and over the pave-[illegible] towards him. Peredeus extended his arms, caught the

moving form passionately to his breast, and kissed its parted lips with all the enthusiasm of a hungry lover.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "this is indeed kindly done! I knew thou wouldst not be always obdurate! Oh, that I might see thy face! Come out into the moonlight but for a moment; we may easily slip hither again unobserved. Everybody in the place is asleep,—the guards are all lying as drunk as hogs around the banquet-tables! I saw them as I passed just now. Such a spectacle! 'Tis well for them that their lord is in the same plight!" And there he stopped the flow of his loquacity to laugh.

Rosamunda wrested herself from his grasp.

"How now!" cried she, in accents of extreme displeasure, "what insolence is this? For whom dost thou take me, Peredeus?"

The deluded henchman checked his untimely mirth, and retreated from her at least as briskly as he had advanced, muttering with a horrified expression of voice, "I thought it was Thorelil!"

"Not so," returned his companion sternly, "I am Rosamunda. Knave, thy lord and mine shall hear betimes of the outrage thou hast offered me. What! couldst thou fancy the wife of Alboin would stoop to wanton with such as thou art?"

"By all the life in my body," reiterated the dupe, "I swear I came hither to find Thorelil!"

Rosamunda laughed scornfully.

"A crafty tale," she sneered, "but hardly clever enough to beguile me! Thórelil is the most bashful and discreet of all my tire-women. She is the last maiden to have given thee a midnight tryst in such a place as this!"

"I crave thy noble patience, madam," cried Peredeus eagerly, "I have here the letter she sent me not an hour ago! If thou wouldst but deign to come out of this dark hiding-place, I could shew thee the very words she wrote!"

"Give me the letter here," said the queen, hastily snatching away the tablets as he drew them from the pouch at his girdle. "I will take the writing hence to Thorelil, and question her myself. But attend, and beware; this may prove but a trick of thine to escape my just resentment. If thou darest to quit this room till my return, I warn thee the king shall assuredly learn what insult thou hast presumed to put on Rosamunda! And I warrant thee too thy head shall answer him for that!"

She paused, expecting his asseverations of obedience, but affairs suddenly assumed an aspect for which, at this stage of the dialogue, she was unprepared.

"Fair lady," said Peredeus, changing his tone of alarm for

one of curiosity, "it seems to me that the trick, if there be one, is on thy part rather than on mine. I understand not how I came to encounter the queen of the Lombards here to-night. Nor why," he added, after a moment, "Thorelil doth not appear to keep the assignation she herself made with me. Will my lord's wife condescend to explain at least the first of these seeming mysteries?"

Rosamunda had trusted, by the adoption of an indignant manner, to bully Peredeus out of daring to start this difficulty. Finding, however, that she had failed to intimidate him sufficiently, she raised her tone to the highest pitch of arrogance.

"It is not befitting the queen of the Lombards to justify herself at the bidding of her husband's servitor. My conduct and my actions, fellow, are no concern of thine! Didst thou dream I should stoop to make excuses or explanations to *thee?*"

But she had gone too far; or perhaps the darkness emboldened Peredeus. Had he been able to see her face he might have shewn less temerity. Thrusting himself before the archway to prevent her egress, he resumed: "Madam, though I am a serf, I am yet no fool. This letter—this meeting—this attempt to detain me here, are but passages in a play of which I know not the purport!"

Rosamunda grew desperate. Night was already far advanced,—she could afford to waste time no longer.

"Peredeus," cried she, turning to bay like a hunted deer, "thou shalt hear the truth! Alboin has grossly affronted me at the feast to-night. He made rude sport before all his chiefs of the memory which is dearest and holiest to me, and compelled me, with bitter taunts, to drink wine with him out of my father's skull. Stung to the heart, I have sworn to suffer the hateful love of thy Langobard master no longer. Now choose—at once! Associate thyself with me and with Helmichis in our design against Alboin's life, and win thereby my gratitude and the richest reward which thou canst ask or I can give. But if thou oppose thyself to me, and seek to hinder this enterprise, I will accuse thee to Alboin of a treasonable attempt upon my honour, and my testimony shall not lack support. Then, Peredeus, thou wilt stand but small chance with Rosamunda's lord."

A flash of admiration for the courage of the woman, who in such a place and season could be thus lavish of her threats, crossed the brain of Peredeus. But he also had a purpose in view, and answered her with simple earnestness:

"Queen Rosamunda, I neither hate nor love thy lord.

But my heart is set upon winning my dear mistress. She doth not think of me unkindly, but dares give me no hope, fearing to incur thy displeasure by favouring openly the suit of a Langobard. Promise me the hand of the fair maid Thorelil, and I will do for thee to-night whatsoever thou shalt demand."

"Thy request is freely granted, good Peredeus," returned the queen. "And it shall be my care to give thee with thy wife such dower as my treasury may be able to bestow. Now go hence quickly, seek Thorelil, and bid her prepare to quit Verona with thee and me at dawn. Get horses and attendants ready with all the speed thou canst use. To-morrow's sunset must see us within the Roman walls of Ravenna."

Then she said to herself, "Great Odin! how weak are these men,—or rather, how strong is their love! What indignity will they not endure, what treachery will they not commit, for the sake of the women who have won their hearts!"

CHAPTER XII.

DAWN was already peering greyly into the room wherein Alboin lay stretched in heavy slumber. The tread of Rosamunda and Helmichis passed his couch unheeded; no sound so gentle could reach his torpid brain. Facing the dim light he lay, but half disrobed, the glittering taberd of his festal attire still covering his breast, and upon the velvet mantle which enwrapped his feet were the purple stains of wine yet wet and bright as fresh-spilt blood. Rosamunda, bending over a pile of arms beside the couch, lifted noiselessly the spear which had once been Thurismund's, pressed its barb against her lips, felt its edge, and whispered as she drew her fingers caressingly along its shining haft, "Good steel! to-night thou shalt strike thy best and most redoubted blow, though it be a woman's hand that direct thee!"

Then, glancing at Alboin, she added in louder tones, "Rouse him, Helmichis, I cannot slay a sleeping man. Besides, I would have him look upon my face!"

Her voice seemed to stir confusedly the dulled senses of her drowsy lord. His lips unclosed, he moved on his pillow and muttered hoarsely :—

"By the power of God, methinks the wine hath drawn a richer flavour from the heathen skull of the Gepide! Fill again to me, Henrick,—let the gracious juice flow freely!"

"Aye!" repeated Rosamunda, looking at him, "let it flow! I feel stronger again! Awake, Alboin!" she cried, "bestir thyself, Christian toper! It is the daughter of Kunimond who calls!"

The king's eyes unclosed heavily, he glared about him a moment like a ferocious beast suddenly roused from his lair, struggled to his feet, and snatching up a small wooden stool from the floor beside the bed, hurled it drunkenly at Helmichis.

"What dost thou here, Goth?" roared he with an oath; "who bade thee hither to disturb me?"

Then, perceiving his wife, he broke into a rough fit of laughter. "Ah ha! my handsome witch!" he cried, "was the Falernian sweet last night? What thinkest thou of my dainty goblet?"

"Ill thou judgest to bandy jests with Rosamunda!" she answered, quoting his own words with emphatic bitterness. "Defend thyself, Langobard! this is thy last battle with the Gepidæ!"

As she spoke, Helmichis, taking her words as a signal for the encounter, attacked the king with a short poignard; but Alboin, though unarmed and barely sober, was an antagonist of such strength and alertness, that the struggle might have gone hard with the Goth but for the interference of his mistress.

Choosing a moment when Alboin's arms were raised to parry an impending thrust, she drove her spear with a mighty effort full at the king's uncovered breast. Instantly the bright vest was darkened with a crimson stream, and a yell of pain and fury burst from the lips of the wounded man. Grasping the haft of the lance with both hands he sprang blindly forward, and wrenched the weapon from his wound. The blood spurted forth with redoubled violence, a terrible shiver convulsed his limbs, he collapsed, groaned, and dropped upon his face. The spear of Thurismund had done its destined work with awful fidelity, and the Lombard hero, who had cheated Death on a hundred battle-fields, sank pierced to the heart upon the floor of his bed-chamber, to breathe his last at a woman's feet!

So grim at times is the irony of that fate which governs great men's histories!

Rosamunda turned from the corpse of the man she had slain to look in her lover's face. Laying her hand softly in his, she said, "Now at last, Helmichis, I am free. My work is accomplished, my father's house is avenged,—Rosamunda is thine!"

The Goth remained silent. He bent his head and kissed the hand she had given him.

In the courtyard beneath, the sound of horses' hoofs broke the stillness of the early dawn.

"Listen!" said the queen, raising her hand, "they are there awaiting us,—Peredeus and Thorelil. Quick, Helmichis! the new day is already bright over-head; it is time our journey were begun. Once within the gates of Ravenna we may laugh the Lombards to scorn!"

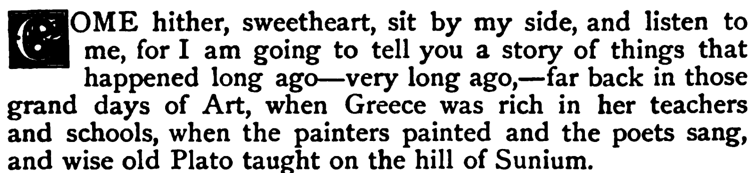
"Alas! Rosamunda," murmured the Gepide chief, as they passed the chamber threshold together, "thou hast this day lost a kingdom for my sake!"

She answered, looking tenderly upon him, "Yet, though men's tongues may call me queen no longer, I have gained a better sovereignty over the heart of my love!"

So she spoke, not knowing that fortune had already decreed to her the crown and the purple of Ravenna!

THE FLOWER-GIRL OF SICYON.

CHAPTER I.



COME hither, sweetheart, sit by my side, and listen to me, for I am going to tell you a story of things that happened long ago—very long ago,—far back in those grand days of Art, when Greece was rich in her teachers and schools, when the painters painted and the poets sang, and wise old Plato taught on the hill of Sunium.

For in those golden times there was in the city of Sicyon, in Argolis, a famous school of painting, the first and most renowned in Greece; and thither were sent many youths of noble families, that they might learn the use of the cestrum, the exclusive privilege of the free-born.

So, one fair spring day, somewhere about the year 385 B.C., the streets of Sicyon were all astir with people passing to and fro, and jostling one another as they went and came. For it was still early in the morning, and the merchants were on their way to their stores, and the housewives to the market, and the scholars to their academies. And among these last were three young men, of whom the youngest seemed scarcely more than twenty,—fellow-pupils in the school of the painter Pamphilus, who was then the greatest master of his art in all Southern Greece.

These three were Apelles, Melanthius, and Pausias—men whose works have long, long ago made their names glorious in the history of grand old Greece. But they were young and unknown then, and people passed them by without notice, as you and I, sweetheart, are passed in the streets now. But who knows what you and I carry about with us in our hearts, and who can possibly divine what wonderful things we may some day do?

And so it was then with these three painters, who years afterwards made all the world so ring with their praise that the echoes of it have not passed away yet; and never will, until men leave off loving art and science and all fair and beautiful things.

Now as these three went on their way they talked as all scholars talk,—of their studies and of their master; and one told how he had been commended for his industry, and another boasted of his success and skill, or bantered his companions on their failures.

"Prithee tell me what you paint to-day, Melanthius;" cried the fair-haired Pausias, with a sidelong glance at his companion out of the corners of his mischievous blue eyes. "Are we to be favoured again with the sight of that woebegone Ariadne of yours, or may we hope Dionysius will come and fetch her away before nightfall? Methinks if the disconsolate maiden herself had waited half so long alone at Naxos as her effigy has waited in solitude upon your canvas, she had been dead before the wine-king found her."

"Indeed, I marvel much at your impertinence, Pausias," responded Melanthius, laughing; "for methinks the jest might well be turned against you! Pray how much longer do you intend to dabble over that ill-fated head of Cytherea? Bah! I assure you the mere thought of the thing makes me quite faint! But, heyday! What have we here?" he added, with an air of surprise, and suddenly stopping himself and his companions: "the goddess in person, I believe! or perhaps I should rather say the ambrosial Chloris[a] herself, in the midst of her flowery kingdom!"

For there stood beside them, just at the doors of the Sicyon academy, a young peasant-girl with fair hair and soft brown eyes, like heifers' eyes to look at for their depth and tenderness, and across her shoulder was slung a wicker-basket filled with bunches of wild-flowers, and bright-coloured garlands.

Very shyly she looked up into their merry faces, that fair flower-girl, and shyly she held out to them a cluster of white lilies, all heavy with drowsy dew.

"What, you want to sell the ensigns of your royalty, Queen Chloris, do you?" Melanthius asked her smilingly, as he took the flowers she offered him; "well, then, I suppose we must all adorn our desirable persons with some of these most costly treasures. But what are those you wear in your dress, fair Chloris? I see no others like them in all your store."

"They are roses, sir," she answered him timidly, "and I did not mean to sell them, but to keep them for my mother at home, because they are the first I have found this year, and my mother loves roses. And my name is not Chloris, but Glycera."

"It is a pretty name," he said, "and well befits its owner, for she, methinks, seems as fair as the flowers she carries. But tell me, Glycera, if I may call you so, are you not a stranger in this town, for I do not remember to have seen you here before, and yours is a face not easily forgotten?"

Then she answered him, blushing as she spoke, "I am no stranger in Sicyon, fair sir, for we have lived here all

[a] The Grecian Flora.

our lives—I and my mother; but this is the first day I have sold flowers in the streets. This morning I went out early into the woods, down by the banks of the river, to gather the wild amaracus, and the yellow-leaved lotus and asphodel. But these red roses I found far away in a glen between the hills, and I have only one bunch of them. But if you have a mind for flowers, here are wreaths of a thousand hues."

Then Apelles answered her, laughing, "Give me a bunch of your purple berries, Glycera; these many-coloured garlands befit not such grave students as we are. And you, Pausias, what say you?" he added, turning to the younger of his two companions, "are you for flowers or berries?"

And Pausias said, "Flowers and berries are all sweet enough, but these red roses eclipse them all. Look, maiden, I will give you this silver coin if you will only spare me one of your roses."

Then she looked up quickly, and met his bright blue eyes fixed full upon her face, and there was so strange a look in them that her heart beat fast, and her eyelids drooped, and she dared not raise them again while she made reply:—

"Fair sir, I will not sell the first-fruits of my glen for money. If you love the roses, take them, they are yours."

And with that she plucked them from her bosom and put them into his hand, and turned and went on her way. But Pausias spoke no word.

CHAPTER II.

THE day was fast drawing to its close, and the crimson sun flared like a beacon of fire above the western hills. And out on the open plains beyond the town, a group of merry peasant youths and maidens had gathered to enjoy their evening sports.

"Glycera! Glycera!" cried a dozen voices in musical chorus, "come quickly, we wait for you! Your basket is emptied, your day's work is done; come and join us!"

But the flower-girl only shook her head, and passed them by. "I cannot come to-night," she said, "you must dance without me, for I am going home."

What ailed Glycera that evening, that she chose the lonely little footpath down by the river, far away out of the sound of the dance, and the merry voices of her companions? And when she reached her home, why did she leave her distaff and spindle all untouched, to sit alone by her chamber-lattice silent and saddened?

And what, too, all that day had ailed the youth Pausias, that he failed at his work, and spoiled his picture, and drew upon himself the eyes of all the pupils, and the censure of the stern Pamphilus? What ailed him, when school was over, and he went home at evening to his friends, that he joined in no jest and laughter as he had been wont to do; but sat apart from all the rest, as though he were in a dream?

Ah, me! it was that old, old story, that has been told so many times over, ever since the beginning, and will be told again and again in thousand, thousand different lives, until the world shall be no more.

For Pausias and Glycera loved one another.

CHAPTER III.

"PAUSIAS! Pausias! you will never be a painter!"

And Pamphilus sighed as he spoke, for his youngest pupil was his own especial *protégé*, and the old master loved him well, and was not a little proud of his genius. But of late, day after day, the youth had failed in his studies, his compositions were lifeless and feeble, and his hand had lost its skill.

Then when Pausias heard those sorrowful words, he pushed away his easel from him, and looked into his master's face, while the tears grew thickly in his great blue eyes. And Pamphilus took him by the hand, and gazed at him some time in silence, and then he answered him again,—

"Child, I spoke harshly to you, and in haste. I did you wrong, for your face is pale, and your lips white—you are ill, and must not work. Leave your painting, my son, and go out into the woods for a while,—the fresh air from the river will bring the colour back into your cheeks, and put new strength into your veins."

So Pausias left his work and his companions, and went out alone into the streets, but he looked in vain for the flower-maiden; Glycera was not at her post. Then he passed on sadly through the town, away into the meadows beyond, and into a little coppice in the hollow of the hills. And there he sat down alone upon the soft grass, beneath the shadow of the pine-trees, and tossed away his hat and cloak from him, that he might rest his head upon his hands, and look up dreamily through the quivering foliage at the blue sky above him. And his thoughts were all about the beautiful Glycera, and her soft brown eyes, and her fair face and pleasant smile; and from the folds of his robe he took

out a little bunch of withered red roses, and kissed them, because the flower-girl had worn them on her bosom.

But presently, while still he held the roses in his hand, there came through the wood the sweet voice of a woman, singing.

And Pausias listened while she came nearer and nearer yet; and still she sang, till all the wood was filled with the soft music, and the birds were silent on the branches for very wonder and delight. And these were the words she sang:—

"O fair, very fair and glorious is the broad world,
And all full of sunlight is the blinding and infinite blue;
Earth and heaven are beautiful in their perfect peace,
But my soul within me is all a turbulent sea of love!
O my love! I behold you everywhere by night and by day;
In my dreams you are with me through the darkness, and when I awake you abide still in my heart;
Never a thing I do but I do it for you who cannot see me, never a word I speak but I speak it for you who hear me not:
O me! love is very sweet and sorrowful, but the pulses of the great earth beat continually to the music of love!
Is there anything stronger and mightier than love, that overcometh alike gods and men?
Answer me, ye beautiful flowers of the forest, ye amorous trees that overhead tenderly embrace one another!
Alas! I behold you happy in perfect possession;
But my soul, my soul is all a turbulent sea of love!"

Then Pausias rose up wondering, and the hot crimson came and went in his cheeks, as he stood beneath the tall pines and listened for more. And suddenly from the shadow of the dark trees the form of the beautiful Glycera came out into the sunlight, and the young man's heart leapt up into his throat for joy.

Her hands were full of flowers and bright berries, and the tremulous leaves of the scarlet acanthus and the daffodil nodded upon her fair forehead. And, while Pausias stood and watched her still, and longed once again to hear her sing, she sat down to rest in the warm light upon the stem of a fallen tree all bound about with clambering ivy and soft tender mosses.

Then she began to make a garland of the flowers she had gathered, and anon while she wove them she talked dreamily to herself, and anon she sang a snatch of drowsy rhyme, but Pausias listened always, underneath the tall pines.

"Ah, well-a-day, dear flowers," she sighed, "you must comfort me now, for I have no one else to talk to about my sorrow. And though indeed I would give all the world, if it were mine, to see him, yet I dare not stand again by the doors of the school; and to-day I shall not go at all into the streets, but sit here in the silence and

think. Maybe my mother will chide me for my idleness, and what shall I say? for I have no heart to stand to-day in the streets and sell, so this garland must needs be destined to brighten our own little chamber. Did they call him Pausias? I think it was Pausias. Well, it is a nobly-sounding name, and he, doubtless, is nobly born. O me! and I,—I am a peasant, and a flower-seller, and yet I love him more than all the world!" And she hid her fair face in her hands, and wept.

Then, when Pausias heard the words she spoke, his love grew all the mightier, and his soul burned within him like a great furnace of fire; and he strode out into the sunshine, and stood before the maiden. But she dropped her garland, and would have fled, only that he caught her by her robe, and bade her stay, that they might sit together on that fallen tree, for, said he, "I have much to say to you, Glycera."

So they sat down, side by side, Pausias and Glycera, but for a while neither spoke. Then Pausias looked into her face, and said,—

"Tell me truly, Glycera,—of whom spoke you just now, while you sat here alone and wove your flower-wreath?"

Then she blushed and hung down her head, for she thought, "I have betrayed myself through my foolishness, for I fancied none were near to hear me, and now he is making game of me, and will go to-morrow to his friends and tell them what I said, and they will laugh at me together, and I shall become a jest for all the town." So she answered not a word.

But Pausias took both her hands into his, and read all her heart in her face, while the fitful colour came and went like flame beneath her fair skin. And he said, "Glycera, I heard you talking to yourself about me, and I know you love me. O Glycera! only hear me, for *I* love *you!*"

Then she looked up at him, and answered, "Do not mock me, fair sir, for I am poor and fatherless, and it is not fit that one like you should speak of love to a peasant-girl. For you have heard the things I said of you, and I cannot deny them; but now leave me, and forget them all, and let me go my way, for I am a true woman, and it is not well my name should be a sport for noble youths." But her eyes were dim and misty, and her voice faltered as she spoke.

"Glycera, you must not leave me yet. I make no sport of you, for I, too, have a true heart, and I speak the truth to you. It is nothing to me that you are poor or unknown. Am not I noble? and cannot I make my bride what I will? Glycera, I have loved you since that day I saw you in the streets, selling flowers by the doors of our school. See, here are the roses you gave me then; I have carried them about

with me every day, and I have not lost a single flower. For I love you, I love you, Glycera, as the flowers love the sun, and as the immortals love heaven."

Then she bowed her head upon his shoulder, and told him all her heart; and Pausias kissed her, and spoke sweet words to her, and they sat there together, hand in hand, for many a happy hour, till the sun dipped down behind the purple hills, and the birds went to sleep in their nests.

Ah, sweetheart, love is very beautiful, and the world is everywhere full of it! It is the one great poem that has been sung by all living things through all ages, since Chaos himself became musical through love. And it dwells for ever and for ever, in all inconceivable fulness, within the heart of the Universal Father, from whom all things take their being. And some day they say that great Father will gather all the whole world into His infinite love, and there will be no more tyranny and strife, and envying and hatred, but all men will be brothers, and He above all. But whenever that glorious day may be, sweetheart, and how it may be brought upon us, we cannot tell, nor shall we be able to tell until it comes. Only of this one thing we may be sure, that when it does come it will be all the sweeter, and all the more beautiful to those who have waited and longed, and hoped and lived for it.

CHAPTER IV.

PLEASANTLY and dreamily sang the waves on the reedy shore of the river Asopus, and the garrulous wood-birds chattered and screamed to each other on the swinging branches of the tall oaks and the plane-trees.

Pausias and Glycera sat together on the sunny slopes down by the water, and the flower-girl's basket, newly filled, stood beside her, for it was early morning, and her day's work was not begun, nor was it yet time for the young student to present himself at the schools. So they sat and talked there, these two, as lovers always talk together, and she told him all her thoughts, and all the things that had befallen her since last they parted, and he spoke to her of his painting, and his hopes, and fears, and disappointments.

And they were very, very happy—so happy that it would be quite impossible for any one who never himself loved to imagine *how* happy they were.

"Do you know, Glycera," said Pausias, presently, after a little silence between them, "I cannot paint now as I used to do before I saw you, for your face always comes between

me and my picture, and I cannot draw rightly for thinking of you. And, yesterday, I put in brown eyes for my Pallas Athené, and, when Pamphilus asked me the reason why they were not blue, I had nothing to say, so I twisted and fidgeted about, until I spilt all my colours on the floor, and Melanthius laughed at me, and I felt stupid and foolish before them all. And I know Pamphilus thinks I shall never learn to paint, for now he often sighs, and looks sorrowful and disheartened when he comes and watches me at my work."

"If that be so, then, Pausias," she answered, "why don't you paint me? You might come here early every morning, and in the evening, too, for the days are long and sunny, and I would sit by you under the trees, and you could make a picture of me, and shew it to your master, that he might see you are a true genius after all. Will you do this, Pausias?" And she nestled closely up to his side, and looked nto his eyes, and waited for him to speak.

Then he laughed and said, "Glycera, you talk like Apollo's priestess herself; and truly, darling, you are my oracle, and you shall be obeyed. For I think your idea is a very wise and clever one, and I will bring my canvas and my tools here early to-morrow, if you will come too, for this is a quiet little spot, where no one can see us, and then I will begin my picture. What shall I call it, Glycera?—the 'Queen of the Flowers,' or the 'Sovereign Nymph of the Sicyonic Woods?'"

"Wait until it is finished, most impatient Pausias," she said, laughing; "it will not do, you know, to try weaving the garland before the flowers are plucked!"

"Every shell on the sea-shore sounds of the sea," returned he, slyly, "and every man talks of his trade; and so you, my dear Glycera, when you want a simile, must needs look for it in your own flower-basket!"

Then they laughed together, and made merry jests, until the sun began to climb up high in the clear blue, and it was time for Pausias and Glycera to go to their work. So the flower-girl rose and took up her basket, and Pausias helped her to fasten it on her shoulder, and they kissed one another, and parted and went upon their ways merrily.

CHAPTER V.

"YOU are late this morning, Pausias," cried Melanthius, meeting his companion at the door of their academy; "Pamphilus has been in the studio full half-an-hour, so that Apelles and I began to imagine you must have drowned yourself

in the river, or have gone, like another Hylas, to visit the golden-haired Naïades, and we were very properly distressed in consequence. Indeed, I am not quite sure that Apelles has not washed out his painting with his tears; and, as for myself, you behold in me a masculine Niobe! Well indeed, it is that you have at length burst like a sunbeam upon my failing sight, and saved me from weeping myself into an insensible stone, out of grief for the loss of you! But what have you there, shrouded so carefully from the profane and common gaze, in the folds of your cloak? Oh ho!" continued the merry young student, in a bantering tone, "a picture! So we have been working at home like an industrious pupil, have we? And pray what may be the result of our labours? Is it a second edition of the fair Cytherea, or a masterly portrait of the blue-eyed Pallas? No, I crave your forgiveness—I meant *brown*-eyed; for I mind me how your most admirable modesty prevents your attributing to the virgin goddess orbs of vision resembling your own in hue. Why, heyday, Pausias, what are you blushing at? Pray do not turn quite scarlet all over, or Pamphilus will be apt to imagine you are a rather large cake of vermillion, and rub his brushes on you by mistake!" And shrugging his shoulders and laughing merrily, Melanthius led the way into the hall where Pamphilus and his pupils were at work.

Then Pamphilus looked up as the two young men entered, and said sadly—

"Why came you not hither sooner, Pausias? You work not so cunningly, nor so fast, that you can afford to waste your time; this is not well, my child."

But Pausias laid upon his easel the picture he had brought, and answered gently, "Master, I am sorry that I have deserved your reproofs, but my picture is heavy to carry, and I had far to come. But now see, for I have toiled hard at this painting that I might win back for myself your love and your praise. What think you, master—is it well?"

And he drew the covering from his picture, and looked into the old man's face.

Then there was silence, while Pamphilus stood motionless and gazed at the painting before him, and his pupils rose astonished, but Apelles and Melanthius looked at one another wondering.

For the picture was the picture of Glycera, crowned with red dewy roses, and her hands full of bright rainbow-coloured garlands.

Then Pamphilus turned, and uncovered his white locks, and stood bare-headed before his pupil Pausias. "My son," he said,—and all the school stood hushed and still while he spoke,—"genius is reverenced alike of gods and men, for only

genius makes the young man greater than the aged,—the learner wiser than his teacher. You have wrought here a work, Pausias, which will live through many broad years to come, and make your name famous through all Greece, long after you and yours shall have passed away out of the memory of the living. Child, you have gladdened my heart, and made me proud to-day, for I can see how, in the dim far-off future, you will stand high and glorious among the great ones of our land, historians shall write of your cunning and your skill, and minstrels sing your praise; nor shall I be forgotten then, who taught the painter Pausias!"

Then all the pupils shouted for wonder and surprise, and ran together into the midst of the hall, where Pausias stood by his picture, and one clasped him by the hand, and another by the shoulder, and all wished him joy and were pleased at his pleasure, for every one loved Pausias well.

But only Apelles and Melanthius knew who was the original of that beautiful picture.

CHAPTER VI.

VERY fair and sunny had been the long summer day, and bright and clear the broad deep sky; but now evening was come, and the sun sank red and lurid behind the town, and out away to the windward were piled great masses of dark thunder-cloud, that presaged a mighty storm.

But Pamphilus strolled along the path by the river with his friend Brietes, the father of Pausias, and the cool breeze came up from the water, and the bright glow of sunset danced upon the waves, and neither knew what lay behind them. For the master talked of his favourite pupil, and the father of his only son.

What were they saying?

"Friend Brietes, you speak wisely and well; and though indeed I am loth to part with the lad, yet I believe the parting will be for good. For of late his health has failed from day to day, and his face has grown pale, and, though he is still merry and laughter-loving as ever, yet sometimes methinks I catch a shade upon his brow and a sadness upon his lips that were not wont to be there. And at Athens he will see new things, and fresh faces, and his picture will gain him great honour, and who knows what noble wealth and praise? Ay, Brietes, it is well the boy should go."

Then Brietes answered him, "I am glad indeed, my good Pamphilus, that I sought counsel and advice of you in this matter, since I am persuaded that what you say is said

for the good both of me and of my boy, whom you have always loved well, I know. For Pausias is my only son, and all my soul is wrapt up in him and in his welfare, and I have a twofold reason for the thing I do. For look you now, Pamphilus, how all here who have seen his painting wonder at it; and at Athens, then, what renown and fame would it not bring him, where genius and talent are always applauded! O Pamphilus, my soul grows great with pride and hope when I think how he may build himself a noble name there some day! And he is ill too, and needs rest and change, for he looks strangely and sad at times. And every morning early, and again at eventide, he slips away alone into the woods, and there doubtless he sits and broods and muses over I know not what foolish fancies. The boy is ill, Pamphilus, I know, and far better away at Athens for a while."

But all this time, while they said these things to each other, Brietes and Pamphilus were coming nearer and nearer to two who sat together on the green slopes by the river,—a young student and a flower-girl. And these two were talking together, also very earnestly, but the words they spoke to one another were all of love.

"O Pausias!" she said, laying her golden-haired head upon his shoulder, "if only I could be sure you care for me with all your heart, I think I should be quite happy. For then I would not mind the worst that could befall us; I could endure anything for your sake; and it would be enough of happiness to know your love always steadfast and unchanged."

"Glycera! Glycera!" he answered her, and there was pride in his voice and love in his blue eyes while he spoke, "I cannot bear that you should doubt me still, after all that has passed between us, day after day, for so long. For, O my darling, I swear to you to love you with all my heart and for ever! Only promise me, Glycera, that you will be brave and true, and all things will be well."

Then she laid her hands in his, and kissed him, and promised. But, even while she spoke, the rolling thunder rose, and shook, and died wailing in echo after echo far away beyond the western hills.

Was it an evil omen?

Then they started to their feet, Pausias and Glycera, and turned, and saw behind them the high dark folds of swirling cloud that grew and spread minute by minute up the purpling sky.

"Glycera, there is going to be a dreadful storm to-night; but, if we go home now, we shall be safe enough, for the clouds are yet far northward, and the wind is still, and they

cannot rise overhead for an hour or more. Come, darling, while there is time."

So they climbed together up the steep slippery banks of the river, and gained the footpath above, and passed on swiftly towards the town. But presently, just at the corner of the road where it wound serpent-like round the foot of a high mound, Pausias heard voices speaking, and he started, and turned pale. But Glycera saw the change in his countenance, and she laid her hand on his.

"What ails you, Pausias?" she said.

"O Glycera! Glycera!"

But he could say no more, for they stood face to face with Brietes and Pamphilus.

"Pausias!"

Then the two old men looked into the flower-girl's face, and they thought of the picture Pausias had painted, and understood it all.

But the face of Brietes grew stern and angry, and there was a dark look in his eyes as he turned again to his son.

"Pausias, who is this girl, and what do you here alone with her?"

Then Pausias drew Glycera's hand in his, and stood up proudly like a man, and answered proudly back, for he was no coward.

"Father, this is Glycera, the flower-maiden, and she is good and gentle, and she has given me her love, for I love her, and would have her to be my wife."

But the old man grew white, and made no reply, for his grief and anger choked the words in his throat; so Pausias spoke again:—

"My father, if I had wrought you some disgrace, or had done some shameful deed, I should not dare to stand before you, and speak to you as now I speak. But I have neither wronged you, nor any human soul, in this my love for one who is worthy to be the bride of a prince."

Yet Brietes answered him roughly, for he was vexed and sorrowful.

"Son, son, you talk like a silly boy and a fool. Twenty long years I have loved, and watched, and taught you, and besought the gods to spare to me my only son that he might live to be an honour and a glory to my house. And the gods heard my prayer, Pausias, and you lived on, and grew up fair, and tall, and strong; and they gave you genius, and skill, and a cunning hand, so that you became a pride and a joy to my heart. And now I looked for the time when you should win yourself a noble bride, the daughter of some ancient house, and I should see your wealth and prosperity, and hear men speak with envy of the happy painter Pausias.

But to-day you have taken away that pleasant hope out of my soul,—you have degraded your name, and dishonoured yourself and your art, and all for what? A pitiful prize indeed you have earned, son Pausias! Let this street-pacing flower-seller go, for she shall never be daughter of mine!"

Then when Pausias heard that, his heart heaved up in his breast with indignation, and his eyes flashed like living coals, and he drew Glycera the closer to him,—all trembling and pale for fear and shame.

And "I care not," he cried, "for your noble brides and your wealthy heiresses! I work not for them; let them sit at home, and count their ancestors and their gold, for I will none of them! But beware, father, how you dare breathe a word against my blameless love, for she is pure as the snow from heaven; and never one of those proud maidens you speak of could boast a fairer or a more stainless name than she!"

"Pausias! Pausias! you must be mad!" shrieked the old man, in his wrath, and the hot blood flared up in his face for anger,—"*mad*, to speak to your father after this fashion! Know you not that I have power and authority over you in all things? Ay, Pausias, and I will use my power too; and you will thank me for it some day to come! For, hear me, son, and trust me to keep my word; to-morrow you go with me to Athenæ. Your master knows that before now I had a mind to take you there, but now I am decided. You shall not be another day in Sicyon, Pausias, to idle away your time and your honour with flower-girls and garland-weavers! As for her picture"—and his voice trembled, and sank again into something like tenderness—"I would indeed it had been any other than it is! But since it is done, it is wondrously well done, and we will take it with us to Athenæ. For there none need know its history nor your foolishness, and it shall earn you a meed of goodly praise. Answer me nothing, Pausias, and spare yourself the pains of entreating me, for my mind is made up, and my word is pledged, and nothing shall alter it."

But the young man made answer boldly, for, though his heart was heavy for sorrow, and the big tears had put out all the flame in his eyes, yet he was still brave and strong, and knew that the time was come for him to play the man. For did not Glycera stand beside him, and look to him, and to him only, for help and for support? So he said, "Father, I am indeed your son, and you must do with me what you will. But know this—for I too have pledged my word to Glycera, and, by the gods, I will keep it!—that nothing, nothing in all the world shall ever make me change or falter in my love for her. And I care not how broad the

land, or how long the years, that divide us may be: I will be a true man, father, through all the evil that may come upon us, be it never so hard to bear, and the promise I have given I will not break."

Then Glycera minded not for Brietes or for Pamphilus, when she heard Pausias speak those words; but she fell upon his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder, and sobbed aloud for joy, and for sorrow, and pride, and love.

But the white-haired Pamphilus shook his head sadly, and said, "Child! child! the sparrow sang to his love last spring—'I will never leave thee!' but when the autumn came he fled away. And to-day methought I heard him singing to another mate the selfsame song!"

* * * * * * *

There was a fearful storm that night over the city of Sicyon, and it lasted until the grey light of the morning grew in the sky, and the broad low sunrise broke beyond the dusky hills.

And once again they met—Pausias and Glycera—all in the wind and the beating rain, and they kissed for the last time, and vowed—poor children!—to be true and loving to each other always, come what would.

And when they parted, Pausias took Glycera's hands into his own, and looked very earnestly in her face, and said—

"Glycera, Glycera, all will be well yet, I know, if only we can have patience and courage to face our sorrow bravely. Promise me, love, to be true and fast to me always."

And she answered, "Until death, darling—until death!"

CHAPTER VII.

CLOSE by the open casement of a little dark chamber that was all sweet with the odours of wild thyme and roses and almond blossom, Glycera lay alone upon a little wooden couch, and her lap was full of fair flowers and wreaths. Very pallid and wan was the beautiful face now, and all dreamy and lustreless the soft brown eyes, but their winning sweetness was not gone, for Glycera's soul looked out of them still.

But the flower-girl had lost all her strength and her brightness, and her merry smile, nor was she able any longer to stand in the streets with her basket, and her mother watched her sadly while she drooped and faded day after day, but knew not the reason why.

For Pausias had been away at Athens since the last year's

summer, and now it was summer again, but Glycera never heard any tidings of him, nor knew if he loved her still.

So she fell sick for sorrow and for failing hope and for longing to see him again; and many a long day she lay by the lattice, and wove her garlands listlessly, for now her companions sold them for her in the town, since she was too feeble to go abroad.

And while she lay there she made sweet rhymes, and sang them softly to herself, as was her wont when she was alone. And she sang of Pausias, and of her love for him, and her trust and patience, and she wondered if he were thinking of her then, and when he would be able to come back again, and take her home to be his wife.

And with the thought the colour stole for a moment into the pale thin face, and her eyes grew misty while she pictured in her heart the happiness and the sunshine that would be. "And I wonder," she thought, "what he will be like when I see him again, and if his eyes are as blue, and his hair as fair and as curly as ever! And I wonder if he will think me altered, and what he will say to me when we meet! Oh how handsome he is! and how good and brave it was of him to face for my sake his father's anger, and to forego all thought of winning himself a wealthy maiden for his wife,—for me, *me*,—a poor peasant-girl, who have nothing in the world to give him but my love!"

And then she laid her little trembling hands together, and prayed the gods to bless her Pausias, her noble Pausias, and make her day by day more worthy of him, that all her life long,—oh, all her life long!—he might see how mightily she strove to deserve his love, and to be to him a true and faithful wife until their life's end. And presently the door was pushed open gently, and a bright rosy face looked into the room, and a pleasant voice said—

"What, still at work, Glycera? I fancied you might have been asleep, and I feared to wake you, so I came in softly, and left Laïs outside, waiting for me. See, your basket is empty, Glycera,—I did business famously to-day, for all the young men at the schools bought of me, because you know to-morrow their master gives them holiday, and their hall is to be decked with flowers in honour of the gala."

"What gala, Myrrha?" said the flower-girl, looking up dreamily; "I did not know anything was going on."

"How now, Glycera!" returned her companion merrily, "hav'n't you heard the news? Everyone is talking about it! Well, well, I don't see how you should know it, though, since you lie here all day long, and never see anybody. Give me that bunch of acacias you have in your lap, Glycera, and I can sit here and twist up a chaplet while

I tell you all about it. Why, then, the young student Pausias,—you know the name, don't you? he that made such a stir here more than a year ago by painting some wonderful picture or other, and then went off to Athenæ with his father to make his fortune,—well, he is going to be married to-morrow. And they say his bride is one of the noblest and richest maidens in all Attica, and he is to bring her here to live with him and his father at their old home, and all the town is full of the tidings! And you'll have plenty to do, Glycera, when they come, for there'll be feasts and dances given to all the town, and we shall have garlands hanging from every window! So you must make haste and get well again as fast as possible, that you may be able to work the better, and dance with us all, and play games in the meadow. But do you know, Glycera, I saw the painter Pamphilus to-day, for he came to buy a bunch of roses of me; and when I spoke to him of Pausias, and asked him if he were not glad to hear such good news of his pupil, he only looked sorrowful, and murmured out something about a sparrow and a new mate, and I know not what beside! I think the old fellow is crazed or moonstruck; for why else should he talk so strangely, and look so pitiful and sad when everyone else is merry? There, Glycera, now the story is told; and look, I have just finished the wreath, all but,—why, Glycera! Glycera! what have I done?—what ails you, sweet? Why don't you speak to me? —O Laïs! Laïs! come, come quickly! What shall I do!" For the garland she had been weaving had fallen from the flower-girl's hands, and her eyes were strange and glassy, and a spasm passed across her lips as if of sharp, sudden pain.

But Glycera's mother had heard the cry in the inner chamber where she sat spinning, and she left her distaff and came in haste, and found Myrrha and Laïs, and Glycera lying motionless and white on her pillows.

O sweetheart! my story is common enough, I know, for things like this happen somewhere every day. And most men and women live through them, and wear their sorrow out; for life is sweet, and hearts are hard to break,—but yet with some it is otherwise. So they came and stood beside her,—those three,—all hushed and wondering, and she held out her hands to them, and looked up at their sad faces, and tried to smile, but the smile would not come.

Ah, Pausias, where were then your vows, and your promises, and your unchanging love? Poor boy! you loved once indeed very truly and sincerely; but then you forgot all about it long ago, and thought, no doubt, that the little flower-girl had forgotten it too. What if you could have stood then in

that little dark room, and could have seen what was going on there?

Then that poor mother stooped down weeping, and kissed the white forehead, and cried out bitterly in her sorrow, "O my darling! my darling! if they take you away from me, I shall break my heart! For you are all I have left to me now in the world, and I have no one else to love but you! O me, must I live without you, my dear, dear child?"

There lay among the flowers in Glycera's lap a little knot of red roses. And she took them up gently, and laid them upon her bosom, and folded her hands over them, and turned her face towards the window. Then her eyes closed wearily, and her white lips moved a moment while she whispered something to herself. They knelt beside her, and listened earnestly for the broken words. And they were these,—

"Until death,—love,—until—death,—true and fast,—true—."

And then there was silence.

But, just as that last word was spoken, there came through the lattice a single ray of bright ruddy light from the setting sun. And it fell full upon the white face and golden hair, and lit them up with misty glory. And then little by little it faded away and was gone, and all was darkness.

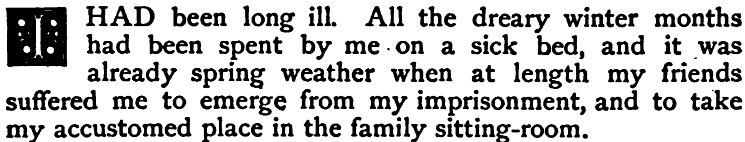
Sweetheart,—my story is told.

A CLUSTER OF FLOWERS.

THE CROCUS . . . . . . *Spring.*
THE ROSE . . . . . . *Summer.*
THE WATER-REEDS . . . . . *Autumn.*
THE MARIGOLD . . . . . . *Winter.*

THE CROCUS.

"Temperance is a bridle of gold; he who uses it rightly is more like a god than a man."—BURTON.



I HAD been long ill. All the dreary winter months had been spent by me on a sick bed, and it was already spring weather when at length my friends suffered me to emerge from my imprisonment, and to take my accustomed place in the family sitting-room.

Flowers were peering above the hard earth in the garden-beds, and here and there a bee hummed across the lawn, but the air was still bleak, and no one listened to my petition, "for a walk in the sunshine." So I betook myself instead to a little conservatory connected with our parlour, and there having ensconced myself luxuriously in my arm-chair with my favourite book within reach, I fell into a reverie. At my feet, in a long porcelain box, bloomed a row of yellow crocuses, upon whose gay petals streamed a bright sun-ray, illumining them with a still richer gold than their own, and attracting my attention forcibly to their wealth of colour and beauty. And I,—always fond of mystic speculation, and now, perhaps in this first day of convalescence, unusually predisposed towards it,—fell, little by little, into a reverie over the symbolism of the beautiful flowers with which God so lavishly decks our earthly heritage; a symbolism which we, dimly apprehending, have sought to express and translate into common meaning, in our fanciful "language of flowers." In that pretty poetic glossary, I knew that the crocus was adopted as the emblem of cheerfulness, and it was easy enough to perceive in the smiling aspect of the golden blooms before me, in what manner the connection between the earthborn type and its spiritual signification had been established. But this mere fantasy of correspondence between colour and quality did not satisfy me. I wished to explore the idea I had conceived to its utmost depth, and with this end in view I turned my thoughts on the nature of cheerfulness itself, and sought among its many manifestations for some clue to its true source. "What," I asked myself, "is that condition of spirit which engenders cheerfulness?" The answers I returned myself were vague, —religion—a good conscience—health of mind,—all these seemed to me synonyms for general virtue. Then I called to my remembrance the classical story of the origin of the crocus, if perchance I might find in its details some indication of a mystical significance. But in vain; and so with

my thoughts full of old-world mythologies, and of modern speculation, I yielded myself insensibly to the drowsy influence of the warm sunshine, and dropped into a pleasant sleep. And sleep suggested to me the parable I had vainly attempted to weave in my wakeful moments,—a parable tinctured indeed with my former conjectures, but so wonderfully connected in its parts, and didactic in its signification, that on awaking, I deemed it worth while to write out the story of my dream as follows.

I thought I found myself standing in the very core and centre of a brilliant sunrise glory: in the midst of a dancing, sparkling, happy brightness, that bathed my face like the light of a summer's morning, and tinted my dress with a sheen as of gold. And before me an apparition came out of the impalpable air, taking a misty substance and gathering shape and features like a cloud,—a fair spirit, radiant-eyed and buoyant, whose very presence distilled an atmosphere of warmth and genial kindliness. In the sweet wise countenance of the phantom, I noted an expression of homely grace, a human sympathy that freed me at once from all sense of awe and set me altogether at ease in the strange Presence. Then I perceived, as I looked steadily upon this bright spirit, that all her slender form and shining yellow robes, were illumined with the flame of a lamp which she carried within her transparent vest. And while I wondered at the sight, a clear childlike voice, less like music and more like a voice than I should have fancied possible to hear from such ethereal lips, addressed me thus in answer to my thoughts:—

"Daughter of earth, you know me well, I am the Spirit of the Crocus, the flower which is the emblem of cheerfulness. And I am cheerful because I am *temperate*. For it is temperance only that is able to beget true health of mind and of body, whence arises that joy and peace which no immoderate man can obtain. For cheerfulness, so precious in value, so pure in consistency, so attractive in brightness, so durable in quality, is indeed most fitly likened to refined and burnished gold,—a gold which cannot be bought by any wealth of earth, nor garnered by any avarice. And here, beneath my vesture, I bear in my bosom the light of the third holy Fire which burns before the Throne of God in heaven[a], the Spirit of Counsel, which gives wariness of choice, and prudence, and power of judgment, and wise advice, adorning the blessed company of confessors in the kingdom of the Lord, with the grace of godliness, and giving to men of lowlier life the virtue of moderation and of

[a] Rev. iv. 5.

self-control. For it is evident that a just regulation of life can proceed only from a right apprehension of its ends and its significance."

She paused, floating before me in the sunny lustre that surrounded her; and, looking into her soft smiling eyes, I took occasion to praise her delicate beauty, and the golden brightness of her floating flower-like robe.

"Yet," she rejoined gently, "the crocus is not merely fair to the eye, it has its hidden virtues and uses, and these are the similitudes of Temperance. For its chives and filaments yield the golden saffron, with which in old times the Romans dyed the sacred garments of their augurs, and the marriage veils of their maidens; because to the Seer, yellow is the colour of counsel, and to the bride it is the emblem of gladness. And indeed, it was a very beautiful and significant custom that adorned the young wife with the vestment of cheerfulness and temperance. For it was a type that henceforward her chief duty should be to make home a place of smiles, and to rule her household in moderation and health and sobriety. Therefore also, to all the nations of the earth, saffron has been a balsam of healing and of gladness, —the companion of cassia, frankincense, and spikenard, betokening the counsel of Christ to His Church, a fragrant and pleasant balm in the treasure-garden of His Kingdom [b].

"Yet more beside this I do, daughter of earth, for as a medicine I soothe, and warm, and sustain. I am an anodyne to assuage pain, I am a sudorific to reduce and temper, I am an aromatic cordial to comfort and invigorate. And all that I do for the body by means of extracted essence, temperance, whose symbol the crocus is, is able to do for the mind. For temperance is that virtue which like an anodyne allays the pangs of desire and intolerance,—like a sudorific humbles, chastens and subdues,—like a cordial cheers, strengthens and diffuses a pleasant warmth of charity and kindliness, so that it trebly enriches with the graces of moderation, limit, and regularity. It is that virtue which levels and restrains the mind of man in such manner that he shall be neither too greatly elated by success, nor too much depressed by misfortune; it moderates his passions, rules his expectations, preserves his health, and secures him from the agitation with which the passing affairs of life affect the luxurious and misgoverned. Temperance is a continual law, and they who submit to its benign control are known by their unvarying cheerfulness, as the balm-yielding saffron is manifested by the bright garb of the crocus. Melancholy is the peculiar attribute of the lawless,

[b] Canticles iv. 14.

the special malady which most readily besets the irregular and the immoderate man. And yet, mistake not my meaning. Cheerfulness is not levity. It is simple ease. That mind is dissolute and ungoverned which must be hurried out of itself by loud laughter or sensual pleasure, or else be wholly inactive[c]. But temperance, like the sun in a clear sky, diffuses throughout the mind which contains it, a pervading and modulated lustre, which men call cheerfulness. Therefore mark that the most manifest sign of Divine wisdom is continued cheerfulness[d], since philosophy, by exposing the folly of regret, and by supplying the means of health, tempers the mind with an even warmth and brightness. And to add yet further testimony, remember these words long since written by one of your great men, 'It is most becoming and most wise, so to temper gravity with cheerfulness, that the former may not imbue our minds with sadness, nor the latter sink into licentious living[e].'"

"Bright one," said I, seeing that she paused in her speech, "it seems to me that temperance is not so simple a matter as I had supposed; to be thus truly temperate one must require continual thought and vigilance."

As I spoke I looked earnestly upon the face of the Crocus Spirit, and saw that her ghostly eyes were fixed seriously upon me.

"To be really temperate," she repeated slowly, "one must be continually thoughtful and continually vigilant, for as fortitude is the right endurance of pain, so temperance is the right endurance of pleasure. But now listen, for I will tell you a story about myself, and you shall judge therefrom of my value and of my mission upon earth. Long since it was given me to lighten with my helpful smile the mind of one whom the power of temperance made a king among mortal men."

Then as the bright eyes of the Spirit turned towards the earth I marked that there came into their clear depths a passionate light of tender remembrance, and she stretched forth her shadowy arms as though to recall and clasp some dear and vanished past. And when again her sweet voice broke the silence, I fancied its tones were yet softer than before, as though a reverence for something hallowed and precious restrained their wonted gaiety.

"Centuries ago," pursued the Spirit, "I bloomed with many thousand others of my sister flowers upon the shadowless downs of one of the Seven Hills of Rome. Before us lay the broad undulating reaches of the Campagna, rich in vivid colouring and splendid contrast, here purple and

[c] Steele. [d] Montaigne. [e] Pliny.

there saffron with beds of crocuses—for we love the open ground—and above us, unbroken by any intervening foliage, spread the open sky, sometimes like ourselves, purple in its intense blue, sometimes golden-hued with the glory of the southern sun-light.

"Early in the morning the flower-girls of Rome were wont to come out into the Campagna to gather blossoms for their chaplets and posies, and often, if they lighted on a tuft of fine blossoms, would dig up the whole plant, and transfer it to a painted or an earthen vase for the decoration of some patron's indoor flower-garden. And that, one of these wandering Floras did with me. She found me in the dawn of a certain misty morning, as she climbed the slopes, and darting upon me as upon a rare prize, loosened the light earth from my bulbous roots, and carried me off rejoicing, in a basket full of wreaths and flower-knots. She took me into the city, and wound her way swiftly through many narrow streets and alleys, eating her scanty breakfast as she went, till she came to the fashionable quarter of Rome, where she hoped to lighten her fragrant load; and there, leaning against the corner pillar of a colonnade opposite to one of the most frequented thoroughfares, deposited her burden upon the pavement at her feet, and waited for customers.

"For some time the only persons who passed that way were slaves from the great houses, who came abroad early to make purchases for the culinary needs of the establishments to which they respectively belonged. Many of them, especially the younger ones, stopped now and then to gossip with my flower-girl, and several bargained with her for a garland or a few blossoms to help in the adornment of cates and wine-beakers. Some white roses which lay beside me in the basket were all speedily sold, for the white rose was regarded by the Romans in old days as an emblem of secrecy, and for that reason they used it to ornament their drinking-cups and flagons, and frequently introduced its painted semblance into the fresco pictures of their banquet-rooms, as an admonition to the guests that nothing spoken or heard during the symposia should be repeated elsewhere. But crocuses were not the fashion, and though one or two of my Flora's clients condescended to admire me, no one seemed anxious to become my purchaser, nor offered for me so much as a single sorry coin. I wondered, this being the case, why Flora had evinced so much delight at first sight of me, and to what end she had dug me up so carefully and borne me off with so much glee. 'Perhaps,' I meditated, 'I am reserved for a more dignified fate than that of festooning wine-vessels or crowning the brows of aristocratic topers. Certainly, such a destiny would be strangely ill-suited to my character!'

"While thus I speculated, a citizen, singular for his upright figure and artistic garb, crossed the square which fronted the colonnade, and approached the flower-girl. She seemed to brighten when she perceived him, and catching up her basket from the ground ran towards him, exclaiming joyfully,

"'See, noble patron! I have secured for you to-day such a root of yellow crocus as one does not often behold! This very morning, on the Alban hills, I lighted on it! The colour is magnificent—you could wish no better!'

"The man thus accosted took me in his hand, tenderly as though he really thought me a sentient thing, examined me for a moment, then without more ado paid the price which the flower-girl named, and carried me away. He was a young man, hardly yet in his third decade, and the serenity and peace of his countenance gave it that peculiar beauty of expression which is so much more attractive than mere regularity of feature—the beauty of sweetness and light. Looking at his deep serious eyes, broad smooth brow, and the curved softened lines of his lips, it was easy to perceive that this man was both wise and happy. For the body is only the soul made visible, and every one carries his character on his face, written in type as legible to eyes which are able to read the writing of Nature, as those curious fragments of Hebrew scripture which the devout Pharisees were wont to fasten across their foreheads.

"With a swift elastic step my new possessor traversed the broad squares and streets, pausing now and then to greet a passing acquaintance or to return the respectful salute of some household servitor. At length, in a narrow place, remote from the gardens, baths, and the statelier porticoes of the city, the man who had bought me arrested his steps on the threshold of a small unimportant looking building, and crossing its paved vestibule, entered the atrium, which I observed to be more artistic in its adornment than I should have anticipated from the exterior of the house and the indifferent locality of its site. A curtain suspended before the entrance of an apartment communicating with the hall, was raised gently as my bearer advanced, and a young woman, with a beautiful face and radiant hair bound in the Grecian manner by a fillet of purple silk, appeared before us.

"'Crocuses!' cried she gaily,—'what fine blossoms! Are you going to paint them, my husband?'

"With the same tender care he had before used in handling me, he now placed the jar in which I was planted upon a stone pedestal in the tiny parterre which bounded the atrium, for in these old times most Roman houses occupied by citizens of the better class included in their precincts such indoor gardens.

"'Yes, Irene. I have just bought them from a flower-girl

THE CROCUS.

"A curtain . . . . was raised gently as my bearer advanced, and a young woman . . . appeared before us."—(*To face p.* 82.)

opposite to the Forum. Some time ago I bade her look me out a cluster like this. I have an idea—to paint them as a background to my medallion head of Aglaia.'

"'Too much colour! too much colour, my Felix!' said a voice behind him. It was that of a visitor who had entered the atrium unperceived, and who now approaching, saluted the master and mistress of the house with the familiar courtesy of an intimate acquaintance.

"'Not so, my Luctus,' answered the other with a sober smile; 'clear colour when used judiciously is but the fit interpreter of bright thought. It is meet that the face of Aglaia should be encircled with gold,—the idea is ethical and didactic.'

"'Felix,' said the visitor again, after a moment's pause, 'have you sent your designs yet to the villa of the Senator Crassus?'

"'I took them there yesterday.'

"Luctus flashed a keen glance at him. 'I also took mine yesterday,' said he. 'Perhaps,' he added, his voice faltering into huskiness, 'we shall hear the decision of the judges in a day or two. The artist to whom Crassus gives the preference will indeed be a happy man! Thy name, my Felix, is but an evil augury for me!'

"There Irene interposed a gentle remonstrance.

"'But perhaps,' said she, 'the senator may divide the favour? Perhaps he may commit to Felix the decoration of but part of his new villa, and to you, Luctus, the rest.'

"'It seems then, fair Irene,' rejoined Luctus, with some bitterness, 'that you are at least assured of your husband's success! But I cannot stay to discuss probabilities; to-night I entertain my cousin, Laxus, and three of his friends. You will not be of our company, Felix?'

"'Nay,' replied the other, shaking his head and smiling; 'I should be but a sorry guest at a table such as thine, my Luctus! Besides, I care not to leave Irene alone in the evening, with no companions save the slaves, while I make merry elsewhere.'

"'Ah, I doubt not you are in the right,' cried Luctus, turning towards the portico; 'would that I too had as sweet a reason for remaining sober! We bachelors are but pitiable creatures, gay flies disporting ourselves in a treacherous sun, that by-and-by will singe our fine wings! Farewell, charming lady!' Then he pursued in low tones which were not meant to reach the ear of the wife, 'Thou art too domestic for Rome, my Felix! No man of any taste or style in these days *lives* at home! One's own house is for sleeping in—the houses of one's friends for all other uses! Wine and mirth,—these are the pleasures of manhood, and life is a poor affair without them!'

"But as he passed by the open casement a moment later, he looked envious and discontented, notwithstanding his protest against sobriety.

"Scarcely had this brief conversation ended, when a page appeared in the outer vestibule, and being beckoned by Irene to enter, advanced and presented Felix with a letter written upon papyrus, and bearing an elaborate seal of imposing dimensions.

"'It is from my master, the Senator Crassus," said the messenger, delivering the packet; and retiring respectfully a few paces, he stood waiting for any reply that might be entrusted to him. The painter opened the letter with calmness, but had scarcely glanced over the first two lines of it when his face shone with a great joy, and he cried aloud as he read,—'Irene mine! the choice hath fallen upon me! I am commanded to begin the frescoes if possible this very day! Crassus hath also written to Luctus telling him of this decision! "The best connoisseurs of art were consulted on the matter," writes the senator, and all unanimously gave their approval to my design. Ah, little wife! how happy I am!'

"Indeed he looked the picture of happiness, as his wife, laying her hand fondly upon his, smiled up in his radiant face, and kissed him with a simple delight in his pleasure, that was better evidence of the love between them than a thousand passionate vows would have been. She said no word that I could hear, but congratulation between husband and wife needs not expression in uttered sound,—wedded spirits have sweeter ways of sympathy. Felix turned to the slave.

"'Tell your lord,' said he, 'that at noon I shall do myself the honour to attend at his house.'

"With that the messenger withdrew, and Irene and her husband retired into a little side chamber, which served, I suppose, as her boudoir, for the curtains that ordinarily screened it from the outer court were pushed aside, and I saw disposed within the room such feminine toys and garniture as women everywhere delight in, and a roll of embroidery, glowing with the sheen of web-like silks, lay outspread upon a tiny table in the centre of the apartment. There the two sat together and talked, a little about themselves, more about this new villa on the Pincian hill which Felix was to adorn with fresco-painting, and most about art and its relation to morality. From their discourse I gathered that my owner and his wife had been but lately married. Felix, visiting Athens for purposes of study, as it was customary for young Roman artists to do, had lodged in the house of Irene's uncle, a citizen of that great metropolis

whose patroness was the wise goddess, Pallas, divine guardian of the arts, and queen of all loveliness and maiden grace. There Felix found Irene, for she lived then under her uncle's roof, having been an orphan since her childhood. And in her he found also the real and living Pallas of his heart, he loved the sweet mild face and pure soul of the Grecian girl, and from that day set himself to woo and win her. And she loved him, and he returned to Rome with Irene for his guardian and directress, and all that Pallas, the blue-eyed maid, was to the land of philosophy and beauty, Irene became to Felix the painter. She was indeed his peace, and he her happiness!

"About noon my painter went up to the villa of Crassus, the senator, and I saw nothing of him again until the evening, when he returned to his wife full of a great content, but so little flushed with his triumph that he rather seemed to me the humbler for it.

"'Read me something out of the poets, sweet,' said he, 'for I have a work before me now, and service to do for art, and I would fain store my mind with visions of the beautiful, that my hand may convey true images, and that my thoughts may have better power in creation, and my eyes in discernment.'

"And Irene read and recited poem after poem in the sweet-flowing tongue of her own land, which has no equal in modern language,—tender Sapphics like the refluent music of the sea, graceful hexameters, and the stately melody of the Alcaic verse: for these things exalt and teach and refine the spirit of man. Felix Sobrius, as his companions were wont to call him in those days of pertinent appellations, knew that all worthy and precious art has its foundation in virtue, and is not merely a means of delighting the sense, but of educating the heart. Therefore also, he knew that no man can be a great artist who is not first inly great in idea, for art is the work, not of the hand alone, but of the whole man, and as he is, such likewise will be the thing he makes. 'Neither is it enough,' reasoned Felix, 'to lay on colour; one must have joy, and wonder, and reverence, and compassion of soul to make art didactic, mythic, endurable. Into the forms which his pencil creates, the maker must be able to breathe the breath of a 'living soul.'

"The days wore swiftly away in the home of Felix and Irene. Springtide drew towards summer, and the work at the villa on the Pincian hill went on steadily. And where still I bloomed like a tiny sun in the midst of the house, I saw and heard many things of the daily life about me, which I have no time to tell—others which I can touch

upon but briefly. Now and then I saw Luctus in the atrium, but he always looked discontented and restless, always deplored his destiny, always desired something he had not, and envied men whom he conceived to be more blessed than himself.

"'I know not how it comes about, charming Irene,' said he, 'that thine husband is so much luckier than I! All Rome is beginning to talk about him and his paintings, while not one so much as knows my name, and yet the good gifts of fortune find no such welcome from him as I should give them! Is Felix invited to a banquet with some gay spirits? behold he refuses to be of the party; or is a fête proposed to do honour to his genius, he will have nothing to say to it! He is always learning—learning, and never enjoys! While as for me, since the public does not give me my due, I treat myself perpetually. Never a night passes that I do not spend in the adoration of Bacchus, nor is there an expense I grudge to entertain my friends. Thus would I unite art with pleasure,—and lo! both elude me! I clasp only bitterness and melancholy! My wine is drugged with disappointment,—every cup is watered with disgust!'

"The last fresco in the senator's villa was almost finished. It was an Idalian Oread reposing on a bed of crocuses, and I was carried up to the villa to serve as a model for this fancy, which Felix had already found successful in his treatment of the Aglaia. While he was at work late in the morning, and the picture neared its completion, Luctus lounged into the chamber, red-eyed and scarce sobered from the previous night's excesses, but as usual, voluble with complaint and grievance, which were in no wise diminished by the sight of the painting before him.

"'Apollo!' cried he, starting as he beheld it, while a sudden light that flashed and died again in his dark eyes betrayed his resentment, 'you have indeed been industrious, my Felix! What progress! what colour! what form! Was ever any man so fortunate in his undertakings!'

"With Luctus, good fortune was a synonym for genius, perseverance, or virtue. It was at least a comprehensive term.

"'Have you heard,' he continued, lounging against a porphyry column behind Felix, 'whether it is true that Crassus means to give a great banquet here shortly? I was told so in the city to-day, and I came up here to ask if you know anything of it.'

"'Yes,' replied Felix. 'It is quite true. I am working especially hard now to get this last fresco finished in time.'

"'Ah?' responded Luctus, in a tone that seemed like

a gasp for breath, so impossible was it to repress his spleen, 'you know everything in Rome, my Felix, while other men can only surmise! May be, you will also inform me who are the invited guests?'

"There is no secret about the affair, Luctus. The entertainment is to be most magnificent. The Emperor himself is expected, and nearly the whole of the Senate.'

"''Tis a marvel that Crassus omitted to bid you also, my dear Felix, among such illustrious visitors.'

"These words were accompanied with a sneer of so much malignity, that Felix could not fail to perceive the harshness it imparted to the tone of his companion's voice.

"'Crassus *did* invite me,' replied he with some pardonable acridity.

"Luctus was beside himself with fury. He could not utter a syllable.

"'But,' resumed Felix, 'I shall certainly decline to be present.'

"'Decline! Heavens! Felix are you a fool?'

"'I should merit the reproach of being one if I accepted the invitation,' returned the painter quickly. 'Crassus did me the courtesy to request my company, because I have helped to prepare for the entertainment by adorning his apartments, but his kindness would not justify me for intruding on his guests. I know none of them, and some of their number might perhaps regard me as a vain upstart, should I presume to impose myself upon men of their position. Moreover, I have no fondness for wine, nor for delicate meats and dainties; banquet dalliance wearies me, and the golden bloom of yonder flowers is to my sight a thousand times more attractive, than the ruddy glow of all the Falernian and Chian draughts that were ever poured into jewelled cups at the imperial table itself. My Art is my nectar and ambrosia. I desire no other.'

"Luctus was silent for a little while. Then he recommenced abruptly:

"'No doubt, then, my friend, you are so addicted to this all-absorbing profession of yours, that nothing would ever allure you from its charms, or rive the enchantment it possesses for you?'

"'Nothing,' answered Felix, fervently: 'nothing, except loss of sight.'

"Again the dangerous-looking eyes of the man who stood behind him seemed to me to lighten grimly, and his hands clutched one another convulsively as though they would crush the life out of some noxious thing that lay in their grasp. But after that he spoke no more until he took his departure.

* * * * * * * *

"I was back again upon the pedestal in the court of my owner's house, and it was the evening of the senator's great banquet.

"Irene and her husband sat together in the atrium by the side of the hospitable hearth-fire of which the Roman poets sing; for though the spring was advanced, the nights were often cold, and the air keen and piercing. While thus the painter and his wife conversed together in the dim glow of the flickering light, the flame of a lamp suspended outside the portico projected the shadow of a man's figure upon the drapery about the doorway. Felix took note of it and rose to admit the coming guest, but when he lifted the curtain, the face which met his own was unfamiliar, and a strange voice accosted him in imperfect Latin, against whose martial utterances the Grecian accent did tender trespass.

"'Fair sir, I crave your pardon for this intrusion. But the night is bitter and stormy, and I scarce can stand against the violence of the wind. I have journeyed far, and am sorely tired, and the yellow light of the lamp above your door discovered to me a place where perhaps I may be suffered to rest awhile.'

"'Whoever you are,' responded the painter, cordially, 'be sure you are welcome. Enter and be seated at the hearth of our sacred Lares. Methinks you are a Greek,—my wife Irene will be glad to meet a compatriot.'

"As he spoke, he admitted the stranger, who, having shaken the hail from his garments, advanced to the entrance of the hall, where for a moment he paused, and pronounced these words in a clear solemn voice:—

"'Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it[f].'

"Then he saluted Irene, and took the seat she placed for him.

"He was an old man with a long flowing beard, and the aspect of his whole person was grave and subdued; perhaps even a touch of austerity lurked in his deep grey eyes. His attire, like his speech, was Grecian, and though his years must have numbered almost seven decades, there was in his manner a strange youthfulness that seemed to have its source within him, as though the soul were renewing itself even while the outer frame decayed.

"'You are a traveller?' questioned Felix, as the slaves set bread and wine upon the table, 'and no doubt you come from our cherished and beautiful Greece? Are you perchance an Athenian?'

"'Not so, my kind host,' answered the pilgrim, 'I come from Corinth, a messenger to certain sojourners in Rome, to whom I bear tidings and letters from distant friends. This

[f] S. Luke x. 5.

evening only have I reached the city after a long and tedious journey. And my name, if you care to know it, is Olympas. May I ask, in return, that of my hospitable entertainer?'

"'I am called Felix,' answered the painter, as he offered his visitor a goblet of tempered wine, 'and thereto some add the surname of Sobrius. But my family is not noble, nor have I any relatives in Rome.'

"'Brief as my time has yet been in this city,' returned the stranger, 'it has yet sufficed me to learn something of you. Two men whom I overtook on my way, spoke as I passed them of Felix Sobrius the painter, and of some marvellous frescoes he had resently designed and executed. But I did not divine I should so soon be honoured with your actual acquaintance.'

"'It is a strange incident,' replied Felix, 'but not inexplicable. Such things belong to metaphysical phenomena, and make a part of the destiny which governs the affairs of men.'

"The old man cast a wistful look upon him.

"'Are you a philosopher, my son?' he asked, gently.

"'I am a humble lover of wisdom,' responded Felix, with a smile, 'although indeed I am not wise.'

"'Philosophy doubtless assists you in art,' pursued the pilgrim, 'and that is perhaps the secret of your success. You are not a man of pleasure, like these debased Romans who surround you on every side,—these lawless, disorderly crowds of patricians and freedmen, who have corrupted so horribly the doctrine of our Garden Teacher [g],—who put light for darkness, and darkness for light, and call their Latin debauchery, Athenian Epicureanism. The soul of your Grecian wife has saved you from that unhappy fate.'

"The painter turned his loving eyes upon the face of Irene, and drew her hand tenderly to his lips.

"'Rightly you divine, my wise guest,' he answered. 'Here is my good genius. Whatever grace I have, she gave it me; whatever good I possess, she taught me how to win it; if in anything I be wiser or better than other men, it is she who has made me their superior.'

"Irene laughed, and shook her golden head and blushed, but she hid the blush against her husband's cheek.

"'There are,' said the old man, watching them, 'three things which endure, three things for which there is a place for ever: beauty, justice, and truth. If you know this in your soul, feel it in your heart, and understand it with your mind, my son, you are indeed an artist.'

"The painter's clear eyes kindled.

[g] Epicurus.

and certain extravagant cates and sweetmeats in demand at Rome were named 'Apician' in celebration of his renown as the most luxurious glutton of the great city. The messenger from Apicius brought a letter to Felix, and was besides charged to entreat him that he would not refuse to undertake the commission proposed in it, 'so warm and profound,' the slave had directions to say, 'was that esteem which Apicius entertained for the exalted talents of the distinguished artist whom he addressed.'

"But Felix was not entangled by this high talk. He opened the letter with a good deal of indifference, and having read through a preliminary page of fulsome adulation, discovered that the undertaking required of him was the decoration of a new triclinium [k] at the Apician villa. The gourmet wished to have painted on the principal wall of the apartment a large fresco representing a celestial banquet, the chief feature of the composition being the figure of Jove, as presiding deity and founder of the feast, arrayed in all the glorious pomp of divine majesty, and surrounded by a halo of mystical radiance, the centre of supreme homage and admiration; which god-like figure was to be the portrait of no more spiritual a being than Apicius himself! The letter concluded with promises of liberal payment, and begged an immediate response.

"A request so vain and puerile was not altogether unparalleled in the days of Caligula and Nero. Felix read it to Irene as they stood together under the colonnade of their indoor garden. She smiled, with far more of gentle sadness in the expression of her face, than of scorn or indignation, but she did not question what her husband's reply would be. I knew there would indeed be no question about it. And I breathed my sweet savour of strength upon his brows as he stooped and kissed her, and turned away. Not for the sake of any gain or renown would the artist prostitute his genius or degrade the work he loved. In his ordered soul, the power of temperance had overcome both avarice and ambition.

"'Say to Cælius Apicius,' said Felix, returning to the messenger, 'that I will write to him to-day. You need not wait,—I can carry the letter to his villa myself.'

"The servant quitted the house. But just outside the door he appeared to encounter some one, and stopped. I heard voices,—the voice of Luctus, vehement with earnest interrogation, and the messenger of Apicius replying with equal volubility.

"'From Cælius Apicius?' questioned the first voice ner-

[k] Banquet-hall.

vously; 'Great gods! are you sure? Felix is to paint his triclinium?'

"'I am certain,' answered the other confidently, 'I carried the letter, and as I amused myself by reading its contents on my way hither, there can be no mistake on the matter.'

"'Nor any doubt what answer our painter will send,' added Luctus.

"'Indeed, I fancy not! He dismissed me empty-handed, for he says he means to visit the Apician villa to-day. You see he is not willing to lose time over the affair.'

"I almost believed I could hear Luctus gnash his teeth as he listened, but there was no further discourse. If he had come up to the house with the intention of visiting Felix, he evidently changed his mind, for his steps presently departed in another direction, and the gourmet's messenger went on his way chuckling audibly. *He* had made mischief, and that delighted him. Minds of such an order as his are always pleased when they have managed to set richer men by the ears.

"Two hours after this, Felix having written his letter of refusal to Apicius, went out to deliver it at the great man's villa. It was drawing towards evening, and the lamps of the city began to sparkle here and there through the gathering haze. But the haze grew into shadow, and the shadow deepened into night, and yet Felix did not return. Irene, anxious and disturbed, paced up and down the court alone, listening to every sound without, but waiting in vain for that sound which had tarried already so long. Suddenly she paused, and hurried across the atrium with a sharp cry of alarm. Some neighbours were bringing her husband home, —guiding him to his own door, leading him to the familiar threshold like a little child: for he could no longer see.

"He was blind; blinded by a strange and terrible accident that had left its mark like a scar upon his forehead, and had burnt the youth out of his features as though with fire, and had for ever quenched the joy of his life. All in one little moment! She took him to her heart, she held him there in her agony, as though, since he could not see her face, she wished that he might yet hear how her love for him beat strong and fast within her bosom. She rained her tears and kisses on his wounded brow like healing balm, and soothed him with tender words in low soft tones, calling him her blessing,—her darling,—her beloved.

"So the pitying neighbours left them.

"When they were alone, he told her how it had happened. As he came back from the villa of Apicius and re-entered the city, a casement above him in one of the smaller streets suddenly opened, and a voice called him by name, 'Felix,

Felix Sobrius!' He lifted his head and looked up. In that instant a hand,—he knew not whose,—flashed like a light from behind the lattice and flung into his face a burning liquid, that thrilled his nerves with intense pain and struck the light of day from his sight. When he came to himself after the first shock of that awful anguish, the people had gathered about him, and were leading him home. None knew what had become of the person who had injured him. The casement was closed, and not a creature could be found within that fatal house.

"Three days passed away.

"On the fourth came Luctus, full of condolence and lamentation. He had heard the terrible news from his friends. He was inexpressibly grieved. Was his dear friend really blind,—would he never recover his sight? What said the learned surgeon who had been consulted?

"Irene was hopeful. The surgeon believed that in time her husband would partially recover his vision. But the scars which the vitriol had left, the terrible seaming scars that were like marks of flame, would never be effaced.

"Luctus was inconsolable. 'What a calamity!' cried he, wringing his hands. 'Just when he was appointed decorator at the Apician villa,—an undertaking which would certainly have made his fame for all time! What a loss! what a cruel disappointment!'

"'Nay, my good Luctus,' quoth Irene, interrupting the torrent of his lamentation, 'you are in error. Whoever informed you on that point, was clearly at fault. It is true that Apicius desired Felix to perform the task you speak of, but Felix unconditionally declined it. He was on his way home, after delivering the letter which contained his refusal, when the disaster you deplore with so much kindly grief, befell him, and destroyed his sight.'

"Great gods! Declined! Refused!'

"Luctus whitened to the temples, a hideous look rose into his eyes, his lips trembled like withered leaves, and his breath came sharp and quick between them, like the breath of some fainting creature sore-pressed and hunted by insatiate pursuers.

"'What have I done?' he muttered, as he fled from the house. But Irene did not hear those last words.

"That very evening the old Grecian, Olympas, came again. He had learned the story of the accident, for all Rome was busy over the sad tidings, and curious about the details of so strange an adventure. He had come, said he, not to ask questions, but if he could, to console; if that were not possible, at least to offer his help and sympathy.

"He found Felix reclining on a seat beside the pedestal

upon which the crocuses were placed, for the painter had asked to have his couch set there, that, if he might not see, he might at least be near the blossoms he loved and had cherished so long.

"'Beautiful flowers,' said he, bending over them. 'I cannot behold you, but your sweet scent and soft touch tell me you are still here, and I know your colours are rich and bright as ever. Even so, though art is no more for me, and I can no longer guide the pencil nor limn the fair vermillion and gold, I know that beauty and virtue, which are the root and blossom of all pure and lovely art, are still real, and so indeed flourish evermore.'

"Then as the old pilgrim stood before him, and looked into Irene's fair face, where she sat watching tenderly by her husband, the gentle voice with the Grecian accent broke softly on the ear of the blind man.

"'I perceive, my son, that although God hath sent you pain, He hath still left you peace.'

"'Peace and cheerfulness, wise Olympas,' replied the painter, smiling as he turned from his wife to the crocuses. 'The gods are good. I am content.'

"'Son,' resumed Olympas, regarding him with admiration, 'I perceive also that thy temperance is real. It enables thee to meet adversity with a smile, and suffering with courage, neither is the joy of thine heart destroyed because thou hast ceased to be fortunate. Whence hast thou this wisdom?'

"'The philosophers and poets whom I loved in my success, are my resource now,' he answered. 'Seneca tells us that "true joy is a serene and sober motion, the seat of it is within, and there is no cheerfulness like the resolution of a brave mind." And again, I call to remembrance the words of our Roman poet Horace, "The mind that is cheerful in its present state, will be averse to all solicitude as to the future, and will meet the bitter occurrences of life with a placid smile."'

"'Young man,' pursued Olympas, looking at him earnestly, 'thou knowest so much, that it grieves me thy much should be so little. For of such as thou art is that great army which God hath sent forth to make war upon the world, heroes who carry in their hearts a brighter light of happiness than even thine, on the badge of whose panoply is written for a token of their service, "*Sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing.*" For upon every wave that rises against them they behold through the shadows the approaching form of their dearest Lord, and they hear above the roar and din of the world's tempest, a voice that speaks to their heart continually, "*Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid.*"'

"The blind painter could not see upon the face of his

visitor the light which was there, but he seemed, in the midst of his darkness, to feel its shining, and lifted his dimmed eyes towards it.

"'Father,' said he, 'for you call me son, and the reverence I bear you is indeed filial,—will you teach me your philosophy? Now that life is become to me a more sombre thing than it was when last I spoke with you, I would fain behold that divine glory of which you tell me. I would fain wear upon my brows the incorruptible crown that fadeth not away. Whence then is that Light, and whose is that crown?'

"'Dear son,' answered the aged Greek, 'if thou wilt join the company of philosophers to which I belong, thou must forego the corruptible for the fadeless laurel. Thou canst not, in these days, obtain both. Our school of wisdom is a persecuted one, and if thou cast in thy lot with us, the times will change for thee. Men will shun, as hitherto they have sought thy friendship, the old familiar ways of art will become hard and bitter and thorny to thy tread, because for thee there will be no longer renown or reverence, nor sweet meed of human praise.'

"'The gods have been kind, father,' said Felix, touching his eyes significantly. 'All that, they have already removed from me.'

"The Greek looked at him still with infinite compassion. 'Thou hast then no hatred against thine unknown enemy?' he asked. 'Thou seekest no vengeance for the injury that has befallen thee?'

"'None,' replied the painter simply. 'My anger never endures.'

"He spoke truly. It had been overcome by the rule of temperance.

"Upon the grave face of Olympas, where youth and age mingled so harmoniously, I saw the strange light again, stronger and brighter than ever.

"'And thy wife?' he asked presently. 'What says the angel of thy peace?'

"Irene knelt down before her husband, and laying his hands upon her heart with a gesture of unutterable love, turned her beautiful eyes towards the guest.

"'My husband will lose nothing by his choice,' she answered. 'He has ruled his mind with temperance, and to him all paths are equal. He had no expectations of greatness, no passion for the praise of men. His art was his praise, and his genius its own reward. What then can he lose or regret?'

"How beautiful she was! How tender, how helpfully wise! More beautiful now than ever in this wifely office of sustainer and counsellor!

"'Listen then, my children,' resumed the old Greek, after a minute's pause. 'For my philosophy is a Message.'

"And straightway, beginning with the sign of the holy Cross, he poured forth to them the glad tidings of great joy.

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"As for Luctus I heard by-and-by that he had contrived to obtain from Apicius that coveted commission which had first been offered to Felix. For Luctus, like all intemperate men, was greedy and avaricious, and he longed with passionate desire for the rich reward that Apicius promised.

"But it was never paid; for before the fresco was half completed, his patron, the would-be Divinity, had eaten his last banquet, and *hanged himself*[1].

"It was on the eve of the day that was fixed for the baptism of Felix and Irene, that the wind, the messenger of God, came for me.

"Without, the air was full of the new-born summer, and the crocuses which had long been languishing, were parched at heart with the hot breath of the Italian May. Their heads sank upon their flexible stems, and the pure spirit that dwelt within them sought to free itself from the drooping petals which yet restrained its course, and to be exhaled into the clear and bodiless ether.

"For my mission in the house of the painter was finished, and on the morrow he was to enter upon a higher and diviner way than I could teach, the Way of the Cross, the Life of the saints which is hid with Christ in God.

"But before I passed out into the dim unknown heights, I floated through the silent atrium into the chamber beyond it, and hovered awhile above the couch whereon Felix and his wife lay sleeping. Side by side they lay, the woman's beautiful face serene in its wonderful loveliness, with its unblemished features and smooth white brows,—and the face of the blind artist,—scarred and seared and branded; but more kingly so, and more divine in its repose, than any other face I had seen upon earth. I think that man must have died a martyr."

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So the childlike voice of the golden-eyed spirit ceased.

And as the sunny radiance around me faded and dissolved into shadow, I awoke from my sleep, and found myself again in the little familiar conservatory among the spring-tide

[1] The inordinate expense of the culinary establishment of Apicius reduced his fortune and involved him in debt; when, finding that, after clearing off his incumbrances, he should have left only a pittance utterly inadequate to keep such a body and soul together, he took poison, as some say,—according to others, hanged himself, in preference to pining after unattainable luxuries. Apicius is celebrated by Pliny, Juvenal, and Martial.

flowers. But my slumber had lasted long, and the sun was already so far on his way westward that the hazy gloom of twilight began to darken the glass roof above me, the March wind was chanting its evensong amid the garden trees without, and at my feet, the yellow crocuses one by one were closing their bright petals and composing themselves to sleep.

THE ROSE.

"Yes, Love indeed is light from Heaven,
A spark of that immortal fire
With angels shared, by Alla given,
To lift from earth our low desire.
Devotion wafts the mind above,
But Heaven itself descends in Love;
A feeling from the Godhead caught
To wean from self each sordid thought,
A ray from Him who formed the whole,
A glory circling round the Soul!"

Byron.

IN a certain favoured corner of our garden is an arbour of red roses. There, on sunny days in June and July, I delight to sit, inhaling the fragrant air, and weaving the while the threads of those many-coloured thoughts which my vagrant imagination, whether conscious or dreaming, invariably formulates into stories.

Last spring, a box of yellow crocuses in our conservatory furnished me with the text for a romance on the virtue of temperance. And now that summer is here in all the richness of her multiform bloom and beauty, the very breeze seems redolent with tenderness; and an intense sympathy towards every living thing inflames and fills my heart, inciting me to take them all in my embrace, and through love of them aspire to communion with God.

I feel sure that these red roses, swaying to and fro in the soft wind, are able to teach me something which it would be good and pleasant to learn. This one, nodding and beckoning so daintily at me round the corner of the arbour, has certainly a secret to impart! Come, beautiful flower, to whom the wandering breeze reveals the mysteries of heaven, and repeats the stories which the angels tell one another,—what strange sweet things will you say to me this dreamy summer noontide?

"I will tell you," she whispers, touching my forehead softly, "a story which my pilgrim friend the Wind has just recounted to me. He spent the night far up in the sky, among the flowers of the rainbow garden, and there in its highest circle he met the spirit of one of my fairest ancestors, the beautiful Rose of Kashmeer! And he said that she,—more queenly and imperial than any other in the Paradise of the

flowers,—bears evermore in her bosom the light of the crimson Sardius, type and interpreter of Divine Love, even as we in the world of men are the symbols of human passion and tenderness. For Love is ruler in earth and heaven, and his royal seal is set on the brows of all the best and the greatest, distinguishing the hero from the sensualist, the genius from the dullard, the noble man from the base and insensible.

And this is the history which my lovely ancestor recounted to our roving friend the Wind.

"Centuries ago, one sunny season, as long since as the year 1324, I first awoke to life, a tiny crimson rose-bud, among a bevy of my fair sisters, in the famous Valley of Kashmeer. My birthplace was an island, feathery with slender aspens, and rich with the luxuriant verdure of the warm Asian soil. Arbours of myrtle and climbing eglantine adorned the sloping shore, and all day under their cool shadows rippled the musical waves of the Kashmeer lake. From the bower in which I blossomed I could discern a hundred similar islets, studding like so many emeralds the golden expanse of glittering water. Here and there, as the peaceful hours went by, white sails flashed and dipped among the winding alleys of the lake, and the sweet strains of lute or viol came mingled with women's voices down the luminous tide; now from some distant haunt of sylvan revelry, now from the open casement of a Hindu bungalow, where joyful maids and matrons had met to celebrate the annual Feast of Roses.

"Upon my particular island, the wildest and most solitary in the little archipelago, dwelt a young devotee of the Brahmin caste, that tribe of priests, whose members, like the Levites among the Jews, inherit the sacerdotal office, and to whom only appertains the guardianship of the national religion.

"These Brahmins observe three successive conditions of life, the highest of which is the Vanaprastha, or life of penitential seclusion. The priests who attain this saintly distinction are called Rishis or anchorites; they dwell in complete solitude, and are occupied solely in devout contemplation, prayer and the study of the Vedas, which are the sacred books of the Hindu faith. But before entering upon such holy retirement, it is commanded every Brahmin to pass a certain portion of his life in the domestic state of Grihastha, or matrimony. At an early age he must choose a wife of his own caste, and rear his sons and daughters in the faith; and not until they have passed the age of childhood is he permitted admission into the nobler fraternity of monasticism.

"The young priest who dwelt on my rose-island was then little more than a novice in the sacerdotal order. Every morn-

"Every morning at sunrise-time his betrothed wife came to visit him in a tiny canoe, bright with gold and vermillion."—(*To face p.* 101.)

ing at sunrise time his betrothed wife came to visit him[a] in a tiny canoe, bright with gold and vermillion, bringing with her a cruse of some sweet drink, ripe fruits and meal-cakes; for the Brahmins are forbidden to eat the flesh of any creature that has lived. Never was maiden more graceful in form or comelier of face than the beautiful Bhagwandaee, peerless even among the high-bred ladies of the Brahmin caste, to whom the palm of loveliness is always awarded from poetic Kashmeer to the southernmost shores of Hindustan. Scarcely more than a child in years, Bhagwandaee's dark oval face was serious with the tender shadow of earnest thought, and her brown jasper-clear eyes revealed within their radiant deeps the glory of a soul that loved and aspired. It was no idle inconsequent passion that united the hearts of the Brahmin neophyte and his betrothed, nor was it without meaning that the same name had been given to both of them,—a name which signifies in the parabolic tongue of the Hindus, 'the servant of God.'

"Hour after hour Bhagwandas was wont to sit alone under the rose-bushes by the margin of the lake, buried in a profound meditation. And when at sunrise his fair companion came across the golden water to visit him, the lovers greeted each other, not with the light-hearted rapture of youth, but with the grave earnestness of fellow-students and philosophers, between whom exists the magnetic kinship of metaphysic and psychic sympathy.

"'I might relate to you,' said the Rose of Kashmeer, 'many a strange and startling speculation, many a daring theory which I and my sisters overheard in that fair solitude, as we waved our white and coloured blooms above the heads of these young aspirants after Truth. But I pass on rather to the events of a certain day, just as I was beginning to expand into rosy blossom, when there came to the islet, I know not whence,—a certain strange man, tall and stately of mien, and clad gorgeously, in a different garb from that worn by the Hindu people. Bhagwandas was reclining as usual by the sandy marge of the lake, absorbed in so deep a reverie that he would doubtless have remained unconscious of the stranger, had not the latter, confronting the recluse with stern visage and folded arms, thus addressed him in the Hindustanee tongue:

"'Young man, art thou not Bhagwandas, votary of the false deity Brahma?'

"Nowise disturbed, the other answered placidly:—

[a] Until the time of the Mohammedan conquest mentioned in this story, Hindu women were permitted to associate freely with men of their own caste.

"'And if I be, who art thou that darest thus impugn a God, concerning whom thou knowest perchance nothing?'

"The tall man smiled.

"'Mine is a purer creed than thine,' replied he, with an accent of disdain, 'and the God I adore admits no rivals on his throne, nor tolerates the impieties of idolaters. Know, O misguided youth, server of dumb images, that Allah the Almighty alone is divine, and that the faith of Islam only is true and heaven-descended! It is the will of Allah which has brought me hither to thee with this holy message on my lips, for I have heard in a dream that thou, Bhagwandas, art beloved of Heaven! Arise, quit this idolatrous valley, embrace the creed of our prophet, and a great destiny shall be thine! I have need of such as thou art in the fulfilment of my mission in the world.'

"Bhagwandas lifted himself upon his elbow, and looked stedfastly in the face of the Mohammedan.

"'I know thee,' he said, 'priest of a fierce and intolerant religion! It is by dint of thy wily tongue and subtle heart that our barbarian conqueror, the mighty chieftain of the Tartar host, hath of late embraced the faith of Mohammed. By means of thy craft and cunning, he and the seven thousand infidels who serve him have smitten and overcome the people of Kashmeer. Once were they free, dwelling in their own country, and serving their gods in peace. But thou and thy barbarians have brought our land into bondage, so that we keep our sacred festivals and sing our holy songs as strangers and aliens on its soil. And shall I, the servant of Brahma, forswear my solitude and my vows to make common cause with the oppressors of my race, and to gather with thee the paltry reward of worldly renown and greatness? Thinkest thou that I am still so much a child as to be dazzled with the tricks and gauds of time? Not so, false priest; I seek deliverance from the illusions of earth, and desire only to be united for ever in soul and substance with the vast spirit of Nature.'

"'Thou art bold of speech, young man,' returned the Mohammedan, 'and the bold should not be apt to despise the rewards of daring and manly enterprise. What! can the mute expectancy of annihilation possess charms for a youth of such vigour and comeliness as that which I behold in thee? Art thou not ashamed to waste thy best and noblest years in the contemplation of Divine Nonentity? Thy Nirvana is but the promise of Death. But as for me, my faith is full of life and enjoyment in the things of sense; I scheme, I work, I see the fruits of my labour! Am I not the chief minister of your Tartar prince, second only in the

new empire of which he is head? Rise, quit this unworthy ease, this studious repose, and enter with me upon a life more becoming the spirit of man[b].'

"The face of Bhagwandas was troubled, and he cast down his eyes.

"'Priest,' he answered, after an uneasy pause, 'thy message is not for me. True, that oftentimes my flesh is at war with my soul, and I long to be mingling in the press and stir of the world. But my God hath shewn me the emptiness of all things earthly, and well I know that the fair fruits with which you seek to tempt me are but apples of dust and bitterness. Nothing in Time can satisfy the spirit which yearns after Eternity.'

"Thus they disputed until the sun dipped below the margin of the lake, and the rapid fall of the night warned the stranger to quit the rose-island. Bhagwandas remained alone, lying upon the soft turf, and watching the play of sparkling light with which the rising Eastern moon silvered the silent waters before him.

"'Alas, Almighty!' he cried, lifting his hands heavenward, 'to what end is man endowed with soul? Must he for ever find the instincts of his nature and the necessities of his existence at war with the aspirations of the spirit which Thou hast breathed into his breast? Thou hast taught him to love gentleness and pity, Thou hast shewn him that the rule of benevolence is nobler than the dominion of physical force. Thou hast made him in his highest state to abhor carnage and bloodshed, and to subsist only on the fruit and the herbs of the earth, lest he pollute his soul with cruelty, and his body with unclean food. Idealizing the best he knows, he pictures Thee as a God delighting in mercy and love. Wherefore, then, dost Thou mock at his aspirations, and bar his upward progress with insuperable difficulty? Thou hast given him the heart of an angel, and hast clothed him with the skin of a beast! Vainly he seeks to emancipate himself from the law of the brute, and to live a higher life than they. Vainly he denies himself the diet of blood and slaughter, since with every breath he draws, with every step he treads, he involuntarily outrages the sacredness of life! How shall he believe Thee loving or pure, when the nature Thou hast produced is so full of foulness and of wrong? He feasts his eyes on the crimson and gold of the sunset, he dwells with rapture on the translucent purple of the deep summer sky, he listens entranced to the musical

[b] In the year 1323 A.D., Kashmeer was invaded by 70,000 Tartars, whose commander established himself as sovereign of the country, and was soon after converted to Mohammedanism by a priest, who in return, was made his prime minister.

voice of the cascade, or to the tender breath of the evening wind among the roses. He beholds the changeful glories of the lake, he inhales the fragrance of flowers, a taste of ineffable sweetness blesses every sense. For these things he adores, he praises, he loves Thee! But let him examine into the heart of all this outward beauty, and he will weep and wring his hands for pity and despair. For upon each of these fair islands, beneath the waves of this shining lake, and overhead in that calm supernal blue, innumerable deaths are being endured, innumerable pangs are being dealt, innumerable tortures are being suffered. Yonder, in the scented brake, some hungry lynx mangles and devours a dove; or a wild cat, yet crueller and more merciless, worries to death its innocent and terrified prey. Here also, in the gleaming waters, and in the air overhead, life is everywhere sustained upon death. Such, Almighty, is the course of Thy creation; nor is man, Thy greatest and noblest work, exempt from the common curse of bloodguiltiness. Like the grave itself he lives upon death, and every day beholds happy and sinless creatures render up their spirits with suffering, in order that he may continue to exist. How then shall he rejoice in his humanity, knowing well that the higher he advances in love and perfection, the more odious and awful to his imprisoned spirit must seem the bondage of his body, and the keener must become his sufferings of sympathy with the suffering world around him? Nay, let him purify his diet as he may, the very trappings and adornments of his person and his dwelling represent unnumbered agonies. On every side the fateful meshes environ him, he perceives the good, and must perforce do wrong! O wretched, wretched Man! who in earth or heaven shall deliver thee from the thrall of thy nature! Sorely, indeed, am I tempted at times to abandon in despair the contemplation of these terrible mysteries, and to plunge myself unthinking in a career of selfish fleshly enjoyment and worldly ambition. Strive as I may, I can never be perfect, since my body compels me to live in pollution; why, then, should I seek at all to spiritualize myself, when so doing I can but grow more restless and more sensitive? Better far to be as the stranger whom I have seen to-day, to whose soul life is precious for its sensuous delights! Ah miserable Bhagwandas! where shalt thou find counsel or consolation?'

"In musings and meditations such as these the young neophyte passed the greater part of the night. With the first streak of the sunrise Bhagwandaee's canoe came darting over the bright bosom of the lake, but this morning its fair mistress did not visit the rose-island of her betrothed alone. In the boat sat an old man of European race, wearing the

habit of his people, and carrying in his right hand a long staff surmounted by a cross, upon which was carved in ebony the image of a man crowned with thorns and crucified. Struck with the reverend aspect of his unknown visitor, Bhagwandas quickly rose from his post of contemplation, and hastened to greet him. 'Thou art welcome, father,' he said, with grave courtesy; 'Heaven and my betrothed have doubtless brought thee hither to aid and comfort me, for I see the mark of wisdom, and the seal of peace upon thy brow.'

"'Son,' responded the other, 'the fame of thy piety and of thine austerities hath not escaped mine ears. And, having somewhat to say to thee, I besought this maiden, thy betrothed, to carry me with her to the place of thy retirement, that we might converse together. If, then, as thy words imply, thou standest in need of mortal help and comfort, open thine heart to me, and let Heaven speak if it will by these unworthy lips. But what, in this abode of loveliness and repose, can occur to trouble or distract thee? Dost thou not dwell here by choice, apart from thy kind, communing only with Divinity?'

"'Father,' replied Bhagwandas with a sigh, 'thou knowest the rule of life prescribed by the laws of Manu for the observance of the zealous Brahmin. *"He is not to wish for life nor for death, but to expect his appointed time, as a hired servant expects his wages. He must subdue all passions and desires, and detach his affections from all worldly affairs."* To this calm and holy disposition I seek to bring myself, in obedience to the dictates of our religion, that if possible I may attain to the merit of saintship and escape the penalties and defilement of future transmigration, by uniting myself immediately after death with the pure spirit of the Deity. Thus hath my Guru [c] instructed me, and desiring to obey him to the utmost, I have come hither to dwell in this seclusion, that I may the better reflect upon the vileness and worthlessness of earthly things.'

"The old man turned his glance upon Bhagwandaee.

"'But, my son,' said he, looking from the beautiful girl to the neophyte, 'is not this thy betrothed? *Thou lovest,* —how, then, canst thou profess renunciation of all affection and desire that is not of Heaven?'

"'It is true,' replied Bhagwandas with visible confusion, 'that this maiden is my plighted wife. But I seek to make the love I bear her such as my Guru may approve. Day after

[c] At an early age the Brahmin youth is placed under the guidance and instruction of a man of his own caste, called a Guru, whose commands he is bound to obey, and who occupies the position of his spiritual parent and confessor.

day I wrestle with my lower self, striving to subdue the promptings of youthful affection, and to bring my soul out of the bondage it suffers by nature. By-and-by, I trust I shall so have weaned myself from the rule of earthly love as to regard all things with equal indifference, and should Heaven so ordain,—even to behold Bhagwandaee die without feeling a pang of regret for the loss of her.' But as he spoke he did not venture to look in the face of his betrothed, and I thought that his words seemed to cause her great distress.

"'Alas, poor boy,' said the stranger mournfully, 'these professions of thine recall to me the belief and the struggles of my own long-vanished youth. Fifty-five years ago I forsook my home, my friends, and my country, and solemnly devoting myself for ever to the life of poverty and virginity, I took arms as a Knight Templar in the last Crusade, which the princes Louis and Edward led against the Saracens. To thine ears, my son, these names convey no meaning, for thou and thy people dwell remote from all that concerns the objects and the interests of the Christian nations. For thee it must suffice to know that thus early in my career I vowed to renounce the secular life of wedlock, and to tread the path of manhood and of age alone and unbeloved of woman. Fervent in the resolution thus adopted, I landed on the shores of Palestine, and bore my part with enthusiasm in the enterprises of the Holy War. It was my fate to fall into the hands of the infidels. Many and sad were the years of my captivity, but at length I burst my chains and escaped into Arabia. There, while seeking the means of return to my own land, I was treacherously betrayed into a second bondage, and carried farther eastward by a wandering tribe of Bedouins. Then followed a time of bitter servitude, long and inexpressibly galling to my ambitious spirit, but fraught with precious lessons, which since I have learned to understand and to value. Thus the flower of my life was passed, and when the Arab chief who owned me died, I found myself restored to freedom at an age when freedom could no longer bring me adventure or renown. What few years might remain to me under the sun I resolved to devote to the preaching of my faith. With this intent I journeyed from city to city, but my infirmities and my sorrowful condition, though saving me often from persecution, gained me but scanty hearing. Coming at length to Kashmeer, the report of thy youthful sanctity reached me, and I sought my way to thy presence, believing that to one so earnest and so thoughtful the blessed message of divine truth could not be declared in vain.'

"'Old man,' replied the Brahmin, 'one whom I know not

has already been hither to me with a like announcement. He came to unfold to me the creed of his prophet Mohammed. And he spoke to me of manly ambition, and of the rewards of worldly glory and power as the only objects worthy humanity. But I told him that such vain desires must fail to content a soul profoundly sensible of the sadness and bitterness of earth, nor could all the gold and pomp of Islam avail to dazzle senses which perceive only the supreme horror and misery of existence. How should I, in whose ears the vast cry of Nature's travail is ever sounding, be beguiled by the pitiful sophistry of a solitary worldling? My soul is torn with the harrowing mysteries of creation, —vainly I seek to harmonize the actual with the ideal, and to reconcile the conditions of life with the law of love! If, then, thy message be worth anything to my bewildered mind, it is able to provide me with at least some clue to the solution of the enigma that torments me!'

"'Son,' replied the aged Templar, 'behold this figure carved here upon my staff. It is the image of the Christian's God! Not without awful significance is the Crucifix presented to the world as the universal symbol of religion! Pierced heart, wounded hands and feet, stricken brow, parched lips, agonized nerves and sinews, scourged and lacerated flesh, outraged modesty, hard unrestful bier of a lingering death,—all these are the everlasting type of the religious life on earth. No other form of martyrdom would exemplify it as completely, nor could rack, or block, or stake, or pillory present in so striking and acute a manner that distinctive penance of every member,—that wearying shameful exposure in the eyes of all the world,—that patient endurance of which the Cross is our eternal badge and sign. Strange inscrutable dispensation, vast allegory of Nature's duality, mysterious figure of a yet greater and profounder mystery,—the relation of the material to the spiritual,—of the Soul to the Flesh. Everywhere this duality confronts and confounds us! Always the body smitten that the spirit may aspire; always the contempt of the individual life and the cry of travail and death that new births may continue the eternal order of things undying; always the law of Nature at war with the intuition of the soul! Yet it is written in our holy books as it is in the Vedas which thou believest, that God is Love! He who insisted most upon that truth had stood nevertheless beneath the Cross on Calvary, and had witnessed there the supremest agony of the world! He who most insisted on the doctrine of God's eternal love had seen the martyrdom of the Innocent, had taken into his home the very Mother of Sorrows, and had become her adopted son! But when thou knowest God

as the beloved disciple knew Him, when thine head has lain upon that bosom whereon his was wont to rest, thou too, my son, shalt understand the mystery of Love made manifest in suffering!'

"Bhagwandas made a gesture of impatience. 'Father,' said he, 'all this which thou sayest does but confirm me in my despondency. Already I know the evil, and admit the mystery; thy crucifix justly symbolises both. But shew me the remedy,—tell me what I, in my own person, can do to re-adjust the world!'

"As he spoke he extended his hands in nervous eagerness, and his strained and anxious face bore testimony to the deep emotion which moved him. But the Christian answered in slow and solemn tones:—

"'Son, be more humble. Humility is the mother of the Virtues. It is not for thee nor for any man to re-create the heavens and the earth! Be comforted to know that the burdens of life are at least equally laid upon all flesh, and that if the beasts suffer in their blindness to satisfy human needs, man in his turn suffers at least no less with open eyes, foreknowing and foreseeing his perils and his trials from day to day. And as for thy part, my son, think of thyself as an atom in the whole which God has evolved, —as one of His many thoughts,—and fulfil to the fullest thy destiny. Do the work which lies nearest to thee, tread thy course in the midst of a halo of love. Much thou mayest heal,—much thou mayest mitigate; perchance for such ends wert thou even born. But beware of becoming indifferent,—lose not thine hold upon love. It is better for thee to suffer for love's sake, than to obtain peace by means of a hard heart.'

"'Would indeed,' cried Bhagwandas, 'that I could accept thy doctrine! But what use can I make of a tender heart, since I am myself the cause of daily death to scores of innocent beings?'

"'Is death then so great an evil?' pursued the Templar. 'What,—does not even thine own religion teach thee that Siva the Destroyer is equally divine with Bramah the Creator and Vishnu the Preserver, in the trinity of the Vedas? Death in its bare simplicity is no calamity, it is the knowledge of its approach that is horrible, and the sense of that which will be lost by means of it. For those creatures, then, to whom such knowledge and such sense is impossible, only the mere stroke of death remains, and this it is thy duty and the duty of all men to render as brief and as painless as can be. Thank God that it is in thy power to mitigate the real evil of the world,—the suffering *of the living!* Teach the race of men to regard with tenderness the creatures which toil

THE ROSE.

"She began to weave herself a garland."—(*To face p.* 109.)

for their benefit, the living beasts of burden; and if thou wilt, forbear thyself from slaughter. Be as perfect as thou art able to be,—God will ask no more at thine hands.'

"'Thou thinkest then, father,' said the young Brahmin, 'inasmuch as life everywhere admits of suffering, and the conditions of man's existence preclude him from attaining the highest ideal of perfection, that God is not to be found in Nature?'

"'What,' returned the pilgrim, 'do we understand by 'God?' Our highest—our noblest—our best imaginable. In all that Nature shews of innocence, beauty and tenderness, we recognise God. In all that humanity has of good and great we see him equally. God, then, is found for us in the best of Nature and of Man. So far as we know, man only has the intuition thus to formulate the idea of God. Having that power, he is bound by the very fact of his intuition to aspire after the best he perceives. And he can only aspire by means of Love,—Love which is symbolised by the Crucifix,—Love which is ever perfected by suffering.'

"Silence followed these last words, which the Templar accompanied with a sigh, and in the pause Bhagwandaee rose from her seat on the turf, and extending her hand to the branch upon which I blossomed amidst a cluster of my sister roses, she broke it from the tree, and began to weave herself a garland. The old man looked at her inquiringly as he marked her busy fingers; and she told him, smiling, that a great religious festival was to be held in a neighbouring temple at sunset, and that she and her betrothed must both be present to take part in the worship. 'And,' added the beautiful Hindu, 'since we are now commemorating our Feast of Roses, all the women will wear chaplets such as this which I am making, in honour of the god, to whom the flowers of holy Kashmeer[d] are more precious than any other blossoms of the earth.'

"'And who,' asked the Christian Knight, 'is the deity whose praises you are thus about to celebrate?'

"'It is Kama Deva, god of love,' replied Bhagwandaee, hiding her face in her veil.

* * * * * * *

"The hour of sunset, the third sandhya[e] of the pious Brahmin, had arrived, and crowds of devout adorers thronged the temple of Kama Deva.

"Vast aisles and labyrinths of variegated marble, colon-

[d] All Kashmeer is accounted holy land, and miraculous fountains abound in all parts of it. Many of its sacred monuments have to this day escaped the iconoclastic zeal of the Moslems.

[e] The Hindus observe three sandhyas, or hours of prayer, the first at sunrise, the second at noon, and the third at sunset.

nades of agate and porphyry, vaulted roofs ablaze with circles of coloured light,—all of splendour and of mysticism that could enchain the senses and fascinate the imagination was lavishly displayed within this pagan house of prayer. On every side the walls were covered with enormous frescoes of grotesque and monstrous figures, scented volumes of sandalwood and incense smoke rolled upward and broke against the lofty dome; and at the farthest end of the temple, where the clusters of lamps were thickest, festoons of embroidered tapestry, heavy with gold and gems, concealed the shrine of the Deity.

"Bhagwandaee, wearing the rose-garland upon her black shining tresses, stood among a group of dark-eyed maids and matrons similarly crowned. Near them I saw her betrothed and his Guru,—a man of stern and forbidding aspect. The neophyte's face was troubled, and he seemed absorbed in meditation which precluded him from joining in the general fervour; he stood erect and motionless, his eyes fixed upon the pavement, and his arms crossed over his breast. Little meaning could the rites of Kama possess for one whose course of life from day to day was a constant warfare with love, whose loftiest ambition was to merit the honours of the ascetic and recluse. Presently a low murmur of wild, rich music and a chorus of human voices stole from the sanctuary of the temple; the congregation fell with one consent upon their faces; the sound swelled and rose into a mighty rush of voluptuous harmony, and the huge folds of tapestry before the altar parted asunder in rolling waves, disclosing within the sacred adytum the mystic image of Kama Deva. Rubies, sapphires and emeralds of the rarest magnificence flashed from the brow and arms of the colossal idol. Its body shone with burnished metals, and in its five hands were strings of golden bees, and shafts of honey-coloured amber, tipped with roses. Wheels of scintillating flame encompassed the shrine, and kindled into unearthly brilliancy the myriad jewels which adorned the figure of the god. A great shout of exultation filled the echoing vistas of the temple, and mingled with the pealing chords of melody around the precincts of the altar, the voice of a mighty multitude celebrating the Divinity of Love!

"Slowly the sound died again into the music, and as the worshippers rose to their feet Bhagwandas was conscious of a new presence beside him, and the touch of a hand on his shoulder.

"Turning in surprise, he encountered the grave face of the Christian pilgrim, and perceived that he still bore with him the symbol of his philosophic faith. Startled and bewildered at so unexpected an intrusion, the young Brahmin scarcely

suppressed a cry, but the other bending towards him, whispered earnestly; 'Come out,—come hence with me while yet there is time; danger menaces these heathen revellers, but thou and thy beloved may yet be saved.' With these words he seized the unresisting youth, and drew him forth from the crowd, unobserved amid the general excitement of the moment. At the doorway of the temple Bhagwandas paused, and the name of his betrothed rose to his lips. She was already beside him,—the eyes of love are quick and watchful. Noiselessly the Hindu youth and maiden followed their guide into the outer court of the temple, and into the shade of a myrtle grove beyond. There they paused, and Bhagwandas was the first to speak.

"'Wherefore, father,' said he, 'hast thou faced the anger of my people thus, and exposed thyself to the peril of death? If my Guru should chance to have seen thine hand on mine, he will deem the laws of my caste transgressed, and all the repute of my devotion will not suffice to save me from the penalty of pilgrimage.'

"'Son,' replied the Christian, 'I have heard that to-night the Moslems intend to surprise the worshippers in your temple, and to pillage its shrine! Unarmed and unprepared, a company of revellers will have small chance against the forces of the Tartar invaders! Your Feast of Roses may speedily become an orgie of blood! Blame me not that I have endangered thy reputation or risked my own safety to save thee and thine affianced bride from impending doom. A brief time hence, and that reputation will avail thee nothing, for Kashmeer is in the hands of a nation by which your distinctions of caste are accounted childish folly. But thy life—with that thou mayest yet do great things! I could not endure the thought that a soul like thine should perish within the walls of a heathen temple. Forsake this corrupt religion, whose conceptions of God are as fantastic and deformed as its idols, and depart with me to the shores of the West. Thy spirit is too noble and clear-sighted to be bound with the cramp-irons of a system which, by forbidding man to foster love for human things, debars him from aspiration towards the Divine! I, too, in my youth committed a mistake yet more fatal than thine, and by an oath which I have not dared to break, severed myself from all the dearest relationships of our race. Be warned by me,—come forth from the gloomy solitude of feverish thoughts which prey upon thine heart, and enter instead into the healthy action of a loving human life. There do thine utmost,—neither God nor man will hold thee responsible for the laws of Nature! Love's royal way reaches from earth to heaven; it is surely long enough and broad enough for thee!'

"While yet the Templar spoke, a loud discordant shout rang through the evening calm across the beautiful valley; there followed a sudden tumult of hurrying feet and a noisy clash of arms; cries of dismay and entreaty burst out amid the confusion, and the fugitives in the myrtle grove looking forth from their place of concealment beheld the temple of Kama already surrounded and attacked by the Tartar legions. Then from the heart of the struggling host issued bands of terrified women with torn garments and dishevelled hair, wailing and beating their bosoms as they fled from the scene of their fateful gala.

"'O Almighty!' cried Bhagwandas, struck with indignation and sorrow, 'how hard are the deeds of the world!'

"His exclamation reached the ears of a Mohammedan priest, the director of the assault, who had reined up his horse close by the myrtle thicket. 'Ah, wretch!' retorted he, 'I know that craven voice! Thou art the idolater Bhagwandas, who yesterday refusedst my patronage! Thou art the coward who didst prefer a puerile seclusion to the ambition of a worthy manhood! Take the death thy meanness deserves, the death of a useless, whining cur!' And raising himself in his saddle, the Moslem drew his bow-string to his shoulder and launched an arrow at the breast of the Hindu youth. Then, not pausing to see the result of his aim, he struck spurs to his charger and galloped away into the thick of the medley. But the doom he had threatened fell upon one whom he knew not. With the noble impulsiveness of a generous nature the Christian Knight flung himself as a shield before the intended victim, and intercepted with his own body the winged death-bolt of the Mussulman. Bhagwandas and his betrothed uttered a cry of horror. Eagerly they tore the barb from the wound of the fallen man, and sought to staunch the blood which bathed his side. Vain was their tender care,—the sounds and sights of earth were already passing away from the dulled senses of the martyr. A few broken words escaped him, but they were uttered in a language unintelligible to the anxious ears of the listeners.

"He speaks in his own tongue,' whispered the Hindu maid, 'I know not what he says, but the look on his face is a look of peace.'

"Bhagwandas knelt, and gently touched the hand which clasped the ebony crucifix. The pulse no longer beat, the tide of life was quelled in the old man's veins for ever.

"'He is dead,' said the Brahmin, in hushed and solemn tones,—'the Almighty has recalled the soul he has purified. It is the enigma of Love made perfect in Suffering!'

"Bhagwandaee answered nothing, but the tears flowed fast from her soft dark eyes. With a tender and reverent gesture

she also fell on her knees, took the rose garland from her hair and laid it on the breast of the nameless stranger who had given his life to preserve her beloved. Then she rose and put her hand in that of the youth beside her.

"'Let us depart,' she said, 'the Moslems approach our hiding-place; we can do no more for the dead who has saved us.'

"Bhagwandas lifted the pilgrim's staff from the motionless hand which had borne it so faithfully through the world. 'Henceforth,' he said, putting the cross to his lips, 'this symbol of the Christian's faith and knowledge shall also be mine own. Let Love be Lord of all; the mystery of life and suffering are God's.'

"Then, carrying the staff, he turned to his betrothed, and hand-in-hand they passed down the myrtle-grove together.

"And I, the Rose of Kashmeer, withered upon the breast of the unknown dead!"

THE WATER-REEDS.

"There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of th' everlasting chime;
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat."
Christian Year.

I HAVE always from childhood entertained a great fancy for finding parables in Nature. It has ever been my special delight to frame for myself stories and allegories out of the voiceless things around me, and to discover in the silent insensate life of flower, stream, or sea, lively images of the mysteries of God's spiritual kingdom. In such a mood have I sought to pourtray, however faintly, the gentle life of temperance and of love severally typified by the Crocus and the Rose. For in the beautiful garden of the Rainbow, (of which we mortals catch a glimpse now and then, when the angels open the bright gates of heaven to let out the sunshine after a storm,)—in that fair Paradise of flowers, all the hues of our earthly blossoms bear part, and we see wheel within wheel of shining colours, wondrously blent into one another, and brighter far than any in meadow or garden below. And who, looking upward from the fair-faced flowers of earth to the more glorious dyes of the rainbow, can help reflecting on the allegory thus presented of the gentle and of the divine life? Here, in hidden and in high places alike, the saints of God display to Him their fair lives, and give out their sweet fragrance of good deeds; in heaven, eternally united, they encircle the throne of the Most Holy, fairer and brighter than when on earth, yet each differing from other as the stars in glory; every saint crowned through his own special grace, this one through patience, that through ardent love, another through faith or Christian valour. And in this heavenly garden my golden crocus has its place with the rest, side by side with the clear stedfast green of the fourth circle,—the green that speaks of refreshment and of strength, the hope of faithful souls. Come, then, with me to the brook which winds round the base of yonder bush-grown hill; there on the gnarled trunk of a fallen oak,

sheltered from the somewhat too rough zephyrs of early autumn, which indeed are apt at times to be rude play-fellows, we will sit together and interpret the parable of the tall green water-reeds at our feet.

Yes, of the Water-reeds! Be sure that these slender graceful fairy-wands, favourites alike of the old mythologists and of the modern poets, have a story to tell and a moral to point us at least as worthy our interest as those we have heard already!

Here, as I lean back at my ease against this mossy elm, and watch the quivering reeds and the great bull-rushes tossing their heads in the wind, I picture to myself the ghostly shape of their representative Genius. I see the Spirit of the Water-rushes, floating above the shadowy stream like a ray of sunlight, and her aërial garments, as they curl to and fro with the breeze, seem rythmical in their motion as though swayed by the pulse of some celestial music which mortals cannot hear. In her bosom she carries the bright flame of a divine lamp, whose clear shining illumines her stedfast eyes, so that they bear in their depths an expression of singular strength and rapture, as if the holy fire had concentrated within them all its power and vitality. And in the face of the fair spectre, I see the waiting, abstracted look which painters give to the countenance of S. Cecilia, the listening look of one who catches afar off the holy melodies of heaven.

Then, while yet I gaze upon her with wonder, a voice like the plaintive long-drawn sigh of the wind among the rushes of the stream issues from the phantom's nebulous lips. Presently it swells into a strong murmuring sound, such as one hears upon the rivers at sunset, when the evening gales are shaking the tall reeds of the shallows, and methinks I see the cloudy veil upon the head of the Spirit, lifted as though by an airy breath. Beneath its folds I perceive a wreath of pliant water-grasses, drooping their green spear-like blades over her neck, and about the long uncurled hair that seems to hang round her as though dank and heavy with moisture.

"I am," says the beautiful eidolon, "the Genius of the green water-reeds, under the figure of which the seers of old and new times have discovered a true emblem of Music. But the music of the soul upon earth, which to mortal sense is inaudible, is the spiritual harmony of Patience, whereof also the life of the water-reeds is a continual type. For as the storms that sweep across them, and the rains that beat upon their stedfast heads, serve but to elicit from them sweet cadences, and can neither tear them from their place, nor lay bare their roots which are covered by the impregnable waters, so is it with the soul that abides in patience. There

is no tempest of adversity, no rain of tribulation that shall be able to overcome the patient man; the fiercer the assaults of the world, the sweeter and the louder is the melody within his heart. And because the principle of that divine music is Patience, the strong sustaining grace whereby all the virtues are established and fortified, the reeds also, which even in angry weather emit unceasingly an excellent harmony, are a symbol of the soul's continual music, pervading the life of those who love God, and who being rooted and grounded securely in His love, are safe evermore from the jars of this world's confusion and discord. Wherefore it is written, that 'through patience the saints shall possess their souls.' And the lamp of God, whose fire I bear beneath my vestment, is the holy spirit of Fortitude, whereof the glory is like that of the emerald surrounding the heavenly throne. And forasmuch as the flowers of earth are always enshrined in leaves of green, let that be a token to you that every Christian grace must in like manner be strengthened and set about with Patience, since by means of patience only can any virtue endure and be preserved. It suffices not to strike now and then some stray note, there must be a sequence and continuation of sweet sounds to form a melody, nor must those who would make music in their hearts to the Lord be fain to weary in well-doing. But let not such be fearful or dismayed, for the last chord of their symphony shall be sounded in the full light of the Perfect Day, when there shall no more be any need of patience, but instead thereof a new song shall be sung in the temple of the Lord, and they who have waited for Him shall receive their heart's desire.

"Listen, daughter of earth, while I recount to you my history, and learn from it what patience and fortitude were once able to accomplish even for men of ruder creeds and rougher times than yours. Nor marvel, while I speak, that my story tells of days so far remote. I am of ancient birth and noble lineage; my ancestors, indeed, were the reeds of whose green hollow stems the river-god first made the musical Syrinx, and the earliest remembrances of my life are all inwrought with classical and legendary ages. Still you may see me carved in stone or chiselled in marble upon the façade of old-world temples, wrapping the sacred feet of a nymph or adorning the brows of an ancient river-god. Wild and terrible times they were,—those bygone days of poetic dæmon-worship; but there were noble lives lived, and fair examples set even then which many a Christian of to-day might worthily take for pattern. And if you care to know the story of such a life, though indeed a brief one, hear what the Spirit of the Water-reeds can tell.

"Two thousand three hundred years ago, according to the measurement by which you mortals mete out eternity, I chanted my windy music about the shady margins of the river Permessus in Bœotia. That was a time of disaster and dread to all the broad land of Greece, for Xerxes, the Persian, had come into the country with an army which could scarce be counted for its vast multitude, and on all sides the peasants and the men-at-arms alike trembled at the bare thought of encountering the moving hosts of this terrible invader. There was a council held in the Isthmus of Corinth, and every Athenian and Spartan state sent deputies to assist at its deliberations; but the hearts of the sturdiest patriots misgave them in the midst of their courage, when they heard from certain of their countrymen who had been sent to watch at Sardis while Xerxes mustered his warriors there, how huge a host it was that the son of Darius was leading against the free homes and holy shrines of Greece.

"Close by a wind of the river Permessus, just where the waters met in a broad shallow pool, and where my green bristling spears were thickest and my music loudest, stood the homestead of a Thespian farmer named Stratiotes. His wife was a Spartan woman of a sweet countenance, and they had one child, some fifteen years old, crisp-haired and sinewy-limbed, a boy with the heart of a hero and the face of a god.

"Now when the war between the Persians and the Greeks began to be imminent, and the Isthmian council met to decide for the plans of defence, all the men of Thespia made an agreement among themselves to help in the army that was to be led against the enemy, for some of the people in the northern provinces, overcome with dread because of the vast multitude of the Persian ranks, were already shewing signs of a desire to submit tamely to the fate which they deemed inevitable, and were afraid to take up arms against the eastern power. But the Thespians were true men, and every one of them who was free to bear a weapon in defence of his country went eagerly to enrol himself in the guard which the council was about to send into Thessalia, to keep the passes there against the advancing foe. For otherwise they feared to be taken for traitors or cowards like their northern comrades, and they thirsted to prove their integrity in the eyes of all Greece.

"Then when the farmer Stratiotes heard that the men of Thespia were enlisting themselves to serve in the war against the Persian king, the fire of his great race kindled in his veins, and he longed to be out and away upon the march also, with the armies of his country, to shake his spear in the faces of the strangers, and to fight to the death for

Stratiotes and Metis by the river Permessus.—(*To face p.* 118.)

the holy fanes of Father Zeus and Hera the immortal Queen of heaven.

"'It is to no noble end,' said he to his wife, 'that I remain here like a shepherd's dog, minding my flocks or watching the boiling of the meal-pot, while the citizens gird on their armour and go out to battle like brave men. They shame me, and I cannot endure to live with the stain of a blush upon my forehead. What matter whether the kine fatten, or the fields yield well, or the barns be filled, when the ground upon which we tread trembles beneath the thunder of six million hostile feet, and the air we breathe is heavy with the sound of many tongues speaking a strange language? Let me be away, wife, where it becomes a Thespian to be, fighting for thee and for the land of Greece, by the side of Thespian men.'

"And Metis the wife made answer, raising her wise brave eyes to his,—

"'I am a Spartan woman,—shall I bid thee refrain from battle? Go, my husband, and the gods of Greece go with thee!'

"And I heard the words, for Stratiotes and his wife stood in the door of their house as they conferred together, and the wind came up out of the river to me, and I clapped my many-fingered hands and sang a pæon of strengthening assurance and patient hope.

"So the farmer called his son and said to him,

"'Child, I am going to join the forces of Bœotia. Watch over the farm until I return, have a care of thy mother, and in my stead be master of my servants and of my cattle.'

"Then the boy lifted his face to his father's, and I saw that the fierce blood of Theseus the slayer of the Minotaur, and of the divine son of Danae was aglow in his fervent eyes.

"'Father!' he cried, 'let me also go with thee! Let me fight by thy side for the freedom and for the glory of our land!'

"But a cloud came over the countenance of the Thespian farmer, and he answered his son reproachfully.

"'Boy, do I leave thee to a mean or an unworthy task? Art thou become too proud to serve the mother who bore thee, or too wise to mind thy father's affairs?'

"And when the child reddened for shame and penitence, his mother spoke for him, taking him kindly by the hand where he stood beneath the portico of the door, hanging his curly head in silence:

"'He means no harm, Stratiotes; it is but natural that he should wish to be with thee, and so, too, should I, if I were strong enough to bear arms. But the time will come,' she said, addressing herself to the boy, and caressing his thick

tresses with her white fingers, 'when thou, Iphios, shalt no longer be bidden to stay behind while thine elders go out to the battle. Next year, maybe, thy father himself will help thee to brace the war-harness upon thy limbs; meanwhile thou must be patient, and gather strength for the manhood that is to come to thee.'

"Then Iphios kissed his mother's hand and promised obedience, and she bade him go straightway to his work again in the fields with the farm labourers. And as he went, taking the low path along the shores of the river, the water-reeds that stood in the shallows beckoned him with their lissome waving hands, and shook their long green tresses, and sang softly in his ear of the blessed power and might of patience, that is able to make heroes of the feeble and the unrenowned, and gods of mortal men. And he passed on with the music of that song in his heart, to do his daily task in the pastures and orchards of his father.

"Not many days after that, Stratiotes departed to join the army that was to march northwards to keep the mountain passes against the Oriental hosts, and the Thespian came with his sword in his hand to bid his wife and his son farewell, as they two sat together by the margin of the river Permessus. And when Iphios rose up to greet his father, as the good fashion was in the old heathen times, when sons revered their sires and young men their elders, Stratiotes laid his hand upon the boy's head and said to him:

"'My son, I am going to leave thee a charge in my absence, which charge, if thou wouldst prove thyself a true Greek, thou wilt faithfully fulfil. For the first duty a soldier must learn is Obedience. I set thee, therefore, to keep house for me while I am away at the war, and to guard thy mother, and to look diligently after the herds, and the fields, and the barn-presses. Obey thy mother also in everything that she would have thee do, and make no excuse to her, whether her bidding seem right or not in thine eyes. Whenever I can, I will send messages to thee, to let thee know how the campaigning prospers, and how it fares with me; but until I return, or thy mother desire it, desert not this house nor remove hence. We have both a service to do, my son; I, to fight for the land with sword and spear in the face of sudden alarms and dangers; thou, to abide in the gates of our home, doing the duty of a sentinel,—which is not the less the business of a soldier,—waiting patiently at thy post in all fidelity of heart and cheerfulness of mind. For if thou prove worthy in the easier charge, I shall the better know to trust thee by and by with a manlier. But for the present Iphios, have patience.'

"Then he kissed his wife and the boy, and they all wept sore together, for they knew that farewell embrace might, perhaps, be their last. And Stratiotes heaved up his sword upon his thigh, and turning his face away from home, sped forth towards the Thespian camp, and Metis and her son stood watching until the crest of his helmet dipped below the slope of the purple reach that outlay the farm-lands, and they could see him no more.

"So gladly in the valiant old days men went forth to lay down their lives for the honour of their gods and their nation; so patiently and bravely then, women and children yielded up their beloved if the voice of the country called her sons to arms! Ah, daughter of the Newer Age! your civilization and your international commerce have cost you a noble and a genuine passion;—patriotism is quenched under the bushels of modern policy and philosophy!"

And with the utterance of the last words, the voice of the phantom rises into a cry, a wailing, stirring cry, like two musical tones blent in one sound, a cry of mingled complaint and warning, and the shadowy palpitating form takes suddenly a brighter luminance, and comes out before me sharp and distinct in the midst of the soft light, as though the miraculous wind which environs it had fanned it into a vehement flame. But while I am watching, like flame it sinks again and grows shadowy as before, and the mystical breathing of the surrounding air only dallies lightly with the long floating veil and shroud-like garments that drape the shape of the spectre. And like the low symphony left among the swaying rushes when the blast that fiercely assailed them has passed away, recurs the plaintive recitative, soughing and sinking at intervals, but always conveying in every modulation a strong sense of latent power, self-restrained, and voluntarily repressed.

"Days and nights when they mete out times of prosperity and happy love are like tall polished columns of victory, garlanded with ample wreaths, and signalling each one some new delight or triumph. But days and nights when they measure the absence of a beloved one, are but blank unwelcome mile-stones, marking the way from Paradise across a barren and sunless waste, and without Patience one may well grow weary and faint on such a journey as that.

"But although times were changed at the Thespian farmhouse, and the voice and presence of its master no longer made it home, Metis and her son were no idle sentimentalists; and still the distaff was busy, and still the fleece was combed and carded, and the wool spun, and the handmaidens were busy about their mistress with distaff and shuttle indoors, while Iphios and the men-servants toiled

in the fields, or threshed and winnowed briskly in the barns and garner-sheds. For Patience is always cheerful.

"There came to the farm one day, not long after the departure of Stratiotes, a citizen of Thespia, who had often visited Metis and her husband in pleasanter times, and whom Stratiotes had now charged with a letter to her and to his son. And he wrote that the council had decreed to send four thousand men under the command of Leonidas, one of the kings of Sparta, to keep the pass of Thermopylæ by the Hot Gates, where were the warm sulphurous springs in which sick persons were wont to bathe, because there was medicinal virtue in the waters. Through this narrow pass, the land-troops of the Asiatic lord would be forced to make their track, for all along the southern boundary of Thessalia, the Œta hills rose up and barred the way against the advancing enemies of Greece. King Leonidas,—said the letter,—had brought with him three hundred men from Sparta, brave and lion-hearted as himself, and there were seven hundred Thespians, with Phocians and Thebans and men from Mycenæ; but at best it was a pitiful band to keep the Gates against so many thousand legions as Xerxes was leading southward. And yet, notwithstanding this great disadvantage, Stratiotes bade his wife consider hopefully, that if Greece lacked in numbers, she was superior in moral power of resistance, because the soldiers of her scanty forces went forth as freemen to fight for their hearths and their holy shrines; but the myriads which swelled the Persian host were soulless mercenaries and wretched slaves, bribed for lust of gain to pander to the ambition of the Eastern tyrant, or torn preremptorily from their homes to serve an arbitrary master, in whose cause they had no natural interest, and for whom they could feel no devotion, sympathy or admiration. 'To fight well,' pursued Stratiotes, 'one must not wear fetters.'

"I did not see the bearer of this letter deliver it to his friend's wife, for she received him in the house; but when the family had dined, Metis and Iphios brought their guest out of doors, to sit in the customary seat on the river marge, under the larch and aspen trees, and there they talked together about the things Stratiotes had written. And when the visitor praised the gallant Leonidas and his Spartan comrades, and told Metis how, before they quitted their native city, they had caused their own funeral rites to be performed, believing so surely that they went forth to their deaths, and yet going so gladly, I perceived that the large dark eyes of Iphios glowed with intense longing, and more than once, involuntarily he clenched his hands, as though he felt within their grasp the hard unyielding sword-hilt, and

oftentimes he sighed with all the bitterness of futile and passionate desire, while his glance roved about the quiet pasture and meadow-lands, and he panted for the stir of the fighting northward, and the clash of sounding spears and hauberks, and all the manly noise of war. But when the soft airs of the river shook the water-rushes, and they whispered their gurgling music and waved their blossoming russet heads to and fro, the fresh river smell came up from the midst of them, and cooled the fever in the burning heart of Iphios, filling it instead thereof with the strong refreshment of Patience. For the reeds have no luscious perfume like that of the flowers, they breathe only the keen peculiar scent of the water, from which they draw their sustenance, and the restoring strength of the wind which invigorates them. Even so also Patience makes not itself apparent by any acts or signal tokens of brilliant virtue, but is only the true and continuous evidence of the Christ-like life, and of the abiding presence of the Spirit of God. Therefore, also, the water-reeds are entirely green, which is the colour in particular of hope and refreshment, and, in the diviner sense, of that everlasting life which is the portion of the Saints who through patience inherit the promises of their Lord. Neither do the water-reeds bear flowers of any bright or delicate dyes, but only small brown-coloured blossoms, signifying thereby that Patience is not an active but a passive virtue, mightiest in retreat, and in its very nature repugnant to deeds of manifestation; since, as I have said already, it is rather the strength and setting of other virtues than an independent virtue of itself. Without green leaves the loveliest flowers would look amiss, losing both brilliance and grace; and without patience, all the virtues would be spasmodic and feeble, having neither power of continuance nor of edification.

"Hear further, therefore, child of this new impetuous age, what I did for Iphios the Thespian in the iron times of the long past. There were scant modes of correspondence then, and they who stayed at home were forced through many weary, anxious days and nights to endure the silence of their kindred in the camps, for messengers could rarely be sent unofficially, and horses' feet are slower far than the steam and posts of modern years.

"Stratiotes went in the Grecian ranks to keep the gates of Thermopylæ, and there came to Metis and her son never a word nor a token of him for many a dreary day. But at last, one evening, as the twilight was beginning to fall over the country, and the western slopes of Mount Helicon had shut out the last low streaks of the sunset, it befell that Metis went out of the house with one of her maidens to gather simples, and perceived a small company of armed men

eastward beyond the farm-lands, going slowly along the way to Thebes. And when she saw that they carried Grecian ensigns, she stood still and sent her maid to call Iphios to her from the farm-stores, where he was at his business; and when he came, she bade him run after the soldiers, and ask their leader what news he brought of the fight, and whether he or any of his battalion knew how Stratiotes fared.

"So Iphios went to meet the company, and Metis stood by the river with her handmaid, watching him, and awaiting his return; but the captain of the band, when Iphios had told him his errand, desired his comrades to halt beneath the trees of the roadside, and crossing the meadows with the boy, came back with him to Metis, and saluted her by name.

"'Fair mistress,' said he, 'I would I had good tidings to give you, but the gods have ordered it otherwise. I and my company are Thebans, who return to our city after a long and toilsome journey, having chosen to abandon a leader whose designs for resisting Persia must assuredly end in miserable defeat.'

"'Who is this leader, sir?' asked Metis.

"'He is Leonidas,' answered the Theban, 'to whom four thousand men of Greece were lately entrusted, but now he commands only fourteen hundred.'

"'Leonidas!' cried the wife of Stratiotes. 'Is not that the brave king of the race of Hercules, the warrior whom all Greece commended for his valiant heart?'

"'That may be,' replied the captain, scornfully, 'but I trow none have praised him for his wise head! By this time he has spilt the best blood of Greece in a vain and senseless struggle.'

"'I pray you, sir,' said Metis, 'explain the meaning of your words, for my son and I know nothing of all these things.'

"'Last night,' answered the Theban, 'a man from our camp, a traitor named Ephialtes,—may the gods torment him!—betrayed us to Xerxes, and shewed one of his generals a narrow way across the lower ridge of the mountains, where the woods are thickest, to the end that a Persian cohort might be led down into the valley of the Phocians which lies on the near side of the springs, so as to take us in the rear, enclosing our army on all sides with Asiatic forces. Very early therefore this morning, before the dawn, our guards perceived the shimmer of the Persian spears in the openings of the forest, and moreover, there came to us one from the outer wall of the Hot Gates, with news of the enemy's movements. Then Leonidas, calling us together, warned us that before noon to-day we should be shut in by the foe who advanced every minute nearer upon our ranks, and that those

of us who believed it would be indiscreet and blameable to resist such fearful odds, should retreat while there was time. Then Megistias the seer added his wise words, and testified that the portents of the victim slain that morning were of disaster, and doom, and death. And we, when we heard that, and knew that to remain in our place would be madness unworthy of free and prudent men, elected to depart homewards before the unequal strife began, and with us went also many others, so that we quitted the camp an army of two thousand six hundred. But Leonidas and his Spartans, with some eleven hundred more, preferred to stay at Thermopylæ, to be cut in pieces there like dead beasts in the shambles.'

"Then said Metis very earnestly, when the Theban captain had made an end of his story,

"'Sir, did my husband remain behind,—Stratiotes the Thespian,—is he still with Leonidas?'

"'Mistress,' answered the captain, 'all the Thespian men remained, and Stratiotes was of the number. I myself beheld him burnishing his spear for the fight, as my cohort quitted the Gates.'

"'I thank the gods!' cried the Spartan woman, triumphantly, 'for had Stratiotes returned with you, he should have tasted neither meat at my board nor rest upon my bed! But he was found worthier!'

"'Mistress,' retorted the Thespian, angrily, 'your words are uncivil! Do you taunt me with cowardice? Is it right to waste the blood of noble men as water is poured upon some arid field?'

"'Say, rather,' responded Metis, fixing him with her mild wise eyes, 'that such noble blood is sown as seed in a fruitful soil. For though indeed the ground receive it, there shall yet arise to Greece, from such deaths as these, a race of heroes, fired with admiration and love of their fathers, eager to imitate their deeds, and proud to follow the example of their glorious manhood. And in that coming generation of valiant soldiers, my son Iphios shall bear his part the better, remembering how dutifully his father feared not to die for the gods by the side of the brave Spartan king.'

"But when he heard that, the Theban laughed incredulously, and departed, muttering to himself; and Metis turned and looked at her boy.

"'Iphios,' she said, 'even now he who gave thee thy life may have lost his own for the sake of Greece. Let us entreat the gods, my son, that thy father may not die in vain.'

"Then where the captain of the Theban deserters had left them, Iphios and his mother and her handmaid knelt and adored the Immortals, praying that albeit that very day, now

dying behind the purple hills, should bear away with it into the place of shadows the spirits of Stratiotes and his fellow-soldiers, that yet the stedfast courage and undaunted service of so good and faithful a company might plead as a mighty oblation before the Divine Council, and redeem the land of Pallas Athenæ. And when the prayer was ended, I lifted up my voice in the river shallows, and sobbed from the midst of my blossoming heart, 'Amen! Patience and faithfulness shall conquer the world!'

"Then forthwith the night fell darkly about the land, and high above the slow-gliding waters the cohorts of heaven came forth from the purple pavilion of the Great King, immoveable and stedfast, armed with innumerable shafts of steely radiance, and glittering in burnished panoply, —star above star, with grand patient eyes of light, defending the gates of God.

"Two more days went by, and yet there came no tidings from Thermopylæ. Many times I saw Iphios ascend a small hill that was close by a coppice on the farm-lands, and stand there shading his eyes with his hand, while he looked out eastward for some messenger going to Thespia or to Thebes with news of Leonidas and of his battalions. But after he had watched for a good while in this manner without success, and it grew towards sunset on the third day, he espied a man running alone in the direction of the town, with rough uncovered hair, and his apparel in great disorder. As he ran he halted now and then, and sometimes stumbled, as though he were spent with fatigue, and his countenance was pallid and disfigured with dust and sweat. Iphios called loudly to him from the place where he stood watching on the hillock. 'What news of the war, friend? I beseech thee, if thou knowest anything, give me tidings of King Leonidas and of the army at Thermopylæ, but specially of Stratiotes the Thespian!'

"Then, straightway, at the sound of her son's cry, Metis opened the door of the house and came out to hear the news. And when Iphios perceived his mother he went to meet her, and the man whom he had hailed followed him also, panting for breath as he drew near. He was clad in the garb of a Spartan helot, and his dress was torn in many places and dabbled with mire, and his feet bled upon the ground as he trod. But before Metis and her son had time to note all these things, the man lifted up his voice and cried aloud, striking his breast as he spoke, like one who bewails a terrible calamity.

"'Alas, sir! what tidings do you look for at my lips? I am the slave of the Spartan citizen Eurytus, and I am returning to my lord's house with the news of his death.

For Leonidas is killed, and all that remained with him at the Gates; not a man is left alive save myself and a few other helots, who fled to the mountains and hid there among the glens and morasses, waiting in despair and fear for a time to escape southwards. And as for that Stratiotes of whom you speak, I myself beheld him lying dead upon a heap of slain men, pierced with a score of Persian arrows, fallen with his face towards the camp of the enemy, for he died with his sword in his hand, and dropped upon the place where he fought. But the victory was with the Asiatic king, and his army is even now marching southward behind my flying footsteps; fly also, therefore, while there is yet time; for Xerxes lost two thousand men at Thermopylæ, so well and so bravely fought that handful of Grecian citizens; wherefore there is rage and vexation in the hearts of the Persian captains, and they will spare none, for they know not mercy.'

"And with that, the helot turned again, and fled on, as he had come.

"But when Metis heard that the victory was not with Greece, and that the Persians were marching towards Athens, the colour faded in her face, and she stood for a moment motionless and white as the marble divinity of a Phidian Pallas, with eyes that saw nothing save the passion of the burning soul behind them, and tense pallid lips restraining a fire of noble anger and regret, too hot, and fierce, and deep to find a vent in sound. So for a moment she stood; and then, tossing her arms above her veiled head, fell prone along the sedgy turf with a single half-articulate sigh, so low and soft that scarce the reeds themselves could catch the breath of it, and yet it was the burden of a true and livelong love, the utterance of a name that had been talisman to the most wondrous loyalty and the noblest fortitude the world ever witnessed.

"'Greece!'

"Not her husband, not her own immediate loss and sorrow, nor the desolation of her home, nor her newly-made widowhood; but the degradation, the disgrace of the country she loved! Gladly for Greece she had given Stratiotes, as she would have given Iphios also by-and-by, for indeed she knew that to them, likewise, it was honour to die in the war-harness, and that to such great souls death brought neither darkness nor extinction, for the Immortals made heavenly beacons of them, that the whole world might see them through all the long years to come, grand and peaceful in the blue open firmament: Perseus, and Bellerophon, and Heracles, and many another doer of glorious deeds, spirits of heroes that rejoice for ever with the holy gods themselves in the asphodel gardens of heaven.

"'Greece!'

"In that one word the Spartan woman uttered a whole creed, rich in the pathos of a master emotion which has long since died out of the earth; and fitly with the sound of the much-loved name upon her lips, she breathed away her soul, and passed with the dying sun through the dim haze of twilight to the land of another and a fairer dawn.

"Trembling and dismayed, Iphios raised his mother in his arms, and fixed upon the white deathly face that lay upturned in the grey light a gaze of earnest and terrible anguish. For through the half-closed lips of Metis, a thin scarlet stream flowed slowly downward upon her white vested bosom, staining its pure drapery and the white immobile hand drooping across it with a dye that was more intense and sudden in its warm clear brightness than the ruddiest bar of sunset in the western sky. In that shock of tempestuous grief which had broken up the great deeps of her heart, life itself had been rent away from her, and as Iphios breathlessly scanned the drooped, quivering eyelids, and heard the thick convulsive gurgle of blood in her throat, he knew that even then he was left to bear the coming doom *alone*. Where he knelt by the river-side, the golden glow of the sunset brightening his dark curls, and irradiating the wan, still face on his bosom with a rosy mocking flame that seemed to ape the semblance of that life which too much love and sorrow had quenched for evermore, the son of Metis and Stratiotes lifted up his heart to the gods of Greece, and prayed for the gift of Patience.

"'Let me not fail in courage, O lords of heaven!' he cried, 'neither suffer me to weary in my obedience, for I come of a strong race that has always loved brave men, and hated renegades to the death. I am the son of a soldier,—let me live as my father died!'

"And the wind of the evening that bore aloft these holy words, swept across the shallows as it went, and awoke the music of God in the heart of the Water-reeds; and they stretched their long pliant arms towards the kneeling figure beside them, bending their stately, reverent heads, and calling to him:

"'Take courage, Iphios, knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh Patience!'

"Then the sun sank; and the boy, lifting his gaze from the face of the dead, turned himself towards the west, where the glory of the day had gone down, and the cool vernal-eyed twilight, like the clear deep sea-green in summer-time, covered the far reaches with the colour of Hope, spreading upward through the rising mists of earth till it touched the summit of heaven and lost itself there in the fulness of

the sacred Amethyst. And while Iphios beheld it, the voice of the river-reeds answered him again from their place in the glassy water that was all bright and scintillant with the sheen of reflected glory:

"'Take patience, Iphios, son of courage and of good counsel, for Patience is the beginning of Hope!'

* * * * * * *

"They performed the funeral office for Metis in haste, because every hour the army of the Persians approached nearer and nearer; and when the last rites were over, the serving men and women besought Iphios to abandon the farm and retire with them to Trœzen or Ægina, 'for thither,' said they, 'all the people of the country round us who value their lives have already fled.'

"But Iphios answered them; 'Fly if you will, you are free to depart, for I will detain none of you. But as for me, your master charged me to stay at my post unless my mother bade me otherwise, and she died here giving me no word of dismissal nor even of warning. And, therefore, because the place of her death is dear to me, and because I hold my father's house and goods as a sacred keeping, I shall abide by them, defending them as best I may, until the gods send us easier times, and I am able to recall you. But if not, I am still content, I can die in no better place than this.'

"So he sent them all away, and returned to the farmstead alone. And day by day he went out as usual to his work, only that now he had to do the labour of the servants also; and the flocks were folded and the steers fed, as they had been before the herdsmen abandoned them, for Patience is not found in idleness, but in dutiful endurance.

"Then came the end. For one night, when the hours of the darkness were far spent, and Iphios was asleep in the house, and the stars were growing large and liquid with coming dawn, the reeds of the Permessian rivulet were moved by a strange, unwonted air, air that parched instead of refreshing, air that carried deadly heat and oppression on its swift wings, such as had never before breathed across the open pasture-levels of Bœotia.

"And over all the eastern reaches arose a red glowing light that was not the light of dawn, and it smote full upon the closed casements of the farmhouse, and awoke the boy as he lay alone in his silent chamber within, dreaming perchance in fantastic allegories of the glory of that beatific Vision yet unrevealed to men, but awaiting only the fulness of time to pour forth its wondrous consolation upon a noble army of martyrs and patient soldier-like saints, whose

upon wave of airy motion sweeps over the cloudy form, I entreat the Spirit, ere she vanishes into the sunlight, to tell me whence comes the strange and rhymical wind which surrounds and supports her so mysteriously.

"Daughter of earth," she responds, "this also is a parable. For this wind, though it continually rends and divides me, can yet in no wise dissolve my substance nor scatter my members, but the rather strengthens and renews me. So, likewise, the patient soul is neither distracted nor daunted by trial, but rather inflamed thereby to greater vitality. And as the Water-reeds cannot utter their music unless they are stirred and awakened by the breath of the wind, so neither can the soul of man give forth its melody of itself alone, but must be moved thereto by the power of the Spirit of God. 'Unto Him therefore give the praise, who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure!'"

And with that last word the phantom stretches her ghostly hands towards me in token of farewell, and before I can speak again she has melted into a ray of flickering sunshine, that dances and twinkles gaily on the brown heads and green lissome stems of the rushes at my feet.

* * * * * * * *

Have I, after all, been dreaming again? Maybe; but the dream, I think, is worth remembering nevertheless. The air is growing chilly,—rise, my dear friend, you must surely have been asleep too! Good-bye, water-reeds,—we are going home!

THE MARIGOLD.

A STORY OF THE FRANCO-GERMAN WAR.

"I never felt my nature so divine
As at this saddest hour."
Lovell Beddoes.

SOME time ago, I sat reading at evening-time beside an open window which gave upon the picturesque street of a little German town. Between the leaves of my book lay a dead and faded marigold, whose history I did not know, for it had dropped, just dried and shrivelled as it was, from the pages of a nun's Prayer-book, as she rose from her devotions before the altar of a neighbouring church. And I, interested in the incident, and impressed by the beautiful pale face of the young "religious" herself, had carefully lifted the flower from the stone pavement, and ever since had treasured it as a memorial of sacred, and perhaps melancholy associations. Rapidly the time of sunset approached, and as the golden doors of heaven opened in the far west to admit the angel of the Day, a beam of mellowing light fell upon the leaves of the volume I held, and attracted my attention to the glories before me. The afternoon had been one of brief and sudden showers, and now, round the shining lake of sunset radiance, lay shadowy continents of grey cumuli, with dusky fringes and inner tracts of dark hill-like circles, over which was flung, distinct and beautiful, its topmost height lost in heavenly glory, the seven-coloured bridge of the angels of God.

Then, as I sat gazing dreamily at this beautiful scene, there stole upon my senses the reposeful, insidious drowsiness which comes of silent contemplation; the rainbow faded, the sun sank, my book glided slowly down upon my knee, and I, yielding to the mesmeric influence of the balmy air and soothing hour, passed contentedly into the land of slumber.

And, presently, I dreamed that adown a ray of golden light there came floating into the room before me a lovely spirit, with airy arms extended downwards towards the earth. She was covered with a veil, like a mourner, but beneath the tawny web-like tissue I could see that all her cloudy limbs glowed through and through, as though with

hidden fire. Then in a sweet voice, low and tender, as the wail of an Eolian harp, she thus revealed to me her name and story.

"I am," she said, "the spirit of the dead marigold, which lies between the pages of your romance, and I dwell in the garden of the rainbow, the Paradise of flowers, where the faded blooms of earth are renewed in undying beauty, to give eternal joy and refreshment to the holy angels of the Lord.

"Just outside the walls of this German hamlet there is a little Friedhof, a garden full of crosses pointing heavenward over many long green hillocks. Wreaths of immortelle flowers and tiny pictures of saints have been laid by pious hands upon most of the graves, and around some of them are planted shining rings of yellow marigolds. There, once, in the midst of such a group, I also bloomed,—the flower of grief and pain, whose petals are bitter as aloes to the taste, —fit emblem of care, and mourning, and desolation. In the evening, when it was fine weather, a little French peasant-girl came, with her book or needlework, to sit upon the soft dry grass beside the two graves close to the spot where I blossomed. I believe she planted me there with her own hands, before I opened my great golden eye upon the world at all; but, be that as it may, I knew that now she took much care of me, and never suffered me to droop for want of water, nor to be devoured by noxious insects.

"Sometimes, when she came to see me, she brought white or yellow garlands of immortelle flowers, which she hung tenderly about the little wooden crosses at the heads of the two narrow mounds; sometimes her offering was a posy of wild blossoms, or even a little chaplet of rosary beads, which the priest had blessed for her. She was an orphan, and it was her father and mother who rested in those two long graves.

"A sorrowful little maiden she was,—small and shrivelled in stature, but sedate beyond her fifteen years, and I never saw her mingling with the noisy children who often passed me on their way home from school; for there was a shady footpath through the cemetery, and people came and went along it all day, as they do along the paths of any other public garden.

"Sometimes, indeed, on very fine evenings, a few merry voices called to her from the meadow beyond, or from the stile at the end of the long avenue: 'Marie! Marie! we want you! Come and help us to play!'

"But she never went, and I think they only invited her out of kindness, for the cry was seldom repeated.

"Among the many villagers who trod the cemetery path,

"In the evening, when it was fine weather, a little French peasant girl came, . . . to sit upon the soft dry grass beside the two graves."—(*To face p.* 136.)

two figures were especially familiar to me, for I saw them there every day, and always at the same hours. One of them was a tall stalwart youth of about twenty-two, with a handsome frank face, and a smile as bright as the sunshine, fair brown curls, and German blue eyes; a boy to make any father hopeful, and any mother proud. The other was a maiden of some eighteen years, golden-haired and fair, too; but there was no likeness between them save the likness of a happy fellowship, which illumined their glad faces, and beamed in their radiant eyes. Every evening, when the young man came home from his work, the maiden went to meet him by the stile at the end of the footpath, and they walked through the grave-garden together on their way to the village. Strange, indeed, and pathetic it seemed to me, to behold youth and love thus walking hand-in-hand between the rows of low silent habitations wherein the dead lay evermore so lonely and regardless.

"These young people called each other Hermann and Hertha, and I thought they had neither ears nor eyes for anything except themselves. But, at last, one evening, when the young man's work was over earlier than usual, and Hertha met him at the stile a full half hour before the ordinary time, they loitered in the beautiful cemetery-garden, and seated themselves on the green turf, in the shadow of a quivering aspen-tree,—the tree which is always shuddering and sorrowing for the terrible part which it had in the Passion of the Lord*.

"And while they rested there, Hermann, lazily toying with the daisies around him, turned his bright eyes from Hertha's smiling face, to the face of the orphan child, where she sat, like a little guardian angel, beside the two graves she loved better than anything else in this world. And he asked her gently, whence she came, and why she always spent her evenings there, instead of playing or rambling about the meadows with the girls and boys of the village. Little Marie looked up from her knitting shyly, and told him that her father and mother lay buried there. That they were Alsatian peasants, who had travelled with her to this neighbourhood in search of employment, and that, while they were still strangers in the place, God took them both in one week; and she was left in the wide world with no friend but the *curé* of the village, and he was only a poor man. But he sent her to school, said Marie, and she was earning something now,—very little it was,—by her needlework, and by

* It is related in the folk-lore of Germany, that the cross upon which Christ suffered was made of aspen-wood; and that in remembrance of the fact, the awed tree has trembled ever since, and it is thence regarded as the emblem of lamentation and fear.

minding the babies at the cottages while the mothers were away, or helping the housewives in their business sometimes. But when her day's work, whatever it chanced to be, was over, she always came to sit by the place where they had laid her father and mother; for she loved those two low graves too much to leave them for any dances or games or merry sports in the world.

"And as she bent over her shining needles again, she began to weep, silently and intensely, out of the bitter depth of a grief which had already bleached to winter ashen the gold of her brief April life, and changed the tender-hearted child into a sorrowful lonely woman.

"Hermann watched her awhile without speaking, but his large blue eyes were full of compassion, and he would have said something to comfort her, had he only known what words to choose. But Hertha plucked him sharply by the sleeve, and her beautiful face looked vexed and peevish as she whispered to him that he ought to talk only to her, and not to interest himself in strangers. Marie did not catch the rebuke, for it was uttered in low, suppressed tones, but the marigolds heard it well, and they perfectly understood what baneful emotion it was that was busy in Hertha's heart. *She was too much blessed.* She was so happy in her full possession of Hermann, and in the knowledge of his great love for herself, that she had no sympathy to give to any-one else, and she grudged every word and look which he spent upon the little French maiden. Hertha thought that all Hermann's tenderness was due to her alone, and that none other than she had any claim on him. Her felicity had made her selfish and hard, so that instead of opening her heart to all the world, and crying,—'See how happy I am; come and drink of the abundance of my joy, come and be cheered by the sunlight that brightens my life,'—she chose to shut herself up with her treasure in a strong room of her own making, and cared nothing for the poverty and desolation of the souls outside in the cold. 'I have my happiness,' she said, 'I have my prize, what are the misery and bereavement of strangers to me? I am going to enjoy myself, and have no taste for doing anything else. And Hermann shall not sully my pleasure by importing into it the woes of others, nor bestow on them any part of a love and sympathy which I claim to be wholly mine by right.'

"And while the ruddy-hued marigolds looked up in Hertha's face, and saw these cruel thoughts reflected in her fair maiden eyes, the evening breeze passed swiftly over the shining petals and stirred them as with a strong emotion, giving them power to utter the words of God. And the flowers stretched their slender throats, and raised

their tawny faces to Hertha, and murmured sadly,—'Bear ye one another's burdens: weep with them that weep.'

"But Hertha heard only the sound of the breeze among the leaves, and knew not that it was the breath of the dear God, whispering to her dry and hardened heart, and bidding her to bend like the yielding grasses and field-flowers, before the gentle influence of sympathizing love. Her ears were deaf to the many voices of nature, and my tender reproof was uttered in vain for her.

"But the rustling which the wind made among the marigolds attracted Hermann's attention towards them, and without answering the complaint of Hertha, he continued as he bent towards me, 'Are these flowers also your care, little Marie? you appear to have bestowed great pains upon them.' And when she answered 'Yes;' he added with gentle tenderness, 'You have chosen well, my child, for marigolds are hardy plants, they brave the bitterest winters, and are self-sowing, so that they do not need replacing every year like other blossoms. Did you know that when you chose them to put here?'

"'Surely,' interrupted Hertha, interested in spite of herself, because Hermann was interested, and resolved to play a part at least in a conversation which she had failed to terminate, 'surely that must be the flower of Love which endures all storms, and renews itself spontaneously every year!' And as she spoke, she blushed and laughed, and let her silky hair drop over the young man's shoulder.

"'Alas, no, Fräulein,' answered Marie, bending her sorrowful eyes upon me; 'it is the flower of grief and bitterness; and in France we always plant it about the graves of the dead, to signify the pain we suffer in being parted from our dear ones, whose bodies lie at rest beneath the earth out of which all the flowers spring. And we call it *Souci*, for care and regret are perennial to souls on this side of earth.'

"Hertha looked in surprise at the little homilist. It was very strange, she thought, to hear a mere child discourse in this grown-up fashion: even she herself, who was so much older, knew nothing of care or regret.

"'You French have droll notions, then,' she rejoined, shortly, addressing Marie for the first time. '*We* call this flower of the churchyard *Gold-blume*, the golden flower.'

"'It is both, I think,' answered little Marie, in a thoughtful, musing tone, that made Hertha wonder at her more and more: 'care and sorrow first, that turn to gold for us by-and-by, and that *are* gold, too, all the time, if only we understood their ministry and their meaning rightly.'

"But all this was sheer folly to Hertha. What had she to do with grief or bitterness while Hermann was beside

her? Impatiently she turned to him again, and urged him to rise and come away.

"'The sun is setting,' she cried, 'and the old grandmother will be expecting us home. Come, dearest, I am sure you have rested here long enough.' And nodding her head carelessly at Marie in token of farewell, she led the young man off down the avenue; and as they went, the dying, inconstant sunshine peeped between the branches upon their retreating figures and danced delusively before their feet, as gaily as though it were going to last for ever, and had no intention at all of passing away. And yet, even then, the sunshine was fading fast, and before long the last streak of daylight would have utterly sunk in the west, and night would have enveloped earth and heaven in her melancholy gloom and silence.

"Another day passed; and little Marie was there again in the burial-place. 'God's Acre,' the Germans call it, and the words carry with them a beautiful and significant sense of beatitude which is pleasant, I think, to dwell upon. Again Hertha came along the pathway under the lindens to meet her handsome friend at their trysting-wicket; and as she passed me, the orphan child looked up from her needlework, and greeted her with so wistful an air that Hertha stopped involuntarily, and answered the salute in quite a gracious mood.

"'Is he your brother?' asked Marie, looking earnestly into the beautiful face before her; 'he who is always with you?'

"'No,' replied Hertha, with a rosy blush, 'we are betrothed, —we are to be husband and wife.'

"'And you love each other very much, then?' questioned the child, naïvely.

"'Oh, yes!' cried Hertha, clasping her hands in the fervour of a passionate nature; 'Hermann is more than all the world to me!' Then suddenly checking herself and resuming her former dignity, she added in a colder tone, 'But you cannot understand this yet; you know nothing of love.'

"Little Marie glanced at the two graves in silence. *They* spoke for her, and Hertha, seeing the significant look in the child's wounded eyes, made haste to tender some sort of excuse for her impetuosity.

"'Such love as mine, I mean!' she cried, reddening. 'It is quite a different thing from any other, you know: it is much better and stronger. No other love is to be compared to it; if I were to lose it, I should die.'

"She spoke rapidly, with a fervid absorbed expression upon her face, and her eyes stedfastly directed towards the place of tryst. Hermann was not yet in sight; how long he tarried!

"'Shall you be married soon?' asked the little mourner gently, after a moment's pause.

"'Yes, soon; oh, very soon.'

"Again the answer was hurried and passionate in its utterance, but it had scarcely died upon her lips before Hermann himself appeared, advancing slowly towards us, and with a cry of joyous recognition Hertha ran to meet him. But the young man's eyes betrayed traces of recent tears, and the hand that was laid fondly in the eager grasp of his betrothed trembled under the power of an emotion he vainly strove to conceal. With passionate love the young girl hung upon his neck, and entreated him to speak; but for a minute he stood silent, straining her almost fiercely to his breast, as though by that tender and ardent gesture he defied some invisible enemy to tear her from his faithful embrace. Suddenly he withdrew himself, and holding her out from him at arm's-length, gazed earnestly into her terrified face.

"'The war!' he cried wildly; 'O Hertha, the war!'

"I had heard of this war many times lately, from the people who passed to and fro through the cemetery, and talked to each other as they went. And I knew also, from these fragmentary conversations, that it was daily expected some of the villagers would be called to the battle-fields. For in Germany every man is a soldier, and may be bidden to assume arms in the ranks, whenever the necessities of Fatherland demand the lives of its sons. It did not therefore surprise me to hear Hermann tell the weeping girl who leaned on his bosom, that the Meister of the atelier where he daily worked, had that morning received an official notification claiming for the country the services of his artisans, and warning the young men to hold themselves in readiness for immediate marching orders. But how terrible was Hertha's misery on hearing these evil tidings! In that cemetery I had borne silent testimony to the suffering of many a mourner bereft of his dearest treasure; I had marked the tears of many a sorrowful group gathered about the unclosed grave of a beloved one, but never had it been my lot to witness grief so wild, so intense, so appalling, as that which I now beheld. No anguish of parting from the dead could equal in abandonment or despair the anguish of this farewell to the living! O Love, how sweet thou art in thy delights,—how bitter in thy sorrows! So desperate and profound was the agony of this German maiden, that neither Hermann's tender caresses nor the tearful adjurations of little Marie, availed to afford her the least consolation. Madly she clasped her betrothed to her wounded heart, in a frenzied tumultuous passion of love that had

something dreadful in it, and cried aloud upon God to destroy them both with His lightning where they stood, rather than suffer them to be parted thus! Hermann hushed the wild appeal with his lips; he drew down the white lifted face upon his breast, and smoothed the soft disordered hair with his trembling fingers. Then, after a little while, he led her gently away homeward; and hand-in-hand, as it was their wont to walk together, they went with slow faltering steps down the dark sombre avenue, where no beaming light danced to-night, for the hour was late, and the sun had set;—and so, broken-hearted and silent, they passed out of the cemetery. Never again, O Hermann, to enter it hand-in-hand with thy beloved! . . .

"For many weeks I saw them there no more. Little Marie still came in the evening to her old place by the two graves, and the villagers went to and fro, and talked of the war, and of the tidings which reached their homes from the camp, and of the great victories which were being won for Fatherland; but I heard nothing of Hermann.

"Then the days grew shorter; the summer roses around me shed their last blooms and perished; dead leaves fell thickly upon the turf, and I, too, yielding to the touch of doom, latest of all the flowers in the Friedhof, began to drop my queenly headgear, and to fold my mantle of shrivelled leaves tightly over my chilled heart.

"Just one golden cresset remained, puny and rusty indeed, but braving yet the early November atmosphere, when on a certain morning a new grave was dug, not far from the spot I occupied, and people gathered round the freshly-turned earth, and spoke to each other in subdued voices about the death of one whom they had all known familiarly, and who was to be buried here to-day. It was a youth, they said, who had died of wounds received in a recent battle; and an old woman related how his regiment left him to the care of strangers in the hospital of a distant town, and how he begged to be sent back to his own village, that he might look once more on the face of his betrothed, and die. So, said the old woman, his request was granted, for the surgeons knew his wounds were mortal, and that no treatment of theirs could save his life, and they laid him in an ambulance and sent him home.

"But while the gossip still went on, there came up the avenue beneath the shadow of the linden branches,—between which the snow-flakes now began to drop, and the winds of winter to sough,—a little funeral procession, deeply pathetic in its simplicity, sublimely solemn in its touching reality and earnestness. Upon the violet pall which shrouded the coffin there were laid side by side two garlands,—one of laurel, the

other of dried marigolds. The first bore witness to the glory of a dead hero, the other to the heart-rending of her who should have been an artisan's wife. She followed, leaning upon the arm of the good priest who had been so kind to the French orphan, and behind them walked little Marie herself, with her pale face and her large intelligent eyes, telling her rosary sadly as she went. Then they gathered round the grave, and the promised bride of the dead man raised the black veil which hitherto had covered her features, and stood beside the bier of her beloved, like a marble woman,—white, cold, motionless, and heedless of the falling snow.

"It was Hertha! She had lost all!

"Then arose the prayerful wail of the Miserere; and the storm-wind, moaning organ-like through the tossing aspen-boughs, swept down upon me, and shook from my withered lips the solemn antiphon: 'Incerta et occulta sapientiæ Tua manifestasti mihi [b]!'

"And again in the same plaintive Psalm: 'Domine, labia mea aperies; et os meum annuntiabit laudem Tuam [c]!'

"For it is the divine gift of understanding which alone avails to grasp the true meaning of suffering; to interpret God's hieroglyph of Pain, whence charity and sympathy draw their holy being; and to make of the bitter *Souci* a *Gold-Blume* of inestimable price.

"The accents of the concluding responsory died away, borne aloft upon the hurtling wings of the snow-wind, the grave was covered with earth, and the little crowd of mourners and spectators slowly dispersed. Then also went the good pastor himself, not without a kindly benison upon the head of the desolate widow-maid, where yet she stood unmoved beside the resting-place of her lost love; a marble woman, tearless, pulseless, frozen-hearted beneath a touch that was sharper and more icy-keen than that of the frost beneath her feet, or the bitter air upon her brow.

"But when the priest had departed, and the flutter of his black cassock was hidden from sight beyond the farthest tree of the avenue, Hertha, alone with her dead, fell suddenly upon her knees on the crisp hard earth, and tossed her arms wildly upward towards the grey November sky.

"It was a strange picture,—this passionate woman, with the wan lifted face, the shining hair of gold, and the heavy black dress streaming about her upon the blank white ground, —a strange picture, vivid in its contrasts, weird and ghastly

[b] The uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom, Thou hast made manifest unto me.

[c] Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord; and my mouth shall declare Thy praise!

in its terrible realism. Then from the pallid lips there burst a sudden cry, a wail of utter despair and agony, more grievous far than any tears,—the cry of a woman's soul in exquisite torture; without hope, without understanding, without human sympathy.

"'O Lord, Lord, Thy ways are hard to bear! Men are not cruel as Thou art, Thou Ruler of Life, merciless and uncompassionate! *My* god is dead! is dead! is dead! I shall hear his voice no more! I have lost all!'

"She fell along the frozen clods of the new-made grave, and moaned.

"Footsteps, swift and soft, came over the snow behind her, and a light hand touched her upon the shoulder.

"'Hertha!'

"The gentle child-like voice was familiar to her, and with a slow weary gesture she raised herself, and turned her deathly features upon the pitying face of little Marie.

"'I saw you meant to stay here,' whispered the French girl, bending tenderly over the poor mourner, 'so I waited till everybody was gone, and then ran back. Take my cloak, Hertha, 'tis bitter cold, and the snow is falling.'

"'I don't care for that! I like the cold! It is nothing to me! See!'

"And she flung back the dark veil from her head, and let the white flakes drop upon her yellow hair. But Marie hastily wrapped her own woollen mantle about the frenzied girl, and warmed the icy hands of Hertha in hers, while she sought gently to draw her away from Hermann's grave.

"'You do not know what you say now,' argued the child, caressively, in her soft Gallic German; and there stole over her tender face the shadow of that serious womanly look I had seen there when first she spoke to Hertha's betrothed about her dead parents. 'I know what that is, that you do not care, for I, too, felt just like it once; but time is good to us. You must trust to God and Time. It is because I also have suffered, that I understand and love you now.'

"But the heart of Hertha was wounded too sorely to feel the sweetness of the dropping balm as yet. She covered her stony face with her hands, and moaned. 'I want no love but Hermann's! I never sought any other love, I never cared for any other! I have lost all!'

"Little by little, with mild compassionate words and gestures, Marie drew her companion away, and the falling snowflakes hid them speedily from sight, as they went down the long white path towards the cemetery wicket.

"Many days elapsed, and they returned not; my last tawny blossom froze in the bleak atmosphere, but still the life was in me, when presently, one sunny noontide late in

THE MARIGOLD.

"She spoke, gazing down upon the Marigold plant at the foot of the two graves."—(*To face p.* 145.)

December, when the frost was yielding under foot, and the birds were chirping faintly in the withered rose-bushes, they were there again. Marie, with her childish figure and her woman's face, and Hertha, in her widow's garb, paler and deeper-eyed than she used to be in the old days, but lovelier so and sweeter far, than when I saw her first in the full rose of her selfish, petulant beauty.

"She spoke, gazing down upon the marigold-plant at the foot of the two graves, and I noticed that the delicate voice had lost its careless jubilant ring, and had grown subdued and thoughtful; a voice to match the face in tenderness; for speech is made sweeter by tears, as music is sweeter that sounds from the sea.

"'Marie, your *Gold-Blume* is dead. See here, not a single flower remains! Alas! how well I recollect our conversation about it that September evening, and my own foolish utterances, and your replies, which then I thought so old-fashioned and incomprehensible! Ah, *Souci!* bitter *Souci du Jardin des Morts!* thou art indeed undying! thou art a real immortelle! for neither heat can wither, nor frost destroy the germs of thy hardy being. Now, indeed, thou seemest to be dead, but the spring will revive thee in fresh youth and vigour; and, while with care one must gather the seeds and foster the offshoots of the frail blossoms of love, thou, O flower of sorrow and dole, renewest thyself unheeded year by year! To thee the returning winters bring no real decay, for every spring-time finds thee again in thy place, wearing always the same hereditary coronal; self-perpetuating and unchanged!'

"'Yet,' said Marie, softly, as she bent over me, ''tis a *Gold-blume* too, this imperishable *Souci!*'

"'I thought so once,' answered Hertha, in mournful tones, 'but what is the good of sorrow? Am I better off because I have lost my heart's beloved?'

"'Yes,' responded the child-philosopher, firmly. 'Better off: for now you have an affinity with the universe, and with the grand world of spirit. One with whom you are most familiar, one to whom you are ever the dearest, has passed into the dawning light of the perfect day. Rise with him, through sphere after sphere!'

"'But he is lost to me!' cried Hertha, lifting her earnest eyes to the cold blue space overhead, as though she sought to pierce its blinding deeps, and find therein some shadowy semblance of the face she had loved.

"'Lost!'

"'Not so, dear Hertha; the golden *Souci* has taught me a sweeter lesson than that! It has taught me that if grief and care are perennial, so also is the precious treasure of human love! That is the indestructible gold which fire mars

not but refines, the flower of gold which dies not with dying spring or summer; which the rank atmosphere of the charnel-house cannot tarnish, nor the bitterness of tears corrode; but which ever blossoms most richly upon the very graves of the dead!'

"'Alas,' answered Hertha, a mist before her jasper-clear eyes, 'I know that your words are true, but my heart returns them only an uncertain echo! You have learnt more in your fifteen years of existence than I!'

"'When one's existence of fifteen years is such as mine has been, one learns many things,' rejoined Marie, gravely. 'Human life is not measured by the year, as cloth is meted by the ell. I am older than many a woman whose age doubles mine. To live alone is often to live twice one's time. If, therefore, I seem to assume too much, or to teach when I ought only to condole, you must forgive me, Hertha; for somehow you have always hitherto seemed to me younger than I. But now, we are of equal age.'

"I put the pretty broken German sentences she used into words which I think may render their sense more intelligibly to you, but I cannot reproduce the earnest tones and the simple grace, which gave their meaning its power and tenderness. But Hertha, no longer hindered by a too great happiness, felt the deep force of the pathetic apology, for over the once cold and arid nature of Hermann's betrothed, there had arisen the gracious life-giving warmth of holy sympathy. Not the full light as yet, but the dawning of it. She took the orphan girl to her own bruised heart, and whispered in low tones that she loved her, and that henceforth they would be sisters to one another. And then they were silent; a quiet brooding sense of serenity descended upon them like a blessing; and there was no further need of words between them for awhile. The communion of sorrow is sweeter at times than even that of joy, for joy leaves nothing to be desired, but sorrow yearns, and seeks redemption.

"The clamorous voice of the chimes, ringing the four quarters in the belfry of the village church, broke the spell-like stillness, and then came a single reverberating stroke from the brazen hammer of the great clock itself, which evermore looked down from its high tower upon the buyers and sellers in the market-place,—like a round, sleepless, open eye of Time. And while the heavy sound yet thrilled and quelled through the air, a woman's voice from the wicket-gate summoned Hertha to the family *Mittag-essen;* and for that day the conference between the two maidens was ended.

"But soon they were again in the grave-garden, very early in the morning, before the red light of the winter

sunrise had faded in heaven, and while the glow of the new day was still sharp and pure upon the white crosslets that marked the resting-places of the dead. But the light upon Hertha's pallid face was a light of soul, calmer and diviner in its bright-shining than the inconstant radiance of the sunbeams; a light of springing hope, and strength, and love, which should not fail nor perish for evermore.

"She knelt beside the grave of the artisan-soldier, and her meek jasper eyes dwelt intently upon the stone cross which was set there, with this inscription graven on its base:—

"'OF YOUR CHARITY PRAY FOR THE SOUL

OF

HERMANN FROHSINN.

Arise, shine, for thy light is come;
And the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!'

"And she wept as she read; then lifting her gaze to the watchful face of her friend, repeated aloud, in solemn musing tones, that brief exhortation, which of all the little philosopher's words had most deeply impressed itself upon Hertha's sorrowing heart; "Rise with him, through sphere after sphere!' And after a little pause, she added, laying her hand upon the cross at the grave-head,—as of old the Crusaders, when they made a solemn vow to God, laid their hands on the crosses of their sword-hilts:—

"'Marie, I am going to do that. I am going to use my adversity as I never thought of using my happiness. My mind is made up to leave the village to-morrow morning, and to go to nurse the wounded soldiers in the towns and hamlets wherever the surgeons will let me go, and wherever I can be of use. Many women have gone already to this good work, and I have no home duties that need keep me here. It will comfort and strengthen me to know that I am treading in the footsteps of Hermann, following where he has been before me, and doing perhaps, for his very comrades, what strangers did for him. And if, among the sick or dying whom I tend, any poor fellow should speak to me of a dear wife or sweetheart waiting for him at home, I shall know what to say to such an one out of the depths of my own torn heart,—I shall understand his grief by means of mine, and be able to give him, not the barren comfort and surface smile of common nursing cheer, but the meed of a living and perfect sympathy.'

"The light of that new day-spring grew brighter in her crystalline eyes as she ceased, and Marie looking upon her,

and 'seeing her face as the face of an angel of God,' returned no answer in words, but yielded only with silent tears the benediction of her pure and simple heart.

"And again Hertha spoke; while the fresh morning air, floating hither and thither over the grave mounds, bore to her lips the subtle balm of my spirit, and laid upon her brow with invisible lingering hand the strength-giving benison of the Lord.

"'There is a new world opening to me,' said the sweet rapt voice, 'and new thoughts are awakened within me. It is borne in upon my heart for the first time with real conviction, that Hermann is *not dead*. That I have not indeed lost all. It is something to *feel* that, instead of merely saying it, and hearing it said. I see now that I must not lose a day in idle sorrow, but that where I can, I must help others, love them, and thank God I have seen upon earth such a heart as his,—have known, have loved, and have lost it. For not even heaven itself is able to take from me the love with which I have loved; my soul will be richer thereby through all eternity [d]. Sister Marie, have you also felt this truth?'

"'Dear Hertha,' cried the orphan, weeping, 'your nature is nobler than mine, and your love was a stronger and a loftier love than that which fell to my share. Last year, you know, you told me so yourself. And because you loved with that mightiest love of all, therefore your discernment now is clearer than mine, and the grace your sorrow brings you is higher and more perfect. To have loved as you have loved, is to know love for ever face to face, to be able for ever to love all beauties of nature and of mind,—all truth of heart, all trees, flowers, skies, hopes and good beliefs, all dear decays, all trusts in heaven, all capabilities of loving men [e]!'

"'And are these too, Marie, among the teachings of your darling *Gold-Blume?*'

"'Indeed I believe they are,' whispered the little maid timidly, leaning her brown head upon Hertha's bosom; 'for I have often marked how the marigold, though it is the flower of sorrow and loss, yet bears the image and colour of the sun, and itself resembles a tiny luminary upon earth, abiding and perennial as the great Giver of light in heaven, whom it ever adores and imitates. And so also we, even though it be winter with us, and our joys and our loves lie buried beneath our feet, may yet, like the sun, give forth to others our sweetness and our strength, to gladden colder hearts with deeds of charity and words of help.

[d] "Recreations of Recluse."

[e] Leigh Hunt.

Even as you, dear Hertha, are about to do for the wounded soldiers of Fatherland!'

"The answer came with infinite tenderness:

"'And as you, dear Marie, did first for me, when Hermann died. From you I learned this lesson of human sympathy!'

* * * * * * * *

"The grey keen lines of breaking daylight were low in the bleak east, when Hertha came again, to take her farewell of Hermann's grave. Marie was not with her, for doubtless the instinct of the woman-child withheld her from intruding even her gentle presence upon such a sacred leave-taking as this. Hertha knelt alone by the burial-cross of her beloved; her clasped hands resting on the white stone, and her face bowed down upon them,—the face that had grown so subdued and solemn in its pathetic beauty. No sound of sigh or moan escaped her hidden lips, no passionate sobs disturbed the faithful heart; but I knew that the farewell prayer she prayed, and the farewell intercourse of soul with soul, were a holier oblation and a truer communion for the consecration of that sacramental silence. Then she rose, and mounting a little green knoll beneath the aspen trees, waved her 'good-bye' with a kerchief to some anxious watcher, who waited at a distance for the parting signal; and so, with the dawn upon her face, she went her way.

"Winter wore itself out loitering and reluctantly into a cold and peevish spring. April gave place to May, and summer began with tardy fingers to colour the folded buds of the rose-bushes, and to sow the meadow-grass with silver dew and daffodils of gold. After a while, I too unfold my new-year's vesture, and all around me tiny green heads force their way through the damp mould wherein my seeds have lain throughout the colder months in darkness and seclusion, and ascend to the surface of the earth, thirsting to behold with their yellow eyes the light of day, and with me to receive into their hearts the low-breathed messages of God's evangelist,—the Wind.

"The campaign is over, and I hear it whispered among the market gossips, that very soon Hertha will be with them again; and they mention her name with reverent love, for she has been good to those of their sons and brothers, whom, like Hermann, the summons of the country has made soldiers and heroes,—not infrequently also, victims. For of late many a poor fellow has been brought home to the village dying or dead; and the graves are close and numerous under the waving lindens; so that here and there the rose-bushes have been forced to yield before the sexton's spade; and on moonless nights the villagers shrink from crossing

the Friedhof, because the death-lights[f] upon the new-made mounds are so bright and so frequent.

"Then, towards the close of June, Hertha returns. Again I see her in the cemetery, with the same calm face that since I saw it last has beamed sweet consolation upon a hundred dimmed eyes and stricken hearts, a face softened and made solemn by the double beauty of understanding and sympathy.

"For she has been in many battle-fields, and has witnessed many a strange and terrible tragedy of wholesale death; she has seen the green slopes of Alsace and Lorraine strewn with the writhing forms of dying men; she has found in the stiff grasp of more than one poor boy some unfinished letter traced in pencil with unsteady fingers to the 'liebe Mutter,' or the 'Kleine Trüdchen' at home,—pathetic little messages of only two lines, perhaps,—for then the palsied nerves of the writer had failed, and his dead hand had fallen heavily upon the torn morsel of paper.

"And Hertha has knelt beside many a wounded veteran, friend or foe, and heard him murmur huskily of Vaterland, or of the Emperor, while the slow pulses of his great brave heart beat—beat—beat the continued rattaplan of war for the country or the name that he most loved. And she has bent her pale lips to his ear, and whispered gently that glory and honour cannot always last[g], that war and war's renown must pass away, and love alone endure.

"And here too is Marie—Marie, childlike in form as ever, but careworn and desolate no longer; for there stands beside her a tall fair youth with beaming eyes that dwell upon her fondly,—a youth for whom all the village has a word of respectful praise and hearty affection; for is he not the pastor's nephew, just returned from a brilliant college career at Leipsig? And all the maids and matrons whisper sagaciously that it is at the feet of little Marie his academic laurels of erudition and honour will ere long be laid.

"The sexton is busy digging under the shade of the shivering aspen boughs, for to-morrow another corpse will be borne to its long home,—the corpse of one whom Hertha has nursed, the last martyr among the village patriots. In

[f] Death-light or ghost-light;—a luminous vapour caused by the decomposition of the human gases, which vapour is distinguishable on dark nights above new-made graves. In England it is called the corpse-light.

[g] "Quand un ancien regarde
En pleurant sa cocarde,
Au grand nom de l'Empereur
Quand trop fort bât son cœur;
Doucement je m'avance
Et je lui dis,—silence,
La gloire et les amours
Ne durent pas toujours!"—*La Cantinière.*

"Hertha has knelt beside many a wounded veteran, friend or foe."—(*To face p.* 150.)

the midst of his labour the old delver pauses, wipes his heated visage, and looks appealingly at the little French maiden.

"'Fräulein Marie,' says he in gruff guttural German, 'your marigold plant is in the way here! I shall have to dig it up. You see there's no room now that the ground's so full of graves on this side, and we are a bit pressed for space. 'Tis a favourite corner, Fräulein, you know, under these trees along by the rose-bushes. Folks *will* be buried here!'

"And down goes the spade into the turf with a terrible thrust that is my death-blow. The iron cuts my stalks in twain, cleaving in a moment the tendrils of my infant roots, and I am lifted with a jerk from the severed fibres, and thrown upon a bank beneath the aspens, amid a heap of torn squitch-grass, and mould, and pebbles, and twisting centipedes. As I lie there, dying under the fierce glare of the midsummer sun, Marie's gentle face bends over me, and her small hand breaks from its stalk the most beautiful of my tawny blooms.

"'Ah,' sighs she regretfully, 'I am sorry to see thee wither thus, my dear *Souci!* Thou hast soothed and strengthened me in many of my lonely, sorrowful hours!'

"The tall youth beside her stoops and kisses her soft forehead.

"Those hours are past for ever now, he tells her fondly; he will never let her be sad or lonely any more. In the future they two will be all to one another, always together, always glad-hearted!

"She does not answer him, but turns her brightened face timidly upon Hertha.

"'Dear sister,' she murmurs, caressing the thin white hand, upon which still gleams the gold betrothal ring of former times,—'indeed I feel almost guilty to be so happy and so blest, when thou art alone, and hast lost all!'

"The pallid widow's face lightens with a smile of unutterable trust, the sweet solemn voice thrills with passionate love.

"'Not lost,' she answers, 'Oh not lost! Mine for evermore! Hermann has become to me part of the universe; his spirit speaks to me in the flowers, surrounds me in the air, and looks upon me from the stars; and I am never desolate, since earth and heaven alike are filled with the presence of my beloved. And with him I rise! Who therefore can partake in thy joy, Marie, more truly than I, who have suffered with thee? For I, too, have loved and have been happy!'

"She stoops, and taking from Marie's outstretched hand the flower of the marigold plant, fastens it in the folds of her snowy neckerchief, to be treasured side by side with a little silver crucifix, significant and familiar memorial of One 'Who

learned upon earth to be touched with the feeling of mortal infirmities,' because He likewise was 'made perfect through suffering.'

"And upon that true and maiden bosom the last blossom of the *Gold-blume* died."

* * * * * * * *

There the story ended.

"Then," said I aloud, "I suppose Hertha became a religieuse, and it was she whose sweet calm face I saw in the chapel to-day!"

The sound of my own voice awoke me. The rainbow had vanished, the sun had set, my beautiful phantom was no longer before me, and the whole room was darkened by the drowsy shadows of fast-approaching night.

THE PAINTER OF VENICE.

A STORY OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

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CHAPTER I.

"IN THE AGE OF ART."

THE city of Florence, during the palmy days of Cosmo de Medici, was a very Arcady of poets, painters, and musicians. Cosmo was one of the richest and most princely *dilettanti* of the fifteenth century, whose ardent love of learning, munificent liberality, and splendid administration of the immense power he possessed in Florence, induced his fellow-citizens to honour him with the title of "Pater Patriæ;" a designation, however, that hardly proved itself appropriate in after years, since the influence of the Medici certainly derogated with time from the liberty of the Florentine republicans. Cosmo, like all the great men of his romantic age, was doomed to earn his dignity at the cost of severe misfortune; for he had a gruesome rival in Rinaldo Albizzi, then leading governor of Florence; and the popular patron of the *belles-lettres* and *beaux arts* fell before the jealousy of the man in authority, at whose instigation he was cited by the Signoria, and exiled as an enemy to the state in the year 1433.

But the chief of the House of Medici was too influential and revered a citizen to remain long in banishment; and after the lapse of only twelve months he was recalled by a new parliament, and Albizzi experienced in his turn how capricious are the fancies of small states, and how dangerously changeful the fortunes of great men; for the Florentine republic now turned the flowing tide of its varying wrath upon him, and sent him forth by a mandate of exile, to take refuge with Filippo-Maria, Duke of Milan. So much it has been necessary to recount *en parenthèse*, concerning the personal history of Cosmo de Medici; but little more remains to be added here on the subject, and it will suffice for the purposes of this romance, to predicate, before proceeding further on our way, that after his recall from exile, the princely merchant-scholar passed at Florence a life of uninterrupted prosperity and continual munificence.

His mansion was always filled with men of art and talent, who came thither from all parts of Europe to enjoy the generous hospitality and protection of this wealthy merchant, and to make famous for ever with immortal works of genius the fairest capital in all divine Italia.

Among the many illustrious strangers whom Cosmo thus attracted to the Palazzo Pitti were two artists, named respectively, Domenico Veneziano, and Andrea del Castagno.

Domenico, as his surname indicates, was by birth a Venetian, and his master had been the famous Antonello of Messina, in whose studio this illustrious pupil acquired the art of oil-painting,—a far rarer accomplishment in those days than it has since become. Veneziano's skill in this particular branch of art became so famous throughout Perugia and other parts of Italy, that it was not long before an invitation from Florence summoned him to honour that resort of genius with his presence, in order to design and promote the decoration of a chapel in the Santa Maria Nuova. It was arranged that Veneziano should be assisted in this latter employment by Andrea del Castagno, a native of Mugello, and a man of such singularly violent temperament and vicious career, that he earned for himself, even in the turbulent days of the fifteenth century, the unenviable sobriquet of "The Infamous." Alas that any of those on whom God bestows His choicest blessings of creative power and beautiful thought, should ever forget the goodness of the Giver in the pride of possessing the gift, and lose in the indulgence of that unworthy sentiment the true glory of the artist!

Domenico and Andrea were almost of an age; the former was born in the year 1406, the latter in 1409; but an ill-spent youth, and the tempests of a passionate disposition, had so worn and ravaged the face of Castagno, that one would have taken him for the elder by many long years. They seemed a strange, incongruous pair, these two men, as they walked together through the streets of Florence, or pursued their mutual labour in the chapel of Santa Maria; and it was not long before the Florentine juveniles learnt to watch for their passing at the corners of the public building or the mouths of the courts, and cry allegorically,—for boys have been the same in all generations, everywhere,—"Here they come! Michael and Lucifer! Oh, how amiable they are together!"

But Domenico was not a painter only. He excelled in a sweeter art than that of handling the brush, for he was also a practised musician, and could play so marvellously on the lute, that those who heard his exquisite minstrelsy often wept while they listened to it, for pure delight and tender emotion.

There must be a soul in the bosom of a man before he can

produce perfect music. One may design, or group, or lay on colour, or illuminate, or chisel, or even write good verses perhaps, by dint of mere cultivated trick and conventional discriminating taste; but to be a musician, one needs a touch of something far higher than mere educational refinement; one needs to have grasped in some measure the appreciation of the Divine.

I do not know that I am quite prepared to assert with Mr. Ruskin, that a great artist must of necessity be a good man; but if there be truth in that opinion, it is certainly truer of the musician than of any other votary whom the celestial Nine delight to honour. To be a sculptor, or a poet, or a painter, one must doubtless be a man of power, and such was Castagno; but to conceive and execute sweet melody of sound, one must be oneself in harmony with the heavenly choir, and the gamut of one's thoughts and desires must be turned to the great Keynote of the universe. And Domenico Veneziano was a man of such lofty parts and noble comprehension. He had learnt to do all that he did for the sake of a higher Name than his own, and his work became to him accordingly, the labour of no mere profession, but the sweet duty of an accepted vocation, the service of a willing husbandman in the great vineyard of an eternally-bountiful Master. It is, I believe, because this religious spirit is lacking so much and so palpably among the artists of our later times, that Art has ceased to be the noble and sacred thing it once was, and that there has grown up in some communities distinguished for their piety, an instinctive distrust of those whose occupation it is to embody and to realize beautiful thoughts and ideal forms of loveliness. It is too much the custom in these money-getting days to make a *business* of Art; and perhaps it is for this one reason alone,—so potential a reason is it, and so disastrous and universal its consequences,—that we cannot claim to have one true and great genius alive now in the world. For our world has become long since a world of Commerce and of Coinage; and Art, and the love of Art, are an event and a passion of the golden past.

CHAPTER II.

"CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH."

THE picturesque hill of Fiesole which girds the north-eastern quarter of Florence, and which is now covered with gardens and country houses, possessed, in the days of which we speak, a far more rural and uncultivated appearance. The Mugnone river, a tiny tributary of the Arno, slender and

bright as a thread of burnished silver, wound its fantastic way along the base of the hill beneath natural canopies of bending larch and tremulous aspens, round a hundred curves of moss-mingled, weedy turf-border, over pebbled shallows and whispering rushes,—the swiftest, clearest, shadiest of runlets that ever delighted painter's eye, or filled the heart of a poet with peaceful rapture.

One lovely, cloudless evening in the spring of the year 1462, two figures, descending the hill of Fiesole, not long after the conclusion of vespers, came slowly towards the sloping banks of the stream, and paused there, standing together beside the darkening waters. These two were a Dominican monk of venerable years, and a lad in the garb of a scholar, the latter so singularly beautiful in feature and appearance, that, even at that romantic period, when picturesque costume and artistic modes of *coiffure* were doing their utmost for the people of Southern Europe, the rare graces of this young Florentine were wont to attract the gaze of casual passers in the streets, and to elicit from strangers words of keen surprise and warm admiration.

Fra Giuseppe was affectionately attached to this beautiful boy, over whom the old man exercised a specially endearing influence, for a familiar tie, not only of spiritual affinity, but of earthly relationship, existed between him and his pupil. The beautiful Angelo was the only son of Fra Giuseppe's dead sister, Teresa, whom, during her short life, he had loved with all the strength of a passionate and tender Italian heart, and whose dear memory he now cherished and revered as that of a triumphant saint in the bosom of God. Teresa had died in giving birth to twins, and Ilario, her husband, perished at sea ten years afterwards, while returning from a cruise to some distant port, whither he had been to seek for employment; for Ilario had never had any great share in the world's good things. Fra Giuseppe was thus left the only living relative of these two orphaned children, and from that day the aged monk devoted himself with all the pious energy of his affectionate disposition, to alleviate as much as was possible their poverty and desolation. But little Teresa inherited her mother's fragility of health, and she and her twin brother had not been two years alone in the world before the bright tint began to fade from her delicate face, and there came a certain new light into her large brown eyes which the good ecclesiastic was grieved to see; for like most of the cloistered *religious* at that period, Fra Giuseppe was a physician as well as a savant. And when the third winter of her orphanage had come, Teresa was no longer able to trip by Angelo's side through the crisp, bleak air of the dawn to attend the early matin service as she had been wont

to do, but was forced to lie still in her little wooden bedstead, until the good old uncle-priest came to say a prayer with her there, and to lift her up in his strong arms and carry her to and fro before the cottage, where the noonday sun fell warmest and brightest between the sheltering lattice-crosses of the green verandah.

There was a kind neighbour of Teresa's, a widow named Ursula, who used to sit by the poor girl's couch during the afternoon, while Angelo was studying at the convent, and she taught her patient little *protégée* to weave and embroider, and to make lace; so that Teresa could lie and work with her needle while Ursula sang beside her, or told her wonderful legends about the saints, or the yet more mythical mountain gnomes and water Undines. Ursula had an inexhaustible store of such tales as these, and Teresa was never weary of hearing them, nor of listening to the old woman's soft, melodious contralto hymning the "Ave" when the chapel bells rang for the *Angelus*, or chanting tender litanies to the monotonous music of the murmuring spindle-wheel.

We cold-blooded, dull-hearted denizens of unspeculative England, can but dimly comprehend the deep mysterious meanings that lie hidden beneath the simple wording of those Italian and German fairy stories,—we read, and smile, or even weep perhaps, over the poetic visions pictured in their fascinating pages, but we miss the philosophic thought, the daring guesses at truth, the wonderful power of idea that underlies their baby-language, and points every adventure and utterance of their imaginary heroes and heroines. But farther south, where a brighter sun enlightens the eyes and souls of men by day, and where the skies are so pure and clear that at night one can see the stars down to the very edge of earth, and water all round the horizon,—there, too, the hearts and understandings of the people lie nearer their lips and ears than they do among themselves, so that they speak in allegory of things we do not dare to dream about, and hear with reverend looks and grave countenance certain histories and fables that we are wont to profane with jests.

CHAPTER III.

"THE SWEET POWER OF MUSIC."

FRA GIUSEPPE and Angelo stood some time talking that evening beside the runlet, for the quietude and serenity of the beautiful scene possessed a power of deep enchantment for both of them, because to the hearts of both Nature spoke

intelligibly, as she ever speaks to those who keep their eyes single and their consciences unclouded.

"Uncle," said Angelo, stretching out his hands towards the purpling landscape before him, "how is it that, when I look upon all this beauty in such calm moments as these, I feel that it is not *enough* to look at it? I seem to want some other mode of apprehending and enjoying it,—some other sense than mere sight, or even touch. I want to lose myself in it, to embrace it, to drink it, to take it all to my soul, and become identified with its perfect peace and loveliness!"

Fra Giuseppe's dark eyes kindled, and he looked earnestly into the boy's wistful face as he answered him: "My child, I think that the feeling and the longing of which thou speakest are the motions within thee of that fuller life thou wilt one day enter upon. When thou wert a little child, unable to utter distinctly any single word, thou didst often long to express thy desires and thy thoughts, and wert dimly sensible that there existed some method, which thou wert incapable to employ, of communicating thine heart to others, and of giving form and definition to thine emotions. What are all men now in this lower world but little children? The want thou feelest, the sense thou lackest, shall be supplied to thee hereafter, when thou hast learnt more and art grown older. But that will not be until thou hast gone home to thy Father. Thou must first learn here that thou hast indeed something to say, and feel thou longest to say it, before the power of expression can become thine. For I believe that thou wilt only know what new sense it is thou so vainly desirest, when thou shalt have put aside the senses of thy body, and art become a pure spirit full of eyes, in the perfect light of God. For then, dear child, thou wilt understand Divinity, and the wisdom of the Father shall be revealed to thee."

"Thou thinkest then, uncle, that the sense I feel myself to lack is nothing less than a celestial faculty,—that perception which, perhaps, in angels corresponds to our faculty of vision?"

"I believe, my child, that it is indeed so. That vague desire that fills thine heart in beholding the beauty of the natural earth and sea, is a yearning to drink of the eternal waters of Wisdom, a longing for perfect rest upon the bosom of divine Love. And although thy judgment discerneth not that such is the real meaning of thine unsatisfied aspiration, yet doth thy spirit apprehend the truth, else how do the tears rise to thine eyes, and how comes it that thou art conscious of some feeling akin to restlessness and pain, even when thine eye and ear are most delighted with the admirable works of God's creation? It is because thy soul, by

means of that earthly loveliness, is put in remembrance of her eternal rest, and yearns to mingle herself in the ineffable brightness of the supernal fields, and to repose in the full undying refulgence of the changeless glory of heaven."

A sound of approaching footsteps arrested Fra Giuseppe's discourse, and he and Angelo involuntarily turned to look at the intruder upon their solitude. He was a man of middle age and dignified appearance, closely habited in a plain brown mantle, of which the peaked hood partly concealed his face; but even so, it was easy to perceive that his features were of no ordinary type, and the grave, large eyes which met Angelo's inquiring glance, were bright with a peculiar light, like the clear shining of an inward flame.

"Salve tibi!" said the Dominican, saluting the stranger genially. "This is a heavenly evening, friend, is it not? One almost expects at such times as this to meet some of the angels walking on earth in the cool of the day, as of old they were wont to do in Paradise."

"Salve, father!" returned the strange man in a singularly sweet voice, and, as he spoke, he fixed his expressive eyes on Angelo's beautiful face. "If my vision deceives me not, there is indeed at least one angel upon earth to-night."

Fra Giuseppe followed the direction of the speaker's gaze, and smiled.

"Well said," returned he, "you guess cleverly, for such indeed is my nephew called. Angelo hath for his patrons the whole company of the heavenly host."

"You are a Dominican I perceive by your habit, father," observed the stranger, after a moment's pause. "Is this lad then your neophyte?"

"Not exactly," replied the monk, affectionately laying his brown hand upon the boy's glossy curls. "He is an orphan, but God hath given him a sister to live for, hitherto. Angelo is my nephew, and my pupil. The rest must be as our dear Lord pleases."

Fra Giuseppe's rich voice dropped a little into something like sadness as he spoke of Teresa, and he lingered musingly over the last words of his sentence. Perhaps the question of his interlocutor had evoked a new desire in his pious mind. But the mantled stranger turned his bright eyes again upon Angelo.

"I hope, my child," said he gently, "that you learn diligently and are studious, since you have so kind an instructor to teach you?"

A sudden expression of sadness and discontent gathered like a dark shadow upon the boy's fair countenance as these words were uttered, and Fra Giuseppe hastened to anticipate his nephew's answer.

"Angelo is a good child," he said quickly, "and does his best. Not the cleverest nor the most gifted of us can do any more."

A look of intelligence responded in the glance with which the strange man met the Dominican's kindly eyes, and he suddenly drew a lute from beneath the folds of his heavy brown mantle.

"Do you love music?" he asked Angelo, abruptly.

The boy's eyes glittered brilliantly, a rosy flush overspread his fair face, and rose like a bright light to his forehead.

"Oh, sir, with all my whole heart."

Fra Giuseppe touched the strange man softly on the shoulder.

"You have made one more happy guess, my son. Music is Angelo's chief delight. He appears like a transfigured creature when he sings in our chapel."

The man in the brown mantle made no reply in words. He seated himself upon the stem of a fallen tree, around which the soft climbing mosses and wild creepers had woven their delicate growths, and began to tune his lute. Presently he played a few faint chords in a minor key, melting and blending one into the other like a low sea-wind on a summer night, and while yet the tender tones of that brief prelude vibrated along the silver strings, he lifted his sweet voice,—which was tenor in its compass, a tone less rare among the Italians than with us,—and sang an exquisitely melodious hymn to the Virgin. The thrilling, strong, pathetic music of his wonderful intonation rolled out sublimely on the still night air, and every note stirred the souls of his enraptured listeners as might an audible flame of celestial fire, so that they stood gazing upon the brown, wrinkled face of their unknown entertainer, as though it had been the luminous countenance of the seraphic minstrel Israëfel. And still he sang, while the waters rippled their drowsy monotonous treble beside him, and the sleepy breeze of the evening murmured its tender susurrations in and out of the drooping osiers and arbutus, and the waving reeds chattered and soughed in the dark shallows. And still he sang, now lifting his strong sweet voice in passionate appeals of prayerful adoration, now sinking its tender notes in dropping cadences of reverential pathos, till all the pure bright air of the open night was laden with the burden of the lovely harmony, and the far-off stars, with their golden-clear eyes, seemed standing still to watch and listen at the thousand doors of their purple pavilion.

But at length, when the last Amen was uttered, and the soft harmony of the lute-strings had ceased to thrill the solitude, Angelo moved slowly from his place, and dropping

THE PAINTER OF VENICE.

"Do you love music?" the stranger asked Angelo, abruptly. "Oh, sir, with all my whole heart," the boy replied.—(*To face p.* 162.)

down beside the stranger, where he yet sat upon the fallen tree, raised his great liquescent eyes to the dark corrugated face, and asked earnestly: "Are you not Messer Domenico Veneziano, the foreign painter, who has come hither lately to paint the chapel of Santa Maria Nuova?"

The strange man smiled benevolently.

"Yes, my dear child, that is my name. How came you by it so correctly?"

"I heard you playing," answered Angelo rapidly, "at the open casement of your chamber in the Nuova-square, one evening as I was going home from the monastery. And I waited in the street to listen to you, until a man in a yellow vest, who chanced to be standing in the yard beneath your window saw me lingering, and bade me go about my business. And he said that Messer Domenico did not play to me, but to himself; and that nothing was more ill-mannered than to stand about at night under people's balconies, as though I were moon-struck, or wanted to ask alms, or worse. So you see, he let me know your name, though he *did* send me away!"

Messer Domenico moved his bright eyes from Angelo's face, and swept the lute-strings for a minute without speaking, as though thereby to tune some jarring note in the gamut of his own emotions. Then he said, looking kindly upon Angelo, "*I* would not have sent you away, my child, had I known you were there. But I daresay, if you choose, and your uncle permit it, that you will hear me play again very often."

"Thanks, Messer Domenico," said the Frate, once more anticipating his nephew's reply, with a world of gratitude and admiration in his genial eyes; "such music as yours will teach Angelo better and nobler things than all the lore I am able to impart. Music, I take it, is the language wherein Nature, who is God's schoolmistress, instructs His children. Angelo, too, has a passionate love for beauty, whether of sight or of sound."

"So have I," answered the artist, letting his glance rest expressively upon the boy's uplifted face. "Come, father, with your consent, we will make a bargain! Let your nephew spend two or three hours a-day with me, as my model, at Santa Maria, and in return I will give him a reasonable salary, and teach him to play and sing. I daresay he will find time for studying with you as well, and the thought of the lute will help him on with his more tedious labours. We can set the primer and the Latin exercises, or what not, to music you know."

Again the benevolent smile irradiated the bronzed features

of Messer Domenico as he made this proposition, and Angelo, hastily gathering consent and approval in Fra Giuseppe's responsive gaze, burst into a gleeful acceptance.

"Oh, Messer Domenico! how good you are! how happy you make me! But if I can really be of any use to you, and you will really teach me to play the lute, that is more than enough for me! a great deal more! I could not endure to take money from you!"

"Angelo is quite right, my son," interpolated the monk, gravely seconding his nephew's eager disclaimer. "I do not want him to begin to love coin. All that he and his sister need, thank the dear Lord, His Church is able to supply; and by-and-by Angelo will be apprenticed to some trade, and will learn to get his living industriously. Just now he is learning other things."

"You are very right, father," answered the painter, emphatically: "I perceive that Angelo has indeed a wise preceptor. I am a stranger in this city, as you have heard him say, and I know none of the faces I meet every day in the squares, but may I hope that I have found to-night a friend in you?"

Fra Giuseppe warmly grasped the hand that was outstretched to meet his own. "With all my heart," said he, in his most cordial tones. "But the hour is growing late, and before I return to the cloisters I must take Angelo home, and see little Teresa who lies there ill. Shall I bring your new model to the chapel of Santa Maria to-morrow?"

"If you will do that, father, to-morrow will be a happy day for me, and I shall be impatient till you arrive. Noon is the best time, so far as I am concerned, for the light suits my painting best then. Is that hour convenient to you?"

"It will do excellently well," responded the monk. "And now we must bid you farewell, Angelo and I."

"Stay, father!" cried Messer Domenico, "I am returning to the city also. May we not walk together?"

"By all means, my son," returned the sociable Frate: "our way lies through the square of the Santa Maria Nuova, and we can enjoy your pleasant converse therefore, until you leave us at your own door. And I hope it will not be the only time we shall walk together."

"I hope not indeed, father," said Messer Domenico earnestly, "by the grace of God."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN IN THE YELLOW VEST.

ANGELO, as Fra Giuseppe had hinted to Messer Domenico, was by no means a clever boy. Nature, who had not spared her bounty in adorning his person, had somewhat parsimoniously neglected the faculties of his mind, and had apparently thrust him into the world unendowed with most of those abilities which compensated his playmates for their various faults of physique. Angelo's face and form were perfect, but in mental capacity he was indubitably inferior to other children of his age. He had neither skill to learn well, nor memory to retain the little he learnt, although the good father was a patient instructor, and his nephew, in all honesty, worked at his best, poor as his achievements proved to be. But, as though to amend these intellectual blemishes, the heart of Angelo was filled to overflowing with the love of beauty and goodness; the open land, the clear broad skies, the wild melodies of the birds, and the breath of the forest flowers,—these contained for him as much and more than all the musty tomes of the convent library did for the erudite scholars of the cloister; and Fra Giuseppe often wondered whether indeed the Word of God, which is plainest written in the works of God, were not after all more easily discernible to the eyes and ears of this ignorant child than it was ever likely to become to the most promising of his fellow-pupils.

"For," mused the good father, "the dear Lord hath seen fit to hide His secrets from the wise and prudent, and to reveal them unto babes."

There was among the boys who came to be taught at the monastery a certain lad of Angelo's age, named Niccolò, as remarkable for wit, quickness of apprehension, and retentive power, as Angelo was for physical beauty.

Between these two children there was some bitterness of heart, for Niccolò, being himself cast in a very ordinary mould, envied Angelo his fair face, and Angelo, in his turn, chafed at the superior capacities of his school comrade, and often resented very warmly the gibes, reproaches, and personal allusions to dulness, in which Niccolò, during his fits of jealous malignity, was wont to seek consolation for his own lack of beauty.

Fra Giuseppe noted with sincere sorrow this boyish animosity, which grieved his genial nature no less than it outraged his ideas of Christian brotherhood, and he strove earnestly and continually to establish in place of so much uncharitableness a friendly rivalry and emulative alliance;

but he strove in vain, for Niccolò was sullen, and Angelo discontented, and neither would be first to negociate a peace.

Things were in this unhappy state when Messer Domenico Veneziano dropped like a wandering star into the orbit of Angelo's daily career, and illumined its sombre routine with a newer and brighter element than had yet disturbed the monotony of the boy's orphanage, altering its whole complexion and prospects by a series of strangely monitory events. For, on the very occasion of Angelo's first introduction to the chapel of Santa Maria Nuova, after Fra Giuseppe had taken his leave and returned to the monastery, —for he was not free to remain away with Angelo all the morning,—it happened that as the boy stood beside his new patron, watching the progress of the painting, a strange man entered the chapel, and pausing in the doorway, saluted Messer Domenico familiarly.

"Thou hast a model, I perceive, Domenico! Verily, I congratulate thee! Where didst thou find him? What magnificent shades of hair! what colour! what undulating curves! So," said he, holding his head sideways and regarding the boy as though he had been a statue or a picture, "it is really the face of a seraph! Superb!"

Angelo blushed hotly, as the strange man uttered these words. The tone of the voice was harsh and discordant, his manner was indescribably arrogant, and the young Florentine was not accustomed to hear his charms appraised in a style only appropriate to criticism on the points of a horse. He felt instinctively that the new comer was a vulgarian, and he had besides an acute recollection of having heard the voice before, under circumstances which had not impressed him favourably. But when the stranger laid aside his outer mantle, and displayed beneath it a gay costume of canary-coloured silk, Angelo recognised him instantly, and straightway registered a new dislike in the mental repository of his pet aversions; for this disagreeable critic was none other than the man of the yellow vest, who had dismissed him from his chosen auditorium beneath Messer Domenico's window, upon the evening when he had first heard the music of his patron's wonderful lute.

"This boy's name is Angelo," returned Messer Domenico, softly; "he is a pupil at the Dominican monastery of Fiesole, and I only met him yesterday for the first time. As you say, Andrea, I am very fortunate."

"Now I look at him more closely," rejoined the other, scanning the boy's features with more familiarity than Angelo was able to relish, "I fancy he is not quite a stranger to me. I believe I saw him hanging about under your balcony, Domenico, one night not very long ago."

"Yes," observed Angelo, quickly, with some resentful asperity in his tone; "and you told me to go about my business. I knew you directly by your yellow vest."

To Angelo's great astonishment, Messer Domenico immediately put down his palette, and lifting his cloak from the place where he had laid it, deliberately drew out of his capacious pocket his favourite lute, and as he stood before his painting played a few soft harmonious chords, exactly as he had done on the previous evening, when Angelo had first related the incident of Castagno's interference.

"Why do you do that, Messer Domenico?" asked the boy, speedily forgetting his anger in his surprise.

"I thought there was discord somewhere," answered the painter, putting the lute back in its place.

Angelo understood the rebuke, and coloured deeply in silence; but Castagno bit his nails and laughed in an insolent manner, as if some ludicrous eccentricity had excited his contempt. Yet notwithstanding this ungracious behaviour, Angelo noted with increasing bewilderment that Domenico and Castagno were apparently good friends, that they addressed one another in the language of intimacy, and that from time to time, as the business of decoration went on in the chapel, Veneziano left his own painting to help in the labours of his fellow-artist, and to admonish and encourage him, or even add a touch here and there to Castagno's handiwork. But ever and anon when Messer Domenico made an effective stroke of the brush upon Castagno's panel, or heightened a light, or deepened a shadow for him with peculiar skill, Angelo observed to his amazement that although Andrea's words were expressive of gratitude on such occasions, his black, deep eyes glowed the while with a fire of unmistakeable hatred; and as the glitter of the noonday sun-beams caught the silver-mounted pencil he held in his right hand, Angelo almost fancied it a dagger, so spitefully he wielded it, and so evilly his dark countenance glowered above it at the friend who stood by his side assisting him. Angelo was greatly perplexed. Up at the convent among the Frati, he had never seen anything like this, and even Niccolò's enmity, which was the fiercest and most determined Angelo had ever known, was perfectly candid and unconcealed. Niccolò hated him, and said so without disguise, but the conduct of Castagno was inexplicable. Angelo was sure, from the glances which from time to time he cast upon Domenico, that he did not really feel obliged to him; but why then did he pretend to be thankful and affectionate? And did Messer Domenico believe his protestations?

All the time that the work of the two painters continued, the boy puzzled himself with this enigma, but the nature that

was too simple and spiritual to comprehend worldly lore, failed also to penetrate the base motives of a lower soul, for Angelo had learnt his lessons from the Book of Nature, and there is no falsehood, no treachery, no deceit written there. He did not guess, poor inexperienced child, that the evil demon which fired the dangerous eyes and overshadowed the lean face of Andrea del Castagno, was that very sentiment which he and Niccolò cherished towards each other,—only, grown to maturity. For Jealousy, though he may be the tiniest of imps at his birth, has always a fine constitution, and grows in time to be the cruellest and most powerful of giants.

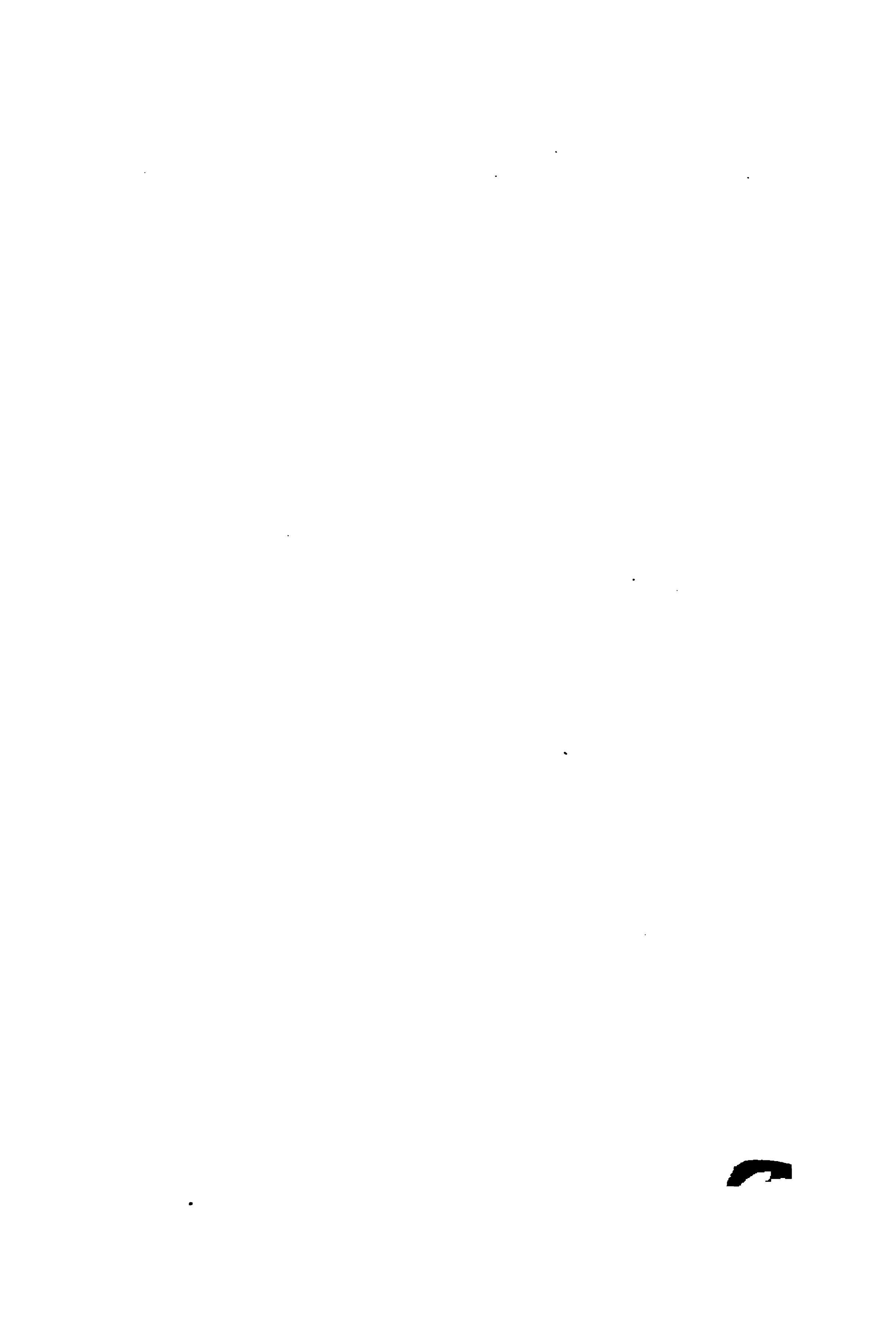
CHAPTER V.

ON THE MERCATO VECCHIO.

It was not long, of course, before the fact of Angelo's acquaintance with Messer Domenico Veneziano transpired in the monastery schoolroom, and in a correspondingly short period the nature of that acquaintance also revealed itself in the same academy of erudition. Such tidings were not calculated to improve the state of Niccolò's mind in regard to his handsome rival, and it resulted that the jealous spirit which had so long and persistently held these two children apart, now gathered fresh fuel from Angelo's recently befallen fortune, and no opportunity for recrimination or taunt was suffered to pass unnoticed by the amiable Niccolò. For to the feelings of that young Haman it was simply intolerable that his juvenile Mordecai should be so far preferred before himself, as to be actually summoned on account of his superior charms to the studio of the first painter in Florence, and there become immortalized upon the walls of one of the most noteworthy chapels in Italy, while he,—the gifted, the clever, the accomplished Niccolò,—was treated as though he were only a unit among the common herd of ordinary youngsters, and passed in the streets without observation by scores of people, who would ere long assemble to gape at the painted likeness of the stupid Angelo, and cry, "*Magnifico! Squisito!*"

So the battle between Niccolò and Messer Domenico's model took fresh impetus accordingly, and raged with such open and continuous fury, that the whole monastery began to be disturbed by it.

One day Messer Domenico, whose keen appreciation of beauty and artistic love of simple truth had already attached him sincerely to the spiritual, unsophisticated nephew of Fra



THE PAINTER OF VENICE.

Messer Domenico takes Angelo to the Mercato.—(*To face p. 169.*)

Giuseppe, quitted the chapel-studio earlier than was his wont, and taking Angelo with him, threaded the shady narrow streets of the city, and emerged with his fair young companion upon the wide piazza of the Mercato Vecchio. The hour of day, the bright weather, and the plenty of the season, which was festival-time into the bargain, contributed just then to render the Mercato one of the gayest and noisiest scenes in Florence. There was a never-ending Babel of voices, and an incessant stir and flutter, varied here and there by a shrill, pleasant jingle of bells upon the mule or cart of some newly-arrived or departing trader, or the stentorian cry of an itinerant pedlar vaunting his wares. Canopies of bright-coloured stuffs erected over the stalls, and supported by tall plane-withes, flashed in the warm sunshine like so many festive banners, and in conspicuous corners, gay knots of ribbon fastened to the tops of poles, or floating scarves of dyed silks and glittering filloselle, symbolized the nature of the trade that was carried on beneath their respective auspices.

Everything was sold in the Mercato Vecchio. Here a housewife might cater for the provisional necessities of a whole family as liberally as her purse would allow; or a maiden might trick herself out for a festa in the bravest fashion; or a juvenile fancier of the animated creation might be provided to any extent with cats, monkeys, birds, or rabbits; while those of the Florentine populace who were not disposed to be purchasers, might easily acquaint themselves, free of payment, with the latest, choicest, and most pungent bits of scandal extant for twenty miles round the neighbourhood.

Messer Domenico led his little companion to a fruit-stall, temptingly piled with all manner of luscious edibles; grapes, peaches, figs, melons, and citrons were ranged in profuse abundance upon the clean white linen which shrouded the wooden counter, and behind this fructiferous display stood the presiding goddess, an appropriately apple-cheeked matron with long dark eyes like sloes, and tiny pouting lips that were ruddy as her own cherries.

"Come, Angelo," said the kind artist, "I want you to tell me what Teresa would prefer among these fruits, and you shall take her home a basket-full this morning. See, shall we have some of those ripe nectarines?"

Angelo's eyes sparkled.

"You are too good to me, Messer Domenico," he said; "Teresa loves nectarines."

"So!" quoth the benevolent artist with a smile. Then addressing the ruddy-faced contadina—"We will take these, padrona, and some of the purple grapes yonder. They look good also—the figs in that corner, and those yellow-skinned

apples. Ah, that makes a goodly pile! Can you lift them, Angelo?"

As he put the question, Messer Domenico deposited a brimming straw *panier* in the hands of his protegé, and was answered by a delighted look of grateful acquiescence, as the countrywoman gaily swept Veneziano's coins into her embroidered money-bag, and glanced round the market-place with her most fascinating smile, for some new customer. But Messer Domenico and his boy companion had scarcely quitted the stall, when there emerged from the busiest part of the piazza a little throng of Angelo's school-fellows, just released from the monastery, and intent as boys always are in their first moments of liberty upon amusing themselves with any piece of excitement that might offer. There was a general shout in their ranks as they caught sight of Angelo, and a voice he knew but too well, suddenly cried out, "Ecco! Look, here's a sight indeed! Only consider what a fine thing it must be to have no lessons to learn, and no work to do, and plenty of presents given to one, all because one happens to have a pair of large eyes and a small mouth! Here is the boy who was so stupid that the fathers had to give up teaching him, turned gentleman, and selling his face for figs! Ohé, you little impostor! You are too much of a dolt to know anything about Absalom, but let me tell you he came to a bad end!"

With which angry denunciation, Niccolò suddenly darted out from among the group of boys, and hurling himself impetuously upon Angelo, seized him by the arm with so much roughness, that the basket of fruit which the latter was carrying was torn from his grasp by the shock, and fell to the ground, scattering its contents in every direction, and staining the grey stones of the piazza with the rich dye of the grape-juice.

"There! you pitiful sneak!" cried Niccolò, maddened with jealous wrath; "let that teach you not to count too much on your good looks: pretty faces don't please everybody!"

The whole scene had passed in such a moment that Messer Domenico, who had not yet quitted his protegé, had had no time to prevent the catastrophe. But as soon as he heard the commotion, saw the nectarines and apples rolling, and perceived the nature of the disturbance, he stretched out his hand and caught the aggressor so firmly that, notwithstanding his most vigorous resistance, Niccolò could not free himself from that resolute gripe.

"Who are you?" asked Messer Domenico, quietly; "what is the matter with you?"

"Ask *him*," retorted Niccolò fiercely, pointing to Angelo; "*he* knows. Why doesn't he fight me, he hates me enough?"

The insinuation conveyed in the taunt, and the tone in

which it was uttered, were not lost upon the boy-spectators of the fray. Immediately they took up the war-note, and cried with one voice, "Oibò! Why doesn't he fight? *Coward!*"

Until that instant Angelo had stood like a statue, pale and terrified into immobility by the sudden violence of Niccolò's onslaught; for his perceptions were naturally dull, and he did not apprehend the situation of affairs at once, as an ordinary boy would have done. But at the sound of that cry the blood suddenly reddened the clear skin of his temples, his great eyes flashed with indignation, and he struck a wild blow at his antagonist, a blind unskilful blow, which Niccolò, though still in the powerful clutch of Messer Domenico, easily parried. A general commotion ensued, and a vast deal of shouting, and many of the marketers, buyers and purveyors, left their business and ran excitedly to the centre of the tumult; but in the midst of the crowd the figure of a tall man was seen approaching, and a harsh dissonant voice that made itself distinctly audible above the confusion, broke upon Angelo's recognizant ear.

"What uproar is this?" cried the man of the yellow vest; "who is that valiant hero there in the arms of the Signor Veneziano?"

"Niccolò! Niccolò!" responded the chorus of that worthy's juvenile supporters; "let them fight! let them go!"

Castagno forced his way through the motley assemblage of bystanders, and tapped Angelo's shoulder lightly with the tips of his lean olive fingers.

"Why, my young Adonis," sneered he, in a tone of disagreeable banter, "have you been falling out with the god of war? squabbling over Venus,—or, no;" added he, looking down at the bruised nectarines and apples, "no, I should say —Pomona?"

"I don't know anything about Adonis, or Venus, or Pomona," responded Angelo, decidedly; "but Niccolò pushed me and upset my *panier*, and spoilt my fruit, and they called me a coward, and I hit him."

"Short epitome of the wars of the world! The 'Why and Because' of national disputes!" cried Castagno, airily. "Well, Niccolò, and why have you been assaulting our laconic friend here?"

"Because I hate him," replied Niccolò, in defiant tones; "and he hates me, too."

"The very best of reasons possible for a mutual misunderstanding," observed the man of the yellow vest, in the same ethereal manner. "But come, now, have you had enough fighting?"

"They have not fought at all yet, Castagno," remarked

Messer Domenico, gravely. "Angelo struck once, but I have not suffered Niccolò to return the blow."

"Why not, then?" demanded the other painter sharply, with that same strange glance of malignity upon his dark countenance which Angelo had observed there when Veneziano had assisted his labours in the studio; "why not? Come, Domenico, let us have fair play; the boys are well matched. Do not be a fool!"

"They shall fight if they like," answered Messer Domenico, still keeping his hand upon Niccolò's arm, "to-morrow; but I am going to give them both an invitation first, which I earnestly hope neither will refuse. I want you, Angelo and Niccolò," he continued, turning to the two children, "to come and sup with me this evening at sunset, and to promise me that meanwhile you will suspend your quarrel until you shall both have bidden me good-night. This fruit which you have spoiled and trampled here on the pavement, Niccolò, was not for Angelo, but for his sick sister Teresa. As it is she must go without any, for I have no money to buy more: that ought to make you sorry. Now will you give me your promise to come to supper with me, and not to fight each other before you see me again?"

The quiet, unmoved voice touched them. Niccolò cast down his eyes and reddened as he gave the required pledge, and felt how Messer Domenico's detaining grasp instantly removed itself, and in respect for his sense of honour, gave him his freedom. But when Angelo with a beating heart lifted his glance to meet the mild countenance of his patron, Messer Domenico was no longer there. The grave-faced painter had only waited to hear his protegé's murmured word of promise, and receiving it, had immediately withdrawn himself, so that Angelo's gaze encountered only the man of the yellow vest, Andrea del Castagno, with his sinister smile and the mocking light in his long dark eyes.

Leaving the bruised fruit upon the pavement, Angelo turned swiftly away to seek and to follow his friend, for the child had conceived towards Castagno that instinctive spirit of aversion with which the presence of evil, even though it be unrevealed, often inspires pure and innocent souls, and he could not endure to remain unprotected within the range of those malevolent orbs. Outside the group of staring bucolics he encountered the ruddy-cheeked contadina of the fruit-stall, with her linen apron full of ripe pomegranates and apricots.

"Ah—h;" she cried, with that long deep emphasis of the interjection which is peculiar to an excitable nationality, "there you come at last, then! I could not get at you in the

crowd, because I was afraid of the signore with the sharp eyes and the hard voice; but I thought I should see you alone in a minute if I waited. Look, here is some fruit instead of that which is spoilt; it is the best I have left. Take it home, my child; there is not more of it than you can carry in your gaberdine."

Angelo looked up at the soft black eyes and the rosy mouth of the market-woman, and gave her his tearful thanks. There is nothing so affecting to the human heart as the kindness of a stranger in a time of injury or distress.

"God bless you, dear padrona!" cried he, clasping the plump little hands that poured the fruit into his tunic; "it was for my sister Teresa who lies ill at home that Messer Domenico gave me that basket-full: I will tell her how good you are. But," added he, hesitating, with an air of timidity that suited well with his soft seraphic beauty, "what is your name, monna, that I may tell my sister about you?"

"Cristina, dear child," responded the rosy peasant, readily; "and we will make friends, won't we? and you shall take me to see your Teresa some day. But I must run back now to my stall. Good-bye——"

"Angelo," interpolated the youthful proprietor of that appellation, perceiving that his new acquaintance paused in some uncertainty; "and my uncle is Fra Giuseppe the Dominican, and I belong to the Signor Veneziano." Which last piece of information was volunteered with a dignity of bearing, and a pride of voice and gesture, that would have provoked Niccolò's malice to exasperation had he only been present.

"Ah—h?" said the smiling Cristina once more, with a sigh of appreciative satisfaction; "well, God bless thee, then, Angelo; thou wilt always find me in the Mercato Vecchio at market-time. We shall meet again." And she hastened away, nodding gaily at him as she went, and kissing her pretty fat palm in parting salutation. As for Angelo, he pursued his way in much content, for he knew in his heart that he had that day gained another friend.

CHAPTER VI.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

NICCOLÒ slunk sullenly away from the Piazza Vecchia, and had not got half-way down the Via dell' Alloro, when a dark figure walking swiftly overtook him and arrested his progress, hailing him by name.

"Hist! Niccolò!"

It was the voice of Messer Andrea del Castagno, and Niccolò stopped in sulky obedience, not bold enough to discard the command of so great a gentleman, and yet loth to yield himself to further rebuke or cross-examination, especially when garnished with that scornful, flippant style of banter which Castagno seemed so much to affect.

But in regard to that latter peculiarity, Niccolò was fated to an agreeable surprise, for in place of the saturnine smile which a few minutes ago had so unpleasantly irradiated the face of Messer Andrea, there was a corrugated solemnity, almost stern enough for a frown, and his chameleon eyes glittered no longer with levity, but with the fire of unmistakeable passion.

"Stop," he whispered, laying his lean hand upon the boy's wrist, and bringing his keen piercing gaze to bear full upon Niccolò's dazed countenance; "I have something to say to thee. Tell me no lies, they are not necessary with me, for I am neither monk nor minstrel. Look at me, Niccolò, and tell me,—art thou able to *hate?*"

These strange words, pronounced with an intense earnestness, startled the boy out of his sulky humour, and involuntarily he obeyed Messer Andrea's monition, and lifted his eyes, bewildered and wondering, to the shadowy face above him.

"Tell me, Niccolò," repeated the painter, in the same low whisper of concentrated passion, "art thou capable of hatred?"

"Why, yes, messer," answered Niccolò, taking courage at the recollection of his feud with Domenico's protegé, "I certainly am, for I hate Angelo with all my heart!"

"Why, then, art thou going to be reconciled to him?" asked Castagno, eyeing him sharply.

"I?—Reconciled?" cried Niccolò, chafing anew with reawakened indignation; "not I, indeed, messer!"

"That is well spoken," returned the other, nodding his head as though the answer had pleased him; "but if thou art so much of a man as thou wouldst have me believe, why go to Messer Domenico's house to-night? canst thou not perceive that he means to make thee friends with Angelo there?"

"Friends!" echoed Niccolò again, reddening with fury; "he may try, but it shall be in vain!"

"Come, then," pursued the painter insinuatingly, "if this indeed be thy mind, prove that thou art not the coward Messer Veneziano would have thee be, and instead of going to supper with him and Angelo, come home with me, and I will teach thee to play a game at single-stick, whereby

thou mayest quickly spoil the good looks of the monk's white-skinned nephew!"

But, to the surprise of Castagno, Angelo's implacable enemy hesitated and cast down his eyes.

"I should like to go with you, Messer Andrea," he stammered, twisting his fingers nervously about the ornamented hilt of the short dagger which the artist wore at his girdle; "but you see, I have promised Messer Domenico to sup at his house, and he let me off on that understanding."

"Pouf!" cried Castagno, with a contemptuous oath, "this is some of the nonsense the monks have taught you, I suppose! Well, if you sup with me you *will* sup at Messer Domenico's house, for he and I lodge under the same roof. Now are you content?"

"Under the same roof?" reiterated Niccolò, perplexed in his turn: "Then I suppose you must be great friends with him!"

"Not exactly, my child," quoth the painter, with a return of that disagreeable sneer which Niccolò disliked so intensely; "I am not very fond of music, and Messer Veneziano has a taste for twanging lute-strings at unseasonable hours, so we occupy different rooms, and take our meals separately. Well, whose invitation are you going to accept?"

"I am afraid, Messer Castagno," returned Niccolò, with some embarrassment of manner, and much ruddiness of countenance, "that I shall be obliged to accept Messer Veneziano's; I hope that will not offend you, and indeed I had much rather be with you, but you know I *promised*." He laid great emphasis on this last word, pronouncing it in a tone of dignity, which, unconscious although it really was, visibly annoyed his companion, and prompted the acridity of his next rejoinder.

"Oh, you *promised!* What a feeble sort of generation shall we have by-and-by, if the boys of to-day are not sufficiently masters of themselves to follow up their own inclinations! Come, Niccolò, I will tell you a secret. In a few days the great lords of Florence and their friends are going to view the new paintings in the chapel of Santa Maria, and Messer Veneziano is in a vast hurry to get his picture finished in order that these grand folks may better judge of it. Now you know that your stupid little schoolfellow, Angelo, is intended to figure in this picture, and unless you do something to hinder his likeness from being completed, these noblemen will certainly not fail to fall into raptures of admiration over it, and before long the whole city will learn their opinion and repeat it too, for the decisions of high rank are always endorsed by the people, and you will speedily have the mortification of hearing it

proclaimed throughout Florence that Angelo del Fiesole is the sweetest and loveliest youth in creation." Castagno touched a vulnerable point here, and Niccolò plainly winced, but the next instant he took fire again, and burst into a fierce tirade of abuse and invective.

"*Will* they?" he cried, absolutely stamping with rage; "Lovely, indeed! he is a dolt—a mummy—a cowardly, spiritless puppet, with a skin like white wax, and eyes like the crystal globes the conjurors see fortunes in! Oh, they'll go mad after *that* idiot, will they?"

"No, they won't," said Castagno, with a cunning air, "if you follow my advice."

"And that is——," cried Niccolò, catching the painter's arm eagerly.

"To go home with me to-night, and learn a little boxing. I can teach you in a very short time how to pound him up in the featest manner, and blacken his white complexion, and spoil his fine features so effectually, that he will be quite useless as a model until long after the exhibition of the pictures in the chapel. That is the only way I can see of successfully attaining your object; any other scheme might stand a chance of failure."

"It is a famous idea! but I know enough of fighting to be able to do that without having a lesson first, so that I can still keep my word with Messer Veneziano."

"Ah," rejoined Castagno, quickly, "but if you do that he will oblige you to be friends with Angelo. You don't know what powers of sophistry and persuasion Messer Veneziano possesses. He will talk to you about 'loving your enemies,' and get you to make him some new promise, which you will not like to break any more than the one you have made him already, however sorry you may be afterwards; that is why I wish you to refuse his invitation. Boys like you are easily talked over by a few fine speeches, and the world is full of cant about the propriety of peace and the blessedness of brotherhood, and such-like puerile rubbish, of all which Angelo's patron will not be slow to avail himself. For my part I admire a good hater, for I am sure that anger is a noble and manly emotion, without which human beings are no better than milch cows or fatted swine. Universal peace and friendship will be all very well in the millennium, but it is fitter and more natural *now* that men should shew some becoming spirit at times, and not suffer themselves to fall into a supine and bestial ease, that is neither capable of feeling insult, nor of avenging it with dignity and honourable resentment. Do you think I can trust you to remember this when Messer Domenico is talking to you? You had better sup with me."

Messer Castagno perplexed at the decision of Niccolo.—(*To face p.* 177.)

"No, Messer Castagno," returned Niccolò, more steadily than he had yet spoken during the whole interview, "you must let me fulfil my promise, and I am sure now, from what I have just heard you say, that you will think the better of me if I do. For if it be a good thing to be honourable and dignified in conducting one's quarrels, it must also be a good thing to be honourable and dignified in keeping one's appointments. Self-respect is the same in both cases, as I take it; and if I were to break my word to-night and Angelo should keep to his, as I know he will, I could no longer hold myself at liberty to find fault with him, nor feel worthy to resent the injury he causes me, for my right to do so would have been forfeited with my own self-esteem."

This was a line of argument for which the man of the yellow vest was not at all prepared. For a minute he stood silent and disagreeably perplexed, stroking his close-shaven chin with his lean hand, and eyeing his youthful monitor with an aspect of mingled surprise and disapproval, Then his colourless lips slowly lapsed into the only smile they were ever able to assume,—the very shadow of a smile it was, for the substance and reality of it had been long dead,—and the irritating tone of banter, which, like a light artistic froth always veiled the solid meat of Castagno's displeasure, gave an ungenial pungency to his reply, and impressed Niccolò more unfavourably than any of his previous utterances.

"Quite a knight of spotless integrity!" cried the painter in a mock rapture of delight: "without fear and without reproach! Really though, what a flower of chivalry you must be! talk of teaching you a *trade*, and bringing you up among common boys in a monastery! Pouf! why you ought to be apprenticed to Roland and Oliver, and admitted immediately to one of the grand orders of knighthood! What a jewel of a boy! Pray keep your word, most illustrious, with that unimpeachable honour which so worthily distinguishes you; and after supper, be sure to embrace the beautiful and gifted scion of Fra Giuseppe's ancestral house, and delight thereby the very apostolical heart of your friend Messer Domenico Veneziano. Of course in that case, you will shortly have the satisfaction of hearing Angelo's praises in every Florentine mouth, and no doubt the same critics who commend *him* will decry *you*—but what matter? Angelo, too, will probably put you down as a poltroon or a weathercock, shifting with every breeze—but again—what matter? You will be consoled by the knowledge of your unblemished honour, and will desire no more substantial recompense than the approval of your own hallowed conscience. Well done, indeed, Ser Niccolò!"

"Messer Andrea del Castagno," quoth the subject of these

sarcasms, with a vast sturdiness of manner which he well knew how to command at odd times, and for which he was no doubt indebted to that same obstinacy of his nature which gave continuance and stamina to his enmity with Angelo, " if what you are saying be wit, I don't understand it, and find nothing fascinating in it, so it's not likely to improve me. But I would rather not quarrel with *you*, because you have been kind to me to-day, and I think you mean well to me. So I will bid you good-bye, and hope to meet you again very soon, and to tell you that I have *not* embraced Angelo, nor been converted by his patron's discourses."

And with that Niccolò lifted his brown stuff cap to Castagno, and went on his way down the alley, while the painter stood looking after him, a strange bright flame in his coal-like eyes giving him a certain Mephistophelean appearance, to which his dark shaven face, mediæval garb, peaked shoes, and the shadowy background of gaunt, gabled walls behind him, added not a little.

"And I *will* go to Messer Veneziano this evening," said Niccolò, aloud to himself, as he turned the corner of the Via dell' Alloro.

CHAPTER VII.

SUNSET, FROM VENEZIANO'S BALCONY.

WHEN Niccolò presented himself that evening in Messer Veneziano's room, he found his enemy there before him. The greeting between the two boys was not a promising one, for Niccolò was determined on his part not to give ground, the more especially because Castagno had taunted him with soft-heartedness, and warned him of the attempt which Veneziano was sure to make towards a reconciliation between his guests; and Angelo had not forgotten the morning's incident, and the forcible spoliation of the figs and nectarines. But however much and blackly they eyed one another, Messer Domenico took not the least notice of their scowls and sour looks, but welcomed Niccolò as blithely as though envy, hatred, and malice were unknown quantities in the world; and glancing towards the supper-table which was ready spread in a bright corner of the chamber, cried out in a cheery voice, "Boys, are you hungry?"

"I am not," answered Niccolò, sullenly, seeing that the painter looked at him first and expected a reply; "I never care much for supper."

"I don't mind about eating just now," answered Angelo in

his turn. "Fra Giuseppe gave me a sweet cate this afternoon when he came to see Teresa."

"If that is the case," said Messer Domenico, with the same pleasant manner, "and you are neither in a hurry for supper, what do you say to a little music first? It is quite early in the evening yet, and there is a delightful window here with a balcony you see, where I always sit and play as the night draws in."

"I know!" cried Angelo, brightening up. "That is how I first heard you on the night when Messer Andrea del—"

But suddenly he paused; for, at the mention of that name, Domenico's eyes darkened with the same sad, troubled look which Angelo had noticed on one or two previous occasions, and which always seemed to cloud his face when anything was said in his presence which appeared likely to kindle or revive a spirit of bitterness. Then immediately catching up his lute from a corner behind him, Veneziano rose and led the way to an open window overlooking the Piazza della Maria Nuova, beyond which was seen the greater part of Florence, with its picturesque peaked houses of the fifteenth century, its tortuous winding streets and paved squares, its fountains and pleasaunces; and, towards the south-west, the flashing waters of the Arno, golden as the fabled river Pactolus under the flaming touch of the setting sun, and studded here and there with the brown hulls of merchant vessels, or the dipping canvas-sails of fishing lanteens.

Messer Veneziano's balcony was a picture in itself, and worthy of the great artist, who delighted to spend his leisure beneath its broad green verandah, and feast his eyes on the varied forms and rich tints of the landscape it commanded. Over its wooden pilasters clustered the heavy foliage of a climbing vine which covered the outer wall of the house, and upon the white pavement of the balcony itself, coloured tazze of flowers,—japonica blossom, roses, and scented geraniums,—brightened the cool thick shadow of the greenery that hung above them. Just at the time of sunset this charming little bower was especially lovely, for the aroma of the flowers was sweetest then, and the air most pleasant, while the city beneath and beyond was at its best and gayest, and the whole clear Italian sky overhead hung steeped in an effulgent sheen of changeful crimson.

There was such a sunset as this on the evening of which we speak, and when Messer Veneziano led his two guests to their seats in the balcony, it was evident that the glorious beauty and tender influences of the hour had already begun to work their charm upon the heart of Angelo, always susceptible to the persuasions of Nature, and the glance he cast at Niccolò as the boys silently appropriated the two low

stools Messer Veneziano pointed out to them, was so far gracious that his enemy flushed with surprise; for those who have not the poetic heart are strangers to the "peace and goodwill" which the angels of open earth and heaven are ever ready to sing in the ears of shepherd watchers.

But, indeed, the fair scene that lay beyond Domenico's balcony was lovely and rare enough to have moved a less sensitive soul than Angelo's. Florence has been always known as one of the most picturesque cities of Europe, and those who have had the good fortune to see it themselves, may imagine how beautiful it looked in mediæval times, with its porticoed buildings, its quaint bridges, its spacious squares, all gorgeous with the vivid splendour of an exceptionally brilliant sunset. Every gable and porch were rosy with the reflected carmine of the glowing western sky, across which floated a slow-moving train of fantastic clouds, full of that changeful opal-light one only sees at the close of a summer afternoon, and transpierced by a hundred shafts of upward-darting radiance, ascending like so many tall plumes of light from the golden-burnished crest of the day-god himself.

For a little while Messer Veneziano suffered his guests to contemplate the magnificent panorama in silence, and then, while their eyes were yet riveted upon it, he drew from the lute he held a few soft uncertain notes, and straightway began in Italian, S. Bernard's beautiful hymn of praise to the Holy Name of Jesus.

Nature and Fine Art, when they are thus combined, each under its most winning aspect, have more power to touch and subdue the human soul than all the rhetoric or theories which Science can muster. The flaming glories of sunset, the delicious perfume of the roses, the delicate reticulated coolness of the vine, the peaceful beauty of the bright-tinted city beneath, the thrilling music, and the sweet passionate words of song that stirred the warm balmy air around Niccolò and his rival, did with them more than the ablest sermon on charity could have accomplished. Under such tender and beautiful influences it would have been impossible for even hardened and experienced minds to have remained unmoved, but Messer Veneziano's guests were only children, and their senses were still acute and their hearts impressible. And as note after note of the poet-painter's rich tenor voice vibrated the still sunlit atmosphere, and the sweet music of the silver strings kept time to the rise and fall of the pathetic yearning words he uttered, Niccolò and his companion, moved by the selfsame impulse, rose together from their seats, and leaning upon the green garlanded rail of the balcony, turned their faces with one accord towards the setting sun. Little by little he sank into the misty vapours beyond the river,

"Continually the clear, sweet voice of Messer Domenico went up with the sound of the silver strings through the moon-lit air."—(*To face p.* 181.)

and overhead, in the jasper-lined vault of clear infinite æther, the full moon emerging from a purple cloud stood revealed in her glory of white sheeny light, like the gentle eye of God in the midst of heaven, silently rebukeful of sin, and shaming with its calm, mild patience the turbulent passions and rage of men. Where the sun had gone down, the scarlet and gold of the sunset paled into green, soft and drowsy as the deep-sea hue in summer-time, and the clouds that hung about the distant reaches of the west lost their flame and began to put on the darker but scarce less beautiful garb of night. Then, too, the hum and stir that had not ceased in the city since dawn grew fainter and fainter, until, save that here and there a church-bell sonorously tolled the hour, or a wandering strain of serenade-music piped and trilled in the distance, the repose of earth became almost as profound as that of heaven. And continually the clear, sweet voice of Messer Domenico went up with the sound of the silver strings through the still moon-lit air, as with the passionate tenderness of a Divine Love upon his lips, he sang :—

"O Jesu! Thou the beauty art
Of angel worlds above,
Thy Name is music to the heart,
Enchanting it with love!

"Celestial Sweetness, unalloyed,
Who eat Thee hunger still,
Who drink of Thee feel yet a void
Which only Thou canst fill!

"Stay with us, Lord, and with Thy light
Illume the world's abyss;
Scatter the darkness of our night,
And fill the earth with bliss!

"Thee may our tongues for ever bless;
Thee may we love alone;
And ever in our lives express
The Image of Thine own!"

Angelo's blue eyes filled with tears; Niccolò's heart thrilled with a strange, unwonted sensation. Insensibly they lifted their faces towards the sea of pure colour above them, and as the last prayerful words of sweet music died upon the air, and they turned their gaze earthward again, their eyes met, softened with a new light, and the next minute their hands met also in the grasp of that human sympathy for the True and the Beautiful in Nature, which is the very talisman of the Gentle Life, the golden plectrum by which alone the cithern strings of the heart can be made to give out the

harmony of virtuous and kindly deeds. Thus, then, in the spirit of a true artist, Domenico appealed to the hearts of the boy-wranglers by means of *a picture*. For he knew that real beauty is always didactic, and that there are, in sooth, more eloquent sermons in stones, and abler lectures in landscapes, than in a hundred arguments delivered by the lips of men.

I leave you to imagine how the evening closed, and whether or not those cates and sweetmeats, which Veneziano had prepared with lavish hospitality, were delectable to the taste of his youthful guests. Not once did the kind and wise painter refer to the morning's fray, nor even to the recent peace-making. He told stories and sang songs innumerable, and brought out of his closet many a beautiful sketch and coloured design for the entertainment of the two boys: never was a supper-party more thoroughly successful in its details, never did hours pass more swiftly or laughter sound more blithe and sincere. In the hearts of the monk's nephew and his new friend was a peace which had been strange to them both for many a long day, and though as yet no word of apology or of pardon had passed between them, they were already reconciled by virtue of that silent interchange of sympathy which is the universal utterance of all the deep and subtle emotions of humanity. It was not until they had bidden their good host farewell, and were on the point of parting from each other at the corner of the street which conducted to Angelo's home, that Niccolò, resting his hand a moment in that of his late antagonist, raised his brown eyes to the beautiful face which above all objects had most awakened his envy, and murmured regretfully, a sense of shame tinging his dark cheeks with crimson while he spoke, "*I am sorry I spoiled your fruit, Angelo.*"

"It does not matter now," returned the other, hastily. "Indeed, I think I am glad you did. You know, Niccolò, but for that, we should not have supped with Messer Domenico to-night."

And as Niccolò turned away, it did not even occur to him to wonder what the man in the yellow vest would have to say to him when next they met.

CHAPTER VIII.

LITTLE TERESA GOES HOME.

A CURIOUS little white cottage, one story high, with quaint oval windows like eyes, and flower-pots ranged in the wooden balcony over the doorway. Under the gabled porch, two women, habited in the Italian peasant-garb of mediæval times, stand talking earnestly together, with faces that betray an interest too vivid to suit with the light affairs of ordinary gossip. They are Ursula and Cristina the market-woman, who, through her acquaintance with Angelo, has recently become a pretty constant visitor to the bedside of his invalid sister. And there on the oaken settle beneath the porch, rests a great yellow pannier, containing fruit, eggs, and cream, a goodly store of dainties which the kind-hearted Pomona has just delivered into the care of Teresa's nurse as a present for that poor little maiden who lies so pale and so patient from day to day upon her couch in the rose-scented chamber within.

"So she is no better, Monna Ursula?" asks the younger woman, settling her broidered kerchief with a plump peachy hand, upon which the gold wedding-ring gleams brightly in the noonday sunshine.

"No," returns Teresa's guardian, curtly; "and she never will be better in this world."

"Poor thing!" sighs Cristina, with a shake of her round head, that sets two long silver earrings twinkling and bobbing on either side of it; "ah, poor thing!"

"And why 'poor?'" retorts Ursula; "won't the child be better off among the angels in heaven than in that dark room of hers yonder, I should like to know?"

Cristina is taken slightly aback by this unexpected interrogatory, and she opens her sloe-like eyes in indolent deprecation of the old woman's rebuke.

"Oh yes, Monna, of course; but for Angelo, you understand—poor boy—to be left so alone when his sister goes ——"

"I tell you," says Ursula, cutting her short again with a decisive tone and a quick emphatic gesture, "Angelo will be far better off, too, when Teresa is at rest among the seraphs. His uncle, Fra Giuseppe, will make a *religious* of him, then; *now* he can't do that, because it would be cruel to separate two such children; and so long as Teresa lives, Angelo's duty is to bide by her. But by-and-by ——," she paused, and glanced significantly towards the inner room.

"Ah, well!" says Cristina, complacently regarding the

bright bars of colour with which her kirtle is profusely adorned; "and you think the boy likes the idea of conventual discipline? For my part I never could understand the beauty of the monastic life,—there is so much gloom, so much sadness, so much isolation about it. But then to be sure, if one had a vocation it would seem different, I suppose. To me, everything would be intolerable without my husband and my babies: home is my paradise,—the prattle of my little Nina and the fat creasy arms and legs of my bambino, are better to me than all the Gregorian chants that ever were sung, and all the relics of dead dusty saints that ever were kissed; and I couldn't get on without my holiday gear, and my crimson girdle, and my amber necklace. Oliviero says I look so well in them on festa days, you know, when he and I go to mass together, and to the fair afterwards: and to have no Oliviero and no bambino,—and to have always the same dingy, coarse, straight-down gown with a rope perhaps round one's waist and a cowl over one's head,—oh!"

Ursula vouchsafes no reply to this lively tirade. Perhaps she is deep in a dream of her own home in the past, *her* paradise that now is lost, of the sweet ties which death has broken, of the dear voices time has silenced, of the husband and children awaiting her in some far-off happy mansion of the Father's house. Ah, what would become of us all in this hard work-a-day world, were it not for the blessed anticipation of "Paradise regained." It is that heart-longing which alone consoles us for our human foreknowledge of death!

"Monna Ursula!" cried the blithe voice of the younger matron, suddenly, "I protest I see our Angelo coming hither with his old enemy beside him, and apparently on the most affectionate terms! What strange beings children are; two days ago they were ready to tear each other's eyes out!"

"Aye!" answered the old nurse, shading her brow with her hand as she looked out down the sunny street, "forgiveness is but a childish fashion truly; we bear malice when we grow older; but of such as these is the kingdom of heaven."

As she spoke the two boys drew near with rapid steps, their eyes glittering with delight, and their cheeks flushed with wholesome excitement.

"Only think!" cried Angelo, clapping his hands and executing a *pas d'extase* under the trellised porch, "Messer Domenico has begged a holiday to-day for all the boys at the monastery, on account of the exhibition of the new frescoes at the Santa Maria Nuova. The great signori of

Medici and his friends were at the chapel yesterday afternoon, and we are all to go to-day and look at the pictures in our turn. And I am there you know, Monna Ursula, painted by Messer Veneziano as an angel. Oh! I have got such a pair of wings, I promise you: only think!"

"And," continued Niccolò, taking up the wondrous tale with a reminiscence of his former jealousy, "do you know they say in the city that all the nobles admired Messer Veneziano's frescoes much more than his friend's, and were heard to say so openly, while Messer del Castagno was present. I wonder how he liked that; it must have been rather hard to bear, I should think."

"Ah!" returned Angelo quickly, finding in this last remark of Niccolò's an opportunity for publishing his patron's greatness, "*I* am not surprised that they said that: for although no doubt Messer del Castagno is a very great artist, I am sure he is nothing in comparison with the Ser Veneziano! Do you know that Castagno is his friend's pupil, and that every day he takes lessons of him in the new method of painting which the Venetian painters use? Messer Domenico can lay on colours with oil as well as water, and he is teaching Castagno to do the same. And that is why they live together."

"Who told you all that?" asked Niccolò, with some astonishment.

"Why my patron, of course," replied the other, grandly; "I get my news from the fountain-head, not from the contadini at the doors of the taverns. It was Messer Domenico himself who told me all that one day, when I had asked him why the man with the yellow vest was so often in his room, leaning over his shoulder, and watching him paint his cartoons. But at any rate, the great point is that we have got a holiday, and when I have talked a bit to Teresa, you and I will go to the chapel, Niccolò, and see the sight for ourselves."

And he ran merrily into the house.

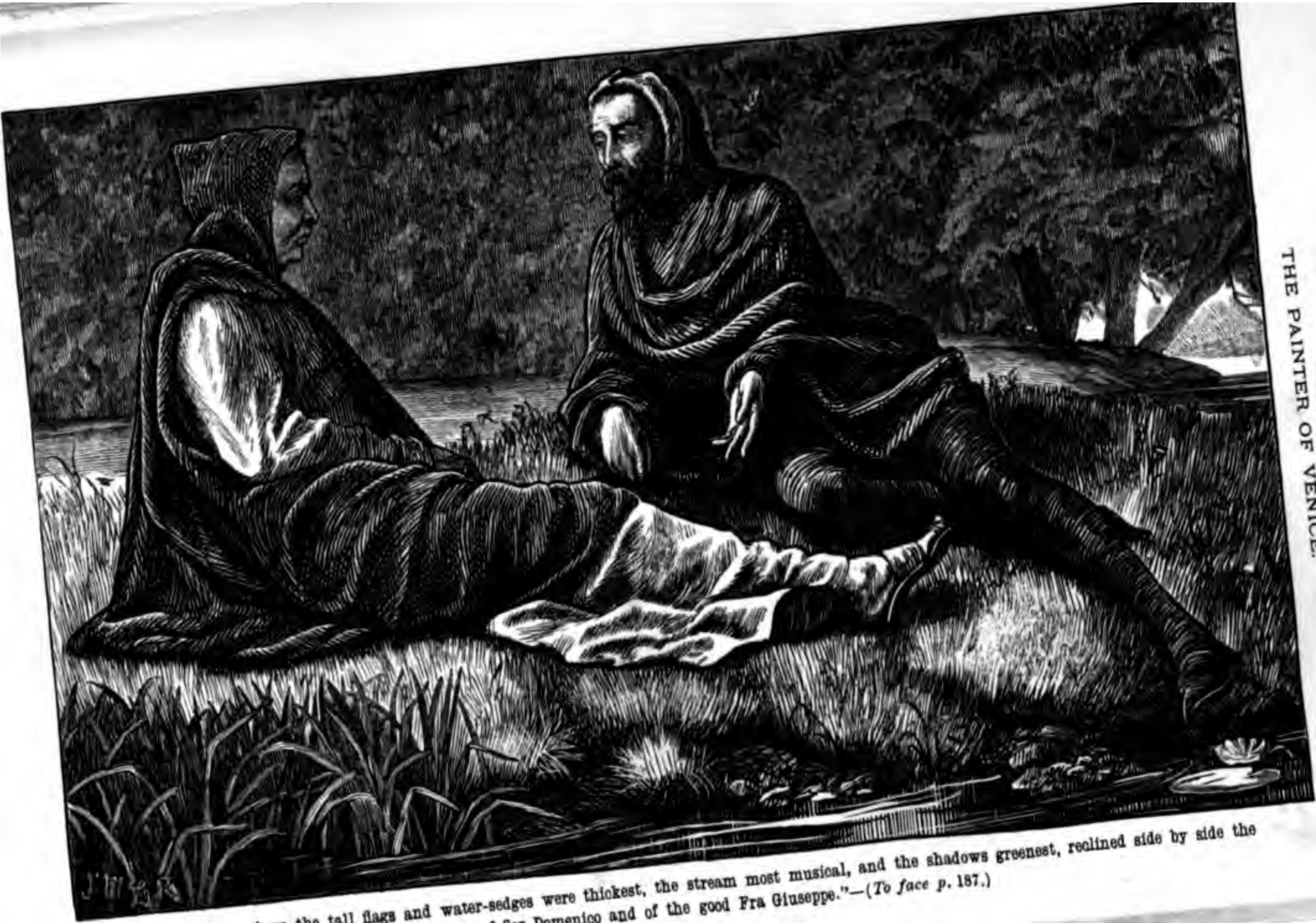
Poor Angelo! Inside that little shaded chamber sorrow was waiting for him. For Teresa, excited by the sound of the chattering and laughing under the verandah, had sprung up in her bed, and was bending forward with eager flushed face and burning eyes, to catch a glimpse of the talkers through the half-open door.

"Teresa!" cried her brother, running in with his curls flying behind him, "you must not jump up like that, it will make you cough so dreadfully! Oh, do lie down!"

But the adjuration came too late. Flinging her thin arms about his neck, the sick child burst suddenly into an hysteric fit of mingled laughter and tears, one moment congratulating

her darling Angelo upon the immortalization secured to him by Messer Domenico's painting, and anon lamenting with frenzied grief that, while all the townspeople were gone to admire the wonderful masterpiece, she, who alone had a dear and particular interest in it, must perforce remain behind, solitary and quiet in her dark little chamber. Nor would she be consoled, even when Monna Ursula and the good Cristina pressed her to their motherly bosoms, and promised to glean for her all the tidings and gossip obtainable about the new picture; she continued to weep passionately, crying out between her sobs that she had never before understood how bitter and sorrowful a thing her weakness could really be; for now it was destined to hinder her from going with the neighbours to the chapel of the Santa Maria Nuova, to enjoy there the very best sight of the whole long year! Poor little Teresa!—she was only a child, and the disappointment was indeed heavy for so frail a form and so tried a heart to sustain; nor is the quick Italian temperament attuned to patience like the hardier nature of more northern climes.

Already some low hurried talk had passed between the two women about the possibility of muffling Teresa in a mantle and carrying her, bambino-fashion, to the spot she so ardently wished to visit, when their kindly intentions were suddenly frustrated by the occurrence of that identical disaster which Angelò had sagely foretold. A violent attack of coughing succeeded Teresa's sobs, and her whole frame, already exhausted by the agitation of an hysteric fit, was now convulsed anew by a yet more terrible paroxysm. She beat the air piteously with her tiny wasted hands, and struggled for breath till her brow was moist with the dews of a mortal anguish. Tenderly the women raised her from her pillows, while Angelo and his friend stood by dismayed and pallid, for neither of them had ever witnessed until now so distressing and ghastly a sight as this. Then came an interval of silence,—they hoped of repose also, but that was not to be. Teresa fell back upon Ursula's breast, and lay there a minute with closed eyes and tremulous lips, drawing great slow breaths that sounded like sobs; then she turned her head with a languid weary gesture, as though she sought the support of the cushion behind her, uttered a low cry of pain, and seemed to swoon. Cristina shrieked and ran hastily for a basin of water, but Angelo, dimly understanding that the worst had at length arrived, dropt upon his knees by the bed, and covered his face with his hands. A moment of suspense intervened, and no sound broke the awful stillness, save one low moan,—an ominous sound that lost itself in a gurgling sob,



"where the tall flags and water-sedges were thickest, the stream most musical, and the shadows greenest, reclined side by side the [illegible] of Ser Domenico and of the good Fra Giuseppe."—(*To face p.* 187.)

and passed away into silence more profound than before. Ursula was the first to recover herself. Gently raising the unconscious form of the child in her arms, she brushed aside the brown fallen curls from the damp brow, and moistened the white breathless lips with water. No care could now restore the spent life, no love could re-animate the little worn emaciated body. Teresa had done with the world for evermore.

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Outside on the settle under the portico, the rosy apples in Cristina's basket grew ruddier still under the hot kiss of the morning sun, and the vine-leaves drooped and shrivelled above them, but no one heeded, and no footstep disturbed the silence; until at last, as the shadows of the latticed verandah began to lengthen towards the east, the cottage-door opened, and Angelo and his school-fellow passed slowly out into the glow of sunset-light westward. Their errand was to Fra Giuseppe at the Dominican monastery of Fiesole.

CHAPTER IX.

SUMMER ON THE BANKS OF THE MUGNONE.

ONCE again the course of our story carries us to the banks of that picturesque little runlet in the valley of Fiesole. There, one balmy Sunday morning after matins, upon the smooth moss-sprinkled turf, where the tall flags and water-sedges were thickest, the stream most musical, and the shadows greenest, reclined side by side the figures of Ser Domenico and of the good Fra Giuseppe.

It was the day after little Teresa's burial, and Angelo's two patrons were occupied, naturally enough, in discussing the future prospects of their favourite. Both men inclined to the belief that the monastic life was, of all others, best fitted to the tenderness and indolent softness of Angelo's disposition, so ill-suited for active battle with the rigours of poverty, and the hurry and stir of that world of trade with which he would most surely have to contend if he entered upon a secular career. Nor indeed, as Fra Giuseppe argued, had the boy hitherto manifested the least indication of skill in any branch of craftsmanship; and those leisure hours which his playmates devoted to the pursuit of their several pet hobbies, and to the employment of knife, chisel, or saw, Angelo passed in solitary wanderings through the vineyards, musing or

singing as he walked; or, at times, repeating aloud some hymn or psalm· which had been recently chanted in the oratory. "So that I greatly fear," concluded the good ecclesiastic, "supposing the boy should be provided with some craft and apprenticed to a master, lest this natural languor and inability to apply his mind to study should materially affect his progress in trade, and bring him perhaps into disrepute with his superiors, and to ridicule among his fellow-servants. Therefore, Messer Veneziano, it is strongly forced on my conviction that the cloister is indeed Angelo's proper home; and it seems to me that our Lord, by removing the little Teresa to Paradise, has purposely opened the way for her brother's reception as a neophyte, if only the inclination of the boy himself accords with the disposition of events."

"But my good Frate," enquired Veneziano, "have you never yet ascertained what are Angelo's desires in this particular respect?"

"I am hardly sure of them, dear friend. It is true that I have always encouraged Angelo to dwell upon the thought of the religious life, and have never found him averse to the contemplation of it; but while Teresa yet remained to us, I did not directly propose to him any choice in the matter, for it seemed to me unwise to wean his affections from her, or to seek a recluse at the expense of her trial and discomfort. Rather, indeed, have I sought to impress on him the necessity of strengthening himself—if need should be—to become her protector and champion in the world; for at times I fancied it possible she might linger with us many years. One sees those things happen, you know,—the human frame can bear so much disease, and yet retain its hold on the divine spark. But God has otherwise ordained; and Angelo is free to decide as he lists."

"He is a strange boy," said Ser Domenico, presently: "I shall keep a lively interest in him all my life, wherever fortune may take me. And I hope, by God's grace, that already my friendship has wrought the child some slight benefit."

"Truly, dear friend, had it not been for your kindly advice and Christian interference, my nephew and his schoolmate Niccolò must have remained the bitterest of enemies. It is to your sweet lute and pious hymn that they are indebted, under the grace of God, for their most happy reconciliation."

"Yes!" answered the minstrel-painter, smiling, "the lute and the sunset wrought the charm. Nature is ever seeking to assimilate earth to heaven; if we do but suffer our ears to hear her voice, and our eyes to dwell upon her beauty, she will infallibly recall us to pristine tenderness and peace."

"You express my own conviction," remarked the monk,

thoughtfully; "and I observe in our child so great and intuitive an appreciation of that subtle appeal of nature, that I suspect he is not altogether the dunce which some of us at the monastery yonder are apt to believe. You may find him now and then before daybreak, seated on a scarp of rock, half-way up the hill, with his chin on his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the reddening east, conning no recondite manuscript of man's inditing, but that eternal and glorious Gospel which God's own hand inscribes across His heaven night and morn, in living letters of fire; a writing which Angelo loves to read in solitude, and which he comprehends and remembers as none other of our pupils are able to do. I fancy, for my part, that the child is almost a poet."

"It may be," returned Ser Domenico. "There is always greatness in the soul which can afford to dispense with human fellowship. Such voluntary retirement proves a sense of kindred with higher existences. Fra Giuseppe, I think Angelo may become a saint some day. And, so far as I see, his way to the crown and the white robe must lie through the shadows of the cloister. Make him a novice, good father."

"Methinks truly," replied the other, "that the course of events indicates that holy path for him. Our Lord has taken from earth, one by one, all those in the outer world for whose sake his presence by the home-fireside might have seemed needful. All are gone before to await his arrival at the Master's house. And you, too, they tell me, must soon leave us for the lagoons and gaieties of Venice."

"It is true," answered the painter, "that I must shortly depart; but I think it not unlikely that the courtesies of your noble Cosmo de Medici may ere long oblige me to return to you for a season."

"He is a great man," said the monk; "and he loves to make himself the companion of great men."

"There is a speech worthy of a Florentine!" cried the painter, gaily doffing his cap and saluting the old Frate with mock solemnity of acknowledgment: "Ah, Fra Giuseppe, I protest no courtier could have framed a compliment more gracefully."

"It came from my heart, friend," rejoined the monk, with a grave smile; "your courtiers cannot always boast of so much sincerity. But tell me,—does Messer del Castagno remain in Florence after your departure?"

"Why do you ask me that?" said Veneziano, averting his face from the gaze of his companion.

"Because," returned Fra Giuseppe, who never made a secret of anything, "he seems to have taken a fancy to our Niccolò, and I imagine—God forgive me if I ignorantly wrong a good

man—that his influence over the boy may prove at least less kindly than yours. I had from Niccolò lately some slight account of a conversation between them, and as the confidence was not made to me in the confessional, I do no harm in assuring you that the counsel Messer del Castagno gave the lad, upon the occasion I have named, was scarcely such as a Christian *religious* could approve. Now I should not like Niccolò to become further intimate with him ; yet I hear you are his friend, and gossip adds that he is also your pupil."

Messer Domenico lifted his face, and laid his hand gently upon the monk's arm. "Fra Giuseppe," said he, in a low, steady voice, "believe me, you indeed err: I will tell you all I know of Andrea del Castagno, for I owe so much to justice, to your friendship, and to the tie which exists between you and Angelo. I first met the man of whom we speak in Venice, not long ago. He has always been ambitious of distinction ; and when it was told him that I had learnt in the studio of Antonello of Messina, and had been instructed by my master in the new manner of colouring by means of oil, he visited at my house, and besought me that I would initiate him also in that art. I must not conceal from you, my friend, that I had the weakness to hesitate about my reply. I knew myself to possess a great secret, which my vanity urged me to retain undivulged, and I perceived that my visitor was a man of genius, and, if armed with the superior acquirements he sought at my hands, might soon eclipse and outstrip me. Nay, worse than even this, I permitted my senses to be swayed by a prejudice I conceived against his very face and manner of speaking ; the tone of his voice offended my too fastidious fancy, and I absolutely took exception to the expression and the colour of his eyes. I mention these ludicrous foibles of mine, Fra Giuseppe, not less to shame myself than to convince you, by what follows, how great was my mistake in forming so hasty a judgment, and how little characteristics of physique are to be trusted as criterions of a man's moral nature. It was not until we met in this city that I yielded to Castagno's pressing entreaties, and consented to admit him to my studio. He took lodgings in the house I had chosen for my own residence here, and I soon learned to enjoy his companionship, for he has a fluent tongue and lively imagination ; while his intellectual capacity exceeds mine as far, dear Frate, as yours the simplicity of Angelo. Andrea is impatient, I cannot deny it, and he is even passionate now and then ; but these are the errors of genius, and who will not readily forgive them? No doubt that advice of his which you regarded with so much disapproval, was tendered to Niccolò in some rash moment

of irritation; and believe me, Andrea in his more sober moods, would be the first to condemn it. It is impossible for me, Fra Giuseppe, to pardon myself that selfishness of which I was once guilty towards him, nor can I ever enough express my sense of Castagno's generosity in so easily forgetting it. But in order that I may never again harbour an unkindly feeling towards him, nor suffer an ill word of him to be spoken unchecked in my presence, I have imposed on myself a perpetual penance, which perhaps you may consider as light and trivial as it is quaint and eccentric. It is this; that whenever a thought detrimental to the merit of my friend arises in my heart, or whenever I hear others speak of him disparagingly, I put aside brush, palette, or book, and drawing out my lute from my bosom, I charm away the evil spirit of discord which would disturb me, by some snatch of melody, as once you remember, Frate, the shepherd youth was wont to chase the demon from the breast of Saul."

"'Tis a pretty device," quoth Fra Giuseppe, "and worthy of the poet who adopts it; but is it always successful?"

"I strive to make it so," answered Domenico, humbly; "it is but my way of praying against the powers of disorder. Plaintive music is the strongest and truest restorer of peace with which I am acquainted; and, as a rule, I have found others equally amenable to its gentle influence."

Fra Giuseppe bent his head in silence, and the painter resumed his narration.

"We spend our evenings together," continued he, "in the pleasantest fashion, for Castagno is the most delightfully genial companion in the world. Every day, when our work at the chapel of the Santa Maria is concluded, he returns with me to our lodgings; or, if the evening be particularly inviting, we stroll and loiter together in the country, I sometimes playing upon my lute when we chance to rest, and he rhapsodizing, as he only can, upon a thousand wonderful phases of art and nature. Ah, how you would like to hear him discourse, Fra Giuseppe!"

The old monk winced. Somehow his heart thrilled disagreeably at finding the simple Messer Domenico so earnest in the praises of this Andrea del Castagno. Could it be, wondered the Frate, that his own instinct had deceived him, as Veneziano believed himself to have been formerly misled? could the man in the yellow vest be really the worthy and noble being that his friend supposed? Castagno's face said "no," and the monk knew that he generally read faces well: Niccolò's account of him said "no," also; and the monk knew that Niccolò had never been detected in a falsehood. And yet Veneziano, himself the best and simplest of men,

and Castagno's most familiar companion, believed so firmly in his virtue and sincerity. Here was an anomaly: but the good Fra Giuseppe was no hypocrite, and on certain subjects was accustomed to hold such strong opinions, that he could not bring himself to express contrition for the blame he had imputed to Niccolò's tempter, even were it to do a pleasure to Angelo's benefactor.

So there was an awkward pause, while the water bubbled away noisily over the rolling pebbles, and the monk betook himself to gathering the rushes at his side, and waiting in silence for some further confidence on the part of his companion. None came, however, and at length the good Frate grew desperate, and by way of divertisement, propounded a query in another direction, yet sufficiently near the topic of their recent converse to avoid the appearance of abruptness.

"Are the frescoes of the Santa Maria completed?" he asked, delighted with his own ingenuity in so perplexing a situation.

"Not entirely; but they are much further advanced than the ceiling of the chapel."

"And that is also your work?"

"Mine,—and Andrea's."

"Ah!" said the monk, hastily; "but I thought the Medici princes had already seen and pronounced on the paintings?"

"They have seen the frescoes only; the ceiling was not uncovered for them: but the whole chapel will be completed soon; in a week at the furthest, I fancy, for Andrea works even more quickly than I; and he is a far better draughtsman: I have seen none who can equal him among living men in this respect, save perhaps Roselli and Masaccio."

Fra Giuseppe began to feel hipped, for his instinctive mistrust of Castagno increased in proportion to the zeal of Veneziano's championship, and he feared by-and-by to become positively uncharitable. Looking up in his embarrassment for some object that might distract his attention, he perceived Angelo approaching at a distance with his former enemy and now inseparable ally, and hailing the welcome sight as a God-send, leaped to his feet with alacrity, and beckoned the two boys to join him and the Ser Veneziano.

CHAPTER X.

NICCOLÒ'S PETITION.

IT needed but a glance of the Frate's clear eyes to detect an unusual gravity and thoughtfulness in the demeanour of his two pupils, and to convince him that some conversation of a specially earnest character must have recently engrossed their minds.

"So you have been walking together this morning, my children," began the old man, as he invited them to a seat on the mossy turf beside him.

"Yes, uncle," returned Angelo, in a subdued voice, "and we have something of great importance to tell you; something which I hope you will be glad to hear."

He paused, and Veneziano, believing that the boys wished to continue their confidence to the monk in private, gathered his mantle about him, and prepared to rise, when Angelo darted forward, and seizing the painter warmly by the hand, besought him to remain in his place, and to assist them with his friendly counsel, "For," added the lad, with kindling eyes into which the tears rose while he spoke, "it ill becomes me to keep secret from you the strongest desire of my heart, and the most serious resolution which I have ever formed; nor does Niccolò intend to be more mysterious on this subject than I, since he has already obtained the consent of his father and mother to follow the path he has chosen to tread with me."

"This is an eloquent beginning, Angelo," quoth the monk, smiling, "but we have yet to learn what serious resolution this is in which you two are so solemnly agreed. And as you appear to be spokesman, I pray you relieve our anxiety on the matter without more preamble.

"Dear uncle and father," murmured the child, dropping his fair head upon the Frate's shoulder, and blushing as he uttered his avowal; "it is this, that Niccolò and I are sure we have vocations to serve God in the cloister; and we wish, both of us, to enter the Dominican fraternity, and become monks there together."

Fra Giuseppe's heart gave a great bound, and his face blanched as he met the glance of Ser Veneziano. For a little while his emotion hindered him from speaking, and he could only press his nephew warmly to his breast, and inwardly entreat the Master to inspire him with grace to judge aright and to counsel discreetly.

"My child," said he presently, in slow, gentle tones that betrayed his deep agitation of mind, "God forbid that I

should seek to discourage you in your pious desire, I, who for so many long years have joyfully served Him in this virginal habit; I, to whom that service has been sweet and peaceful as the duty of angels! But it behoves me to remind you both of your present youth, and of the many changes of disposition common to boys of your age; of worldly chances that may yet perhaps surprise you, and allure your steps to some other way; in brief, dear children, of the thousand accidents possible during these next five years, which must pass over your heads before either of you arrive at the estate of manhood."

"Father," said Niccolò, looking reverently up at the white-haired ecclesiastic, and speaking in a voice of great decision and calmness, "do not imagine that Angelo and I have determined this matter in haste. Long had I thought of it before I knew that he also was bent upon the same course; nor, when last night I named my wishes to them at home, did my father and mother appear the least astonished at hearing what I told them. They have other sons to work for them, and to cheer their old age, and they do not repine over the thought of yielding me to God. Do you not believe, father, that at sixteen I am able to judge for myself in such an affair as this?"

"I only dread, my dear son," returned the monk, earnestly, "lest you should judge with too much precipitation, and vow too rashly, as Jephtha did of old. For one of your vigorous health and active character, Niccolò, the monastery, remember, may some day prove a grievous restraint. I cannot but entertain some fears on your account which do not trouble me for Angelo, since he was always different from you in temperament, and fitted, as I imagine, to find repose and peace where you would only experience dulness and monotony. Yet, my son, I seek not to drive back a sheep from the Lord's fold, and if, indeed, you have heard His voice inviting you to follow Him more closely than He permits to those of the outer world, I would rather applaud your obedience than condemn your imprudence. What then, my child, is your motive for thus seeking admission to the Dominican confraternity?"

Niccolò rose from his seat, and stood before the Frate with folded arms and burning cheeks.

"Father," said he again, in a voice which struggled manfully against a storm of passionate tears, "you do not know—you cannot guess with how powerful and indomitable a devil I have to contend! It is a devil that 'goeth not out save by prayer and fasting.' Let me seize this hour of grace which God accords me, before the fiend returns again to his evil work! I am tormented with a continual

envy and jealousy of every creature more gifted or more blessed than myself; I am devoured by a constant thirst after the praise of men, and by a malignant hatred of those who on any account are preferred before me. If I remain in the world I shall become the slave of ambition, and shall pass my life pursuing some chimera of fame, of gold, or of high station, restless always, fevered with dissatisfaction, and miserable at the last. Better then, surely, to fly, while I may, to the quietude and peace of a sanctuary which no worldly competitions can disturb, no dreams of aggrandizement profane, no bitterness of disappointment or of envy overshadow. In the world there is ever temptation and care; in the convent there is brotherly love."

"Ah, my child!" cried Fra Giuseppe, sadly, "would indeed that you uttered only the truth; would, indeed, that the world were as utterly excluded from our monastery walls as you imagine. It is not so! We monks escape, perhaps, those pomps and vanities which allure the senses of laymen, or even of the secular priesthood, but we are not secure from the assaults of our own evil desires. We shut out, indeed, the harassing cares and petty vexations of domestic life; we are not fretted with the grinding annoyance of money-getting, nor with the fear of personal loss; we are so humbly placed that we cannot fear to fall, and the ambitions of the world touch us not. But no vows, nor habit, nor walls of stone, can bar from the human heart those fatal sins of envy and jealousy from which you fain would secure yourself. Beware of seeking any refuge from these upon earth. No asylum can shield you from a spiritual foe; no garb, however sacred, defend your soul from danger of transgression. He who needs vigilance to guard himself from slipping upon the highway of the world, will find the narrow footpath scarcely less dangerous to his steps. Let such an one look rather to the shoes upon his feet, and take good heed that he be 'shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.'"

"Father," responded Niccolò, after a moment's thought, "I know that you speak in kindness, and that your words are wise and truthful. But I am persuaded my vocation is from God, and I long to do such valiant war against the demon within me as the pressing concerns of a secular career would not permit. In the silence and seclusion of the cloister I shall have leisure to devote to that spiritual conflict which is ever raging in my bosom, nor will the fiend have so great chance of victory over me, if those worldly guerdons and pelf which are his most ready weapons, be not at hand to arm him withal."

Long time the good monk continued his argument with

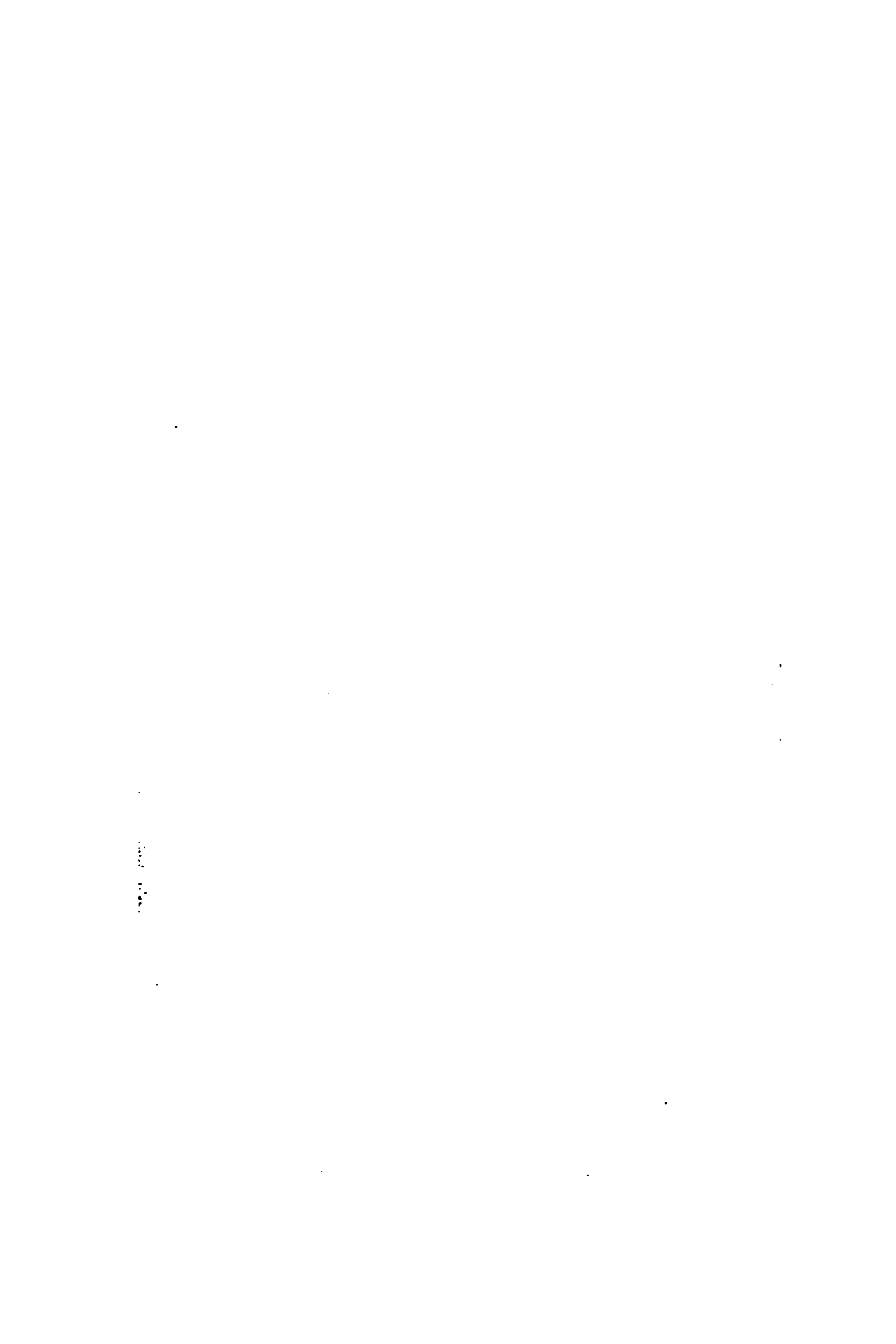
Niccolò, urging upon him the many difficulties and trials of an ecclesiastical life; but yet the boy remained so firm in his desire that at length Fra Giuseppe's kind heart yielded, and he promised that evening to seek an interview with the Superior of the monastery, and lay before him the request of the two lads to be admitted as novices of the lowest degree. Thus, then, was the matter settled for the present, and the last words on the subject had scarcely escaped the Frate's lips than the hollow, sonorous tongue of a colossal bell in the convent-tower announced the hour of noon, and summoned the Brothers to their frugal meal in the refectory.

"Farewell for the nonce!" cried Fra Giuseppe, hastily preparing to depart; "the voice of our noisy tocsin calls me away from you, but no doubt we shall soon again meet in another friendly conclave. What say you, Messer Veneziano,—shall we make an appointment for the holding of a general council to-morrow evening in this pleasant spot? Think you that for an hour or two your friend the Ser Castagno will consent to spare you to us, so that we four, who are as yet alone in the secret, may discuss at greater length and leisure the very solemn hopes and desires of which these our children have petitioned us to be the arbiters?"

"For my part," replied Veneziano, with ready cheerfulness, "I shall most willingly present myself, for I am deeply interested in the pious design our young friends have formed, and am not a little anxious to hear the verdict of the Superior upon the matter. As for Andrea," he continued, with his wonted sweetness of smile, "he will doubtless entertain himself during my absence with some one of those Greek or Latin authors whose works he loves to peruse in odd moments, and with whose great and wise souls his genius gives him a right of kin. Are you agreed, boys," continued he, addressing himself to the two students beside him, "in this proposal of the Frate's? Shall I meet you here at sunset to-morrow?"

"Yes, dear Messer Veneziano," answered Angelo, rapidly taking his cue from Niccolò's gesture of assent, "we will both be here at the time appointed. And," added he, dropping his voice and catching the painter by the hand as he moved away, "forget not, I beseech you, to bring your lute, that we may close our discourse with some of those beautiful hymns of which you know so many."

"Have no fear on that score, my boy," answered Veneziano, smiling, "for I always carry my music with me. And when I die, my lute shall be found upon my heart!"



THE PAINTER OF VENICE.

"Veneziano and Castagno, surrounded by various implements of their craft, stood each in front of his panel, brush in hand."—(*To face p.* 197.)

In this manner then, and in pleasant anticipation of a speedy re-union, the little coterie of friends dispersed. No presage of disaster troubled them; no boding cloud intercepted the deep sapphire of the still Italian heaven; no whisper of warning in the drowsy summer air foretold an impending tempest. Yet not a score of hours divided the Ser Veneziano and his companions from the most awful event of their lives; an event which was to open for one of them the gates of the Unseen Land, and to leave behind it for ever upon the pages of Florentine history a stain so dark and terrible that even among the many wild romances of the fifteenth century, it looms before us a blacker and more savage record than any, for it carries with it an eternal reproach to genius,—a perpetual shame to human gratitude and friendship.

CHAPTER XI.

"MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND."

THE hour of sunset was fast approaching. Already a flood of ruddy light streaming through the narrow windows of the Virgin's chapel illumined its painted walls with mellow fire, and scattered upon its marble pavement broken gleams of topaz and ruby-coloured glory, touching with finger of gold the sculptured architraves of cold white pillar and column, and converting the very motes of dust which slowly wheeled and circled in its kindling rays to the semblance of floating diamonds.

Veneziano and Castagno, surrounded by various implements of their craft, stood, each in front of his panel, brush in hand. They had been working thus since noon, and yet, as hour by hour the glowing forms they had conceived sprang into life beneath the touch of genius, the painters felt neither fatigue nor restlessness; the crawling changes of the day passed by unnoticed while they feasted upon the labour they loved, and watched its progress with eyes of creative pride and affection.

It was not until the rosy descending light from the west gleamed full upon the fresco which Veneziano was occupied in painting, that he remembered the lateness of the hour and the promise which, on the previous morning, he had made to Fra Giuseppe and the two students; and, turning to his friend Castagno, he thus interrupted a silence which had lasted out the greater part of the afternoon.

"Andrea, I have an engagement this evening in the glen

of Fiesole; will you pardon me for abandoning you during a couple of hours? I shall be home to supper, and, if you please, we will take our symposia together."

Castagno rolled his sinister eyes upon the simple face of his companion, and briefly accepted the invitation, adding however, in a tone which seemed to the sensitive Veneziano indicative of some disapprobation, "No doubt your engagement is a friendly tryst with the Dominican friar whom, of late, you have so much affected?"

"You divine rightly, Andrea," returned Messer Veneziano, wiping his brushes upon a palette-cloth as he spoke. "I have promised to meet him and his two favourite pupils by the brook of Fiesole this evening."

"His nephew and that young idiot Niccolò, I suppose," growled the other painter. "A more consummate pair of suckling fools than those unfortunate boys I never beheld! Monks, children! ascetics in the bud! I am glad, at least, Domenico, that your studies no longer require the attendance of Saint Angelo as model in this artistic haunt of genius!"

"Nay now, good Andrea," expostulated Veneziano, "something has chagrined your humour! Be not so hard upon the youths, they deserve none of these ungentle strictures."

Castagno lifted his shoulders in silent deprecation, retired a few paces before his fresco, examined it critically, added here and there an effective touch of the brush, and then, turning his attention to the result of his companion's labour, fell to comparing the two paintings with expressive gestures that betokened strong dissatisfaction.

"Domenico," said he, sharply, "you will always excel me in brilliancy! I cannot produce the richness of colour which you command with so much ease. Whence comes the pure intensity of this blue mantle upon your figure of the Virgin, this luscious depth of madder in the shadows of her fallen hair? *I* can mix no colours like these."

"'Tis a mere trick," responded Veneziano, readily, "a knack of brush which anyone may easily acquire. But what is brilliancy compared to the creative power with which nature has dowered *you*,—a power of design which far surpasses my feeble efforts, and should render you superior to all lower cravings after styles of tone or detail. Yours is the higher gift by far, for you have a sweep of hand and a conceptive faculty which I can never hope to attain."

Castagno turned away morosely. "Flattery!" said he, in a low hoarse voice. "I do not ask for that at *your* lips, Domenico of Venice! And, talk as you please on the matter, you will not pretend to deny, I suppose, that Cosmo de' Medici and his noble companions found more to admire and praise in your frescoes than in mine. Colour pleased their

eyes; design was passed by unnoticed. And these men are *cognoscenti* in art!"

"You are bitter, Andrea; you permit your heart to be moved too easily. Know you not that princes oftentimes award their praises in inverse proportion to their real judgment, and are frequently most sparing of their commendations where most their taste is captivated? And, be that as it may, it is hardly for me to remind you, my friend, that the true artist labours not for requital at the lips of men, but for pure love of art, and for the reward which Heaven only is great and high enough to bestow upon genius."

An angry smile mantled the sunken olive cheeks of Andrea del Castagno, and faded into that unprepossessing sneer of contempt, which appeared to be his most habitual expression.

"It is not difficult for you to enunciate that theory," quoth he, returning to his work, "for *you* are the favoured artist; and he with whom the world wags well is always ready to sing psalms. Is that panel of yours finished, Domenico?"

"No," replied the other, putting up his colours and pencils, "none of my work can boast of completion yet. But a few days' industry will end the business, I fancy. The lights of the flesh-tints require heightening, before the full effect which I mean to produce can be accomplished. See," cried he, seizing Castagno by the arm while the deep enthusiasm inspired by the love of his art filled as with a glory the sunken wells of his Italian eyes, and the withered hollows of a face from which the freshness and energy of youth had long since passed,—"see here!" I shall add to this crimson drapery of the Madonna's robe a reflected light, to give it sharper prominence against the cool grey of the angel's wing behind; and there yonder, the tumbled masses of the Magdalen's yellow hair must be touched with a brushful or two of a colour whose value for effects of golden brilliance I have but lately learned. You, too, shall know the secret, Andrea; 'tis a veritable marvel of our art,—one's pencil seems dipped in sunlight when loaded with this wondrous tint!"

"Cease, cease, for God's sake!" cried Castagno, twisting himself free of Veneziano's grasp, "you drive me mad! you goad me to desperation! Would that no Medician patron of our craft had thus closely associated us in the adornment of his chapel; would that no fatal invitation had bidden us thus recklessly to Florence, and, in an evil hour, confided the execution of these cursed frescoes to our mutual labour! Ah, that I had burned the deadly paper which committed to me the partnership in this miserable work! ah, that you had died on the day you, too, accepted it! Domenico! Domenico! my demon overpowers me! Save me, preserve me from his malice!"

He sank into a chair which was placed in front of the painted walls, and covered his face with his quivering hands. Gently Veneziano bent over his friend and whispered some broken words of consolation. "You have toiled too long, dear Andrea," said he; "your brain is overwrought, you need repose. Come out with me into the open air; perchance the breath of the sunset-hour and the music of my lute may revive your spirit, and restore you to your truer self. Rise, Andrea,—let us be going,—remember I must keep my engagement with the Frate."

But Castagno, with averted face, repulsed him.

"Go," murmured he, "I seek not to detain you here; but I cannot accompany you, I am too ill to walk to-night; besides, my day's portion of work is still unfinished. I must add yet another tint to the thorn-wreath on the brows of my dying Christ before the colour dries, and then I shall go slowly home to await your arrival. Fear nothing for me," continued he, seeing that Domenico hesitated in his departure, "'twas but a momentary fit of the vapours, and I am already recovering myself. Go, I shall be better alone."

"Farewell then, Andrea," replied the guileless Venetian. "I yield to your desire for solitude, not to my own selfish inclination, in thus abandoning my friend. But if you should again require my assistance, despatch a messenger to the valley of Fiesole; he will find me there with the Fra Giuseppe. For your sake I shall make the interview as brief as possible."

And with lingering steps the Venetian painter quitted the sacred atelier.

CHAPTER XII.

BY THE CASTELLO GIOBATISTA.

"IT is fully an hour since sundown," said Angelo, addressing Fra Giuseppe and his fellow-student, "and yet the Ser Veneziano tarries! What can have become of him?"

The clear purple twilight of a southern summer was gathering about the little group in the romantic dell of Fiesole, and a drowsy haze—half evening mist, half halo of reflected glow from the lately resplendent west—crept along the distant landscape, and shrouded the grey towers of the Dominican cloister. Fra Giuseppe and his two pupils had been laudably punctual to the appointment at sunset, and for a short time after their meeting were well enough disposed to accord the painter reasonable grace while they beguiled their waiting-moments with general discourse; but

by-and-by, when the monastery chimes had announced the flight of three successive quarters, a spirit of trepidation and anxiety visibly disturbed the small assembly, and even the triumphant satisfaction disseminated by the Frate's account of his successful interview with the Superior on behalf of his youthful clients, had no longer power to check their disappointment at the continued absence of Messer Veneziano.

"It is but half-an-hour's walk from the chapel to this spot," ruminated Niccolò in discontented tones, "and if our friend had started at sunset he would have arrived here long ago! Some unforeseen accident must have delayed him."

"I will run towards the city," cried the other boy, leaping to his feet, "perhaps the man with the yellow vest may have met and detained him on the way." And Angelo darted swiftly off upon his errand, and was soon lost to sight in the deepening twilight.

After a short silence, Fra Giuseppe and his remaining companion fell again into a desultory conversation concerning the various difficulties and obstacles incidental to the career of undowered neophytes; and the Frate was deep in the relation of his own early trials under similar circumstances, when a shrill cry, apparently issuing from a spot some two hundred yards down the course of the stream, suddenly interrupted the progress of the monk's discourse.

"Uncle! Niccolò!" shrieked the voice, in accents of horror and consternation, "help—hasten for the love of God! The Ser Veneziano is murdered!"

Following the direction of this appalling cry, the student and his preceptor rapidly quitted the shadows of their favourite retreat, crossed with as much precipitation the open ground beyond, and halted, breathless and dismayed, under the high blank wall of a fortress known as the "Castello Giobatista," immediately outside the city.

Here the clear soft light of the Italian evening revealed a scene as inexplicable as it was disastrous; a scene which struck fervid terror to the boyish heart of Niccolò, and filled the more experienced bosom of the monk beside him with sensations of alarm and excitement unknown to him for many a long, quiet year. Upon the turfed sloping margin of the castle fosse, full in the weird light of the rising moon, lay the motionless figure of the Venetian painter, his uncovered head supported upon the knees of Angelo, who, with face and lips scarcely less white than those of the prostrate man, was bending over him, and vainly striving to recall him to consciousness.

"Mother of God!" ejaculated the Frate, aghast at the awful sight, "who did this? how did it happen?—what is the meaning of it?"

"I know nothing," responded Angelo, in a low, horrified whisper; "he lay thus when I found him,—a low moan only attracted me to the spot. Is it possible any one can have assaulted so good and gentle a man as the Ser Domenico? O, uncle Giuseppe! for Christ's sake come hither and bind his head,—see, it is almost cleft in twain!—my vest is drenched with blood!" He started back as he uttered the cry, unable to control his terror, and pointed with a trembling hand to a dark, shining stream which slowly oozed from the wounded temples of the insensible Venetian. Fra Giuseppe's surgical knowledge stood him in good stead at this critical moment, and his manly presence of mind fortified the quailing spirits of his younger companions.

"Quick," cried he, snatching Niccolò's cap from his head and thrusting it into the hand of its owner, "hasten to the rivulet, fill this with water, and bring it hither as fast as possible."

While Niccolò obeyed, the monk hastily tore into strips a kerchief which Angelo produced at his uncle's bidding, and with which, having dipped it in the water Niccolò brought, he proceeded to bandage the forehead of his patient. Monks in the old days were often well-instructed in the art of medicine, and many of the best physicians and herbalists were to be found, as we have already hinted in our earlier pages, among the ranks of the religious Orders; nor, indeed, are we of the nineteenth century more indebted for Art's sake to the medieval painters and poets, than to the cowled ecclesiastics of the same rich age, for the "culte" and preservation of science. In all countries, the cloister has ever been the home of students and the nursery of learning;—astronomy, music, literature, and medicine,—all these were nourished in their growth by the successors of Bede and Alcuin; a fact apparently ignored by the present generation, at once so intolerant of monasticism and so proud of its Bible, which, but for the jealous care and unwearying labour guaranteed by that very monasticism, would never have been preserved for the enlightenment of Queen Victoria's subjects. For, in the turbulent middle ages, when warfare was the occupation of the many, and the fine arts of the few; when all manufacture was really hand-work, and the utter lack of machinery and steam-pressure necessitated the employment of a hundred artizans where now a dozen suffice;—when the transit of merchandise was tardy, commerce difficult, free trade among the nations impracticable, and printing a thing unknown; few among the laity had either sufficient time or manual dexterity to undertake the arduous and delicate task of transcribing the Scriptures, while to the monks this sacred work was at once an avocation and an ecclesiastical

duty. The invention of the printing-press, and the adoption of the new art by members of the secular community, was therefore the severest blow ever dealt upon the head and front of monasticism, since it effectually rent from the hands of the "religious," not only the chief weapon of their power over the people, but the very stay and solace of their solitary hours. So surely does every fresh discovery and application of the strength of the Ogre Mechanism become the means of filching occupation and existence from thousands; and while disseminating knowledge and luxury among poor and rich, still realizes the old nursery legend of its devouring kin, and ever as the years roll on, continues to ply with ceaseless hand its iron mill, and grinds the bones of Art to make its bread.

So whirl the changes of the times, so also we shift and mingle as they turn!

But while we have been indulging in this romantic monody over the Past, what have the skill and promptitude of the brother Giuseppe accomplished towards the recovery of Messer Veneziano? Alas, it would need a cunning leech, in truth, to restore to that stricken victim the life and consciousness which were his but one short hour ago! For a brief space, indeed, the cool touch of the water upon his brow revives him; the languid pulses throb again, the closed eyelids quiver, and from the white lips comes a single word, repeated twice in accents of terrible pathos. With hushed breath and expectant faces, the friends about him stoop to catch the faintly-murmured sounds.

"Andrea! Andrea!"

Fra Giuseppe leans forward and addresses himself in low tones to Angelo.

"He wants his friend,—Andrea del Castagno. Help me to move his head from your knees to mine, and I will remain here with him while you and Niccolò hasten to the chapel of the Santa Maria to fetch the Ser Castagno hither. But listen;—in an hour's time the city gates will be shut, and we must lose no time in getting our poor friend into shelter. Let Niccolò call at his home—you pass it on your way to the chapel—and tell his brother Paolo to bring us a litter as quickly as possible. Be speedy on your errands, my child; the time ebbs fast, and his life goes with it!"

The two boys needed no second adjuration; the wind itself could scarce have outstripped their rapid steps. Fra Giuseppe sat alone with the wounded painter, in the very heart of a light so weird and solemn, a silence so profound, and a scene so strangely awful, that the circumstances might well have appalled the soul of a stouter hero than that of the good friar. Fra Giuseppe, however, was not a man to be

easily dismayed. Earnest religion and unwavering faith supplied him with a greater courage than belonged to most Italians in that age of superstition and fear. As he bent over the sufferer, alternately moistening the stony lips and chafing the cold hands, it occurred to him that a search after the instrument which had wrought so grievous a disaster might not just then be altogether a useless or unsatisfactory employment. It was evident at the outset, that the deep gash upon Veneziano's forehead had been caused by a forcible blow from some blunt weapon, which had fractured the skull and so fearfully injured the brain, that the Frate's medical knowledge left him no hope of his patient's ultimate recovery. Nevertheless, it would be well, thought the Frate, to ascertain, if possible, whether this fatality were the result of an accident or of an assassin's attack; and if the latter, whether any clue remained near the scene of the murder which might serve to assist in detecting the criminal. No knife, no dagger had dealt the blow, nor was it, as the friar opined, the effect of a heavy stone flung from a distance; but probably of some implement struck over Veneziano's forehead from behind him, and with a force which indicated intense passion or malice as the actuating motive of the murderer. And indeed this hypothesis seemed the more likely to be correct, on account of the extreme celerity and silence with which the deed must have been perpetrated. Nowhere was there the least sign of a struggle—the soil was undisturbed—the maestro's dress bore no marks of violence or disorder; nor could the friar recollect that the slightest sound of cry or confusion had interrupted the conversation below the hill until Angelo himself gave the alarm. Or, if a casualty had occurred, then the painter must have stumbled over a large rock or mass of granite—perhaps of iron,—substances for which the monk's keen eyes vainly searched the smooth sides of the fosse, where scarce a flint or pebble broke the even regularity of soft, rounded turf. Stay, what is this? Something gleams dully in the gloaming light a few paces off,—something thrown carelessly down beside a tuft of blood-stained grass,—something with jagged edges and a crooked centre, that seems as though a heavy blow had bent and doubled it.

Fra Giuseppe lays his burden softly upon the turf, rises quietly, and picks up the gleaming object. It is a piece of lead, about the thickness of a thin plank, and looks as though it had been hurriedly torn from a sheet of the same metal, or as if it had formed part of a case or portfolio. Dear God! a terrible suspicion flashes across the Frate's mind, for he knows that it is in leaden cases, just such as that from which this crumpled fragment appears to have been wrenched, that

"Five shapes, indistinct at first under the shadow of the castle wall, drew near the scene of the murder."—(*To face p.* 203.)

travelling painters are accustomed to carry and preserve their unfinished canvases and sketches. Sharply he turns and glances at the motionless figure on the ground. No; from the position of the wound and of the prostrate body, it is evident enough that suicide *cannot* have been committed. Nor is it possible that so good and simple-hearted a man as the Venetian painter should have thus laid violent hands on himself in the very hour of his greatest fame and triumph,—in the very zenith of his fortune,—in the full-shining of his happiest star! Far more probable, that in this lonely place—at this still hour of twilight, some envious brother-artist, following Domenico with stealthy steps and hatred in his heart, may have——

Fra Giuseppe drops the instrument of death in sudden horror and crosses himself, as a man might do who feels the presence of some hideous fiend he dares not face. Is this awful event, indeed, a fulfilment of his own dark prognostications concerning the real character of Andrea del Castagno?

But a slight movement of Veneziano's hand, and the sound of a low cry, recall the friar's bewildered thoughts; he pushes the fragment of lead aside with his foot into the knot of grass behind which it was before hidden, and hastens again to the relief of the dying painter. Alas! how terrible is this unbroken stillness, how unearthly the glamour of the white ascending moon that bathes with its eerie luminance the lifeless form stretched on the margin of the dyke, and blanches to a yet more ghastly pallor the upturned marble face, with its closed eyes and bandaged temples! How slowly the time passes by; how long the messengers tarry;—the world seems indeed to be standing still with poor, anxious, tormented Fra Giuseppe!

That was a step at last, surely! Yes, another follows, voices murmur together in subdued tones, approaching forms loom darkly through the purple shadows yonder! Thank God, the lonely watch is ended,—assistance and companionship are near at hand!

CHAPTER XIII.

"FOR EVER AND EVER."

FIVE shapes, indistinct at first under the shadow of the castle wall, drew near the scene of the murder.

Foremost came Andrea del Castagno, walking alone, and behind him the two students conducting Niccolò's brothers, Baldassare and Paolo, who bore between them a litter covered with grey cloth, and resembling in fashion the

modern bier, which in some southern countries is used for the purpose of conveying corpses to the place of burial.

As Castagno approached, Fra Giuseppe instinctively shrank before him; but the former, unheeding this mark of repugnance on the part of the old friar, and apparently oblivious of all else than his friend, threw himself despondently on his knees, and embraced the lifeless frame with gestures of ardent affection and frenzied sorrow.

"Where did you find him?" whispered the monk, suspiciously, in the ear of his terrified nephew.

"Find him,—find the Ser Castagno?—why at work in the chapel, where you told me to go for him!" answered Angelo in the same hurried tone.

"At work!" repeated the monk in his turn, with a puzzled expression of countenance,—"at work in the chapel? Strange!"

Angelo mistook, as well he might, the cause of his uncle's perplexity, and interpreting it in the only sense obvious to his perceptions, hastened to amend his foregoing statement with a whispered explanation.

"It was hardly dark in the chapel, uncle," said he, "and besides, Messer Castagno had lighted the tapers to work by. I suppose he was anxious to get his frescoes done:—you know the Ser Veneziano—(oh uncle,—it was only the other day!)—told you his would be completed in about a week. No doubt therefore——."

But Fra Giuseppe turned away before the sentence could be concluded, and addressed himself somewhat grimly to the new comer, who during this short colloquy had been seated on the margin of the castle fosse, abandoning himself to tears and lamentations over his wounded colleague.

"Messer del Castagno," quoth the Frate, "let us waste no time in these futile demonstrations of grief,—they will close the city gates ere long."

"Nay, nay!" cried Andrea, displaying all the tokens of a lively sorrow, "to lift him now would be to murder him outright. Think you he could endure the miserable jolting of yonder wooden bier?"

"As for the murdering of him," muttered Paolo, bluntly, "I think that part of the business seems to have been effected pretty completely already! Alack,—look there! scarce any life is left in his body!"

For, as he uttered these last words, Castagno raised the dying man in his arms, and the wound burst out anew beneath the ligature of the bandage, letting a few slow, heavy drops of blood ooze darkly through the linen folds, and fall on the jewelled hand with which Andrea supported him.

"I faint," whispered the marble lips;—"water!" Instantly Fra Giuseppe was beside his friend, but all his affectionate care and professional science could but revive the wasting flame and flickering pulse for a few brief minutes: the clear fire of that generous life was fast burning out, the throbs of that true simple heart came slow and feeble now.

Heavily Ser Domenico raised his eyes, which already the mists of death were veiling, and fixed his gaze upon the fair tearful face of his former model, who stood silent with Niccolò at the feet of the dying master. He beckoned them to approach; and with an expressive gesture, softly laid a hand of each within his own clasped palms.

"Boys," said he in low tones of intense earnestness, his lifted eyes still fastened on their sorrowful faces,—"have you forgiven each other,—are you friends from your hearts!"

"Yes, yes, dearest Messer Domenico,—from our hearts!"

"No longer jealous of each other?—cherishing no secret bitterness,—nursing no malice under the guise of a mutual love?"

He looked intently into Niccolò's pallid face.

"No, no;—true friends,—God knows it,—reconciled for evermore!"

"It is well," murmured the painter, sinking back again with closed eyes; "better is an open adversary than a friend that is false!"

For a moment his soul lingered upon the threshold of its earthly house; he extended his hand to the Frate, and signed to him his wish for absolution. There followed a low, muttered prayer, a few inaudible words,—a solemn benediction;—then the fire sank,—the feeble pulses ceased. Upon his placid face and weary eyelids came the shadow of that darkest, stillest Night, which ever heralds the dawn of the eternal Day.

* * * * * *

Among the awe-stricken witnesses of this strange and terrible tragedy, Fra Giuseppe was first to break the spell of fear and sorrow.

"It is over," said he, in a quiet, serene voice;—"he is dead. Angelo,—Niccolò,—assist me to lift the body upon the litter. 'Tis the last service we shall be able to render him on earth."

The good Frate could not find it in his heart to ask help at the hands of Andrea del Castagno.

In reverent silence Fra Giuseppe and his pupils lifted the corpse of the painter-minstrel from the ground, and laid him gently on the bier, in the full clear glory of the solemn moon. With the movement, the thick folds of a mantle in which Veneziano had been wont to envelope himself after the

fashion of mediæval times, fell heavily aside, and within it, upon the stilled heart of the wearer, the pale light touched with its ghostly kiss the silver-shining strings of a lute,—beloved and treasured for many a happy rolling year,—silenced henceforth for evermore!

CHAPTER XIV.

WINTER AT FIESOLE.

THE desired hour had well-nigh arrived: Angelo and his friend were about to be received as novices into the confraternity of the Dominican cloister. It was close upon Christmas-tide; bleak roving winds and bitter frosts desolated the vale of Fiesole, fetters of ice restrained the impatient waters of the winding Mugnone, and where but a few months since flowers and ferns had bloomed in rich profusion, the hardy reeds and bulrushes alone survived to rear their dingy heads above the shallows, and breathe pathetic dirges along the blasts that heralded the snow-storm.

Within the monastery there was warmth and comfort, and the gleaming light of burning pine-logs. In a small room with narrow grille-windows, adjoining the refectory, Fra Giuseppe sat with the two neophytes-elect, in the ruddy glow of a blazing fire. To-morrow had been chosen by the frati as the all-important day which should witness the formal admission of these youths into the Brotherhood,—a day much desired and long anticipated,—a day which was to mark for Angelo and his fellow-student the era of a new birth, the beginning of another and as yet an untried path in life.

This afternoon the trio had held a last meeting upon the threshold, as it seemed to them, of the old boyish days, lingering there and looking back upon the past with love, ere they started together upon the heavenward pilgrimage before them.

Seldom, since the tragedy of the disastrous night recorded in the last chapter, had either of the students referred at any length to the mysterious death of the Venetian maestro;—a few brief words of sorrow, spoken whenever his name was mentioned between them; an instinctive silence of affectionate regret whenever they passed the dark walls of the Castello Giobatista,—these only had betokened the tender grief which moved their hearts for the fate of their lost friend, and the reverent respect in which they held his memory.

But now, ere they buried the dead of the Past; now, ere the veil of the cloister dropped upon the shadows of their former life, Angelo had nerved himself to speak unreservedly of that fatal tryst, and of the mystery which had ever enshrouded it, baffling in its strange impenetrability the acumen both of justice and of curiosity.

"Uncle," said the youth in slow grave tones,—"in those last minutes of the Ser Veneziano's life,—brief minutes even though they were,—surely you must have asked him who it was that had wrought so horrible a crime?—some word must have escaped him—some faint sign or whisper must at least have suggested the motive, if not the identity of his murderer?"

"In truth, my son," replied the monk, in the same grave voice, "I certainly hazarded the question before bestowing absolution; but he only answered me that he had fallen not by his own hand, but by that of an enemy. And when I asked him further to name this enemy to me,—even were it under the seal of confession, no voice reached my ears in return. He died with the secret hidden in his generous soul."

"And the piece of lead you found, Father?"—said Niccolò, interrogatively.

"Was gone when I came back again to look for it, my son; some one had carried it away,—no doubt designedly. Had I but stood in any other position than that which it is the will of God I should occupy, a sense of duty and of justice would have urged me to sift to the bottom so extraordinary and foul a mystery. But my office is that of consoler and priest, not of judge or avenger; and so also my director bade me recollect, when in the confessional I laid my doubts before him. My vow of obedience therefore, as well as the voice of my conscience, withholds me from an investigation which natural indignation and personal friendship would have led me to prosecute with vehement resolution."

Fra Giuseppe sighed.

"Father," asked Niccolò, quickly,—"have you a suspicion ——"

"Child," interrupted the monk with a sudden gesture of interdiction,—"any question but that! I dare not answer it! All suspicions are forbidden to me; lest, unknowing, my heart should accuse an innocent man."

A shadow darkened his thoughtful face; he crossed himself, and murmured a penitential "Ave."

"And so, after all," quoth Angelo in a reflective tone, as he rose to take his farewell,—"after all, Messer Veneziano's frescoes will never be completed!"

"Never!" echoed Fra Giuseppe.

CHAPTER XV.

TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

LATE in the evening of a certain fair and stilly Italian day, towards the close of the year 1483, two monks of the Order of S. Dominic were summoned to attend the last hours of an aged man, whose godless career and misused genius had gained him everywhere an infamous renown. The two Frati, both of them men in the prime of life, were curiously unlike each other in face and bearing. Upon the sweet delicate features of the taller and more slender Brother was an expression of repose and pathos, such as one might imagine in the countenance of S. Francis of Sales,—the apostle of the "Philothea;" and his whole demeanour bespoke an excessive gentleness, born not of monastic restraint or personal suffering, but the natural habit of a dreamy mind. His companion, on the contrary, seemed moulded after the type of the inflexible S. Jerome; every line and curve of his clear-cut profile announced the soldier of Christ; indomitable in energy, fervent in spirit, decisive in judgment. To one of these men life was but a sweet dream of Paradise, a shadowy garden outlying the realities of the Eternal City; a sombre tranquil twilight forerunning the glories of a transcendent sunrise:—to the other it was a stern and earnest warfare, a wrestling with principalities and powers, a perilous keeping of the Master's house against midnight thieves; a breathless pressing towards the mark of everlasting reward. Yet it was no secret in the monastery that between these two brothers existed the friendship of David and Jonathan; and that their hearts, so dissimilar in natural emotions and sentiments, were nevertheless united in an indissoluble tie of firm and tender love. Twenty years they had dwelt together in the religious solitude of the Dominican cloister, together they had entered it as novices, together they had professed and assumed the full habit of the Order, and now in their pious labours among sick and dying they were rarely separated. On the occasion of their present errand, they bore with them to the house of the penitent who sought their aid the sacred Host and the holy oil used in the administration of Extreme Unction; for the messenger who had summoned them reported his master to be upon the point of death, and grievously disturbed in conscience.

With rapid steps the two Frati silently followed their guide through a score of dark winding streets, above the gabled house-roofs of which the stars already began to burn in the

far-off vault of space; noiselessly they ascended the steps of a dreary palatial old tenement pointed out as their destination, and entered almost immediately the gloomy chamber of the dying maestro,—Andrea 'degli Impiccati [a].'

He lay upon a handsomely draped couch, his white head supported on embroidered pillows;—a man upon whose ghastly olive face disease and age had ploughed deep furrows, hollowing the sallow cheeks, tightening the thin lips, and tracing upon the broad prominent forehead line above line of care and wearing thought.

As the Brothers silently lifted the heavy crimson curtain from the doorway and approached the bed, he made an effort to raise himself on his elbow; but his feeble powers proved insufficient to sustain so trying an attitude, and he sank back again with an impatient moan, beckoning the two Dominicans to his side.

"What are your names, monks?" he demanded abruptly in a deep hollow whisper, which, if the dead could speak, might well have fitted the lips of a corpse.

"We are the Brothers Michael and Raffael, my son;" answered the fairer and slighter of the Frati. "It is your desire, no doubt, to seek the consolation of the Church, and to unburden your soul of its past sins, ere you enter upon the valley of shadows. Speak without reserve,—he whom you select as your confessor shall remain with you here, while the other retires for a short space to secure you the greater privacy."

"I seek no privacy, monk," pursued the hoarse whisper, "nor do I desire the consolation of your Church. Remove from me your altar-god and your oil-cans, I want no viaticum at the hands of friar or of angel, although both characters should be combined in you and your hooded helpmate. Had I any kinsfolk,—any friends to summon hither to my dying couch, I would have bidden them come instead of you, to hear the story of my former life,—its temptations, its passions, its black and treacherous sin; so little privacy I seek, so little concealment I court, in this my last extremity."

The terrible voice paused, a ghastly smile contorted for a moment the sharp, stony features, and then passed, more like a shadow than a smile, to leave again only the hard relentless expression they had worn before.

Fra Raffaelo seized the favourable pause, and in sweet feminine tones, to which the soft Italian language lent

[a] Andrea del Castagno earned this strange surname—Andrea of the Hanged—on account of his famous picture upon the façade of the Podestà palace,—a picture which represented the murderers of Guliano de' Medici suspended by the heels in a curious and horrible variety of attitudes. This weird picture was Andrea's masterpiece, and was painted in the year 1478.—Vasari's *Vite dei Pittori*, and Baldinucci's *Notizie dei Professori del Disegno*.

a double charm, besought the dying maestro to re-consider his fatal resolution.

"Have faith, my son," he pleaded; "there is One Who saveth to the uttermost, One Whose grace and pity never fail, even at the eleventh hour of a wasted life!"

Castagno rolled his implacable glittering eyes upon the speaker.

"Monk," said he, "Andrea degli Impiccati is no coward. Seventy years I have served my master the Devil, and now I go to receive the wages he gives his servants. Shall I mock the Master I *never* served, by basely claiming at His hands a reward I have not earned, a reward I scorned to work for, when health and power and genius were mine, to bestow them how and where I chose? Not so,—by my own labours, by my own life I stand or fall; I take the penny for which I bargained. I die at my post as a man should die, neither flinching from the stroke of the enemy's sword, nor deserting the standard I have followed through the war. Vainly, therefore, you solicit me to forsake my colours now, or to insult with the offer of a brief hour's service that God Whom I have contemned and defied for more than threescore years!"

Sternly the voice of the second Brother interposed.

"Wherefore then, Andrea del Castagno," he demanded, "hast thou summoned us hither to thy dying couch? Refrain, at least, thine impious tongue from reviling the Lord Who died for thee, whilst thou speakest in the presence of His servants. What seekest thou at our hands?"

"I would have you hear," rejoined the maestro, "ere I lose the power of speech, the story of the only crime of my life which has escaped the discernment of human inquisitors; a crime so black and perfidious, that its single enormity outweighs the whole collected guilt of all my other sins, and in this my hour of doom oppresses me so heavily with its dire remembrance, that I dare not conceal it longer. It must be told therefore, not in penitence, not in fear, nor even in regret, but because my spirit is grown too weak to preserve its secret longer, and seeks the relief which words alone can afford. To you, monks and ascetics though you be, I have chosen to make this discovery, because no relatives of mine are here to attend my call, and because the chief witness of the crime I am about to reveal was an aged recluse of the Dominican confraternity, who must long ago have put aside his cowl and cord for a more radiant garb in the courts of the New Jerusalem. Were it possible he could be yet surviving on earth, I would have sent for him by name; as it is, I chose to summon at random any Brother of the same Order who might be able to present himself. Your Prior, with infinite

consideration for my frailty, has provided me with two confessors; I appreciate his zealous care, and duly avail myself of the double honour. Now hear me;—for I have scrupulously satisfied your ecclesiastical curiosity touching my motives for this confession, and I claim a right to your patient hearing of it.

"Twenty years ago, the invitation of Cosmo de' Medicis associated me with Domenico of Venice in the work of adorning the chapel of the Santa Maria Novella. My colleague was master of a great secret which I longed to possess, the secret of a new and marvellous art, transcending in importance and effect all the former discoveries of our sublime calling. At first I found the Venetian loth to make me partner in his cherished knowledge, and I honoured his scruples in my heart, even while I resolved to overcome them; for I felt that could we but have changed places with each other, prayers and threats alike should have found me adamant. But this Venetian was a weak, inconstant fool, unworthy of the priceless treasure he held;—in an evil hour he yielded to my importunity, he disclosed to me the secret I desired, he taught me the art I coveted, he cast his precious pearl before my feet, and like the swine in your parable, I turned again and rent him without mercy! My object once acquired, I waited only an opportunity to remove from my path this detestable colleague, whom I had always regarded with the bitterest jealousy, and who now, being useless to me, I not only hated as a rival, but scorned as a broken tool. I need not tell you, monks, how simple and unsuspecting a man this fellow was, nor how he fostered by his religious faith and piety the natural childishness of his character. For you may well believe that had he possessed any degree of penetration or of common sense, he would never have been deceived by the flimsy friendship I pretended for him, a pretence convenient enough to me, since it gave me occasion to be constantly in his society, and thus, when Fate should favour my plan, to strike the more quickly and securely. Meanwhile I sought every means possible of retarding his work and frustrating his designs. The Dominican Brother of whom I spoke to you was my colleague's friend; and had a nephew of about sixteen, whose fair face and figure attracted the Venetian's admiration, and determined him to introduce the boy as a ministering angel in one of the chapel frescoes. Already the new model had attended several times at the Santa Maria, and the sketch was fast advancing, when by chance I discovered that the youth had an enemy among his school-fellows,—a rival who hated him on account of his superior beauty, as I hated the Venetian for his superior knowledge and power. A strange sympathy

drew me towards this jealous child; I sought to make friends with him as my colleague had done with his school-mate, and before long it occurred to me that by a judicious appeal to his envy I might incite my young acquaintance, who was by far the stronger and bigger of the two boys, to engage in an open hand-to-hand fight with his pretty rival. If such a battle could be brought about, I knew that the Venetian's model would be certainly worsted, and his beauty so effectually marred, that for weeks to come he would be quite useless in the studio; a result which would for just so long oblige my colleague to suspend his work, and so prevent one of his chief frescoes from attaining completion before the visit of Cosmo de' Medicis and his friends, who were then daily expected to fix a date for making their first formal inspection of the new paintings. In this attempt, however, I failed; some scruples,—not of cowardice however,—appeared to dissuade my protégé from the revenge I proposed to him; —the frescoes progressed uninterruptedly, and the Florentine princes came to view them. With one consent, with one voice, they gave the palm of superiority to the paintings of the Venetian! Such depth of colour,—such perfect *chiaro-scuro*—such faithful perspective as his had never before been seen! My designs perhaps were better,—yes,—but where was the brilliance on my plaster,—where the vivid lights,—the softened shadows? I heard, I witnessed his triumph, and the fire of jealousy rent my heart with its fierce flames! Now that Domenico of Venice had yielded to me his secret, —now that I, too, had learnt the glorious art of oil-painting, —he who had been my instructor and my friend only remained to bar my path to fame and to embitter my future greatness! I swore to sacrifice him to the divinity of my genius; I resolved to be his assassin! None should stand between me and my *apotheosis;* none who had been preferred before me should live to blight my career! Fate, who is a wicked goddess, favoured my malignity. One evening, as our work grew towards the finish, my colleague told me he had engaged to meet his friend,—that old monk of whom I have already spoken,—in a glen outside the town. Their meeting was fixed for the hour of sunset. Before the Venetian left me he shewed me his work, and boasted of a new discovery he had lately made,—vaunted the wondrous properties of some new pigment which was to excel all other colours in virtue and brilliance. I looked in despair at his glowing panel, already fervent with a life and tenderness which I could never produce, and my demon whispered me to delay no longer the climax of my jealous malice. My rage overcame me, my face changed, and the Venetian fancied I was ill. He urged me to go out with him into the

"With marble face and gasping lips the aged Maestro rose in his bed and stretched his hands to heaven."—(*To face p. 215.*)

open air, believing me to be over-tired with my work; but I refused to accompany him, and pleaded that I had yet to complete a certain part of my fresco which I pointed out to him. However, as soon as he was gone, I started after him by another route, overtook him by the walls of the Castello Giobatista, and struck him so violent and sudden a blow upon the temples with a piece of lead which I had hastily torn from one of my picture-cases, that Fate allowed him time only to give me one look before he fell unconscious to the ground. Never was murder committed so deftly, never did assassin escape with so much good fortune! I thought my rival dead, and hurried back immediately to my work in the chapel, where not half-an-hour afterwards I was found by those who came to tell me of the Venetian's disaster. With them I returned to the fatal spot, and it was in my arms,—O Fate! how malicious a deity thou art!—in *my* arms that Domenico of Venice breathed his last! His friend, the Friar of your Order, who had attended his dying moments, took charge of the corpse, and under his directions it was borne away to the city. Be sure I left no tell-tale implement of death upon the ground to bear against me a dumb accusation! I rejoiced; for the Venetian's paintings were never finished; day by day their beauty paled and faded, while the hand that should have given them life and immortality lay cold and senseless as the brain that conceived them, beneath the pavement of the very church which had been the scene of his last labours. Yes, they buried him in the chapel of the Santa Maria Nuova, whence now his outraged Phantom rises to rebuke me, not only with my false friendship and my shameful jealousy, but with the interruption of his greatest work;—with the theft of his fame and his future,—with the murder of his genius! Monks,—my story is finished; you have heard from end to end the details of that blackest and direst crime which sears the soul, and shall stain for ever the memory of Andrea del Castagno!"

With marble face and gasping lips the aged maestro rose in his bed, and stretched his hands to heaven.

"Judge of all the earth," he cried, with a supernatural strength of utterance in his hollow, ringing voice,—"I ask no mercy from Thee, for I shewed none to Thy servant, and I scorn to seek at the hands of a God what I denied to my fellow-man! Deal with me as Thou wilt; I carry hence with me at least this consolation,—that now the burden of no secret clings to me; no hidden guilt remains to weigh me down through the ages of eternity with the shameful reproach of final cowardice! Soul of the Venetian, be content; this night thy murderer is judged,—this night thou art avenged!"

The moisture of death stood thick upon Castagno's fore-

head; he fell back in an agony of exhaustion and excitement.

Gently as a woman the fair monk stooped over the dying painter and made the sign of the Cross upon his brow and lips.

"By this holy sign," said he in sweet hushed tones, that contrasted like notes of music with the harsh voice of the maestro,—"thy Lord redeemed thee before thou wert born: by this holy sign He is yet ready to forgive thee: by this holy sign thou mayest yet be saved!"

"Nay! nay!" murmured Castagno, rousing himself from the deathly lethargy which was fast overcoming his senses,—"the Cross is not for me! For, even in this last and awful hour, I know that if the horrible crime I have recounted were to be done again, and I had strength to strike, it would be done! No devil is so potent and so tenacious of his stronghold as the devil which has possessed me all my life, the devil to which I have sacrificed my art and my genius, the destroyer of my peace,—the demon of jealousy and envy!"

His voice failed him, he turned his steely eyes upon the dark-faced Friar who stood absorbed and silent at the other side of the couch, and briefly uttered a single word, the selfsame whisper which had risen to the lips of his victim in the faintness of death, twenty years ago,—

"Water!"

Fra Michael obeyed the sick man's appeal mechanically, moving and acting like one in a dream; no word escaped his lips, no gesture betrayed the deep agitation of his mind. Again the sweet womanly voice of his angel-eyed companion thrilled the chamber of death.

"Repent, my son," it pleaded; "time indeed is short for thee now, but the mercy of the Lord is long and boundless. 'Though thy sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow!'"

Castagno was sinking fast, but his lips moved faintly, and Fra Raffael bent anxiously to catch the breathless murmur; —perhaps, even now, it might be a prayer?

Alas no!

"Too late!" repeated the quavering voice,—"too late! Demon — thou hast thy triumph, — Venetian — thou art avenged!"

Then the hard face relaxed like melting iron, the glittering eyes grew fixed and glassy; Andrea del Castagno,—Andrea the Infamous—had gone to meet his Judge, in the eternal world of the Hereafter!

* * * * * * * *

Tears stood in the stern dark eyes of Fra Michael as he

stood by the side of the dead man and clasped the hand of his fair friend.

"Brother," said he in a changed voice, that thrilled solemnly through the hushed and darkened room, "let us pray fervently for the soul of this poor miserable man! Had I listened to the voice of that very evil spirit which has slain him, and which tempted *me* so grievously twenty years ago, Angelo might have died like Domenico of Venice, and the end of Andrea degli Impiccati might some day have been also mine!"

"It was God, Brother Michael," returned the fair monk, "who wrought so marvellous a change in thine heart! To Him and to the sweet lute of my dearest patron we are both indebted for our love this day. *Gloria Tibi, Domine!*"

"Amen!" answered his friend, with bowed head. "To Him alone be the glory for evermore!"

. . . .

Together they went out into the open night, and beheld the solemn shining stars that eternally surround the throne of the Lord. And it seemed to them that from the midst of the glowing purple sky the voice of an angel spoke to their grateful hearts in the sweet familiar words of that holy antiphon, which for eighteen hundred years has echoed so lovingly the triumphs of the saints:—

"THANKS BE UNTO GOD, WHO GIVETH US THE VICTORY: THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD!"

NOBLE LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH TREATS ESPECIALLY OF THE HERO AND HEROINE.

HIS most gracious Majesty of England, King Charles the Second, had come home at last after much tribulation, to take to himself the enjoyment of his father's crown, and the charge of his father's people. And the bells had rung themselves out, and the roasted beeves were all eaten to the last shreds, and the flags that had floated over the head of the "merry monarch," from lady's casement and from attic window, were rolled up and put back into dark closets and dust and oblivion.

But the Puritans of Cromwell's planting lived and flourished still by hundreds, in all the villages and hamlets of the kingdom, as many of the restored royalists discovered with no small disgust, when they returned to the halls and estates whence they had been ousted by the Rebellion.

Baron Rowan Maxwell Rowan, an old man at the time of the first Charles's impeachment, was a staunch adherent of his ill-fated lord, and hated republicans and Puritanism as heartily as bad wine. And when Cromwell and his clique had got the ascendancy, and the king was dead, and his heir an exile abroad, Sir Rowan resolved to go also, rather than remain at Rowan Court to be bullied and persecuted by democratic tyrants. So they went forth into the world together,—old Sir Rowan and Lady Maxwell, with their two children, Edith and Marvel. They left behind them streets full of weeping tenants, among whom Puritanism had made but few converts, and to whose loyal hearts the restoration of the monarchy seemed the one earthly thing most to be hoped and prayed for. Great, therefore, was the surprise of Marvel Maxwell, when at last he returned to the old place with his widowed mother and his sister, to find the village creed reversed, the Sunday bells silent, and a white-washed tavern-room and close-cropped tinker supplying the place of church and priest! So fickle and so unsteady are human hearts and human affections!

If Marvel Maxwell had been more of a grown man than he happened to be at the time of the Restoration, it is likely his influence with his tenantry might have been much more powerful than in fact it was; for despite his endeavours, the re-opened church did not fill, and the recalled parson preached in vain. Poor Marvel! He was scarcely more than two-and-twenty, for his mother had borne no children until long after her marriage, and Edith was his elder by some five years. As for Dowager Lady Maxwell herself, she was little help to him in his labours, for her health was broken with travel and misfortune, and she cared for nothing but to sit all day on some high-backed chair by the fireside, and dream indolently of her dead husband, and of the days of her youth, and the things that had happened long ago.

It was not till late in the winter of 1661 that the Maxwells arrived at Rowan Court, for private matters had detained them abroad after most of the king's adherents had returned to their homes in old England. So the white February snow was yet thick upon the broad roofs of the great house, and the wind was bleak and keen enough for Christmas, when young Lord Marvel was installed, or rather installed himself into the new dignity and responsibility of Baron and Lord of Rowan Court.

Some few of the peasants he recognised and greeted for old friends, and their voices sounded familiarly as they wished him "God-den," but most of them by far bore the aspect of strangers, or of children grown beyond his remembrance. It was getting late one Sunday evening as Marvel walked home over the crisp crackling snow, meditating over these and many other things. He had been holding a long chat with the poor priest of the village church, who was sadly disheartened at the ill-success of his ministry, being one of those feeble, impatient, despondent people who are given to faint at the least discouragement and to shrink from all sorts of energetic labour. He was a good man in himself, but he never turned himself out for the good of others, and was therefore the most unfit of all men to be pastor at such a time to such a flock as the Rowan tenantry. Beyond the saying of daily prayer, and the preaching of weekly sermons, on which occasions the family at the Court and their immediate followers formed the only congregation, this timid priest did scarcely any work in the service of his Church. Once or twice during the first week of his return to the place, he had attempted a few visits among the cottages, but the harsh words he met from their inmates, and the general horror and indignation with which he found himself and his office regarded, drove him back to the solitude of his fireside, to pray and wish idly for better times by-and-by.

And on this particular evening of which I speak, he was as down-hearted as usual, for the assembly at church had not increased that day, and he began to believe, he said, that it never would, despite all his prayers and his longings. And Marvel was greatly saddened by his melancholy talk, and no wonder, for they had spent some hours together, and an old man has large influence over a young one, especially if a priest's cassock be added to the weight of years and experience. So as he walked home, the baron's meditations were not cheering, and he said to himself that the Rowan villagers were an ill set altogether, and that there was no good of any sort to be found among them, no love, no charity, no teachableness. Just as he came to this unsatisfactory conclusion, there sounded behind him a light brisk step over the hard snow, and Marvel turned hastily to see whose it could be, for he knew it was a woman's. She came up with him the next moment,—a little shapely village damsel, with a covered basket on her arm, and a dark woollen cloak drawn tightly about her head and shoulders. When she saw the young lord she paused an instant to drop him a reverence, and then sped swiftly on, as though she were apprehensive of some pursuing danger, and were pressed for time to escape it. Marvel was naturally of an inquisitive turn, and he had seen in the moment that the girl's face met his such a gentle pair of soft brown eyes, and such a sweet expression of patience and tenderness, that he longed to know more both of herself and of her errand. So he went out of his way after her, and followed her noiselessly, down a dark narrow lane, fenced in on one side by yew-trees and bending chestnuts, and on the other by a high dead wall. It was a dreary walk even at noontide, but now in the gathering blackness of a February night it was ghostly and gloomy enough to chill stouter hearts than Marvel Maxwell's. Overhead the skeleton branches rattled and quaked like the dry bones in the vision of the prophet, and the wind moaned around and through them as dolefully as any wailing banshee. What could induce this trim little maiden to take such a desolate path all alone at nightfall! Marvel felt quite glad as he pondered over this, that the fancy had occurred to him to follow her, for in case any untoward accident should happen in that lonely place, she would not now be without a protector and a helping hand.

But nothing happened, and no nightly marauder, natural or supernatural, appeared on the scene, so that the young lord's chivalry was not, for that time at least, put to trial, and the little Puritan emerged from the gloomy lane, unhurt and unappalled. The lane opened upon a wide gorse common, whereon stood a single solitary hut,—one could hardly

call it a cottage, so miserable and homeless a place it was,—and here under the wooden-roofed doorway the bearer of the basket paused and knocked. Marvel paused too, and leant against a corner of the building, in the shadow of a tall oak-tree, dreading discovery much less on his own account than on that of the little wayfarer, whom he greatly feared to alarm by his presence. So that it was no little relief to him when an old woman within the hovel unfastened the rickety door and admitted her visitor, with a croaking, husky word of welcome, like the voice of a marsh-frog.

"Ah, Dorothy! God bless you, child; what a bitter night it is, isn't it?"

Then the door was closed again, and Marvel heard the latch drawn within, and crept out of his corner on tiptoe and round to the front of the house. There was a light burning inside, a pitiful light enough, for it was only one rush candle, but it served to shew him dimly the neat little figure of the Puritan damsel, uncloaked and unhooded, in a sober-coloured gown and big white collar, with her plentiful brown hair stowed away under a cap of snowy texture. She was busy, too, it seemed, for her hands flitted to and fro before the feeble light as though she were unpacking something, and Marvel strained his eyes in vain to see what it could be.

Presently she moved away from the window, and the candle-light went with her;—had she put it out, he wondered, or only taken it somewhere else?

But by-and-by a red warm glare lit up the whole of the little hut, and flickered and danced on the white snow outside. Dorothy had lighted a fire.

There was a tall black tub for holding rain-water in a recess beside the window, and the moonlight being behind it, its long dense shadow offered an inviting hiding-place to young Maxwell, whose interest in the adventure was now thoroughly awakened. So into the recess he crept, warily and stealthily as a thief, and peered with eager eyes round as much of the one ill-furnished room as came within the scope of his observation.

Opposite the fire, on a broken-backed chair, that was patched and mended clumsily enough, reclined an old palsied woman with white hair and shrunken sallow features, that looked weird and uncanny in the fitful flame-light. Dorothy stood beside a deal table, to which the solitary candle was now restored, spreading about her various good things from her basket—bread-cakes, sugar, a can of milk, and a dish of cold broken meats. When she had arranged all these articles to her satisfaction, she passed for a moment out of the range of Marvel's focus, and re-appeared bearing a cup, a trencher, a wooden spoon, and a knife. Then she stepped

across to the old dame's side, and bending tenderly over her, said something which Marvel strained his ears in vain to hear, for the wind howled and groaned so persistently and so loudly, that a dozen voices would scarcely have been audible through its tumult. But that Dorothy's address was an invitation to supper was apparent enough from the sequel. For the rickety arm-chair was pushed to the table, the old dame re-seated thereat, the milk poured into the cup, and the bread sliced on the trencher in the shortest possible time, by the deft fingers of the youthful Puritan. Very pleasant it was to see that smiling little personage passing and repassing before the window as she waited on her ancient pensioner, now with the bread, now with the drink, cutting and halving, and coaxing and persuading, with a grace that was irresistibly charming. And when the meal was ended, and the remnants of food stowed away on a shelf for the morrow's breakfast, Dorothy turned her attention to the old woman's pet black cat, who had been watching the proceedings throughout, hungrily and patiently enough, from his nook in the chimney-corner. On him she now bestowed a full platter of milk and soaked bread, and afterwards a great deal of caressing and encouragement, which he received after the manner of cats, with evident nasal acknowledgments and gratefully lifted tail.

Then a certain large book with a worn cover was taken from its shelf, and Dorothy sitting at the feet of the old woman, found a place in the soiled pages and read aloud for some minutes, during which Marvel had to content himself with watching from behind his tub, the sweet lovable face of the little damsel and the reverent tenderness with which her aged companion regarded her.

"Surely," he said to himself, "unless appearances are strangely different from truth, here are two real Christians in our domain! I will not believe, after this, that everybody is bad in Rowan village. But why doesn't Dorothy come to church? I will walk home with her and ask her."

There was a hand on the latch that instant, and then the door turned slowly with a rusty creak, and a flood of warm ruddy light streamed out over the threshold and fell upon the snow beyond it. Marvel took the warning, and withdrew himself hastily from the window corner to the shadow of the oak trunk.

"Good-night, mother Forbes," said a sweet soft voice, which Marvel thought matched exactly with the gentle brown eyes and the patient face; "your firewood will last till I come again, and to-morrow after my day's work I am going to gather a faggot for you in Rowan Brown Wood. So you mustn't wonder if I am somewhat late."

"God bless thee, Dorothy! What should I do if He did not send thee to take care of me? But it is such a dark, cold night! Art thou not afraid to go alone down the Ghost-walk, my child?"

"Oh no, indeed!" laughed the little Puritan; "there's nothing to be afraid of except the cold. And with this warm cloak of mine—see!—I don't think even the cold can hurt me!"

And she tripped away merrily, with her empty basket on her arm, laughing and nodding back at the old crone under the porch.

Then the rusty hinges creaked again, the red glow disappeared from the doorway, and the latch fell within. And there was nothing to be seen but the cold white snow all over the bare gorse moor, and the colder moonlight all over the bleak sky, and a little dark figure moving swiftly along towards the entrance of the Ghost-walk.

CHAPTER II.

CHIEFLY CONCERNING DOROTHY AND DOROTHY'S DIFFICULTIES.

NOT alone though, for Marvel Maxwell followed her closely, plucking up heart and words wherewith to accost her, and finding both items sadly inadequate to the occasion. At last he made a bold stroke, just as they passed into the gloom of that desolate lane, and quickening his pace, he brought himself to the girl's side with a courteous salute and a soft-spoken,—"Mistress, this is a lone walk and a late hour; may I be your escort to the village?" But over the top of the high wall the moonlight fell full on his face as he raised his hat, and Dorothy gave a little start and a little cry, but the next instant recognising the baron, she blushed beneath her hood from chin to forehead, like a full-blown peony.

Marvel perceived her embarrassment and ventured a gentle remonstrance.

"What, my fair mistress, are you afraid of *me?* On my word as a gentleman, I have no intention towards you save to bear you good company down this dismal road. But if you don't like my fellowship I will walk behind and be content, so long as I see you safe and unmolested."

"Forgive my seeming rudeness, noble sir," stammered Dorothy; "it was not yourself that startled me, but a

foolish fancy, for which I suppose the moon and the shadows of the branches overhead are to blame."

"How now?" returned Marvel, laughing, "did you then take me for a goblin?"

"Not for a goblin exactly, my Lord, but for something, I own, quite as disagreeable to my taste."

Marvel's curiosity, already wide awake for all that concerned Dorothy, was piqued exceedingly by this mysterious reply.

"Prithee, damsel," said he, "forbear riddling, for I am slow at guesswork, and tell me, without more ado, what made you cry out at the sight of me, if it was not I myself who startled you?"

But Dorothy's answer was long in coming, and the words faltered and staggered on her lips,—"It was only a resemblance, my Lord,—the sound of your voice,—a sudden likeness which struck me as I looked in your face. But no doubt I mistook: I have only seen your lordship once or twice, and then not closely nor unbonneted. Besides, I have never heard you speak until now."

"So ho, that is all, is it? Well, I'm glad you did not take me for a Ghost! But may I ask, mistress, for whom or for what you did take me, and why the resemblance was so unwelcome to you?"

Dorothy hesitated more painfully than before, but Marvel scarcely noticed her reluctance to reply, being as thoroughly in earnest about the matter as it was his nature to be about everything which was not a subject of absolute indifference to him. But perhaps if he could have caught a glimpse of the confusion that crept over the little face under the Puritan's hood, he would have desisted from such strict catechizing. However, as Dorothy did not raise her head, and as they were now walking through the darkest part of the road, he can hardly be blamed for a breach of good manners, if he waited somewhat pitilessly for his companion's answer. When at length it came, it was spoken in a low voice, but withal was firm and explicit enough to satisfy even inquisitive young Maxwell.

"My Lord, I fancied your voice and your face bore a likeness to Nicholas Webb's,—your Grace's lodge-keeper,—and I hate him more than anything upon earth, although he is my father's friend."

Despite himself, Marvel's brow lowered, and his lips tightened, for this resemblance between master and dependant was not accidental. Baron Rowan Maxwell had grievously sinned once in his life, and this Nicholas Webb was half-brother to Marvel, though none but Lady Maxwell and her son knew the fact. Webb's poor mother had died in giving

him birth, and Lord Rowan by way of partial atonement for his guilt, had confessed the whole matter to his chaplain and to his wife, like an honest man and a Christian. And then to do his best by his peasant-born son, he brought him, with Lady Maxwell's consent, to his own estate, and gave him into the care of an old maid who then kept the lodge at the gates of the home-park.

She christened her nursling Nicholas, after the patron saint of boys, in hopes, doubtless, that he might do honour to so reverend and catholic a name. But when she died, and the young waif succeeded her in the post of lodge-keeper, he did not grow up in the way he was taught, but became instead more selfish and hypocritical and sensual every year; and when Baron Rowan and his family left the Court, and Puritanism came down like a flood upon the country, Nicholas was one of the first in the place to adopt the new morality, for he recognised in it an easy cloak for his particular sins.

Marvel was seven years younger than this promising half-brother of his, and therefore was not of an age to understand the relationship between them until some time after his father and mother had gone with him and Edith into their voluntary exile. Then Lord Rowan told him, and bade him for Christ's sake to treat his vassal brother kindly when he should come to be master at the Court; but he left it to Marvel's own discretion to tell the matter to his sister Edith or not. And Marvel had never told it her, for he thought it best that the secret should remain with Lady Maxwell and his own heart, since Nicholas believed himself the orphaned child of some poor cottager whom his lord had befriended, and had no more notion than the old dame who nursed him that his father was Lord Rowan Maxwell. Perhaps it was a little unfair on the part of the latter to conceal his parentage from Nicholas himself, but after all it was best in the sequel, especially with the sort of disposition which young Webb developed. And Marvel felt that it would be worse than useless now to let loose the tongues of the tenantry over his dead father's honour and good name.

Yet sometimes he almost made up his mind that it was expedient to remove Nicholas from the estate, upon some pretence or other, for the likeness between them had increased with years, and although in childhood it was not very remarkable, the new baron feared that now he had returned to the place a grown man, the similarity his features bore to those of his servant would be noticed by some of the villagers, and that thus the real state of the case would be discovered. But Marvel forgot that resemblence lies less

in feature than in expression and surroundings, and that his own open, truthful face, curled love-locks, and cavalier's moustache, could have but little fellowship with the sinister countenance, clipped crown, and unkempt beard of Nicholas Webb.

It was with no small dismay, therefore, that Marvel heard Dorothy admit her mistake, for he did not then know either what particular cause she had for her nervousness, or how useful the resemblance between him and his lodge-keeper would one day prove both to himself and to her.

So, to divert a conversation which he could but ill sustain, Marvel began a new code of queries relative to his companion's own personality and condition, with which he, as lord of the demesne, had a right to be acquainted.

Dorothy, in speaking of Nicholas Webb, had mentioned him as her father's friend, and Marvel took occasion from this admission to ask whose daughter she was.

"Humphrey Pratt,—my father,—if it please your Grace," answered she, dropping him another little reverence, "is a weaver of Rowan village; and I am Dorothy Pratt, his only child, bread-maker, cheese-churner, and laundress, at your lordship's service."

This glibly-delivered piece of information sounded to Marvel's ears so like an "advertisement," that he laughed outright, and the little Puritan took heart at his merriment, and brightened up amazingly. And looking up with shy, soft eyes at his jovial face, as they came out of the dark lane together into the clear broad moonlight, Dorothy wondered in her heart how she could possibly have confused it with the face of such a churlish loon as Nicholas Webb. But Marvel talked on.

"Humphrey Pratt is your father, is he? I have heard mine speak of a weaver named Pratt who lived once in this place, but he left it to marry on another estate before I was old enough to remember anything about him. But if he has returned hither again, and you are his daughter, you should certainly be no Puritan, for the Pratt of whom I speak was a staunch Churchman, and a great favourite with my father. He used to say that Pratt the weaver was the most loyal subject of the King, and the most dutiful son of the Church, on the Rowan land."

"That was Philip Pratt, my Lord," returned Dorothy. "He was my father's only brother, and died when I was hardly four years old, so that I know little or nothing about him. But my father and I came to live at my uncle's cottage in this place fourteen years ago, and his old sign-board is over the door still, because, as father's trade is the same as my uncle's was, he didn't think it worth while to

take it down. I think uncle Philip left him the cottage, or asked him to take it, for I know we came here directly after his death, and I can remember no other home. But father is a Nonconformist, and has brought me up in his way, though to be sure I do hate going to hear Master Nipper discourse at the tavern on Lord's days."

Marvel laughed again at this concluding acknowledgment, but somewhat bitterly too, for he thought of ignorant Master Nipper's crowded assemblies, and of the pitiful congregation in the little village church. But he said nothing, so Dorothy, true to her surname, prattled on.

"Father is at Master Nipper's meeting now," she said; "or coming home by this time maybe, for I am afraid it is late. I must get indoors before he comes though, for I have to lay supper, and he doesn't know I have been out." Then, with a sudden little expression of alarm on her sweet face, "You won't tell him, my Lord, will you?"

"Oh no, not I," answered Marvel, lightly; "set your mind at ease on that score, Dorothy, and on all others too, for," continued he more gravely, "I'm very sure you have been doing nothing wrong."

He did not tell her that he had been witness of her evening's employment, for he feared she might think him something of a spy; but his opinion of Humphrey Pratt's creed was not bettered by the inference he drew from Dorothy's conversation, that her father would have disapproved such conduct as hers had he been made cognizant of it.

He was reflecting upon this last point, when Dorothy again interrupted the silent tide of his meditations.

"See, my Lord," she said, "that is uncle Philip's house, —the white one with the sign-board over the doorway."

And Marvel looked and beheld a gilded shuttle suspended above the gabled porch like a hooked fish, and read beneath it, in straggling, clumsy characters, "Philip Pratt, Weaver."

"You don't speak of your mother, Dorothy," said Marvel presently, in a gentle voice. "Is she dead?"

"Yes, my Lord, she died long, long ago, so long ago, that I think I must have been only just born, for I don't know anything about her."

"Then," pursued he, "you don't know, I suppose, whether she was a Churchwoman or not?"

"No, my lord, I never heard father tell. But I should think she couldn't have helped being what father is."

Marvel's lips curled a little.

"Dorothy, I wish *you* would come to church."

But she shook her head demurely.

"I can't, please your Grace; father would be so vexed, —so angry."

Marvel's good opinion of Humphrey Pratt, small as it had been at the beginning of his conversation with Dorothy, was now fast diminishing to nothing.

"You are quite right to be dutiful to your father," he said, in a low voice; "but remember, fair mistress, there is a higher duty still, due to another Father than he. Besides, you tell me that what you have done but now would offend him if he knew it. Why, then, did you do it?"

But the little Puritan was either shy of controversy, or apprehensive of Humphrey's speedy return.

"You are very kind to me, my Lord," she said after a little pause, "but indeed, indeed I daren't. I run more risk just now than you can know, and I have my bread to earn, and not for myself only. But now I must bid your Grace good-night,—we are at the door."

So Marvel said no more, but he resolved on the morrow evening to be in Rowan Brown Wood, whither, he had heard Dorothy tell the old dame, she was going to gather faggots. And he bade her farewell like a courteous gentleman, and strode on his way homeward.

CHAPTER III.

HOW MARVEL ASKED SOME QUESTIONS.

THE horologe at the Court House was just upon the hour of six p.m. as young Lord Maxwell came sauntering down the broad gravel way of the park towards the lodge gate. Nicholas Webb was outside the porch, hatchet in hand, chopping sticks for fire-wood, and humming to himself a Puritanic psalm-tune withal to beguile his labour.

But when Marvel came up, Master Nicholas, who, notwithstanding his Puritanism, was always glad of an occasion to curry favour in high places, and who kept a civil tongue in his cunning head for all his betters, ceased chopping, and doffed his cap with a smooth "Good even to your Lordship; your Lordship will be in for a fresh fall of snow I'm thinking! It's mighty black over Rowan gorse moor, and I sha'n't ha' finished my work here a piece too soon! You'd best not venture far, my Lord."

"Go to, man!" laughed Marvel, contemptuously, "do you think I care for a snow-storm? But, talking of the gorse moor, canst tell me who lives in the little wooden house there, just at the top of the long yew lane? I marked it

yesterday, and wondered who kept it, for it sadly needs repair."

"Why, surely!" quoth Nicholas, with a sagacious leer on his disagreeable face, "I can tell your Grace of one who bides therein, but they do say there be others also, whose names I daren't so much as spell over to your Lordship. But the house, your Lordship, belongs to old Alice Forbes, the witch, who has an evil eye over all in the place, and who fills Yew-lane with ghosts and goblins so that nobody may be able to come near her. And nobody would either, after sundown, at least, even if the ghosts were away, for Satan goes o' nights to the cottage, and I've heard tell in the village that one of the neighbours coming home over the moor after eight o'clock saw a light burning in the house and the door ajar, and heard two voices talking together, and was so frightened that he ran for his life in a cold sweat and was sick of an ague for a week afterwards."

Marvel laughed merrily at this long-winded relation, for he thought he could guess who had been the Satan in the instance on record. But as the lodge-keeper looked inclined to sulk at such a demonstration of incredulity, he controlled his sense of the ridiculous, and asked him with more gravity of demeanour,

"Well, Nicholas, but why should the neighbours see anything diabolic in the fact that the old dame burns a candle after dark, or talks with her visitors at her own doorway?"

"Because," returned Nicholas, brandishing his hatchet with impressive energy, "because she can't have got any candles unless the Evil One brought them to her, and she can't have any visitors except they come from where they shouldn't. Nobody has seen her at the market these six months and more, and she daren't come, for there's not a soul would sell her so much as a single loaf, and she'd only get her head cracked for her pains. Last time she came, all the village set on her and had her down to the horse-pond and there they ducked her well, and drove her home with a hue-and-cry at the broom-end, only as it was June weather the water was warm I suppose, and she took no hurt; but even so 'twas enough to have made an end of any old crone over seventy, saving a witch. So you see, my lord, she don't stir out now, because she knows what she would get by it; and there's not a body on the land that dare cross her path, let alone speak with her, for fear of her spells and of her black cat, which they say is a demon, and takes his real form at night. And besides that, all the gossips are sworn to duck the first man or woman that holds a word of converse with her. So as things are in this case, how is it possible for her to live at all without ever a bit of mortal bread or sup to bless

herself with since Midsummer, or how can she light a fire without a candle's end, or have visitors when nobody dare go near her? It's quite clear, as your Lordship sees, that some one *must* supply her food and her fuel, and that some one is undoubtedly the foul fiend himself, and that's the reason none of us dare go by the house of late, for fear of even worse company than witches. If it weren't for that, I'm thinking they'd have set fire to it long ago, and burnt the roof over the old hag and her cat together. But of course, Satan being there, no man durst attempt such a thing."

Herewith Nicholas brought his oration to an end, and shook his head two or three times like one who has delivered some incontrovertible argument. And Marvel, who knew how useless it would be to attempt reasoning with such gross prejudices, contented himself with the mental ejaculation, "Well done, Dorothy!"

Then he took two steps towards the gate, hesitated, and turned again to his retainer.

"Do you happen to know anything of a weaver in this town named Humphrey Pratt?" he asked, with an off-hand, careless manner, as though he wished to make a few unimportant inquiries.

"Ay, ay!" was the prompt rejoinder, "that do I my Lord. They call him blind old Pratt, because he glues his eyes to his loom so hard and so long, that he can't see a yard before his nose when he looks off it! He has a fair daughter, whom I hope and trust some day, so please your Lordship's honour, to make Mistress Webb."

"Indeed!" said Marvel, with much greater interest; "I am surp—, I mean I am glad to hear it. May I ask, friend Nicholas, if it be not impertinent, does Mistress Dorothy love you?"

"You know her name, then, I perceive, my Lord," quoth the other somewhat evasively. "Ah! if you have any dealings with good Master Pratt, would your Lordship just put in a word for your humble servant, and say the match would give your Lordship much satisfaction and content?"

"It seems, then," persisted Marvel, "that you have some little difficulty to overcome in the matter?"

"Not with worthy Master Humphrey, please your Lordship; he is willing enow to take me for his son-in-law, but the damsel is rather coy at times."

"She does not love you then, I suppose?" said Marvel, driving his nail fairly home. Nicholas winced visibly.

"Oh yes, she loves me, your Lordship, but, as I was saying, damsels are always a little coy. So if your Lordship would condescend to—"

But Marvel cut him short.

"Well, well, Nicholas, I promise you I'll inquire into the matter, and you shall have all possible justice done you; but I can't stay now, it grows late, and the evening's too cold for much standing."

And he went off on his expedition, repeating to himself,—"'Nicholas Webb whom I *hate.*' That doesn't sound much like coyness, I fancy. But we shall see."

It was past seven before Marvel reached the Rowan Brown Wood, and Dorothy was there already, hard at work among the broken boughs and stubble chips.

But she did not see him, for her eyes were intent on the ground, and there were many thick bramble bushes between them. So Marvel stooped down and applied himself diligently to the task of collecting a faggot, the presentation of which might earn him the privilege of another conversation with the sweet little Puritan.

And since his interview with the lodge-keeper, Dorothy Pratt had risen to a high place in his good books; for in those times, when superstition and prejudice were so strong and rife among all classes, it was a certain proof of no ordinary intelligence and courage to act as this little woman had done. So Marvel knew now that she must be wise and brave as well as kind-hearted, and he longed to make a Catholic of her, and to save so much dignified sweetness from the influence of schism and false teaching. He felt sure that he had discovered a real jewel among the dust and chaff of the village, and he could not find in his heart to pass it by without one effort to dig it out of the general mire. But how should he set about the work? Certainly it was a delicate matter.

While he pondered and collected, Dorothy had well-nigh filled her apron, and sat down upon a felled beech-trunk to bind up her store. Marvel glanced at his bundle and saw that it was quite large enough for an ordinary-sized faggot,—as much, certainly, as the little maid could carry in addition to her own. So he broke through the brambles and advanced with his offering, to the great surprise and confusion of poor Dorothy. But the gift was presented with such kind words and with such an easy grace, that she was soon re-assured, and Marvel, sitting down beside her, helped to tie up her treasures, so that by-and-by master and peasant became quite sociable, and chatted together as pleasantly as possible.

After a little while, Marvel contrived to turn the dialogue again upon Nicholas Webb, for he wished, in spite of his dismay at the unsavoury mistake Dorothy had made between them the preceding day, to know more exactly what place the lodge-keeper held in his fair one's estimation.

At first, however delicately Marvel's questions were framed, Dorothy betrayed great uneasiness in answering them, but by degrees, as she perceived the really warm interest he took in the matter, she began to open all her heart to him. Very probably she imagined, as her lover had done before her, that the young baron might exert his influence to help her out of her difficulty with Master Nicholas, and to smooth things over between him and her father. For she told Marvel that this churlish admirer of hers pursued her everywhere with his odious attentions, and although she took every possible occasion to discourage and avoid him, and had refused his suit in her very plainest language, yet that she found herself beset by him at home and abroad all times of the day. "And," continued Dorothy, "this is not all, for my father, by some misapprehension, takes his part; and every evening when my work is over he falls to discoursing with me upon Master Webb's excellences, and my folly in so long delaying a marriage between us. But indeed, my lord, I *cannot* obey my father in this, though I have tried many times to make up my mind to it, and I have prayed with all my heart that if it really is my duty, it may be made a little pleasanter to me to do. I suppose father's friendship for Master Webb makes him press the match upon me so greatly; but yet, until Master Webb thought of me, I don't remember ever having seen him and father together. And even now, though I call him father's friend, it's very little they have to do with each other, save a word or two at the prayer-meeting and at our house when Master Webb comes to talk with father about me, which he does generally once a-week, on Saturday nights. Oh, my Lord!" cried poor Dorothy, breaking down suddenly at this point, and hiding her sweet face in her hands, "I don't know what your honour must think of me, but I am so very very unhappy sometimes when I think of all this."

And she bent down her little hooded head and cried bitterly.

Marvel felt for a minute exceedingly shy, and ill at ease. He did not know quite what to do nor what to say, nor indeed whether to do or say anything. But presently his generous frank good-nature came to his aid, and he said simply,

"Don't cry, Dorothy; I'll try and help you, I will indeed, and I daresay it will all come right soon. Only go on doing as you are doing now, and being kind and brave and patient, and you are sure to be happy."

Then he hesitated a little, and kicked the snow at his feet before he got courage to go on, but then;

"Dorothy," he said, "do you know I saw you last night at

old dame Forbes's,—and—I know all about her and why people ill-treat her so shamefully; but I want to know now if it is you who have kept her alive and clothed and fed her since Midsummer?"

Dorothy dropped her hands suddenly and looked up at him for a moment without speaking, and with such a mixture of alarm and dismay in her brown eyes, as made Marvel add hastily;

"There's no reason to be frightened, Dorothy,—never mind if the villagers are fools, *I* am only very very glad to know the poor creature has a friend in you. So please tell me all about it."

"Thank God!" cried the little Puritan, drawing a deep breath of relief. "I thought all the world was against her! But if your Lordship is of such a mind, maybe you would speak to the neighbours and get them to hear reason. They won't take it from me I know, and I daren't try, for fear they should come thereby to find out how I visit at her house, and should hinder my going there, and then she would surely starve. But this reminds me that the hour is late, and I must be going on my way with my bundle."

"Stop, Dorothy," said Marvel, leaping up eagerly as she rose to go, "let me walk with you! I am to blame for keeping you here so long in this desolate place! Why, you must be perished with the cold! And look,—it begins to snow now, and I can see how black the sky is through the branches above us. You must never venture along that dark gloomy lane alone to-night, for I know, Dorothy, that's the way you're going!" So they went, both of them together.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEREIN DOROTHY GOES TO CHURCH.

TWO or three weeks had gone by, and the weather began to look less winter-like. The snow was gone from the roads and the housetops, and the rough March winds swept and roared and careered over the bleak gorse common like demons let loose for a season.

Marvel Maxwell had learnt several things about Dorothy since his first acquaintance with her, and all he had learnt only served to raise her higher in his reverence and esteem.

Chief among his discoveries was the fact that the Puritan damsel had been the sole succour and support of poor old dame Forbes ever since that fatal market-day of which Nicholas Webb had spoken. And when her day's work as

baker, churner, or sempstress was completed, and old Pratt was safely away at the tavern, attending pious Master Nipper's addresses,—which were punctually delivered there every evening at seven o'clock,—little Dorothy, basket on arm, had been wont to sally forth for an hour or two, to carry relief to the persecuted widow. True, there had been some cold damp foggy nights when Nipper's discourses had failed to attract old Humphrey from his corner settle, or when Nipper himself had not been moved to assemble the elect. But these occasions were few and far between, for other things took place at the tavern besides prayer and eloquence, and Pratt was not the man to lose a stirring draught of brew and an hour's good company for fear of five minutes' walk through an unpleasant atmosphere. Wherefore it was not often that Dorothy missed her nightly labour of love, but even when such was the case the old crone had no need to go to bed portionless, for her kind guardian's supplies of food and fuel were always plentiful enough to last over two days.

So for a long eight months this good little girl's earnings maintained and clothed and comforted the outcast of the village, who but for such timely help would most certainly have perished. Truly she was rightly named Dorothy, for to one at least she had already become in a singularly literal sense, "God's Gift!"

All these things came to Marvel's knowledge little by little, for Dorothy was slow to tell her good deeds, and the young lord was obliged to help himself to information on the subject from his own surmising, and then question his little heroine as to the truth of his assumptions. But he was not so long in discovering another fact, to wit, that Humphrey Pratt's daughter was the pet and idol of the whole village. All the young men of the place sighed and cast sheep's eyes after her as she went by their workshops; all the young women ran to her for advice and help whenever they fancied themselves in a dilemma; and all the fathers and mothers smiled and brightened at the sound of her voice, as though it did their old ears good to listen to it. So perhaps Dorothy underrated her influence with the incorrigible Rowanites when she took it for granted that they would never hear reason from her lips. At all events, Marvel tried *his* arguments, and tried them in vain,—the very mention of Alice Forbes was enough to throw a gloom or a scowl over the face of the most kindly-disposed among his tenants. For of all terrible evils under the sun, prejudice is the hardest to get rid of, and when it has infected a whole town of ignorant peasants, there is little chance of overcoming it at all, unless by some sudden stroke which shall convince and convert the entire population at once. And at present there appeared to poor Marvel

little likelihood of such an event. But all things come in their proper season, and as the all-wise God sees best and fittest.

So Dorothy went on with her good work in secret, not doing her alms to be seen of men, but yet much lighter and gladder of heart now that she had Marvel's help.

Old Alice's store of provisions increased considerably after her little friend's acquaintance with the young master, and beside Dorothy's dainty loaves and her can of milk, there often appeared a good bason full of thick soup or of jelly from the Court kitchen, or a flask of red delicious wine out of the baronial cellar.

And now Dorothy's walks to and fro the gorse common were seldom lonely, for Marvel Maxwell almost always found means to bear her company, carrying her basket and beguiling the journey along the desolate way with his pleasant talk.

Never once during these expeditions did they encounter a soul, for all the peasants had taken such thorough fright at the "Ghost-walk" and the "Witches' Moor," that none of them, especially after sun-down, would venture within half-a-mile of the place. But notwithstanding, Marvel thought it prudent to keep watch outside the cottage, while Dorothy delivered her gifts, and made supper for her charge within. Though, if truth be told, this course of conduct was pursued as much to avoid the embarrassment of the old dame's thanks as to secure Dorothy's safety.

But Marvel had something better than pretty talk for the Puritan maiden during these evening excursions. For the two whole months of March and April, he laboured incessantly to bring her into the bosom of that Church which was so dear to him; and Dorothy, though horribly afraid of offending her father, began after a little to hear him gladly.

So he taught her all that he himself had been taught, and the sweet comfortable doctrines won her love and warmed her whole heart, till they sank down into it and took root there. And she felt how blessed a thing this great broad Catholic truth is, and how much better than her father's narrow cold-souled Puritanism, that doled itself out in lachrymose psalms and tinkers' prayers.

Ah, those Yew-lane walks in the evening were very sweet and pleasant to both Dorothy and Marvel, spite of the ghosts and the hobgoblins there!

And so the windy March weather wore itself out, and April laughed and wept over the land by turns, as though she were loth, even in the midst of her kind-heartedness, to give so lavishly from her treasure-store of sweet buds and blossoms, and must needs shed a few tears over them as she dropped them one after the other into the hungry hands of the poor

"Marvel Maxwell almost always found means to bear her company, carrying her basket."

(*To face p.* 236.)

old earth. But Dorothy loved the spring-time dearly, as all pure beauty-loving hearts do, for it is the most musical poem in all the world's great hymnal. And the grand Master-poet who wrote it so long long ago, has left in it, to those who read it rightly, a sweeter mirage of His own tender heart and eternal loveliness than in anything else we know of upon earth. And as Dorothy and Marvel passed side by side down the long lane in the soft still delicious eventide, under the bending yew-trees and the chestnuts and the lindens, now no longer bare, but laden with all their new wealth of fresh tender leaves, the little maiden said to herself in the joy of her heart, "Surely this must be like something in heaven!"

And I do not think, for my part, that she was very wrong, for what shall we find in heaven better than the consolation of God, and pure love, and peaceful beauty? And the beginnings of these three things are here upon earth with us now, shadows though they be, vague and unsatisfying, but pictured promises nevertheless of blessed, blessed fulness hereafter! "For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face."

One Saturday, the last in April, as they came home together, Marvel spoke long and earnestly to his little catechumen about the duty of serving God in heaven before any man upon earth, whether dear friend, or father, or husband. "For remember, Dorothy," he said, "that if father or mother should forsake us, the dear Lord will be better to us than they. And who knows but that if you only do what is right yourself, you may win others back to the old faith, and perhaps even your father too in time? You are brave, Dorothy, I know, will you not do this little thing for the holy Christ who did such great things for you, and be first of all in the village to call His Church your mother?"

And Dorothy answered him,—"My Lord, it is not that I am afraid to go to church, or even that I dread my father's displeasure, but only that he *is* my father and that he has forbidden me to hear the priest. Now, it is not at all the same thing for me to go to church as to visit Alice Forbes, for the one my father has positively commanded me to refrain from, and the other, being a secret to all except yourself, is of course unknown to him. So in what I do now I am free from disobedience, but if I should go to church I should transgress in the most direct and flagrant manner. And am I not bound to obey him, seeing I am his child, and, as such, owe him all reverence and duty? Besides, I have a new debt to him now, for of late he has been very kind to me in the matter of Master Webb, and I have heard nothing about him, nor have I so much as seen him near me these fourteen days and more. So, though I don't quite like to ask, I begin to

hope the match is broken off. And if it be, ought I not to be very grateful to father for it? And then, you know, St. Paul himself bids children obey their parents."

"Yes, Dorothy, but *'in the Lord.'* You believe that your father's religion is false and insincere, you know that the better road is before you, and God's voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' yet you forget that your example might lead your father himself to follow your steps, if only you would 'do the thing that is right.' And whether he follow you or not, you are more bound to hear that voice of your Father in heaven than any other who pleads with you on earth. Only look upon all the golden light and brightness of large love and nearness to the dear Lord, that lies before you, and think!—can you bear to turn back again into the cold twilight and the narrow-heartedness of this wretched, barren schism? Will you live and die without once having joined in the prayers of our sweet Church liturgy, without once having sung our hymns, and saddest of all, without once having knelt at Christ's altar to share in that glorious Feast we celebrate every Sunday? O Dorothy, Dorothy! you are a Catholic at heart, be a Catholic also in noble deed and name!"

Dorothy looked into Marvel's eyes. They were brimming over with anxious tears, and his whole face was flushed with the earnestness of his entreaty.

"My Lord," she said, in a low, unsteady voice, "be comforted, and pray that things may turn out for me and for my father as you have said, for I will surely be at church to-morrow, and you may tell the priest that I will go and speak with him afterwards."

So she promised, and they parted, both of them glad and hopeful, for both were young and true-hearted.

And the next morning Dorothy kept her word, and came shyly in at the church door just as the bells began to ring, for she was terribly afraid of being late. And she sat down in the remotest little corner she could find, beneath a tall painted window of the Blessed Virgin with the holy Child upon her knee, and she looked up at it and wondered at it with awe in her brown eyes, and thought how very beautiful it was, and how much she should like to have such a sweet picture to look at every day.

And when Marvel came in with Lady Maxwell and his sister Edith, and saw his little catechumen sitting in her place with her big white collar and gray gown, and the bright colours of the painted window shining full on her Puritan's hood and blushing face, he smiled a kind glad smile at her that did Dorothy's heart a world of good. But when the service was over, and the last blessing pronounced, she rose

"'How now, Dorothy!' cried her father."—(*To face p.* 239.)

up from her knees before the rest of the congregation, and stole out alone on her way home. For she was afraid of meeting Marvel then, because the Baroness and Lady Edith were with him, and they were strangers to her, and little Dorothy was shy of such grand people.

But at home there was great trouble in store for our heroine. For no sooner did she enter the low porch of the weaver's cottage than old Pratt pounced upon her like a cat on a mouse, with an angry frown on his pimply face and a grasp like the pinch of iron tongs.

"How now, Dorothy!" cried he; "where hast thou been with that best hood and clean new collar of thine? Not to the prayer meeting, I warrant me, for I looked all round the room, and thou wast not to be seen there! Thou hast been gallavanting about the country, wench, with some idle young loon, or gossiping maybe in good-for-nothing Nell Tomkinson's cottage! I'll teach thee thy duty, girl, I promise 'ee."

"Indeed, father," pleaded poor Dorothy, "I haven't been loitering about anywhere. I know I wasn't at Master Nipper's meeting, but indeed I have been doing nothing wrong."

"Where hast been, then, wench?" demanded the weaver, standing over her with a grim scowl on his brow. "I'll have it out o' thee, so speak up at once and no badgering. What hast been doing all this morning? Come!"

Dorothy stood silent, with her eyes cast down and her hands pressed together very tightly. The trial time had come already, and the armour had to be buckled on. Would it be proof against such a thrust as this? Poor little soldier!

"Come, come, mistress!" thundered old Pratt, after waiting for a reply in vain a few moments. "I *will* be obeyed! Tell me where you have been!"

"Father," said the sweet, low voice, very falteringly, "don't be angry with me; I have been to the village church."

There was a pause. Dorothy knew what it meant, and her heart sank within her miserably. If only Marvel were there by her side!—but she was all alone, quite alone. No, not quite alone. For just at that moment she remembered the consoling words of which Marvel had spoken the night before,—"When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord taketh me up." But old Pratt was past indignation,—he was past argument—he was at sarcasm point.

"Oh ho," he sneered, "thou hast been to church hast 'ee? Well, thou'lt never go again, mistress, for I've got a cure for that complaint all ready here in my pocket!" And as he slapped the side of his vest with a vehement hand, Dorothy heard the crunch of paper. What could it be?

"So this is the meaning of thine unwillingness to hear good Master Nipper's discourses, is it? Art going to set up

stocks and stones in *my* house, and go to confession and eat fish o' Fridays like a Papist? Very pretty indeed, and mighty like to be! Out on thy damnable idols and superstitions and priestcraft! But there's an end of it all for 'ee now, for I've made my mind up, and I'll have no more shilly-shallying. If thou won't obey *me*, thou shalt obey another man, for I've promised 'ee to wife this very day, and Master Webb has got my word on it!"

O poor little Dorothy! Poor little white ghostly face, poor little quivering hands that clutched each other in horror as the miserable tidings were told! And poor little gasping, tremulous voice, that cried out piteously, "Father! father!"

"It's no sort o' use bullying me," returned Humphrey, doggedly. "Get about thy business, and behave as a good daughter should. Most girls 'ud be glad enough to get such a mate as Master Nicholas, well-to-do and young withal, but as for thee—there, I'm ashamed o' thee, Dorothy, thou'rt worse than a heathen! No words with me, wench. I'll not budge an inch if thou worry and fret till midnight!"

So Dorothy Pratt went off in silence to her little bed-chamber, and there she knelt down by the settle in front of the open lattice, through which the warm sunlight streamed gloriously and free. And she prayed in the bitterness of her heart, and in the blindness of tears that fell like rain, "O Lord, how long? how long?"

CHAPTER V.

HOW MARVEL WAS INVITED TO A "BAL MASQUE."

MARVEL MAXWELL waited a good hour at the corner of Yew-lane that Sunday evening before Dorothy came. And when at last she appeared, how changed she was since only that morning! No smile, no light brisk step, no lifted bright brown eyes. What terrible thing could have happened in that short time, he wondered, so to whiten the poor little cheeks, and to make the drooping eyelids so red and swollen and heavy? Then a sharp spasm of remorse came into his mind, and he said to himself that perhaps it was all his doing, and that old Pratt had found out her apostasy from Puritanism, and had been angry with her in consequence. But of worse than this he did not think.

"Why, Dorothy!" cried he, looking earnestly into her face as they met,—that face that was always so sweet to

see, and sweeter now in its very sadness than any other face upon earth in its joy,—"Why, Dorothy! what ails you? Has your father been rating at you? Oh, don't cry,—don't cry, so!—tell me everything. What is it, Dorothy?"

For at the first sound of that dear voice, the poor little maid's grief overflowed her heart, full as it was almost to bursting: and she sat down on the daffodil-bank by the roadside and put her basket on the ground. And she covered with her two shivering hands the eyes that *would* weep and the tears that *would* fall.

Then Marvel sat down by her, as they had sat together in the wood more than two months ago, and begged her to tell him all that had happened to her at home. So she told him every whit, and how she knew her father's mind was made up at last; and what a stern austere man he would be when he chose it, and how she had rather die again and again than be Nicholas Webb's wife.

"But indeed, my Lord," said she, "I cannot tell what hath made father take this sudden fancy to have me wedded off-hand. For of late you know I told you he has scarce spoken at all on the matter, and Master Webb has not been near our house, nor has he held any manner of converse with me for a good three weeks. I thought it was all over and done:—and now! Oh I am so very, very, very miserable!"

And she wept bitterly.

But Marvel sat still and mused awhile, casting about in his mind what he could do to help her in this strait.

Certainly, as Dorothy said, it was a sudden fancy of old Pratt's, seeing how matters had stood of late, and a strange fancy too, for the agreement between him and Nicholas was made on Sunday morning, before Humphrey knew of his daughter's attendance at church. Therefore it could have had nothing to do with his vexation at her conduct on that score. And Nicholas himself! Why had he maintained so cold a demeanour towards Dorothy for so long, only to burst out afresh in this fashion, just as she was persuaded of his indifference? There must be another reason,—something more behind the scenes than the weaver had thought fit to tell Dorothy. How should he get at it? Anyhow, it must be known to Nicholas. But it would be as foolish to ask the lodge-keeper of the mystery, as to expect that old Pratt would tell it him or his daughter. Then an idea, like a bright ray of sunlight, crossed his thoughts. "Thank God," he thought, "there is no misfortune comes to men under the sun that may not be turned to some golden luck, if only there be sense in mortal minds to discern the good clearly, and to use the evil well."

But the next moment he doubted whether his scheme were really fair and honest, and a shadow came over his brow again as he repeated to himself, "It is not lawful to deceive any man knowingly, nor to do evil that good may come." Yet there was no other way, and this was so easy, so ingenious, so efficient, and withal it would be such a merry frolic.

Marvel was a young man, and the mirthful enterprise and humour of young blood prevailed. "And besides," he argued, "if such a saint as the great Apostle himself did well to be 'all things to all men, if by chance he might catch some;' shall it be blame to me if I follow his example in one instance?"

Just then Dorothy raised her soft jacinth brown eyes and looked him in the face, wondering at his long silence: and the look went to the young man's heart, and he debated with himself no longer. He felt that at all risks Dorothy's life must be saved from the horrible misery that threatened to blight and overshadow it so completely. And if a certain strange accident opened to him a means for saving it, the lesser evil was surely preferable to the greater.

"Dorothy!" he cried, springing up and standing before her, "I have it! I have found a way to help you. Cheer up little one, for I can put everything straight for you I hope. So don't cry any more at all, but only hope for the best, and wish me luck. And now let us go on our way to old dame Alice, or she will wonder what can have become of you."

But Marvel did not tell Dorothy what his plan for her rescue was, lest she should have something to say against it.

So they went together on their errand, and our little heroine, whose faith in her friend's infallibility was implicit, walked homeward afterwards with a far lighter heart and blither step than had been hers when she set out that evening.

And when they parted at the turning of the lane, there was a sparkle of hopeful thanks in the eyes she lifted to his, and a flush of bright glad colour upon the dimpled cheeks and on the soft-parted lips that whispered Dorothy's good-bye. And Marvel went on his way musing, and as he went a smile flitted to and fro over his face, coming and going like sunshine on a cloudy day, for he was thinking of the adventure he proposed for himself on the morrow, and of the rare entertainment it was likely to afford him.

Just as he set foot within the great paved hall of Rowan Court, an oaken door on his right opened, and a pretty mischievous-looking face with bright flaxen curls hanging round it and over the white forehead, in royalist fashion, peeped out at him.

"Oh, Marvel! I'm so glad you've come home. I'm hungry as a hunter, but I ordered Isaac not to serve supper till your return, like a dutiful sister as I am. What has made you so late? But here," she cried, holding up a letter in her little jewelled hand, "is an invitation from our neighbour Baron Shakeshaft for you to be present at his May-day revel to-morrow night. He gives a dance to his peasantry, and our villagers are asked to join likewise, if they be not too prudish for such impious mirth. They are to have a May-pole and a feast under the trees, and all sorts of games in the day-time: and in the evening the baron gives a dance indoors to his own guests, and you are all to go like masqueraders, in mummer costume: I mean the baron's friends you know Marvel, not the peasants! What fine fun it will be for you, won't it? And how shall you choose to dress? Oh, I wish I was asked too,—it's a great shame!" And she pouted her pretty lips and shook her flaxen curls with playful indignation.

"Why, fair mistress, how did you come to know all this? Do you open letters that do not belong to you?" laughed Marvel gaily, as he snatched at the missive Lady Edith held over his head, while she stood on tiptoe before him.

"No," she answered, yielding the contest and the note together; "certainly not, most suspicious Marvel! But the baron's groom, who brought your letter this evening, told me the purport of his embassy. Is your Grace's august displeasure allayed?"

"By all means, madam, allow me to tender my humble apology to your sweetness for my base insinuations against your unimpeachable honesty. And now let us fall to, for I am no less hungry than you are."

So they entered the supper-room together.

It was a long old-fashioned apartment, more like a hall than a parlour, and furnished rather scantily, as we should think in these luxurious days. There were straight-backed carved oak chairs; one or two mirrors, a spinet, a large bookcase, a side-board and several great family portraits in heavy gilded frames, hung each in its particular panel, as each succeeded each in the line of Rowan ancestry.

But the long table in the midst of the room was certainly not open to censure on the score of scant garniture. For it bore steaming soups and cold meats, and fried collops, and not least, a plentiful jug of brown ale, to all of which Marvel did full justice.

Lady Maxwell had supped early, and retired to her room, as her general custom was on Sundays, which, to her delicate state of health, were fatiguing days. So Edith and her brother had the conversation all to themselves; and as it

ran wholly upon a certain point of interest in our story, it is just as well that it should be recorded here. Marvel's thoughts had been busy ever since the receipt of Baron Shakeshaft's letter, with meditations on the strange opportuneness of the invitation. It was the very thing he wanted to complete his plot. Now everything would run on greased wheels; and the favour he had to ask of his sister that night would not appear to her either whimsical or suspicious. True, he might almost have anticipated such an event as that of which he had just been informed; for it was always the custom for neighbouring nobles to exchange hospitalities on certain holydays and festivals; and the May-day mumming was a great occasion in those times. "But nevertheless," he said to himself as he gulped down his last draught of ale, "'a word spoken in due season, how good it is.'"

"Edith," he asked, "will you turn out some of your old charade properties, and dress me up to-morrow evening? I know you have a rare store of wigs and beards, and the like, in some old closet of yours upstairs."

"By all means!" she answered, laughing merrily. "My theatrical wardrobe is at your service; and I think I may promise you a goodly selection, for I have all manner of disguises and masques, which were manufactured, you remember Marvel, for our frolic on Christmas Eve."

"Nothing could be better then, Edith. To-morrow night shall behold a transformation, that shall be a *marvel* indeed to all masqueraders. Laugh at my jest please, madam, and when you have poured out a glass of sack for yourself, pass the flagon to me. And now if you have finished your meal, bid old Isaac hither to clear the table; and let us end the evening with that beautiful Magnificat service that I love so much to sing with you."

So the butler was summoned and the supper dishes carried away, and Lady Edith repaired to her spinet, while Marvel took his seat beside her on a low velvet ottoman. Then the echoes of the great old hall rose and fell to the sound of two sweet young voices that sang together the glorious hymn of the ever-blessed Mary.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCERNING A BATTLE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

LATE in the afternoon of the next day, Marvel sent a servant to the park lodge to bid Nicholas Webb come up and speak with his lord in the mansion hall. And when the keeper entered the corridor, Marvel was there already, with a sealed note in his hand.

"Good-day, Nicholas," said he, pleasantly, as his Puritan vassal appeared; "I have an errand for you to do this afternoon, for I was sure one so sober-minded as you would have no part in these gay May-day revellings of our good neighbours. So I want you to saddle roan Berry at once, and ride over to Shrewsbury, to deliver this letter to Master Noakes, the timber-merchant. Get yourself a meal at the inn, and bait the mare, or if it like you better, sleep there, and ride home on the morrow. Take your own course, Nicholas, for I know you are to be trusted, and bring the reckoning to me. And a pleasant journey to you."

Marvel felt it expedient to add this last little piece of flattery to the directions he had given, for Webb's brow clouded blackly, and the corners of his bearded mouth took a sullen curve, when he heard his master's commands. By way, too, of further douceur, Marvel, who knew the Puritan's weaknesses of appetite, produced a beaker of amber ale, and pouring a copious draught of the soothing liquor into a silver-chased goblet, he handed it graciously to his ambassador, and bade him refresh himself before his ride. And when Nicholas wiped the foam from his lips, they had recovered their normal lines, and he pocketed Marvel's note with a far more agreeable air than might have been expected from his previous expression of physiognomy.

"Ah," said the young baron under his breath, as he stood at the open door and watched the man turn down the path towards the stables, "so far so good. I have got you out of the way till to-morrow, my fine fellow; for even if you ride back from Shrewsbury to-night, you can't get home till past ten, and long before then my little game will be played out. But I'll see you safe through the gates before I begin my preparations."

Half-an-hour after this, as the sun began to decline in the west, Nicholas Webb was on his road out of the village. And Marvel, in a high state of glee, eyed him from the topmost window of the mansion, indulging himself the while in a selection of curious contortions and grimaces, expressive of his own intense satisfaction at the state of affairs. Then, as the tail of roan Berry whisked out of sight round the last turning of the road, Marvel closed the casement, and ran briskly downstairs into the hall, where he snatched his hat from its accustomed peg, and hastily donning it, sped down the broad gravel to the keeper's deserted dwelling. Shutting the door carefully, lest he should be espied from without, Marvel entered Master Webb's bed-chamber, and selected from his closet a full suit of the keeper's clothes, —hose, boots, belt, and jerkin inclusive. To these he added a large gray mantle, which served as a wrapper for the whole bundle, and re-fastening the closet, he issued forth

triumphantly on his return to the mansion. At the door of his own apartment he met his sister, Lady Edith, with a merry smile about her pretty lips, and a mirthful ring in her silvery-toned voice.

"There," cried she, "I've carried them all into your room! Such an outfit,—beards and moustaches, and wigs of all shapes and colours! Pray make a becoming selection. But what in the name of all that's astonishing have you there? Is this your costume? What is it? Oh, do let me see!"

"No, no, not yet!" cried Marvel, running past her into his room. "Wait till I'm dressed, and then you shall stare to your heart's content. The mysterious toilette of Proteus is about to begin."

So Edith tripped off along the corridor, laughing musically, and Marvel remained a full hour and more in the seclusion of his chamber, dressing, arranging, trimming, and adapting himself and his costume before a large cheval looking-glass. So it was well-nigh eight o'clock before he presented himself at the door of his sister's boudoir, arrayed, as she believed, for Baron Shakeshaft's masquerade, but as Marvel himself intended, for a campaign on behalf of Dorothy Pratt.

"Why, how's this?" cried Lady Edith, as the sheep in wolf's clothing appeared before her. "Nicholas! what are you doing here? I thought you were gone on an errand for your master. What is it you want? Can't you speak, man? NICHOLAS!"

For Marvel suddenly put his arms about her neck, and kissed her.

"Little simpleton," said he in a fit of laughter, and with no small delight at such an unequivocal proof of his success, "don't you know your own brother? But isn't it capital,—sublime,—magnificent?"

Edith sank down on a large satin-cushioned sofa as Marvel turned himself round and round for her inspection, imitating his keeper's manner, and counterfeiting his puritanic twang in a style that could not fail to place the excellence of his histrionic talent beyond dispute.

"Well," exclaimed she at length, her bewilderment giving gradual place to admiration, "this is the very cleverest disguise I ever beheld. But you have certainly chosen a most appropriate character, Marvel, for to tell the truth I always thought you like Nicholas, save that your hair is long, your skin fairer, and your chin beardless. However, my abundant repository I see has rectified all deficiencies, and those pimples and blotches with which you have adorned your nose and cheeks are really admirable." And she threw herself back upon the cushions in an ecstasy of merriment, and well-nigh choked with laughter.

"But indeed, Marvel," she added presently in graver tones,

"'What is it you want? Can't you speak, man? Nicholas!'"—(*To face p. 246.*)

rising as she spoke, and putting one little white hand upon each of her brother's shoulders, as she gazed admiringly at him, "I seriously believe that if the true Nicholas were to stand by your side now, I should not be able to decide on the original. So this is the secret of your prodigious bundle! And you have sent the poor knave to Shrewsbury in order that you might safely plunder his wardrobe! Indeed, you evince remarkable aptitude for military tactics, brother, and if you held your proper position, ought certainly to command his gracious Majesty's forces. But have you ordered a horse, for it is time you should depart, I think, Marvel?"

"I have no need of a horse, Edith," returned he, carelessly. "'Tis but a little way to go, and I have taken a great gray cloak out of that varlet's closet, in which I wrapped up all his costume when I carried it from the lodge, and in which I purpose also to envelope myself. It is a lovely evening, and I shall enjoy a stroll across the park amazingly. Good-bye, sister mine."

Then the door closed behind him, and a minute afterwards Edith heard his quick step upon the staircase as she drew her canvas frame nearer the lamplight, and sat down to embroider, still smiling at the thought of Marvel's merry conceit.

As for the young noble himself, he was bent on a very different diversion from that which his sister imagined occupied his fancy. For fear, however, that she should be watching him from some impossible window, and furthermore to avoid meeting any one on his way to old Pratt's cottage, Marvel took a circuitous path that led across the park-lands in the direction of Baron Shakeshaft's estate.

Dusk was fast giving place to darkness, and the trees around him already looked weird and shadowy against the purple sky, when Marvel reached the borders of the wood. He turned down a narrow curving lane that led off the high road towards the village, but he had not gone very far along it before his ears were assailed by loud cries and the noise of blows, and of many scuffling feet. Marvel paused a moment and listened, to make sure from whence this hubbub proceeded. His first thought was to avoid the squabble, lest any unpleasant recognition of his identity should take place in consequence of the rough handling with which excited crowds are apt to welcome any addition to their number. But his mind changed when he heard above the angry shouts of the combatants a shrill quavering cry, almost pitched to a shriek, and entreating every moment for a little mercy. "Good people," it cried, "what are you about? Will you pound a poor old man to death? I assure you she said herself she had no mind to dance. Help, help, some one, or I shall be beat to a jelly!"

Marvel did not wait to think any more. He ran hastily forward, and the next moment rounded the corner of the lane, and found himself close upon the fray. In the middle of the path was a mob of gaily-dressed young men from the neighbouring demesne, armed with stones, mud, and hedge-stakes, beating, pelting, pommelling, and abusing at the tops of their voices some unfortunate individual who had incurred their displeasure. It was too dark now to discern faces very clearly, but Marvel could tell from the feeble whimperings of the sufferer that he was an old man, and that his powers of resistance were well-nigh exhausted.

"For shame, you bullies!" the disgusted baron burst out in a storm of indignation, "What, a dozen of you against one, and he an old man! Give place, there, or it will be worse for you!"

And he laid about him so lustily with his clenched fists that in less than a minute he stood beside the victim, and had hit such a sounding blow on the face of the first who attempted to be forward, that the rest took warning and fell back a few paces.

"Who are you?" cried one. "Who sent you here, I should like to know? Leave us alone, and let us manage our own affairs."

"Do you know," shouted another, "who that old scarecrow is? He's a Puritan miser, who won't let his daughter dance. His own daughter, who's the comeliest maid in all the country; and the girls wanted to make her Queen o' the May at our merrymaking, but this old frump wouldn't let her come."

"Let me get at him," roared a third. "I'll teach him to keep a pretty girl indoors when her mates are footing it on the greensward!"

"Indeed, indeed," pleaded the old man, shielding his face with his hands from the menacing fists uplifted about him, "Indeed she wouldn't have danced, nor have been Queen either, even if I had been out of the question. She said of her own free will that she had no humour for such sports."

"That's because you've worried her out of all spirit, then," retorted the first speaker; "because you've badgered, and crossed, and fretted her beyond bearing, till she's lost all heart for mirth and frolic. Pah, you old toad; I'd like to have the giving o' you your deserts! Egad, wouldn't I lay it on sturdily!"

"Now, now," shouted Marvel; "stand back all of you, you've done mischief enough for once. Get back to your place, and tell your baron, with my respects, to keep his tenants at home for the future, for they've not learnt yet to behave themselves among company. Make way, I tell you, and stand back, if you don't want to lie down instead!

And now come along, old man. Whoever you are, these young jackanapeses should have had greater respect for your gray hairs than to use you thus."

So Marvel elbowed and fought his way out of the crowd with the abused Puritan clinging fast to his arm; and the resistance offered by the assailants soon weakened as they perceived the determination of their new opponent.

"By old Noll himself, though," said one, "this fellow knows how to use his wrists."

"He's a plucky devil enough," quoth another, who had just received a fortnight's black eye. "Come, let's be off. We've had our revenge, as he says—now let the old beast go."

Which sage advice apparently had its due effect, for one by one the insurgents dropped off and melted away almost imperceptibly into the darkness, leaving their victim and his new friend to pursue their own road in peace.

For some moments the old man neither spoke aloud nor looked at Marvel. He untied from his neck a long linen scarf, with which he carefully wiped the smears of mud from his face and beard, muttering to himself the while certain angry and unscriptural imprecations against his persecutors. When this rough toilette was completed, he tucked away the scarf into his pouch pocket, and for the first time raised his eyes inquiringly to the face of his deliverer. But the result of his inspection was speedy and satisfactory enough, for a sudden start and a cry of recognition did fresh honour to Marvel's disguise.

"Eh, what? is it the moonlight, or do I really see beside me my dear friend Nicholas? Ah, deary, deary! I didn't know thee, man, by thy voice, which may serve to prove to thee how those young dogs had beaten my senses out of me. And I am so blind, so blind; my poor eyes get worse and worse, Nicholas, but in such twilight as this they are no eyes at all. Furthermore it hath never been thy wont to plunge thus into the midst of a brawl. I have always known thee for a cautious man, shy of tumults and raised fists, as befits a good Christian. Well, well, I should surely have been dead without thee this time. May the Lord wipe those young serpents off the face of the earth! But what made thee take such a road, man? Wert thou not coming to see me to-night after thine agreement? I told Dorothy yesterday that matters were settled between thee and me. Thou dost not speak. What ails thee?"

Truly poor Marvel knew not how to answer, for he feared by some inadvertence to betray his real identity to his companion, or at least to discover himself as an impostor. However, the mention of Dorothy's name in connection with the one he himself assumed, re-assured him, and he began to hope

that he had fallen in thus accidentally with old Pratt himself. And this was really the case. With an effort Marvel regained his self-possession, and adopting the puritanic tone of his lodge-keeper, made the old man the most appropriate reply he could concoct under such embarrassing circumstances.

"So thou didst not know me, friend? That I suppose is because thou didst not look at me, for I think thou art scarcely blind enough as yet not to know the face of Nicholas Webb, even in the twilight. But I would not have taken part with any other than thee against such contumacious rogues."

"Ah, Nicholas, Nicholas! it is not for me thou didst fight, man, but for thy mistress, Dorothy. Is't not so? Thou knowest if I were slain thou wouldst stand but a poor chance of getting her to wife. Ah, ah, I have thee there, certie. Eh, Nicholas?"

Marvel hesitated in his rejoinder.

"Shall I see her to-night, friend?"

"Ay, ay, thou'lt see her, Nicholas, safe enow. But I question if she frets very mightily for thine appearing. By the way, man, hast thou brought *the money?*"

Old Pratt's voice dropped to a low tone as he said these last words, and when they were said he eyed his companion so keenly and so closely that Marvel's face blanched beneath its painted pimples.

"The money?" he stammered, perceiving that he must answer something. "What, to-night? I thought,—perhaps,—"

"Come now, Nicholas; as the Lord liveth, this is no fair play of thine. I agreed with thee yester-morning at the tavern that the girl should be thy wife next week, whether she would or no, so thou on thy part shouldst give me twenty pounds to-day. Now I began my share of the business honestly, for I broke the news to her as soon as I came away from talking with thee, and rare work I had of it I can tell'ee, Nicholas. And now will ye be a knave after all, and the bond signed between us?"

But Marvel's heart leapt into his throat, and he gasped for breath. So this vile piece of buying and selling was the cause of poor little Dorothy's new anguish,—that young man's sensual passion, this old man's greed of gold.

"Stop!" he cried hastily, laying his hand on Pratt's shoulder, for he was afraid lest in the heat of his righteous indignation the Puritan might turn away and leave him. "Stop, man, and hear me out first. I was going to tell thee I couldn't bring the money to-night because,—because,—I have no bag for so large a sum, and I like not to carry

coin loose in my pouch. But to-morrow I will take care that my debt shall be fully paid thee, to the very last farthing, and thou shalt have thy measure pressed down, shaken together, and running over."

And Marvel spoke earnestly, for he meant what he said in good sooth.

"Well, well," replied the weaver, mollified, "I see thou art an honourable man after all. I was hasty, Nicholas, but the tongue, thou knowest, is an unruly member. So by the same token is Mistress Dorothy. I hope thou mayest find her more obedient to thee as a wife than she hath been to me as a daughter. But here we are, — turn in, turn in. Supper must be almost spoiled with the waiting, for I was coming home from tavern when those young sinners of Baron Shakeshaft's met me, — ill-luck befall them. And they must have belaboured and reviled me a full twenty minutes, I take it, to judge by the bruises and sores I feel all over my body."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEREIN HUMPHREY PRATT TELLS A SECRET.

LITTLE Dorothy Pratt stood before the window, looking up at the moon and the clear evening sky.

"How bright and how many," she thought, "are the eyes of God's heaven at night, and yet the worst deeds that are done among men are done beneath the stars! And for all that, God Who is patient still, bearing all things and enduring all things, is perfect in goodness and in power. God has been patient in the midst of perpetual injury and slander for thousands of long years, and shall I, who am so far from His perfection, be impatient under the trials of a little life-time?"

She looked so beautiful in her white Puritan cape and gray dress, standing with clasped hands in the broad moonlight,—so beautiful and so good, that Pratt's companion, who carried Marvel's heart under the garb of Nicholas, paused on the threshold, and watched her with a feeling akin to worship.

But Dorothy turned and looked at him, and she took him as his sister Edith and as old Pratt had done, for her unworthy lover, the lodge-keeper. Then in a moment the hot red blood flashed over all her face from chin to forehead, and the next she was deadly pale, and her hands

trembled as she laid on the board another trencher and another cup for her father's guest.

Marvel longed to make her some sign by which she might know him, but Dorothy, after the first glance, studiously kept her eyes turned from his, and it was in vain that he coughed and signalled to attract her attention, for she neither heard nor saw him.

Old Pratt sat down to the supper-table with a more cheerful face than that he had brought through the porch, for like his ally Nicholas he loved good ale, and the draughts he had swallowed that evening at the tavern had been considerably shaken down with subsequent rough treatment.

"Come, man," quoth he, emerging redder and more pimply than ever from his first pull at the tankard, "thou dost not drink!"

But Marvel was looking at Dorothy.

"Ah, I see," cried Humphrey, "thou wouldst first take fit greeting of thine elected wife, eh Nicholas! Dorothy, wench,—hither, and buss thy Nicholas! Dost thou forget that he will be thine husband before the next new moon?"

She came forward falteringly two or three steps, and then stood still, and suddenly covered her face with her hands.

"Dost hear me, little baggage?" roared her father; "come hither, I say, and kiss Master Nicholas!"

"No, no, let be," pleaded Marvel, grasping the weaver by the sleeve; "thou seest, friend, she likes it not, it goes against her maid's modesty!"

But old Humphrey was in a passion.

"Tut tut, man," he shouted, "I say she *shall*, and I'll be obeyed! She's as obstinate as a mule! Dorothy, do my bidding! I tell thee, thou art already this man's wife,—his *wife*, minx, as surely as thou'rt a living woman!"

"O father, father, I CAN'T!"

The words were spoken with a low gasping sob, so terrible in its despair and bitterness that they smote to Marvel's heart like sword stabs.

He sprang from his seat, but old Pratt was before him, and Marvel was too late to intercept the angry blow that fell full on Dorothy's bosom.

For a second the room and the warm flicker of the lamplight reeled confusedly about the young baron, and the floor seemed to whirl under his feet. He caught Dorothy passionately in his arms, but she no sooner felt the touch of his embrace than a sudden shudder restored her self-possession, and she fled from him into her own chamber and shut the door.

Then Marvel turned fiercely upon the old weaver, with a hot tongue and clenched fists, till a moment's recollection

changed his purpose, and he dropped into his chair again and kept silence.

Old Pratt walked to the table, replenished his tankard, and drank off its contents at a single draught, before he spoke again. Then he drew his chair towards the fireplace, and judicially sat down, as if for a debate, evidently expecting his companion to begin the conversation upon some pre-determined subject.

But Marvel was mute with anger. So, after waiting for a little while, the old man cleared his husky voice once or twice from the rising beer-bubbles, and said shortly, "Thou seest, Nicholas, she cannot abide thee."

Marvel acquiesced with a nod of his head and a grunt, which might have been taken for either approval or disapprobation of Dorothy's tastes. He could not bring himself to speak intelligibly yet, for the little maid's cry still rang in his ears, and his throat ached with a strange stiff sense of oppression.

So Humphrey Pratt went on:—

"I've had more trouble with her than thou dost wot of, friend Nicholas. She hath been a stone of stumbling in my path, and a thorn in my side these eighteen years. Thou seest what I suffered on her account to-night, at the hands of those young ruffians whom Satan set on to buffet me. Well, Nicholas, I tell thee, it's not the first time I've been ill-treated and abused for the like. It's not long since the young fellows of our own town, and a parcel of idle girls who ought to have kept out of such unseemly brawls, beset me and beat me foully on my own door-step! And all for what, think you, Nicholas? Why this, just as I tell it you man. Pious Master Nipper's lawing at the tavern that quarter was rather heavier than he himself could pay, so we got up a subscription among us, as you must remember, Nicholas, to help him out of his difficulty. I'm a poor man, you know, friend, —a poor man,—and I didn't quite see my way to giving my share of the money we agreed on, but I knew Dorothy earned more than she could well spend on herself. So I came home, and I said, 'Dorothy, give me some of thy silver crowns to help pay good Master Nipper's reckoning, and the Lord reward thee!' Says she, 'I've no money to give, father, it's all spent.' Well, I couldn't believe it, so I went and turned out her box, and sure enow, there was ne'er a sixpenny-bit in it. Says I, 'Dorothy, thou canst not ha' spent all thy week's wage on thyself; what hast thou done wi' it then?' 'Father,' she says, 'I spend it always, every week, just the same.' So I got a piece hot then, as is my way at times, and I answered, 'Dorothy, if 'ee don't tell me this minute what thou'st done with that money

o' thine, I'll beat thee till I know. Dost 'ee buy finery with it like the sinners?' 'No, father,' she says, 'it isn't anything for myself indeed, but I can't tell thee more than that about it.' 'Can't forsooth,' quoth I, 'well, we'll see to that!' But she stood up there before me, as hard and as brazen as a church-bell, and I took her by the shoulders and shook her, but I couldn't shake a single word out. So then I laid about her with my staff, roundly enough, Nicholas; and every minute I stopped beating and asked her, 'Wilt tell me now, Dorothy, and I'll leave drubbing thee?' But she says each time, 'No, father, thee may'st drub, for I can't tell.' So I was forced to go on beating till I was just tired out, and then I let her go. But she took on sick or stiff or something, the next day, and lay a-bed instead of going about her work as usual, which I am convinced was pure obstinacy and contumaciousness. So, close upon noon, in comes a saucy wench from the neighbour's house where Dorothy ought to have been at her baking, and says she, 'Dorothy, what ails thee that thou dost not come to bake to-day?' Whereat the young baggage hangs her head and says nothing at all, so the other, taking her for a sluggard, hauls her half out of bed, and bids her not be lazy, but get up and dress. Well, Dorothy happened to have one or two bruises and marks about her shoulders, and this impudent hussy, as soon as she catches sight o' them, yells out and hustles her back into her blanket, and bounces into the room where I was, like a young tigress. Says she, 'You've been beating your daughter, you old knave! I've had her out o' bed and seen the scars, and she can't stand;' and with that she tells me all that's been going on betwixt her and Dorothy in the next chamber, as I've told you, and threatens me with a cudgelling—*me*—in my own house, Nicholas! Then off she goes again out of the place, ranting and raging all manner of ungodliness, and leaves me in peace, as I thought. But that very evening as I crossed the porch, beshrew me, Nicholas, if a whole herd of young vixens and work-shop 'prentices didn't fall on me, and this girl at the head o' the mob, shouting and egging the others on to assault me, Nicholas! How is a man to keep any just authority over his children, if such outrages are to be permitted? But, thank the Lord, I am not like Eli; I never failed in my duty of correction towards Dorothy! Ah, my dear friend, that was indeed a comforting reflection to me in the midst of the grievous pain I endured all that night, for I could get no sleep for the wounds and the sores they had given me. Next day I went round to the neighbours, —as well as I could walk, Nicholas, which was but poorly, —and complained how their sons and their daughters had

behaved, and they, for all answer, Nicholas, told me to my face they were sorry I was hurt, but they hoped I would keep my hands off *their* Dorothy in future!

"Nicholas! Nicholas! it's a bad world, and in the midst of so much wickedness it ought to be a cause o' deep gratitude to you and me that we are among the remnant o' the elect! When I look on that minister of Beelzebub, for instance, our young baron's priest, and think, 'Thou, O man of sin, art destined by God to eternal torment,' with what intense thankfulness I feel myself able to conclude, 'But I, by the grace of the same God, am assured of obtaining heaven!'"

Herewith old Pratt drew himself together and fell back in his chair with the face and manner of an ecstatic martyr. But there was in all this long rigmarole of his, so strong an element of entertainment, and the speaker's air and countenance were so savoury to Marvel's intellectual palate, that, in spite of the bitterness and disgust at his heart, the young noble could scarcely conceal his mirth.

"Thou speakest truly, neighbour," said he, constraining himself to reply seriously, and putting on an air of puritanic piety; "for my part, I own, and may God forgive me if I err, that it affords me considerable gratification to reflect on the reckoning that awaits some people for their ill-deeds! Yet I am far from wishing that even they should be consigned to eternal punishment! But now about this affair of Dorothy, and your twenty pounds."

"Ay, ay," quoth the weaver, more briskly; "about my twenty pounds!" And his gray eyes twinkled with greed, beneath their steep overhanging brows.

"Thou seest, Nicholas, it is only fair and just that if I have had the care and the upbringing of thy wife, and all the labour of insisting on the match between you, and o' breaking her into it, which isn't done yet mind 'ee, Nicholas,—besides the trouble and the dole she hath wrought me otherwise, whereof I have told thee; it is, I say, but fair and just that I should have some reckoning for my pains. And besides, sith matters are settled between us now, and we are old friends, Nicholas,—old friends,—I will tell 'ee a piece of a secret, man, wherewith to stuff thy wedding pillow. But do as thou'lt list about telling it to thy wife, for I've always kept it away from her for my part, lest if she knew it, she should be more undutiful and froward than ever. And she's wild and headstrong enow without it."

He paused and looked dubiously towards the door of his daughter's chamber, and then back again to the anxious face of the pretending lodge-keeper, and cleared his throat again to make way for the news.

Four tankards of ale, and the anticipation of twenty pounds, had evidently opened the old man's heart, or whatever apology for that particular organ he may have possessed. At all events, Marvel was in luck.

"I shouldn't tell 'ee, mind, Nicholas," he began, confidentially, "if I didn't want to shew thee that I deserve some credit for the care I have taken of a wench who has no really true claim on me, and who, mark me friend, can never have any sort o' claim on me after she is married, for she'll be even less to me then than she is now. I want to shew thee, too, since 'tis all settled between us,—signed and sealed, Nicholas, and the bond in my vest pocket,—that thou must not expect me to be looking after, nor maintaining, thy wife at my expense in any wise. When she leaves this house for thine, friend Nicholas, I wash my hands of her, you mark me; I wash my hands of her altogether. That's understood between us, Nicholas; for, to make a short story of it, man, *Dorothy is not my daughter*, but my niece. Philip Pratt, her father, was my only brother, and he used to live in this house some twenty years ago as a bachelor, till he met by chance with a papistical milk-maid from another county, who came to Rowan on a visit to a friend. So they got married, Philip and the milk-maid, and went off together to live at her place, and she died about a year after this Dorothy was born; and my brother died the next year, for grief of her loss, as the people said. And just before he died, Nicholas, he sent for me, as I was his only relative, and his wife's friends were all foreigners; and says he, 'Humphrey, I'm going after my Marie,' that was the woman's name, 'and you're the only creature left in the world to take care o' the little one. So I leave her to you, and I want her brought up in my faith, and in her mother's, which is the faith of the Catholic Church of England, brother Humphrey,' says he. 'Charge her by God's love, when she comes to an age to wed, that she take for her husband none other than a man of her father's creed, that she be not unequally yoked, and so come into perplexity and sorrow. And now,' quoth he, 'take her back with you when I am dead to my old house at Rowan, for I bought it with my money, and I leave it to you and to her, and all that is within it. Only, by the brotherhood between us, be sure you teach my Dorothy to be a Churchwoman.'

"And with that you see, Nicholas, he died; and when I'd seen about the burial I came straight away here with the baby, and none o' the villagers knew but that she was my own child, for they'd never set eyes on me nor on her before. But as to bringing Dorothy up to Catholic ways and priestcraft, I wasn't going to lend myself to suchlike ungodliness,

so I taught her the Lord's Word, and held my tongue about her father and mother.

"So thou seest, Nicholas, that my patience and forbearance towards the wench ought in good sooth to be well repaid, for she hath been nought but a trouble to me all her life; and the money Philip left for her upbringing was not overmuch, seeing how poor I am,—how poor I am, Nicholas. Many a man in my place would have turned such a disobedient unchristian girl out o' doors, instead of fostering and housing and spending for her as I ha' done. But there's an end of it now, Nicholas,—you mind me,—an end of it, I'll have no more to do with her!"

With this old Pratt made an end of his confessions, sublimely unconscious that they had in the least degree criminated him in the eyes of his companion. As for Marvel, his joy and triumph knew no bounds. For now Dorothy's way was open and clear before her, her one difficulty was fully removed, and she might without any breach of filial discipline forego the religion of Humphrey Pratt! Nay more, for the commands of her dead father still waited her obedience, and Dorothy's human duty was become one with the call of the Church!

Silently there in the little cottage parlour, as he sat in his strange disguise opposite the old miser, Marvel gave thanks in his heart to God, who had brought so great good out of so much evil.

From without, the ding-dong of the bell in the church tower, chiming the hour of ten, came in through the closed lattice in deep musical tones that sounded in the ears of the young lord as sweetly as though they rang overhead in heaven. Marvel rose to his feet.

"Farewell, gossip," said he, and saying it, his voice shook a little under its assumed twang; "I must get home now, for it grows late."

"Thou wilt surely come to-morrow night, Nicholas, after the wench is gone to bed, mind, and bring me those twenty pounds which are my due? Thou wilt not fail, Nicholas; I have thy bond for the amount, remember."

"Never fear, man," answered Marvel, "my share in the matter shall be fully discharged. I will surely come hither to-morrow and pay out my reckoning with thee on Dorothy's account, surely as I am a man alive to-night, and a Christian gentleman!"

"How sayest thou, Nicholas,—a gentleman? Body o' me, but this is rare news, and smacks withal of the speech which the ungodly use one to another!"

Marvel flushed to the roots of his wig, for he feared he had betrayed himself through the earnestness of his protestations.

"Beshrew me," cried he, "I ask pardon mine host, but that ale of thine methinks is potent, and the word slipped out unawares. I have heard it up at the Court among the baron's friends, and I suppose it got between my teeth that way and stuck there. But now 'tis fallen out, thou needest not fear to hear it again!"

Old Pratt laughed.

"I see, friend Nicholas," said he, "'evil communications corrupt good manners!' Is't not so? But beware of these priest-ridden swearers and drinkers, for they are given over as brands for the burning. Ah, what a world of iniquity it is, and how comfortable should we be, as I said before, to know *we* are numbered with the elect! Good-night, neighbour! To-morrow evening after nine, remember!"

"Good-night," said Marvel, "I'll remember! And marry," he continued, as he gathered his mantle about him and strode up the road alone; "I'll keep my promise honestly, and pay my lawing with you to-morrow, to the very last mite! And a noble lawing it shall be, too, as you shall find to your cost, old Pharisee and hypocrite that you are, Humphrey Pratt!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DOROTHY STANDS AT BAY, AND AFFAIRS COME TO A CRISIS GENERALLY.

MARVEL'S plan for Dorothy's rescue had not been put into execution an hour too soon. May-day night had been fixed upon by Humphrey Pratt and his supposed daughter's worthy admirer for the final settlement of their villainous compact, and the completion of the bargain between them. Hence, therefore, Nicholas Webb's ill-humour when his master sent him that evening to Shrewsbury, and thus arrested the progress of the transaction. And not only that, but by the hurry which Marvel affected to be necessary for the delivery of his message, Nicholas lost all opportunity of excusing his absence to old Pratt, and consequently the latter, not knowing what had passed at the Court, expected the bridegroom elect the very night on which his counterfeit presented himself.

But little Dorothy's heart was heavy enough that May-day night, for she had not recognised Marvel under his clever disguise, and had seen only the features and the garb of Nicholas Webb. Perhaps if she had scanned her father's guest more closely, she might have detected his real personality, but the great dislike and loathing she felt for the man whom she believed him to be, forbade her eyes to rest upon his face for a single moment.

So she passed all that night in broken sleep and hideous dreams, waking with every watch to weep over her helplessness and grief, and to pray that even yet Marvel might be able to save her.

And when at last the morning broke, and the sun began his day's journey along the heavens, poor Dorothy rose from her bed, pale and cold and unrefreshed, and crawled out to her work with so slow a step and so sad a face, that all the neighbours wondered and speculated about her.

"What think you," said one old crone, leaning out of her open window, to her gossip next door, who stood broom in hand upon the doorstep as Dorothy passed: "what think you of our Dorothy? She's got something on her mind I take it, for 'tis now the third day she hath been moped and sickly like this. Didst mark how she scarce looked up at me as she went by?—and she mostly stays awhile to talk."

"Ay, indeed," returned the other, "'tis certain there's somewhat amiss with the wench. Why she used to be the life o' the village!"

"And yesterday was May-day," chimed in a young girl, who was on her way with two pails to her milking, and who had paused to join in the dialogue: "and all of us were merrymaking, but Dorothy sat at home the whole day long over her spindle! And one of the young men who passed by Master Pratt's cottage, swears he saw her weeping while she sat at the window and span."

"Who's this you're talking of, gossips?" interposed a fourth voice, just over the shoulder of the milkmaid. The speaker was a carpenter bound for his work-shop, with his bag of tools slung over his shoulder, and little, keen, black, inquisitive eyes that peered about him like rolling beads.

"Mercy on me, cousin John!" cried the girl with the milk-pails, "how you frightened me! Why we're talking of Dorothy Pratt, of course; hav'n't you seen how altered she is these three days past? So white and sad and silent?"

"Well now, I tell ye what it is," quoth the carpenter slowly, concentrating the gaze of his beady eyes with impressive awfulness on the face of the old woman at the window: "it's my belief, Mistress Margery, that our Dorothy is bewitched. That's it, depend on't."

"Bewitched!" screamed the three females in shrill chorus, "Lord preserve us! But you're in the right, neighbour! Alice Forbes is at the bottom of this new piece of mischief!"

Here a fifth villager, by trade a blacksmith, and a great authority in the place, besides being a popular preacher at the tavern, joined the group and the conversation, and then another and another, till there was quite a large assemblage

about Mistress Margery's window, and the hum and buzz of the mingled voices could be heard all down the street. Of course everybody endorsed the sage opinion of the carpenter, for in those days people loved to believe in things that they could neither explain nor understand, and were delighted to have some pretext for discussing so mysterious and appalling a theme as witchcraft.

So the blacksmith made a long oration on the subject, which edified and instructed all his hearers exceedingly, and which ended by impressing upon them the exigency and importance of the Mosaical command, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Nothing, therefore, could be clearer, as the preacher made manifest, than the two facts that old Alice Forbes had laid Dorothy under enchantment, and that it behoved the Rowanites, as good Christians, to rise like one man and burn the cottage on the gorse-common to the ground, with all its contents.

"It is time she should die, indeed," cried they; "for how can she have lived all these ten months, unless Satan has supported her?"

And again: "Let us be cowards no longer; Satan dare not face a hundred pious men! We will go this evening and take vengeance on him and on this devil's hag for bewitching our Dorothy!"

So they fermented and worked themselves round into a mighty state of righteous indignation at the suppositious crime, and only separated at last to go and stir up others also in the same cause, and to spread from house to house the rare tidings that Dorothy Pratt was bewitched, and that Gorse Moor Cottage was to be set on fire before nightfall.

And in some such way as this, conclusions are often drawn, and "justice" is often done among men.

Seven o'clock came, and old Humphrey went out as usual to the tavern, to hear Master Nipper pray, and another eminent saint preach, and to drink two pots of ale after the prayers and the preaching, with the divines and the elect congregation generally.

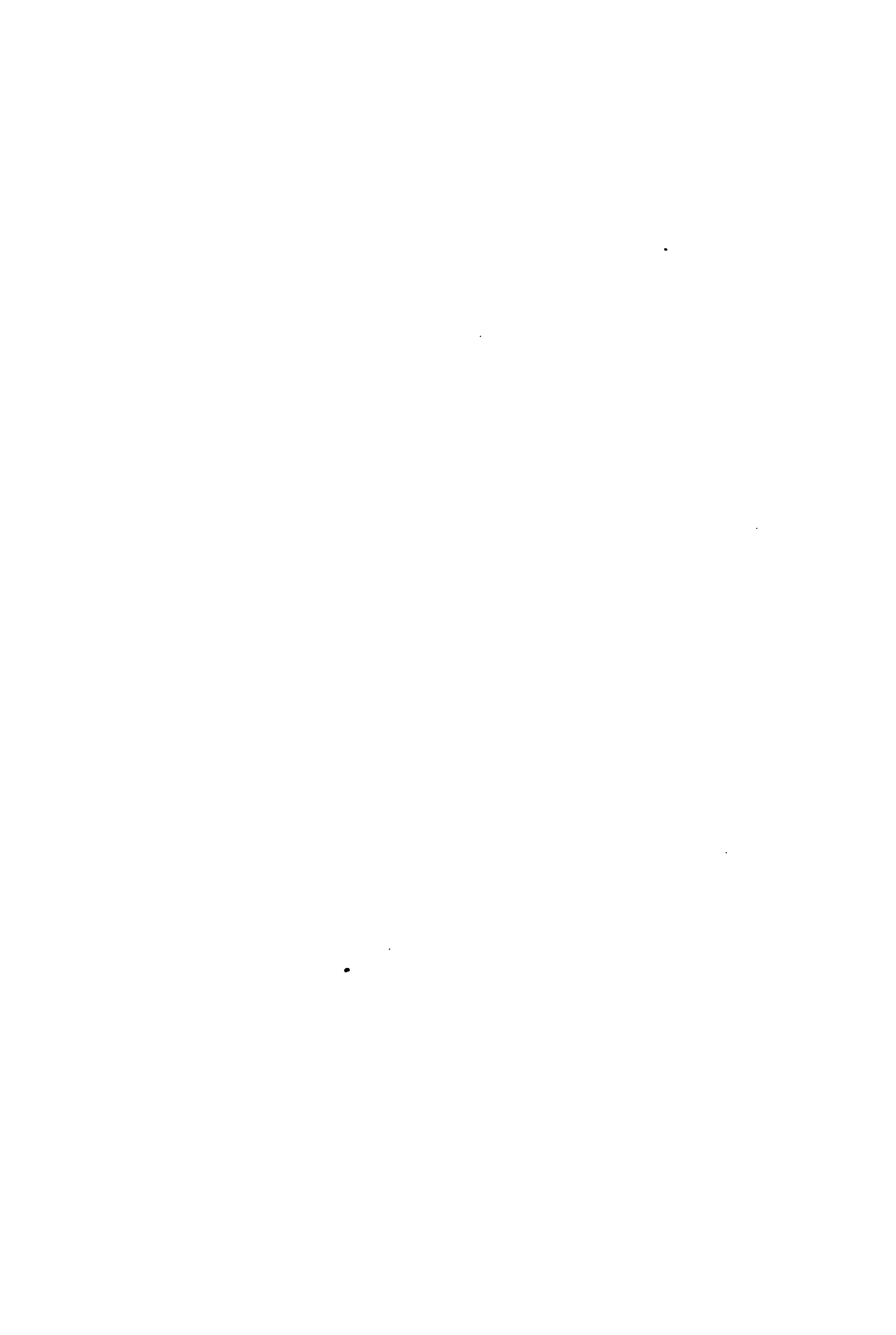
And Dorothy,—poor little sad-hearted Dorothy,—slipped on her hood and cloak, took her basket of provisions, and sallied out on her errand to Dame Alice.

But, before she had gone two yards on her way, a rough voice suddenly saluted her, and a rough hand from behind grasped her on either shoulder.

"How now, pretty mistress? Whither goest thou, and what hast thou there beneath thy mantle?"

It was Nicholas Webb,—the real Nicholas this time, and not the false coin!

"How now, pretty mistress? Whither goest thou, and what hast thou there beneath thy mantle?"—(*To face p.* 260.)



But Dorothy stood still, speechless and confused. It was the first time she had ever been questioned on the purport of her evening expeditions, save by Marvel, and she knew not how to reply. What could Nicholas be doing there at such a time,—he who always went to hear Master Nipper discourse? She asked him.

"I came after thy father, pretty one," he answered. "I was in hopes to have been in time to accompany him to the assembly, but I find he is already gone and the room empty. And thou, my angel, my treasure,—whither art thou bound?"

Dorothy's face glowed and reddened with vexation and dismay. What should she say to him, and why did he persecute her so, and where,—O where was Marvel, to help her out of her misfortunes as he had promised to do?

So she held her peace, till Nicholas grew angry and tore aside the cloak from her grasp in a passion. And behold the basket and its cover of white cloth, and beneath it two loaves of Dorothy's baking, and Marvel's soup, and the butter and the wine.

"Why, what's all this?" he shouted. "Dost thou gad about hawking victuals, then, Dorothy; and doth thy father know of thine errand to-night?"

But Dorothy drew the cloth and the mantle again over her basket, and would have passed him by without an answer; only he caught her arm rudely and held her so that she could not stir.

"Let me go, Master Webb," said she, with an air and voice of quiet dignity which seemed her own natural prerogative, and not the mere assumed trick of an injured woman. "You have no right to question me in this manner. Unhand me, if you please, sir."

But the Puritan lover did not understand courtesy. He laughed a short sharp laugh like the broken ring of false metal, and griped Dorothy's arm the tighter.

"No right, forsooth, my angel? Sayest thou so? Prithee tell me, then, who hath a right to question thee if not I, —I, thy husband?"

"Not my husband yet," answered Dorothy, determinedly; "and God forbid you ever be! If you make me wife of yours, Master Webb, it must be by force, for my voice shall never promise love and loyalty to the like of you! I have told you this twenty times, and I told it to father in your hearing last night, and now I tell it you again, that if perchance there be some grain of wisdom or of Christian kindness left in your heart, you may even now see well to withdraw from such hopeless courtship as yours!"

She was roused at last, this little gentle Dorothy, and

something akin to indignation burned in her throat and glowed in her brown eyes as Nicholas dropped his hand from her shoulder, and she turned about and faced him.

"Heyday!" cried he, "my certie, these are high words, mistress! Perhaps thou mayest learn another tune before to-morrow! Thy father, worthy Master Pratt, will have somewhat to say to thee to-night on this score, and I shall have my way with thee yet,—vixen and shrew though thou art! But for the nonce, thou shalt not stir a step without me, for I warrant thou hast some mischief in thine head now. Whither goest thou, Dorothy, with that basket?"

And again he caught her by the wrist, and glared in her face with a hideous leer that made her heart leap in her bosom for terror and loathing.

"Whither I go," she said, boldly, "is not for you to know, nor shall I tell you, though you stand here and hold my wrist all night. So you may get on your own way at once and leave me alone, or if not I will wait in this place till you grow tired of keeping me and be pleased to depart. But my errand this evening is not yours, and I do not desire your company."

There came over the face of Nicholas Webb a black, horrible scowl, and his eyes grew bright like a cat's, with malignant passion.

"If thou wilt not go with me," he hissed, in a lower, huskier voice,—Nicholas never spoke up when he was angry, —"thou shalt not go at all, mistress! I have that to do to-night with thy father which perhaps may render thee more tractable in future. For the present, it is enough that thou go home with me." And he chinked the twenty pounds in his pouch, and grinned the grin of a triumphant fiend, as he dragged Dorothy back into the weaver's cottage.

There she sat down in the window-seat, and looked at him out of the clear depths of her indignant eyes, as she had never looked at him before; but she spoke no word, nor moved her stedfast lips. And Nicholas, who could not abide much watching, paced up and down the room uneasily, till the sense of her quiet gaze grew intolerable to him.

"Dorothy," said he, wheeling about suddenly, and confronting her, "if 'ee dost think to bully my purpose out o' me by thy staring, I tell thee thou'rt out of thy reckoning. I'll not stay here to be insulted by any woman alive, much less by thee, mistress mine! If I can't bring thee to thy right mind alone, be sure Master Pratt and I will do it together, for I'll away to the tavern this moment, and fetch him hither. And as for that basket,—I shall take it with me, that I may shew him and the rest of the worthy neighbours there, how ill Mistress Dorothy spends her time when

they are engaged in prayer and pious discourse. Perchance some one of them may be better able than I to guess what pretty business is this o' thine at night, and to what end so much deceit and iniquity are directed!"

So he pounced upon her basket as a hawk swoops on his prey, and bore it off, soup, wine, loaves and all, bolting the door behind him to make his captive safe, and muttering under his breath like a distant storm of thunder.

Dorothy heard his footsteps on the threshold of the house and then outside the window, but she neither lifted her head to see him pass, nor moved the open outstretched hand from which he had taken the basket. So she sat awhile absorbed in her new bitterness, and dimly wondering what misfortune would happen next, and how that miserable day would end for her. Then the thought of Marvel came into her mind, and she leant her head against the window-frame, and the tears fell so fast and thickly down her cheeks, that all her indignation and all her dignity were quite washed away in a minute, and nothing was left in her heart and in her eyes but aching sorrow, and weariness, and forlorn hope. For Nicholas had latched the chamber door without, so that she could not escape, but must sit where she was like a little caged bird, until he and her father should come to rail at her again, and to expound that fresh wretchedness at which they had both already hinted, and which she knew was in store for her that very night.

By-and-by it grew dusk, and Dorothy could see the lights twinkling here and there in the windows of the houses all along the village street. Overhead the sky was dark and stormy, and there was no moon to be seen, only now and then a star looked out from behind the sweeping masses of cloud, and smiled encouragement at her with its bright clear eye.

And Dorothy took heart again as she watched the stars, and she thought that if the stedfast lustre of their faces could not be dimmed nor changed by the shadows about them, why should she be dismayed because for a little while her life was clouded and dark? So she threw open the lattice and leaned her chin on her two palms, and looked hopefully upwards to the God beyond the stars, till there came into her mind the words of an old hymn which was sung first long ago by one in great tribulation, and which has been the consolation of many a burdened soul since then.

And she said the words aloud to herself, lingering over them reverently and trustfully, for she knew they were the words of a singer who had learnt his songs of God Himself.

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me! Hope thou in God, for I will yet give

Him thanks, who is the help of my countenance, and my God!"

Whose light, brisk footstep was this, coming down the sounding street towards her, with such even, sturdy tread?

Whose shadow was this on the window-sill outside? Who was this that called to her suddenly as he stopped in front of the open casement,—"Dorothy, Dorothy! What all alone and crying?"

Then she leapt up in mingled joy and grief and welcomed him, and said, "Come round quickly, my lord, and open the door, for Master Nicholas has been here and is gone again, and has put up the latch without, and I cannot unfasten it!"

So the next minute the bolt flew back and Dorothy's prison-door opened, and in strode Marvel Maxwell, no longer disguised, but in full royalist costume, plumed and curled, and sword girt, indignant and fierce as a wild bull at the sight of scarlet.

"Where is Master Pratt?" he bellowed, "I'm come here to pay him the reckoning I promised! Isn't he home from his tavern yet?—the coward, the miser, the whining, drivelling, paltry, hypocritical old knave!"

Poor Dorothy rose from her place astonished, and stared at him with wide alarmed eyes and round mouth, for she had never heard Marvel declaim in this fashion before, and she was terribly scared at such an outburst. And Marvel caught sight of her face, and stopped short in his passion to laugh.

"What, did I frighten you, Dorothy? Well, perhaps I was a little hasty, but if you only knew;—Never mind," and he checked himself, "you must know some day, so it doesn't matter now. But don't be dismayed, little woman, *I*'ve not been to hear Master Nipper, so you may be sure ale has nothing to do with my vehemence! I suppose your—your *father* has not come home yet?"

Then Dorothy told him all that had befallen that evening, and the evening before, and how she had refused to kiss Master Webb when her father had bidden her, and how he had been very angry with her for her disobedience, and had told her that resistance was of no use, for he was resolved she should marry that hateful man. But Dorothy said nothing about the blow Master Pratt had given her, though her bosom was black and sore with the bruise.

Then she went on and told Marvel how Nicholas had met her that night, and what she had said to him, and how he had gone off in a rage to fetch her father, and had taken her basket with him; and she cried, "Oh what will poor Dame Alice do this evening without me, and without anything to eat? For there was not enough left last night at

her supper to last out all to-day! And I *promised* I would come!"

Marvel stood a moment before her, grinding his teeth in indignant silence, and gazing into the road with angry eyes, as though he were looking out for those two knaves. Then he turned again to Dorothy, and said very gently and slowly,—"Dorothy, Alice Forbes shall not go fasting to-night because Nicholas has carried away your basket and locked you up. I will go back to Rowan Court and get you some food to take her, but I dare not leave you here alone meantime, lest he and Master Pratt should come upon you while I am gone. Neither can I take you with me along the streets, for the townsfolk would see us walking together, and take note of it perchance, to speak ill of you and of me, Dorothy; for it is late now, and I have never yet been through the village with you even by day. Have you courage enough to brave the spectres in Yew-lane by yourself this dark night, and meet me at the widow's cottage? I will be sure to be there at least as soon as you, for I can run all the way, and I run fast too."

So they settled it between them, and Marvel went up the street again towards the Court-house, to fetch a supper for old mother Forbes; and Dorothy went another way to the entrance of the Ghost-walk.

Now Marvel was a merry boy for all his indignant spirit, and when he came to the park gates and looked in at the lodge-keeper's door, behold Nicholas Webb's supper lay ready spread for him on the table,—ale and rye cake, and a goodly trencher full of dainties.

And a thought came into Marvel's head, and he said to himself; "Faith, why should I go any further for a meal, when so rare a one stands ready before my very nose? I shall save time by taking this, and do a piece of benevolence on Master Webb's account as well. St. George! but the rogue shall be charitable for once, even against his will!" So Marvel stepped into the lodge parlour laughing; and when he had found Master Webb's market-basket he stowed away inside it the ale-can and the comestibles, and left the table as bare and barren as its owner's conceptions of Christianity. Then he slung his treasures over his arm, and ran off at the top of his speed in the direction of Gorse Common.

CHAPTER IX.

SHEWING HOW THE VILLAGERS "ROSE LIKE ONE MAN."

MASTER HUMPHREY PRATT and Master Nicholas Webb sat together in a small parlour at the Rowan Inn, deeply engaged in some apparently controversial argument.

Between them was a square deal table, and thereon two pewter tankards, half-emptied. Dorothy's basket lay at old Pratt's feet, and Dorothy was the theme which had started the present discussion, but in the turn it had taken, the basket itself and its contents were quite forgotten.

And an animated discussion it was, to judge from the loud tones, round eyes, and lifted brows of the old weaver and his intending nephew. The truth was that Nicholas Webb had just proved his *alibi* with regard to the events of the previous evening, to which, very naturally, old Pratt had referred almost immediately they met. So both men were in a very pretty state of confusion and perplexity. Had Marvel been present to overhear the colloquy, he would doubtless have enjoyed it exceedingly, for the superstitious and gloomy proclivities of these two worthies led them, as perhaps the young baron anticipated, to ascribe the weaver's experiences of May-day night to diabolic agency.

"I tell thee, Nicholas," cried the old man, bringing down his fist with an impressive thud on the hard deal table before him,—"the man was as like thee as thine image in a mirror! He wore thy dress, he spoke in thy voice, he used thy gestures,—how could I tell he was not thyself? As the Lord liveth, Nicholas, hadst thou been there in the flesh thou wouldst scarce have believed in thine own substance! Did Dorothy say nothing to thee about it?"

"I mind me now," answered Nicholas, greatly puzzled, "that she did indeed use certain words this evening which implied my having been present during some converse she had with thee last night, but it escaped my thoughts to inquire what she meant. This is an awful business, neighbour,—an appalling, a terrible, an unearthly business!" And he shook his cropped head slowly from side to side with each adjective, and gazed fixedly at the horrified grey-beard opposite. Humphrey shook his head also, and his hand trembled as he lifted the tankard beside him, and drained it dry in silence. Nicholas followed his example, and then for a minute both men sat and stared at one another without speaking, each occupied in his own reflections. Any other matter than precisely the one in question, they would, by

mutual consent, have referred to the wiser judgment of Master Nipper, but they both felt the delicate position they held respectively in the present affair, with regard to the pecuniary nature of the agreement between them, and were loth, of course, to publish their knavery even to their own shepherd. So they sat still, each in his chair, staring and meditating, but each unable to arrive at any rational solution of the mystery which bewildered them. Old Pratt was the first to announce the unsuccessful result of his cogitations.

"It's beyond me altogether, Nicholas," said he; "The best we can do is to marry the girl to thee off-hand, and take no note of last night's doings at all. Thou'st brought the money thou sayest?"

"Ye-es," stammered the lover, turning paler than before,—"I've brought the money, sure enow; but ye know, friend, 'tis an awkward thing to take a wife who's pledged to—to—*Satan*, ye know!"

He leaned across the table when he came to the last words, and delivered them straight into his companion's ear in a hissing, ghastly whisper. Old Pratt recoiled as from a sudden blow, and fixed upon the lodge-keeper's face a pair of the most dismayed and frightened eyes that ever looked out of mortal head.

"By the word of truth, Nicholas Webb, thou hast surely hit the mark! Wretched man that I am, I have promised my Dorothy,—*your* Dorothy, Nicholas,—promised her, body and soul, to the Evil One himself! Oh, oh, oh! this is a machination of the gorse witch, I tell 'ee! What *is* to be done,—what *is* to be done!"

But Nicholas held up his hand suddenly, and turned in his chair towards the closed door behind him.

"Hush," whispered he, "listen, neighbour,—what's *that?*"

There arose as he spoke a confused din as of many voices, a growing tumult, coming down the road nearer and nearer.

Humphrey sprang from his seat in a frenzy of terror, and smote his hands together above his grey head.

"I know, I know!" cried he. "Oh, Nicholas, fool that I am! I forgot it until now! He said he would come to-night to pay me his debt, and to claim his pledge of me! I—I pressed him to come, Nicholas; I made him promise he would not fail! How could I tell who it was I was inviting? That's him,—that's *them*, coming now, Nicholas! It's *fiends*, I tell 'ee, FIENDS!!"

The words rang through the chamber with a dismal shriek, that was echoed back from the long passage outside, mingled with the noise of cries and hooting and the quick tramp of approaching footsteps. Old Pratt flung himself forward into the outstretched arms of his appalled companion, who had

risen from his seat, and held on to him like a shipwrecked man clinging to a timber-raft. But that moment the door flew open, and there rushed tumultuously into the little parlour, not a company of fiends, but of human-visaged Rowanites, armed with sticks, bludgeons, and hedge-stakes, and all yelling and whooping together in noisy chorus.

"Master Pratt! Master Pratt! we want you,—come with us! They told us you were here, so we came on to fetch you! Come quickly,—here's Dorothy kidnapped, and we're going to burn the old witch and her house to-night!"

Humphrey dropped his hands from Nicholas, and stood aghast.

"Why, neighbour," gasped he, catching the foremost of the rabble by his leathern jerkin, "what's all this? Dorothy kidnapped, did they say?"

"Aye, aye, neighbour! kidnapped in good sooth," returned the others, gazing back at him, "for it's not a quarter of an hour since Mistress Holmes saw her go down Ghost-lane alone, to all appearance, but running as though Satan himself was behind her, the which he may ha' been well enough, for what pair of mortal eyes can discern a spirit? And, moreover, Mistress Holmes affirmed, that as she ran she looked behind her ever and anon, like one who is pursued, and flies for dread of an enemy."

"It's true, it's all true," roared the weaver, wringing his hands in an agony of horror. "Didn't I tell 'ee so, Nicholas? It's the Evil One that's been to fetch her while I'm away, and he's driven her off to Gorse Cottage, sure enow! Or, maybe, she's been drawn there by the witch's spells! It all comes o' that cursed business last night! We shan't none of us set eyes on Dorothy again, Nicholas! Satan has redeemed his pledge, and she's gone for ever, body and soul!"

So Humphrey Pratt, who had beaten and abused and maltreated his little niece all her life, lamented now over her supposed abduction from him and from salvation! But the case is not an uncommon one.

Nicholas, with greater presence of mind than the miser, recalled him to the exercise of the few senses he possessed, fearful, perhaps, lest the old man in the paroxysm of his horror should betray more than would be expedient for the gossips to hear.

"Come, come, neighbour Pratt," cried he, "'tis no sort o' use to stand still and wring your hands in this fashion! Let's be off with these good people at once, and see if something can't be done in the matter. Maybe Satan 'll take a compromise, or better still, take fright, and leave Dorothy alone! There's enough of us, at all events, to fight a crew of evil spirits; and 'tis clear enough too, from what neighbour

Holmes saw, that Dorothy's been driven down Ghost-lane to the Witches' Moor; so we may be in time yet before Satan carries her off! We're not going to be outdone by a parcel of witches and fiends, are we neighbours?"

And he drew himself up bravely, and glared defiance of all Pandemonium, in the full glow of that courage which the consciousness of supporting numbers inspires in the breasts of certain human creatures. For only a few minutes since, before the arrival of the crowd, this same heroic Nicholas had been as arrant a coward as his worthy colleague, the weaver. But now his appeal was received with loud plaudits, and the whole assembly, headed by Master Grymes, the prophetical blacksmith and prayer-maker-in-ordinary to the village, rushed pell-mell out of the tavern and up the road toward Yew Walk.

Never before had that solitary lane been filled with such tumult and confusion. Certainly the ghosts and witches who were commonly reported to infest it at nights, and to hold all manner of mad orgies and revels up and down it, would have been mere lambs at play to this howling rabble of the human species! But not a sign of witch or ghost was to be found that night, though many a Rowanite seer swore to the glint of white garments and gleaming eyes by the wayside, as the rustic army pressed on toward the common. Torches, shovels, and birch-brooms swayed to and fro above the heads of the mob, and yells and cries of excited rage rent the night air and awoke the birds on the rustling yew-branches over head. There was no moon, and the clouds which Dorothy had remarked from her lattice an hour ago, now filled the whole sky and threatened storm and hurricane from every quarter. And presently the thunder broke with a deep, broad, ominous growl in the south, and rolled up the heaven and down again, and died away on a blast of wind.

They all heard it above the sharp clatter of their own voices, for thunder at night is too distinct and unmistakeable to be confused with any other sound. And one cried, "Let us press forward, neighbours! there is a storm in the air!"

And another, "Back, back! the witches are abroad!"

But their prophet, the man of iron, sturdy Master Grymes, shouted out, "Forward! before the Evil One carries off his prey! We may be in time yet, for that is the noise of his chariot-wheels approaching, the chariot of the Prince of the Power of the Air!"

Then they dashed on, and the rising blast swept along with them, and puffed fiercely away at the flames of the torches, as though it would fain have blown them out, and served old widow Forbes a good turn. But it could not, so it rose up into the trees, and moaned and sobbed in indig-

nation and disappointment among the branches, and then higher still, out and up and back into the dark open sky.

And the villagers turned the corner of the lane and poured themselves tumultuously upon the bleak gorse moor, and behold, before them, the little hovel they had come to destroy, and the mysterious light gleaming forth from its one unshuttered window!

CHAPTER X.

BESIEGERS AND BESIEGED.

MARVEL and Dorothy were both within, for Marvel had heard the hubbub of the crowd coming up the lane some minutes before, and had run in from his customary reconnoitring post to warn the little damsel. But when the noise drew nearer, and they peeped out together from the window and descried the flare of the lights and the numbers of the mob, Marvel bade Dorothy bar up the door and keep within; "for," said he, "they are too many and too noisy to hear reason yet,—we must stand at bay for a while. I might save you by taking you out to meet them, but I could not save poor dame Forbes, and we must not think of leaving her alone to face these savages,—it would be certain murder. They would kill her outright or frighten her to death in no time, for there can be little doubt on what sort of errand they are come!"

And he pointed with one hand to the torches waving to and fro in the darkness, and with the other drew Dorothy closer towards him.

"Dear Dorothy," he whispered, "be brave and stand firm by me; we must not desert this poor old woman, whom God has given into our charge to-night."

Then the crimson blood rose quickly to the little Puritan's forehead, and she bent her face down low to hide it; for this was the first time Marvel had called her "Dear Dorothy," and the words were somehow wondrously sweet and strange to her ears.

But the noise outside grew nearer and louder as he spoke, and two distinct shouts arose above the general din, clearer and fiercer than all the rest: "Burn the house! burn it down to the ground!" "To the horse-pond with the witch!"

And Dorothy turned from Marvel to poor Alice, who was almost bed-ridden now, and very deaf and feeble and helpless.

"Dorothy, Dorothy," wailed the palsied old voice from

"Dorothy, what is all that noise, my darling?"—(*To face p.* 271.)

the little couch in the corner, "what is all that noise, my darling?"

"Nothing, mother," said Dorothy, "nothing to be frightened at. Lie back again and drink this milk I have warmed for you. And see, here is some nice new bread and a little stew, which has been just cooked at our own fire,—only taste how soft and good it is!"

So she sat down by the old woman, and coaxed and soothed and persuaded her, while the thunder muttered and rolled without, and the shouts grew fiercer, and the smell and heat of the burning torches filled the tiny cottage from end to end. Some one flung a stone through the window. It fell at Dorothy's feet harmlessly enough, but the old dame saw it, and she pushed away the cup which the little nurse held to her lips, and clung round her neck in terror.

"Dorothy, darling," she cried, "Oh what is it all about? They are come to kill me, I know;—don't let them kill me, Dorothy!"

"There's no need to be frightened, mother," answered Marvel, from his place at the doorway, "nobody shall hurt you. Eat your supper, and be sure things will be all right presently. You needn't be afraid, indeed."

"God bless you for a true, good gentleman!" cried Alice. "You and Dorothy are my ministering angels, and without you I should have surely died long ago! O Lord, I pray Thee, let Thy blessing be upon these two for ever!"

There stole up the doorway without a red quivering blaze, and the dry old boards crackled and creaked like living things in pain. Then there came a great blow, as from a hammer, and another, and a crash; and the door rocked and hung swaying to and fro. Then a heavy iron crowbar struck it once more, and it fell inwards in a cloud of smoke and dust and flame.

With a loud yell of triumph the villagers rushed forward, armed tooth-and-nail for the battle with their diabolical enemies; but they stopped short as the foremost set foot on the fallen door, and stood gaping in each other's faces.

For within the little chamber, side by side, stood Marvel and Dorothy, close to the bed of the sick old woman, who was now sitting up against her pillows, and grasping the little maid's outstretched hands in piteous alarm and bewilderment.

Here indeed were Dorothy and the witch, but where was Satan?

So there was a murmur among the crowd in the doorway, and some whispered, "'Tis the baron, we must go back;"

and others, "We shall have to pay for this night's work;" but the greater part stood still with mazed faces, and stared blankly upon the rest.

But Marvel did not let them wait long in that uneasy plight, for he was indignant enough at heart, despite the comical looks of astonishment they cast one on another, and their foolish, crest-fallen faces.

"Well, neighbours," said he, stepping forward to meet them, "what brings you hither in this unneighbourly fashion? Is it your Christian love and your tenderness to the aged and the widowed?"

And at that they looked more foolish still, and gaped the wider; but the boldest man among them took Nicholas Webb and Humphrey Pratt by the arm, one on either side, and led them forward, loth enough.

"Here, your Lordship," quoth he, "is the father of that young woman beside you, whom we came to seek,—honest Master Pratt, the weaver. And here is Master Webb, your Lordship's lodge-keeper, to whom she is betrothed, an't please you; so now they shall speak for themselves, for," concluded he, under his breath, as he slunk back into the crowd, "I'll be hanged if I'll say any more."

"Well, Master Pratt," said Marvel, fixing his clear blue eyes on the face of the unhappy grey-beard, "will you be good enough to tell me why you came here to-night?"

"They brought me, your worship," he stammered, "because they meant to burn down the witch's house; and Dorothy—she being bewitched, my lord—was drawn hither by spells; so they came, didn't you, neighbours? to fetch me, my lord; as they'll tell you themselves, if your worship's grace will inquire."

And he began to hedge himself back again into the mob, as the first speaker had done, but Marvel stayed him in his place with a wave of the hand.

"Stop, if you please, Master Pratt," said he. "Do you mean to tell me that you and your fellows really came here to burn the house over this poor old woman, sick and palsied and helpless as she is? Are you *men*, you creatures before me with human faces, or are you not rather fiends and goblins who have no hearts in your bosoms, nor brains in your skulls? Faith! it is the first time I ever had reason to believe this moor a haunted place, for I have been here many an evening before and found it peaceful and lonely enough. But to-night I think I have at last encountered the evil things people tell about,—the malignant devil's crew of Gorse Common! For surely so foul a crime as that you came hither to do can never be the intent of Christian

souls and manly hands. Answer me, Nicholas Webb, and you there Master Grymes the blacksmith, hath your friend the weaver spoken truly?"

But there was silence, for they were all afraid and some ashamed; so Marvel asked again:—"Master Grymes, how say you? Has the weaver spoken truly?"

Grymes saw he must say something now, so he resolved to make the best of it, lest his prophetical character should be damaged with the villagers, albeit his iron soul quaked exceedingly.

"It's true my lord, as he says, but indeed everybody knows Alice Forbes for a witch, and a dangerous one too, your lordship's grace. Why how has she lived these ten months without meat and drink unless she be a witch? There is not a man among us who has had any dealings with her, but Satan hath nourished his own, and now the Lord hath delivered her into the hands of His Israel!"

And thereon several among the crowd took heart again at their leader's boldness, and shook their heads, and repeated the usual indisputable argument, "Aye aye! how has she lived these ten months?"

Marvel turned to Dorothy and drew her right hand into his, but Alice still clung to the other and held it tightly and trustfully to her breast, as though her little nurse were indeed her protecting angel.

"I will tell you how she has lived, neighbours," said Marvel. "Nearly a year ago, when all of you turned your back upon that poor old woman, and abused and ill-treated and drove her from your streets, there was yet one little Christian among you who loved her Lord with all her heart and who kept His commandments. And for love of Him and of His poor, she had compassion on the widow for whom you had none, and she gave her earnings week by week to buy food and clothing for her, and took patiently and lovingly much reviling and slandering because she would not tell others of her good deed and of her alms. And in fair weather and in foul she came hither up Yew-lane to minister to the woman you despised, never wearying nor fainting in her charity. This she has done for ten months, and for the last three I have helped her, and this evening I let her out of the room into which Nicholas Webb had locked her, and she came here on the same good errand as before of her own will, and by force of no spell, unless it be the spell of Christian love. So now you know how Alice Forbes has lived, but I have something else to tell you to-night besides that. Humphrey Pratt,—it was I who supped at your house last night, in the guise of your worthy friend there, and it was to me and not to him that you promised to sell

Dorothy for twenty pounds. It was in my presence that you struck her on the bosom, because she told you she could not be the wife of Nicholas Webb. And it was to me also that you confessed your real relationship to her, and the knavish manner in which you had abused your dead brother's trust. You are worthy no longer of that trust, for she is a treasure of pure gold, and you are base metal to the backbone, and have done your worst to make her like you. But thank God she has better blood and truer in her veins than runs in yours, and so you failed in your intent, and would have rid yourself of her to a man she hates for a bag-full of clinking coin. Get you back again to the place whence you came eighteen years ago, for the house in which you live here is not yours, but his to whom you have broken your pledge, and whose child you have shamefully betrayed.

"And you, Nicholas Webb, who would have bought your wife for money because you could not get her by fair means, you may put your gold by again in your closet, for if Dorothy will not take you freely and for love, I swear by my halidome she shall let you be." Then Marvel looked at Dorothy, and there came a strange earnest light into his eyes, and his voice faltered as he spoke again; "Dorothy, you told me that the only thing which kept you back from the Church, was your duty of obedience to your father, who had forbidden you any worship save his own. This Humphrey Pratt is not your father, and himself disowns all claims between you and him. Your father was his brother Philip, a good Catholic and loyal servant of the King's, and he left behind him an earnest charge that you also should follow in the way he went and in the way of your mother Marie. But your uncle here, broke his trust and dishonoured his faith, and brought you up instead in his own outlandish fashion, and this very night he would have sold you to be the wife of another as bad and disloyal as he. Tell me, Dorothy, will you marry this man Nicholas Webb, whom your uncle designs for your husband, and sing psalms with him in his conventicle? Or will you be *my* wife, Dorothy, and go to church as your father and your mother did before you?"

MY WIFE! Ah, if there had been clamour and hubbub before among the villagers at the doorway, there was silence enough now, when those words were spoken, silence so deep and still and wonder struck, that each man might almost have heard his neighbour's heart beat in the stillness. But little Dorothy heard the words like one in a dream, a happy, mazy, misty, golden dream. He had not asked her to be "Lady Maxwell," nor baroness of Rowan Court,—he had only said,—"Dorothy, be *my wife.*"

And she looked up and saw the sea of astounded faces before her, and the ghastly stare of Humphrey Pratt, and the livid cat-like eyes of Nicholas. Then she turned from them all to Marvel, and laid her brown head upon his neck and said, "'Where thou goest I will go, thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.'"

The lightning shone full on her sweet face as she spoke, and on the swaying crow-bars and axes and torches of the crowd, and the thunder burst and died away in awful reverberation. But Marvel caught her to his breast as the solemn peal rolled overhead, and kissed her before them all.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH EVERYTHING ENDS HAPPILY.

So now my story has come to its ending, and I am very glad it has such a pleasant one, for stories that end sadly are very uncomfortable things indeed. And all I have to say yet about Marvel and Dorothy will be sweet and acceptable to you, I hope, reader mine, whoever you may be, if you have had patience to hear me throughout until now.

For the prejudice and the bigotry that Marvel and the priest had found too strong for them, fell before Dorothy's gentle love and patience, as all bad things must fall before the good, when the right time comes. And the villagers were ashamed of themselves when they found out how simple, and mistaken, and unjust they had been, and what bad deeds were done among them, and what a false prophet their blacksmith was. And just because the conviction of their folly struck them all alike, and altogether, it struck them deeply, for prejudice must be dealt with wholesale, if it is to be really overcome. So they gave up their tavern meetings, and their Bible-talk; and the tinkers, and cobblers, and blacksmiths preached no more unless they preached at home, for all their old disciples went to church again, like good Catholics, and heard the priest, and learnt their catechisms, and carried their babies to the font to be signed with the sign of Christ's cross.

But Humphrey Pratt left the village of Rowan Court, and went to live somewhere else; and Nicholas Webb went, too, after a while, for he was angry and sour-grained at losing Dorothy, and he could not abide to see the old religion back again, but liked new ways and strange doc-

trines better. And, besides that, all his old companions avoided him, out of disgust at the shameful part he had played with the banished weaver, and the very children cried out at him as he came down the street, "Dorothy Pratt for twenty pounds! Who'll buy? who'll buy?"

So he said, "That since every man's hand was against him, it would be better for him to leave the place," and as nobody contradicted his opinion on the subject, he went; and another keeper took his lodge, and his salary, and let us hope he behaved more virtuously than Master Webb had done.

But Marvel Maxwell himself got a better wife than most young noblemen in those days, for he married not for rank, nor for money, nor for blood, nor even for beauty, but for something far above all these,—something purer, and higher, and more blessed. For he loved Dorothy with all his heart because she was wise and good, and because of the sweetness and patience that looked out of her eyes. Well, indeed, had Philip and Marie chosen the name of their only child, for God's gift she was to them, and God's gift she had been to Alice Forbes, and to the villagers of Rowan Court. And God's gift she was now to her husband, loving, and gentle, and good as St. Dorothy herself; and whenever she spoke, it was as sweet church-bells, and when she smiled, it was bright as the sunshine in May.

As for old widow Forbes, you may be sure that she was well taken care of for the rest of her days on earth. Dorothy would not hear of her staying on still in the little dilapidated cottage of Gorse Common, but gave her instead her own house in the village,—the same that had been Philip Pratt's, and was now become his daughter's.

And after Mistress Forbes died, Dorothy bequeathed it for ever as an alms to the poor, and would take no rent for it; that its tenants should be none but the aged, or the sick, or the penniless, who could get no home elsewhere. But the sign-board and the gilded shuttle were not taken down, and they hung above the porch-gable for many a long year after Dorothy's generation had passed away, to be a memorial to those that came after, of her patient girlhood, and of her goodness, and her Christian love.

Mothers and sisters, standing on their doorsteps, pointed the old board out to the little children about them, and taught them to read the yellow letters upon it, and told them the story of Dorothy Pratt, and how she came to be Lady of Rowan Court. And the children were never weary of hearing the story, but would ask for it again and again, until Dorothy became to them a sort of patron saint, and old Humphrey and Nicholas stood for the modern Blue-Beard

and Red-Riding-Hood's were-wolf, in their repertory of nursery romance.

But the old shuttle and the sign-board swung and beat about in the rain and storm and snow and sunshine of many seasons, and nobody mended nor re-painted them, so that at last the shuttle fell altogether, and the sign-board hung by one rusty hinge. And people say you may see it there still, but all that is left of the original inscription is,—

"Ph . l . P . . tt . W . . ver."

THE ROMANCE OF A RING*.

IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.

GOLD.

TO begin this romance of mine I must retrace three weary decades of my autobiography, and call back to my memory the time of my early girlhood. I was sixteen years old when I lost my father, and was left alone in the world, for I was an only child, and my mother had died before I completed my fourteenth year. But I was by no means a poor orphan. My father, during his last illness, having no relatives to whose care he chose to entrust me, confided me to the guardianship of his particular friend, an old white-headed baronet, who had been Pythias to his Damon at Oxford, and whom I had always held in especial reverence and affection. Sir Lorrimer Randall was the kindliest, delightfulest specimen of that *rara avis in terris*, a good old English gentleman, that the sun has ever seen. His consort, too, a kissable, rosy-faced matron of some fifty seasons' standing, with white dimply hands of very diminutive size, and a quick mouse-like deportment, was the very ideal of a pretty old lady. I loved these dear ancient people with all my heart, and their two children, Vane and Alice, were always my special admiration. Very shortly after my settlement at Randall Hall, Alice and I became bosom allies, and vowed an eternal fidelity and affection to one another, that neither lapse of years nor change of circumstance should be able to break. I have said that I was sixteen when I became an inmate of Sir Lorrimer's house. Alice was two years younger, but her brother, Vane, had attained the dignity of majority. He was of a very peculiar temperament, and his physique was appropriately singular. During my forty-six years of experience, I have never come across a duplicate of Vane Randall, nor have I ever encountered again so strange an expression of face and manner as his. He had an extraordinary reserve of character, remarkable in so

* The leading incidents of this Story are true, but the writer is not at liberty to mention how she became acquainted with them.

young a man, and though I believe that his emotions were really stronger and more easily disturbed than most people's, and his sense of honour was particularly keen, yet he was very rarely betrayed into any outward demonstration of feeling, and had an exceptional fondness for solitude. In person he was tall beyond the ordinary standard, olive-complexioned, and brown-haired, and his eyes, the most remarkable and attractive it has ever been my fortune to see in or out of a picture. When I first went to live at Randall Hall, no longer as a casual guest for a few weeks' visit, but to take my place there as a regular member of the family circle, I was rather afraid of Vane. His reticence and grave demeanour discomfited me, his unyouthful patience and quietude annoyed me, and gave me a continual sense of being at a disadvantage when in his presence; while yet his evident power of mind, and his easy flow of language when he spoke upon any subject of depth or learning, moved my admiration and compelled my homage. Alice positively adored her brother, and believed in him implicitly. I think it was principally Alice's example upon this point, and the representations she so often made me of Vane's unerring sagacity and surpassing goodness, that first induced me to seek his friendship also; for I thought that one whom Alice held so infallible and loved so dearly must needs be somewhat beyond the common standard of mortals, and as eminently worthy of my adoration as of hers. My first advances towards the coveted alliance were made one summer's evening by the borders of an ornamental water upon the estate of my guardian. I had been gathering wild-flowers in the neighbouring copses and meadows, to adorn the chamber of my dear Alice, who lay at home indisposed with headache, and with whom these children of the hedgerows were always greater favourites than the choicest exotics of hothouse or conservatory. Forcing my way through the brambles and underwood of the cover, parting the tangled branches with my hands, and threading a path in and out of the intricate labyrinth of hazel and birch, I came suddenly upon a little quiet piece of open, a sloping mound, green and soft with the verdure of delicate mosses and ferns, and espied Vane reclining in an attitude suggestive of meditation, upon the bank of the lake that bounded the charming spot. Vane leaned against a mound of tasselled grasses, with his hands clasped beneath his head, and an open book upon his knees, his deep, wonderful eyes fastened upon the tiny rippling waves that broke drowsily on the shore at his feet, and the whole expression of his face like that of a man lost in reverie. For a moment the excessive brightness of the spot, all bathed in the splendour of the summer sunset, dazzled and bewildered

me after the subdued shadows of the wood. I paused, pushing aside the bracken, and shading my eyes with my hand, when the rustle of the branches caught his attention, and he turned his head and spoke to me.

"Why, Kate! So you've been wandering, have you? And you look tired, too. Come and rest yourself — this is an Eden worthy of your observation, I assure you; the loveliest bit of landscape for forty miles round!" I came forward, a little shyly, and sat down by his side in the full glow of the rosy light, but my heart fluttered uncomfortably, and I was still afraid to look him in the face. So, to avoid that necessity, and to divert his attention from myself, I took from his knees the book he had been reading, and found it to be Spenser's "Faerie Queene."

"Can you read this easily?" said I. "I never can understand it, the old English is so difficult to make out."

"Would you *like* to understand it, Kate?" he asked me, smiling a little. The question confused me—why, I don't know; I suppose I had not expected such a reply, or else the tone of his voice was embarrassing.

"Of course I should, Vane," I stammered, conscious of a blush. He took the book from my hands, and sitting closer beside me, translated a part of the poem with so much fluency and grace, that I forgot my timidity of his presence, and lost my self-consciousness in newly-awakened admiration of the metrical treasures he unfolded to me. I was charmed — enraptured; and Vane, looking in my face as he closed the volume, no doubt perceived the emotion I had not sought to conceal, and said gravely:

"I always sit here, Kate, every evening, with some one of my books. If you will come with me now and then, I think you would like to hear others of my favourite poets. Let me see—do you know German well?"

I confessed with burning cheeks that I was totally ignorant of it.

"Well, then," said he, kindly, "I will teach it you. Is it a compact, Kate? Shall we read Schiller and Doctor Faustus together?"

Of course it was a compact, and so also from that day was the friendship between my tutor and me. And Alice, when she recovered from her indisposition, and found that I went every evening with her brother to learn German upon the banks of the mere, was very merry at my expense, and playfully assured me that she was rapidly becoming a prey to insupportable jealousy. Ah, I look back now upon that fond tranquil time of my life with bitterness in my soul, that bitterness of regret which is sorrow's crown of sorrow,—the remembrance of happier things. How swiftly the years

went by! How devotedly I grew to love Vane Randall! How proud I was to believe—alas, poor mistaken child that I was—that I, and only I, possessed his unbounded confidence; that to me alone he was content to shew his hopes, his aspirations, his hidden labours; that in my presence only he laid aside his reserve, and spoke out of the very fulness and depth of his thoughts, hiding nothing from me, making me proprietor of every desire, and idea, and passion that occupied his mind! But there came at last a time when this pleasant delusion was to be done away, and I was to learn, oh, by what a bitter experience!—how far I had been from sharing the real secret of Vane's heart and life. Five years of happiness that was almost uninterrupted, of peace that was almost untroubled, passed away from me at Randall Hall; and I awoke one sunshiny morning in the early spring to the consciousness that I that day attained the dignity of twenty-one, and that the auspicious event was to be duly signalized by a gayer and grander ball than had been celebrated in the old country-house for half-a-century. There were to be a great many people present that evening, to honour me with their congratulations, whom I had never seen, some whose names I had scarcely heard twice in my life, others who were not known to me at all; but of one expected guest I had heard Alice often speak with awe, not unmingled with some touch of dislike, as I found by the disapprobation she openly expressed when her father made known his desire that Mr. Moreton's name should be included in the list of the invited for my birthday night.

"Mr. Moreton, papa?" she said, with a little *moue* of surprise, "what is he to do at a ball? Clergymen don't dance. He'll only stand in the doorways, and help to block up the entrances!"

But Sir Lorrimer insisted upon the despatch of the invitation in question, and Mr. Moreton, to Alice's profound astonishment, wrote an acceptation in reply. I was flushed with excitement and expectancy when I entered the brilliantly-lighted drawing-rooms that night. And the knowledge of my own beauty, though it was none of the rarest, was unutterably delightful to me. I floated through the night in a sort of dreamy ecstatic gladness; I danced, as it seemed to me, upon clouds of lightness, my heart beat joyously with a sense of something akin to triumph. Vane never danced much, but he waltzed twice that evening with me, and I said to myself that if it had not been *with me* he would not have danced at all. There was infinite gratification in the thought, and the colour burned brighter in my cheeks as I rested my hand on his shoulder, and

plunged for the second time under his piloting into the sweet reckless delirium of my favourite *deux temps*. I saw Mr. Moreton several times during the evening, and I learned from Alice that her father had made arrangements for him to sleep at the Hall, as he was going in a few days to his rectory near London, and Sir Lorrimer and he were old friends, and had not met for some years.

"But, Ally," I remonstrated, "is he going to stay in this house till he starts for London? Won't that be rather a nuisance?" Alice pouted and shook her pretty head in self-exculpation. "*I* know nothing about it," she said; "don't ask *me!* Oh, what a tiresome thing, though, Katie?" Then she gave her hand to the gentleman who came to claim her for the next dance, and they went whirling away together down the long bright room.

But the Reverend Charles Moreton *did* stay at Lorrimer Hall for more than a week; and though I could not quite make up my mind to like him—it seemed somehow disloyal to Alice to admire any one she depreciated—I could not but admit to my own conscience that his manner was gentle and pleasant; and though I daresay Alice would have indignantly repudiated the notion that he had any pretensions to beauty of person, he was at least agreeable to look at, and the tones of his voice were incontrovertibly soft and melodious. He was a much older man than Vane, probably by some fourteen or sixteen years, but I thought he assumed too much of the patron towards my *cher ami*, and I was proportionately indignant, and should no doubt have taken some method of openly expressing my ire on the subject, if Vane himself had only betrayed the least resentment towards the man, whom, with some strange unaccountable feeling of presentiment, I could not help regarding in the light of an intruder and supplanter.

We saw a great deal of Mr. Moreton after the ball. He held too livings, one near London, and one in the midland counties, which had recently fallen into his possession; and on his journeys to and fro he frequently rested two or three days at Randall Hall.

He was with us once in the early autumn, just as the leaves began to change their summer brightness for more sober shades, and I remember that the season was an unusually hot and sultry one. This time he had stayed longer at the Hall than on any previous visit—almost a fortnight, and on the evening before the day fixed for his departure, Alice and he and I had spent a good half-hour beneath a big cedar-tree on the lawn, discussing church politics and parochial management. But Vane, finding himself unbearably bored, sauntered away with an excuse, and Alice herself was soon

after summoned by the housekeeper to lend the light of her countenance to some domestic arrangement indoors. It came to pass, therefore, that my guardian's guest and I were left alone, and I, possessing very few conversational powers, and being aware of my deficiency on that head, was fain to propose a tour through the garden alleys and the shrubbery. Suddenly, when we were in the very midst of the shrubbery, Mr. Moreton stood still and faced me.

"Miss Brandiscombe," he said, with strange abruptness, "you know that I am not a young man?"

I was taken horribly aback by this embarrassing piece of intelligence, pointed as it was with an interrogatory emphasis; but I did my best in the emergency of the moment to unite the principle of abstract truth with my own sense of personal politeness.

"I don't think you are very *old*," I said, with an airy laugh. But he corrected that levity on the instant.

"Nor a poor man?" he added, in the same tone of inquiry. I lifted my eyes to his in alarmed silence, and mutely gave the affirmation he desired. "I have known Sir Lorrimer Vane Randall almost all my life," said he, taking both my hands into his, "and there are few things connected with my circumstances and career which are unfamiliar to him. I believe he has an esteem and attachment for me. Certainly I regard *him* with feelings of the sincerest friendship." There he paused, and seemed to be again expecting some pertinent observation, but nothing at all appropriate suggested itself to me. So I coloured high, and still preserved a sagacious silence.

"Perhaps you guess already," he continued, looking earnestly at me, "my motives for reminding you of these things. It is that you may not think I deal unfairly with you, or dishonourably towards the gentleman who has so long been your guardian and our mutual friend, by preferring the request I have resolved upon. Miss Brandiscombe—Kate—I am sure that I ask you to do nothing likely to displease Sir Lorrimer in entreating you to make me happy—to give me the title to protect and adore you—to be my wife."

He was actually in earnest! I dropped my eyes, and felt the crimson blood flaming hotly from my throat to my temples. In a moment a hundred swift-winged thoughts, reminiscences, and anticipations crowded into my mind, overwhelming and confusing the voice of my heart. Vanity, self-conceit, the desire of glorification—these were the baneful demons busiest with the shaping of my future at that terrible instant. I reflected that I was now past twenty-one, that, being very pretty, I ought no longer to remain boxed up in this country domicile of my ex-guardian's, surrounded only by gamekeepers and serving-men, and exhibited occa-

sionally only at a county dinner or a hunt ball. I knew that this man who now desired to marry me, after having passed forty years in the world unconquered by any woman, was looked upon as invulnerable, indomitable, and yet he had confessed himself my captive! What would be said of such a splendid conquest? Little Kate Brandiscombe leading the erudite, the *savant*, the cynical, the magnificent Charles Moreton in fetters! How the affair would astonish Sir Lorrimer! and please him, too, no doubt, as Mr. Moreton had said it would. Perhaps, already Sir Lorrimer knew of his friend's intention. And Alice—what would *she* say? Vane——

There a cold shiver seized me, my heart recoiled in my bosom, and I felt as though the soft August atmosphere had suddenly become an icy wind. I stood silent, unable to speak the words that would tear me asunder so irreparably from *him*, that would destroy so utterly a hope of whose existence in my soul I had been unconscious till that very moment. It is not until we stand on the point of losing for ever the possible fulfilment of our desire, that we comprehend how much the desire itself was part of our being.

Charles Moreton's musical voice broke in upon the thought that tore my heart so sorely.

"Dear Kate, is it to be 'Yes' or 'No?' Will you let me be your husband?"

Vane! Vane! The dear familiar name ran through my soul, like the death-cry of that terrible Hope dying in its birth. Ought I not to be ashamed of myself—ashamed of my weakness—ashamed of such unmaidenly, unsolicited, unrequited love? I had been taught that "Women should be wooed, and not unsought be won;" and I believed it to be decenter and better for a girl to marry where she could feel little affection, than so to forget herself as to love where she could not marry. And so I accepted the escape that Providence seemed to be offering me; I crushed the natural morality born within me under the iron of the artificial morality I had learned in the world; I sacrificed the first-fruits of my heart to the idol of a false idea;—other women have done the same things since, often and over again. I *gave the promise* that Charles Moreton had asked of me, and I thought that in doing it I did well, since I could never be the wife of Vane Randall. *Never!*

But from the hour I pledged myself and my honour thus, there seemed to come a change over the still quiet eventide, and all the shrubbery about us was astir with an awakened sobbing wind. Bough on bough swirled and sighed around, and here and there some light crispy leaf, withered by the touch of autumn, fell quivering from the rustling canopy.

overhead, and lay motionless and deathlike upon the gravel at my feet. I passed out into another world, out into another life, with the man to whom I had promised all my future, the man who was my chosen husband, henceforth to be my sole guide and closest companion till the end.

Hardly had we quitted the shadow of the grove, when I perceived Alice hastening towards us. I could not meet her smiling happy face at that moment, and I felt that her merry laughter and light talk would break my heart. So I made a hasty excuse for deserting Mr. Moreton, and, promising a speedy return, I turned away from him and sped back into the shrubbery. But the next minute I heard Alice calling me, and fearing that I should be followed and captured either by her or by Charles Moreton himself, I ran breathlessly down a narrow cross-path leading to the banks of the mere, whither I did not think it likely any one would be at the trouble to pursue me. But the intricate maze of small winding byways and my own discomfiture of mind bewrayed my steps, and I plunged by mistake into the coppice below the lake where I had gathered the wild flowers for Alice on the day of my first *tête-à-tête* with her brother. I remembered the spot—I remembered the whole circumstances of that bygone evening, the brightness of the sunlight, the feelings of my heart, the beauty of the poem he made me understand then for the first time! Mechanically I sought and found the opening in the low brushwood and bracken that led to the mere. But when I stepped out of the coppice on to the open rising ground, and fronted the full glory of the swooning westward sun, my heart leapt with a great leap into my throat, and the turf seemed unsteady beneath me, for there—as though that lost day of the Past were indeed restored—there, by that identical knoll of tufted grasses, his book lying open upon his knees, and his dear grave face turned towards the sunset, sat my darling, my friend Vane Randall! And when he saw me he rose and made me welcome, as he always did, laying his book aside, and as I drew near I looked down at it and saw that it was indeed the "Faerie Queene." "Katie, dear, you are trembling—what is the matter?—what has happened?" Then I laid my arms about his neck, and buried my head upon them, and told him that I was engaged to be married to Charles Moreton, that he loved me and that I loved him, and that he was gone to tell my guardian about it now. And after I had told him I fell to crying like the child that I was, my face still resting upon his shoulder, hiding and nestling there where I had so often fled to seek sympathy and comfort before in far lighter cares than this. Ah me! how much lighter and more evanescent!

But after a little while, when I found that my friend let me sob on in silence, and said not a word to this great piece of news, I turned myself slowly in his embrace and looked at him, wondering why he did not speak. God pity me! even now I seem to see it all again as I saw it then—the white quivering lips, the eyes benumbed as in a dream, the dear terrible face that looked no longer like the face of Vane, but like an image of it carven in marble! My sobs died suddenly, choked to silence by the new horror that seized me, and a fierce unwonted pain like the touch of fire caught my breath midway in my throat, and sopped up the tears that had been ready to fall from my eyes.

"Forgive me, Kate!" said he, at last. "I wish you to be very happy, dear,—but—I had thought you loved *me* more than him, and I hoped to have made you my wife this year. But it's over now, Katie; and though I can't help telling you, don't let any one else know about it;—we've been playing a game of cross-questions together, dear, and I've got my crooked answer—that's all."

Through the dreadful silence his words, sharp and distinct in their low measured utterance, fell upon my heart,—words that I have heard through more than twenty-five years since that autumn evening, reviving, like a constant haunting presence, a ghostly regret for the life they blighted,—the life *that might have been;* and filling me with a weary unsatisfied yearning over the glory of youth and womanhood that perished at that bitter going down of the sun.

And as I looked up again I saw that the sun had gone down, and the gold of my life had gone with it. For me, henceforth, the grey had begun.

CHAPTER II.

GREY.

THAT evening seemed to me to have no end. While I was dressing for dinner, Alice came into my room and sat down by the toilette-table, as it was her custom to do; but I felt that it would be impossible to support any sort of conversation with her then, and I could not conceal my swollen eyelids and the disorder of my mind. But Alice did not seem at all surprised. She looked at me kindly, and drawing down my face to hers, told me, with a kiss, that she knew all about it, for Mr. Moreton had already told her and my guardian; that she hoped I should be very very happy, and that I mustn't cry. "But, Katie," she added, with one of

her discontented little grimaces, "do you know I'm not quite sure that *I* shan't cry. I had no idea it was Charles Moreton you liked! Shall I tell you what I thought and hoped?—and now you've spoilt it all!"

I could not speak, for at the moment that strange sensation which most people seem to experience at certain seasons pervaded my mind, and I felt with a curious certainty that I already knew the words she was going to say, and that I could not hinder her from saying them.

"Well, then," said Alice, after a little pause of hesitation, "*I* thought it was Vane that you liked, and I said to myself and to papa that you two would marry in the end; and papa believed the same, I know; for when I first told him what I fancied about it he pinched my cheek and laughed, and said he didn't think me a very remarkable prophet, for *he* was clever enough to see as much as I did in that particular direction! And, of course, now that you are really engaged to somebody else, you won't mind my saying that I am a little disappointed—will you? Because I always promised myself that you were going to be my sister in good earnest some day."

Again I could not answer her. *I* only had sown my own misery then, and I had to reap my harvest of bitterness in silence. To think that, after all, that very Hope had been the hope of my guardian and of Alice, and of Vane himself, and that I—*I* had destroyed and ruined it in my fatal haste to be married! To think that happiness—*such* happiness would have come so easily to me if I had only waited for it perhaps a few days longer, and that everybody was ready to rejoice at my gladness! To think that the sweet fruit had been so near to my lips, and that I, in my blindness and folly, had voluntarily thrust it away! And then to hear Alice's qualified felicitations on my terrible blunder, and to be told that she was disappointed in my choice! Disappointed! SHE!

How I wept that night! How I sobbed and moaned and sighed out the dull creeping hours from midnight until dawn! How I hated the returning light and my own life, and the pitiless, heartless sun that *would* rise again and make a new day!

But I never breathed a word of my distress to Alice; I never betrayed myself to Vane; I never resented a kiss nor a word of caress from Charles Moreton. My guardian plainly was a little surprised at the engagement, but he made no allusion to his son, nor hinted at the existence of the disappointment Alice had expressed so openly. Then came the eve of my wedding-day, and with it, Vane, who had been in London for some weeks, returned to the Hall. It was very

late when he arrived, and Alice had already bidden me good-night and was preparing to retire to bed. But when I heard Vane come into the house, I was seized with so strong a desire to see and speak to him, that instead of going directly to my bedroom, I ran down the stairs and encountered him in the dim-lighted hall.

At the sound of my footstep he looked up and greeted me with a smile.

"Ah, Katie!" said he, "I'm glad you're there—I have something to shew you. And you'll be in such general requisition in the morning that I shan't be able to get near you; so I'll take the chance that Providence gives me, and make the most of the present. Smithers, where is there a lamp burning?"

"In the dining-room, if you please, sir."

I followed Vane into the great empty room, with its grim oaken wainscoting and faded ancestral portraits hanging on the walls.

Vane took a tiny velvet *étui* from his vest and opened it before me. It contained a gold ring of three separate circles, made in the semblance of a snake, and upon the crest of the head was set one large diamond of the first water, an amazing gem both for size and lustre.

"This is my present to you for to-morrow, Katie. You must wear it as a guard above your wedding ring. There is something written inside, you see, so that you mayn't forget me by-and-by."

He held the jewel beneath the lamp as he spoke, and the light fell full upon the inside of the coils. I read this inscription graven there:

"*Vane Randall gives this, with himself, to Kate Brandiscombe.*"

I could not read it twice for the tears that blinded me. I could only hold the dear giver to my heart, and let him take my thanks in the passionate silence of a last embrace. Oh, if even then he could have known how I suffered for his sake! If even then he could have guessed how wildly I loved him! That night I was nearer to telling him the truth than I had ever been before, for I saw that his love was not abated towards *me*, I knew that I was his darling still. Would it have been better for us, better for *him*, if I had spoken then, I wonder?

As I laid the jewel in its velvet case I looked again at the inscription within it, and noticed that it was not my married name that was engraven there, though the ring itself was a wedding gift.

"Why did you not," said I, "write Kate Moreton instead of the maiden name I shall forego to-morrow?"

"I have never known Kate Moreton," he answered, in a low, sorrowful voice. "It is Kate Brandiscombe that I have loved, it is Kate Brandiscombe that I shall carry about in my heart all my life. And whenever she thinks of me I want her to be Kate Brandiscombe again, that my ring may be to her not only a 'goodly ornament,' but an 'endlesse moniment' of the past."

He too, then, must have been thinking of the "Epithalamion."

* * * * * * *

I was married to Charles Moreton upon the *twenty-fifth of October, eighteen hundred and forty-five.* And upon that day, after I had returned from the church with my new-made husband, Vane himself added his golden serpent to the single coil of the wedding-ring already upon my finger. For I would wear no other guard than this gift of Vane's, and I would suffer no hand but his to put it on. And he, bending over me as I gazed at the shining circles, murmured,

"There are three coils, Katie—that is the magic number, you know, and the full elaboration and perfect complement of three is nine; three ones of threes, trinity in unity thrice demonstrated. Let the diamond on the serpent's crest stand for the adamant of our friendship—the indissoluble bond between us—and the allegory is complete!"

"Ah, Vane," said I, "what result may not nine years bring to that precious friendship?"

No one was attending to us—we stood apart from the guests, and the chiffonier, groaning beneath the weight of my costly wedding-gifts, was the centre of the general attraction. Vane glanced rapidly across the room, and then, fixing his wonderful scintillating eyes upon my face; "Katie," said he, with unwonted earnestness, "something impresses me to make you a very foolish request. Keep this ring untouched where I have put it. I shall like to think when we are parted that you have never moved it from your finger since this day, and that where I left it, there it remains."

"Vane," I answered, all my heart upon my lips, "it shall never be moved from my finger until you draw it off yourself." Then a sudden thought struck upon my mind, and I added hastily, "But oh, Vane, suppose I lose the diamond—the symbol of our friendship? What shall I do then?"

And he answered me, "*If you lose that, Katie, I will send you another gift to replace it.*"

CHAPTER III.

SABLE.

VERY shortly after the return of my husband and myself from the Continent, where we had spent our honeymoon, and just as I was beginning to settle down in my new home, I heard from Alice that Vane had entered the army.

"After your marriage, Katie," wrote my *naïve* correspondent, "Vane seemed to grow quite different. He became more speculative than ever, but instead of being tranquil and serene over his speculations, as he used to be, he turned excitable and restless. You may think how surprised we were to hear him say one day that he was tired of his quiet life, and must have some active profession, something that would stir up his energy, and take him into adventure and commotion, if possible—into danger. Papa laughed at him, and suggested that the season for fox-hunting had set in already; but I knew what Vane was hinting at, and what he meant to do. So I was not surprised when he told us very calmly last Saturday that the preliminaries were concluded, and that he had 'got a mount for her Majesty's pack.' I think it's in the Lancers. Write to him, Katie; I know he would like to hear from you."

I wrote as she suggested, and Vane would have come to see me, but I feared that if he did I might betray myself before my husband. So I sent Vane an excuse, and with the letter went also a *gage d'amitié* I had prepared for him, and which I was sure he would appreciate and value as dearly as I did his ring. My present was a double locket of plain dead gold, containing in the interior of one fold my own portrait, enamelled upon ivory, and bearing on the inner part of the fold, opposite the picture, this single line, traced in the tiniest of seed pearls:

"*For short time an endlesse moniment.*"

Time went on very calmly and placidly with me at the rectory, and Charles and I were as happy together as any one could reasonably have expected, considering the disparity of our ages: certainly we were much happier than I had believed it possible for such a marriage to make us. I did not see so much of Alice as I had hoped to do, for Randall Hall was quite in the midst of England, but we often exchanged epistolary greetings, and our friendship remained as warm and unalterable as ever. Alice would not marry. Three years after my marriage, Lady Randall, whose feeble health had long before made her a nonentity

in the household affairs, died, and my friend loved Sir Lorrimer too dearly to be able to leave him alone, now that Vane no longer resided in the old place. It was Alice's mission to be a good daughter, and she performed her duty with earnest devotion and willing love.

Time is a wonderfully skilful healer of mental disorders, and he was a good doctor to me. But I was sorry for my husband's sake that we had no child. More than eight years of my grey married life had passed away, and no baby came to gladden the house and wake the mother's heart in my bosom; no tiny voice babbled in the great luxurious rooms where I sat day after day entertaining my visitors or presiding at my husband's table; no little pattering footsteps disturbed the aching silence of the heavy-carpeted staircase and the long marble corridors.

I taught myself to believe at last that the blessing women covet and prize so much was denied to me, and that in this crowning joy of happy wives and solace of sad ones, I should not be suffered to partake. But Providence meant more kindly, and decreed that though it was not for me to have a child upon earth, I should have one in heaven.

Early in the summer of 1854, a little son was born to me, but he was a weakly, tiny infant, and we all saw from the first that he could not live long. Three days after his birth we gave him the names of Charles Vane, and when the quiet ceremony of baptism was over, my husband carried him to the couch where I lay, and put him gently into my arms. He opened his blue eyes, and looked at me wistfully, as though, poor baby, he dimly understood I was some one he might have learned to love if he could have lived a little while longer, then he dropped his wee tired head upon my breast with a little sigh, and died. I do not think I was very sorry, for I knew that I had a baby still, and that in some quiet corner of Paradise I should find, by-and-by, a tiny smiling face that I should know, and hear a childish voice that the angels would have taught to call me "*mother!*"

My husband's rectory was a very short distance from the Norwood Cemetery, in which my father had been buried; and at my request they laid the little coffin beside his grave, for I liked to think that they were so close together, and that when I was able to go out again, I might sit beside them both as they slept so quietly there and still, in their low green beds, whereon the grass waved, and the roses bloomed, and the sunshine and the rain of heaven came day after day to bless the peaceful rest of the dead.

That practice of burying one's friends in vaults is very horrible! It is so much better to think that those we have loved lie out beneath God's wide, open sky, under the clear-

eyed shining stars and the warmth of the golden summer-time, and the soft, beautiful snow that the angels spread so reverently over the long graves like a white pall to keep the frost and the cold of winter from those who lie below, than to know we have put away the bodies of our dead upon shelves in a damp cupboard underground, with great iron doors and heavy bars shutting them in like the gates of a dungeon!

But it was very long before I was able to go to the cemetery. After little Charlie's death I lay a long time so ill that it was believed I should die, and I almost hoped so myself, for I had grown terribly weary of the world. But little by little my strength came back to me, and at length I used to walk up and down the garden-paths, leaning on my husband's arm, and watching the companies of swallows that congregated and wheeled and darted round the gabled roof of the rectory, already assembling for their southward journey. At last, one morning about a quarter before nine, I crept alone out of my husband's domains and found my way to the cemetery. I took with me the latest blooms our parterres had yielded, some golden pompones and lobelias, and a few hothouse rarities of fern. Kneeling by the two green mounds I had come to visit, I laid my flowers across my father's grave with unsteady fingers, and hung a wreath of maiden-hair and feathery exotics over the white stone cross that marked the resting-place of my baby-boy. But, not daring to remain too long upon a first expedition after so severe an illness as mine had been, and fearing to be overtaken by the rain—for the sky was gloomy with gathering clouds, and the wind blew sharply and keen from the north-east—I hastened home as quickly as my weakness permitted, and retired to my own boudoir. As I entered the room, the tiny French clock upon the mantelpiece chimed for the quarter to ten. Raising my hand to draw aside the muslin curtain that shaded the window, my glance was suddenly attracted to some unwonted appearance connected with my wedding-finger. The next instant I perceived the nature of this peculiarity, and uttered a cry. I had lost my serpent-ring! And straightway with the knowledge of that loss a flood of long-slumbering memories awakened within me, and the whole tide of my old passionate love poured back upon my heart. Only a few weeks ago I had heard from Alice that Vane was in the Crimea, and expecting soon to send us the account of some brilliant engagement in which—he had gaily written home—he should certainly distinguish himself and earn the most splendid laurels imaginable. Where was he now? what had become of him? And the ring!

waited to see me in my husband's study. She brought me his card, but the name upon it was unknown to me—"Colonel Somers, Scots Greys." I found him a man of stately presence and peculiarly gentle voice, but of so haggard and melancholy an expression of face, that the very sight of him filled me with pity and sympathetic interest.

"Madam," said he, rising and bowing low as I entered the room, "such an utter stranger to you as I have the misfortune to be, ought certainly to excuse himself for the suddenness of an intrusion like this. But I am'—he hesitated a little, and his voice slightly dropped and faltered—'*I have been,*—a friend of Captain Randall; and being brought unexpectedly to England upon some very urgent private affairs, impossible even in the present state of the war to neglect, I have come here to deliver to you with my own hands a packet, the contents of which, I am told, must certainly be more rightfully yours than any one else's."

He placed on the table, as he spoke, a small leathern jewel-case, worn and stained, which I did not recognise. My thanks rose to my lips, but the tears were ready behind them, and I could scarcely trust myself to speak. Colonel Somers took pity upon me, seeing me so distressed, and dropping his eyes from my face, he added, in his slow, musical tones:

"No doubt you know, Mrs. Moreton, the history of the disastrous Light Cavalry charge at Balaclava a month ago. It was a dreadful business — the result, probably, of some misapprehension between Lord Raglan and Captain Nolan—who fell, poor fellow, doing his mistaken duty so admirably in the front of the Russian batteries. I did not myself take part in the charge, for I belong to the Heavy; but I saw the devoted brigade ride to its destruction, and I never shall forget the splendid sight. Cavalry ought on no account to act without support; infantry should always be close at hand to back them up; but *we* were the only reserve behind these men, guns and infantry being far in the rear. The brigade advanced in two lines, quickening their pace as they went—trot—canter—galop—then a splendid burst! We heard them cheer as they flew into the smoke of the Russian batteries; we saw their lines thinned and broken—saw them join again—saw them rally. We could catch the flash of their sabres as they dashed among the guns, scattering the enemy's columns right and left, and striking down the gunners. I do not believe one man in the whole brigade flinched from the desperate encounter. But gods could not have done what those brave fellows failed to do. They will settle these things at home, I suppose. I am a soldier, and

I must pay my tribute where it is due. I never saw such magnificent riding, such undaunted courage in my life before I saw this, and I have been many years in the Queen's service, so that I speak with some experience of battle-fields and military enthusiasm. Those Muscovite wretches should have reverenced the unparalleled valour of this Six Hundred; but they could neither understand nor appreciate it, and they opened their cursed volleys of grape and canister upon the returning remnants of the band, and shot the brave fellows down as though they had been dogs!"

Colonel Somers paused a moment, and presently resumed in altered and calmer tones:

"After the whole thing was over, some of our men found Captain Randall lying across his dead horse, among the foremost of those who had fallen, with his face turned towards the guns he had ridden out to capture. They brought him to me, because they knew he had been my friend. When I opened his vest I saw that he had been shot in the heart, and the bullet that had brought him his death had passed on its way through a little gold pendant which I found tied about his neck with a silk thread. I hesitated at first to remove it, perceiving how much he must have valued it; but when I reflected that he was now no longer able to estimate that value, and that his father and sister would dearly prize the little treasure as a memorial of him whom they had lost, I altered my mind, and laid the trinket aside in a small leather stud-box of my own, until I should have an opportunity of restoring it to my friend's family. Coming to England so soon after the battle, I brought it with me, and yesterday took it to Miss Randall at Randall Hall, but she told me it could belong only to you; and I begged your address of her, that I might have the satisfaction of giving it myself into your hands."

I was weeping now unrestrainedly, for I could no longer conceal my emotion, and I knew from the tone of the voice that spoke to me that Vane's friend himself was scarcely less moved.

"Colonel Somers," said I, "you have done me a kindness that no words can repay; and if I fail to thank you sufficiently, it is because I feel so deeply the goodness and delicacy that prompted your visit. But I want to know one thing more: the *hour* at which that disastrous charge of the twenty-fifth of October took place. Can you remember?"

"*The Light Cavalry Brigade,*" he answered, "*charged at ten minutes past eleven. By twenty-five minutes to noon, only the dead and dying were left in front of the Russian guns.*"

I had no need to ask further. Exactly at that time, allowing for the difference of longitude between London and the Crimea, the ring which Vane Randall had given me fell from my finger upon the grave of the child who was called after his name. But I longed to set my last doubt at rest, and I took the morocco *étui* in my hand.

"You will excuse me?" I said, pressing the spring, as I looked up at Colonel Somers.

He bowed his head in acquiescence.

Alas! alas! It was the gold locket I had given Vane nine years ago, all riddled and crushed by the bullet that had pierced his heart.

RELIGIOUS TALES.

THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM.

SYMPHORIAN. CÆDMON.

THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM.

I. The Teacher.

"AND in the world to come, life everlasting."

There was a sunset of red flame far away behind the sloping hills, and the air was very calm with the calm of coming night.

For the hum and stir of labour in the low-lying village were over, and the daily toil was done, and the peasants thronged together on the open heights to hear the strange Teacher, who was come among them preaching of a Life to be Hereafter.

He stood by the breaking of the cliff, in the full halo of rosy light, grand and tall and kingly; and the people listened earnestly all round Him while He taught them the wisdom and beautiful love of the God whom He called His Father.

Very new and wonderful was the philosophy of this strange Preacher. There were none in all the crowds which pressed upon Him daily, who had ever heard tell of such a bold speech as His. Dimly in the Jewish scriptures of prophets and sacred singers, and in the mythologies of Greece and Persia, people had caught hints and glimpses rare and far between, of some vague life to come, and longingly perhaps and curiously, they speculated on what such hints should mean. Here and there one or other snatched at mysterious words and promises which seemed to savour of the world to be, and anon perchance some sorrowful souls, to whom the earth brought forth only briars and thorns, were wont to draw consolation from the thought that there were unfading flowers in store for them elsewhere.

But over all rang the unmusical burden of the Preacher-King's wisdom: "One thing befalleth the man and the beast, as one dieth so dieth the other; all go to one place, all alike are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

And the fervour of the ancient religions grew feeble, and the shrines of the old-world gods were deserted for the academies and groves of the philosophers, and men ran wild after new theories and new teachers; but, after all, none of these could venture beyond speculation.

So Plato and Epicurus, and Zeno and Aristotle, and Pyrrho, and a hundred more, reasoned and prated of beauty and truth and eternity, and drew away each his five thousand disciples,

and died at last in hope, perhaps, of good to come, but nothing more.

And as for the Jews, the one great boast and glory of their religion was gone; their peculiar freedom was lost; their prophets were dead; their Jehovah fought no more for them, and they were servants and tribute-payers to a conquering lord. What was pious faith to a fallen nation like this, whose God had been a "man of war," and whose religion had been a system of conquest and sway?

But now here was One who taught a new philosophy and a new faith, One to whose gentle greatness of soul the whole conception of a Jehovah-King was a barbarous phantasy, and the traditions of his priests immoral and absurd; One who spoke instead of an All-Father ruling the world in the calm grandeur of majesty and wisdom, presiding everywhere, and loving all alike; making His sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sending rain upon the just and the unjust.

Wonderingly the people followed Him from place to place, an ever-growing multitude; wonderingly they gathered about Him, and listened while He talked of a God whom He carried within Himself; of a universal law of love, and of an eternal life that was to Him no matter of doubtful desire, but of certainty. And with startled ears and open eyes they heard how He put aside each item in their old code of ethics with His calmly royal "But *I* say unto you." For this strange Preacher taught as One having authority, and not as mortal man.

So from all the cities and villages through which He passed, rich and poor and young and old followed Him in multitudes; some hungry after His doctrine, some in admiration of the winning grace and poetry of His speech, and some for curiosity and wonder at so strange a man and so novel a morality.

And now He stood on the hill and spoke to His audience as it was His wont to speak, of the two great themes which most He loved to dwell upon—the kingdom of God, and the life to come hereafter.

At His feet, half-hidden in a cleft of the rock, sat a young peasant-girl, with soft brown eyes fixed intently upon the face of the teacher. Her hands rested on an earthen pitcher which she had been filling at the well on the hill-side, and a mellow ray of sunset shone over the thick glossy waves of her chestnut hair, and on the white folds of her dress.

Anywhere and at any time this young girl would have seemed beautiful; but now as she sat at the feet of Christ, with her sweet face and tender eyes glowing with earnestness and devotion, she looked almost an angel.

And the Teacher spread out His hands towards the west-

ern sky, all ablaze with the golden and opal splendour of sunset, and His clear eyes kindled as He spoke of the inconceivable glory that was in store for the children of the heavenly Father, when death and sorrow and sin should be passed away for ever, with all the vanities of earth, and its wealth, and its loves, and its pride.

"For whosoever shall forsake houses or lands or kindred for My sake, and for the kingdom of God, shall receive abundantly more in this present world, and in the world to come life everlasting."

The Teacher folded His arms upon His breast, and stood silent awhile, watching the crimson sun as it dipped behind the ridge of grey evening clouds into darkness; then He looked again towards the waiting peasantry, and dismissed them with a grave, kingly gesture of farewell, and a word of warning that the hour was late. And one by one and thoughtfully they obeyed, and streamed down the pathway of the hill into the village below, until He was left on the heights with twelve only.

The peasant-girl with the brown eyes was among the last to go. Slowly and silently she raised her pitcher from the ground, slung the hempen cord across her shoulder, and went on her way alone, musing.

Homeward along the cliff behind her came a young man, singing to himself snatches of quaint old ditties, and his frank, bright face was the face of one who found the world very flowery and pleasant, and was well contented with its sweetness, nor had a thought of care beyond it.

Suddenly he espied the peasant-girl in front of him toiling down the hill with her burden. "Mona! Mona!" he shouted, "stop for me, I'll carry your pitcher!" and presently he was beside her and had loosened the cord from her shoulder and slung it upon his.

"I've been supping with my Uncle Caius, Mona," he said, "and he's coming over to-morrow to see us. How is Nurse Esther to-night? no worse, I hope, dear?" Then, without waiting for an answer, "Who is *He*, sister?" and he glanced over his shoulder in the direction of the heights behind them.

"Jesus the Nazarene, the Teacher of Galilee," she said.

"What does He teach?" asked the boy, lightly.

"The kingdom of God," answered she.

II.—DEATH.

A LITTLE room darkened and still, a sweet aroma of flowers, and an open white-draped couch, whereon lay one quiet and pale and patient, waiting for the Angel of Death.

And a young girl with brown eyes sitting beside the dying with a roll of the Scriptures upon her knee, and a sweet voice that read from them a hymn of the old Psalmist King's, softly and low, like a maid who reads to her lover.

"O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before Thee.

"Let my prayer come unto Thee, incline Thine ear to my cry.

"For my soul is full of trouble, and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.

"I am numbered with them that go down into the dust, I am become as one that hath no strength.

"Free in the freedom of death, like the dead that lie in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more, for they are cut off from Thine hand.

"Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness and in the deeps.

"Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast made me fearful with all Thy storms.

"Thou hast put away my beloved from me, Thou hast made me an abhorrence unto them ; I am shut up and cannot come forth.

"Mine eyes mourn by reason of sorrow ; Lord, I have called daily upon Thee, I have spread out my hands unto Thee.

"Wilt Thou shew wonders to the dead ? shall the dead arise and praise Thee ?

"Shall Thy loving kindness be declared in the grave, or Thy faithfulness in destruction ?

"Shall Thy power be known in the dark, and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness ?"

Then Mona's heart failed her at those dreary words, and she bowed her fair head over the scroll and wept sore. And at the sound of her tears the dying woman stirred upon her pillow, and said brokenly in a whisper :—"Hush, darling, not for me, not for me ; say to thyself, 'God gave and God will take away ;' we all come to it in time, it is no new thing to die, I am going to the land of forgetfulness, where there is peace. Forget, forget, my darling !"

But Mona turned her heifer's eyes upon the white face, and made answer gently,—"Mother, the Teacher says that the children of God have everlasting life."

"The thin hand groped its way towards her across the couch, and Mona took it gently and laid it in hers, and clasped it there lovingly."—(*To face p.* 305.)

Then there was silence between them, and the vine upon the outer wall of the room beat the closed lattice with its swaying tendrils, like a death-watch tapping through the stillness. And presently a voice at the doorway said, "Mona, Mona, may I come in?"

"Yes, Azriel, come; I think she is dying."

And again they were together, the frank-faced boy and his peasant sister, standing hand-in-hand beside the dying, sad and silent, for they were both her children, though she had not given birth to both. For Azriel's mother had died when he was born, more than twenty years back, and this woman Esther had taken her place then and kept it ever since, and Esther's child was to him a twin sister, for they grew up together and were companions and playmates from the first, and Azriel had no other sister than she.

But his father, Ephraim, had married again, and the new wife was a Roman and an infidel, tall and proud and gloriously beautiful, and the peasant-nurse and her daughter found no favour in the ungracious eyes of Hyperia. Neither cared she greatly for Azriel, because her love was bent only upon her husband and her little son; but Azriel took nothing of that to heart, for the love of his foster-sister made up to him for all else, and he was young and careless.

But now sorrow was come over his life, the first he had known, and it was very heavy and unmusical to him.

So they stood there, he and Mona; in the quiet, darkened room, watching, and all through the silence the vine knocked at the casement, and to Azriel's straining fancy it sounded like the approaching footsteps of the black-robed Sammaël. But in Mona's heart there ran a single thought, "In the world to come, life everlasting."

But she said no word.

Then, while they stood looking, Esther stretched out her hand feebly and uncertainly, as though it were night, and her white, dry lips unclosed.

"Mona."

And the girl stole softly to her side.

"Mother. I am here," she said.

The thin hand groped its way towards her across the couch, and Mona took it gently and laid it in hers, and clasped it there lovingly.

"It is dark, dark, so dark," said the dying woman. "Mona, where is the light?"

Azriel opened a side of the lattice softly, and the mellow rays of the sunset fell full upon the white drapery of the bed, and on the wan face, in a flood of golden glory.

"There is light, mother," said Mona, bending over her, and speaking tenderly.

But Esther answered nothing.

Then Azriel, watching her always with sorrowful eyes, turned them now upon Mona, and his voice sounded hard and strange, like the voice that speaks to one in fever dreams.

"Sister, it is over. She is dead."

O me! how well we all know this picture! You know it, reader, you have seen it somewhere at some time or other of your life:—that quiet darkened chamber, those sweet-scented roses in the vase by the bedside, that motionless waxen-like face upon the white pillows. And you have heard some one say those words in a whisper through the aching stillness, words that dropped one by one upon your heart as though each were spoken hours after each, words that seemed to repeat themselves in louder echoes again and again after they were said, while you sat still by that bedside, and looked with dry eyes, that you could not move, upon the wondrously still form lying there.

And if you have not yet seen that picture, nor heard those words, you will some day, for they come to all in turn and in time. And when they come, remember that in the world to come the children of the kingdom have everlasting life.

Then Mona put out her hand, and drew her brother closer to herself, and looked into his face.

"Azriel," she said, "did you hear what the Teacher of Galilee told us last night?"

"No, sister," he answered dreamily, "I was not there to hear."

"He said," she went on, slowly and steadily, with her brown eyes fixed upon his, "that the children of God's kingdom have eternal life."

"It may be, Mona; but who are the children of the kingdom?"

"I cannot tell, Azriel."

III.—A Conversation.

"Son, son, why do you sit there dreaming so long? You are a man, Azriel, and must not let a first sorrow master you. For Mona, it is natural enough; but you have another mother, and a father too, but she is an orphan. Up, my son, up and get the better of this excessive grief. Go out into the garden and walk with your Uncle Caius for a while; I see him under the plane-trees speaking with Mona."

And Ephraim laid his hand for a minute on the boy's head, but Azriel looked up into his father's face, and said, "Father, have you heard of Jesus of Nazareth?"

"The Galilean Prophet?" answered Ephraim, more thoughtfully; "yes, Azriel; what of Him?"

"He says that the children of God's kingdom have eternal life. Father, who are the children of the kingdom, think you?"

"The sons of Abraham, I suppose, Azriel," he said.

"And what of eternal life, father?"

Ephraim passed his hand over his eyes. "I do not know, my son. There are many who like to believe in a world to come; it is a beautiful hope, and I hold it a wholesome one withal; but there is nothing certain. Say you the new Prophet speaks of it?"

"Mona told me, sir,—she has listened to His speech, and is greatly taken with it, for His words are very grave and sweet."

Ephraim stood still, and looked earnestly at his son's face.

"Azriel," he said, "is it Esther's death that has changed you thus, and set you thinking of these things?"

"I thought nothing of them before, father; but then the Prophet was not here."

"Then Ephraim sighed very deeply, and said:—"Child, when I was a younger man, I loved to believe in the life to be, the hereafter, that this Jesus preaches,—for the poetry and the dignity of the thought that I was immortal, was pleasant to my youth and sweet to my pride. But I am a Sadducee now, Azriel, or almost one, for I have seen too much of death to believe longer in its powerlessness. Your mother Hyperia laughs all this to scorn, my boy, for you know she holds no creed nor faith of any sort, and, indeed, methinks sometimes she is in the right of it. But if you list to believe in more than we can see, Azriel, it may make you happy for a time, as it made me, until I put away my boyhood, and grew into the reason and judgment of a man. And it is good to be happy even if the spring of one's happiness be a myth and a vague phantasy."

"*If* it be," said Azriel, "but what, father, if it should be real?"

"Then so much the better for us, my son; we shall know it in due time, and the glory of the new day will be all the greater when we wake, for that we lay down to sleep not expecting it."

"But there is a condition, father,—the Preacher says, *The children of the kingdom* have everlasting life; and what if we, just because we lay down expecting no coming day, should awake in the darkness, and so lie with open eyes through the night for ever? That would be worse than not waking at all."

"I know what you mean, Azriel; but I believe in your

hell less even than in your heaven. Think for yourself, and decide in the matter according to the measure of your reason, which, after all, is the best guide, and the safest, for every man. Only remember, it is the sounder philosophy to doubt until there is reason to believe, than to believe until there is reason to doubt."

"But who are the children of the kingdom, father,—not the sons of Abraham only? For have you not said that God is just, and if He be just, shall not all the world share in His gifts?"

"We are His peculiar choice, Azriel, they say; but this is a question that has to do with the life to come, of which we have been speaking. But all our work, my son, is to keep God's commandments and walk in His ways; this is our duty, and with more than this we have not to do. If there be more, He has not told us of it yet, but it shall be given, doubtless, to those who obey Him for fear of Him only, and in the hope of no reward. For, after all, it is a base thing to do well for the sake of gain in the end, and a coward's part to avoid sin for terror of punishment. I am a philosopher as well as a son of Abraham, my boy, and I hold that present happiness, which is the result of virtue, is the highest good of men; and that to be happy here because we do well is all we can desire or strive after. Without virtue there is no happiness, so that the one is not the reward of the other, but its natural element and sequence. And were it otherwise, then should we choose virtue with pain, rather than vice with greed, for to seek a reward is mean, and dishonourable to our manhood. But for any after life, Azriel, we know nothing of it—we walk in very great darkness, and though the light would be pleasant to our eyes, yet, if we have it not, it is our wisdom to content ourselves in the night."

"But," said Azriel, earnestly, with his eyes full turned upon his father's face, "if One come to us with light, why should we not walk in the light rather than remain groping in the darkness?"

"Many such have come to us with their lanterns, my son, but they have burnt out after a while, and then the night is all the deeper and the darker, for the light that was and is quenched."

"Father, the Teacher carries no lantern. Mona says He is Himself the Light of the world. If, then, He be the Light, there is no longer danger of it burning out."

"But how long will He remain with us?" said Ephraim, with pity in his eyes and scorn in his tone.

"Mona told me, sir, that He would be with us always, even unto the end of the world."

"That," said Ephraim, "cannot be, unless He were very God Himself. Your Prophet blasphemes, methinks, Azriel. Have a care, my son, for we must not listen to nor have to do with those who handle holy things like toys."

Azriel lifted his eyebrows.

"I never heard you speak on this fashion before, father," he said; "but if that be indeed your thought, why did you——"

He paused, and his face crimsoned.

Then a cloud came over the man's brows, and he spoke uneasily, and almost like one who is humbled.

"Why did I marry your stepmother? you mean, I suppose, child. Because I loved her, Azriel, and because I was sad and lonely, and she brought joy into my life with her beauty and her love for me. And, besides, Azriel, she is no follower of the gods of Rome, as is her brother Caius; you well know she contemns that superstition as greatly as our faith. She has done no one harm with her strange thoughts, my son, and she has made the world pleasant to me, which else had been very barren and bitter."

Then Azriel was silent; but his father's words sounded to him more like a defence than an explanation. It was one thing, he perceived, for a philosopher to theorise, and another for him to act after his theories. And, somehow, certain words of the Preacher, which Mona had repeated to him, came into his mind.

"For whosoever loveth wife or kindred, or the things of this present world, more than Me, is not worthy of Me."

But Ephraim passed by, and Azriel rose and went out into the garden.

IV.—ANOTHER CONVERSATION.

MONA was gathering white roses, to weave of them a garland for her mother's grave, and Caius came upon her at her pious work.

This Caius was Hyperia's younger brother, an officer in the imperial legions at Jerusalem, and he was come down to Lebonah for a while to visit his sister and her husband.

And at their house he found the brown-eyed peasant, and her sweetness and her beauty won and tempted his heart as nothing before had ever done. For ten years' work in Cæsar's service had made the man hard and careless of all tender and gentle things, and the grossness of the religious faith he held, had wrought him worse harm still.

So from the day he found Mona, he laid snares for her in his dark soul, and spent many a sweet look and honey

word to catch the fatherless girl. And when Esther died and left her an orphan and alone, Caius thought himself sure of his prize, for now who was there to withstand him? Not his sister, for she never dropped her eyes so low as Mona; nor Ephraim, for the girl would be too shy to ask counsel of him in a love matter, and Caius had, besides, a ready tongue and a fair smile.

So he came to-day upon Mona, as she gathered her flowers in the garden, and he said—

"Sweet one, what do you? and what is this wreath you make?"

"Sir," she answered, without raising her eyes, "it is for my mother's grave."

"You are all alone now, Mona," he said, after a minute.

"I have Azriel," she answered him again.

The brow of Caius grew black at this.

"Do you love him very dearly?" he asked.

"Yes," said she, simply.

"More than you loved your mother, Mona?"

"No, sir. My mother was dearest of all to me; but she is dead."

And there were tears in the brown eyes, and a sob in the sweet voice.

"Do not weep, pretty one. There is better love than even a mother's," he whispered, watching her fair face like a snake; "and it may be yours, if you will have it so."

She looked up surprised, for she thought of the love of God and knew that Caius was a pagan. Was it possible that he, too, had heard the Teacher, and believed Him? She wondered. But the man went on—"You marvel, sweet Mona, at my words; but by the gods they are true, for it is of myself that I speak. I love you, Mona, and though I cannot make you wife of mine, that matters not, for I am rich and great, and you poor and lowly, and alone and sorrowful besides. Come, my beautiful Mona, leave sadness and tears for eyes less bright than yours, and forget your loss in my love."

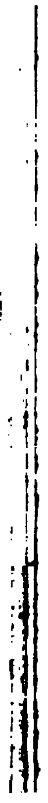
Then the white garland of roses fell in the dust at Mona's feet, and the small quivering fingers that had held it went up to hide her face, and there was silence.

Caius wondered. Was he defeated, or was this merely a maiden's trick of bashfulness, the natural result of his words?

He looked down at the roses lying bruised and soiled in the pathway, and then again at the statue-like figure before him, standing motionless, with its fair head bowed upon its hands. Then he found his wily tongue once more, and said—

"'Sir,' she answered, without raising her brown eyes, 'it is for my mother's grave.'"

(*To face p.* 310.)



"Come, Mona, sweet, what ails you? You are but a peasant, remember, and it were no shame to you thus to link your love with mine, who am a Roman, and noble withal. I'll make you happy, sweet, I swear, and stand between you and poverty and loneliness; for you are alone now, Mona, bethink you."

But no answer came from her, nor did she look up.

Somehow the man grew awed. He could easily have pulled aside the little white hands, and have unveiled the face beneath; but his fingers were shy of the work, and he did not dare touch her.

So he kicked the stones at his feet, and was silent too.

Footsteps came along the pathway towards them, nearer and nearer, and Caius looked up and saw Azriel. A minute or two before he would have cursed the boy for his coming; now it was something like a relief to him, and he felt almost thankful for it.

"Why, Mona! sister Mona! what has come to you? Dost weep, sweetheart?"

Caius stepped forward to meet him with a smile that was meant to be innocent, but which was perhaps rather more hyæna-like than he suspected.

"It is a little outbreak of weeping because of Esther, methinks, nephew," he said, in a whisper. "For, look you, she has been weaving a garland for the dead, and musing doubtless the while of the things gone by. I have said what I could to console her, but in vain, Azriel. Perhaps it were well to leave her alone for a time. Grief like hers is best undisturbed."

And he laid his arm upon his nephew's, and made shift to draw him aside into a byway among the shade of the tall plane-trees.

But, with all Azriel's respect for Mona's supposed sorrow, the longing within him to comfort her was stronger still.

So he left Caius standing beneath the planes, and went and touched Mona softly on the shoulder, and said he, "Sister."

Then Mona dropped her hands from her white face, and looked into his; but there were no tears in them, nor any sign of weeping.

And Azriel sat down wondering upon a basil bank, and drew her gently beside him, with her head hidden on his neck. So for a while they sat, and neither spoke, but Caius watched them from beneath the plane-trees.

Then said Azriel:—"Sister mine, why do you tremble so, and what did ail you when I came upon you but now, and saw you stand so strangely and still? You must not be sick of heart, Mona, for remember I am left, and the time is now

come that you and I should be dearer than ever. Let us sit here and talk together for a while, little sister, for I have many things to say to you, and the evening air is soft, and pleasant with flowers."

So Mona lifted her head from Azriel's shoulder, and laid her hand in his, and they sat there upon the bank of sweet basil and talked, and Caius watched them always, like a snake that watches his prey; but never a word he heard of all they said, for their voices were low, and he far off beneath the rustling planes.

And Azriel told the peasant-girl all the things his father Ephraim had spoken that evening, and how he had warned him against the Prophet of Nazareth, saying that He blasphemed God in His teaching. And Azriel said:—"What think you, Mona, did the Teacher mean when He spoke of being with us until the end of the world?"

Then Mona pondered for a while, and answered him doubtfully,—"I do not know, brother; but I think that, too, had somewhat to do with the kingdom of God."

"How?" asked he. "Is not the kingdom of God yet to come?"

"No, I think not," said Mona. "It is something, Azriel, that must begin here, something that we must make for ourselves,—I know not how or where; but the Teacher bade men to leave all and follow Him. And if one would be wiser or better than others, He says always this same thing, —'Leave all and follow Me.' And He said, moreover, that only they who so follow shall have eternal life."

"Then, Mona, the children of the kingdom are they who follow the Teacher?"

But Mona looked sad and doubtful, for she thought of her dead mother.

So Azriel lifted her fair face to his, and kissed her, and spoke words of comfort and love to her, and the two rose and went together into the house.

But never a word Mona told Azriel of all that Caius had said that day.

Then came Caius from beneath the plane-trees, and there was an evil look upon his dark brow, and an evil thought in his dark heart, for he said to himself, "She has told him of all I have spoken, and he has consoled her and kissed her, and given her counsel, and promised her no doubt many a fine thing. But I will have my will yet with the foolish girl, and Azriel shall not trouble me long."

V.—Of Philosophy.

That same evening Azriel stood alone in the doorway of the house, and all the wide landscape before him was golden with light, and the tall cliffs of the Samaritan hills shewed white and sharp in the clear glow of sunset.

And Azriel understood all the beauty and the music of the land, and his soul looked out of his eyes in silence, adoring the silence around. Then presently Ephraim came where he stood, and laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Azriel," said he, "it is near sunset. Go out and find me your mother and Caius; they are yonder somewhere on the hills; and bid them come in, child, as quickly as may be, for supper is ready."

So Azriel went out on his errand up the pathway of the cliff, and his eyes were fastened on the ground as he went, and he was grave at heart and dreamy, for the thought of the Nazarene prophet, and for the thought of his father and Mona.

Two figures came down the heights towards him, walking together like the two sins of self-conceit and self-love; the one tall and beautiful in her thirty-eight years' glory of womanhood, with broad swelling bosom, and eyes like living sapphires, and luxuriant orange hair, all frothed and wreathed about her veiled head like a flame. And he who walked beside her was her brother, the evil-eyed Caius, younger than she by some five years, with cunning brows, and quick lithe smile that came and went continually. And he, seeing Azriel coming, looked up and cried,—

"Why, here, I protest, sister, is the hope of the household! Whither now, nephew mine?"

Then Hyperia lowered her steep level brows and frowned at those words, for she had a little son of her own, and hated that another woman's child should be preferred before him; but the evil heart of Caius beat faster as he watched her.

So Azriel lifted his head in the same grave mood, and told them his father's message and the lateness of the hour, and never another word, for his mind was full of busy thoughts. And Hyperia made answer lightly, and her red lips curled with contempt as she spoke; but the frown was gone from her brow, for she pitied Azriel's sorrowful humour.

"We had been earlier, Azriel, but for our strange entertainment on the slopes yonder. Didst ever hear, child, in all thine old nurse's baby-lore, of a kingdom of God and everlasting life?"

And the sapphire eyes were full of disdain, and the broad

bosom shook with low derisive laughter. But Azriel woke like one out of sleep, and looking earnestly in her fair scornful face:—"The kingdom of God, mother," he said; "who told you of that? whence come you?"

"From hearing I know not what of mad talk," she answered; "for there is One in the meadows over the hill, whom I take to be either wholly distraught or partly a fool; or maybe He is some poet whom rapture of the golden vision hath driven frantic, so that He must needs go out and babble of it to the unlearned and the curious, who stand all round Him with mouths agape, and eyes like the moon."

"It is the Prophet of Nazareth," said Azriel, reverently; "you have heard Him then, and are not holden by His language?"

Hyperia's laugh rang like golden coins.

"*Prophet!*" she sneered. "Are you but just out of your swaddling-bands, Azriel, not to have yet outgrown such dotard's stories as these? That old-world title hath lost its meaning in these days, for those at least who hold wisdom and fact to be of any worth! What is this strange phantasy of the blood that consumes men so, in spite of reason itself? Why, here is my brother Caius, whom years and observation should have made wise, but he still sticks like a thirsty leech to those old gods of his which long since philosophy hath knocked over and destroyed!"

And she turned her glorious eyes upon the man beside her and laughed again.

Caius put his hand on her arm deprecatingly, and spoke in a tone of horror.

"Sister! sister! why will you talk in this strain? For less blasphemy than yours, believe me, the divine gods have been pleased to drop death from heaven as a punishment."

"Wherefore," she returned with scorn, "you wonder greatly, O credulous Caius, that I do not wither and shrink into parched nothingness before your eyes, or fall down maybe under one of Jove's redoubtable thunderbolts, a just warning to all infidels and misbelievers!"

But Caius had put his fingers in his ears, and turned his head away, so greatly was he shocked at her light words.

For it was this man's policy to ape the ways and opinions of religionists; it gave him a certain standing and credit of position in Cæsar's service, which more liberal thinkers did not possess. Moreover, he was neither strong-minded nor intellectual enough to adopt Hyperia's doctrine; religion he found a much more easy garment than philosophy, and one too that could be more loosely worn, and met with greater approval in the eyes of others. And though he did not much trouble himself to believe all he professed, yet his re-

ligion was a comfort and a screen to him in its way, for if sometimes his deeds caused him any uneasiness of conscience, it was soon set to rights by the simple reflection that all the gods had done the like in their several careers. But blasphemy he could not tolerate, for had ever any god denied himself?

As for Hyperia, she was too proud to conform to any religious creed, when she saw no reason to believe it; and rather than encumber her scornful soul in a dress which did not fit it, she put aside every sort of faith from her, and stood up boldly in her own nakedness before all the world, unashamed, and utterly careless of opinion. There was a certain nobleness and grandeur about this woman's character, which even Azriel owned and admired, while he shrank from her fearless talk. Many in those days thought as she did, but not many were so indifferent to popular prejudice as to spit their thoughts in its very face. But Hyperia cared not a straw what conformists said of her; she believed nothing, and openly denied everything, dethroning all the gods that ever were or should be, to set up in their room what she called the only law-giver and guide of humanity—reason.

And Hyperia was tolerably happy in her philosophy—tolerably happy, for she had not yet found the highest good; but she was better off than Caius, with his superstition, and the craft and licence which fitted into it so well,—better off than Ephraim, with his Sadducean dogmas, and his reasonable religion and unhopeful faith; for she threw all these things off, and crushed them down under her scornful feet and stood above them, grand in her weakness and proud in her own unwisdom; yet stronger and wiser than either the pagan or the Jew. So she curled her lips at Caius, and turned upon Azriel.

"You are curious, child, I see," she said, "to know what folly this Man doth teach. Well, well, it will do you no harm, for one can never expect to be prepared against such vain talk unless one has heard it. No bird can outfly another before he has come up with him. To-morrow, Azriel, you can go and amuse yourself by hearing this outrageous Prophet, as the people call Him."

But Caius caught the last words, as he dropped his fingers from his ears, and put in his oar eagerly:

"Nay, nephew, if you have a mind to hear Him, go now, for it is not so very late after all, and He may be gone to-morrow; for I heard say He is on His way up to Jerusalem."

Both Hyperia and Azriel wondered. What! this bigot, who so shrank from blasphemers of his gods, recommending to his nephew the Teacher of a new faith!

But the next moment the man saw his mistake in their faces, and went on as though he had not seen it :—

"You are pale and in ill sort, Azriel, and the evening breeze will do you much of good. And as for the Man Himself, why He is at least silent of the gods, and not so your mother. We will take care to let them know at home whither you are gone, and keep your share of the supper untouched. And look you, boy," he added, as though a sudden thought had taken him, "come and meet me upon the hill on your way back, for I love a stroll by moonlight."

So Azriel nodded consent gladly, and turned to go on his road, and Caius laid his hand, cold and damp like a lizard, on his, and hissed like a lizard in his ear,—"Remember, Azriel, the footpath along the cliff." For he thought, "It will be dark presently, and the cliff is high and steep ; and while we walk together, I will take care to have him nearest the edge of it. What then ? I remember Mona, and he who stands between us, her counsellor against me ;—no need of force, a little push of the arm ;—I am alone upon the cliff ;—the girl is mine ; and where are the witnesses ? No, no, the boy's foot slipped, and he fell before I could put out my hands to save him. There is weeping and dole, and I go about softly. Such things have been, and will be again ; do we not read them in the histories of the divine gods ?" Then they parted ; and as he went,

"Good-bye, mother !" cried Azriel.

"Ay, good-bye," said Caius, under his breath.

VI.—Azriel is called.

The Preacher had finished His daily task, and His hearers, save only a chosen number, had left Him and gone to their homes before Azriel came where He was.

He was standing on the brow of the hill, in the midst of that grave, saintly little group, and Azriel leaned against the stem of a shadowing sycamore, and watched them reverently.

Long time he stood there, gazing and listening, all enamoured of the Preacher's gracious presence and hungry of His speech, yet not daring to draw near to Him lest such boldness might be rebuked ; but now and then a lift in the wind, or a turn of the Preacher's head, brought a few words to his ears, and from these he could gather that the Galilean Teacher was speaking still of the kingdom of God. And he saw that the faces of those who stood about Him

glowed with something akin to adoration as they listened, drinking in His speech with thirsty silence; or, if sometimes one would ask Him somewhat, addressing Him as "Lord," even as though He were divine.

Strange thoughts rose in Azriel's heart while he stood under the sycamore-tree and heard these things—strange thoughts about the kingdom of God, and about eternal life, and about the Preacher Himself. Who was He, he wondered, that these men had so great awe of His presence, and took so great care to call Him by that reverential name?

Then while he wondered, the darkness fell softly about the hill; and through the darkness the lights began to quiver in the village below; and He whom Azriel watched drew His mantle around Him, and came on towards the sycamore-tree, and His disciples followed.

Something rose in Azriel's soul as that wondrous One drew near—something that he had never felt before; something that made him long to rush out of his hiding-place and fall before His feet, entreating to be always with Him to see His face and hear His words; something, too, it was that made the boy's eyes droop and his head bend worshipfully as the Preacher came closer to him, even as though he had been in the very presence of God. And another moment, he thought, and the Preacher would have gone by, and he perhaps might never see Him again. Oh what should he do,—he asked himself almost wildly,—what should he do to become one of those children of God of whom the Preacher said that they had eternal life? Like an answer to his thought came two words almost in his ear, stern and sweet, like a command,—

"Follow Me!"

Azriel looked up surprised, and saw the Prophet standing before him. Then in a moment he remembered what Mona had said about those who left all to follow Him, and that they only were counted the children of the kingdom; and there was hope, and longing, and gladness in his eyes, for he thought of the gloomy-hearted Ephraim; and how he would go home and tell him he had found the Light of the world and the kingdom of God. And how his father should rejoice with him, and bless him, before he went; and how perhaps he might fetch Mona also, that she might go with him.

So he answered readily, and mindful of the title the disciples gave their Master:—"Lord, I will follow Thee, but suffer me first to go and bid them farewell which are at home at my father's house."

But He of the clear eyes looked steadfastly and sternly in Azriel's face, and said, — "No man, having put his

hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

And with that He passed on across the hills southward, away from the village, as though He heeded not Azriel any longer; and His disciples followed Him. So the boy stood alone under the sycamore, and looked wistfully after them, with a very heavy weight suddenly fallen upon his heart, and a growing mist before his eyes.

Then he was aware of a presence, and looking round, saw before him one whom he had noticed a few minutes ago among the Prophet's disciples, a venerable old man with a white beard, and a staff in his hand. And he looked very lovingly upon Azriel, and said,—"Child, why followest thou not?"

"Oh, sir," answered Azriel, thickly, for his fears and his longing stood in his throat, "I have a father and a mother at home, and a sister whom I love very, very dearly, and my uncle even now waits for me yonder on the cliff. Would it be dutiful and right in me, think you, to leave all these without one word of farewell, to follow this Stranger?"

"Son," said the old man, looking earnestly upon Azriel, "He whom thou callest a Stranger is surely our Lord and Master. So that thou mayest safely follow, knowing this, that there is nothing hid from Him, nor would He have thee forego thy farewells without due reason. For those who would be of the kingdom of God must wholly love their King; nor cares He for their allegiance, who have other loves beside. But yesterday, the Lord called another to follow Him, whose father even then was carried forth for burial. And he, willing as thou art to obey the call, but loving still the thought of that other love, made answer, 'Lord, let me first bury my father.' But the Master said to him, 'Let the dead bury the dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.' What then, my son?—he left those drowsy mourners and their bier, and went after Him who called, as thou also must, if thou wouldst inherit eternal life.".

Then Azriel mused a moment, and looked up, and took the old man's hand reverently, and went with him across the hill after the Prophet, all in silence, for he could trust himself to speak no word.

So the lights burned on in the valley, and the darkness fell softly about the land, and Caius waited in the darkness by the cliff side; but Azriel had left all to follow Jesus of Nazareth.

VII.—DARKNESS.

SOME time had gone by since that last scene upon the Samaritan hill; time that had taught Azriel greatly; time that had shewn him the glorious love of the All-Father; time that had put a new and beautiful light into his heart and his eyes—the light of knowledge, and the symbol of sonship in the kingdom of God.

But oh! it was a short, short time for all the strange and sorrowful things that had held their part in it! For since that night a horrible darkness and dread had fallen upon the children of the kingdom, and they were scattered and dismayed, and their league of universal peace seemed suddenly to have found an end, for the Prophet-King Himself, the Teacher of Galilee, had died, and the death He had died had been very significant and terrible.

Not the death of a philosopher, though the world had seen philosophers die, and make noble deeds of their deaths that should be written in letters of gold upon the purple pages of story.

But Jesus of Nazareth, hanging upon His cross, was not at all like Socrates drinking his hemlock poison. For the teaching of Socrates had been more than his death, and his death had only illustrated his teaching; but with the Christ of Galilee, it seemed that His death was more than His teaching, for His teaching was consummated in His death.

Therefore the Grecian philosopher died an example of patience, but this One died a sacrifice of love.

And Azriel stood on the hill of Calvary, and beheld the terrible scene that seers and psalmists had sung about all through the long dim ages of the old world, and that since poets and preachers have made their grandest theme in these days of the new.

He saw the Cross of the Christ stand up against the black sky and defy it, and above the quaking earth and resist it, because it was greater than heaven or earth.

Then three sorrowful days went by, and the dead, silent body was laid in the darkness among the spices of the grave, like any other in the brotherhood of death; and the disciples went sad at heart away, and the women wept,—and where was the kingdom of God and eternal life?

And now it was the first day of the week after all these strange, terrible things had happened, and Azriel sat alone in an upper room, meanly furnished and poor enough, in a lodging-house at Jerusalem. Sat alone, with his arms laid upon the little bare table, and his head bowed down upon

them, motionless and heavy, as though it had been stricken there.

And upon a wooden bench by the window were his cloak and hat, lying as he had tossed them off when he came in the evening before from gleaning the same sorrowful tidings that all the world was telling and hearing then.

And all the weary night through Azriel had prayed and struggled, and thought, and paced the long bare chamber up and down, and watched the dreary evening fall into the night, and the night grow into the dreary morning. Then he saw the red sunrise break up the eastern sky, and glow and glare upon the balconied roofs of the houses and upon the pinnacles of the Temple, until the whole city seemed a city of flame.

And now the sun was half-way up in the blinding blue, but Azriel was wearied with thought, and watching, and prayer, and he sat dreamily down before the table and dropt his head upon his arms, and almost slept. Almost slept, for his mind was busy still. And in the visions that came to him in that troublous sleep, the boy read over again the story of his Master's Passion; saw the swaying crowd, and the flashes of fasces and firebrands; saw the cross on Calvary and Him who hung upon it, and the earth that trembled beneath the mysterious burden, and the darkened sun that fled from the sight of it. And again he heard the yelling, and the cursing, and the wailing, and the Babel of tongues around the dying King, and felt again the sickness of horror, and the death-longing, and all the utter loneliness of soul.

And anon he fancied himself back upon the Samaritan hill, and Mona with him, searching everywhere for his Master and never finding Him, until suddenly there came a voice as from a great height, calling, "Azriel! Azriel!"

And the sound of the voice was so clear that it awoke the boy from his sorrowful sleep, and he looked up and saw standing opposite to him in the full blaze of the sunlight —whom but Caius!

But oh! he was changed, this cunning Caius! The self that had eaten him up and disfigured his face was not there, the snake that had looked out of his grey eyes was not there, the wily smile that came and went continually was not there. For, in the stead of all these, there was that something else that had come upon Azriel, softening and making melody in his heart and in his face, even the knowledge of the kingdom of God.

So Azriel rose up surprised when he saw his uncle, and gave him welcome as gladly as he could, wondering the while what tidings he brought, and whether Ephraim had sent to find him out and bring him back to his home.

"But maybe," he thought, "my father holds me no more a son, for that I left him taking no farewell."

So he waited in silence with his eyes cast down.

And Caius stood before him and said,—"Azriel, I have something to tell you."

So strange were the words, and so strange the voice that spoke them, and so strange the man himself, that Azriel thought, "My father is surely dead." But he said only, "Tell me, uncle."

And Caius, never moving from his place, but watching Azriel always with sorrowful eyes, told him from beginning to end all that had passed at Lebonah before Azriel went away, and of Mona, and of his own evil designs towards her, and of his lying-in-wait upon the cliff side. And how he went home that night disappointed, to his own house, and found there a message calling him to Jerusalem. And how he had gone thither the next day in haste, bidding none farewell nor seeing Mona again, but leaving only a letter for Hyperia. And how he had stood by at the Passion of Jesus, and had seen the black sky and the quaking earth, and the veil of the Temple that was rent, and had heard one beside him cry out that this was indeed the Son of God; and seeing, had himself believed.

So Caius told him all, from beginning to end.

And when it was told, Azriel hid his face in his robe and sat down again silent, for he thought only of Mona and of the words of the white-haired disciple upon the Samaritan hill.

And what of Caius?

He came round where Azriel sat, amazed at him, and knelt before him there, mild and gentle like a woman, and caught the boy's hand in his, and said, "Azriel, Azriel, I am come to be forgiven."

But Azriel's face was buried in his robe, and he said no word, nor moved to lift him up.

So Caius went on,—"I saw you first, on that last day of the Crucifixion, Azriel, among the crowd on the hill-side, for I knew not that you were in Jerusalem before, though your father sent to ask me tidings of you. So I heard how you were here, and came to see if I could find you, to tell you all these things; and the people of the house brought me to your room, and coming in I found you asleep, but I woke you, Azriel, for I am come to be forgiven."

But Azriel's face was hidden away from him in his robe, and he said no word, nor moved to lift him up.

So Caius went on still,—"I am come to be forgiven, Azriel, for that I also have left all to follow the Lord Jesus."

Then Azriel looked at him and answered,—"He is dead."

VIII.—LIGHT.

IT was full day when Caius and Azriel went out together beyond the city, towards the sepulchre wherein the Lord lay.

Scarce a word they said to each other as they went, for Caius was perplexed and humbled, and Azriel sick at heart for weariness and sorrowing and amaze.

But before they came to the garden-doors they saw many women who had been disciples of Jesus standing there and talking among themselves.

Some of them carried vases of spice and ointments for the anointing of the dead, and some, bundles of sweet herbs and flowers, and some had nothing; but all looked earnest, and glad, and astonished.

So Caius and Azriel drew nearer, and at the sound of their footsteps one of the younger women, who stood outside the group with a garland of white roses in her hand, turned her head about to see who they were that came. And the sweet face that turned upon them, and the eyes that looked into theirs, were the face and the eyes of Mona.

Then Azriel cried out for wonder and joy, and ran to meet her, and she ran to meet him, and they fell upon each other's necks and kissed, and could not speak for gladness. As for Caius, he hung back, for he saw the garland of white roses, and he was ashamed and sad at the sight of it and of that sweet presence.

But Azriel, after he had kissed Mona, turned towards him and took him by the hand, and said,—"Sister, here is my uncle Caius, who has told me all that passed between you both before I left my father's house; and he is come to be forgiven, Mona, for that he also learned sometime to love the Lord Who is dead."

Very sadly and falteringly these last words were spoken, and Azriel's voice went over them again more sadly still, as though they were a terrible lie that he would fain have some one hear and unsay: "The Lord Who is dead."

But Mona, without a blush upon her innocent face, gave a joyful hand to each, and answered,—"All is forgiveness, and peace, and love this day among the children of the kingdom, for this day, Azriel, the Lord is surely risen again from the dead!"

Then the women all thronged about them, weeping for gladness, and told them that wondrous story that we all know so well,—how Mary Magdalen, coming early to the empty tomb, had been the first to learn the glorious news; how she had carried it to other disciples of Jesus, and how after that they all came together to see the sight, and the

great white angel that sat upon the sepulchre stone, with a countenance like lightning for brightness and beauty.

And when they had made an end of their story, and had shewn Caius and Azriel the place where the Christ had lain, and the stone that the angel had rolled away, and were all silent for greatness of amazement and joy and wonder, Mona drew Azriel aside from the rest, and said,—"I have a message to you, my brother."

Then she put her hand into the bosom of her dress, and took out of it a sealed letter, and, giving it to him, "Azriel," she said, "soon after you left your home, and your father and I were very sad-hearted and anxious to know what had become of you, the lady Hyperia began to persuade him that you were certainly dead by some evil mischance. And so did she assure and advise him, that your father, who you well know loves her greatly, yielded his mind to hers, and left Lebonah to go with her and their little son to Rome."

"To Rome, Mona!" cried Azriel, with much wonder and not a little sadness; but Mona went on still,—"'For,' said the lady Hyperia to your father, 'it were better surely for your peace to leave this lonely place, where day by day and year by year you will be reminded of the son you have lost. Rather go hence to the glorious city of the seven hills,'—so she spoke, brother,—'and learn among stranger scenes and wiser philosophy to forget your new sorrow.' And more than this, Azriel, for I think your stepmother wearied of the village, and the silence and the country life, and had a mind for her own land again. So they went, Azriel, but I would not go, for I could not leave the country of God and the people whom I love and among whom I was born, for a city of strangers and infidels; nor, I think, did the lady Hyperia care to have me; 'and besides,' said I, 'what am I now to them, since my mother is dead and Azriel lost?' Neither, I think, does Caius, whom now I hold a brother in the kingdom of God, know of all these things, for he went away suddenly on the self-same night with you, and left only a letter, saying he was gone to Jerusalem. So your father sent a messenger to him there, asking tidings of you, for we thought you might be with him; but he had no news to give, nor knew anything of you. And because the lady Hyperia spoke much of her brother's coming himself to Rome this next month by order of the Emperor, having business there, your father did not care to send again to him to tell him of their departure, since they should meet so soon in Rome, but bade me give him warning when I should be come hither. But I dared not go to him then, Azriel,—though I could not tell your father why,—not knowing Caius was become a disciple

of the Lord. And so they went, but I stayed behind with a cousin of mine, who would have me to go and live with her, for she is a widow, and was alone. And on the day I parted from your father, he gave me this packet for you, that if ever I should meet with you I should put it in your hands. 'For,' said he, 'my son may yet be alive, and if he be, God will send him back to me in peace.' Then they sailed, Azriel, and I came with my cousin to live here at Jerusalem, where I have seen all the wonderful things that have come to pass concerning the Lord Jesus, Who is gloriously risen this day from the dead!"

Then Azriel opened the packet that Mona had given him, and read all that Ephraim had written, and how he was reluctant indeed and unwilling to leave Lebonah, but that Hyperia would have it so, and longed for her own city and her country people. And how he desired Azriel, if he yet loved his father, to follow him to Rome with Caius, who would be recalled thither in a little while; or if Caius were already gone before Mona could find her brother, that he should sail alone as soon as might be. And then came a farewell and a blessing, and "God of Israel keep thee, my dear son!" and that was all.

Then Azriel kissed the letter and put it in his bosom, and his eyes glistened as he looked again at Mona, and said,—"Come home with me, sister mine, and stay till the evening, and we will call my uncle and talk over these things together."

So Mona ran back to her cousin, who stood talking among the holy women, and told her that she had found her brother, and was going home to his house until the evening; and they called Caius again, and the three went on their way homeward.

And as they went, the boy told his uncle the news of Ephraim's departure, and how he had said that Caius would presently be in Rome, and that he should bring Azriel thither with him. And his heart leaped in his throat for the thought of seeing his father again, and bringing him the tidings of the kingdom of God, and of Him Who was risen from the dead. But Mona was something sorry because she should part from Azriel.

Then Caius said,—"It is quite true, my dear boy, that I sail so soon for Rome; and we will surely go together if the King hath no need of us here: for remember, Azriel, how He said, 'Leave all, and follow Me.'"

IX.—And the Last.

In that same upper chamber, some fifty days after, Azriel and Mona sat talking very earnestly and gravely; and their talk was all of their King, and of His rising from the dead, and of His glorious ascension into heaven; and their faces kindled as they spoke together of all the things they had seen and believed.

And better than all else Azriel loved to tell over and over again, like something always new and sweet, and still Mona never wearied of hearing, one beautiful and wondrous story, —stranger than which, the world from age to age has never heard. For not many days since, there had been an assembly of the brethren, five hundred in all, and Azriel had been among them. And while they held converse together of their Lord's Passion and Resurrection, and of all the marvels of the Cross, and some were silent, and some prayerful, and some doubting, there came in the midst a glorious Presence, gathering itself out of the air, and growing like a mist of golden flame, with radiant eyes and stern sweet face—even the presence of the Lord Jesus Himself.

And Azriel told how the Lord had spoken, and they had all heard His voice like the voice of God, breathing His peace upon the children of His kingdom; and how He bade them go forth into all lands and preach to all men of His Name and His wondrous works, and the gift of eternal life that was given to the world through Him.

"And now," said Azriel, "He is gone to sit at the right hand of the All-father, waiting and watchful, until the last great day shall break up the world-wide skies, and all vainer schools and philosophies are swept away like shadows before the eastern sun."

"And until then," said Mona, "the children of the kingdom, like faithful subjects whose King is absent for a while, must keep His laws and love His Name, and watch for His coming day by day, for none do know when His coming may be.

"But then shall they all have fulness of joy in His presence, sitting at His feet and drinking in His love, and looking for evermore upon His face that shall be as the sun in his strength and beauty; for the kingdom of God is this, even to dwell in perfect peace."

And her bosom heaved beneath its white robes, and her sweet eyes dilated while she spoke as though already she beheld the golden Jerusalem of the Hereafter, and the great white throne of the glorious King. So they sat together

silent and still for a time, and Azriel turned his head towards the open casement, and looked upon the city lying stretched below him, far out and around, all in the blaze of the mellow noontide; and upward at the blue level heavens, where continually the light clouds came and went like the white-robed armies of the King.

And Mona sat at his feet with her hand clasped in his, and the gaze of her brown eyes at rest upon his face, and one prayer in the thoughts of both,—that prayer of the Church through every year of her waiting love:—"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

So they sat until there was a third presence in the long bare room, and Caius came and touched his nephew softly upon the arm, who turned and met in the grey eyes such a look of earnest pity, that it stopped the word of welcome on his lips.

But Mona saw it not, for she had risen quickly from her place on the floor to make room for Caius, that he might come and sit beside her brother. Then Azriel, seeing he had something to tell, sat silently with his eyes cast down, expecting, until his uncle spoke.

"Azriel."

Then a pause again, as though the message he had to give would not come. And he drew his nephew's head down on his own neck, as though he had been a little child, and laid his hand upon the fair curly hair, and Mona saw that the hand trembled as it lay there.

"Azriel," he said again presently; "I go to Joppa tomorrow to join my ship, and you, I think, had prepared to sail with me. Was it not so?"

"Yes, with you, uncle," answered Azriel, lifting up his head in some surprise. "Why not? it is my father's bidding."

Then Caius took him by both hands, and looking him full in the face,—"You will have to leave Mona, Azriel," he said.

"I know it, uncle; but Mona will stay with her cousin, and I shall go to tell my father of the kingdom of God and everlasting life, even as the Master bade us that we, who have followed Him, should go to all lands and preach the tidings of peace."

But Mona, standing behind her brother, and watching Caius as these words were spoken, saw a strange look upon his face that made her heart beat fast and her eyes droop, for she knew that somehow there was ill news to be told.

And Caius answered, very slowly, "But now, Azriel, I think you had better stay with your sister, for you are still but a boy, and where would you go, and what would you do in that great city of foreigners? For I could not be with you,

having mine own business to do, and you would be alone from day to day, *all alone*, Azriel."

Then the brown eyes drooped lower, and Mona's hand found Azriel's and laid itself upon it, lovingly and firm, as though it said, "Now we will never part, my brother."

And Caius went on slowly, and every word was like the stroke of a bell.

"For, Azriel, farewells are spoken, and friends part, and ships sink at sea sometimes, and dear ones are lost; but the Master is with us alway, even unto the end of the world."

Faster still and tighter the small hand held Azriel's, and Caius pressed his own together and sighed,—half a sigh it was and half a groan, for the man had a sorrow too at heart, having hoped to win his sister Hyperia to the faith of Christ, when he should meet her in Rome.

"Then, uncle, the ship in which my father sailed, went down at sea?"

Azriel spoke very steadily, and his eyes were wide and dry.

"Went down at sea, my boy," said Caius.

"And all were lost?"

Still the voice was steady, and still the eyes were wide and dry.

"And all were lost, Azriel, save those men only who came hither yesterday to bring the news."

"Sister," said Azriel, turning to the sweet face beside him, "henceforth we will live together."

Then he bowed his head upon her bosom and wept bitterly and long.

And after that they parted. Caius went to Rome, one of the first who carried thither the glorious story of the Cross; and Azriel and Mona abode still in Jerusalem, until the promise of the Lord came, and the Holy Ghost fell on them that believed.

So these three lived, and laboured, and died, as many since have done for the Master's sake, and are gone hence to the rest of the saints until the day break and the shadows flee away, and the Christ return to reign among the children of His kingdom.

SYMPHORIAN.

A STORY OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—PHIL. i. 21.

MARCUS AURELIUS, emperor of Rome between the years 161—180, has been made known to us by historians as a man of noble character, refined sentiment, and exalted intellect,—a true lover of philosophy. But his conduct towards his Christian subjects can never be excused. He certainly sanctioned, even if he did not command, the perpetration of many gross cruelties upon them, and during his reign, one of the most violent persecutions ever known raged against Christianity, in the Roman dominions of Gaul.

The incident related in these pages, however little claim it may otherwise deserve to have on the reader's attention, yet bears with it this one recommendation,—it is perfectly true. And so, if after hearing that recommendation, my friend the reader may wish to know what I have to tell him, I must beg him to transport himself back in imagination to the year 179 A.D. and fancy himself walking with me through the streets of Boxum, (now Autun,) in Gaul.

It is a beautiful morning in the month of August, and though the hour is yet early, the roads are all astir with people. Let us stand awhile beneath the portico of this house, and watch the busy throng of citizens hurrying up and down the pavement on their various errands. See, here comes the elegant chariot of Heraclus, the governor or consul of the province. He is hurrying on, probably to attend some court of justice, for during his residence in Boxum he often acts the magistrate as well as the governor. We have no time to look at him, for he drives with all the speed that the importance of his duties and position can urge, and his horses are scarcely less impatient than their master.

But who are these two young men who are now approaching us, so earnestly engaged in conversation? If we may judge by the disparity of their dress and bearing, they should be of unequal rank, and it is strange to see them thus walking together. The elder of the two,—he with the

bright sunny curls and blue eyes, is Symphorian, a youth of twenty, the only son of the Decurion Faustus, one of the principal men of the town, and formerly its Duumvir, or prefect. His poorer companion is a fatherless boy of sixteen, named Victor, of whom Symphorian, in his tender-heartedness has made a protegé. Let us follow them if you will, reader, and listen to their conversation.

"Indeed, my dear friend," says Symphorian's kindly voice, "I am very sorry to hear such ill news. But don't be downhearted, my boy, come home with me now, and you shall have a jar of wine to carry to your mother. And look you, this afternoon I will run round myself to your house, and see how she fares, and what is most needful for her. You know, Victor," he adds with a bright smile, "everybody says I am a capital physician, and the sick seem always the better for my visits."

"It is your goodness of heart, my kind Symphorian, that makes you beloved everywhere," answers the boy, looking up in his companion's face with grateful eyes; "there is no one, however poor or sick, but is cheerful and happy in your presence. God bless you for it,—my mother and I owe all we have to you!"

"Hush, hush, my dear boy, you must not flatter me so, or I shall grow vain and conceited, and then you see you will run the risk of spoiling the fine character you admire. What a pity that would be,—wouldn't it, Victor?"

"You are laughing at me, Symphorian, as you always do, when I try to thank you for your goodness to us. But you know how dearly I love you for it, and how very unlike flattery is my praise of you!"

"That I do indeed, dear Victor! God bless you for your love,—it makes me very happy. But look,—in the earnestness of our talking, we had wellnigh passed my father's house. Come in,—I see him watching for me."

As Symphorian speaks, the two youths enter beneath the white marble portico of a house whose stately structure and adornings bespeak the wealth and opulence of its owner. That individual, in the person of a tall handsome man, now makes his appearance in the atrium, or inner court of the building. We notice at first sight a remarkable air of stateliness and military dignity in his bearing, but this altogether disappears when he perceives Symphorian, and the natural sternness of his countenance gives place to a smile of paternal pride and fondness, as the young man quitting his friend's side, runs forward to meet his father.

"Father!" he cries breathlessly, "I have brought Victor home with me, his mother is ill, and I have promised to give him some wine for her. Where is my mother?"

"In here, my dear boy. Victor, you had better follow him. I am sorry to hear of your mother's illness, but if we can do anything for her, do not hesitate to ask it." And with a kindly smile Faustus passes on, and Symphorian and his protegé enter the apartment where Emilia, the mother of the former, is sitting at her embroidery-frame.

"Dearest mother," says Symphorian, running impetuously up to her, and speaking with a kiss, "here is Victor! His mother is ill, and I told him, if he would come home with me, you would give him a flask of wine to take her."

"Willingly, my dear son," she answers; "call Irene hither, and bid her fetch you some. Victor, my boy, while he is gone, come, sit down on this sofa and let me hear about your mother. Is she very ill?"

"Not so ill, dear lady, but that by care and God's blessing, I hope soon to see her well again. The tumults and riot in the town of late, have sorely alarmed and terrified her. She loves me dearly, you know, and her fears for me, lest during my absence from her at my work, I should fall into the hands of the mob, or some evil befall me on account of my faith—have obliged me for these last two days to leave my labour, and remain at home with her. Three days since, the people set fire to five houses in our street, because they had heard that Christians lodged there; and several of the faithful died in the flames; others were murdered as they attempted to escape. We heard the hootings and yells of the crowd, and the crash of the burning houses every minute. I would fain have gone to see if I could not save some of the victims, but my poor sick mother clung to me in an agony of terror, and implored me to stay, trembling all the time so violently, that I dared not leave her alone.

"Then again, the night before last, a Christian traveller was struck down, almost at our door, by some cowardly soldiers, and they had wellnigh made an end of him, but by good luck, a pious woman took him into her house, and tended him, and I hear he is in a fair way to recover. But all these troubles, dear lady, distress my poor mother sadly, and she is full of apprehension, that I may be the next victim."

"I hope not, my dear boy," answers Emilia, with a deep sigh; "but these things, you know, are not at man's disposal. God grant you may yet be spared a long time to brighten and cheer her old age; but if not, Victor, remember all things work together for the good of those who love Christ. But here comes Symphorian with the wine. How will you carry it? Ah, wrap it up so in your mantle. Now, good-bye, my child. God bless you, and make your mother well again!"

"Good-bye, Victor," cries Symphorian, as the boy hugging

his treasure up closely to his bosom turns to depart, "I will not fail to go this afternoon and see you. No thanks,—we have had enough already."

"So, Symphorian," says his mother, as the former having divested himself of his cap and cloak, re-enters the apartment and seats himself at her feet,—"you are off again this afternoon! You do well, it is thus you have become a sunbeam in everybody's house!" As she speaks, resting her hand upon the young man's golden hair, and gazing lovingly into the depths of his upturned eyes, her husband stands beside her.

"Ay, ay, Emilia," he says, "God is very gracious to us in giving us such a son. I remember well, how the good priest Benignus, long since gone to his rest, when he had baptized you, Symphorian, gave you back into your mother's arms with these words,—'My children, this boy will be more of an honour to your house, than now you wot of.'" He lingers on the words as if they were sweet music to him, and Symphorian lifting his eyes to his father's says,—"They murdered him,—that holy priest,—did they not, father?"

"Yes, my son, he died a martyr at Alesia[a], but not before he had borne a noble testimony to the faith of Christ. Your aunt,—my sister Leonilla,—carried him to his grave. You recollect, Emilia, how on the day we parted from the good priest, when he went at my desire to Andematunum[b] to baptize Leonilla's three grandsons, as he stood with us on the threshold, he laid his hand in mine and said, 'Son Faustus, farewell; I thank you for your hospitality. I part from you as a wanderer and pilgrim,—you yourself are no more. When next I salute you, it will be as a fellow-citizen.' How prophetic the old man's words were! I did not think then, that I looked on his face for the last time! Ah, he is now with the holy bishop Polycarp, whose disciple he was, and of whom I have often heard him speak. Nobly indeed he followed in his master's footsteps, and nobly, like him, he drank the bitter cup of martyrdom! And now he is gone to join that master in the rest of the blessed in Paradise, until the last great day shall call them to receive at the hands of their common Lord, the white robe of righteousness, and the golden crown of victory, which shall be given to them who are slain for the witness of Jesus."

"Ah, dearest father!" cries Symphorian, the tears glistening in his earnest eyes, "would that I too, might be one of that glorious company! Do you not remember last year when you took me with you to Sidolancum[c], to attend the burial of the martyred priest Andochus, and the deacon

[a] Dijon. [b] Langres. [c] Saulien.

Thyrsian, how peaceful and calm they looked in their death-sleep, though they had died in torture? Ever since that day I have been longing to be like them."

Faustus gazes long into his son's face as Symphorian ceases speaking. What are his thoughts? Is he repeating to himself the prophetic words of the priest Benignus, with a new presentiment as to their meaning,—"This thy son shall be an honour to thine house." Perhaps it is so. He lays his hand tremblingly on Symphorian's shoulder: "My boy," he says, and his voice falters as he speaks, "pray God it be not yet. I could not bear to lose you, my son, my only son!"

CHAPTER II.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—S. JOHN xvi. 33.

THE red autumnal sun is sinking fast behind the chain of hills on the western side of Boxum, and a rich flood of mellow light streams down into the town below, and kindles like flame upon the marble tops of its many colonnades and basilicas, until they glow beneath the ruddy gleam like molten gold.

The business of the day is over now, and there are scarcely any people to be seen in the streets, except perhaps a few idlers, who, with no particular object in view, have chosen the last few hours before sunset to loiter away their time in a leisurely stroll through the town.

But see; here comes one at least, whose quick lively step and animated countenance proclaim at once that he is no idler. It is Symphorian, returning from his charitable mission to Victor's widowed mother, and singing blithely to himself as he hastens along; listen, we can catch the words of his song:—

"Adeste, cantate Domino canticum novum, cantate Domino totus orbis terrarum!
Omnes enim cæterarum nationum dii deastri sunt; at Jova cœlorum conditor est.
Jova mea potentia atque cantus, mihi saluti fuit.
Ad Te Domine, animum meum attollo, Tibi, mi Deus, confido, effice ne frustrer, ne mihi insultent hostes mei.
In Te Domine confido; non metuo, ne quid mihi faciant homines!"

Ah, what a heavenly glow of light illumined his face just then! It was the gleam of the setting sun streaming down upon him between the carved pillars of the marble colonnade. It has faded now, for Symphorian has turned the corner of

the street, and a high dead wall interposes itself between him and the sunlight. Hark! what is that sound that makes him pause so suddenly, and sends the hot blood rushing up like fire into his forehead?

It is a sound like the surging of a great multitude,—the trampling of many feet,—the murmur of many voices. He stands a moment and listens, and then drawing his mantle closely around him, he hastens onward repeating to himself, as though the words inspired him with fresh courage,—"In Te, Domine, speravi, — I will not fear what man doeth unto me!"

They are coming nearer now; he can see lights gleaming at the other end of the street, and a dense crowd approaching him. There is the terrible shout again, that so startled him before; he can hear it more distinctly now:—"Hail to the great goddess! the Magna Mater,—hail to the mother of the gods!"

Onward they come, nearer and nearer, with wild yells and cries, and the noise of drums and cymbals mingling in the tumult. The red glare of a hundred torches throws a lurid blaze of light down the street, and reveals a wild disorderly throng of people, surrounding with frantic gestures and dances a number of men habited in the garb of heathen priests, and bearing aloft the colossal statue of a majestic woman, crowned with a circlet of towers, and holding a golden disk or orb in her right hand. It is the procession of the goddess Cybele, more commonly known among the Romans by the name of the Magna Mater, or Great Mother.

Already some of the foremost stragglers of the crowd have come up with Symphorian, and the young man well knows that if they espy him, he will be pressed to join in their impious carnival. Unwilling therefore to expose himself to danger by any unnecessary temerity, he steps hastily aside into a recess of the wall behind him, in the hope that he may remain there, unperceived, until the procession shall have passed by. But he has scarce waited a moment before his anticipations of security are suddenly disappointed by a loud exclamation close beside him: "Why, Marcellus, whom have we here, lurking like a shadow behind this broken pillar? Out, youngster! and cry with us, 'Hail to the great goddess, the Magna Mater!'"

The heavy hand of the speaker is laid roughly upon Symphorian's shoulder, and the youth presently finds himself in the centre of a group of coarse-looking men, whose strange disorderly apparel, and wild unearthly countenances, give them more of the appearance of savage revellers, than of religious devotees.

"What, silent? dumb? Prithee, find us a tongue presently,

young fellow, and tell us what thou dost, hiding thyself away like an owl in the darkness!"

"Nay, leave him alone, Maximan," says another kindlier voice behind him, "you handle him too roughly. I'll answer for it he's an honest townsman, and is only waiting to join in the procession; is it not so, my boy?"

Symphorian throws a hasty glance at the motley group that has gathered round him, and then at the fast-approaching multitude. "Let me go, I pray you, townsmen," he answers, "for I cannot join in your procession to-night. I am in haste to return home, before sunsetting, and I must be gone."

"Not so fast, young fellow, if it please you," retorts the first speaker, darting forward and thrusting himself in Symphorian's path; "we shan't let you off so easily, I promise you! No one meets us to-night, who does not join us; that's the rule, isn't it, Marcellus? Head of Jupiter! we'll take no excuses!"

"Pooh, pooh! Maximan, let him go! How perverse you are! What can it matter to us if one sorry stripling refuses to join? Let the boy go if he wants to go; do you hear?"

"Oh ay, Quadratus! but lend me your ear a moment, man; look you; for if I guess rightly, this same harmless stripling is nothing less than"—and here he sinks his voice to a whisper, and eyes his companion with a sagacious leer.

"Impossible, Maximan!" exclaims the other, starting back as if horror-stricken; "it cannot be, surely; he looks much too innocent for that. Prithee, tell us, young sir," he continues, snatching at Symphorian's cloak, "who art thou?"

"The son of the Decurion Faustus," answers the other, mildly, and as he utters the words, his interrogator casts a look of triumph upon Maximan. "I told you you were mistaken," he cries; "now will you let him go?"

"Stop a minute, Quadratus; I am by no means so satisfied," replies Maximan hastily; "my suspicions are not lulled so soon as you fancy! Hark you, my friend," he cries, turning abruptly to his prisoner, "art thou not a Christian?"

A sudden pause and stillness falls upon the noisy throng at the words, and a crimson flush, faint indeed and momentary, rises to Symphorian's forehead, as he marks the silence around him. But he does not hesitate, nor does his voice tremble as he gives his answer. Hardly is that answer given, than the hush of expectancy is broken by wild yells of execration, speedily echoed by the multitude now close at hand. The air rocks and shivers with tumultuous cries,—"A Christian! an infidel! Away with the godless Christian! Christianos ad cædes! Christianos ad leones!"

Like one in a dream, Symphorian stands silent and calm in the midst of that savage crowd. Dimly he beholds, as in a vision, the sea of angry faces around him glaring upon him with wild fiery eyes. Dimly, as in a dream, he sees a dozen uplifted blades flash and quiver above his head in the red torchlight, yet he neither shrieks nor quails at the sight; he stands alone and unmoved, like a solitary rock in tempestuous waters; he stands, as a hundred years before the first martyr Stephen stood, calm and steadfast, in the midst of his murderers, bearing the face of an angel in the very presence of death.

But suddenly, just at the very moment that seems destined to be Symphorian's last, the wary Marcellus bursts forward from the throng around him, and interposes his tall manly form between his enraged companions and their unshrinking victim.

"Stand back, you fools, you idiots!" he almost shrieks. "Here is no mere swineherd whom you may cut in pieces in the streets, and hear no more about it! Patrician blood is not so cheap at Boxum! What if the boy be a Christian? have you not heard but just now that he is the son of a Decurion?"

"He speaks truly enough, and wisely, townsmen," answers a hoarse voice in the crowd. "But what then, Marcellus, shall we let him go?"

"No! no!" roar a hundred voices; "the gods forbid! Away with the infidel! Christianos ad leones! To death with the impious!"

"Carry him to the governor, townsmen," suggested another voice, when the clamour had subsided. "Ay, ay! take him to Heraclus!" they burst out again in chorus: "Away with him to the dungeon; there is no liberty for Christians."

"Be it so then, my friends," rejoined Marcellus, stepping coolly backward from Symphorian's side; "this, methinks, is a much wiser plan than stabbing him down unheard in the public ways. But be speedy on your errand, the sun is almost set."

And Symphorian is led forward, an unresisting prisoner, and the crowd sweeps on again up the street, and again the clash of cymbals, the roar of drums, and the burden of that hateful cry burst forth like thunder upon the calm evening air,—"Hail to the great goddess! hail to the Magna Mater, the Mother of the Gods!"

* * * * * * * *

"I marvel, Emilia, that Symphorian tarries so long; the sun hath been set this hour, and he promised us to return home before evening. I hope no mischance hath befallen the boy."

So, about an hour later, spoke the Decurion Faustus to his wife, as he stood beside an arched window facing the street, and with anxious countenance watched the grey night falling like a thick veil over the town.

Emilia did not answer. She sat silently, leaning back upon a couch at the other side of the apartment, her hands clasped firmly together, and her eyes fixed intently upon her husband, as though she were trying to read his thoughts. He turned away from the window, and met her glance. It did not move from his face, nor did the strange expression of her face alter, as they looked at each other.

"Emilia," he said, "tell me what you are thinking of."

"I was wondering," she answered slowly, and still without moving her eyes from his, "what those shouts could mean, that we heard in the streets more than an hour ago."

There was silence, and Faustus turned again to the window. After watching there in vain a few minutes, he exclaimed anxiously, "I can wait no longer, Emilia! I am going out, to see if I can hear any news of him, or perchance meet him."

But as he crossed the room, he suddenly paused, and his wife following the direction of his glance, looked towards the doorway, and saw a figure standing there in the gathering darkness. She uttered a cry, and rose hastily from her seat.

"Victor!"

The boy came forward into the room, and as the light from the window fell upon his face, Faustus almost started at its unnatural paleness. Emilia saw it too, and re-seating herself, she pointed to a vacant place beside her on the sofa, and held out her hand kindly to Victor. He sat down without speaking a word, leant his head upon her shoulder, and burst into a great sob. Faustus stood opposite and looked at them both,—the fair-haired lady, and the weeping boy, the black curls hanging so helplessly down over the folds of her white robe, and the brown hand clasped so lovingly within her own. Long time they sat together like this, and still Faustus stood silent, watching them, with a strange incomprehensible feeling at heart,—a feeling which at one time or another every one experiences,—that all that was then happening, was not new to him, but had already happened at some indefinite time gone by, and that he knew what was yet to happen.

It was Victor who first broke the silence.

"I heard the noise in the street," he sobbed, still hiding his face on Emilia's shoulder, "and I ran out to see what it meant. I heard shouting and music, and then I saw the glare of torchlights, and a great crowd of people passing along through the streets, and I followed them. When they came to the governor's house, some of the crowd

stopped, but the greater part went on, and then I saw it was the procession of the 'Magna Mater.' I did not care to follow that, so I went with the others into the governor's court. Then I heard some one say it was a seditious fanatic, and another, that it was a Christian whom they had brought there; and I stood by one of the pillars in the hall and waited to see the end. Then Heraclus came in, and several of his officers with him, and the people fell back, and I saw the prisoner;—O, Lady Emilia, it was Symphorian!"

Faustus staggered back upon a couch, and covered his face with his hands.

"I knew it,—I knew it," he groaned. "O, Symphorian! my son! my only son!"

Then there fell a hush and stillness upon the room,—a silence that had something terrible in it, like the shadow of a great dark cloud. Presently Emilia spoke.

"Go on, my child," she said in a low tone, as she pressed the hand still clasped in hers, "what followed?"

"I cannot well remember," he answered, "for I could do nothing but look at Symphorian, and I felt too miserable and sick at heart to note what came next; but I think some one stood forward and accused him of sedition, and of contempt of the gods and the imperial edict. And then I think the governor spoke to Symphorian, and asked him something, but I remember nothing distinctly, for the whole court seemed to rock and swim around me. At last I heard Symphorian's voice speaking, and that was so sweet and familiar, that it brought new life to me, and I looked out from behind the pillar, and heard every word. 'It is true,' he said, 'I am a Christian, nor will I ever acknowledge any other God, than the God who reigns eternally in the heavens. And as for the idol that you would have me adore, I am readier rather to break it in pieces with a hammer than to bend my knee before it[d].' Then Heraclus turned to one of the officers and asked him a question, but I do not know what it was. I heard something said about 'one of the noblest families in the province,' and then something else about the edict. And after that the officer brought out a great parchment, with seals upon it, and he stood forward, and read the Emperor's commands that all who refused to obey him and the laws, and to acknowledge the gods of Rome, should be punished with death as traitors and seditious persons. When that was done,

[d] Tillemont's *Histoire Ecclesiastique*. Symphorian's answers to Heraclus, during his trial, and his mother's subsequent exhortation to her son on his way to execution, as here given, are not imaginary, but are actual translations of the original, in the Acts of SS. Benignus, Andochus, and Symphorian. *Vide* the Martyrologies of S. Jerome, Bede, Ado, Bollandus, Usuard. S. Gregory of Tours, and others.

the governor told Symphorian that if he did not choose to renounce his Christianity, or at least to conform to the worship of the gods, he must resolve to die, for that the Emperor must be obeyed. He did not seem very angry, though he said this, and I thought he looked at Symphorian as if he pitied him. For a long time he tried to make him yield to the edict, and give up his faith, and he said a great deal about his youth and friends, and the sweetness of life, and obedience to superiors. And then he talked about prison and chains, and tortures and death, and much more besides, though I did not hear it all, for I was watching Symphorian and longing for him to speak again. And presently I heard him answer Heraclus that 'no man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, would be fit for the kingdom of God.' Then the governor called to some of the officers, and they brought chains, and put them upon Symphorian's hands, and led him away, and I heard them say he was taken to prison. Heraclus rose from his seat after that, and told the people that he would examine Symphorian there again in three days' time, and give sentence. Then he left the hall, and the people began to move, and I came out into the street before them and ran here to tell you all."

There was another pause. Faustus neither moved nor spoke, and Emilia, gently drawing her hand away from Victor's as he lifted his head from her shoulder, rose, crossed the room noiselessly, and glided through the doorway into an adjoining chamber, whence she presently returned bearing in her hand a silver goblet filled with wine.

"Drink this, my child," she said, stooping tenderly over him, and gently smoothing back the dark curls that hung in disordered masses about his forehead, while she placed the cup in his hand,—"drink this, you need it, Victor. And now," she added, as he rose and placed the empty goblet upon a table beside him, "you must go home to your mother, it is nearly dark, but the streets are quiet now, and you have not far to go. Farewell, my dear boy, and God be with you."

Victor gratefully kissed the hand she held out to him, and without trusting himself to speak another word, he raised his dark expressive eyes to her beautiful face, and turned away. The heavy silken folds of the curtain at the doorway rustled as he passed out, and the hall door closed behind him with a dull echoing clang, his retreating footsteps sounded for a minute upon the pavement of the street, —then all was silent, and Faustus and Emilia were alone.

CHAPTER III.

"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."—Rev. vii. 14.

TWO days had passed away since the events described in the last chapter took place, and another bright autumnal morning poured down its flood of warm sunshine into the busy town of Boxum.

It was just about the hour of noon, and a crowd of people had collected in the outer court of the governor's house, for Heraclus that day intended to resume Symphorian's trial, and pass sentence upon him. The greater part of the spectators were ranged round the hall in a loose semicircle, a few less interested sauntered about in groups near the entrance, beguiling the time and amusing themselves with the conversation of the porters or door-keepers. Opposite the doorway, and under the carved architrave of a granite column, stood side by side, Faustus and Victor. The tall, military form of the decurion was shrouded and almost concealed beneath the folds of a thick, hooded cloak, thrown instead of a toga over the tunic of his dress. His arms were folded together on his breast, and his eyes were anxiously directed towards the entrance of the court. Presently the watchful expression of his countenance changed to one of intense earnestness, he bent eagerly forward, and there was a stir and movement among the people in the hall. It was Heraclus who entered the court, attended by his officers, and followed soon after by several others conducting Symphorian. At the sight of his friend, Victor's pale face flushed crimson, and the tears sprang quickly to his eyes, but the next moment he brushed them away, and pressed his trembling hands tightly together, as if he fain would crush the rising grief at his heart. There was a hum and murmur of compassion and surprise, not unmixed with admiration among the crowd, as the youthful prisoner, heavily fettered and surrounded by his guards, entered the court, for most of the spectators had come there expecting to see a traitor and a malefactor, but they beheld one who looked more like a hero.

Heraclus took his seat at the top of the hall, beneath a sort of apse, formed by a marble arch supported on either side by two massive pillars. His officers ranged themselves to the right and left of the tribunal, the guards stepped backwards into a line with the spectators, and Symphorian was left alone in the midst. How strangely unlike a criminal looked the noble youth standing there before that expectant multitude, his countenance as happy and as fear-

less as if there were no such things in the world as torture or death, and the bright sunny clusters of his golden hair, rippling like a glory round his head, an earnest of the bright crown soon to be placed upon his brows by One, mightier and more powerful than all the judges of earth! Faustus looked earnestly at him awhile, and then, as many bitter thoughts came crowding thick and fast upon him, he wrapt his face in the folds of his mantle, and his heart sank within him, for he well knew that nothing short of apostasy could save his only son from a disgraceful and untimely death. He knew that very day would make him childless,—knew that henceforth there would be a vacant place beside him, in the home that had so long been Symphorian's,—knew that ere long, ay, in a few hours, the bright blue eyes that had so often met his with their sweet loving smile, would be dimmed and darkened by the mists of death; the hand so often clasped in his, cold and rigid as the senseless marble around him now, and the sunny curls of his hair all dabbled and clotted in blood.

"My God, my God!" he groaned in the bitterness of his grief, "why hast Thou forsaken me? Let this cup pass from me, O Lord; nevertheless—" But the holy words died upon his lips, he *could* not add, like his sorrowing Master, "not my will, but Thine be done."

While thus Faustus struggled with himself, Victor laid his hand gently on his arm, and whispered to him in a broken voice that Heraclus was going to speak, and almost simultaneously the governor, turning to Symphorian, addressed him in these words:—

"Fair youth, we have summoned you a second time before our tribunal to-day, that you may the better learn from our lips in cooler moments, what you were three days since too obstinate or too proud to heed, in the excitement of that folly which you doubtless thought to be heroism. Since then, you have, at our commands, suffered the ignominy and pain of the scourge, and have lain two days without food in the darkness and loneliness of a dungeon. And all this we did, not because we desired to prolong your sufferings or disgrace, but because we would teach you to value more the sweets and delights of the home and the friendly companionship you heretofore professed yourself so ready to renounce. Consider well, therefore, whether you are willing to sacrifice yourself, your happiness, and doubtless that of your parents also, for the sake of a Christ, who is, as you see, powerless to help you even in this distress; or whether you will not the rather consent to secure for yourself many long years of peace and tranquillity, by the utterance of a few short words. Your youth, your

beauty, and your station, all of which are so pitiable in you as a prisoner, and so ill befit a condemned criminal, would serve, were you at liberty, to gain you favour with the emperor, and perchance raise you to a high station of honour and dignity in the state. I counsel you, then, to forsake this folly of Christianity, which can bring you nothing better than death and disgrace, and instead to seek the glorious laurels of valour, fame, and wisdom. Take my advice, therefore, and save yourself for better things, and if you will, I promise not to forget you when I return to Rome, and wait upon the imperial Aurelius."

There was a profound hush of expectation among the assembled crowd as the governor ceased speaking, and Symphorian, raising his head, fixed his glance earnestly upon his judge's face and briefly answered,—

"Think you, noble Heraclus, that it is an honourable thing in a judge to whom is committed the care of a province, that he should seek to make men traitors to their reason and their conscience, by teaching them to prefer such paltry gain as these worldly advantages and frivolities, to the true glory of acting uprightly and honestly? Would you have me forswear myself for the sake of such empty hopes as these?"

An involuntary murmur of admiration and sympathy greeted the noble youth as he ceased, and Heraclus, as anxious perhaps to vindicate himself in the opinion of the spectators, as to persuade his prisoner, hastened to reply.

"You misunderstand my words, young man. Think not that I am base and shameless enough to desire that you should perjure yourself in order either to save your life, or to advance your interests with other men. Far indeed be it from me, or any judge, to inculcate such flagrant deceit and cowardice. But I would fain convince you of the utter folly and impiety of your present course of life, I would have you abandon Christianity, because it is hateful and detestable to gods and men, because its doctrines are pernicious, and its rites abominable [e],—because it is worse than distasteful and degrading to noble and upright minds,—because it is inimical and hostile to the safety, welfare, and happiness of the Emperor's subjects: and if these be not sufficient reasons to persuade you of your error, remember what obedience you owe as a loyal subject to your imperial lord,—what example you, as the son of a decurion, and the heir of a noble house, should set to others less noble than yourself, and let not your obstinacy or your false pride induce you to despise the commands of your Emperor; for there is nothing more unworthy or unbecoming one of

[e] The Pagans charged the Christians with the abominations of Œdipus and Thyestes.—*Robertson's Church Hist.*

your station, than wilful disobedience to national laws, and contempt of rightful power. From such a crime as this I desire to save you, and earnestly therefore I exhort and advise you to comply with the imperial edict, and do sacrifice to the immortal gods."

He paused, and again the sweet tone of Symphorian's voice rang like music through the silent hall, as, stretching forth his fettered hands towards the tribunal, he made answer,—

"I have already spoken, Heraclus; cease to argue with me, for I cannot obey you. For what hope would remain to me, if for the sake of obeying you, I should disobey God, and lose my own soul? Or what self-respect, what peace should I possess, did I allow myself to fall into the greatest and most dangerous of all crimes? You promise me treasures and riches more perishable and fragile than glass itself, in exchange for that wealth which the faithful possess always in Christ Jesus, and from which all the revolutions and changes of life, ay death itself, can take nothing. But as for you, though you should enjoy every advantage the world can offer, you can possess nothing in reality; your ambition will never be satisfied, nor your mind left in peace, since as you can never be sure of retaining any single thing in your hands, you must be always in a perpetual inquietude and anxiety."

"Foolish boy!" broke in the governor impatiently, "I have reasoned too long with you. But now your obstinacy and impertinence shall not go unpunished. Plautinus," he continued, turning to his secretary, "write down the sentence. We condemn the prisoner, Symphorian, in accordance with the imperial edict, to suffer death by the sword, as a rebel against the laws, and an enemy of the gods and the state."

Scarcely was Symphorian's fate pronounced, than the guards advanced to lead him away, while the fickle crowd, forgetful of their former sympathy and the compassion they had but a few minutes since manifested for the prisoner, burst into unrestrained applause at what they now considered the justice of the governor's decree.

The sound of their voices smote like a sharp dagger to the heart of Faustus. "Victor, Victor," he groaned in a hoarse whisper, "pray for me; this is more than I can bear. Is not this indeed the valley of the shadow of death? O God, O God! *he is my only son.*"

The cold drops burst out upon his forehead, and he wrung his hands in an agony of grief, as Victor, raising his tearful eyes to the decurion's pallid, despairing countenance, answered gently, "Jesus said, 'Whoso loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.'"

For a moment no answer came but a sigh, deep and intensely awful, like the sound of the bitter night-wind sweeping over a troubled sea; and Victor, who had never before heard such a sigh, almost trembled for fear he had spoken unadvisedly. But as he wondered, the decurion's voice, calmer and firmer now, re-assured him.

"My boy," he said, "you speak truly, for these are the words of the Blessed One: but yet it is a hard struggle to part thus. O my God, Thou only knowest how hard—ay, Thou indeed knowest, for Thou too hast sorrowed, even unto death. Victor," he continued after a moment's pause, "come with me; we will go and stand together by the entrance, that I may see him again as he passes; it will be for the last time, and after that we will go home." As he spoke these words, he held out his hand almost lovingly to his young companion, and for the first time since his parting from Symphorian the tears glistened in the decurion's eyes, as the boy looked up trustfully into his face.

They stood beside the doorway of the court, in the shadow of the great marble-fluted columns, and as the guards leading their prisoner approached, Victor whispered timidly to Faustus, "Will you not speak to him, just one word—one word of farewell?"

But Faustus answered him in a hurried, constrained voice, "No, Victor, I cannot. He needs little the encouragement I could give him, and I should but unman myself; it is better as it is; but hush, he is coming."

And Symphorian passed by, unconscious of the dear presence beside him, unconscious of the tearful, earnest eyes watching him so lovingly, unconscious of the prayerful blessing that was almost agonizing in its tenderness, "God in heaven bless thee, my dear, dear son!"

* * * * * * *

We stand without the walls of the town, in the calm, warm air of evening, the open country lies before us with its fields, and vineyards, and pasture-lands, and here and there some nobleman's villa peeping out from the surrounding parks or gardens. In the midst, a little winding river—almost nameless in modern times—ripples its waters through the bright landscape, mirroring in its clear, cool depths the far-off glories of the western heavens. And beyond, away in the distance, stands the chain of purple hills, bathed in the hazy light of sunset, like a golden frame encircling a beautiful picture.

But what two figures are these, that seem in their sadness and silence so strangely ill-set in such a fair and glorious scene? Ah, we need not look long upon that closely-veiled lady to know that she is Emilia, and the dark-haired boy by her side we recognise at once for Victor. But why are

they here at such an hour, waiting beneath the wall of the town, and for whom or for what do they watch so anxiously?

But we soon cease to wonder, for now we can see a little band of soldiers issue from the gates of Boxum, and come slowly towards us, their arms and crests glistening and flashing in the warm light. They are the governor's guards and lictors conducting a criminal to the place of execution, which is always outside—never within—the walls of the city.

Ah, me! that so bright, so beautiful a scene, so sweet and peaceful an hour, should be disgraced by human cruelty, sullied and polluted with human blood! O fair and glorious earth, teeming with all fragrance and brightness, how comes it that in the midst of such wondrous loveliness man should yet be so unlovely!

"They are coming, dear lady, *he* is coming," whispers Victor as the group draws nearer; and the small white hand trembles beneath the dark folds of Emilia's veil, as the sweet low voice answers him, "I know it, Victor, my boy is there. O God, I beseech Thee, give me grace to love Thy will."

"Amen," the boy returns reverently. "Do you remember, dear lady," he adds, looking up in her face with misty eyes, "how only three days since, you told me that all things work together for the good of those who are faithful to their Lord? But, oh that it were not so hard, so very hard to part!"

Tremblingly Emilia draws aside the veil that, like a mantle, had shrouded her whole form in its graceful drapery, and the rich bright glow of the sunlight shines upon her beautiful face, as she clasps her hands together, and bursts into words of such passionate utterance, that it almost seems as if her heart itself must break for very earnestness.

"O sweet and gracious Lord Jesus," she prays entreatingly, "look with the eyes of Thy compassion upon our anguish and bitterness of soul; and forasmuch as Thou art everywhere, teach us to behold Thee in all things, and suffer not our foolish tears to blind our eyes, and hinder us from knowing Thee, lest we be like the weeping Mary Magdalene, who beheld Thee standing beside her, and yet knew Thee not!"

It is drawing nearer to us now,—that lonely little procession of death, and we can see how one walks first with uncovered head and fettered hands, and yet withal he seems more like a victor celebrating his conquests in a triumph, than a criminal going to execution. His eyes are fixed upon the bright halo of sunset over the distant hills, and his heart is full of still brighter thoughts. We cannot tell what those thoughts may be, but that they are sweet and blessed we cannot doubt. Perhaps as his eye rests on the fair, flowery landscape, sleeping so calmly in the golden mist of sunshine,

he remembers the more glorious light that rests for ever upon the far-off hills of Paradise, where the blossoms are sweeter than all the flowers of earth, where there is no more death nor parting, where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." And, even in this terrible hour, those dear words of consolation rise to his lips, "In Te, Domine, confido, I will not fear what man doeth unto me." Then as the holy accents yet linger in his heart like the echo of sweet, soft music, a gentle hand is laid upon his arm, and Symphorian turns and looks into his mother's face.

They pause at once, all those rude soldiers, pagans though they be, for there is something in *this* that touches even hearts like theirs. And there is silence as she speaks, standing before her son tearless, calm, and almost majestic, and yet with such a world of love and tenderness in her deep eyes, that one could almost fancy her a being from another world, the pitying angel of Divine counsel and consolation.

"My child, my son, Symphorian," she cries, spreading out her hands towards the heavens, now all aflame with the glories of myriad sunset dyes, "look up thither, and remember the living God, for Whose sake you are called to die. Arm yourself, my child, with faith and constancy, for so you shall overcome. Oh, why should we fear a transient death which leads to eternal life? Lift up your heart, Symphorian, and consider Him Who reigns in Heaven. The sentence pronounced against you is not to the end that you may lose your life, but that you may obtain a better; for whoso giveth himself for Christ, the same shall save himself. The way that leads to Paradise is indeed strait and rugged, but it is short. If to-day, my son, you patiently and faithfully persist, you will pass from earth to heaven, and from death to life, to enjoy a happiness and glory without limit and without end."

Another minute, and the last words of parting are said,—guards and captive have passed on their way, and Victor looking after them, sees dimly through the mist of his tears how Symphorian turns to wave his hand towards him in token of farewell,—then the flashing crests of the spears have dipped into the valley beyond, and he beholds them no more.

He turns again towards Emilia; she stands still and erect, full in the flood of golden light, her hands clasped on her heaving bosom, and her eyes fixed steadfastly on something far away. Was it only fancy, or did she really hear in the silence of that evening air the distant sound of sweet unearthly voices, singing alleluias to the Lamb that was slain?

CÆDMON.

THE STORY OF A SAXON POET.

CHAPTER I.

CÆDMON'S SORROW.

A FAIR, broad tract of land on the coast of Whitby,—pastures, farms, and corn-fields ruddy and ripe in the glow of the sunset; behind them high dark woods, and before them the open sea.

And this was the land that Oswio, the seventh and last of the Saxon Bredwaldas, gave to the monastery of Hartlepool, when he had overthrown Penda, and won the kingdom for his own. And he gave his little daughter, Elfleda, only a year old, to the care of the Abbess Hilda, that the child might be brought up in the service of God, and be a sister in the convent all the days of her life. For so Oswio had vowed to do with her on the night before the battle of Winwid, if God should give him the victory; and now that he was king, he kept his word royally, as a king should. And the monks and nuns came down from Hartlepool and built their abbey at Whitby, on the land that Oswio gave them, and sang masses for the pious king day by day, and sowed their meadows and tended their kine, and there they laboured and prayed in peace for many a long year.

But that everybody in the convent lived in peace I cannot promise you, for though men may shut out the world from them, the flesh and the devil are not so easily got rid of; and especially the last of the three, for he, being a spirit, can make his way everywhere, even if people wall themselves up never so fast. And so, somehow, he got into the monastery at Whitby, as you shall presently see.

Now there lived at one of the farm-houses of the monastery, a poor lay-brother named Cædmon, who had charge of the cattle upon the lands. Tall and straight and fair to look upon was this Cædmon, with long bright curls rippling upon his shoulders after the manner of the Saxons, and clear eyes of blue that were full of melancholy. And his face was the face of an angel in its nobleness and beauty, but for the shadow of discontent that rested always upon it, saddening his lips and his eyes, and making a cloud of his very smile.

Not that Cædmon was unhappy or restless in his vocation, for he loved well the life he had chosen, but that he bore about in his heart a great unspeakable regret. For, like all men who love heaven and beautiful things, this poor cattle-drover had a soul full of music, and his sorrow was this, that though almost all the brotherhood could both play and sing, his fingers only had no skill upon the harp, nor his voice a note of melody.

And there was at the monastery a young man of his own age, Aldulf, who had once been like him, a labourer at the farm-work; but Aldulf had a sweet voice and a cunning ear for harmony, so that the monks had noticed his talent, and had taken him in hand. So now he wore a white surplice and sang in the choir of the monastery chapel, and looked down vastly upon all who had been his fellows at the farm. But yet he envied Cædmon and hated him, because of his fair face and bright hair, and because he himself was ill-favoured. And many times Aldulf heard the monks, who happened to know of Cædmon's deficiency, say to each other when they saw him, "This youth is full of grace, what a pity that God has not given him a voice, for we have not one among the choristers to compare with him!"

So Aldulf's heart was bitter and evil towards Cædmon, because of his envy. And whenever he met him it was Aldulf's delight to taunt Cædmon with his defect and insignificance, and to boast of his own skill and his importance, and of how the monks applauded him. And he would end his unsavoury speeches with a sneer,—"But as for thee, Cædmon, thou seest thou art fit for nothing but to drive cattle, for thou hast no more voice than the frog that croaks in the marshes!"

But Cædmon was never angry at this, and seldom answered him again, for he knew Aldulf spoke the truth, though he spoke it harshly enough; only he took all these sayings to heart, and pondered and sorrowed over them in silence. And by-and-by he grew moody and discontented with longing after the gift he had not, and he went about the farm-lands with his eyes on the ground, and oftentimes tears in them, so that all the brotherhood wondered at him.

But Cædmon had an only sister, Wulfrith, who was a portress at the convent of the Abbess Hilda, and the Abbess's lands lay side by side with the lands of the monastery, so that he and Wulfrith often met, and indeed spent much of their time together. For when Cædmon's work was over, and the cattle driven home to their stalls, Wulfrith used to give her keys to her fellow-portress and slip out for an hour or two's stroll with her brother in the pleasant pastures; and there they would sit together upon some knoll of smooth turf in the light of the sunset, and talk. And Cædmon told

"And he knelt in the porch reverently, with his head bared, listening and praying with all his soul."—(*To face p.* 349.)

Wulfrith all his grief and despair, and many times wept in the telling of it; and the little portress did her utmost to act the part of consoler, but always in vain, for Wulfrith was the only one, besides his spiritual director, to whom Cædmon ever confided his sorrow.

But one evening when the cattle were safely housed, and Cædmon was on his way towards the sisterhood in quest of Wulfrith, he came by the porch of the monastery chapel, and the door was open, for the monks were within chanting Vespers. And the deep, sweet sound of the music fell upon the ears of Cædmon, and sank down into his heart, so that he could not but stay and hear more. And he knelt in the porch reverently, with his head bared, listening and praying with all his soul, and his thoughts grew big with grief, and his eyes dim with heavy tears.

For he said to himself, "I never may join with these in singing God's praises, I never may touch the strings of a harp; but while all the brotherhood are rejoicing together and making sweet melodies with the angels in heaven, I alone must be dumb and silent as the cattle I tend in the meadows." And at the thought his soul died in his breast, and he leant his fair head against a pillar of the doorway and wept sore.

But across the pathway of the field came little Wulfrith seeking her brother, and when she saw him kneeling in the chapel porch, she ran to him and laid her hand on his shoulder lightly and tenderly. And she looked in his face with soft eyes that love made misty, and spoke in low sweet tones: "Cædmon, what aileth thee that thou art so sad?"

And he made answer, weeping, "O Wulfrith, that I cannot sing!"

Then said Wulfrith, "Brother, be of good cheer, for if that be all, it is nothing to weep for. It is sin only that should make us weep, and it is no sin of thine that thou canst not sing, since God hath withheld the gift from thee. Wherefore leave grieving, dear Cædmon, and be not cast down nor faint-hearted, but pray more; for our blessed Lord hath bidden us to pray without ceasing, seeing that the things we ask shall surely be given us, if we be not weary in the asking."

But Cædmon said, "To what end shall I pray, Wulfrith, when God hath denied me this precious gift from my birth? Can I think He will now work a miracle for me, and loosen my tongue, or give my fingers skill?"

"Who can tell?" cried the little woman, hopefully; "but at least, brother, if thou prayest for nothing else, pray for patience. Maybe the good God even intends to do thee a greater grace than He gives to those who can make earthly

music to His honour, for thou canst offer Him the spiritual melody of penance. I remember how our venerable mother, only the other night, told us that the greatest saints have always suffered hardest denial, and who knows but our Lord would make a saint of thee and school thee into holiness with this very discipline? And think when thou feelest it sharpest to bear, how that thy silence here will be more than recompensed when thou art made one of the choir in heaven! O Cædmon, it will be all the sweeter to thee to join in the minstrelsy there, for that thou hast burned so long and so ardently to sing upon this earth. I wish we were both singing with the angels in heaven now, brother. It must be sweeter to hear them than the chapel choir!"

She turned her head westward, and looked far away across the meadows into the broad daffodil pastures of the sunset, and the glory smote upon her white floating amice and on her uplifted face. And her thoughts went to the sweet measure of the choristers' chanting: "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." And then the notes died away and Vespers were ended, and the monks came streaming out of the chapel two and two, with heads bent, and pious hands folded palm to palm.

But Aldulf's bench in the choir was close by the porch, and Aldulf had sharp ears when his envy was concerned, so that for all his singing he had managed to catch a great deal of what Wulfrith had been saying to Cædmon. So he fell to thinking about the matter while he sang, and came to the conclusion, that unless something were done to correct Cædmon's conceit, Wulfrith's argument would surely minister to his vanity. "For," said Aldulf to himself, "this cattle-driver will presently take into his head that he is a great saint, whom God specially favours with mortification and trial, to make a sort of Lazarus of him, while I, like another Dives, am perchance to be shut out of Paradise! I shall take this unholy pride of his down a few pegs, and teach him not to set himself up above his betters." So with this pious resolve, Aldulf knelt for the priest's blessing, and came out of chapel.

But Cædmon had already gone on a few paces before Aldulf could leave his place, for the choristers came out in procession, and his turn was not till near the last. But he beckoned to Wulfrith as she turned away to follow her brother, and called her by name. So she came back not very well pleased, because, though Cædmon did not tell her *all* the ill things Aldulf said of him, still she knew they were not friends, and she did not care to talk with the choristers.

But Aldulf smiled, and said very mildly, "Has not Cædmon been without in the porch listening to our chanting?"

And when she answered "yes,"—"I did not know he loved music so dearly," said he. "Go then, Wulfrith, and tell him that if he minds to come to our choir supper in the lower refectory to-night, he shall be right welcome, and shall hear some goodly minstrels sing. Bid him not forget to come, for we shall all expect him. No thanks, sister,—I wish you good night, for I cannot stay. For," said Aldulf, as he turned on his heel to go, "thou, mistress, who hast ministered to his conceit, shalt minister also to his humiliation."

But Wulfrith ran after her brother and cried, "Cædmon, dear, I am sure Aldulf is sorry for his ill words and careth for thee at heart after all, for he did not know the greatness of thy love for music until now, when he saw thee weeping in the porch. And hear what he says, brother, for there is a treat in store for thee to-night, and thou must thank him for it." So she gave him Aldulf's message. And they stood awhile talking about it, till the sun dropped behind the black western woods, and the bell at the refectory rang for the supper hour. Then Cædmon bade his sister good-bye, and went up the avenued path to the monastery. And the little portress tripped away merrily through the meadows homewards, singing as she went, in the joy of her stainless soul.

CHAPTER II.

HOW ALDULF HINDERED CÆDMON'S VANITY, AND HOW CÆDMON DREAMT A WONDERFUL DREAM.

NOW it was a fashion with the Saxons in those old days, that after supper was ended, those at the tables who knew minstrelsy, should take the harp each in turn, and sing to it some improvisatore ballad. And because those who met at the choir supper were all musicians, it became a custom among them to pass the harp round the board to every one, as a matter of course, without so much as asking if he could handle it. And Aldulf knew that the lot to sing and play would fall to Cædmon in his turn as a guest at the table. So he contrived to sit next him that he might have the pleasure of passing the harp to him, and pressing him to sing, and so make his disgrace and incapacity more keenly bitter to him, and more apparent to others.

And this was the generous thought that had come into his heart as he sang God's praises that night in the chapel!

And when Cædmon came in and sat down among the rest

with Aldulf beside him, many of the choristers fixed their eyes upon him and whispered one to another,—" Surely we have an angel among us to-night; didst ever see such a fair face, or such a sweet smile?" And some said, " This is either Cædmon, the cattle-drover, or the angel Gabriel; for Father Cynewulf says the two are alike." But Aldulf heard them, and his brow grew all the darker, and his heart all the harder, and more envious. And when the meal was at an end, Redwald, the choir-master, took the psaltery as usual from its place in the corner of the hall, and, bidding the rest be silent, he lifted it upon his knee and tuned the strings to his voice. Then he ran his practised fingers through the chords, and sang a sweet melody to the Giver of all good, and Cædmon listened, happy and delighted.

And when he had finished, the rest applauded, and the chorister who sat next took the harp in his turn and sang, and then another, and another,—this one a ballad, and that one a psalm,—until it came to the lot of Aldulf. And Aldulf's voice was in fair tune that night, and he was impatient besides to shew off his skill and talent before Cædmon, who, for all his beauty, must needs be dumb; so he tossed his head, and threw back his lank colourless hair with an air of superior mind, and plumed himself like any parrot, till those who sat by and watched him began to titter outright. And when he had done his part, and acknowledged the applause accorded him with a gracious smile, he turned to his victim, and, giving him the harp—" It is thy turn now, brother," said he. But Cædmon would have passed the harp on to the next, only Aldulf laid his hand on his arm to hinder him, and spoke again :—" Not so, fair guest, but thou also must play to us; no one passes by the harp who sits at our table." Then Cædmon looked up surprised.

" Nay, Aldulf," he answered, " but thou knowest I cannot tell a note of music." But Aldulf went on in his malice, smiling, and loud enough for all the hall to hear.

" Thou art over modest, Cædmon; surely thou canst make us some sort of minstrelsy, for there is none so ignorant and rude of touch, but that he can handle a psaltery at a pinch."

But Cædmon blushed all over, through his white transparent skin, for shame, and answered not a word, so sharp to him was Aldulf's reproach. Then said one of the choristers who sat opposite and watched him,—" Take courage, brother, and be not fearful, for with those sweet looks and soft eyes of thine I know thou canst sing, and I doubt not but thy voice is as pleasant as thy face." And Cædmon looked at him who spoke those gentle words, and made reply with tears,—" Brother, indeed if I could play to you, I would at once, and gladly, but my fingers have no skill

upon the strings, and I cannot strike a note. And ever since I could speak I have loved music, and longed to play, but God hath kept the blessing from me."

Then all the choristers looked at each other surprised, and Redwald said:—"Let him be, brother Aldulf, for this is not mannerly, and one can see he speaks the truth,—pass the harp on to the next."

But Aldulf's malice was not yet run out.

"Bear with me, father, a moment more," he cried, "I think our fair friend does himself a wrong. For at least, Cædmon," he said, turning to him again,—"thou canst sing something, even if thou canst not play, and I will accompany thee."

But Cædmon looked at him piteously. "Do not mock me, Aldulf," he pleaded, "thou knowest well that I have no voice, and cannot sing." Yet Aldulf would have made even more ado, but that Redwald angrily bade him hold his peace, and pass the harp on. So he lifted his eyebrows, and drew up his shoulders to his ears, but dared say nothing more to vex Cædmon.

But all the choristers wondered at their guest, and began to whisper among themselves. And one said,—"This fellow is but an idiot for all his fair face."

And another,—"What wouldst thou have of a cow-keeper? let him be, to drive his cattle, for he is fit for nothing better."

And a third,—"I had rather have an ill countenance and be worth somewhat, than possess the beauty of Absalom and be a dolt withal."

And Aldulf heard them, and it gladdened his heart, and he thought he had gained his end and made Cædmon mean in the eyes of the brotherhood, despite his fair looks. For he hoped that on the morrow the whole monastery would hear of the matter. But Cædmon's ears also had caught the gossip of the choristers, and his heart grew so big with its burden of shame and sorrow, that he could not bear to stay in his place any longer. And so, or ever the next minstrel began his theme, Cædmon rose from his seat, and slipped out of the hall into the garden.

And there he leant against a tall beech-tree, and hid his fair face in his hands, and wept bitterly and wildly, as though his very soul would burst with grief. Then he remembered Wulfrith's words and her sweet counsel, and, folding his palms together, he strove in the midst of his weeping to pray for patience, like the saints. And after awhile he felt more at peace, and the stillness of the garden sank into his senses like sweet wine, healing and comforting him with its fragrance.

So he went on his way down the avenue, and over the pastures, to his own chamber at the farm.

CHAPTER III.

HOW CÆDMON DREAMT A WONDERFUL DREAM, AND HOW HE SANG TO THE MONKS IN THE REFECTORY.

AND there he bethought him of the words of one of the monks,—his confessor;—"My son, if our Lord had a cross to bear, His mother a sword through her heart, and St. Paul a thorn in the flesh, dost thou expect to be exempt from penance? Pray rather with holy Jesus and Mary—'Not my will, but Thine be done; be it unto me according to Thy word;' and thou shalt surely hear the King of Martyrs answering thee as He answered the Apostle,—'My grace is sufficient for thee.'"

So Cædmon knelt down by his bedside and prayed our Lord, with tears, to give him patience and strength accordding to the pattern of His own, that he might bear his cross after Him bravely, however hard and heavy it might be. And half the night through he prayed, and wept, and pondered, by turns, until he fell asleep through weariness; and while he slept God sent him a wondrous dream.

For in the midst of the darkness and the stillness of the long night, Cædmon heard a sweet voice calling him by name. And the voice said:—"Cædmon, sing Me something."

But he answered,—"I cannot sing; and for that very cause I left the monastery hall to-night, because all the choristers mocked at me, and wondered how I could be so foolish and unskilled."

"Yet thou must sing to Me," said the voice; and it was so sweet that Cædmon thought it must needs be the voice of the Lord Jesus Himself.

So he spoke again meekly and patiently:—"O Lord, what shall I sing?"

Then the voice answered him:—"Sing Me the origin of things."

And suddenly there came, as it were, a great flood of light into the soul of Cædmon, and his tongue was loosed, and he knew that the gift he had longed for was given him at last.

And the Lord put sweet thoughts and tender rhythm into his mind, and taught him in his dream how to handle the lyre, and to set his measure to the music of the strings. And he sang as the voice had bidden him, of the beginning of all things, and of the infinite wonders that God the Maker had brought forth out of chaos.

And when he had made an end of his song he awoke, and lo, he remembered it every whit. So Cædmon lay and pondered over this strange dream in an ecstasy of sweet delight,

until the morning came, and then he rose and gave great thanks to God, rejoicing with all his soul for the blessing that had come to him. Then he went forth from his chamber joyfully, to hear mass, and to sing the praise of our dear Lord for the first time in his life, at the chapel of the farm.

And when mass was over, Cædmon went to his confessor, and told him of all that had befallen the night before, and of the wonderful vision he had had, and the miracle God had wrought in him.

But when the good father had heard, him, he said, "My son, be not lifted up with pride at what the Lord hath done for thee, neither go about telling every one of thy vision, lest thou fall into sin through thy conceit; but go to thy work humbly, and be patient, waiting for what shall come upon thee; for God, Who hath already so highly favoured thee, will presently also open a way to bring thy graces to light Himself, without thy boasting of them, or going hither and thither to make them known."

So he gave Cædmon his blessing, and sent him away to his labour in the meadows for the day.

But at noon, just as the refectory bell began to ring for dinner, Cædmon spied Aldulf coming up to the monastery along the pathway of the hill. And when the chorister saw Cædmon at his work, he cried,—"Good morrow, fair cowherd! wilt come to supper again with us to-night?"

Then Cædmon bethought himself a moment and answered gently, "Ay, good Aldulf, that will I, readily, and thanks for thy kindness."

But Aldulf stopped short and stared at him doubtfully, for he thought Cædmon must be bantering, or else distraught.

"How now?" said he, "thou wilt come? I counsel thee rather to keep away, lest Father Redwald censure thee for thy presumption. And, indeed, I dare not ask thee to-night, for thou knowest it is the Feast of the Holy Name, and the fathers are going to sup with us in the long refectory. For all of us are to sing an anthem there in honour of the feast, and if thou dost not sing with the rest the monks will notice thee, and want to know who thou art, and how thou camest among us. And when our master, Redwald, sees thee again, he will certainly ask who brought thee in, and be angry with me when he finds out what I have done."

But Cædmon only answered him with a mild voice, "So be it, then, Aldulf, but yet I will come."

"Then take the consequences on thine own head, dolt," cried the chorister, pale with choler; "for I wash mine hands of thee, thou art no guest of mine." And Aldulf turned away, and went up towards the monastery without another word.

But when the supper hour was come, and the long, deep woods behind the abbey lands were red with autumn sunset, Cædmon made himself ready to go to the refectory.

And first he went into the farm chapel and knelt awhile before the altar, praying that our dear Lord would give him grace, and bless the thing he was going to do. Then he arose, and signed himself with the sign of the holy cross, and went upon his way silent and hopeful.

But when he came into the upper hall he found all the brotherhood assembled, and the choristers, and Father Redwald. And they all wondered at him, and whispered together as he took his place at the long board, but yet none spoke a word of rebuke to him, so fair and saintly he was to look upon.

But Aldulf sat sullenly in his place and would not see him, for he was angry at his boldness, and marvelled what possessed him to come. And when grace was said and supper ended, Father Hereward stood up to give a discourse. And he spoke of the Feast that they were met to celebrate, and of the holy Name of Jesus, and the wonders it had wrought among men. And he told how that He who bore that Name was the wisdom and the power of God, by whom the whole earth was made. "Wherefore," said he, "'hath God highly exalted Him, and hath given Him a Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.' For from the beginning of eternity was the Word dwelling within the unspeakable light and clear shining of the Father, and by His Voice were all things made out of darkness and silence and void. And by this Word of God was the whole world created, and by this Word of God was the whole world saved. So that the Wisdom of the Father, which is the holy Name of His Son, is the Alpha and Omega of all things, First and Last, Beginning and End."

And much more than this the good priest said, and all the brotherhood kept silence and listened reverently. And when he had finished talking, he took from beside him the harp, and he said,—"Who of you, my brothers, will sing to us of this great mystery of the wisdom and the love of God, that we may meditate thereon to our soul's comfort?"

Then there was silence in all the hall for a little space, and the monks looked at one another doubtingly, none liking to answer. Then said Father Hereward again, "Is there no poet among you, brethren, who will take this harp and play us some sweet minstrelsy of praise to Him who made us all?"

And in the middle of the long hall, before all those watchful monks, Cædmon stood up, tall and beautiful, the crimson

blood glowing like flame down his fair face and neck. And he put forth his hand to take the harp, and spoke in sweet clear tones that rang through the silent hall like the sound of silver rain, "Father, by God's grace, I will sing."

Then they all wondered at him for his tall stature and for his noble bearing and loveliness; and many of the brothers who did not know him, said, "Who is this fair stranger, and whence comes he, for we have not seen him at our feasts before?"

But Redwald and the choristers were astonished, for they knew him to be the cowherd who the last night had refused to sing to them, and they whispered among themselves. Yet they held their tongues, and none of them rebuked him, because they would see the end. Only Aldulf looked across the table at him, from under his hard, dark brows, and said hoarsely, "Art thou mad, Cædmon? or hast a devil?"

Then Father Hereward bade Cædmon come and fetch the harp, and he put it into his hands and said, "Sing on, my son."

So Cædmon sat down on a stool beside the Father at the top of the long board, and took the harp upon his knee. And he laid his cunning hand across the strings and played a soft, low prelude, like the sound of the wind in summer. And straightway a great hush and stillness fell upon all the monks, for they perceived that their strange guest was a poet indeed.

Then the Spirit of God came upon Cædmon like a whirlwind, and he lifted his voice and sang the song that our Lord had taught him in his dream. And he sang of the wisdom and the Word of God, and of the origin of all living things, and of the making of the world.

And still he sang, with eyes and voice full of heaven, while all that heard him listened breathless, and drank in the sweet words with rapture, longing to hear more and more for ever. And when he made an end of his song, every man sat silent in his place and spoke no word, for very wonder and ecstasy of delight. But Redwald and his choir fastened their eyes upon him with one accord, amazed at his exceeding grace and skill.

And when Cædmon lifted his eyes and looked about him for Aldulf, behold his place was empty, for Aldulf had gone forth from the hall in a fit of sickness, through rage and envy and astonishment. But none besides Cædmon missed him, for all the brothers were intent in thought upon the words of that wondrous poem they had heard. Then said Father Hereward, "Who art thou, my son? and who taught thee to sing so marvellously?"

And he made answer, sweetly, "Father, I am a lay brother,

Cædmon the cowherd, and our Lord taught me to sing only last night; for until then I knew nothing of minstrelsy, and my hand was stiff and untrained, and my voice hard and cracked as a toad's. But from my childhood I loved music and all musical things, and longed with all my soul's longing to be a minstrel, and I prayed the dear God night and day for the gift."

Then, while all the monks sat and listened to him, he told them of his vision, and how the Lord had wrought a miracle for him, out of His exceeding compassion and grace.

And when Cædmon had ceased speaking, every one sat yet for a little while silently, and gave thanks to God in his heart. Then Father Hereward said, "Children, let us praise the Lord for this wonderful and precious benison wherewith He hath blessed our brother. For sith this is the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, we have an anthem to sing to the glory of Him who bare it for us men upon earth amid all manner of pain and reproach, and who bears it now in heaven through all eternity, praised alike of angels and men. And we know that the same Word which in the beginning brought light out of darkness, and sweet sounds out of stillness, hath to-day spoken unto our brother Cædmon, and taught him who was silent to sing His praise."

And when Hereward had said this, all the brotherhood rose to their feet with one accord, and sang together the glories of that blessed Name, and Cædmon sang with them, full of gratitude and joy.

And the sound of their singing came through the opened doors and casements, and across into the meadow beyond. And there stood in the meadow, listening, a little lay sister in a black dress and white veil. For Wulfrith had come out to look for her brother, as was her wont, but Cædmon had already gone into the farm-house chapel before she could find him. So she went into the fields, and wandered up and down, fancying he must be yet busy, and hoping he would come by-and-by. And while she watched and waited, the sun went down, and presently she heard the monks chanting in the long refectory.

Then, being fearful of being late at the convent if she waited longer, she turned to go down the hill again homewards, and met Father Cynewulf, Cædmon's confessor, toiling up the hill on his staff.

"Daughter, daughter," said he, shaking his white head gravely, and trying to look stern, "make haste, and get thee in to supper; it is time for all good Christian maids to be in fold."

"True, dear father," she answered him, with a sly glance

out of the corners of her round blue eyes, "and time also for thee to be at the refectory. Hark! they are chanting even now."

"Ay, my child," said the old man, leaning on his staff, and panting, "but I have already supped at the farm, having much work to do, and these hills are hard to climb when one grows old. For little feet like thine they are easy enough. Hast thou seen thy brother to-day, Wulfrith?"

"Nay, father," she answered, sorrowfully; "I have waited here this hour and have seen nothing of him; methinks he must have gone up again to the refectory. For brother Aldulf, the chorister, father,—"

"I know, I know all about it, my child, thy brother told me this morning. And I may tell thee, Wulfrith, what as yet thou knowest not, but soon all the abbey must know of it, even this,—that the Lord hath wrought a miracle for thy brother, and hath given him skill upon the harp, and a voice to sing His praise." And he told Wulfrith all that Cædmon had related to him of his dream.

Then the little portress clapped her hands above her head and danced for pure joy. And she cried out, with tears in her glistening eyes, "Oh father! father! is it true? *quite* true? Ah, I know it is true, because the dear Lord always hears us when we pray to Him, does He not, father? And I told Cædmon so only yesterday. Oh, I am so very, very glad! and now he will be made a chorister, and sing in the chapel choir with Aldulf! And may I go home and tell the sisters all about it, and our mother the abbess?"

"By all means, my child," quoth the old monk, laying his hand lovingly upon her veiled head, "and bid them all from me give thanks to God for His great grace. And now get thee gone, little woman, for the twilight is begun and it is very late. Even now I am afraid thou wilt have to eat thy supper alone. God bless thee, Wulfrith!"

So they parted, and Father Cynewulf said to himself as he went on his way, "But I am afraid Cædmon will not sing in the choir with brother Aldulf yet awhile, for I shall have a word or two to say to Aldulf's director on this matter before to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW CÆDMON AND ALDULF WERE MADE FRIENDS.

NOW when it came to the ears of the Abbess Hilda that Wulfrith's brother had seen a vision and was inspired, she sent a messenger to the farm on the morrow to bid the young

man come to the convent and speak with her. So Cædmon went up with the messenger, and he brought him into the hall of the sisterhood, and the Abbess came out to him there, holding the little Princess Elfleda by the hand. She brought out a roll of parchment, wherein were copied some verses from the books of the holy prophets, which she gave to Cædmon, that he might measure the words into sweet rhythm, and set them to music, for the nuns to sing in their chapel. For the Abbess would try Cædmon to know whether or not he really had this gift of song. But or ever the hour for vespers came, Cædmon went up to the convent again with the anthem written in his hand. Wulfrith opened the outer gate to him, and when she saw it was her brother who stood there, she laid her arms about his throat and kissed him for joy and delight. So he told her of his dream, and how he had sung to the monks in the refectory; and how he hoped soon to be a chorister in the chapel. She prated to him, in her turn, about her meeting with Father Cynewulf, and of the things he told her, and her being first to tell the Abbess what had befallen. Then they kissed again, weeping for very happiness, and went up to the sisterhood together. And Cædmon gave his anthem to the Abbess Hilda; and when she had read it, she fixed her great mild eyes upon him, saying, "My son, God hath indeed given thee a grand and noble gift, for He hath made thee such a poet as our land hath few to match. See that thou use this great grace in His service always, without wearying or conceit, lest thy Lord, when He cometh, find thee sleeping like a faithless and unwise steward. And now follow me into the chapel, my son; there are those waiting for us there whom you know."

So she went out down the long corridor towards the chapel, and Cædmon followed her, with little Wulfrith beside him, brimful of delight and wonderment. At the door of the chapel they found the good Father Cynewulf and Redwald the choirmaster at the monastery; and Father Cynewulf held out his hand to Cædmon, smiling, and drew him aside gently into the niche of the doorway, letting the Abbess and Wulfrith pass by into the chapel. Presently vespers began, and the soft low chanting of the nuns; and the incense rose up to the carved roof overhead, and brake in soft clouds, rolling to and fro, until it lost itself among the long arches and the mellow glories of the western windows, like a holy mist of prayer.

After that, Cædmon's anthem was sung, and Cædmon stood and listened blushing, while the white-haired priest Cynewulf clasped his hand in his own all the faster and more tenderly, and Father Redwald beat time to the measure

with regular-waving arm. When the last notes were sung, and they all knelt for benediction, Cædmon's tears dropped on the marble pavement like rain, for his soul overflowed with love and great thanks, and he thought that after all earth must be very nigh to heaven, since men could be so happy upon it and God so near them.

Then Father Redwald called Cædmon and brought him to the Abbess, saying, "Venerable Mother, I shall take this young man to the monastery this very hour, to do with him as I told thee, knowing that our Lord hath highly blessed him, and that all the brotherhood will make him welcome, because the Spirit of God is upon him."

At that the Abbess smiled and took Cædmon by the hand, and kissing him on either cheek, "Therefore God be gracious unto thee, my son," said she.

Then she put the copy of Cædmon's anthem into Redwald's hand, and he bade the young man take his leave of the Abbess and come with him, for that he and Father Cynewulf had been bidden to bring him to the monastery.

So Cædmon knelt a moment for the mother's blessing, and kissed his sister Wulfrith, who bade him God speed, and then the chapel door closed after them and they were gone.

But the Fathers Redwald and Cynewulf took Cædmon with them to the monastery and went into the upper hall, where they found all the brotherhood gathered together awaiting their coming. And when Cædmon came in, Father Hereward stood forth from among the monks, and taking his hand in his own, he looked full in his fair face and asked him: "Brother Cædmon, what sayest thou,—wilt thou be one of us, and leave thy herds and kine, and thy farmhouse, to live in the monastery among us, to be a priest of God, and a father to others who are poorer and weaker than thou? For the Lord hath plainly shewed us how that He singularly loveth thee, and hath chosen thee to be His, by pouring out His Spirit upon thine head, and by giving thee this great and wonderful gift. Wherefore, brother, we are met here together to entreat thee earnestly in His most holy Name, that thou refuse not to join us, and to edify us by thy genius, thy sweet doctrine, and power of song."

Then Cædmon made the sign of the cross upon his forehead and breast, and answered with great joy in his soul: "Father, in the name of the blessed Trinity I will take upon me this high estate, and dwell among you all the days of my life, that I may be a priest at the altar to sing God's praises, and to be a father to those who are poor and sorrowful, as I have been. So may God send me His sweet grace." Then all the monks answered and said, "Amen."

And now I am glad that my story ends pleasantly, as all

stories ought to do. But as all things do not come smooth and even at once in most people's histories, so neither did they in the case of the poet-monk. For though Cædmon had won himself the love and reverence of all the fathers, and though the Abbess Hilda and her nuns took him for nothing less than a prophet, yet there was one in the abbey who envied and hated him with a great spite, and longed to do him a mischief: that one was Aldulf the chorister.

And when it was told Aldulf that evening what the monks had done for Cædmon; how he was to become a member of their confraternity, and be a priest instead of a cowherd, he was like to burst with madness of rage and jealousy. But he dared not open his lips to say a word against Cædmon, because all in the monastery admired and loved him, and he knew that if he maligned him he should only bring a curse upon his own head. So he swallowed his anger as best he might, and turned sullen and morose over his fancied wrong, petting it like a cherished serpent, that in return poisoned all the joy of his heart with its baneful breath.

But the next day was not over before his companions of the choir, and the monks who saw Aldulf, had noticed his silent mood and bent brows, and they wondered among themselves what ailed him. When it was the time for vespers, and the choristers were ready in the choir waiting for the beginning of service, came Father Redwald and brought them Cædmon's anthem, and would have them sing it in the chapel for the fathers to hear.

And all the choristers were glad, and they sang with good heart and clear loud voices—all of them save Aldulf, who stood still in his place frowning, and would not utter a word. For he said to himself, "I will sing no anthem of this cattle-drover's."

After the service, when the choristers were gone out of the chapel, Father Redwald followed Aldulf as he went towards the hill, walking moodily apart from the rest. And he touched him upon the shoulder, saying, "What ailed thee, Aldulf, that thou wouldst not sing the anthem to-night with the others?" But Aldulf gave him no answer.

Now Father Redwald was Aldulf's director as well as his master, and Aldulf had kept all this hatred and spite of his a secret even from him, because he was ashamed of it, and knew the good monk would blame him. But Father Cynewulf had told Redwald of the matter, having heard it from Cædmon, and perceiving how wretched poor Aldulf was making himself through his own ill-humour and bitterness.

So when Father Redwald saw that Aldulf was silent, he drew him aside to a bench that was beside the pathway, beneath the shadow of a tall cedar, and bade him sit there with

him. Then he said: "My son, I know that thy thoughts are full of un-christian fancies and dreams that the evil one hath put into thine head, and hath kept thee back from telling me, to make thee miserable and to vex thine heart withal. Wherefore now, my son, hide nothing from me, but open unto me this sin and grief of thine, that I may appoint thee some wholesome penance, and give thee the consolation of God's sweet peace." But yet Aldulf held his tongue, and turned away his head proudly, for he was angry and full of scorn.

Then Father Redwald caught him by the hand and spoke very earnestly: "O child, child, why wilt thou be so foolish and wayward against thine own comfort? Have I any cause to entreat thee except it be for thy blessing and the glory of God? How is it thou lovest this festering plague-spot of sin better than the sweet odour of heavenly grace? Dost thou not know, my son, that every one who wilfully abides in sin, is before God as a corpse that hath been long dead, savouring of corruption and all manner of foulness? But he who does penance and returns to the service of the Lord, becomes like an offering of incense, sweetening his own soul and the souls of others with the fragrant odour of his good example. Wilt thou not, Aldulf, be rather found a clean offering in God's sight than a putrid corpse of unholiness? Son, son, I entreat thee as thy spiritual father, be reconciled to our dear Lord in the sacrament I offer thee. See how He looks at thee from the cross hanging at thy girdle, with His loving hands spread wide to receive thee, and all his immaculate body pitifully torn and wounded for thy sake! Wilt thou let Him suffer yet more pain, Aldulf, by rejecting and contemning His compassionate love and His embraces, when He hath borne all this agony of penance for thee?"

Then Aldulf turned his head, looking into Father Redwald's face, and saw that his grey eyes were filled with tears. And the chorister's hard soul melted within him as snow melts in the sunlight, and he fell on his knees before the good priest and confessed every whit of his sin, weeping sore.

When he had ended, Father Redwald laid his hand on his head and said, "My son, the things thou hast told me are very sad to hear, and thou hast done foolishly, but even so God gives more grace. For there is more rejoicing among the angels over the soul that hath sinned and is forgiven, than over the saint who went not astray; and I have heard some of the fathers say they almost envy their penitents, so great a grace is it to have true compunction for one's ill doings. But for all thou art forgiven, I must set thee a penance to do, that thou mayest not forget how thou hast grieved the dear Lord and wounded thine own soul. Neither

shall thy penance be an idle one, Aldulf, for thou must leave the choir for awhile and tend Cædmon's kine in his place, until one be found among the lay brothers to take the charge from thee. Now go and find him whom thou hast so grievously ill-treated, and ask his pardon for thine evil deeds, and the pardon of his sister Wulfrith, whom thou hast also wronged."

So he gave Aldulf absolution and his blessing, then left him and went upon his way to the monastery, and Aldulf upon his to find Cædmon. Presently he saw Cædmon walking in the garden among the flowers, and Wulfrith was with him. And when Aldulf saw them he stood still for a moment, praying for courage and grace to confess his fault like a man. And our Lord heard him, and sent a great strength into his soul, so that he came forth bravely and went to meet Cædmon, saying, "Brother Cædmon, I am come to ask pardon of thee and of Wulfrith for all the evil I have wrought you, and the sharp words I have spoken. I have confessed all to Father Redwald, and am absolved from my sin, but now I am come to ask forgiveness also of thee."

Then Cædmon put out both his hands, and caught him round the neck, kissing him with all his heart. And when he could speak for joy he forgave him gladly and freely; and as for Wulfrith, her cup of happiness so overflowed at the sight of Aldulf's penitence that she could not say a word for weeping.

And then they all three wandered about in the garden together, plucking the sweet flowers and talking, until the refectory bell rang for supper. Then Wulfrith bade them good-bye and ran off to her convent, and Cædmon and Aldulf went into the monastery hall side by side.

But Aldulf told his friend nothing about his penance, for he thought it would make Cædmon sorry.

On the morrow Aldulf put on the habit of a cowherd, and went down to the farm to take care of Cædmon's kine; all day long he tended them in the pastures, and at night he slept in the farm-house, until Father Redwald found another among the peasants on the abbey lands to take Cædmon's work, and sent Aldulf back to his choir.

After that, all things went well and pleasantly in the monastery, and the days were full of peace, and Aldulf wore his white robes again, and sang in the chapel better than ever he sang before; but every one noticed that when Cædmon's anthems were sung it was Aldulf's voice that was highest and clearest of all.

In due time Cædmon was made a priest, and took the holy vows at God's altar, and became a father in the abbey, beloved and revered of all the brotherhood. The Spirit of

God rested upon Cædmon and upon all his labours; and many a long year he dwelt there in peace, a holy man, teaching, and singing the praises of our Lord, until he died in the year of grace 680.

And because he was the first poet of our country whose name has found a place in its records, we have given him a title of great honour which will carry his memory on to all ages of English literature, making him in some sort the patron of our national psalmody, and enshrining the legend of his life among the many beautiful stories which belong exclusively to the Age of Saints. For Cædmon is called to this day, "The Father of English Song."

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