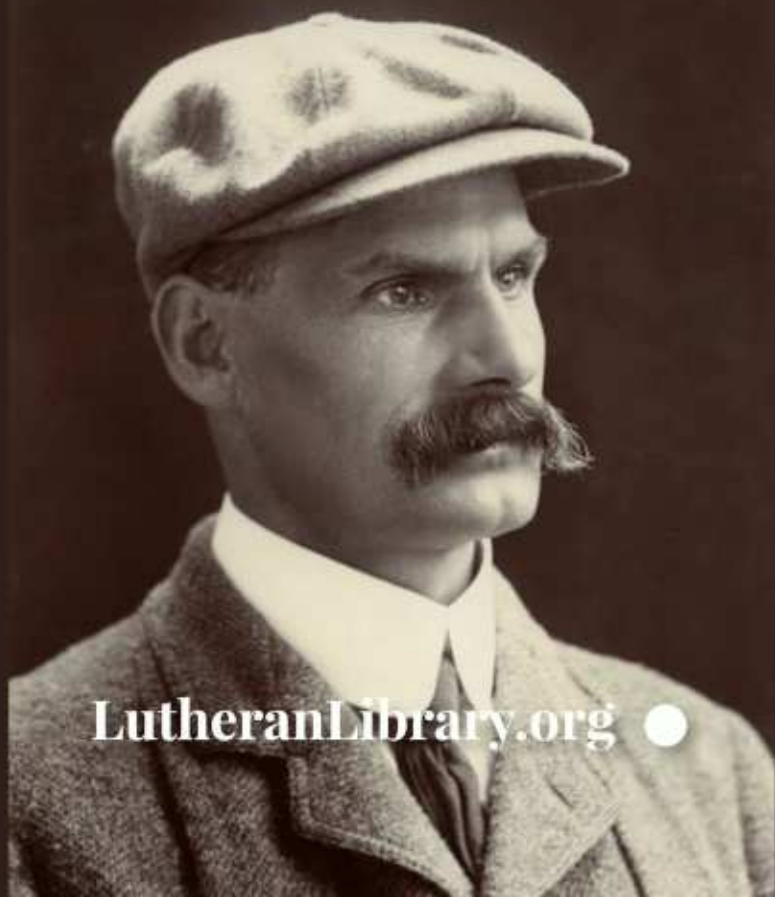


Joseph Hocking

All Men Are Liars



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“ALL MEN ARE LIARS”

“ALL MEN ARE LIARS”

A Nobel

BY

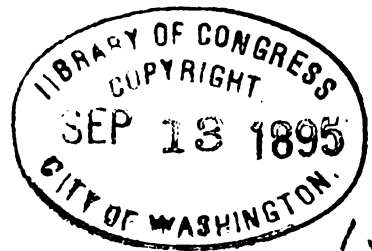
JOSEPH HOCKING

AUTHOR OF

“THE STORY OF ANDREW FAIRFAX,” “ISHMAEL PENGELLY:
AN OUTCAST,” “THE MONK OF MAR SABA,” ETC.

“I said in my haste, All men are liars”

Psalms



BOSTON
ROBERTS BROTHERS

1895

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ALL MEN ARE LIARS.



PART I.

EDUCATION.



CHAPTER I.

LUKE EDGCUMBE, CYNIC.

The Cynic puts all human actions into only two classes, — *openly* bad, and *secretly* bad. All virtue, and generosity, and disinterestedness, are merely the appearance of good, but selfish at the bottom. He holds that no man does a good thing except for profit.

➤ H. W. BEECHER.

WHEN first I heard of Stephen Edgcumbe I was sitting with my father at our little house, which was situated between the market town of Witney on the one hand and Witney Hall on the other. Let me be correct, though. The name of the house, which was originally Witney Hall, had been altered, some time before, to Edgcumbe Hall, by the present proprietor, Luke Edgcumbe, Esq. So that when I was a lad, although the older folks called it Witney Hall, the younger generation had found it natural to fall in with the wishes of the man who reigned there.

My father had just returned from Edgcumbe Hall, and we were sitting together at tea, when, to my surprise, he began to speak to me concerning his business

with Luke Edgcumbe. This was a very uncommon thing for him to do; for although he was communicative to me on many matters, he seldom spoke about the Hall business. I may as well state here that my father, Asher Roberts, was the steward of Luke Edgcumbe, and managed the Edgcumbe estate; for although he was a solicitor by profession, and still practised at Witney, he had plenty of time to fulfil his duties as steward.

“Daniel,” said my father, “Mr. Edgcumbe wants you to accompany me when I visit him to-morrow, as he wishes to see you and speak to you.”

I looked up in surprise.

“There is to be a little bit of a change in the life of Mr. Edgcumbe,” went on my father, — “at least, I hope so, — and he wishes to speak to you about it.”

“To me, father?”

“To you, Daniel.”

I waited in silence.

“Mr. Edgcumbe has a nephew about your age who is coming to stay with him. He is just seventeen, while you were seventeen last month.”

I still waited, wondering what Mr. Edgcumbe’s nephew might have to do with me; but I asked no question, for my father invariably delayed his communications when I asked him questions.

“As you know,” my father went on, “Luke Edgcumbe is a bachelor, and does n’t like lads. But his brother has just died, leaving a son behind him. This lad — his mother having died when he was born — is an orphan, and Mr. Edgcumbe was asked a few days ago, in a letter from his dying brother, to take care of him. He has consented.”

I still waited, wondering what Luke Edgcumbe’s nephew had to do with me, and why I should be invited to the Hall. My father continued: —

“It is now July, and no school or college will be

open until towards October, and Mr. Edgcumbe is anxious that you should be friendly with his nephew, — he is coming the day after to-morrow, — in short, take him off his hands until the autumn, when he may be sent to some school or college.”

I could be silent no longer.

“But what sort of a fellow is he, father?” I cried; “where does he come from, and what is his name?”

“Of course,” my father went on, “this is why Mr. Edgcumbe wishes to see you. Naturally, he wants a companion for his nephew who is his equal in social status and education, and who, moreover, is well behaved and a gentleman.”

I was eager to repeat my question again, but I knew my father’s habits, and was silent.

“This nephew is the son of a Nonconformist minister; his name is Stephen, — Stephen Edgcumbe, — and during the last five years he has attended one of these schools or colleges which have been erected for the education of ministers’ sons. He is said to be very clever; beyond that I know nothing at present.”

I must confess to being pleased at my father’s news. I had just returned from a public school myself, and was wondering what I should do during the vacation; for my mother had died when I was quite a little fellow, and, not having any brothers or sisters, I often felt lonely at home; while for some reason or other I had formed no close acquaintances among the youths at Witney. Thus the prospect of a companion during the next three months, and that companion the squire’s nephew, was exceedingly pleasant.

I waited for further explanations, but none were forthcoming, and the only reply I got to my questions was that I should see Mr. Edgcumbe on the morrow, who would perhaps satisfy my curiosity.

The following morning, therefore, I was ready to

accompany my father. He was very quiet during the breakfast hour, devoting most of his attention to a letter which came by that morning's post, and which he read several times. Presently we got in the trap, and our fast-trotting mare drew us rapidly towards the Hall.

"What do you mean to be?" my father asked suddenly.

"I have n't thought," I replied.

"Lawyer?"

I shook my head.

"Parson?"

"No."

"Dóctor?"

"That's as good as anything."

"Ah!" He said no more, but I thought there was a pleased look on his face.

I asked no questions, for I knew that what my father thought best for me to know would be told me without any interrogations on my part.

Presently we came to the Hall, a fine old place, surrounded by a broad park. The carriage drive was lined with stately old elms, while the countryside was well wooded everywhere. The house was over a century old, but my father informed me that the interior was replete with all modern improvements and comforts.

We entered the house together, my father being ushered straight into the library, where Mr. Edgcumbe was, while I waited in the room adjoining until I was wanted.

I amused myself as well as I could for a few minutes by looking at an illustrated paper, when my attention was attracted by the sound of voices in the library.

"You've brought your son, Mr. Roberts?" It was the squire who spoke.

“Yes,” replied my father; “he’s in the adjoining room.”

“You’ve told him why I wished to see him?”

“I told him what you told me last night; but, as you know, that was very little. You were called away just as you were entering into particulars.”

“Just so; but there are very few particulars. My nephew arrives to-morrow, and I am anxious that he shall have some one about his own age for a companion until October.”

Without thinking whether I was breaking any laws of honor, I listened for what might follow. I felt interested, and wanted to hear what the squire would tell my father.

“Would you mind telling me the nature of my son’s duties?” said my father, a little stiffly, I thought.

“I do not know of any duties in particular,” replied Luke Edgcumbe. “I want my brother’s lad taken off my hands, and providing I am pleased with your son, I shall be very glad if he will do it.”

“It is very kind of you,” replied my father; “but as my son *is* my son, I shall be glad to know something about your nephew.”

I knew my father was a little nettled, by the tone of his voice; evidently he did not care about his son being utilized to oblige his employer, without having some idea of the circumstances of the case.

“Oh, I see. You need have no fear, Mr. Roberts. My nephew will, I’ve no doubt, be the pink of propriety. I have never seen him; but I will vouch for him being a pattern lad, well dressed, pious, and all that. As I told you, my brother was a parson of the dissenting type, one of those people who work their fingers to the bone for the good of the people. His house was well ordered, so no doubt he’ll find this house rather heathenish. In his letter to me, my

brother told me that the lad Stephen was a good lad ; so no doubt he 's one of those pale-faced pattern boys, of the religious order. Never fear ; he will not contaminate your son. Perhaps it 'll be the other way about, eh ? ”

I could not help detecting a slight sneer in Mr. Edgcumbe's reply, although my father did not seem to take notice of it.

“ I think Daniel is well-behaved and reliable,” he replied ; “ but of that you can judge for yourself.”

“ Then matters can be managed without trouble. Both being such patterns, all anxiety will cease. But your son is outside, you say ; let him come in.”

My father opened the door, and asked me to come in. Glancing quickly round the library, I saw that the room was well lined with books ; but before I could make further observations, Mr. Edgcumbe turned around from a little cabinet which he had been examining, and looked me straight in the face.

He was a tall, thin man, of about fifty years of age. His hair was iron gray, and had become very thin at the top of the head. His eyes were small, and the narrow bridge of his nose seemed to scarcely divide them. His forehead was high and narrow, his mouth compressed and drawn down at the corners. This was the first time I had ever seen Luke Edgcumbe, and, boy as I was, I could not help making certain mental calculations about him. I instinctively felt him to be a clever man, his deep-set, piercing eyes revealed the fact immediately, while his thin lips and somewhat bitter smile told me that he was a stranger to sympathy. In the conversation which followed, I could not help thinking of him as a kind of duality. Sometimes he impressed me as a keen, hard business man, living only for pounds, shillings, and pence ; and again, I could not help seeing that he had read much, thought much, seen much, and

was keen in his analysis of men and motives. He made me uncomfortable, for he never seemed in earnest; his mouth was drawn down at the corners by a mocking smile, while his voice was never hearty. There was also another peculiarity about him which I could not understand. He seemed communicative and reserved at the same time. When he appeared to be taking you into his confidence, you instinctively felt that he was keeping back that which he regarded as important. Altogether, I, being a lad of rather strong impulses, did not like him.

I saw, too, that his deep-set eyes rested keenly on me, and he seemed to reckon me up as a tradesman reckons up the value of any article he is inclined to buy.

“Well, young sir,” he said, “I suppose you have heard what your father and I have been talking about?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That’s right, tell the truth; for, after all, truth pays best generally. Well, you know that my nephew is coming to-morrow, and that I want some one to be with him. I am satisfied with you; will you stay here with Stephen Edgcumbe until he goes to college?”

“Stay here?”

“Yes; I want him taken off my hands as much as possible. You will have the run of a good part of the house, and all the grounds. Is that agreeable?”

“If your nephew and I suit each other,” I said, “and if it is understood that I can visit my father often, I shall be very willing.”

“Very well,” he said; “no doubt you will quarrel, and make up again, and all that sort of thing; but if you are what you seem to be, and if Stephen is my brother’s son, I shall not see much of you.”

I could not help thinking that this was rather

heartless ; but I said nothing, while my father sat and watched us both closely.

“ Yes,” he went on, “ the matter is settled. You can look at the books, if you wish. Now then, Mr. Roberts.”

I went away from them toward the other end of the library, and for a time my thoughts were divided between the books on the shelves and Stephen Edgumbe, a picture of whom I had already conjured up. At intervals I heard my father conversing with the squire, but for a long time took no notice of anything that was said. Presently, however, their voices became louder.

“ No,” I heard Mr. Edgumbe say, “ my brother did not leave a penny. He never did know what to do with money ; he never had sixpence to call his own — but once, and then he soon got rid of it.”

My father made no remark.

“ We came of an old Puritan family,” he went on, in one of his bursts of confidence, “ and my brother Steve and I were the only children who grew up out of a large family. This was strange, for all the other children were healthy, as children, while Steve and I, who were twins, were sickly. However, we grew up, as unlike as two boys could be. He was always a dreamy sort of a fellow, of a religious build, and I — well, I was different. He was a favorite with every one — I was n't. My mother died when we were twelve ; and when we were about the same age as the lad whom Steve has foisted upon me, my father also went the way of all flesh.

“ He left us four hundred pounds, which were to be equally divided ; and when matters were settled, Steve, who was always reading and preaching — I suppose that was why he was so popular with the women — spent his fortune in getting into a college where they manufacture parsons. Well, that life

suiting him best. I, on the other hand, went off to London to make a fortune. I had more than the proverbial half a crown, you see; I possessed two hundred pounds. Yes, I'm not ashamed of my beginning. I find that none of the county families cut me because I made my money by trade. After I felt my feet a bit, and measured the world and men, I spent my two hundred pounds in jam. Of course, Roberts, you know that jam bought Witney Hall, and changed it into Edgcumbe Hall; jam furnished it, and jam keeps it going. Through jam I've a big banking account. Steve wasted his money in training to be a parson. Like a fool, he worked for people who did n't care a toss-up about him; and then, when he'd killed himself, they sang the doxology at his grave, and are now on the look-out for somebody else to tell them about heaven. He worked for them for five-and-twenty years for a salary that the foreman of my jam factory would have scorned; and now he's dead, all that his dear people, among whom he thought himself so popular, are going to do, is to erect a tombstone in memory of their dear pastor. The boy, of course, comes to me."

"And your brother's wife?"

"She's dead," said Luke Edgcumbe, harshly. "She suffered his poverty when she might have had plenty; but then Steve was always a favorite with the women,—parsons always are. She died when this nephew of mine was born."

"Your brother never married again?"

"No."

It was at this point that I felt that behind all his freedom in telling about himself there was much left untold. My father evidently saw that this part of the subject was distasteful, and so began to talk of something else.

"You have no plans about your nephew's future?"

“No; I must see him first. I’m not much interested at present; I must see what he’s like. I expect, from his father’s letter, that he’s of the pious sort, and will want to be a parson.”

“I hope he will appreciate his good fortune in finding such a home, and that you may have reason to be glad you have a nephew,” said my father.

After this I became more and more anxious to see Stephen Edgcumbe.

Half an hour later we drove away from the house, — I feeling as though I wanted to draw a deep breath and to stretch my limbs, while a thoughtful look rested on my father’s face.

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

There 's something in a noble boy,
A brave, free-hearted, careless one,
With his unchecked, unbidden joy,
His dread of books and love of fun, —
And in his clear and ruddy smile,
Unshaded by a thought of guile,
And unrepressed by sadness, —
Which brings to me my childhood back,
As if I trod its very track,
And felt its very gladness.

N. P. WILLIS.

THE following day about three o'clock Mr. Edgcumbe's carriage stopped at the door of my father's house, and a few minutes later I was driven to Witney Station. Looking back through the vista of years which have passed since then, I remember that I was very joyous, very expectant, and looked forward to a downright good time. I was a little bit afraid of Stephen Edgcumbe being a goody-goody, lachrymose sort of a fellow, but I hoped for the best. Anyhow, I had made up my mind to like him if possible; and such a resolution, I have since found, goes a long way towards deciding what follows.

I had not long to wait for the train, and there was no difficulty in identifying Stephen Edgcumbe. For, first of all, the passengers who alighted were very few, nearly all of whom I knew; while he, as soon as he had stepped from the carriage door, looked eagerly around as if expecting some one to meet him.

I went up to him without hesitation.

“You are Stephen Edgcumbe?”

“Yes,” he said, holding out his hand; “and you?”

“I am Daniel Roberts, son of your uncle’s solicitor and steward; and if we get on well, I am to be your companion for a few weeks.”

He looked at me in a quick, questioning way, and then gave my hand a hearty squeeze.

“That’s grand,” he said; “but about my luggage?”

“It’s safe in the carriage by this time,” I said, noticing that the groom had been examining and carrying one or two trunks towards the carriage.

“And you are going back with me?”

“If you like.”

“Rather,” he cried. “Come on.”

Certainly he was altogether different from what I imagined, and his every movement dispelled the goody-goody, lachrymose idea. Taller than I by several inches, he was straight as a rule, and walked with a light, springy step. His face was rather pale, certainly, and at times his eyes became dim, as though he were thinking sadly; but on the whole I thought I never saw a handsomer fellow. His face was what some people call “clean cut,” his eyes were large and black, his forehead broad, and his hair jet-black, curling over the temples. I, who was always plain, and a little undersized, envied him such splendid physique. I could see, too, that, in spite of his sorrow, he loved fun, and was brimming over with mischief and laughter. I found out afterwards that he was extremely sensitive, and susceptible to what influences might be brought to bear on him.

By the time we got into the carriage I was in love with him. Any boy of seventeen will know what I mean; any man who remembers that he has been a boy of seventeen will understand me. I had been rather a lonely lad, just a little bit quiet and studious,

with a hobby for scientific experiments, not quick to make friends, and not regarded as sociable; but Stephen Edgcumbe captivated me at first sight. I could not resist the brightness of his eyes, or the clear ring of his voice; and before we had been together five minutes, I had forgotten that he was a stranger.

“There’s my home,” I said, as the carriage swept past my father’s house; “it’s nearly hidden by the trees, but it’s a jolly old place. My mother’s dead, and dad’s only got me.”

I was sorry I spoke a minute after. I saw his lips tremble, and his eyes moisten. No doubt he remembered that he was an orphan, and was dependent on the man whom, as yet, he had never seen.

For my own part I wondered what impression he would make on his uncle, and whether the man dwelling in grand loneliness would be kind to his relative.

“Do you know my uncle?” he asked at length.

“I saw him yesterday for the first time. You see, he’s been living at the Hall only a year, while I’ve been at school most of the time.”

“I never saw him,” he said; “it was my father’s wish that I should come to him, and I could do no other than obey. Had he told me to go to the ends of the earth, I would have gone.”

I did not speak.

“The world has felt like a new place since he’s left me,” he said. “It’s true I was away a goodish bit, but all the vacations we were together, and I always went with him when he had his summer holidays; we used to fish, and swim, and go boating; — now all is changed. I don’t know why he wanted me to go to Uncle Luke, for I don’t think they ever hit it. Still, it’s very kind of uncle to have me, isn’t it?”

He had become thoughtful, and the merry sparkle had gone from his eyes; his dark face contracted as if he were in pain.

"You've to go to college in the autumn," I said; "I don't know where, perhaps to Oxford or Cambridge."

"Am I?" he said. "Well, I mean to work hard wherever I go, and I mean to pay Uncle Luke every penny he spends for me. Can you play cricket?"

A cricket match in the neighboring field changed the conversation.

"Only fairly," I said; "and you?"

"Just a bit. Ours is a good club, and I'm downright fond of it. Ah, his middle stump is down, — well bowled!"

I saw that Stephen Edgcumbe was an enthusiast, and I liked him the more for it. All reserve was broken down between us, and we talked freely.

Presently we entered the Hall grounds, and I watched my companion while, with beauty-loving eyes, he looked around, noting the stately oaks that grew in the park, the green woods away beyond, the undulating country, which was decked in the gorgeous foliage of early July.

"This is your uncle's," I said; "there's the house yonder, — your future home."

"I had no idea it was so fine," he said. "Father told me that Uncle Luke was a rich man, but I did not know he had such a place as this. My father said that, when grandfather died, they had £200 each; and that while he spent his in going to college, Uncle Luke went into business."

"Business pays better than divinity," I suggested.

"Ours was such a little house," he said; "it belonged to the church. Father was asked many times to go to large, wealthy churches, but he would n't. He was fond of the people, and they were mostly poor, so he stayed with them to the end."

The carriage drew up to the door of the great house, and we quickly alighted. A servant led us into the library, where the great jam manufacturer awaited us. He took no notice of me, naturally; but as his eyes rested on Stephen, I thought the discontented, bored look which had rested on his face passed away a little.

There was a slight resemblance between them. The shape of the chin was the same; and although Stephen's face was cast in a fuller and more perfect mould, the contours of the features were not unlike. And yet there was all the difference. Luke Edgumbe's face was something like what Stephen's might become if he grew to be hard and unsympathetic; as yet the dissimilarity would have impressed the casual observer rather than the likeness.

"I am your uncle, your Uncle Luke," said the older man, holding out his hand. "You are like your father a little, but more like — that is, I hope you had no bother in getting here."

It was a cold, unsympathetic greeting, considering the circumstances; and yet I felt that, for Luke Edgumbe, it was cordial.

"No, thank you, uncle; I had no difficulty in getting here. You see, Daniel Roberts met me. We've had a fine ride."

"That's right. If you don't quarrel, Daniel will stay with you till October. I am generally very busy, and have no time to talk. Are you hungry?"

"No — that is, I don't mind."

"Ah, you are hungry. Let's see, — it's half-past four: dinner will be ready in an hour and a half. You can wait till then, I expect."

"Oh, yes."

"That's right. When I was your age I went to London, and for three years lived on seven shillings a week. I've gone hungry many a time because I

wanted to get on. You've never gone hungry, I expect?"

"Not long."

"Well, you are better off than I was; but there, I'm too busy to talk just now. You and Roberts can be off until six. I need n't tell you not to quarrel; it's too soon for that."

We went out together, Stephen looking rather gloomy and depressed.

"Do you like my uncle?" he asked, in an absent sort of way.

I did not know what to answer, so I said, "Do you?"

"I don't know," he replied; "only he's so unlike dad."

We walked through the park together, and on towards a valley which lay in the distance, where a large pond nestled almost hidden by the trees. The water at the edges was still, scarcely a ripple disturbing it; in the middle, however, there was a swift movement. The truth was, the lake was partly natural, partly artificial; for the course of the river had been turned, so as to beautify what would have otherwise been a large swampy place. In the middle, therefore, where the stream ran, was a strong current.

Nothing could be more beautiful than its clear waters, half hidden by the trees, yet shining in the light of the westering sun; and as we walked, I saw that my companion had for the moment forgotten his uncle's somewhat unfeeling welcome.

"Mr. Edgcumbe has a boat," I said; "we could get it out of the boat-house, and have a row before dinner, I dare say."

He did not reply, but there was an eager look on his face, as though he saw something which I did not.

“Did n’t you hear a splashing and a cry?” he said, as he quickened his steps.

“It’s the swan, I expect.”

“No, it’s not; listen.”

Yes, there was no doubt a cry, and it seemed to come from the neighborhood of the lake.

He started off like a deer. I saw now what his light, springy step meant. Stephen Edgcumbe had in him the makings of an athlete. Run as fast as I might, he outran me easily; and when I reached the lake side, I found that he had divested himself of his coat, and seemed about to plunge into the water.

“What’s the matter?” I asked, panting.

“Don’t you see?” and he pointed towards the centre of the lake, where some one was struggling.

“Help!”

The cry came from a bather, for such I judged him to be.

Stephen, without hesitating another second, plunged into the lake and swam rapidly.

“Be careful; the current is strong in the middle,” I shouted; “the bed of the river is there.”

I do not know whether he heard me or not, but he made straight for the man who had shouted for help, and in a few minutes reached him. Even at that moment of anxiety I could not help admiring his courage and his strength; neither could I help wondering at the fact that we should be led to the lake just at this time. As I remember, too, the influence which this incident had on Stephen Edgcumbe’s later life, I wonder still more. It seems to me now the first link in the chain of events and influences which led me to write this story.

I saw exactly how matters stood. The bather, not knowing the nature of the lake, had got out into the middle, where the river ran, and, being a weak swimmer, was unable to get out of the current.

Evidently Stephen knew what to do. He warily avoided the danger of allowing the young man — for I saw that he was a young man — to get hold of him, but, instead, gripped him firmly with his left hand and then struck out for the shore.

When they arrived, I saw that Stephen, although panting, was by no means exhausted; but the other was limp, and almost lifeless. To all appearances he must have been struggling a long while, and thus had spent all his strength. He recovered in a few minutes, however, and was soon able to talk.

“I was nearly done for,” he said. “The truth is, I ought not to have come alone. I’ve only just begun to learn to swim, and I had no knowledge of the lake at all.”

I saw that he was about twenty years of age, but was not so tall or so strong as Stephen, and there was an effeminate look about his face which was not pleasant.

“My clothes are in the boat-house yonder,” he continued. “I should be glad of them.”

I ran to the house in question, and brought them to him.

“You are sure you are better?” I heard Stephen say. “You won’t let me go with you to — to your home?”

“Oh, no, I’ll be all right; I was simply pumped out. It was lucky you came by just then. I doubt if I’d ever got out.”

“How did you think of coming here to bathe?” I asked.

“Oh, Colonel Tempest, at whose house I’m staying, has a — a perpetual permission to come on these grounds. Mr. Edgcumbe is glad to — to, in fact the two families are friendly.”

“I see.”

He did not seem at all troubled as to Stephen's condition, but was evidently anxious to put on his clothes quickly; neither did he seem to realize the peril from which he had been saved. When he was dressed, he said, —

“I must be careful about bathing there again. I'm a — a — much obliged to you for your kindness. By Jove! I wish I could swim like you.”

He nodded to us both, and walked away in the direction of “Bloomfields,” where I knew Colonel Tempest, a very proud aristocrat, lived. As for Stephen and me, we hurried back to the house as fast as we were able, neither of us speaking for some time. For my own part, I could not help being impressed with the fact that but for Stephen's timely arrival the young man would have been drowned, nor could I help thinking how coolly he regarded the benefit received. If Stephen had saved a dog upon whom he placed little value, instead of the stranger's life, he could scarcely have been less fervent in his thanks.

“You must be wet and uncomfortable, Stephen?”

“Yes, just a bit; but it's a good thing we went there. I don't mind the wetting.”

“He did n't seem over-thankful.”

“He did n't, did he?”

Arrived at the Hall, Stephen was shown to his room, where, having changed his clothes, he returned to the dining-room just in time for dinner.

“You've begun well, I hear,” said Luke Edgcumbe, as he entered the room.

“How, uncle?”

“Stimms tells me you have just returned from the park as wet as a drowned rat, and your feet and legs coated with mud. Surely that's a good beginning!”

Stephen was silent, but his face flushed while I told Mr. Edgcumbe what had happened.

His eyes softened a little, I thought, as I told of

his nephew's brave deed, but the cynical smile still distorted his mouth.

"What in the world led you to do that?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied Stephen. "I forgot what I was doing until I got him out."

"Well, you'll be cracked up as a hero to-morrow, if that's what you want. Fancy, it'll be a nice thing in the local paper: 'Gallant rescue from drowning! Heroism of the nephew of Luke Edgcumbe, Esq.!' I begin to feel elated;" and he laughed in a bitter sort of way.

"Was it heroism?" asked Stephen. "I never thought of it that way."

"Nonsense!" said his uncle; "but who was the fellow, by the way?"

I told him what had been told us.

"Phew!" said Luke Edgcumbe, "that puppy, eh? Well, your effort was scarcely worth while, Stephen. The world would have been none the poorer if he'd been drowned. But there, you've saved me the bother of a coroner's inquest, and all that kind of thing, anyhow."

"He said you knew Colonel Tempest," said Stephen, looking at his uncle.

"Yes, I know him, and he knows me. Colonel Tempest is an aristocrat, poor and proud. The chap you pulled out of the water is a distant relation. He, I hear, is pretty well off; that's why Tempest allows him there, I suppose. He also is proud, and a bit of a fool. You have n't saved a future Prime Minister, I can assure you, my boy."

"Still, I'm glad I did save him."

"Very likely you'll be sorry some day."

"Why?"

Luke Edgcumbe laughed bitterly.

"I have n't done many good turns in my day,"

he said. "You see, I don't pose as a philanthropist; but those I have done, I've been sorry for afterwards."

Stephen looked at him wonderingly.

"I'm not such an old man yet," said Luke Edgcumbe, "but I've been knocked from pillar to post a good bit, and I've been obliged to fight for my hand, or you'd have had no uncle. And I've found out this: if you do a man a good turn, he always has a grudge against you, and will serve you out in after years. The old Jews were wrong. People don't give evil for evil, they give evil for good; and it's always well to remember it."

He spoke half banteringly, half earnestly. I had heard that Squire Edgcumbe had very strange views about men and things; but as I had never heard him talk much before, I was unprepared for such sentiments. Being but a lad, however, I did not altogether realize the purport of his words.

"But there," he went on, "I must n't bother you with this kind of thing. You'll find out the truth of what I say before many years are over; and when you get to be my age, you won't feel so heroic about saving such a fellow as that."

"Why," cried Stephen, his eyes flashing half with excitement, half with wonder, "I should never have forgiven myself if I had n't done my best to get him out, whoever he'd been."

"Youth will have its illusions, I suppose," said the older man. "Each boy has his dreams, but they are only dreams. Well, I had them, and I quickly lost them. My advice to you is this: mind your own hand, don't be rash in throwing away your service, never expect gratitude for what you do, and remember that at bottom ninety-nine people out of a hundred will do you a bad turn if thereby they can do themselves a good one."

I hardly knew whether he spoke in jest or in earnest, neither did I really understand him: and I noticed that Stephen had a puzzled look on his face; but the conversation turned on other subjects, and when we went to bed that night he had seemingly forgotten what his uncle had said.

CHAPTER III.

DREAMS AND VISIONS.

The dreams of life are the promises of the future.

LORD ROSEBERY.

THE next morning, when we came down to breakfast, Luke Edgcumbe threw a note to his nephew.

“There,” he said, with a laugh, “that came from Bloomfields this morning. You see what a hero you are already. I wonder what idea the old Colonel has in his mind?”

I saw Stephen’s face flush as he read the letter, not altogether with pleasure, although there was an element of pleasure in it.

“Well, what do you say?” said Luke Edgcumbe.

“It is very flattering of Colonel Tempest,” he replied. “I should like to go very much, but I cannot consent to go to be thanked. It would seem like — like — being a cad.”

His uncle looked at him steadily. Evidently he was trying to read Stephen’s motives and thoughts, and was a bit puzzled.

“It may be best for you to go,” he said at length; “and yet I don’t know. You are such a Simple Simon, you’ll believe all they say to you.”

“Believe all they’ll say to me, uncle?”

“Yes.” Then he continued, with a hard laugh: “The truth is, my lad — and you may as well know

it at once — that in the world people have a selfish motive in what they do. Keep that clear before your mind, and regulate your conduct by it, and you will not be ‘Jewed;’ but if you don’t, if you trust people, you’ll be sorry in the long run.”

It was interesting to watch the two faces as the older man spoke. Stephen looked puzzled, and seemed to doubt his uncle’s words; while Luke Edgumbe had that sour, bitter expression which belongs to disappointed men. And yet he made an impression on me. He spoke like one who knew; for although I felt the hard coarseness of his nature, I could not help seeing that he was one who had tested men and things. A man ruled by pounds, shillings, and pence he might be, yet I knew instinctively that every statement he made he could substantiate by facts.

Looking back over the past now, I recognize, and can understand, what I only dimly felt then; and if I dwell on this part of my friend’s life, it is only because I feel that any history of his career would be incomplete which did not at least indicate the influence at work at this period. Still, it is not for me to write a polemic, but a story; at the same time I would like my readers to remember that the apparently uneventful and uninteresting periods of life are not the least important. There is but little stir or excitement when the sower goes forth with his bag of seed, yet he holds in his hands the germs of the harvest, with all its beauty and joy. School-hours are often dull and monotonous, yet school-hours must not be disregarded in studying the history of life.

“What do you mean?” asked Stephen.

“Just that, lad,” was the reply. “I do not warn you against Colonel Tempest in particular, but against the world in general. I know your father did not believe in this; well, so much the worse for him and

you. He simply killed himself for those shopkeepers and butchers ; he tried to help the miserable, gossiping old women who came to hear him. With what result ? He who is now in his grave ought to be well and strong, and as much as life can be enjoyed, which is very little, he ought to be enjoying it ; while his only son, who ought to be independent of the world, is left uncared for. What do all those dear people do ? Cry at his graveside, and vote a headstone, and then look out for a new pastor, — *dear people !*”

I saw Stephen’s lip tremble, and his chin become rigid ; evidently this was a shot which struck home.

“Your father was one of the few who trusted people, and was what the world calls unselfish. What’s the end of it ? A tombstone, and a meeting to discuss the merits of the next man whom they intend to criticise, abuse, and kill, all to satisfy their love for religion. But, there, I didn’t mean to talk that way this morning. You see Colonel Tempest’s letter. He is doing you a great honor, for he’s a member of the aristocracy, and what money he has is free, as much as money can be, from the pollution of trade. Thus you see that a visit to his house is a great thing. He will thank you in grandiloquent terms for saving his visitor, Mr. Ralph Hussey, from drowning, and you will be lionized generally ; what more can you want ? You see, Daniel Roberts is asked with you, so that he can come in for a share of praise.”

“I would rather not go,” said Stephen, quietly. “I don’t want to be thanked or lionized.”

“Still, I hope you will go,” said his uncle, in a different tone ; “indeed, I wish you to go. At present I don’t desire to offend Colonel Tempest, although I see through him. It is true, the world is full of cant and lies ; but we are in the world, and so must

keep up the farce. Come, now, I'll write that you will go."

"I would rather not, uncle."

"But I wish you. There, Daniel Roberts, read that letter, and see if you don't agree with me."

I took the letter and read it. It ran as follows :

MY DEAR EDGCUMBE, — Mr. Ralph Hussey, who, as you know, is a visitor and distant relative of mine, has told me of his danger when bathing in your lake yesterday, and of the gallant way in which a young gentleman, who, I have been given to understand, is your nephew, came to his rescue. I meant to have come over and thanked him personally this morning; but our young people are having a social gathering this afternoon, and will not spare me. It is the general wish, however, that your nephew and his friend join them in their afternoon festivities, and then we can thank him for his heroism. Forgive this unconventional note, and show your forgiveness by sending your young people without fail. I know you are generally busy; but if you have an hour to spare, I shall be glad if you will come with them. We can get away somewhere together, and have a bottle of wine and a cigar.

Very kind regards, as ever,

REGINALD TEMPEST.

BLOOMFIELDS, *July 15th*, 18—.

Inexperienced as I was, I felt the letter to be rather strange; but I said nothing, not knowing what Stephen's wishes might be. At the same time, I must confess to a very strong desire to go. No lad of seventeen is indifferent to a gathering of young people; and although I was a bit reserved, I enjoyed the pleasures of life as much as any one.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Luke Edgcumbe.

"I should like to go very much," I said.

Stephen looked at me, I thought, reproachfully; then he said, —

“But, uncle, I could not go to be thanked. If they would say nothing about yesterday, I should be glad to go; but I could not bear people coming and saying all sorts of foolish things, simply because I did what nobody could help doing.”

Again a look of suspicion flashed across Luke Edgcumbe's face, but he said musingly, —

“Very well, I have to go to Bloomfields this morning; I will tell Colonel Tempest what you said. No doubt he'll be willing to say nothing, so we may regard that as settled.”

Soon after this, breakfast concluded, and Luke Edgcumbe went into the library, while Stephen and I strolled out into the park, and made our way towards the woods that lay in the distance.

“That's fine, — going to Bloomfields,” I said.

“Is it?” he replied. “Well, I may enjoy it after a bit; but at present I don't feel much inclined that way. I can't help feeling lonely and sad sometimes. You see, I have n't anybody now who really cares about me. I don't think Uncle Luke hardly knew of my existence until a week or two ago, and it seems to me that he regards me as an incumbrance of whom he would gladly be rid; and I know nothing of my mother's relations. So you see how things are.”

“But, Stephen —”

“Yes, I know I'm a bit mean to talk like this, but it slipped out; and all that Uncle Luke said about the badness of people makes me feel all wrong. But there, I'll try and manage somehow.”

“I don't like cant, Stephen,” I said.

“No, Dan, I don't believe you do.”

“But I like you real well, Stephen; I wish you liked me as well.”

I can remember now how his fine eyes flashed as I spoke, and how his face expressed the fact that my words had touched him. After all, we were both

boys, and everything then was very young and beautiful to us. For a time we forgot Luke Edgcumbe's cynicism, and I think Stephen forgot his loneliness.

"Do you really like me, old chap?" he said.

"I do really," I said; and I think my voice trembled a little.

"And I like you real well, although we only met yesterday. You are not a flashy fellow, but I took to you in a minute. I was afraid you would not care for me, and I'm a bit sad, — I can't help it, you know; you would if your dad — died. My dad was — was everything to me."

He dashed the tears from his eyes in an impatient way, and then he went on: —

"But if you like me —"

"We'll be friends," I said.

He looked at me straight in the eyes without speaking, then, catching my arm, walked by my side in silence; but I noticed with joy that a brighter, gladder look than I had seen before came into his eyes; and soon after he began to talk in a boyish way.

"It's not pleasant to be dependent on one's uncle, is it?" he asked.

"No, I should not think so."

"It's a hard nut to crack, and I would not stay with him but for my father's wish; I cannot help seeing that he regards me as a bore."

"I don't think so," I replied; "he likes you as much as he can like anybody."

"He's a curious way of showing it, then."

"Isn't that because he's rather curious? I have a feeling that you'll find out that he means all right."

"Anyhow, I mean to pay him for everything I get from him. I am going to take a note of all he pays for me, — clothes, college fees, railway journeys, and all that sort of thing; then, when it's all over, I'm

just going to work like a galley-slave to pay him back, — every penny.”

“What are you going to do or be?”

“Well, I should like to be what my dad was; but I can't earn money to pay him that way, — parsons are generally poor. I might be a lawyer;” and he threw back his head proudly. “Then I'd become a great advocate, and, who knows? become Solicitor-General some time. Or I might be a doctor, and discover some secret of life, like Harvey. But I'd rather be an author, like Charles Dickens or Thackeray. I have n't decided yet, but I'm going to work like mad. I'll pay off Uncle Luke first, and then I'll have a free hand to do what I want.”

“But I've heard it's a hard thing to get on,” I said, rather dubiously.

“But I'm going to do it,” he replied confidently. “I'm just going to let people know what a chap who has grit in him can do. And I'm going to do it without any shady tricks. Bless you, Dan, I'll do it! Won't we have jolly times in those days, — say, what are you going to do?”

“I fancy I'm to be a doctor,” I said. “I hardly know, but I'm always dreaming about it.”

“A great doctor,” he said eagerly, “one to whom people come with the most mysterious diseases. I tell you, Dan, in those days we'll get all the young chaps together, and we'll give them a helping hand. We'll pick up the poor beggars who lie in the ditch, and help 'em on.”

He forgot all his sorrows in his dreams of the future; his lips parted as if in expectancy, his nostrils quivered with excitement, and his face flushed.

“Hurrah for the time that is to be!” he cried gayly, throwing his hat into the air. “Oh, we'll do it, Dan; we'll do it!”

“And where are we going to live?” I asked, catching his spirit.

“Oh! in London; there’s no place like London. Everybody goes there, — you see, it’s *the* great centre. I’ve only been once; I went a year ago with father. Oh, it *is* a place, is London. We’ll have a house close to Hyde Park, — overlooking it, in fact, — and we shall be close to everything. Yes, London’s the place.”

“And shall we be married?”

“Yes, oh, yes. I shall meet a beautiful lady some day. She may be poor, but she’ll be a lady, kind and gentle. And she’ll be a friend to poor people, and considerate of everybody; but she will love me supremely, and I — I shall love her above everybody.”

“Yes,” I laughed; “and what will she be like? What color will her hair be, and her eyes? Will she be English, or French, or Spanish?”

He laughed gleefully for a minute; then, in a more serious tone, showing that he was more in earnest than in jest, he said, —

“She’ll be English, I think; but I don’t know what color her hair and eyes will be, — it will not matter, you see — for — for I shall love her so. And you, Dan — *you* — are you going to get married?”

I shook my head dubiously, half in jest, half in earnest.

“I don’t know,” I said; “perhaps I shall fall in love with your beautiful lady.”

“No, that will never do. It can’t be. You see, she will be created for me, and I for her. Perhaps we may be poor when we are first wed, — I don’t know; but I shall have paid Uncle Luke, and then she will help me. I shall get a bit down sometimes, for I can’t help it, and then she’ll cheer me. When I was in London, I went to the Academy, and I saw a picture which was n’t talked about, but which I

liked a great deal. It was about a young author or artist, I forget which, whose work had been refused, and he was just giving up, you know; but his wife was by his side cheering him on. Perhaps it'll be like that with me. I don't think it will, for I'm going to get on at first; but that's what my beautiful lady would do, if it were so. And I shall work for her — like — like anything, and we shall be happy, right happy all the way along."

"And where does this beautiful lady live? Have you seen her yet?"

"No, not yet, and I don't know where she lives; but I shall see her some time, — oh, I shall see her right enough. Of course, other fellows will want her; but it will not matter, as soon as I come they'll have the 'right about face.' You see, she'll be mine — mine!"

"There's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream,"

says the poet; and as I remember Stephen Edgcumbe, who had barely entered on the threshold of manhood, telling me, not only of his dream of love that was to be, but his dream of the future generally, tears come into my eyes. But I must not say why now. If I tell his story faithfully, and if you, reader, have the patience to follow me to the end, I think you will understand my feelings.

"But I don't want to be selfish," he went on; "I want to make things better. I am going to destroy a lot of abuses that exist now. Charles Dickens, you know, removed or caused to be removed, a lot of evils. That's what I'm going to do. If I go into Parliament, I'm going to be the poor man's friend; if I'm a doctor, I shall fight against disease, against bad dwellings and unsanitary conditions; if I'm a lawyer, I shall fight against roguery; if a merchant, I

shall never rest until I've purified commercial morality; and if I am an author, I shall investigate all these things, and write about them. You'll see my books will sell like mad, and public opinion will be aroused. Oh, you'll see;" and he strode along as though he had already conquered the evils of life.

"That's a big programme," I said cautiously; "scores of men have attempted these things, and they say it is impossible."

"There's no such thing as impossibility," he cried. "Surely if Napoleon could conquer so much from purely selfish motives, an honest, unselfish man can do more. Oh, bless you, the people will gather around me when I begin. Dad always said I must be a reformer, because I was so impatient of injustice, and because I was such an enthusiast. I shall be glad to go to college, because one must learn; nobody can help the people without knowledge, and so I must work hard."

"Well, we shall see, Steve," I said, growing more familiar with him; "and if you become a modern Hercules, you will find none so glad as I."

"And I'm going to be, Dan. It was my dad's wish, and I would n't disappoint dad for anything."

"But you remember Hercules career, Steve. You remember when he was eighteen he met Pleasure and Virtue, each of whom wooed him, but he chose Virtue."

"Yes, I remember, Dan; and I remember, too, the first great labor that was imposed upon him by his rival, which, as you know, was to kill the lion that mortal weapons could not harm. And Hercules killed the lion with his own hands, and afterwards wore the lion's skin as armor. There's a meaning in that, is n't there? Oh, you'll see, Dan, I'll be a Hercules; and you — what will you be?"

"I don't know," I said dubiously; "I'm afraid I

have n't pluck enough for a Hercules. He had to go through so much."

"'He who thinks he can, can,'" he cried gayly.

And thus we talked of our future, as boys in a thousand ways have talked, and will talk, as long as boys continue to be boys. Perhaps when the training and spirit of our age have destroyed boyhood and girlhood, and caused children to become men and women without passing through that gladsome period, the dreams, hopes, ideals, and romances of life will go by the board. But while young people are allowed to be natural, the world will always be young and hopeful, fond and foolish.

At any rate, as Stephen Edgumbe and I roamed the countryside that morning, ran races, jumped ditches, and caught the spirit of "God's day," nothing seemed impossible to us. Life was full of joy, full of promise. The mystery of the future only added to its interest and joy, the hills of difficulty were all to be climbed, the dragons of life were all to be killed, and we, by and by, were to dwell in that land of poetry, song, and love.

Who is right, — the hopeful boy, to whom life is made beautiful by a thousand rosy hues, or the hopeless cynic, who says the world is all black, and that life's promises only exist to mock us?

That afternoon Stephen and I started for Bloomfields, the house of Colonel Tempest.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

“There's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream.”

BLOOMFIELDS lay two miles farther away from my home than Edgcumbe Hall; it was also situated in another parish, and was not in any way associated with the little town of Witney. It was because of this, I suppose, that I knew but little of Colonel Tempest or his surroundings. I had heard that the retired military officer was by no means rich, but very proud. The Tempest family was ancient and highly connected; the Colonel was a rigid Tory; he was also very particular about his associates; and, while affable with his equals, he treated those whom he regarded as of inferior social standing with a great deal of *hauteur*. In fact, I quite understood Luke Edgcumbe's remark, that only self-interest made the two families friendly. I knew, too, that the great jam manufacturer, although openly scornful of caste and family history, was eager for a place among the county families, and I knew that only his reputed wealth gave him the position he coveted.

However, these things did not trouble us as we made our way to the Colonel's villa. We found plenty to talk about, — boys always do, — and were

not at all impressed with the idea of visiting a man who prided himself so much on his name and lineage.

As we drew near to the house, we heard shouts of merriment ; and finally, when we came to the closely shaved lawn, we saw about a score of young people, who seemed to be about as happy and gay as young people can be.

Colonel Tempest met us, and greeted us with brusque heartiness ; especially was he affable with Stephen, who soon became a general favorite. This was scarcely to be wondered at, for Stephen was a marked lad wherever he went. A bright, handsome fellow, susceptible to the influences which surrounded him, clever at all sorts of games, and with a ready flow of wit and humor, no one could help liking him or admiring him.

Shortly after our arrival, Colonel Tempest, forgetful, I suppose, that I sat close beside him, entered into conversation with a middle-aged lady.

“Yes,” I heard him say, “he’s the nephew of Edgcumbe, the jam man. His father was a parson, a Dissenting parson, I believe.”

“Never ; why, he might have been a direct descendant from William the Conqueror.”

“Such is the case, however ; but his mother was a Temple of Elm Manor. There was a terrible row, I suppose ; but she would marry Edgcumbe. She died when this lad was born. The Edgcumbes are a respectable family, you know, — Quakers, I believe, who became Independents, and were on visiting terms with some very decent people. Some of these Independents are in several of the counties.”

“But the son of a Dissenting minister, Reginald !”

“We must be civil, Maria. He saved Ralph Hussey from drowning yesterday, and most likely he’ll have Luke’s quarter of a million. It’s jam money, it

is true, but it's good, for all that. Money's money anywhere."

"Yes," the lady sighed, "and he is handsome too; he'd be taken for an aristocrat anywhere."

"Temple blood, my dear, Temple blood," said the Colonel, grandly. "He was christened Stephen Temple: good name, you know; sound well anywhere, — Stephen Temple Edgcumbe. Where's Isabella?"

"She's playing tennis with him. Look, they are matched against Ralph Hussey and Laura. He plays well, doesn't he? I thought Dissenters didn't know about such games."

"Many of them are getting quite respectable, — going into Parliament and that kind of thing. You see, the Universities are open to them, — not that I agree with it, but we must take things as they are. There, young Edgcumbe and Isabella have won! They look well, don't they?"

The Colonel, who was of the usual type of retired military men, — thick gray moustache, closely cropped hair, a tall straight form, and a loud voice, — moved away, leaving me to watch the players.

Isabella Tempest, who was Stephen's partner in the game, was about eighteen, but looked older, and promised to be one of the beauties of the county. Physically, she was as much developed as most girls of two or three and twenty, and gave promise to become stout as she grew older. At that time, however, she seemed a full-blown young lady a little before her time, but was nevertheless very attractive. She had large, languishing brown eyes, red lips, a dimpled chin, and clear complexion. Her neck, which was bare, was long and white. She was tall, too, — quite as tall as the average man; but she showed no awkwardness, and her finely moulded figure gave no suggestion of the idea that she was overgrown.

Of the other members of the gathering I remember

nothing worth mentioning, save that young Hussey looked jealously towards Stephen, and did not regard him with a great deal of favor.

As the afternoon wore away, the young people became more friendly with me, and by and by I found myself talking with Isabella Tempest. She and Stephen had challenged any two in the party at tennis, and had in every case won easily. As a consequence, she was in high spirits, and disposed to be communicative.

"I do think your friend is just splendid," she said to me, "perfectly splendid."

I agreed with her very warmly.

"So unconventional, too. He does n't like to hear about saving Ralph Hussey yesterday, and blushed when I mentioned it; but he is just fine."

There was a certain gush about her way of talking that I scarcely liked; but she was praising my friend, and so I became drawn towards her. Besides, she was very handsome; and as in the spring-time of her life, and clothed in light summer attire, she walked by my side, I, lad that I was, could not help being fascinated.

"He has only just come to his uncle's?" she went on.

"Only yesterday."

"And he's staying at Edgcumbe Hall?"

"That will be his home. He's going to Cambridge, I expect, at the end of the vacation."

"Oh!"

"Stephen will study hard," I went on. "I expect he will be a barrister or doctor."

"But there will be no need for him to have a profession?" she said interrogatively. "He will — that is — I thought —" and she stammered — awkwardly, I thought.

"Oh!" I said, "Stephen is an independent fellow,

and means to work for himself. He'll be a great man some day."

She did not seem to care about this, and I saw that she soon began to grow tired of my company. But, then, I was nobody; and my father, although respected and fairly well to-do, was not regarded as of great importance. Besides, I could not somehow catch the spirit of this girl; her world, I felt, was different from mine, our tastes and feelings were not in common. I was not sorry, therefore, when I heard the sound of a gong which summoned us to a repast that was spread for us on the lawn.

We were very merry, I remember. The Colonel, and the lady with whom I heard him talking, and who was introduced to me as his sister, sat with us; and the Colonel told us stories of his adventures in India, and laughed at his own jokes with such heartiness that we were led to laugh too.

I could not help seeing, however, that although Stephen was much in favor with almost every one, young Hussey regarded him with evident dislike. It did not require much penetration to see that he was much enamoured with Isabella Tempest, while she, to all appearance, preferred Stephen's society to his. I saw, too, that when Stephen happened to venture a remark, Hussey tried to turn it into ridicule. But my friend seemed to dwell in enchantment that afternoon; he was not in the slightest degree disturbed, and, boy-like, forgot his troubles amidst his pleasant surroundings.

By and by the time came for us to go home, and the Colonel bade us good-night in his usual pompous way.

"I hope we shall see you again, Stephen Temple," he said grandly. "Your uncle and I know each other, and I was well acquainted with some of your mother's family years ago. That was before you were born!—hem!"

"Perhaps we shall see you on Sunday," suggested the Colonel's sister. "Your uncle comes to our church sometimes."

"But Edgcumbe is a Dissenter," said young Hussey; "you see, his father was a Dissenting parson, and naturally his son would go to the six o'clock prayer-meeting at the little Bethel at Witney. They are Primitive Methodists, and they groan splendidly."

I saw that this remark hurt Stephen; anything that slightly referred to his father aroused him immediately. Still, he kept his temper, and answered pleasantly, —

"Prayer-meetings should always be attended by those who need them most, Mr. Hussey. I should fancy you are contemplating such an exercise."

"But I hear you are too religious to go to church," said Hussey, with a sneer. "All you Dissenters are."

"That'll do, Hussey," said the Colonel, seeing the color rise to Stephen's face; then he went on grandly, "No doubt Stephen will go to church with his uncle now. I say nothing against Dissenters. No doubt that — that some of them are very respectable persons; but, then, it's not the — the proper thing of course."

"The proper thing?" said Stephen, in a questioning tone.

"No; that is — nobody of note goes to these places, None of the old families — that is, of the real old families. I'm very broad myself, and make it a point to be civil to Dissenters, for, as I said, some of them are quite respectable people. But when you come to the right thing to do, of course, there's no question about it. Ancient Church — established by law — bishops, priests, and deacons — laying on of hands — Apostolical succession, and all that; of course — well, nobody who is anybody doubts it. Many decent

people Dissenters — but quite deluded, and mostly of the lower orders.”

I saw that Stephen kept from speaking with difficulty, and I could not help feeling that this sort of talk was scarcely polite; neither would I have related it, were it not among the formative influences in my friend's life.

“I believe in religion,” went on the Colonel, “and I'm against all these rascals that would go in for destroying it; but I must have the right thing you know, for it's only the right thing that'll keep people in their places. But you'll see this in time;” and the Colonel nodded his head meaningly towards my friend.

I think Stephen would have spoken, but Isabella Tempest whispered something in his ear, and so the conversation came to an end, and we took our leave.

For the first five minutes after we left Bloomfields, Stephen did not speak; he seemed to be thinking of what had been said to him: but presently he began to talk.

“We've had a jolly time, Daniel.”

“I'm glad you have, Stephen.”

“Yes, the Colonel is a jolly old boy, is n't he? As for Isabel, is n't — she just — just handsome?”

“Very,” I said.

“She called me Steve, and I called her Bell,” he said, with a laugh. “Ay, and did n't we beat them at tennis!”

“Is she the beautiful lady you were telling me about this morning?” I said.

He laughed again, and then did n't speak for a few minutes.

“Good-evenin', gents.”

We turned, and saw a very talkative, precocious youth named Bill Best.

“Good-evening.”

“I work up to Bloomfields,” he explained. “I was there to-day when you was knackin’ the balls about. I’ve bin’ there now three year.”

“You have a good place, I suppose?” I said, for want of something better.

“Oh, middlin’. Plenty ov work, if that’s what you want. But th’ oull maaster, he’s a beauty!”

“That will do,” said Stephen, as Best went on to discuss his master. “We do not wish to hear what you have to say; besides, the Colonel would be very angry if he heard you.”

“I dessay he wud,” was the reply. “But you wudden’ tell him, — gents never do; and if you did, ’t would n’t matter so much, ’cause, you see, I’m off to ’Merica next week.”

“America, eh!”

“’Merica’s the place for money. Th’ oull Colonel is sa poor as a church mouse, for all his pride; and the maidens, too, be jist so bad.”

“Would you kindly mind your own business, and not talk about your master,” said Stephen, sharply.

“Oh, I don’t want to say nothin’ wrong,” said Best. “The Colonel is good to me, — a lot better than that Mr. Hussey is; but the maaster is terrible fond of Mr. Hussey, cause he’s sa religious. I hear as ’ow Mr. Hussey’s goin’ to be a passon. I believe a bit in religion myself; but I doan’t like his religion, I doan’t. He’ve been sayin’ all soarts of nasty things ’bout Mr. Edgcumbe ’ere, though he saved him from drownin’ yesterday. But I suppose we must make ’lowances for you gentry.”

“How do you know?” said Stephen, eager to know about what had been said, yet angry with himself for listening to such a fellow.

“Oh, sarvants knows most everything,” he replied. “But, bless you,” he continued, altering his tone as though he thought he had said too much, “I doan’t

main nothin' wrong! Rich people must 'ave their fling, else what's the use of bein' rich? I'm off to 'Merica next Monday, and then when I'm rich I sha'n't be Bill Best no longer, but Mr. Best. Then I shall be able to show off like the Colonel, and be able to go to church in a carriage, and church-goin' must be a different thing then. Ya see, the Colonel is friends with the passon, and that do make oal the difference to religion. Good-night, gents. I do live up to that cottage where you see the light."

Bill Best left us then, and went up the path whistling.

"Do you think what he said is true?" asked Stephen when he had gone.

"Possibly," I said; "the Colonel does not enjoy a very good name. But you must take off a good deal from what a fellow like Bill Best says. He's very fond of talking, and is said to be the greatest gossip in the parish."

"Anyhow, Isabella is n't like that," he burst out, after a little silence; "she's just fine, she is. I shall go to church on Sunday — I shall see her there."

I could not help laughing.

"You need n't laugh, Dan," he said, a little bit annoyed. "I — I only —"

"All right, Steve; I meant nothing."

"I mean to work right hard," he said, as if musing. "I shall make a name and fortune such as any one might be proud of — and then — then —"

He walked on so rapidly that I found it difficult to keep up with him.

"Then I shall make her love me."

I laughed again; but a look at his face in the light of the summer night checked me. I saw how earnest he was, how deeply he was moved.

"I'm only seventeen," he went on, "I know that;

but I'm older at seventeen than some people are at twenty. Besides, it'll take me three years to get my degree."

I was always rather old-fashioned, and I saw what was the matter with my new-found friend. Highly sensitive, impressionable, and full of romance, he had been fascinated by Isabella Tempest. A boyish love at first sight — a foolish fancy, perhaps, — a fond dream; but it was real to him, — as real as his own life.

"I think God must have sent her to help me in my trouble," he went on. "She is so beautiful, so good! When I told her about dad, and — and — the way we parted, the tears came into her eyes, Dan, and she looked so kind. Oh! she's not like the Colonel, she's as good as an angel. And she likes me, didn't you see?"

"I saw."

"Oh! it's a glad world, isn't it, in spite of its sorrow? And I'm going to work, and get on; and then — why, I shall be the happiest fellow in the world."

Thus Stephen Edgcumbe first began to dream the dream of love. Was it real? Do these fancies last? That morning he was a boy, with visions afar; now one of them began to take shape. But he was a boy, fond and foolish. What of the future?

CHAPTER V.

THE CYNIC'S RELIGION.

They eat and drink, and scheme and plod,
 They go to church on Sunday ;
 And many are afraid of God,
 And more of Mrs. Grundy.

FREDERICK LOCKER-LAMPSON.

WE did not see Luke Edgumbe that night ; but the following morning he met us at breakfast. "Well, Stephen," he said, "you look famous to-day. I think the air here must agree with you."

Stephen did indeed look well and happy. The sad, lonely look which possessed his eyes when we first met had taken flight, and in its place was an expression of eagerness and hope. The fascination of a boy's love had for a moment made him forget his sorrow. Not that he was unfeeling, and careless of his father's death ; I knew him better than that. His sorrow was only two or three weeks old, and he often had to fight hard against pain and loneliness ; but he was young, and change of scene, as well as new interests, did him good.

"And so you enjoyed yourselves ?" he continued, after watching his nephew's face closely for a few seconds.

"Famously, uncle," replied Stephen, his face flushing.

"Ah, well ! enjoy yourself while you may. Enjoyment does n't last long. You'll soon see that pleasure is a plant of short life."

"No, sir," replied Stephen, eagerly; "my life will, I hope, be full of pleasure."

"I thought so once, when I was your age. About four years afterwards, all that nonsense was knocked out of me. I found out, my lad, as you will find out, that youth is full of illusions. Nothing turns out as we imagine — nothing. You've read stories about the Dead Sea fruit, have n't you? Well, life is like that. When you first see it, it looks green, refreshing, beautiful; that's how life looks to youngsters. You like the Dead Sea fruit, and you find nothing but dust and bitterness. That's how life is when you test it. Nothing is real, everything is mockery. You will not believe me, I know; no lad will believe the truth, and perhaps it's best you should n't. The painted mask will be torn from the corrupt corpse soon enough; then you'll know I'm telling the truth. I tell you this that you may not be disappointed when your disillusionment comes."

As this was not the first time I had heard Luke Edgcumbe speak like this, I began to think more calmly about the purport of his words; but to Stephen they were evidently meaningless, at any rate just then.

"I feel it a right glad thing to live, uncle," he said; "and if you enjoyed yourself as Daniel and I enjoyed ourselves yesterday, you would n't speak like that."

"The time'll come when you can't enjoy yourself," said his uncle. "Now you see things through rose-colored glasses, and the future promises all sorts of glad things. Well, you'll find that the promises of life are all lies. Lies, my boy, lies."

Stephen Edgcumbe looked at his uncle in such a way that I knew his sensitive nature was influenced by what was said to him, and yet I felt that the inherent gladness and hope of his life were fighting against his words.

“You think I’m hard and cruel, don’t you?” said the older man, with a hard laugh; “well, I appear so, but I’m not. After all, it’s best we should see life as it is, and without its gay bunting. It’s as well you should know, Stephen, that, cloak it over as we may, the world is a miserable sort of a place, and life is a miserable affair. There, now, that’s blasphemy, I know, according to the cant of many; but men are beginning to recognize the truth, in spite of parsons and humbugs.”

“But, uncle, my father never felt like that.”

“No; your father was one of the dreamers of life, and would not see facts. If he had, he’d have been living to-day, and instead of killing himself for a few gossips and pious people, who regarded religion as a sort of insurance policy against hell, he would have seen that the best thing to do was to let people go their own way, and mind number one. But there, you don’t like this sort of talk, I know. Colonel Tempest was very kind to you, I suppose?”

“Very kind, indeed. A high old Tory, an aristocrat, and a bigoted Churchman, but very kind still.”

“He asked you to go to church, I suppose?”

“Yes. He said you often went of a Sunday morning.”

“Oh, yes; I go. I’m very religious, because — well, religion is the thing in these country places. I’m a Churchman, of course.”

“But you were brought up a Nonconformist.”

“Oh, yes. For years I gave up going to church. It did n’t matter when I was in London — religion as well as everything else goes by the board there. I lay in bed on Sundays mostly; you see, I worked so hard through the rest of the week. But when I got down here, and lived in a country house, I found that the proper thing was to go to church. I naturally thought of going to the Ebenezer Independent

chapel, but it would n't do. Independency is a very plebeian thing in this part of the country, and so I do the proper thing and drive to church. Bless you, I invite Mr. Sweeting, the vicar, here to lunch sometimes ; I find it pays. But religion, like everything else, must be served up properly, or it is regarded as spurious by such people as the Colonel."

"But surely, Uncle Luke, you don't mean that. My father has often told me about your boyish days. You did n't think like that then."

The older man opened his mouth to reply ; but he refrained from speaking, he seemed to be in doubt about something ; then he said, —

"Well, I shall go to church to-morrow, and you may as well go with me ; you will see the Colonel and his family there. He sings very heartily, does *Tempest*, and repeats the prayers with great fervor. It's quite a treat to hear him chant, 'Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners ;' he puts so much soul into it. You see, he generally has a row with some one through the week ; perhaps that accounts for it. Besides, being so free to confess his sins, and being so fervent in his repentance, he gets absolution, and then, no doubt, feels at liberty to have it out with the people who won't knuckle under to him through the coming week. Oh, the Colonel finds religion is a convenient thing, and respectable too. Therefore he's down on heretics. If you are religious, Stephen, you must belong to the State Church. That's the proper thing ; you get Apostolical succession, absolution, and the whole thing proper there ; besides which, anybody that *is* anybody in this neighborhood looks down upon the people who go to Ebenezer. And so you had better get rid of your prejudices, forget your training, give up your Nonconformity, and have a religion that's respectable."

Stephen did not seem to realize the jeering tone of his uncle's words, but, boy-like, burst out in a hot-headed way :—

“I shall never be ashamed of the principles my father held, and shall hold fast to them; but I don't believe Church people are as you say. Father was friendly with the vicar at home, and I was friendly with a lot of Church people.”

“Your father friendly with the vicar, eh? Ah, yes; Nonconformity is strong there, and the vicar would find it best; but the Church is everything here, my lad. But there, we'll say no more about it for the time.”

We saw no more of Luke Edgcumbe that day, and Stephen and I had a long tramp through the fields. We did not talk much; he was evidently thinking about his visit to Colonel Tempest's house the day before, for his eyes often wandered in that direction, and he blushed scarlet when I mentioned Isabella Tempest's name.

“I shall see her to-morrow,” he burst out once, after there had been a silence between us for a long time.

“See whom?” I asked.

Then he became confused, and stammered, not knowing what to say.

The next morning we drove very solemnly to St. Endellion parish church. I had always been in the habit of going to Witney church with my father, and so my visit to St. Endellion was a somewhat new experience.

On our way there we heard some one shouting in a very loud, angry voice, so loud indeed that Luke Edgcumbe told the coachman to stop, that we might understand what was the matter.

“Ah, you villain!” cried the voice. “I'll make it hot for you. Only picking a few honeysuckles, eh? D—— you, what do you mean by picking honey-

suckles on a Sunday, and on my land too? But I know you, young Tucker, you thieving, Sabbath-breaking rascal. Your father's worth a few pounds, and I'll pay him out for going to law with me because my sheep got into his turnip field. You'll see. A — h — h — h!"

"Who's that?" cried Stephen. "Surely I've heard that voice before."

"It's the Colonel on his way to church," said Luke Edgcumbe; "he's preparing for the service. Exercising his voice a bit; getting into the proper mood for the imprecatory psalms."

In a few minutes we overtook the Colonel's carriage, where we saw the irate soldier and his three daughters. He greeted us very warmly; and as our conveyance drew up by the side of his, we shook hands all round like old friends.

"Glad to see you on the way to church with your uncle, Stephen Temple," the Colonel said pompously; "glad you are beginning right."

"You are very regular at church, Colonel," said Luke Edgcumbe.

"Never miss, sir, never miss, rain or shine. Haven't missed once for twenty years. Don't go of a night, but always of a morning. People are getting sadly neglectful about religion, Edgcumbe. I'm down on that kind of a thing myself. Keep up religion, I say, or the country's done for. I was the same when I was in the service. I was always particular about the men being on church parade. No leave of absence then, sir; by George! no, sir. I always did my best to keep the soldiers religious."

"Yes, I've always noticed your earnestness in that direction," said Luke Edgcumbe.

"Always particular about it. The same with the Communion. I never miss. I was tempted to once, about three years ago. Sweeting was away, and he'd

got a fellow to take service for him, who was chaplain for our regiment when I was in India. I had been at daggers drawn with him for years, and we hated each other as well as two men could. Well, as I said, I was tempted to stay away from the Communion that Sunday; but no, sir! I would n't speak to the beggar when I saw him outside of church, but I did n't miss. Drive on, John; we shall be late if you don't, and I must n't be late at church. I shall be seeing you again, Edgcumbe."

The man drove on, while Luke Edgcumbe gave a laugh. Stephen, however, did not pay much attention to the conversation; his eyes were feeding on the beauty of Isabella Tempest, with all the passion of a boy lover. I discovered in after-years, however, that the Colonel's views were not without effect on his after-life.

The service passed without anything of note happening. Naturally our eyes were drawn towards the Bloomfields pew, which was just in front of Luke Edgcumbe's, and I was struck with the reverence which each one of the Tempest family manifested. The Colonel especially was exceedingly devotional. He turned his face towards the east, and bowed his head at the name of Jesus Christ when repeating the "Belief," with as much fervency as the clergyman himself. He read the lessons, too, with no small amount of impressiveness; and as one of them was a part of the Sermon on the Mount, I was rather curious how it would strike him. But he read it through in his pompous military style, and a casual observer would think he believed it.

"Ye have heard it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

"But I say unto you, *that ye resist not evil*; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

“And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.”

And so on to the end, after which the Colonel went back to his seat, as though he had conferred a favor on humanity at large, and given dignity to religion.

I saw, too, that a wondering look came into Stephen Edgcumbe's eyes during this part of the service; but evidently he was too intent on watching Isabella Tempest to be much impressed by anything around him.

When we came out into the churchyard, Luke Edgcumbe congratulated the Colonel on the way he had read the lessons, which compliment that gentleman took very graciously, after which the “Jam Manufacturer” invited him and his family to come to Edgcumbe Hall to dinner one day during the week.

“I'll invite Sweeting too,” he said, “and then we shall be a nice party.”

The Colonel agreed to this, and we rode away towards Edgcumbe Hall. Arrived there, Luke Edgcumbe asked us how we had enjoyed our morning, and what we thought of the service, to which neither of us replied.

“Tempest does the reading very well, does n't he?” said Luke; “he's quite a pillar of the church. I must say, however, that it was a bit strong after what we heard him say to Tucker, who had been picking honeysuckles in his field. But then, you see, he got absolution all right.”

“It makes church-going a bit curious,” Stephen suggested.

“Just a bit, does n't it? But then it's the proper thing, you know. Besides, things are the same everywhere. When I first left home as a lad, I went to London, as you know. I learnt the trade of gro-

cer, did I ever tell you? That is, I worked a year or two without pay to pick up the business. My employer was a religious man, a Baptist by persuasion. He was a man who went to prayer-meetings at seven o'clock in the morning, was very unctuous at family prayer; spoke to us very often about the condition of our souls; sat in the rostrum while the pastor was preaching, and all that sort of thing; but for slippery dealings in business I never saw his equal. As for the way he treated his shop assistants, well, he'd match the old slave-owners. But then, you see, his religion paid him. He had all the custom of the elect, and was very strong in quoting Scripture to them at the right time. He warned us all against bad habits, the deceitfulness of riches, and so on, and died leaving a big fortune behind him. But he left a good sum of money to pay off the chapel debt, and the pastor preached a funeral sermon, in which he gave an outline of the career of the departed saint. It was wonderful, I tell you; I did n't recognize him from the pastor's description. I was thinking of the lies he told about his goods, of the prices he charged for them, and of the way he ground down the assistants. Still, he was a very religious man, very, and his religion paid him. As he said to us many times, 'Religion's a werry profitable thing, young men; and whatever else you do, stick to your religion!'

"But religious people are not all like that," said Stephen.

"No?" said the uncle; "well, at bottom we are all pretty much alike. We try and make best of both worlds; of course, some do it in one way, and some in another; but then our motives are nearly the same. My old Baptist master talked about his religion in a different way from the Colonel, and each would send the other to hell without hesitation; but

at bottom, I would n't give a pin to choose between them."

Luke Edgcumbe gave expression to these sentiments without the slightest hesitation, and spoke with that calm assurance which made us believe him in spite of ourselves. Still, I felt that Stephen, reared as he had been, was bewildered by his uncle's cynicism, and again he broke out hotly.

"But, uncle," he cried, "if what you say is true, you destroy what seems brightest and best. You make Christianity a mere mockery."

"Do I?" laughed Luke. "Well, it does n't matter. All the world, Stephen, follows after that which pays. Some people are religious. Why? Because they believe it pays. Others, again, are not religious. Why? Because they don't believe it pays. It's all a matter of selfishness, my lad; all a matter of what will pay. Still, I'm like the Colonel. Uphold religion, I say; uphold the Church, it's a very useful institution."

"And you go to church because it's useful?"

"Just that."

"And why to church rather than to chapel?"

"For the very simple reason that the Church pays best. You see, in this part of the country, old associations, old prejudices, custom, and popular feeling, all say you must be religious. Well, which religion must it be? That of the Ebenezer Independents or that of the Parish Church? In reality, there's not a toss-up between them; but then, on the whole, the Colonel and his clique are the people one would rather have to do with than the grocers and shoemakers who go to Ebenezer. In fact, just here the Church is respectable; it's regarded as *the thing*. The clergyman is a gentleman, and as my money gives me an *entrée* among the so-called gentlefolk, I patronize the most respectable church."

“But Jesus Christ was a carpenter.”

“Now, now, my boy, don't talk that way. What do religious people know or care about Jesus Christ? Why, if they started to follow Him, the whole thing would come to the ground. But they don't; they associate certain ideas of their own making around His name, and call it His religion. Nobody believes in Christianity nowadays; it's all a matter of what pays best. Why, Tempest read the lessons in church this morning. Did he believe what he read? When I was silly, I bothered a bit about these things; I don't now. I know what a humbug the whole thing is, so I keep cool. Jesus Christ was a plebeian, we know that. Colonel Tempest, and Sweeting the parson, and Mason, and Hanson, and all these landed gentry, bow their heads when they come to His name in repeating the 'Belief;' but will they associate with any one of the same social standing as Jesus was? No; keep the poor people in their places, is their motto. Our family is a pretty respectable one of Puritan descent, but the whole lot would cut me but for my money. You will understand these things as you get older.”

We rose from the luncheon-table, at which this conversation took place, and Stephen and I went out into the garden. As we walked down the drive, we came across the old gardener, who, in Sunday costume, was looking lovingly on the flower-beds.

“Good-arternoon, gents.”

“Good-afternoon.”

The old man looked eagerly up into our faces, as though he wanted to understand something before speaking.

“You went to church this mornin'?” he said.

Stephen nodded.

“Maaster was makin' mock of religion, was n't he?” said the old man, hesitatingly.

He looked so earnestly at us that Stephen did not resent what might seem a liberty,

“Because,” continued he, “all they mocking things he do say 'bout religion, and 'bout people, pious people, and sich like, is all wrong, all lies. Everybody es n't bad, and religion es real;” and he walked away as though he had relieved his mind of a burden.

To me there was something so helpful and real in the man's words that I was glad we had met him, especially when Stephen told me that there was an expression on his face which reminded him of his father.

CHAPTER VI.

RALPH HUSSEY'S GRATITUDE.

Ye'll try the world fu' soon, my lad,
 And Andrew, dear, believe me,
 You'll find mankind an unco' squad,
 And muckle they may grieve thee.

BURNS.

“YES, Mr. Roberts, I like my nephew very much.”
 “He seems a young fellow to be proud of,”
 replied my father.

“So far, he's been spoiled in his bringing up,” replied Luke Edgcumbe; “that is, he's been brought up to be trustful, to believe in people, to expect sincerity and truth. Otherwise he's a fine lad. He's sharp, although as yet he does n't say much. But his face expresses what he does n't say. With proper training he'll make his mark in the world.”

“Yes, I should think so; but you'll see that he has a good education?”

“Yes; and I intend giving him a chance in life. I'm going to tell him what to expect. I'm going to prepare him for the deceit and hollowness of life; I'm going to destroy the rosy tints in the glasses through which he sees the world; I'm going to let him know now what the world is, so that he may go into it with his eyes open. You see, he's an impressionable sort of lad, and unless he's taken in hand now, he'll throw away his life by taking on with some scheme for reforming the masses, and all that kind of thing. That must n't be. There's no reason

why, with a good education, and a big brain, as I'm sure he has, he may not become renowned as a statesman, or something of that sort. Start him right, and he can soon feel the pulses of the people, and know what to do to become a popular favorite."

"And do you think you'll do the best thing for him by taking that course?" said my father.

"Of course I do; and you?"

"I think that's the way to ruin him."

"No. Mark you, I don't believe, when you've sucked the orange of life dry, you get much for your pains; I've found out that. But of this I'm sure: the only way to get on, and to make life bearable, is to go into the world with your eyes open. The whole business of life is n't worth a rush, but we are all, nevertheless, prejudiced in its favor; and so my nephew will, like every one else, want to live. But if he's to get on, if he is n't to be beaten from pillar to post, bruised by this man and beaten by the other, he must have his eyes open; he must know that the world will overreach him if it can, and he must prepare to match the world."

"Then you believe that the world is bad?"

"I believe just what I see. I know the world; I've lived in it; I've been knocked about as much as but few; and I've been led to see this: that nobody's to be trusted, that at bottom nine-tenths of us are liars and cheats, and that everybody's selfish to the heart's core."

"In that case life's not worth the living?"

"No."

"Then why live?"

Luke Edgcumbe laughed.

"Take care," went on my father; "what seems true to you in a superficial sort of way may become really true to your nephew. He may *really* believe in what you say."

“I mean he shall.”

This conversation was repeated to me years after by my father, when we were trying to solve one of the great problems of my life. He little thought at the time, however, that what he had said to Luke Edgcombe would really come to pass.

Two days passed, and Stephen became eager and excited. The truth was, the Colonel and his family were coming to dine the next day, and my friend was longing for an opportunity of seeing Isabella Tempest. Every man who has been a boy in love will understand his feelings. They will know all his hopes, fears, and desires. Everything told him of Isabella. The birds sang about her, the sun shone for her, the winds sighed about her, the bloom of the flowers reminded him of the bloom on her cheek. To him she was a goddess, without a fault; while the Colonel, her father, became a sort of glorified being, because he was her father.

On the Wednesday evening we were walking together through some fields which skirted a wood, I trying to get my friend to talk, while he with dreamy eyes looked away towards Bloomfields, which lay in the near distance. We kept near the wood; and presently Stephen, thinking we were alone, began to talk about the subject nearest his heart. He had only spoken a few words, however, when we heard a rustling noise in the hedge, and a minute later a heavy, strongly built youth of nineteen or twenty jumped into the field. I instantly recognized him as Ned Tucker, the farmer's son, whom the Colonel had abused so soundly on the previous Sunday morning.

“I s'poase you know you are trespassin'?” he said surlily.

“No,” said Stephen.

“Well, you be,” replied Tucker. “I s'poase you think you ken go where you likes: but you kent.

This is my father's field. Now git out quick, or you 'll be kicked out."

I knew this Tucker to be a quiet sort of a fellow, and wondered at his speaking in such a way.

"Yas, kicked out!" he repeated, going up to Stephen like one in a rage, and taking no notice of me.

Stephen's eyes flashed angrily, but, turning to me, he said, "Come on, Dan, let's get out; but I thought this was a public foot-path."

"But I'll pay you out. It was you who put the Colonel up to gittin' me into trouble about trespassin'. Oh, I knaw all about ya, and now I've got ya, I mean to let you knaw that I'm not a chap to be played with."

"Come away, Stephen," I said, "and not mind what he says."

"Mind yer own bisness, Mister Lawyer Roberts's son," cried Ned. "I'm a-goin' to fight with this snapper for puttin' Colonel Tempest agin me."

I saw that Stephen was getting into a passion; and I was sure, too, that Ned Tucker was playing a part.

"Ah, you 'm a coward, Mister Edgcumbe! a coward! Aw! aw! But I'll let ya kuaw;" and he struck Stephen's face with his open hand.

I caught Stephen's arm, for he was about to return the blow, but he shook me off angrily.

"No, Dan," he cried; "I'll punish the beggar for what he says."

"Come on!" cried Ned. "You 'm two to one, so you 'll see fair play on your side;" and he threw his coat on the ground, and began to roll up his shirt-sleeves.

I was a quiet, reserved sort of lad; but still I was an English boy, and I no longer tried to hold Stephen back.

“Go at him, Steve,” I cried, “and beat him.”

“Ay, let him beat me if he can,” cried Ned; “and if he do, I’ll forgive him.”

I thought I heard a noise among the bushes on the other side of the hedge, but I was too excited to pay any attention to it. Stephen, I saw, was maddened at the way Tucker spoke, and was eager for the fight; but when they had both stripped, I was fearful for my friend. Ned Tucker’s arms were large, brown, and brawny, while Stephen’s were comparatively slight and attenuated. His chest, too, looked flat and weak compared with his opponent’s. But his eyes flashed fire, his nostrils quivered, his mouth moved nervously.

“Don’t let him get to close hugs,” I whispered. “He’s as strong as a horse.”

“The brute!” cried Stephen, passionately, “how dare he strike me! He shall be sorry for it — he shall.” Then he turned towards Tucker, who, smiling and confident, waited to begin.

They were not so unevenly matched as I had at first supposed. Stephen, although slender in form, was yet well made, and I afterwards discovered that he excelled as a gymnast and cricketer at the school which he had just left. His arms, although thin, were wiry and firm, and the springy movement of his body which I had noticed at our first meeting stood him in good stead now. I saw, too, that, although he was very angry, he did not lose his head but watched Tucker keenly. On the other hand, however, Tucker was three years older than my friend, and his daily avocation tended to develop his physical strength.

In my eagerness for Stephen’s victory, I forgot the cause of the quarrel, and at every point he gained I cheered him on. If Tucker had calculated on an easy victory, he was disappointed, and he soon

saw that he had to exert all his strength to be master.

"Aw!" he cried, "aw! Tes like that, hi! I did n't think you could do that;" and then he became more careful.

Half an hour later Stephen and I walked away together, Stephen bruised, bleeding, and stunned; while Tucker, whom he had just left, was also bruised and bleeding, but, as he declared, was ready for a dozen more rounds, if needs be.

"How are you, old man?" I said, as, holding his arm, I walked by his side.

"All right now, Dan; the dizzy feeling is gone. Let me go back, and I'll beat him yet."

"No, Steve," I said. "But wait here a minute; there, sit down on this bank. I'll be back again directly."

I jumped over the fence, and, running along among the hazel bushes which formed the undergrowth in the wood, came near to the spot from whence Ned Tucker had appeared. I did this because, as I became cooler, and was able to connect matters, I saw that the whole matter was preconcerted. I felt sure that Tucker, usually a harmless fellow, would never pick a quarrel unless there were some reason other than that which appeared. I remembered the look which Hussey had bestowed on Stephen as we left Bloomfields a few days before, and I thought of the noise among the bushes while Ned sought to pick a quarrel with Stephen.

As I drew near, I found that my surmises were right, for Hussey was speaking with Ned, and congratulating him on his victory.

"I would n't a done it if I'd a know'd, Mr. Hussey," he said. "He id n't the sort of chap you said at all; he's a right nice chap, and ded fight fair and straight. Ef he'd a bin three or fower year older, he'd

a licked me. But there, I've done it. Give me the suvrin."

"I say, Ned, I'm right pleased with you; but you'll have to wait a bit. I'm hard up just now."

"No, sir; I'm not a goin' to wait."

"But you must; I have n't got it."

"Then give me yer watch to kip till you get it."

"Let you have my watch! I'd like to see myself do that."

"The suvrin or the watch!" cried Ned.

"What do you mean?"

"Jist this. I've done this dirty job for you on promise of a suvrin. I've blacked both his eyes as I promised, so that he caan't hev dinner with the com-p'ny to-morra, and so that it c'n git abroad as 'ow ee've bin fightin', and got bait. I've done that for a suvrin, and for a thing or two besides. Now you must give me the watch or the suvrin; ef you don't, I goes to his uncle and tells ezackly how things be, but not afore I've lerruped you. I c'n do that aisy. You bean't half the man ee es! I thought I was dailin' with a gentleman, I ded."

I could see Ned meant what he said, and Hussey saw it too, for he mused a bit like one in doubt; then he said, as though a thought had struck him, —

"Oh, I won't cheat you, Tucker; you've served me well; and, stay, I have two half-sovereigns which I had forgotten."

"I thought you 'ad," grunted Ned. "Tip 'em over. That's it. Well, a suvrin's a suvrin, but I wudden lick a chap like that again for five ov 'em. Good-night, Mr. Hussey."

"Good-night. Mum is the word, Ned."

"Mum," replied Ned, and went away.

As I went back, I pondered over what I had heard; but I determined not to tell Stephen, at any rate just then. I wanted to think more about it.

Stephen was walking to and fro, muttering to himself, as I came up, and I knew that his sufferings were more mental than physical.

"Where have you been, Dan?" he asked.

"I went back to get something," I answered evasively.

"What maddens me," he cried, "is that I should have been brought into a row just now. My eyes will both be black by to-morrow — when — when — you know!"

I did not reply, and we walked together for a few seconds without speaking.

"Do you think he wanted to fight because of what he said?" he blurted out presently.

"No; that was a blind," I replied.

"How do you know?"

"I do know," I said. "There's something behind it. Why should Tucker want to pick a quarrel with you? He's a quiet, harmless sort of a fellow, not the sort to go on like that. He was set on, and we, like fools, took the bait."

"He seemed to take no notice of you."

"No; it was you. I'm not your uncle's nephew, and Miss Tempest didn't smile on me the other day."

"But — but — Dan, I ——"

"Wait a bit, and we'll find out, old man. Let me think a bit."

We walked on in silence again; then I said, —

"What about your uncle?"

"I shall tell exactly what happened."

"Everything?"

"Everything, that is — I don't know about — yes, I'll tell him everything."

When we got back, Stephen did as he had said. He related the whole circumstance to his uncle, and repeated every word which Ned Tucker had said.

“I suppose you know you are a fool,” was Luke Edgcumbe’s remark, after several searching questions.

“Sir!”

The older man looked at his nephew, and laughed.

“My lad,” he said, “nothing’s worth fighting for like that. You’ve been a dupe in this case; but if you hadn’t, you were a fool to fight that fellow. However, boys will be boys, and you don’t think that the fellow who is at the bottom of this is paying you out for a good deed you’ve done him.”

“What do you mean?”

“There, that’ll do. You *will* be a fool, I suppose; but you can’t appear to-morrow.”

“No.”

“Well, many nice things will be said about you. You see, you are the nephew of a man who’s made money. Every one will ask about you, and be anxious for your welfare. When I was poor, no one ever asked for me; since I’ve made money, it’s surprising the number of friends I have. Still, the sham of life must be kept up. There, go and get your head bathed, and I’ll keep your secret and tell lies about you.”

Stephen was getting accustomed to his uncle’s method of talking, and ceased to wonder at it; but he was very angry when, on looking at his face in the glass, he realized that he would have to carry the marks of his encounter for several days.

The following evening a number of people came to dinner, and with them Colonel Tempest, his three daughters, and Ralph Hussey. The latter no doubt felt that his secret was unknown, and he could therefore be present.

Many inquiries were made about Stephen when Luke Edgcumbe remarked that he was confined to his room and unable to appear, and many flattering remarks made.

"Fine fellow that nephew of yours, Edgcumbe," said the Colonel, pompously; "fine fellow! Pass for a prince anywhere. Good old blood in his veins. Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No, he'll be up in a day or two."

"By Gad! I hope so. All my girls think the world of him."

"Yes," said the young ladies, "he is delightful, and so handsome."

Shortly afterwards I saw Ralph Hussey and Isabella talking earnestly together, and I was jealous for my friend.

There was nothing worth relating that happened during dinner, and I was exceedingly glad when it was time for the guests to depart. The Colonel talked pompously of his religious views, his political convictions, and his army experiences; the Vicar said ditto to everything that everybody else said; while Luke Edgcumbe laughed at them both, although they were unconscious of it. Again and again I noticed that they tried to veneer over the fact that he had made his money by jam, while he ostentatiously flouted the fact before their eyes. He gave expression to things, too, which I thought the Vicar would have indignantly refuted; but I saw at length that jam money was regarded of greater importance than anything else.

Before the party broke up, I drew Ralph Hussey aside and spoke to him.

"I have discovered your part in relation to Ned Tucker's behavior yesterday," I said. "I know why he sought that quarrel with Stephen. I saw you pay him a sovereign for his work."

"What do you mean?" he said, with a guilty look in his eyes.

"Just that," I replied, "and I shall tell him of your gratitude."

That night I thought it best to tell Stephen what I knew, and the conversation which had passed between Hussey and Tucker. He listened very attentively ; and when I had finished was silent for some time. Then he broke out, as if in astonishment :

“ And yet I saved his life the day I came here ! ”

CHAPTER VII.

THE CYNIC'S VIEWS ABOUT PROFESSIONS.

Others mistrust and say, "But Time escapes :
Live now or never!"
He said, "What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has for ever."

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE days passed swiftly by, and Stephen recovered from his conflict with Ned Tucker, and paid two or three visits to Bloomfields. A very hearty invitation was sent to him; and as it included one for me, I went with him.

"Come when you like, my boy," said the Colonel, "and be jolly. I sha'n't be home always, but the young people will; and, by Gad! I don't suppose you'll care much for me when they are around."

As may be imagined, this made Stephen very happy, and each time he went his ardor increased for Isabella Tempest. When he was with his uncle, he could not help being a bit depressed and sad; but when with this proud country beauty, his boyish dreams were realized, and his happiness knew no bounds. If for an hour or two he was impressed with Luke Edgcumbe's sombre views of life, and led, in spite of himself, to catch his cynical spirit, when he reached Bloomfields all was different. Then all was brightness. Ralph Hussey's covert sneers troubled him not a bit; and although, boy-like, he was jealous of the friendship that existed between him

and Isabella, he never referred to the episode with Tucker. He lived in Arcadia; and although no formal love-making passed between them, I knew they understood each other, while I saw that the Colonel smiled, and spoke very pompously and kindly to the "dear boy, Stephen Temple."

Although I went often to see my father, we were much together, and I was glad that each day our friendship became stronger.

At last September came, and, knowing that the time of our separation drew near, I wondered what plans Luke Edgcumbe had made concerning his nephew. Towards the middle of the month he called us both in the library, and began talking with Stephen.

"Have you made up your mind what you are going to be, Steve?" he asked.

"Hardly, uncle; neither had dad quite decided when he died."

"Well, it's about time now, isn't it?"

"I shall be very glad to decide."

"Your father has decided about you, Daniel. He told me yesterday that he was going to send you to Edinburgh to study medicine."

"Yes, sir; I believe that's settled," I replied.

"There's but little chance in medicine without influence," he replied. "If you can get the right side of some old fool who has made a name by prescribing pills for Lord Somebody, you may get on; or if, by some stroke of luck, you can get your name associated with a celebrity, no matter how big a fool you may be, you'll soon be able to sport a carriage and pair."

"I hope to rise by ability and merit."

"My lad," he said, "if ability and merit are all the capital you have, you'll eat small dinners. No; you must get boomed somehow, if you're to get on. However, no doubt you'll do your part. You are

shrewd, although you are quiet. You're a son of your father, and I think he can trust you. But, Stephen, what about you?"

"I hardly know, uncle; have you thought of anything?"

"Yes; I've got a list of professions here. You can get on in most of them if you keep your eyes open, and are willing to pay the price. I'll read them out. The first I've got down is the profession of the law. What do you think of it?"

Stephen was silent.

"There are many great names associated with the law," said Luke Edgcumbe; "but I've my doubts about your power to get on in it."

"Why?"

"Well, you've got a conscience. Of course you'll lose its fine edge in a few years; but, at present, I'm afraid of you. A man who's going to succeed as a lawyer must have no scruples; and, to be honest with you, I don't think you'll be ever sufficient of a liar to make any headway."

"But, uncle!"

"We are talking business, lad, and we must have no moral claptrap. I'm a man of the world; I've had scores of lawsuits, and I never knew one won yet, without — well — giving up a strict regard for the truth. The question is, are you sufficiently a smart fellow to get on? Mark you, there are liars and liars, and the great point of a clever lawyer is to make lies seem like truth, and to tell them in such a way as not to be found out till the case is won. A lawyer is judged by his success, not by his cleverness. Do you think that, as a barrister, you could be eloquent about, and plead for, people whom you knew to be corrupt and in the wrong?"

"I'm sure I could not."

"Then we'll cross off that for the time. I'll put

a remark opposite that: '*Not enough of a liar.*' The next profession I have is that of the Church. What do you think of that?"

A thoughtful look came into Stephen's eyes, and his lip trembled.

"You'll never get on in that, I'm afraid," said Luke Edgcumbe.

"I'm not worthy of it, I'm afraid," said Stephen.

"Bah! you are too worthy."

"But how can ——"

"There are two or three things essential, if a man is to get on in the Church," interrupted Luke.

"And they?"

"Well, first, there is influence. It is true, you can buy a living — 'a cure for souls' they call it, don't they? There, as elsewhere, money can do much; but, you see, you are poor. I'm going to give you an education; after that you'll have to shift for yourself."

"Thank you, uncle."

Luke Edgcumbe looked at his nephew, with a curious expression on his face. Tenderness, mistrust, grimness, cynicism — all were expressed there.

"Well, then, in the Church you can't get on unless you are a fool and have money. You are not a fool, and you have no money. Besides, you are not yet enough of a hypocrite; but that will come in time, no doubt."

"A hypocrite, uncle, a hypocrite — a minister?"

"Absolutely essential, my boy. But let's look at it fairly. Suppose you go into the Church. You, of course, swear to the Thirty-nine Articles, although you don't believe in them; you get a curacy, we'll say, in some country parish. Sometimes the vicar will let you preach; but, as I said, you are not a fool, and will probably preach better than the vicar. With what result? The people will begin to praise you, and you'll be sent about your business."

“ But I should —— ”

“ Well,” went on Luke Edgcumbe, without minding his nephew’s interruption, “ supposing you get a living, the question is, are you enough of a hypocrite to get on ? ”

“ Hypocrite ! ”

“ Hypocrite. Nobody believes in Jesus Christ really. If the parsons preached the Christianity of Christ, all the churches would be emptied. You are at present predisposed in favor of telling the truth ; if you did, you’d die a martyr. The prophets of olden time did, John the Baptist did, Jesus Christ did.”

“ Well, if I were a martyr for the truth, I should be —— ”

“ A fool,” interrupted Luke. “ Nobody wants the truth or expects it, and would only despise you for what you’d done.”

“ No,” cried Stephen ; “ the people heard Christ gladly.”

“ And crucified Him. But then we are all as we are made, mean enough, the best of us, and we must take life as it is, and people as they are. Nothing in life is worth doing unless it pays. Nobody ever does anything unless it pays, except a madman, or a fool here and there.”

“ But what of the missionaries who go away into foreign lands ? Does it pay them to leave everything and go away ? ”

“ Of course it does. The men who go as missionaries are better off there than at home. They have a fine time, a great deal better than cleverer men in England.”

“ They suffer danger, and face death oftentimes,” cried Stephen, remembering incidents his father had told him. “ They can’t do that because it pays them.”

“ No, but they get their vanity flattered. When

they come home every year or two they are lionized, their names are mentioned in the papers, they are made something of; and, bless you, men are so made that they'll do anything to be lifted a bit above their fellows. I remember going into Exeter Hall once, where a returned missionary spoke. I tell you he was made a hero of. When he got up to speak, the people rose *en masse*, and there was such a cheering, while old women and young girls waved their handkerchiefs because a young chit of a parson, who had been to Ceylon, or Africa, or China, or somewhere, gulled them with foolish nonsense."

"But all are not hypocrites. There are many good, and I could be true and do good."

"Nonsense! Who's the better for all the parsons? Besides, if you did not become a time-server, you'd die of a broken heart."

Stephen was silent. I think he was remembering his father's life.

"Of course you might go into one of the Dissenting bodies, like your father, and there you'd be killed as he was. Dissenters are mostly so anxious about religion that they are willing to kill their parsons so that they may have three sermons a week, lectures, societies, and institutions of all sorts. But then you'd have to preach what your deacons, who most likely would be butchers or shoemakers, desired. In fact, there's more hypocrisy needed in a Dissenting Church than in the Established Church. A vicar *can* do pretty much what he likes; but the minister of a little Bethel belongs body and soul to his flock. If he were to dare to tell them the truth, his bread and cheese would be gone. Besides, after all, what's the whole business worth? We'll cross off that, shall we?"

"Yes, you may cross off that," said Stephen, quietly.

"Well, then, you might be an actor. There are

men coining money on the stage, — coining it; but they are few and far between. Besides, the stage isn't respectable. Of course there are a few big guns in London who are popular favorites; but for the rank and file of actors scant respect is felt. Of course lots of people go to the theatres who are exceedingly moral and religious; they cry at the pathetic scenes, and laugh at the comic ones; but as for receiving the actors into their houses — well, that's another matter. No, no; actors and actresses have got the reputation of being dreadfully wicked; and although virtuous and pious people allow themselves to be amused, they look down upon those who amuse them. Besides, I'm afraid you'll hardly do for that."

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Well, then, we'll cross that out. What about the army or navy, now? A man need n't be a genius to get on there. Besides, the profession of killing folks is respectable. Won't that do?"

"No, that won't do."

"But think of the Lord Tom Noddys there are in the service, — princes of the blood, and all that. To be captain in the army means an *entrée* in the very best of society. Think what an ennobling, intellectual pursuit it is, and how useful! Besides, what opportunities there are of being religious! The whole tone of the profession—the idea that you are paid to kill people—must develop all that's noble. What do you say to the army now, Steve?"

Neither of us could help laughing at the picture he drew; but I saw that Stephen did not choose the army as a profession.

"You see," went on Luke, "you must have a *profession*. A *trade* would hinder you from being received into society. Clergymen and religious people don't admit tradesmen into their houses, so you must

have a profession. Come, we are getting to the end of the tether. There is the educational world, the Indian Civil Service, and the world of letters. You might be an author."

"I should like to be a lawyer very well," said Stephen, "and in time become a member of Parliament."

"It won't do, my boy. To get into Parliament means money, and there's nothing at the end of being a member of Parliament unless you are the tool of your party, and are willing to sell your conscience."

"It seems to me, uncle, that one's conscience stands in the way of advancement in every realm of life."

"True, my lad; but as a rule it means but little. People are *generally* willing to sell their consciences if thereby they can gain anything. Still, I've my doubts about you. I'm afraid your conscience is a troublesome affair, and so there will be a difficulty in your getting on."

"Then your opinion is——"

"That people who get on in this life have to give moral sentiment the go-by, and, to give credit to mankind, there are but few who are not willing to do this."

"But dishonesty is punished. Our laws exist to advance honesty, and to destroy the opposite."

"Just so, my lad. But what honesty? We have a conventional code of honesty, by which if we abide all is well. But our code of honesty and your conceptions of honesty are far removed. It's dishonest, for example, for a starving man to steal a bit of bread; but what about the big lord who steals the land that produces the bread? You've heard the story of the goose and the common. The man who steals the goose off the common is put to prison; the noble lord who steals the common sends the man to the

prison. But there, things are as they are; and if everything were done according to the strict laws of honesty, what a world it would be!"

"But what would you advise?" asked Stephen. "You seem to think that the doors of all the professions are closed to me. What shall I do?"

"I'll admit," replied Luke Edgcumbe, "that I have seemed to make it a bit hard. But still we may manage. Your father's idea was to send you to one of the Universities, and while you were there he thought you would see which way your feelings lay, and so be led to mark out your course. I think we'd better do that still. I don't know that the whole business of life is worth making this fuss about; still, I suppose you want to live, and make the best of this dirty little world."

"Then your idea is that I go to one of the Universities?"

"That's it. I've about made up my mind to send you to Manchester. There's a fine college there, and I can easily arrange for you to stay with one of my old acquaintances who lives in Oxford Street, close by Owens College. He is what is called 'a coach,' so he would be able to serve you in a double capacity."

"Manchester, Manchester," mused Stephen.

"It's a fine city," remarked Luke; "a great commercial centre, and a place of great influence. I think the system of education is as free from sham and humbug as at any place I know. Oxford and Cambridge are exceedingly uppish, and engender all sorts of foolish notions."

"Very good; I'll do my best."

"See that you do, and remember to mind number one. If you are strong to fight, people will respect you; if you don't, they'll tread you under their feet. There now, you'll want to be off together now, I suppose, and talk over your plans together, and make

bright pictures about the future. I suppose, too, you think those pictures will be realized?"

We left the house soon after, with Luke Edgumbe's words, half earnest, half jocular, ringing in our ears.

"Mr. Edgumbe is a very successful man," I said to Stephen: "why, then, is he not more hopeful, more happy?"

"I don't know. Look! who's this coming?"

Could I not see for myself, I could easily have guessed, as I saw Stephen's flushed face and eager eyes. He quickened his steps, and ere long was by the side of Isabella Tempest.

They were quite boy and girl lovers, yet I could not somehow understand Miss Tempest's behavior. She seemed fond of him, and yet I could not help feeling that she was really indifferent concerning him. However, I never did know the ways of women; they always have been, and are still, a deep sea which no man has yet fathomed.

"I go to Manchester in a week or two," he said to her after their first greeting.

"To Manchester? Why, pray?"

"To college there, — Owens College."

"But why not to Oxford or Cambridge?"

"Uncle Luke does n't like the idea."

Her lip curled a little scornfully, I thought; then she said, "But you will come home often?"

"Every vacation — you know I will."

"You will forget me there."

"Forget you? oh, Isabel! Will it not be otherwise? Will you promise ——?"

"Have you decided your profession yet?"

"No; my uncle does n't seem to be able to fix upon one, neither can I just now. That will be arranged later on."

A pleased look came into her eyes, and they wan-

dered away together, while I stood musing and watching, and wondering what the future would be.

“Bell,” he said ardently, “I shall always love you, only you, as long as I live. I do nothing without thinking of you. While I am at college, my one thought will be to be worthy of you; wherever I am, my great anxiety will be for you. Oh, Bell, if you only knew!”

“But we must n't let pa know — yet.”

“Not yet?”

“Not until you've finished your college course.”

“And then, Bell?”

“What then, you foolish boy?”

“I shall find my Bell waiting? You are sure, Bell?”

“Of course I shall. There, I must go home now.”

“Give me one kiss, Bell, just one.”

She held her face towards him, while he kissed her with all the fond ardor of a boy of seventeen.

“There, go now; and, Steve, don't tell anybody — not yet.”

Shortly after, Stephen Edgcumbe and I parted, — he to go to Owens College, Manchester, while I went to Edinburgh.

CHAPTER VIII.

STEPHEN'S COACH.

For what hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun ?

For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief ; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This also is vanity.

SOLOMON.

SO far, my story of Stephen Edgcumbe has been told mostly as an eye and an ear witness ; in future, however, I shall not always be able to do this. From this time we were often separated, and so his doings and experiences will be related either as he told them to me, or as I heard them from other faithful witnesses.

Of my own history I shall say little or nothing, save when it is associated with my friend's. His is the story that is worth the telling, and I will tell it as well as I am able.

Stephen was met at the Central Station, Manchester, by his future host and private tutor, a man about forty years of age, rather handsome in appearance, and of strong personality. Stephen recognized him instantly from his uncle's description, and when he saw him at the station went to him without hesitation.

"You are Mr. Ilford?" he said eagerly.

"Yes, and you are Stephen Edgcumbe?"

They went away together, and soon after reached Mr. Ilford's house, which stood in Oxford Street, on the Rusholme side of Owens College.

As Mr. Richard Ilford was closely associated with Stephen during the next few years, it will be well for us to understand something about him.

Richard Ilford was a Londoner, his father being a chemist in London, of quiet studious ways, and consequently pretty much of a recluse. Richard from a lad became a great student. He read freely of the books in his father's library, and, his mind having somewhat of a metaphysical bent, he pondered over subjects to which as a rule lads of his age were strangers. His cleverness, however, was very useful to him. Through it he obtained many scholarships, and so he passed from one educational institution to another without any expense to his father.

When he was about twenty-one, he became closely associated with one of the professors under whom he studied, who found the clever young fellow very useful to him, especially as at the time he was engaged in producing a work which required the help of such a fellow as Ilford. This professor had a daughter, a handsome, fascinating girl, with whom Ilford fell in love, and who seemingly, fascinated by the brilliant young student, returned his affections. For a year Richard was in heaven. He knew he was poor; but with her love to inspire him, and his past record, he felt sure he could eventually become a professor at one of the London colleges, and thus secure an income sufficient to embolden him to ask Rhoda Black to be his wife. Her father seemed to favor his attentions and encourage his hopes, and thus happiness and fame seemed certain. At the end of the year the professor's great work was finished, while Ilford noticed a change in Rhoda's behavior. Moreover, a rich young fool often visited Professor Black's house, and was warmly welcomed. Jealousy entered into the young man's heart, and then, determined to know his fate at once, he asked her to be his wife. The girl was evidently

moved by the expression of his love, and told him that she was very fond of him, and had enjoyed his society so much! She thought him clever,—oh, so *very* clever; but then her father was poor, and Mr. Jones was *very* rich, and — and — well, she thought it best, and her papa thought it best, that she should marry Mr. Jones.

“And you love him better than me?”—cried Richard.

“No, no; but then, you see, I’ve been accustomed to have everything I wanted, and you would be poor for so many years, and papa ——”

“Enough!” cried the young fellow; “you cast me aside like an old glove.”

The girl was distressed, but a big house in Grosvenor Square and an old mansion in the country were more to her than love. She admitted that Mr. Jones was not brilliant,—indeed, pretty much of a fool; but she hoped that Mr. Ilford would see her position, and not distress her.

“No, I’ll not distress you any more,” cried Ilford; “and you will see me no more, for your father has no further need of me.”

When Ilford left the house that night he was a changed man, and thus life to him was changed. With a sore, sad heart he began to muse and brood a good deal. Ambition had largely died out; and so, instead of prosecuting his studies in a practical way, he began to read dark, gloomy literature. He revelled in the writings of Schopenhauer, Von Hartmann, and the whole school of German pessimists, and soon began to realize a gloomy sort of pleasure in believing that everything was bad, that the world was as badly made as it could be, that human nature was a poor, coarse sort of affair, that no beneficent purpose could be seen in providence, and that life on the whole was scarcely worth the living.

Filled with these ideas, and thus saddened to the

heart's core, he ceased to be practical, and ceased to engage his thoughts on those phases of life which, to use his own words, "made the best of a poor, coarse, dirty affair," and thus he failed to succeed in obtaining a footing in those walks of life into which his early achievements promised him a speedy entrance. This went on for five or six years, during which, while he managed to get bread and cheese, he failed to obtain recognition in the quarters where he felt he deserved a welcome. At six and twenty, therefore, he was in many respects an old man; and at that time of life when he should have been full of hope and energy, he was despairing and tired.

About this time he met Luke Edgcumbe, who was several years older than himself; and although dissimilar in many of their tastes, a friendship sprang up between them. Luke Edgcumbe looked upon life as an orange to suck dry; and although the orange was a poor sort of thing, it was the best thing to do with it. Richard Ilford, on the other hand, abused the orange, because he lacked the power to get any sweetness from it. To both, life was a poor thing, at least in theory. Humanity to both was corrupt. Luke Edgcumbe studied man, and from his standpoint, man was bad; Richard Ilford studied books, ideas, and the general tendencies of life, and came to the conclusion that *everything* was inherently bad. That if man was bad, he could not help it; that the forces of life, whatever they might be, were evil; and that life, while we were prejudiced in favor of living, was really a curse.

These two men naturally influenced each other, but not in any true or upward direction. Richard Ilford led Luke Edgcumbe to look, not only at the badness of men, but at the forces in life which made them, what they were; while Edgcumbe caused Ilford to consider life in the concrete as well as in the abstract.

Luke, looking at life from his standpoint, was practical, and matched sharpness, overreaching, and selfishness with the same qualities, and determined to out-scheme the men who were scheming to make money out of him; Ilford, while he was led to think of means of getting a livelihood, and perhaps affluence, still continued his gloomy speculations, which led to still more sombre and hopeless views.

Years passed away, and an old companion of Ilford's told him that if he would come to Manchester, where he had obtained some influence, he could secure him several young fellows who studied at Owens, and who required assistance, as home pupils. He therefore took a house in Oxford Street, not far from the college, hired an old woman as housekeeper, and in the course of a few weeks, the autumn term then commencing, succeeded in getting a few young fellows to board with him; these he also served in the capacity of private tutor. By this means he was able to get a respectable livelihood, and had at the same time plenty of opportunities for reading, and also for writing a book in which his now favorite views were to be expressed.

Such was the history of Richard Ilford up to the time that Stephen was sent to him. Of his uncle's motives in sending him to such a man there could be little doubt. Luke was a great believer in disillusionment; he called himself a realist, and his creed was that the only way to make Stephen's existence bearable was to present life to him in its true light, and thus save him from the terrible disappointments which would otherwise surely follow.

The tutor's creed might be summed up briefly; and although he did not repeat the articles of that creed to Stephen in so many words, it leaked out little by little, and, like his uncle's views concerning the world generally, became a deposit in my friend's

life. If Richard Ilford were to tell exactly in so many words what he believed, he would say something like this:—

I believe that the world is as bad as it can be, and that life on the whole is a failure.

Still, men foolishly cling to life because of some peculiar taint in their constitution.

All religions are myths, the outcome of man's superstitious bent in an ignorant age.

Never be in earnest; nothing is worth being in earnest about.

A truly wise man is never enthusiastic, and never acts on impulse.

Hope for nothing; hope always ends in disappointment.

Every man has his price; if you offer a price high enough, you can buy him.

A woman can be more easily bought than a man.

There is really no such thing as virtue.

Morals are a matter of country, climate, etc.

The color of a man's hair has a great deal more to do with his morals than education has.

The morals of the world will never be improved; they will more likely get worse; and then man's misery will become so great that, out of sheer despair, some great scheme of self-destruction will be invented.

Man's hope of a future and a better life is founded on a vain delusion, and will never be realized.

This joyful creed Richard Ilford expressed casually in the course of conversation, not ostensibly, but covertly, as opportunity occurred. He expressed it also with such grace of diction, and associated it with so many great names and in such plausible forms, that it did not appear so bare and ghastly as when told in plain, straightforward words. It was therefore more insidious, more dangerous.

It is not my purpose to write in anything like detail the history of my friend's college career. Enough

that I indicate the influences by which he was surrounded. The course at Owens itself was vigorous and healthy. With capable professors, a fine library, and a high standard of education placed before him, he had enough to inspire him to work, and to arouse the healthy and vigorous side of his life. The students, too, many of them, were fine, manly young fellows, and some of the best of them became attached to Stephen, — partly, no doubt, because he was a really lovable fellow, and partly, too, because in the college cricket club he became a crack batsman, and the best bowler of whom the college could boast.

On the whole, I do not think he realized that he was much influenced by his host and private tutor. One of his letters to me may here be printed, showing the state of his mind during the third year of his college course.

DEAR DAN, —

I am glad you are doing so well at Edinburgh, and that you are on a fair way to become another Harvey. It must indeed be pleasant to you for your professors to give you so much encouragement by telling you that if you are true to your promise you will take a high place in the medical world; although, if Uncle Luke is right, brains and cleverness count for very little in your profession, unless backed up by private influence. My boy, you must take his advice, and marry the daughter of some great medical dignitary, and then your position will be assured.

You will be glad to know that I do fairly here. I took a first in all the subjects but one at the Easter exam., and Mr. Ilford tells me I ought to come out very well at the final next month. I might do better, I think, if I did less general reading and stuck more to my text-books; but Mr. Ilford has a fine library, and has given me a taste for speculative subjects.

I have told you what curious views Ilford has. If I believed as he does, or as the old German of whose works

he is so fond, I think I should go mad. It is true, I can't answer many of his arguments; I only feel he is wrong. Like Tennyson, I feel as if I must say, —

“ If e'er when faith had fallen asleep
I heard a voice, 'Believe no more,'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled on the godless deep;

“ A warmth within the heart would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answered, 'I have felt!'"

Of course, he replies that my feelings are all humbug, and so on; and yet I know that life is a glad thing. How can it be otherwise, hoping as I do, and knowing what I do? How can virtue be a fraud, and love a delusion, while I know the girl to whom I have given my life? And so, while I can't answer his arguments, my heart laughs at him. Still, life's a mystery. Have you noticed that in cold countries the people are very moral and very miserable, while in warm countries people are very immoral and very happy? Contrast the Italian and the Norwegian, for example.

Manchester is an awful place. In summer it is not so bad, but in the winter the misery is terrible. What is the meaning of it? And yet my own life is so full of happiness and hope that I can't realize the misery of others.

But there, I'm not going to bother you with these matters. In a month or so we shall meet, and then we can talk over a thousand things. By the way, I shall be twenty in a few days; but Isabella says I must not speak to her father until I am twenty-one, and can come to him with a position somewhat assured. The first qualification will soon come around; but the second — well, I'm doubtful about it. My mind does not seem to settle in any fixed groove, and my uncle says nothing. But there, that, too, will come, no doubt.

Ever thine,

STEPHEN.

Reading the letter now, although I do not think he felt it when he wrote it, I see something of the influence both of his uncle and of his tutor; but at the time I saw no difference in my friend, except that he was older and more thoughtful.

A month or so later we met, and spent a happy time together. He was a bit disappointed, he told me, because Isabella had discouraged his visits somewhat. Her excuse was that while she loved him as much as ever, she felt she must not receive his attentions until arrangements for his future had been made. When he was twenty-one, no doubt matters would be more settled, and then they could be more open.

For my own part it seemed strange, but to Stephen all was well but for present disappointment. She had grown more handsome than ever, in his opinion, and her ripened beauty worked on him like a charm. One look from her great brown eyes conquered him in a moment, and she led him at will.

So he promised to be silent for another year, and in the mean time he would do what she wished.

“What would you like me to be?” he asked.

“If—if you must be—something, would not a barrister be as—as good as anything?” she said.

Then Stephen was more than ever glad that he had started out to get a degree in law, and lost no time in telling his uncle that he had decided to adopt the law as his profession.

“Law, eh?” remarked Luke, looking at him keenly. “Well, lad, be what you like; but that means starvation.”

“We shall see,” said Stephen, his eyes shining with determination and hope.

Luke Edgcumbe laughed, while a peculiar expression came on his face. I think I know now what he was thinking about.

During the vacation I heard that Ralph Hussey was often seen with Isabella Tempest, and that they seemed on very intimate terms. I did not like this, for I was jealous for my friend.

I said so much one day to Stephen, but he laughed at me.

“Why, you suspicious old Dan!” he cried; “do you think I can't trust Isabella? Why, all her intimacy with Hussey is a blind, my boy; a mere blind. No, Dan, never try and lead me to doubt her; for if I doubted her, why — I should — but there ——”

There was no doubt about Stephen's love; it was as real as his very life. Was Isabella Tempest's so real? I had my doubts about it; and yet at times when I saw them together away from members of her family, she seemed so fond of him that I did not wonder at my friend's faith in her constancy.

The next year at Owens was a brilliant one for Stephen; he threw himself into his work with all the ardor of which his intense nature was capable, and, as the professors declared, carried everything before him. Even his uncle, who went to Manchester on the prize day in the month of June, could not help being pleased at the number of prizes he took, and at the flattering things that were said of his nephew.

“Who is he?” he heard some one ask, as time after time his name was read out as the receiver of a prize.

“Edgcumbe! Edgcumbe! Don't know; but he's a handsome fellow,” was the reply. “He'll do something in life.”

That was the general impression concerning him, as on-lookers watched his fine, sensitive, and really grand face; and many a sister who had come to hear a brother's name mentioned, talked afterwards about Stephen, and wondered if ever she might see him again.

“Come home with us, Ilford, and spend a part of the vacation,” said Luke Edgcumbe, when they reached his house in Oxford Street. “You have plenty of time, and it will be a change for you.”

The invitation was accepted, and that evening Stephen was surprised to hear both his uncle and tutor speaking cheerfully.

“And what have you been reading besides your textbooks through the year?” asked Luke, after dinner.

“Mr. Ilford would allow me to read nothing but novels,” was the reply.

“And they?”

Stephen mentioned them. They were of that class which Ilford recommended, and which have become the rage during the last few years. Professing to belong to the realistic school, the writers seemed to gloat over the dark, evil side of humanity, and to present existence in the ghastliest aspects. They, while holding a high place in the world of letters, wrote of the sewers and cesspools of life; and though they clothed their thoughts in fine garbage, they presented nothing but gloom and misery. To allow one's mind to become imbued with the teaching of these works was really to shut out the sun and to admit *en bloc* the creed of Richard Ilford.

Stephen admitted that he had been much fascinated with this modern school of writers, although he declared he could not accept its views of life.

“The question is,” said Luke, “have the fellows told the truth as much as it can be told in this lying world? Have they presented life as it is? That's the real question.”

And then followed a conversation in which the subject was discussed; Stephen vehemently opposing the realistic views, so called, Luke caustically trying to refute him, while Ilford every now and then interposed by a pointed and bitter interrogation.

When I saw Stephen a week or so after this, I saw a change in him. He looked more sad, more thoughtful, and did not take quite so rosy a view of things. I asked him why it was, but he did not speak. Then, when I discovered that he had been at Colonel Tempest's the previous evening, I began to wonder.

As the day wore away, however, I knew that he had determined to do something; and when after dinner he asked his uncle for a few minutes' private chat, I anxiously wondered about what it might be.

"Private, eh?" said Luke. "Do you mean that you wish to keep out Daniel here, your close friend, and Ilford, your tutor for the last four years?"

"I should like just five minutes' chat with you alone first," said Stephen.

"Very well, then," said Luke; "come on. You and Daniel," he continued, speaking to Ilford, "can smoke your cigars on the lawn for five minutes, and then we can all have a chat together."

With an anxious face Stephen followed his uncle into the library, while I walked by the side of Richard Ilford up and down the lawn in silence. At the end of five minutes Luke appeared, and asked us to bring our smokes indoors.

CHAPTER IX.

THE QUESTION OF MARRIAGE FROM A CYNIC'S STAND-
POINT.

Woman, that fair and fond deceiver,
How prompt are striplings to believe her!

And hear her plight the willing troth!
When lo! she changes in a day.
Fondly we hope 't will last for aye,
This record will forever stand:
"Woman, thy vows are traced in sand."

BYRON.

WE had not been sitting five minutes before we were all engaged in an earnest conversation. The subject under discussion was — women. I hardly know how it came about. I think we were speaking of a young fellow's chances of success in a city, — say London, — when Luke Edgcumbe mentioned the fact that an incumbrance in the shape of a wife spelt ruin to any struggling man's prospects. This statement was warmly denied by Stephen, whereupon the influence of women on life generally, and their peculiar characteristics, became the topic.

"I suppose they are necessary for the continuation of the race," said Ilford. "Not that I regard the race as being worthy of continuation; but at the same time, if the Bible is any authority, the first woman landed the whole lot of us in a pretty mess."

"Would it not be well to keep the Bible out of the question?" suggested Stephen.

"Certainly, my dear boy. I can't say that it has much weight with me; still, it is as well to look at facts as they stand."

"Facts; just so," replied my friend.

"The difficulty is to get at facts where women are concerned," said Ilford. "They are such bundles of 'make up' and sham, and they do the artificial with such cleverness, that it is very difficult to find and depend on a bit of reality."

"You must have been unfortunate in your acquaintances," suggested Stephen, warmly.

"True, my lad," replied the other, with a great deal of apparent *nonchalance*; "most men, when they have reached my age, have been unfortunate in their acquaintances, especially among women. In fact, I never knew a man of fifty who had n't. Some won't own it, some try and deceive themselves; but at bottom we are all alike. Still, they are as they are. *Non generant aquilæ columbas.*"

"Every man finds out the pertinence of the old fellow's question who, when he heard of a trouble or a row, asked what woman was at the bottom of it," laughed Luke.

"But surely," cried Stephen, "you, uncle, do not look upon women in that way! I have seen you very gallant to them."

"It pays, my boy; and we are all time-servers, all time-servers. Besides, women are all very well if you give them what they want. Let a woman have as much money as she cares to spend, as much society as she wants, as many novels as she cares to read, a sufficient amount of flattery, and the minimum of bother and pain, and she's all right; but if it's otherwise — well, the least said the better."

"One would think you never had a mother!" cried Stephen, starting up, and walking up and down the room hastily.

“Like you, I know little of a mother’s influence,” remarked Luke. “I have seen a good deal of other people’s mothers, though.”

“But what you say falsifies all experience, all history!” cried Stephen, his eyes aglow.

“Whose experience? whose history?” asked Ilford. “I have read about women’s wonderful qualities in your copy-book experience and history; but let any man tell what lies in his heart of hearts, and the tale is altered.”

“The love and purity of England’s motherhood, the innocence and truth of her girlhood, are at once her strength and her fortress,” said Stephen, somewhat grandiloquently.

“Ay,” said Ilford, “when you find them. There’s a paper called ‘The British Matron.’ It pretends to represent that part of the community after whom it is called. But does it? There’s not one British matron in a hundred but will sell her daughter to the highest bidder; there’s not one in a hundred of the mothers among our middle classes, where our greatest virtue is supposed to reside, who, if she has to choose between an honest mechanic and an old gouty peer, who has spent his life in debauchery, but has a plenty of money and an old name, would discard the honest mechanic and choose the *roué*. At least, such has been my experience. All this high-flown talk about the British matron is wind, my lad. As for their daughters, well, there’s seldom much trouble in persuading them to see as their dear mammas see.”

“It’s a lie!” cried Stephen; “that is,” he continued, as if in explanation, “you are mistaken, — you must be mistaken. There may be such cases as you have mentioned, but they are rare, they are the exception. Nothing shall ever destroy my belief in the virtue of womanhood.”

"Yes, yes, lad," replied the other, "women are virtuous, just as men are, till they are found out, or till a sufficiently high price is offered. I daresay now that you, being a decent-looking fellow, with the reputation of having a rich uncle, could get some apparently nice girl to promise to marry you. She would very likely give up some other chap who was not so good looking, or whose prospects were not quite so good, in order to get you; but let reverses come for you, or let some rich fellow with a handle to his name, and a fine old residence to offer, come up, and your place would know you no more forever."

"That is monstrous!" cried Stephen; "it is a libel on all that's good and true;" and yet I thought I saw an anxious look in his eyes.

"If I were to get married," laughed Ilford, without noticing Stephen's indignation, "I should first of all expect to be gulled, and should accept it as a part of the bargain; or if I did n't expect to be deceived, I should take the same precautions as some of the Eastern dignitaries: I should keep my wife under lock and key, but I should be careful that it should be one of Chubb's patents. Even then I should know that she'd deceive me if she could."

"Then you would be ——"

"No better than she, my lad, or very little. We are nearly all alike."

"Evil be to him that evil thinks," suggested Stephen.

"Just so, lad," replied the other; "the old French proverb is true enough; but then ninety-nine out of every hundred think evil. That's the vexing part of it."

"When I am married," cried Stephen, "I will be as true and faithful to my wife as the sun."

"Until you find she's tired of you."

"She never will be tired of me. True love is never tired."

“*Sancta simplicitas*,” sneered the other.

“Mr. Ilford,” cried Stephen, “I wonder, believing as you do, you do not put an end to your life.”

“Have n’t had pluck, my lad, otherwise I might. But look at the matter calmly. Here am I, and here’s your uncle. We’ve been through the mill; we know life. Once I was as fervent and as trusting as you. You are young and inexperienced. Who’s likely to know most — you, or we?”

“That depends,” replied Stephen.

“Of course. No doubt you think you know more than we. Young folk always think they know more than older people. To you, religious cant, hypocrisy, psalm-singing, gowns and bands, philanthropy, and moral clap-trap are all real. At your age, too, all women are angels.”

“And at yours?”

“Women. As for the other things, who has n’t found them out? It is the women who keep up the religion of the community; it is the women who sustain the clerical order; it is the women who collect for the missionaries; it is the women of both sexes who build churches and pose as philanthropists. And what is the practical result of it all? The women are the greatest liars, the greatest hypocrites!”

“Any one would think you had been injured by women,” replied Stephen.

“My life was made black, ruined by a woman,” he said bitterly; then, as if correcting himself, he said, “nay, through a woman I suffered disillusionment, that’s all. If truth is worth anything, I ought to thank a woman, for she led me to see the truth.”

The conversation by this time had become terribly in earnest, and even I, who was far less impressionable than Stephen, was influenced by it. It began in a bantering way; but each of us had become serious. A great deal more than I have recorded was

said on all sides, for I have only written down those parts which impressed themselves on my memory. I could not help seeing, too, that Stephen felt he had by no means the best of the argument; and yet I admired the way in which he held fast to the ideals which had been formed in his heart. Womanhood to him was something beautiful, sacred; a woman's virtue and truth were so real to him that upon them he would stake his life. They might convince his head, his heart was untouched. And yet, even then I trembled, lest the time should ever come when he should realize the hell of a misplaced trust. But then he was confident.

"So sure am I," he replied to a remark of his uncle, "so sure am I of woman's virtue and woman's truth that I am ready to stake my future on it."

"You are just twenty-one and a fool," replied Luke Edgcumbe; "but there, Ilford, let's talk of something else. 'A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still;' I suppose we learn in no other way but by experience."

The conversation turned on other subjects; but I noticed that Stephen was silent. A thoughtful look rested on his face, too, as though he were brooding over what had been said. For the first time I felt they had no right to seek to poison the young fellow's mind; and yet, after all, *were* they right?

When I left for home that night, Stephen walked a part of the way with me.

"Do you think there is any truth in what they say?" he said, after we had walked in silence for some time.

"There is some truth, no doubt," I replied; "but I felt all along that they were one-sided."

"Do you know why they talked so?" he asked.

"No."

"I told uncle about Bella to-night."

“ Ah ! ”

“ That ’s what I wanted to see him about. I felt I — I ought to speak to him, and I did n’t care to talk about her before — Ilford. I think that ’s why he started the conversation. He does n’t seem to like it.”

“ He did n’t give his consent, then ? ”

“ Yes, he did, in a fashion.”

“ Well ? ”

“ Well, you know, Isabella is a little older than I, about a year, and I feel she ought not to be kept waiting. Hussey has been asking for her ; he’s fairly well off, is Hussey, and is in a position to marry at once. Of course she’d wait for me until she was forty ; but then I have no right to keep her waiting.”

“ What are you going to do ? ”

“ I am going to London soon, and shall seek admission into the Inns of Court. Isabella is anxious for me to be a barrister, and I am going to please her. It — it seems a fine profession. Uncle is willing to pay my expenses until I ’m called.”

“ How long will that take ? ”

“ I don’t know. Not long, I hope. You see, I’ve taken a law degree ; I mean to work hard. I hope in a year or so I shall —— ”

“ But, my dear fellow, think of the scores of briefless barristers who throng our law courts. You may be years before you get the usual *quiddam honorarium*.”

“ I shall not be long, Besides, ‘ love in a cottage,’ you know.”

“ But will it not be better to wait a few years until you have made a position ? You are both young.”

“ Yes, we are young ; but that Hussey is always around. Yesterday the Colonel told me that Hussey

wanted to be his son-in-law at once. Of course, he knows nothing of Isabella and me."

I did not speak, but I had my doubts.

"Of course, Isabella will wait; but I don't want to place her in a false position. Naturally the Colonel will want to see her well settled, and Hussey is supposed to be a catch."

"Then ——?"

"I propose to go to Colonel Tempest to-morrow, and tell him of the attachment which has existed between us ever since we knew each other; then I shall tell him of my plans and my hopes."

"I suppose your uncle will do something for you?"

"I dare say, but he says nothing. Uncle Luke, as you know, has strange ways. I don't understand him."

"But you need be under no apprehension, Steve," I said. "With brains, a good hope, and a true, trustful girl, nothing should be impossible."

"The grandest girl in England!" he cried. "Bless you, I don't fear anything. As for Hussey —— Still, you know, I don't want to give the Colonel any excuse."

The next day Stephen went to Bloomfields and had an interview with the Colonel. That gentleman expressed great surprise when he was told of the long-standing affection between the young man and his daughter.

"The sly puss!" he exclaimed. "Fancy her deceiving her blind old father like that! I had almost promised Hussey. But, Stephen Temple, my lad, I like you, and —— but there! Still, can you keep a wife? — hem! Women can't live on nothing, you know. Ha, ha!"

Stephen told him what he intended and hoped to do.

"That's all very well, all very well, — as far as it goes. Of course, a barrister is a fine profession. A

barrister mixes in the best of society, and with brains and influence can make a fine thing. But it takes a long time to get on, — years, in fact. I suppose, like most young fellows, you are anxious to get married, and — you can't do that on nothing. I'll never consent for my daughter — a Tempest — to be married to poverty; no, by Gad! no. You must have something besides that. Your uncle now, Stephen Temple, my boy — your uncle now, what does he say?"

"He will pay my initial expenses."

"Initial expenses; but, but — there. I will think of what you say. I will speak to your uncle; I will ride over this afternoon."

True to his word, the Colonel went to see Luke Edgcumbe, and spoke very touchingly about the virgin affection of his daughter for that fine young fellow Stephen Temple.

"Edgcumbe," he said with energy, "there's Providence in it, nothing less. They fell in love with each other at first sight — at first sight, and they've loved each other for four years. And, sir, I believe in marrying for love. I'm an old-fashioned man, sir; I believe in love."

"So do I, when I see it," said Luke.

"And this is real, no doubt about it. My girl would die for your nephew, and all that. What are we going to do about it, Edgcumbe?"

"I suppose they will be fools."

"Ha, ha! you will have your joke. We can't stop it, however; it's as well trying to stop a stream from going down hill. Of course, my girl's a Tempest, and is a catch for any man. But I'm a broad-thinking man myself; there's no nonsense about me."

"That's why you are willing for her to marry a plebeian."

“Your nephew’s a fine fellow, sir. Come, now, how are we to arrange it?”

“What fortune can you give your daughter?” said Luke Edgcumbe, roughly, at the same time carefully watching the Colonel’s face.

“I’m a poor man, Edgcumbe; you know it. I belong to an old family, but I’m poor. Still, a Tempest is a fit match for any one. My daughter is a fortune in herself. She will have as her dowry a good old name, good blood, a loving heart, and — and — a handsome face and figure. Why, Hussey, who has several hundreds a year, has been asking for her; and if I’d only been able to go into society, and she’d had a season or two in London, why, half-a-dozen lords would have been at her feet.”

Luke remained silent.

“Come, now,” continued the Colonel. “Stephen Temple has told me about his plans, — reading for the bar, and all that; but a wife can’t be kept on a young barrister’s income. What are you going to do for him? Come now, Edgcumbe, say;” and the Colonel, happier now that the most difficult part of his work was accomplished, wiped his heated face eagerly.

“I can’t say,” said Luke, a thoughtful look in his eyes.

“Can’t say! How, Edgcumbe? You are a wealthy man. A settlement of a few hundreds a year, say a thousand, would be nothing to you. You must leave your money to him at some time.”

“Yes, I shall leave it to him at some time.”

“Then why not give him a bit now? Why keep these a — a — loving hearts asunder? — hem?”

Luke Edgcumbe walked up and down the room for a few minutes, as though he were studying a doubtful question; but Colonel Tempest could form no conception as to the nature of his thinking.

“This is a grave subject,” he said, at length. “Stephen has spoken to me about it, and I have promised him nothing more than that I will pay his expenses until he is called. Not that I do not intend doing more than that,” he added quickly.

“Just so, just so,” said the Colonel, nodding his head.

“I do not believe much in marrying; much less in early marriages,” he continued.

“But happiness, Egcumbe — these young people; we must n’t be hard on them, must we?”

“Well,” said Luke Edgcumbe, presently, “I’ll not say what I’ll give him; but if he *will* make a fool of himself — well, I like him too much to forsake him, and I’ll do the best I can for him.”

“The best you can!” cried the Colonel. “What more can they want? Then it’s settled.”

“I’ll not help him, beyond paying his expenses, until he’s been called,” said Luke.

“But why not?” said the Colonel. “What’s a thousand a year to you? Why not let it be at once?”

Luke Edgcumbe gave the Colonel a curious look, for he saw through his plans easily. As usual, the Colonel was short of money, and he saw in his daughter’s marriage with Stephen a means of filling his own purse. The jam manufacturer laughed as he realized how matters stood; and the other, thinking the laugh meant assent, laughed also.

“Ah, Edgcumbe, you are a character. But right at heart, like the British oak; right at heart.”

“Can anything be more beautiful than a father’s love?” sneered Luke Edgcumbe when the Colonel had gone. “Can anything be more noble than the creature called man, especially if that man be a member of the British aristocracy? Ah, Stephen will be doing a grand thing for himself. Ought I to let him,

I wonder? for it is doubtful where this arrangement will lead him. In spite of myself, I do love the lad, if only for his mother's sake. If she had only married me instead of Stephen, if this boy had only been my son instead of my brother's, I might have found a little joy in life. Still, I love the lad, and will it be right to let him go on? Well, I expect I can't stop him; besides, it will be an eye-opener to him. He will see just what the world is made of;" and again he looked as though he had to face a great problem.

A week or two later, Stephen was settled in chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields, where, as he told me, he was going to read like grim death for the profession Isabella Tempest had chosen for him.

"I don't know what's come over my uncle," he wrote; "he's been acting so strangely lately. But his objection to my immediate marriage is becoming less and less strong, so that, all being well, I shall be a Benedict shortly. Hip, hip, hurrah! I say."

Nevertheless, it was two years before his hopes were fulfilled; and then I, with a strange feeling at heart, accepted an invitation to his wedding.

I suppose the wedding was regarded as a brilliant affair. Stephen looked hopeful and happy; Isabella Tempest looked extremely handsome and victorious; the Colonel said many pious things about Providence and love, and of his firm faith in a union of hearts; while Luke Edgcumbe looked as cynical as usual, but said nothing.

After the wedding breakfast was over, just before the young couple started on their honeymoon, they found their way into the drawing-room, glad, no doubt, to be away from the crowd.

"Well, Isabella, my darling," he cried, "our doubts and fears are all over; we are happy at last."

"Yes, Stephen."

“You don’t repent, do you?” he said anxiously, as though her reply were not as warm as he would have liked.

“Repent, Stephen! Why should I repent? There’s nothing wrong, is there?”

“Not that I know of, my darling. It is n’t that, but you are so grand, so good, while I — well, I’m not worthy of you; but — but — I do love you with all my life. I do, I do. You know that, don’t you?”

He was so earnest, so fervent, and his love was so real and true that her heart seemed to melt; for she threw her arms around his neck, and laid her beautiful head on his shoulder.

“I’m not good at all, Stephen,” she said huskily, “not a bit; but I’m so glad I am yours. You are so brave, so clever, that — that — oh, we shall be happy, I’m sure.”

His life was a great joy at that moment. No cloud seemed to hang in his sky, and his heart’s dearest desire was accomplished. What would he not do for her?

“Bella!” he cried, “I’ll win you a name second to none; I can do it with you by my side. The best houses in England shall be opened to us, and you shall have all that money can buy. God bless you, my darling, for loving me so! With love such as yours to cheer me, nothing is impossible. We may be poor for a while, but in a few years ——”

“Poor, Stephen! How can that be? Your uncle ——”

“My uncle has promised to help us; but I want to be independent of him, darling. I would rather get all you want myself. Oh, it will be grand to think that our house, and furniture, and all those things you want will be bought by money that I have earned. And I will work so hard. I have had all sorts of kind things said to me already, darling — and — and oh, my love, my beautiful, I *am* happy!”

So Stephen started his wedded life; and so, with feelings of joy, he drove away for his honeymoon. What more could he want? No wonder he laughed at his uncle's pessimism, no wonder that dark views of life were meaningless. He lived in that realm where all was song and laughter.

And yet I, quiet Daniel Roberts, could not help doubting. I could hardly tell why. Still, as I thought of the influences which had surrounded his life for the past few years, and as I remembered the training and associations of his bride, I wondered what the end would be.

PART II.

ORDEAL.

CHAPTER I.

DISILLUSIONMENT.

There came a mist and a blinding rain,
And the world was never the same again.

STEPHEN EDGCUMBE had been married barely a year, when an event took place which altered the whole course of his life.

Luke Edgcumbe, jam manufacturer, director of companies, and general speculator, failed for a fabulous sum! The man who was supposed to possess an enormous fortune saw his name gazetted, while hundreds of people were dragged down by his fall.

True to his promise, he had offered Stephen a liberal allowance, who, because of his wife's wishes, accepted it, although he would much rather have lived on his own income. Indeed, the question of money was a constant bone of contention during the first year of their married life. Stephen was not long in discovering that his wife was very extravagant in her tastes and habits. Her greatest joys were in new dresses, theatres, balls, and so forth; and Stephen, anxious to please her, gave way to her more than I thought would have been the case. He had been called to the bar; and although the income he received as a barrister was exceedingly slender, he was

able to follow in the footsteps of scores of others, and earn a few pounds by journalism, — enough, in fact, had his wife been of the same mind as himself, to live economically, but comfortably.

“Isabella,” he would say, “why need we be dependent on my uncle’s allowance? Surely we can manage on what I receive?”

“Had you married some one of the frugal order, you might, no doubt; but I don’t choose to.”

“But this allowance is to me pauperizing. I would rather live on less, and be independent.”

“And I’m not going to give up my comforts for the sake of your foolish notions. You will have your uncle’s money some day; why not enjoy it now?”

“But, Isabella, have you no pride?”

“Pride! Yes, too much pride to live as you would have me live. I was never accustomed to such notions.”

“But you had no luxury in your home, Isabella. Your father is poor, and why can’t we be contented without this allowance from my uncle?”

“Because I do not choose.”

“I thought different of you, Isabella. For my part, I should be happier if you would agree to dispense with it.”

“And what should we have to live on, pray?”

“Well, I shall be getting more cases as time goes on, and I am earning a few pounds by journalism. Nearly all the young fellows do it, and — I — I like it.”

“And do you think, Stephen Edgcumbe, that I am going to be content to live in such a way as that? I would never have married you if I had known you wished me to do such a thing.”

“You married me, Bella, for the same reason that I married you, — because we loved each other.”

“But not to live in poverty.”

“I don't mind poverty, if I have your love.”

“Love counts for little when poverty stares one in the face.”

“Do you mean to say, Bella, that you could not love me in poverty?”

“I mean to say that I would not have married you had I not thought you could place me in a comfortable position.”

“Then it was not me you cared for?”

“Of course I cared; but I'm like other people, — I like a nice home and pleasant surroundings; and for you to talk of doing without your uncle's allowance maddens me.”

And so Stephen gave in; but this conversation was only the beginning of others that followed, in which many unkind things were said. Not that Stephen regretted his marriage, — he loved his wife far too much for that; but he discovered that wedded life was not all roses. His greatest grief was, I am inclined to think, that his ideal was shattered. Stephen, in spite of his uncle's sneers and Ilford's cynicism, had up to this time believed implicitly in women. He had believed Isabella Tempest to be as true as the sunlight, and that her love for him was real. All through his conversations with his uncle and with Ilford, when they had spoken sneeringly of women and their virtue, and had described them as creatures to be sold to the highest bidder, he had thought of the girl he loved, and then all their arguments had seemed foolish. She was his anchor, his fortress; she was the rock of truth on which all their lying theories were wrecked.

Not that he doubted her virtue and honor after she had revealed her real nature more clearly to him, but the tender bloom was gone; he had, in fact, ceased to be a boy; he had become a man, — a man, whose dream of life was dispelled.

Still he worked on bravely. Isabella still loved him, — not as he hoped ; but she loved him, and in that love he tried to be content. And so the allowance his uncle made to him was handed over to her, a large part of which, unknown to him, was sent to the Colonel. Respectable firms of solicitors began to recognize his abilities, and barristers whose hair had grown as gray as their wigs looked upon him as a man who had a future.

“He’s a bit too sensitive,” they would say, “and has too high a code of honor for this world ; but by and by, when his high-flown notions are gone, he’ll take his place in the profession, and a high one too.”

Then his uncle’s crash came, causing a panic in the commercial world, and ruining many honest, struggling tradesmen. At first he could scarcely believe it. The thought to the sensitive young fellow was horrible. He, who had an inherent hatred of lies and fraud of every sort, owed his education, his position, his living indeed, to a swindle, a fraud. He happened to be out of London when he first heard the news, and it staggered him, and made him incapable of work. He must go home and speak to his wife, and make arrangements with her about the future. On his way back he made calculations with regard to his plan of action. He reckoned up his probable income, and the cost of housekeeping ; and as he did so, things did not appear so bad. After all, he would be happier earning his own living than dependent on another’s bounty. Isabella would meet the blow bravely ; and although they might have to live frugally for a few years, he would, with increased stimulus to work, carve out a grand future. Indeed, by the time he reached London, he was almost glad that the crutch upon which he had been leaning had been taken away, and he pictured his wife saying brave, com-

forting words to him, and standing by his side hopefully in the dark, dreary days.

When he reached home, he found that her father was with Isabella. He, too, had heard of the smash, and had come straight to London. The Colonel was in a great rage. He stalked up and down the room, tugging his moustache fiercely, and swearing with great vehemence.

“And this is what I gain by associating with those beneath me!” he cried; “this is what comes of marrying my daughter to a plebeian! I feared it; I feared it all the way along. But I was blind, blind. This is what you’ve brought my child to, is it? She who might have been a rich woman is penniless.”

“I’m sure, Colonel Tempest, I’m as deeply grieved as you can be,” replied Stephen; “but I knew nothing how matters stood. My uncle never confided to me in any way with regard to his business arrangements.”

“What are you going to do?” cried the Colonel, almost beside himself.

“I intend to work very hard. Things may not be so bad. I am beginning to get a footing now, and I am sure Isabella and I can manage. Indeed, I have not wanted my uncle’s allowance all along.”

“Not wanted your uncle’s allowance! Well, the money is dirty enough; but not want it! Are you a Rothschild, then, that you talk so? You’ve married a gentleman’s daughter, young fellow. You’ve married a Tempest, and you wanted to do without your uncle’s allowance; how much have you to keep house on? What have you to maintain the daughter of such a family as mine?”

“Well, I find that I can manage to scrape together, say, a couple of hundred a year.”

“A couple of hundred a year, you young scoundrel! And do you mean to have the impudence to pretend to keep my daughter on that?”

“It’s very little, I know; but with that, even, we can hold on till better days come.”

“Better days! bah! Oh, curse you, I say; curse the day when I spoke to your villainous uncle. Oh, that I, a gentleman, a colonel in her Majesty’s army, a Tempest, should have soiled my fingers by touching such a dirty blackguard!”

“This is hardly the place for Billingsgate language, Colonel Tempest,” said Stephen; “besides, Isabella, I am sure, does not feel as you do. It is for her to find fault, and not you.”

All the time Isabella had stood by without speaking; but at this she also took part in the conversation.

“I say what my father says,” she said passionately. “You seem to forget, Stephen Edgcumbe, that I am a lady; and it was only for the fact of the reports of your uncle’s money that we noticed him or you. Do you think I would have associated my name with yours if you had been poor? Do you think I would have married the son of a Dissenting minister, but for the fact of what we heard about your uncle?”

This brutality staggered Stephen. For the first time he saw the mask drawn from his wife’s face; she was not loving, as he had thought. She had no care for him at all; he was simply the prospective heir of a rich man, and so she had married him.

“And you never loved me?” he said.

“Love!” she cried passionately. “What was there in you, with your sanctimonious notions, to love? But you have deceived us all; you have ruined my life; you have made me a pauper.”

“Yes; and to think that Hussey, who has a thousand a year in his own right, wanted to marry her!” cried the Colonel; “a thousand a year sure. Not enough to do much with, it is true, but enough to make things pleasant. But I trusted a plebeian

villain, a tradesman, because it was reported he had ten thousand a year, and that you would have it all."

In their anger and chagrin, they had lost complete control over themselves, and scarcely knew what they were saying. All that was coarse and repulsive in their natures came to the surface, and Stephen's heart grew sick with pain.

"But," cried the young man, "would you have married Hussey rather than me? You told me you loved me for myself alone."

"You have no right to ask me that!" she cried. "You who are a pauper, a mere quill-driver, have no right to ask such a question. He is a gentleman, anyhow, and would scorn to marry under false pretences."

"I married under no false pretences!" cried Stephen. "I told you that I expected to work for my own living, and to carve out my own position, and I can do it; ay, and I will do it, if you will be fair with me. We can go into cheap apartments; and if we are careful, we shall, in a few years, rise above difficulties."

"And do you think," she cried, "that I will bury myself with you, — that I will live in poverty with you? I never, never will!"

"By Gad, she shall not!" cried the Colonel. "Oh, what a fool I was not to see this! And the worst of all is that this fool has no proper pride, no sense of what's the proper thing."

"It seems to me," said Stephen, "that the proper thing to do is, meet the matter bravely. After all, we are not the worst sufferers. We are young, and have health and strength. I trouble more about the poor fellows who have been ruined by my uncle's failure."

"What are a lot of shopkeepers to me? They have n't the same feelings that we have."

A knock came to the door. It was a servant bearing some letters. Stephen took them, and, after looking at the writing, opened one eagerly. "Here is a letter from my uncle," he said; "let me see what he says."

"Yes, let's hear what he says," cried the Colonel; "but there can be no good news. Everything will be seized, and the villain will not be able to pay more than about seven shillings in the pound, so the papers say."

"He is coming here to-morrow morning," said Stephen, "and then will explain how matters stand."

"Coming here to-morrow morning, is he? Then I will come too. I will face the blackguard; I'll let him know what it is to meet a gentleman; I'll — I'll — But what does he say? Read it!"

Stephen threw him the letter, which Colonel Tempest read hastily:—

DEAR STEVE, — You will doubtless have heard of the smash. I will call and see you, to-morrow about ten. Don't be downhearted. Things may not be so bad as you think.

LUKE EDGCUMBE.

The Colonel looked less savage. "'May not be so bad,' eh?" he muttered. "Well, I'll be here. Do you hear? I shall be here."

"Come, by all means," said Stephen. "I'm glad things may not be so bad, after all. Anyhow, I hope the poorest among the sufferers may be helped."

"D — the sufferers!" cried the Colonel. "Come, Bell, let's go out somewhere. You shall not stay here with this hypocritical young rascal, with his silly nonsense."

"But surely, Isabella, you'll not go?" cried Stephen. "You'll stay with me; there are many things to speak about."

For answer, she gave him a look which made the young man's heart feel as though an icy hand had gripped it, and a few minutes later he heard her go out with her father.

For hours Stephen sat like one stunned, not because of his uncle's failure, but because of the revelation of his wife's real feeling towards him. He could not understand it; he could scarcely realize it, save for the pain that had gripped his heart. He had held on through the year, in spite of the difference of opinion that had existed between them. He had been led to make allowances for her feelings with regard to their differences about money; perhaps, after all, it was natural that she should look upon what Luke Edgcumbe had given him as her right, and perhaps, too, his desire to be independent, and to work for his own fortune, was, to say the least, quixotic; but her unblushing admission that she would never have married him but for his money seemed to shatter all possibility of joy or happiness. He saw her now as she really was, — a loveless woman of the world, caring only for her own comfort and pleasure. He was but a tool; she cared nothing for him, nothing at all, — nay, because of misfortune she hated him. She, who he had thought would remain by his side, cheering him and comforting him in the dark days, had taken sides against him, had scornfully abused him. And yet he loved her. He had given his all to her, — the warm, ardent love of his life. He had dreamed of winning a great name for her, of placing her in a high position through his own unaided efforts. He had heard with gladness the kind things said about him; his heart had been cheered by the respect his seniors paid to him; he saw in it all future brightness and prosperity. He knew it would come. All he had to do was to work, and wait, and hope. And he was working manfully, he

was waiting bravely, he was hoping joyfully. For was not Isabella his wife, and did he not love her like his own life? But now his dream was dispelled, his hopes shattered, and the beautiful creature he called wife was selfish, coarse, cruel, caring only for herself, her pleasure, her position, her comforts. God have mercy upon him! He remembered his uncle's advice now; he called to mind what Ilford had said; and for the first time he began to believe those dark things which they had taught was the truth concerning life.

But no, he could not believe it. There must be a mistake somewhere. He must make allowances. He must remember the keen disappointment, he must think of his wife's utter abhorrence of poverty and hardship. He must not forget her education, her training. Her father had poisoned her mind; she would get over her anger in an hour or two; she would come back and tell him that she was grieved that she had spoken in haste, and that her heart was all his. Ah, yes, he would hope on, and he had been wrong to judge so hastily.

When night came on, he waited eagerly for his wife's footsteps; but he waited in vain. She did not come; she left him alone. Still, he was hopeful; she was under her father's influence, and he would keep her from returning to him that evening. Throughout the whole night he did not sleep, and when morning came it was with a sad heart that he made preparations to receive his uncle.

At ten o'clock precisely, Luke Edgcumbe made his appearance, and he had scarcely seated himself when Colonel Tempest and his daughter appeared. The Colonel nodded distantly to the men, and with a great deal of fussiness began to pull off his gloves, while Luke Edgcumbe watched him narrowly.

"I have decided to be present at your inter-

view with your nephew," said Colonel Tempest to Luke.

"Whether you are wanted or not, I suppose?" remarked Luke.

"That's it. Honest men are seldom wanted at such conferences; but I have a daughter, sir, a daughter;" and he struck his breast theatrically.

"Yes, I perceive," said Luke.

"Well, sir, what are you going to do?"

All this time Stephen had watched Isabella narrowly, and hungered for a kind word from her.

"Have you no word for me after staying away all night?" he said; but she only drew closer to her father, without speaking.

"Steve, my lad," said Luke, "do you wish me to talk of our affairs before this specimen of the British aristocracy?"

"I think it is right you should, uncle," replied Stephen. "I am Isabella's husband."

The jam manufacturer hesitated a moment, and seemed to be in doubt as to what he should do.

"Who has a right if I have not?" said the Colonel, in a loud voice. "Has not your nephew taken away my daughter from her loving father? Has he not associated my name with that of a bankrupt? The name of Tempest has never been associated with dishonor before. Trade was bad enough; but trade and dishonor together — ah, what a fool I've been!"

"You would n't mind both if there were a thousand or two a year at the end of them," sneered Luke.

"How dare you, sir!" roared Colonel Tempest. "But tell me some of the particulars of this disgraceful business. In my daughter's name, I demand to be told."

"There are full particulars in the newspapers," said Luke, bitterly.

“I’ve read the newspapers, and it’s well for you that my name is kept out of them.”

“I don’t know that your name is of sufficient importance to put in,” replied Luke; “you’d have only been too glad to have a finger in the pie, if I would have let you.”

“You, you’re a villain!” gasped the Colonel.

“Am I? Well, we’ll see what you are,” replied Luke. “Steve, my boy, if you still wish these people to hear, I am prepared, in their presence, to tell you what I am willing to do.”

They waited for him to proceed.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

And constancy lives in realms above ;
 And life is thorny, and youth is vain.

COLERIDGE: *Christabel*.

“ I HAVE known that this smash was inevitable about a year and a half,” remarked Luke, quietly ; “ I thought it might come years ago.”

“ A year and a half !” roared the Colonel ; “ a year and a half ! Before the wedding ! Why did you not let us know then ?”

“ Because — well, I did n’t choose.”

“ You scheming villain !” gasped the Colonel.

“ Yes, I knew what you wanted,” replied Luke, “ and I was in two minds about letting the boy make a fool of himself. But I was n’t quite prepared to let the world know my position then, and I knew that all of you wanted the matter to be settled quickly, and I decided that on the whole I had better let you have your own way. Steve will be none the worse for this eye-opener in a year or two ; while as for you and your precious daughter, Tempest, you are not worth thinking about.”

“ Not worth thinking about ! ” gasped the Colonel.

“ No ; and for this reason. You have no feelings of honor to hurt ; while a thousand or two will always cool your anger.”

Brutal as was this reply, the Colonel, to Stephen’s surprise, looked less furious.

“What are you going to do?” he said, after musing a minute or two. “Look here, Edgcumbe, consider my position, and then think how I must feel. In a big smash such as yours, — and, after all, it *isn't* a petty bankruptcy, — you must have saved a good deal from the general ruin. Such fellows as you always do.” He spoke as though a new idea had struck him, and as though he wanted to be conciliatory.

“I am not in a position to enter into my affairs,” replied Luke; “but I will say this: I see no reason why Steve can't have an allowance as before, not quite so large, perhaps, but nearly; at any rate, enough to keep the wolf from the door.”

“Edgcumbe,” said Colonel Tempest, “forgive the rash words of a fond father; I might have known that you would do right. Bella, my dear, you'll be saved from disgrace, after all, and you and Stephen Temple can live on here as before. I was wrong to be so rash and hasty; I was wrong to speak so without considering what such a man as Edgcumbe would do.”

A smile curled Luke Edgcumbe's lips as he spoke, and he looked towards Stephen curiously.

“You see things are not so very bad, after all, Steve,” said Luke, “and this little affair of yours can be patched up easily.”

“Might I ask what sum you intend paying your creditors?” asked Stephen.

“A very creditable bankruptcy, my boy; I think we shall manage over a third, — say seven and sixpence in the pound.”

“And yet you can afford to give me nearly a thousand a year?”

“Well, you see, my boy, as the Colonel said, this is not a small affair. My business connections were very numerous, and so I have been able to manage

better than if it had been one little trumpery business."

The Colonel nodded his head with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Personally," said Stephen, quietly, "I must decline to take one farthing of such money; and as the one largely responsible for my wife's transactions, I must insist that she also refuse to receive anything from you."

"What do you mean?" gasped the Colonel.

"Just that," replied Stephen. "What right have I to take nearly a thousand a year from my uncle when he is paying his creditors only seven and sixpence in the pound?"

"And do you mean that you'll reduce my daughter to poverty rather than take nearly a thousand a year when it comes in your way?"

"Certainly."

"What — what — do you intend doing, then?"

"The best I can. We can go to a part of the city where rents are low, and I can manage to do fairly well. Bella must give up her luxuries, but we can live in comparative comfort."

The Colonel's face grew purple, while Luke Edgumbe remained as cynical and watchful as ever. He was evidently enjoying the situation.

"She shall never do it!" roared the Colonel, at length; "never! This is your idea of loving and honoring my daughter, is it? This the outcome of all the love you have professed!"

"Yes." Then, turning to his wife, he said, "You see that this is right, don't you, Bella? You have been led to see differently and think differently since last night. What you said then was without meaning. It is all well, Bella; we'll conquer the world yet, for we love each other in spite of all, don't we?" and there was a yearning look in his eyes.

But she never moved from the Colonel's side. "I say what my father says," was her answer.

Stephen buried his face in his hands, and for a minute he was incapable of thinking.

"Steve, are you sure you know what you are doing?" asked Luke. "Come, what is the use of these high-fangled notions? You see, the Colonel has no scruples, and you know what a religious man he is; why, then, should you bother?"

"Uncle," said Stephen, "you may act as you please. You do not profess a code of honor, but I'll starve before I'll do as you ask me. My only pain is that I have been educated by money which really belongs to others."

"Sad, is n't it," replied Luke, half sneeringly, half pathetically. "My lad, the world's all alike, and civilization is built up on a system of robbery, and all money is filthy with what you call injustice. Your father's salary, which paid for your schooling years ago, was contributed by people who *had* to be dishonest in getting it. All men are dishonest; only some men manage it without being brought into public notoriety. The truth is, I have been beaten by a man who got the whip-hand of me; but I'll be even with him yet. Meanwhile, I and you must take the world as we find it. Honesty and honor are matters of degree, matters of opinion, and I should be a fool if I swallowed a quixotic code of honor, a code which nobody practises, although so many profess it, if thereby I lose my all, and am dragged in the dust. There now, Steve, this is not sentimental talk, but it's common sense. Be comfortable, lad, and let fools wag their tongues."

"No; I shall not touch one penny."

I will not further describe what took place; enough to say that, in spite of Stephen's pleadings, his wife left him with scornful and angry reproaches, declaring

that she would never see him or communicate with him again; while the Colonel, purple with passion, continued to pour out reproaches upon him, and to threaten him with all sorts of calamities.

I, Daniel Roberts, was at this time an assistant to a medical practitioner in Battersea, London, S. W. I had taken my degree at Edinburgh, and had engaged to place my learning and ability at the service of Dr. Blunt in particular, and the Battersea people in general, for a sum which many of the assistant-masters under the London School Board would have despised. Still, I was able to engage a couple of rooms, for which I paid twelve shillings a week, and to live with some degree of comfort. It is true, I saw but little possibility of becoming a renowned physician by staying in Battersea; but I saw the possibility of bread and cheese, and there was also a chance, if I were patient, of succeeding Dr. Blunt when he should be pleased to retire.

I had not been invited to Stephen's house during his married life, owing, I was afterwards told, to his wife's unwillingness to receive me. I constantly received letters from my friend, however; and so, on the morning following the episode I have just related, when I saw an envelope addressed in his handwriting, I opened it without any presentiment of coming evil. When I had read it, however, I was for a time almost stunned with astonishment and grief. Bad as my fears might have been, I had never dreamed that his wife would leave him for any cause whatever; and although he tried in his letter to shield her, I could not help seeing how things stood. For a time I knew not what step to take. I could not go and see him, as my duties just then prohibited it; but I decided to write him, and ask him to share a bachelor's hospitality. By return of post I received a reply from

him, saying that as soon as he had arranged his affairs he would come and stay a few days with me.

I must confess to a shock when he at length came. I did not imagine that he could look so haggard and pale; but he assured me that he was very well, and that he should not seek my professional advice. It was a long time before he would talk at all; but by and by, when the roar of the traffic had ceased, and the clocks were striking midnight, he became more communicative.

“Dan,” he said, “would you mind my being a fellow lodger with you?”

“Nothing would delight me more, old fellow; but how can you manage it?”

“I have sold the furniture of the—the other house,” he said, without seeming to heed my question.

“Yes?” I said interrogatively.

“I was obliged to, you know; besides, I had—no right to it.”

I did not speak.

“I am afraid, too, that my sun has gone down at the bar.”

“Why?”

“I bear an unfortunate name. My uncle’s smash is such a big affair that everybody fights shy of me.”

“It’s a shame,” I said.

“I suppose it’s natural,” was his somewhat bitter reply; “still, I can manage to pick up a living. I write a little for the papers, you know; and I dare say I shall be able to pick up a few cases. Battersea is a long way from Lincoln’s Inn Fields, but not out of reach altogether; besides, I want your friendship badly,—I mean your society and your sympathy.”

“I shall be only too glad for you to remain with me; you know I shall be always your friend, and my landlady will be pleased to let you have a bedroom;

but you 'll be out of the swim for everything. No one of note lives in Battersea."

"At any rate, I'll stay a month or so; and I shall see how it works by that time," he said wearily.

And so it was settled. We were, for a few weeks, to share the sitting-room I had rented, while a bedroom adjoining my own was set apart for his use. During the day, I saw little or nothing of him; but when our work was over, we were much together. He scarcely ever spoke of his year of married life; indeed, as the days went by, he became less and less of a talker, while his face became more careworn and sad.

"Come, Steve," I said to him one day, "you must not yield to sad feelings in this way; there's nothing gained by showing the white feather. Fight the matter, old boy, to the death."

"What's the use of fighting?" was his query.

"Every use," I replied. "You are young, and the years to come will make all things right."

"Do you think so?" he asked, with a show of interest.

"I do, indeed."

"I wish I could think so." He paused a minute, and then continued: "Dan, when you lose trust in what is dearest to you, — when the thing you thought pure and spotless is revealed to you as sordid and — and unlike what you thought, — when your trust has been betrayed, — when you look around and find that men everywhere are alike, that everybody is selfish and poor, — when you see nothing before you but dreariness, — what then?"

"I should say that you haven't seen the whole of life," I replied.

"That is my one ray of light at present," he said; "sometimes it disappears, and I am wholly in the dark; but it comes back again, and then I try to hope.

But what is the light? Is it a reality, or do I create it myself?"

He was terribly in earnest, and I saw that no conventional words of comfort would have any effect upon him.

"God's in His heaven. All's right with the world," I said, remembering Browning's "Pippa Passes."

"It sounds all right," he said. "I've been trying to comfort myself with the thought during the last fortnight, since — since — she's left me. For nights I did not sleep, because I felt no place on which I could rest. I tried to get down on solid rock, and in doing so everything went. All the orthodox theories of life became false as lies. The world's moralities, the world's hopes and aims, appeared to me to contain only the quintessence of selfishness. The religions of the world became only feeble efforts to manufacture hopes to take away the pain of the black logic of life. But I won't tell you all I've gone through during the last fortnight; only, Dan, the future offers nothing to me, life offers nothing worth the grasping, while it seems to me that the cynicism of my uncle and my old tutor is the only reasonable solution of life."

"Solution?"

"Yes; you put your finger on the weakness. There is no solution. At present, everything seems a muddle, worse than a muddle. Life is black, hopeless — worse than hopeless. Everywhere it is pain, misery, woe, and afterwards, nothing. Everybody comes into the world with desire. In nine cases out of ten the desire is never satisfied; and when the one in ten does get the object of his desires, he is disappointed, for it yields him nothing of what he expected. Indeed, the one is about as happy as the other. You remember what my uncle and Ilford

used to say about illusions; well, it seems that my time of disillusionment has come, and I see things in all their ghastliness and nakedness."

"May not your pain and sorrow have blinded you to the truth?" I suggested.

"I have thought of that," he replied; "but somehow it brings no comfort. Before my trouble I just shut my eyes. I was happy, or at least I persuaded myself that I was, which was just the same. When I saw pain, misery, crime, I would not seek to understand their meaning; I thought of my own happiness, I saw my own bright prospects, I believed that my wife loved me. My own circumstances made me look at life through rose-colored glasses, — that is, when I looked at life at all. When Uncle Luke's failure became known, the glasses were taken away, and I was obliged to look at life as it is."

"We look at everything through a medium," I said. "What is your medium now? Is it not disappointment and misplaced love? Wait for time to do its work before you come to conclusions."

"You are right, Dan; I intend to do that. Indeed, I have been trying get a working theory of life. I can't look at life as some do; mine is an earnest nature; and although I have been living in a fool's paradise, now that I am driven out from it, I am going to try and get at some little grain of truth amidst the heaps of lies."

"But how are you going to get this truth? And what is your object?" I said curiously.

He looked at me strangely and earnestly, as though he were studying me, but he did not speak for some minutes. After a while he said slowly, —

"This Battersea contains a little world of itself, does n't it?"

"The poor are here," I said; "the poor and the needy, the hard-worked, the sorrowing. The rich are

very few ; they don't come here, the life does n't suit them. The bad are here ; ay, and the good too."

" You have a great many patients, Dan ? "

" Scarlet fever is pretty prevalent just now," I replied ; " and most of Dr. Blunt's cases are left to me."

" And the people among whom you go are poor ? "

" Very poor, mostly."

" The poorest ? "

" No ; the poorest can't afford a doctor, except the parish doctor ; but I am afraid they find it very difficult to get him."

" Ah ! " He mused a second, then he said, " Dan, I should like to accompany you on your rounds to-morrow."

" Very well," I said ; " I shall be glad to have you."

I had scarcely spoken, when I heard the door-bell ring ; and a minute later my landlady entered, saying that a woman wanted to see me.

" Show her in," I said.

A woman of about fifty entered, whom I immediately recognized.

" It's my Lize," she said, without hesitation. " I went down to the old 'un's surgery, and he told me to come to you."

" Is she worse ? " I asked.

" Been spittin' a lot of blood ; so I jist gives Jim the dish to hold, while I runs off for the doctor. I runs for the parish one, same as I did yesterday, but he would n't come ; he said it were n't reg'lar, and so I 've come to you again."

" Very well," I said ; " I'll come in a few minutes."

She went away, while I began to pull on my boots.

" I should like to go with you, if I may, Dan," said Steve.

" Certainly, old man ; but I am afraid you 'll not be exhilarated by what you see and hear."

" Nevertheless, I'll go," he replied.

After a few minutes' walk we found ourselves in Battersea Park Road, along which we walked for a little way, and then turned down one of the streets which branch from it. All these streets are occupied by working people: in one or two of them the houses are fairly well built; most of them are squalid and comfortless; all of them are "long lines of ugliness." A large number of these dwellings is occupied by several families, some having one, a few having two rooms, wherein to cook, wash, eat, drink, and sleep.

The street we entered was rather worse than most of those I have mentioned. The houses were older, lower, and worse built. It was miserably lighted, and it was some little time before I could find the house in which the sick girl lay; but I discovered it at length, and we entered. The family to which she belonged occupied two rooms on the ground floor. In passing through the living room, we saw a man sitting at the end of a table in a half-drunken sleep; near him were a girl of fourteen and a boy of twelve. The atmosphere was sickly in the extreme, — so much so that for a little time we found it difficult to breathe. There was not a single article in the whole place which denoted comfort; but I need not enlarge on that. The room was a specimen of hundreds of others within three minutes' walk; and perhaps the people living in them were so unused to comfort that they did not feel the need of what many regard as essential to existence.

"She's in there," said the girl, pointing to the back room; "mother's there too; so's Jim."

We entered the bedroom, and were more than ever impressed with the impurity of the atmosphere and the squalor of the surroundings. The apartment could not have been more than twelve feet square, yet three beds were placed in it, on which eight people had to sleep; and one of them was sick, dying of

consumption. In one corner of the room, on a miserable heap of dirt, with two children lying by her side, I found my patient. She had just recovered from a fit of coughing and blood-spitting, and was now breathing with difficulty. She might have been twenty years of age, and was of the usual type of street girl. Marks of an evil life were stamped on her face, and between her gasps she uttered language which I will not write here.

“Will she get better?” said the mother to me after a while.

“She is very ill,” I replied; “both lungs are badly affected, and the disease has evidently been hastened on by the life she has been living.”

“Our Liza was allays a bit flighty,” she replied.

“What has she been doing these last few years?” asked Stephen.

The woman, thinking him an assistant doctor, answered readily:—

“She ran the streets like the others till she was thirteen, an’ was out of the school officer’s clutches, then I gits ’er a place to take care o’ children. But our Liza would n’t, you know; she was that wantin’ her liberty, she was,—and so she could n’ keep her places. Then after a bit she gits into a laundry; but ’t was very hard work, and she hooked that. Then she stops out late at night and took to drinkin’, so that she could n’t git no work at all.”

“And then?”

“Well, then she went wild.”

“And you knew of this?”

“How could I ’elp knowin’?”

“But why did n’t you stop her?”

“Liza was allays strong-willed,” said the woman, with a whine; “and she would n’t take no notice of me. I says to her, ‘Lize,’ I says, ‘you’ll be better off in service,’ I says; but ’t were no use. Besides,

she could n't git service jist then, so I lets her go till she could get a place. That's all."

We left soon after, Steve's face hard and his teeth set. We walked a few steps side by side in silence, then he broke out.

"Dan, I've shut myself away from this kind of life, and I don't know much about it; but—but surely there can't be many such cases as that!"

"I am afraid they are not uncommon," I said sadly.

"No, no, Dan; a mother to talk like that!"

We passed by half a dozen girls, from fifteen to seventeen years of age, who were shrieking with laughter and making coarse jokes.

"I'm afraid there are many mothers who care very little for their children," I said; "some have drunk away all affection, all moral sense."

"Stop!" cried my friend; "listen to that. No, no; 't is too horrible!"

I stopped and listened.

CHAPTER III.

SHRIMP.

Oh! thou art like a flower;
 So fair, so pure thou art;
 I look on thee, and sorrow
 Lies heavy on my heart.

HEINE: *To a Child.*

TWO doors from us stood a woman who with one hand supported herself by holding an iron bar which formed a railing to some steps, and with the other grasped the arm of a girl about fifteen years of age. The child was small for her years, and at first sight did not look more than twelve.

“Where’s that shillin’ I told yer to git?” said the woman, with an oath.

“I could n’ git one,” replied the child. “I could n’ sell no matches, an’ I only got this ’ere tuppence.”

The woman clutched the money eagerly. She had evidently been drinking, and eagerly craved for more intoxicants.

“I told yer to git a bob,” she snarled; “be off an’ git it sharp.”

“I can’t git it to-night. Nobody’ll buy matches to-night; besides, if they would, I ain’t got ’nough to make a shillin’.”

“Then git it some other way.”

“I can’t.”

Then the woman uttered words which I will not write, while the child, with a look of terror on her face, broke away from her grasp.

“Bring that bob to the ——” (naming a public-house), “or I’ll break every bone in your body,” she snarled, with an oath.

“No; not that, not that!” sobbed the child.

“Come with me to the pub now, then,” said the woman, “and I’ll let ye off.”

“No, no!” cried the girl; “I can’t go there.”

“Then see you git it somewheres else,” she said, with a string of oaths. “Be off at once, now. I got many a shillin’ afore I was your age as easy as winkin’, and you could, too, if you wasn’t so finnikin.”

I will not relate the conversation which followed. I have said enough to reveal the ghastly purpose in the woman’s mind, enough to show that she was willing — nay, anxious — to sacrifice everything to gratify a base appetite.

At length she staggered away to the nearest public-house, uttering curses all the time, while the child went sobbing along the street.

“We must do something for her,” said Steve; “there’s no knowing what she may drive the child to, if help is n’t given now.”

“Very well,” I said; “I will speak to her.”

We were still in the side street, where there was little or no traffic, and so she heard me easily. She turned around fearfully, and with a sob.

“We have just heard what your mother said, and we would like to help you.”

She still shrank timidly from us; but, instinctively feeling that we were friends, she said, —

“Please, sir, she is n’t my mother, she’s my aunt. Mother died three years ago, and left me with her.”

“Where do you live?”

She pointed to the house by which they had been standing.

“And your name?”

“They call me Shrimp,” said the child. “Her name” — pointing towards the public-house — “is Hillyer; that’s what people call me.”

“And where’s your father?”

The child shook her head. “Nobody knows,” she said.

“Have you been to school?”

“I did till two years ago. I go to Sunday-school now.”

“Where?”

She mentioned one of the Sunday-schools in Battersea Park Road.

“A good lady teaches me there,” she continued; “that’s why, — why ——” And she burst into tears.

“Would you like to go away from here?”

Her tears dried in a minute. “Where?” she asked.

“To some place where you could be put in the way of getting a respectable living.”

“Yes, sir. Oh, I would!” she said; “but how can I?”

Although reared in the midst of vice, in a neighborhood where children grow old so very, very soon, she spoke in a frank, childish way. I saw by the aid of a gas-lamp, too, that she was by no means ugly. True, she was poorly clad, and she was small and wizened for her years; but her features were well formed, and she had fine gray eyes. But more than all this, she was as yet untainted by her vicious surroundings; some noble influences had been at work, and saved her from being what so many of the young girls in her position were daily becoming. She had not lost the crown and glory of a young girl’s life, — her modesty, and a shrinking from that which was coarse and impure. Both of us felt this as we spoke; and yet, what might she not become if left to the baleful influences which surrounded her,

and to the depraved woman in whose power she was?

“Dan,” said Stephen, “we must do something.”

“What?” I asked.

“First, we must take her from her present surroundings; we must take her away from the clutches of that drunken wretch.”

“It’s next to impossible, old man. The woman is no doubt the child’s guardian, and we put ourselves in the hands of the law if we interfere with her rights.”

“Rights!” he replied; “she has no rights, she has forfeited them all. Why, she would have driven this child to sin for drink; and then you talk about rights.”

I had, I am afraid, become a little indifferent to these things; or, rather, I had, through continual contact, come to look at them as something which, although very bad, could not be altered.

“Well,” I said, “and what do you propose doing?”

“Is there no place to which we could take her for the night?”

“No place, as far as I know. There are two places over in Chelsea that I am acquainted with, where they shelter fallen girls.”

“But this girl is not fallen. She is only a pure, simple child. Is there no place for such as are in danger?”

“I cannot think of any,” I replied. “The two places I have mentioned receive the poor things from off the streets; but they are no fit places for this child, even though she could be taken in. All we can do, as far as I can see, is to give her the shilling that the woman wants, and let her go back to the place she calls home. She will be safe for the night, anyhow.”

“And the future?”

I was silent, for I could think of nothing.

“ My girl,” said Stephen to Shrimp, “ if I give you a shilling now, will that woman let you alone for to-night ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And you can sleep there in safety ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And if I could get you a place as a servant to-morrow, you would go ? ”

“ Oh, yes, sir. But, please, I’ve no clothes ; no one would take me. Besides, she ” — pointing to the public-house into which the woman had gone — “ would find me out, and — and would make things hard for me.”

“ Well, we’ll see about that. Here’s a shilling, and here’s a card with my name and address on it. Come and see me to-morrow morning, will you ? You can come without that woman knowing it, I suppose ? ”

“ Oh, yes, sir.”

“ Good-night, then, Shrimp ; keep a brave heart, and don’t do wrong, whatever comes of it.”

“ No, sir ; I won’t, I won’t,” said Shrimp, with a sob.

We left her then, Shrimp to go to her home, and Stephen and I to go back to our lodgings. Both of us pulled off our boots in silence and sat down by the fire. The month, I remember, was October, and the nights were very chilly. Neither of us spoke for several minutes ; then Stephen broke out bitterly :

“ This is a beautiful, happy world, is n’t it ? ”

I did not reply.

“ Think of the two scenes we’ve just witnessed ! ” he went on in the same tone. “ Here is one girl killed by sin, and yet she never feels the wrong of that sin ; while her mother has been a consenting party, and excuses it. The other one, a poor innocent child, is almost driven towards a destiny at which she shudders. And this is life ! ”

“Not the whole of it,” I said.

“But it is life, for all that. What matters it to poor little Shrimp that others are free from temptation, while yon hag goads her on to hell day by day?”

“Don’t be too hard, Steve,” I suggested.

“Hard, Dan, hard! but we must see things as they are. It is no use smoothing matters over. These ghastly facts exist, whether we will see them or not. For years I have closed my eyes, and have walked in a fool’s paradise; I have refused to believe in what Uncle Luke and Ilford used to teach; but my time of disillusionment has come, and I begin to see things as they are now!”

“Let’s go to bed,” I said.

“You may go, Dan, but I cannot. I’ll stay up and read for an hour or two;” and he took a book from a shelf.

“Some law book, Steve?”

“No, it’s a novel,” he said wearily, passing it to me. “It has just come out.”

“A theological novel?” I said.

“Partly,” he replied; “it is one of the novels in which the writer professes to paint life as it is, rather than as we would make it out to be.”

I took the book and opened it. “*Part II.*,” I read; and then underneath it I saw these words:—

“And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived and worked for. A striving and a striving, and an ending in nothing.”

“I wish you joy in your reading, Steve,” I said, and left him alone.

I had not been in my room more than an hour, when I heard a knock at my door.

“Are you asleep, old man?” It was Steve’s voice.

“No; come in.”

He entered, and I saw that his face was drawn and pale.

“Is n't it time you went to bed?” I said.

“Yes; I'm going now. I'm afraid I sha'n't sleep for a time, though. But I can't read any more of that book to-night. It's too ghastly. Perhaps some other time I may get through with it; but feeling as I'm feeling now, it's too terrible, and the worst of it is, it feels like truth.”

“Don't read any more of it,” I suggested.

“Yes, I must read it,” he said; “I want to see what's right and true.”

There was something about his way of speaking which I could not understand; but I did not question him, I saw he was in no humor for it; besides, he left me immediately after, and I heard him tramping to and fro his bedroom for a long time afterwards.

When we sat down to breakfast the following morning, he said abruptly, —

“Shrimp will be here directly, I expect.”

“Yes,” I replied, “I expect she will.”

“Have you thought of anything we can do for her?” he asked, looking at me eagerly.

“Nothing,” I said. “I'm afraid very little *can* be done. I dare say she's under the guardianship of that woman, and she will hunt her down unless we get the little thing a long way off.”

“You know no place where you could recommend her as a servant, do you?”

“How can I? What do I know of her? It is a very risky thing to have any connection with people of that sort.”

He looked at me as though he were surprised; then he said slowly, “But I'm going to do something, Dan.”

“What?”

“I remember a lady who told me she was con-

nected with a Home where such little things as Shrimp might be helped. I've been looking up the law on the matter, and I don't think that woman can have any claim; besides, if she has, I've no doubt a sovereign will arrange matters."

"You'll buy her?" I asked.

"Anything to get her away from there. This matter means more to me than you think. I'm going to the Home this morning. It's Wandsworth way, and I can be back by about three o'clock. I'll ask Mrs. Blewitt to tell Shrimp to come again at that time."

He ate his breakfast in silence after that, and then hurried away, while I started off on my rounds. When I returned, at two o'clock, I found that he had just got back:

"Dan," he said, "will you go with me to see that woman?"

"Shrimp's aunt?"

"Yes; I want you to come now, if you will."

"Very well," I said; "come on."

We walked briskly towards Battersea Park Road, and in a few minutes we arrived at the house outside which we had first seen Shrimp. To my surprise, we found the woman in, and, although she was slightly under the influence of drink, was not so intoxicated as when we had seen her the night before.

She looked up at our entrance, and asked what we wanted. I could not help admiring the tact with which Stephen overcame her evident desire to be rude, and the way in which he got her to talk of herself and her history. When he broached the subject of Shrimp's relation to her, however, she was less communicative.

"Why do you want to know about 'er?" she asked.

"She's not your child," suggested Stephen.

“Who said as ’ow she was?” retorted the woman. “But I ’ve been as good as a mother to ’er, an’ better, too, for that. But she ’s a himpident little thing, and stupid as a toad.”

“I think I could get her a place,” said Stephen.

“Be you a religious bloke, or a parson?” she asked, with an oath.

“Neither,” replied Stephen.

“Then what right have you to care about she?”

“I ’m a lawyer,” replied Stephen, “and I heard what you said to her last night.”

In a few minutes he had succeeded in frightening her, and she told him that she “’oped as ’ow the gen’leman wudden be ’ard on a pore woman as wanted a drop o’ gin badly.”

Then Stephen learnt Shrimp’s history according to the woman’s version.

“She ’s the little un of my man’s sister,” she said. “I ’ve got my marriage lines to prove as ’ow I was married to Dick Hillyer. Dick’s sister was called Nancy. She was a housemaid over in Chelsea, but she gits into trouble. While she could she took in laundry ’ere in Battersea, then three years agone she died and left Shrimp behind. Dick was soft, and said we should keep her. That ’s all.”

“Then you ’ve no legal claim on this girl,” said Stephen.

“Ain’t I?” said the woman; “then the one ’as takes ’er from me ’ll ’ave to pay for three years’ keep.”

I need not describe the conversation further, except to say it ended in her giving her consent, “pervided Dick was willin’” to sign away all claim to Shrimp for a certain consideration.

When we got back to our lodgings, we found Shrimp waiting for us.

“Well, Shrimp,” said Stephen, “I ’ve found a home

for you, a real good home. You will go away from that woman and be well cared for until you are old enough to get your living decently."

The little thing's eyes filled with tears of gratitude.

"You are glad, are n't you?" said Stephen.

"Yes, sir," she sobbed. "When may I go?"

"You may go to-night, if you like. I will take you to bid good-bye to the man and the woman you have lived with, and I am going to send word to the lady with whom you are going to stay to come here for you."

If I had doubts of Shrimp's genuineness before, they were dispelled now. No bigger than an ordinary child of twelve, she had many of the ways of those far older; and there was a certain touch of womanhood in the way she seized Stephen's hand and kissed it.

"And you'll be a good girl, Shrimp, and do as the lady tells you?"

"Yessir, I will."

"That will do, then. Go down with Mrs. Blewitt, and she will give you some tea; and at six o'clock, when Dick Hillyer comes, you can go and bid them good-bye."

"Don't—don't let me go alone, sir," she said fearfully; "they'd keep me somehow, and not let me go at all."

"This gentleman and I will go with you," said Stephen.

At six o'clock we took Shrimp to the place where she had lived, and found that Dick Hillyer had been back about half an hour. He was "perfectly willing to part with the kid," he said, "just to spite his old hag, who is allays a tryin' to drive her to the bad. Not as 'ow I care for the kid, but still she's Nancy's little un, and she was n't a bad lass."

"Come and kiss me, Shrimp dearie," said the

woman; "come and kiss your aunt good-bye. And you'll write me a letter, won't you, Shrimpie, and I'll come and see the little dear."

But Shrimp refused to be kissed; whereupon the woman broke into a string of oaths, and cursed the whole of us very freely. A few minutes later we left them, Stephen carrying in his breast-pocket an agreement signed by Dick Hillyer, and his wife Harriet, that they resigned all claims upon the child of Dick Hillyer's sister, commonly known as Shrimp.

It was pathetic to see the way the child clung to Stephen; she seemed to regard him as her natural protector, and trusted him implicitly. When we got back to our lodgings, Stephen seemed somewhat agitated.

"Shrimp," he said, "your good behavior at your new home, and at the situation Mrs. Morley may obtain for you after you have been with her for a year or two, means more to me than you think. I build very much upon your being a good girl: do you understand me?"

Shrimp nodded her head.

"I'm going to give you a new name, too."

"A new name, sir?"

"Yes; you are not going to be Shrimp any longer. I am going to call you a name that means very much to me; I am going to call you Hope,— Hope Hillyer."

A glad look came into her eyes. "Please, sir," she said, "could n't I stay 'ere with Mrs. Blewitt, and be a servant to you? I'd work so hard, and I'd try to be very good."

"No, that can't be," said Stephen. "Mrs. Morley will teach you many things which you ought to know, and which I could not teach you; besides, I don't want a servant. But I shall be very much interested

in you. And I want you to remember your name, — Hope, Hope. You know what it means ?”

She nodded intelligently, but her eyes filled with tears.

“If ever you are tempted to do wrong, you ’ll remember that I gave you the name, won’t you? It means very much to me. In the future you will be called Hope, and by that name I shall think of you; and if you are not a good girl, if you ever do anything which will make me lose hope in you, I shall be hurt more than you can think.”

“I will be good, sir,” she said, the tears trickling down her face.

Just then the door-bell rang, and Mrs. Morley entered. She was a cheerful, motherly woman, who in the kindness of her heart had thrown open her own home in order to help poor girls from falling away into wrong. She did not delegate her work to a committee, or to a matron, but carried it on herself, and on this occasion had brought her own carriage to take Shrimp away.

“This is Hope — Hope Hillyer,” said Stephen, quietly; “I hope she will be worthy of your kindness.”

After a few minutes all was ready for the departure, and then Stephen drew the child to him and kissed her.

“Remember your name, little one,” he said, “and then I shall not fear.” She looked at him as though she would have spoken; but her words were checked by a sob, and we heard her crying as she entered the carriage with Mrs. Morley. The coachman touched the horses with his whip, and the conveyance rolled away, and long weary years passed before we saw Hope Hillyer again.

CHAPTER IV.

A SATURDAY NIGHT IN BATTERSEA.

Bernardo: Sit down awhile;
 And let us once again assail your ears,
 That are so fortified against our story
 What we have two nights seen.

Hamlet.

FOR the next month Stephen was very quiet and reserved. Only once did he volunteer to open a conversation, and that was one morning when we were sitting at breakfast. Mrs. Blewitt had placed two packets of letters on the table, — one before the chair which I usually occupied, and the other before Stephen's. I read mine during the meal; but he did not touch his until he had finished eating; then, while I took up my paper to read during the few minutes I had to spare before starting to work, he began to scan the envelopes. Presently he gave a start, and I saw that his face turned paler than usual. I did not speak, because I felt sure that his agitation was in some way connected with his wife.

“Dan,” he said, “a woman's love is a fine thing, is n't it?”

“I should think so,” I replied lightly. “But no woman could ever love me. I am not the sort of fellow that they care about.”

“Be thankful,” he said.

I did not speak. I knew that if he wished to tell me anything he would do so without my asking.

“I wrote my — my — that is, Isabella, three days ago.”

“Yes.”

“It was the second letter since she — she left me.”

“And her answer has come this morning?”

“Yes, her answer;” and he laughed bitterly. “See, she has treated both communications in the same way. Look!” and he held up a closely written page, across which were made several thick ink-marks. “She has deigned no reply in each case but this,” he went on. “She has evidently read what I have written, and then returned it with these marks.”

“And no other comment?”

“Not a word. But, there, I suppose I ought to expect no more.”

“Hope on, old fellow,” I said; “things will come about right by and by.”

He did not reply; but I knew that he had become hard and bitter, and that I should do no good by talking. During the next three weeks he worked very closely through the day, and during the evening sat with me reading; that was when I was not called out. He did not offer to go with me on my rounds again after the night on which we met Shrimp; indeed, he spent his days in the City, and when he came back in the evenings he generally looked very weary. After dinner he read with great avidity, not law books, but novels. He had always been an imaginative fellow, and when I saw him engrossed in works of fiction I was glad.

“They will help him to forget his sorrow,” I used to say to myself; for, although I had little taste and less leisure for fiction at that time, I knew the influence of a good novel. I saw presently, however, that he did not read them as a relaxation, but as serious studies. He became intensely earnest in every problem the writers introduced in their pages, and was

very much interested in the way they sought to explain the riddle of life.

One day I looked at the names of his authors. They included Zola, Balzac, and several other Continental writers of the same school, besides two or three English novelists who were spoken of as belonging to the Realist school. Impelled by curiosity, I read one of them; and I saw that they were pervaded with the same views of life that Richard Ilford sought to impress upon him years before.

"Do you find enjoyment in reading these?" I asked him.

"Enjoyment, no."

"Then why in the world do you read them?"

"Because they fascinate me. They state problems of life, and then seek to work them out."

"And how do they succeed?"

"In the only way possible. These writers read life as it is."

"And their conclusions?"

He shrugged his shoulders, while a strange look came into his eyes.

"Dan," he said one Saturday night, after we had been sitting in silence for a ²considerable time, "let's go out for a stroll."

"It's late," I said, "and very cold into the bargain; surely you don't want to go out to-night."

"Yes, I do; I want to see what Battersea is like on a Saturday night. The people are free at this time, and I want to see how they enjoy themselves."

He put on his overcoat as he spoke, while I, yielding to his wishes, prepared to accompany him. We walked briskly until we came to the London, Chatham, and Dover railway station, in Battersea Park Road, and then went in the direction of Wandsworth. Although it was late, the road was crowded with people, costermongers' barrows lined the sidewalks, and a

brisk trade was being carried on. Occasionally, when we found the crowd a little thicker than usual, we stopped and listened. The conversation of the people in the streets was not ill-humored, but it was of the coarsest and most brutal nature. Men and women alike indulged in talk which I will not try to reproduce here. Occasionally we heard real flashes of rough wit and humor, but mostly the language was repellent to refined ears.

Young girls went shrieking up and down, exchanging jokes with loafing lads which might make an angel weep. People talk glibly about the language of the slums, without realizing what it means. The road in which we walked could by no means be called a slum. It is a broad, open street, with carts, tramcars, and cabs constantly passing up and down; and yet young girls of seventeen and eighteen were bandying coarse jests with lads of the same age; but no blush mounted the cheek of either, they felt no shame. Perhaps this was not to be wondered at. They had been accustomed to it from their earliest infancy, and the surroundings of their life were not calculated to elevate. At every few steps we encountered men and women singing Sankey's hymns, mostly holding one or two children by the hand, and, when the police were not looking, soliciting alms. As we watched, we noticed that between the intervals of their business, these street-singers met and talked, garnishing their speech with choice street epithets, and then immediately afterwards singing in the most lugubrious tones:—

“ Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast.”

During the former part of our walk we did not meet many drunken people in the street; but at

nearly every corner a public-house stood. No sooner had we got away from the glaring lights of one than we came upon another. We opened the doors of a large number and entered, and, without exception, they were full; and these public-house customers invariably belonged to the poorer classes. Standing at the bars and sitting around on the benches were people of both sexes and all ages. The women drinkers were quite as numerous as the men, and, if possible, they drank with more eagerness.

I will not here try and describe their attempts at merriment, because I saw none. To me each ribald song, each drunken laugh, was inexpressibly sad. Women stood there with sucking babes in their arms; on the faces of some I hoped I saw a look of shame, although they endeavored to appear gay and joyous: but to most, this Saturday evening drinking bout seemed but an ordinary thing. Young women sat half-drunk on the benches, while young men in the same condition sat with their arms around their waists, kissing them, and making love to them. Many of the older people were clothed in rags, and yet they found money to spend in drink. Little children, blue with the cold, and with but one thickness of garment on them, came with bottles and jugs for drink. Old men and women were there; but there was neither sacredness nor dignity in their white hair and wrinkled faces.

Some of the men professed to talk politics, and spoke with great gusto about the equalization of wealth, and said that "when they could get hold of the Duke So-and-so's money, wouldn't they have a spree!" The children looked unconcernedly on; as yet they understood little of the meaning of what was said; but their faces expressed no surprise, no horror. The training school of their life was preparing them for a similar fate as they grew older.

I knew that in their homes near by there were gloom, squalor, misery, and that the money spent here might make their cottages comparatively cheerful; but they thought not of this, or seemed not to. All the public-houses were alike, — bright, glaring, and full of customers. The people must have known that the publicans were getting rich because of their degradation; but they showed no concern.

We noticed that one of the popular subjects of conversation was prize-fighting; and the men spoke with great reverence about certain pugilists who had nearly killed their opponents.

“Tell ya,” I heard one man say, “I did n’t think he had it in ’im. He were n’t ’bove ’leven stun weight, and I tho’t he ’d be chucked out bad in less than three rounds. But, blow me tight, if he did n’t tackle the Bruiser, who wer’ over fourteen stun, an went for un like ——. We guv ’em a five-yard run, and in less than ten rounds the Bruiser’s face were as perty a picter as you ever see. It were jist as soft as a bit o’ jelly, and streamin’ wi’ claret. An’ in fourteen rounds Bill were jist like a bantam cock, but Bruiser did n’t come up to time. Tell yer, mates, it wer’ the grandest fight I ’ve seen for a blue moon.”

This led to the experiences of others, who gave the information that they were arranging for some “right beautiful fights.”

By the time we reached a large public-house nearer Clapham Junction, it was nearly midnight; and in a street close by the gin palace we saw that a crowd had gathered. On making our way to it, we found that a ring had been made, and that two men were engaged in a fight. The street-lamp threw sufficient light to reveal to us the state of affairs. A couple of young fellows, perhaps about twenty years of age, were fighting like two tigers, and were cheered by the crowd around.

“What’s the quarrel?” asked Stephen.

“There’s no quarrel,” was the reply. “Harry Stun and Jimmy West is a seein’ which is the best man, that’s all; and Jimmy West ’ll beat, for ten bob. Will yer take me?”

We elbowed our way through the crowd, and saw that each had pummelled the other’s face unmercifully. Both of the lads were evidently tired of the fight, but their seconds urged them on.

“There’s a matter ’o twenty paand staked on this yer fight,” they said, with an oath, “and you’ll have to fight it out.”

This was said while the seconds were mopping the lads’ faces, and rubbing their bruised limbs. We watched while they were placed again for the contest. They stood several yards apart, and at a given signal rushed at each other like madmen. I saw the bigger man of the two strike the other full in the face, and his opponent fell heavily. He was soon lifted up again, however, and began to prepare for another contest. Then Stephen stood in the ring.

“This affair must stop,” he said.

“What have you got to do with it?” asked one of the seconds, with a brutal oath.

“It must stop,” said Stephen.

“Why, there hev n’t bin but sivin rounds yet,” said another; “and it’s not a goin’ to be stopped for any bloomin’ swell.”

“As long as I can stand,” said Stephen, “I’m going to stand between these two lads. Dan, you go and fetch the police; if they did their duty, they’d be here now.”

“Catch ’em!” said the crowd, with a laugh.

I did not like to leave my friend there alone, but I saw that his physique commanded respect. He was over six feet high, and while he was not very broad, his every movement proclaimed him an ath-

lete. I noticed, too, that the two seconds, who were among the scum of the place, and who had evidently a financial interest in the fight, were limp, pulpy men, without either physical courage or strength. The two combatants seemed glad of the interference; and while a number of the watchers were angry at the fun being spoiled, many were interested in the part Stephen was playing.

I had just reached the edge of the crowd, when I saw two lads whom I knew I could trust, and I told them to fetch the police at once, while I went back towards Stephen again.

“Ain’t there a couple o’ chaps ’ere as ’ll pitch this puppy out of the ring?” said one of the seconds; but there were no volunteers.

“Perhaps you had better do it yourself, seeing you are so anxious to have it done,” said Stephen; whereupon there was a great guffaw.

“I say!” said the other second, “I s’pose the other cove will bring the bobbies ’ere in a few minutes; Harry and Jimmy must fight while they can.” But Stephen stood quietly in the ring, and the lads seemed to be glad for an excuse not to fight.

“Look ’ere,” said one of the seconds, “what do you, a howlin’ swell, mean by a comin’ ’ere to stop the poor man’s bit o’ fun? You ’ave yer bloomin’ chapels and churches, and all the rest on it; let us alone, will yer?” This speech was garnished by many oaths, and greatly cheered by the bystanders.

“We don’t interfere with your larks,” he went on, cheered by the approval of the crowd, “and yet the likes of you jist want to stop every bit of fun a poor chap has. “You ’re a religious cove, I s’pose; how’d you like for me to come and stop yer cussed howlin’? Fair play all round, I says. We likes a fight, we do, and we ’re a goin’ to hev it, too. Now, Harry and Jimmy, you know it means a quid to the best man,

and ye are bloomin' cowards if ye let this bloke stop yer."

"Call this enjoyment, do you?" said Stephen; "if there is enjoyment in bruising faces, you two seconds bruise yours. But these lads are not going to fight while I can stop them."

"Let's be off; the bobbies are coming!" shouted a voice; and immediately there was a clatter of feet down the street.

In a minute more the crowd had dispersed, and two policemen sauntered very slowly up to where we were standing.

"It seems to me you are generally out of the way when you are wanted," said Stephen, sharply.

"I s'pose we don't exist for the likes of you," said one of them, angrily. "What's the row?"

"Some chaps were having a bit of fun," said one of the seconds, both of whom had remained, and were evidently acquainted with the gentlemen in blue, "and this bloke comes and kicks up a row; that's what's the matter."

"Come, clear out, or I'll run ye in," said the officer.

"Not before I take your number," said Stephen.

"Take my number forty times if you like," said the man; "but things are coming to a pretty pass if a few chaps can't enjoy themselves without your interference."

"Come, clear out of it," said the other; and the officers walked away, evidently anxious to be quit of the matter. The two seconds made their way to the public-house close by, while we continued our walk up the main road.

By this time the streets were very much thinned. Only a few people were around, and these were mostly issuing from the public-houses, more or less intoxicated.

"We are having an interesting walk," said Stephen,

as we trudged on, — “a very exhilarating one too;” and I noticed how bitter and desponding was his tone. We came up to a square, at one corner of which a music-hall stood, and at the other a huge public-house. People were pouring out of the former, and large numbers were entering the latter. All around were poor bedraggled things seeking to earn the bread of shame, while policemen passed them by, giving them only an indifferent stare. From the half-open doors of the public-house shrieks of laughter and loud curses came, — curses that were black with filth and vice.

“This seems like the very mouth of the bottomless pit,” said Stephen.

“Yet within a few hundred yards from here there are many happy homes, many virtuous, pure-minded people,” I said. “We only see a part; don’t let’s be too hard.”

“And yet these virtuous, happy people sleep in comfort, knowing what lies so near. Look, see that poor thing; she can’t be more than sixteen or seventeen, and yet she stands there waiting for a chance to sell herself, body and soul. There, listen to her language. My God, it’s horrible!”

“But she’s half drunk, or she would n’t speak so,” I suggested.

“Only half drunk, a young girl like that, and ——”

I did not catch the end of his sentence, for it was drowned by the terrible shrieks coming from the public-house; and, looking towards it, I saw two drunken women who had been thrust out into the street, and who were frantically clutching at each other’s hair, amidst howls and shrieks.

“Here’s two women hevin’ a fight; let’s see it out,” was the cry; and immediately a ring was formed around them.

“Where are the policemen?” asked Stephen.

We looked around, and saw one sauntering away. Stephen ran and caught him by the arm.

“Your services are wanted up by the public-house yonder,” he said; “come at once;” and the officer, as I thought to his chagrin, accompanied us. When we got back, both the poor creatures were on the ground; and then, another policeman having come up, the two were taken and marched off to the police-station, while the crowd, many of whom had left their cups to watch the fight, returned to them, so as to “make the most of the time, seein’ as ’ow it wanted ten minutes to twelve.”

“Come,” said Stephen, as the bystanders laughed and joked about “the two ole ’ags a-fightin’,” “let us get away from this.”

We walked towards Battersea Square, and although it wanted but a few minutes to midnight, we saw that every public-house we passed was full. There was a dense population around, but everywhere was misery and vice. Somehow, men and women could find money for drink, but none for clothes or other comfort. I, who had gone into all these streets around, knew that squalor, and sickness, and starvation were all only too common. True, there were many in comfort, and many good, well-meaning people; but there was a monster in the midst of the people which was destroying the best life of thousands with terrible relentlessness.

And yet what had come under our notice was only the outside of the life, — what might be seen any Saturday night by any one who would take the trouble to watch, as we did. Of sickening orgies which doubtless existed, we saw nothing; to dark deeds done in dark places, we gave no heed that night; the vice we saw walked naked, and was not ashamed.

We turned up a lane, and walked quietly on until

we came to a row of tall houses which had evidently been built for shops. On a board was the inscription: "Beds fourpence a night, or two shillings a week. For Men." Close by was a similar announcement concerning women.

"Let us go in," said Stephen; "they are still open."

I was about to reply, when I heard the clocks in the near distance striking twelve; and then the great public-house which stood at the end of the row of lodging-houses, and old clothes and paper shops, began to empty itself. Strange as had been the medleys in the other places, this was the strangest we had seen. There must have been forty or fifty of the outcast of Battersea there. They were mostly tramps, beggars, cadgers, street-singers; people without home or property. The leer of the devil was in the eyes of many, their faces were besotted, and some were hideous. Pock-marked, diseased, dirty, they tumbled into the street, and many of them found their way into the lodging-houses close by. Most of them had been able to beg or steal a shilling or two through the day, and during the evening they laid it at the shrine of the god of their life. Some of them begged the more fortunate for the price of a bed, and cursed themselves for "guzzlin' the last fo'pence."

I will not try and describe their language. I could not if I tried, except to say that every sentence revealed the fact that all true life seemed dead. There was little or no sense of right and wrong, no sense of decency. And yet let me not paint the picture too black. I saw one half-drunken woman say "she'd had a good day, and had a bob left, and would share it, she would, with Sal, who had drunk her last fo'pence." Others who were less fortunate, or more foolish, and had not wherewith to pay for a night's

lodging, went away into the night alone. We watched them enter the lodging-houses, some shrieking with laughter, some cursing with fierce oaths, but all abandoned, and, as far as we could judge, lost.

Meanwhile the publican began to close the doors of his establishment, and we saw him with the woman we supposed to be his wife standing together. A heavy gold chain hung on his waistcoat, a thick ring was on his finger, while the woman was bedecked with showy jewelry. Both, too, were well fed, well clothed. They were prosperous. What was the source of their prosperity?

"Let us go home, Dan," said Steve; "this is enough for to-night;" and we walked quietly up the road together.

"Have you heard that saying about the 'litter of Hell' and the 'spawn of Cain'?" he said.

I nodded.

"We've just seen them," he said. "And the race won't cease. They will have children — just as *they* are. And men say this is God's world!"

When we reached my lodgings, he sat for a long time in silence, and then, with a sad good-night to me, went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

SUNDAY IN BATTERSEA.

An' I hallus coom'd to 's chooch afoor moy Sally wur deäd,
 An' 'eerd 'um a bummin' awaäy loike a buzzard-clock ower my 'eäd;
 An' I niver knaw'd whot a meän'd, but I thowt a 'ad summut to saäy,
 An' I thowt a said whot a owt to 'a said, an' I coom'd awaäy.

TENNYSON.

AT the time of which I write there were over one hundred thousand people in Battersea, the great majority of whom were poor people. I do not suppose that any part of the neighborhood would be called a slum. Even the lowest parts would be regarded, I expect, as a grade above what is usually understood by that name. Still, great masses of poor people congregate there. Many have been drawn there because of the destruction of small houses in Chelsea, and many come there because rents are comparatively cheap. In some parts of what used to be called Battersea Fields are large and expensive houses; while on the Thames side of the district is one of the most beautiful parks of which London can boast. Of course these facts are known to Londoners in general, but I give this information for those who are strangers to our modern Babylon, and who, when they come to "see the sights," seldom find their way to "Sloper's Island."

The local government of Battersea is rather mixed, and I fancy it must puzzle some of the members of the governing bodies to know the limits of their

functions. However, I suppose it is much like other outlying districts of the city.

As I stated in the last chapter, public-houses are very numerous in Battersea, places of amusement are rare. Churches belonging to all denominations are to be seen. Almost every sect in the Christian Church is represented, and a great deal of religious fervor is supposed to exist. That is to say, in a population of over one hundred thousand, religious accommodation is provided for something like a third of the number.

“Dan,” said Stephen to me, on the morning following our walk, “last night we saw one side of the life; let us see the other to-day.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Let us go and have a look at the churches. Let us go into the park; let us see what goes on on Sundays.”

I looked at my watch. “Very well,” I said; “unless something turns up of which I have no knowledge, I shall have done my rounds by eleven o’clock.”

I saw what was in his mind, and began to feel more interested than I thought possible. I had lived my life among these people, without troubling much as to their condition or prospects. Like most other people, I thought most about getting on in my profession, and retiring when I had made my fortune. Stephen had made me begin to be thoughtful and interested. So I got through my work as rapidly as I was able, and just before eleven was ready to accompany him. We were not far from the Christmas season of the year; but it was a bright, warm morning, and offered every inducement to pedestrians.

“Come, Dan,” he said, “we shall be late; come on.”

“Where?” I asked.

“I hardly know yet, but to some church.”

I mentioned a well-known church which I had heard was largely attended.

“No, not there,” he said; “we know what we shall see there; let’s go to another place, — one of the despised conventicles. I saw one last night.”

We made our way to the place mentioned, and arrived there about ten minutes late. It was an ugly, barn-like building, and seated about four hundred people. The seats were badly made and uncomfortable, and the atmosphere near the doors was, owing to the stoves placed there, musty, and unwholesomely warm. Nearer the platform it was damp and chilly. There were, all told, about forty people in the place, mostly old women. They were of the usual chapel-going order, and a look of apathy rested on their faces. The preacher was young, and on the whole had not a bad face. We were informed afterwards that the congregation was unusually large that day, owing to the fact that a minister was in the pulpit. “Mostly,” said our informant, “we have local preachers, and some of them don’t draw.”

The young man was very earnest; but, as far as we could see, he might as well have preached to Hottentots, for all the interest manifested, save by two men who sat in the back part of the chapel with their Bibles opened. I have forgotten the subject of the sermon now. I know it struck me at the time as being altogether unappropriate; but the preacher was in earnest, and an earnest man always commands respect. The singing was doleful in the extreme, and the people, although several of them gave expressive groans during prayer-time, seemed to fail to understand why they were there.

Outside, the costermongers and milkmen shouted, the butchers offered many inducements to buyers, men and women thronged up and down, waiting impatiently for the public-houses to open. And this

church, which was supposed to exist to create a better atmosphere, and to get people to be religious, was nearly empty.

At length the service came to an end, and the people prepared to depart. The preacher came down from the pulpit, and hurried to the door to shake hands with the people as they went out, while one of the "leaders" came up to speak to Stephen and me.

"Very glad to see you," he said; "hope you'll come to-night. A very acceptable local is coming."

"Is this your usual congregation?"

"We are very good this morning; you see, Mr. —— is a smart chap. I s'pose you heard about him, and came."

"But this is a very small congregation for such a neighborhood. There are crowds outside."

"Yaas; 'tis hard to get 'em in. Sometimes, when we give a tea to the mothers and fathers of the Sunday-school children, we can git a crowd; but they don't come else. The old gospel seems to lose power."

"And yet the public-houses fill."

He shook his head, and we passed out. When we reached the vestibule, we saw that the two men who had sat with their Bibles open during the sermon were engaged in lecturing the minister on his sermon.

"'Tis no use, churches and chapels," they said, "and your sermon was all wrong. Nothing will be done till the Second Coming. The world will get worse till then, and then it will be saved in a day. What you should do is to prepare the people for the Second Coming."

The minister feebly protested; but before he could finish a sentence, their Bibles were taken from their pockets, and they poured passages of Scripture upon him with great vehemence.

“As people was eatin’ an’ drinkin’ in the days of Noah, so they are now,” one said. “And you know that such is the time for the coming of the Son of Man. All your churches and chapels are wrong. Preach the Second Comin’, young man, and thus declare the whole counsel. All the sin, all the drinkin’, and swearin’, and blasphemy is accordin’ to Scripture, and the Scripture must be fulfilled. Prepare the people for the Second Comin’, and then the devil will be chained for a thousand years.”

They passed out, and we followed them.

“How did you like the sermon?” I heard one old dame say to another.

“Oh, middlin’; but I sha’n’t vote for his stayin’; he ain’t a been to see me for months.”

“No; he don’t seem to care about comin’ to tea like the last one we had. He used to sit for hours talkin’ with me.”

It was about a quarter past twelve when we left the chapel, and we saw numbers of the people taking their dinners from the bakers’ shops to their homes; otherwise the street was unchanged. Looking up the road, we saw a little group of people gathered, in the midst of which was a man wildly gesticulating. On drawing near, we saw that it was a religious gathering, and that the man in the midst was the preacher. I need not repeat his address. It was after the usual style. The people, he declared, were all lost, all trembling on the brink of the bottomless pit. If they would n’t accept the gospel he preached, they must be damned. A few of the religiously inclined people groaned, but the men and women who waited for the public-houses to open, and for whom the address was especially intended, looked on with stolid indifference. The tortures of the lost affected them not one jot. Some smoked indifferently, others laughed and passed their jokes. Even though they

should go to the place the preacher spoke about, they would go on doing as they were doing. Now and then some of these people became converted, but such cases were very rare. They had got into a groove of life, and it was very difficult to get them out.

“The man’s red-hot address makes no impression,” said Stephen to me.

“Of course not,” said some one at my elbow. “It’s according to Scripture. ‘The people of this generation shall wax worse and worse.’ That’s what they are doing. Everything will go worse till the Second Comin’; then there’ll be a change. Come and hear about it, will you? Here’s a list of our services. We have them at my house in York Road. There’ll be one to-night at half-past six, and, mind you, we do everything according to Scripture.”

We turned, and saw the men who had taken the preacher to task. They carried their Bibles under their arms, and packets of tracts in their hands.

“We used to belong to that chapel till we discovered the error of our ways,” continued the speaker. “Now our eyes are opened. Things will go on as they are, only worse, till the Second Comin’; then there’ll be a change. Come and hear.”

We took a tract and passed on.

“Anyhow, there seems an effort put forth to get the people right, if they are in the wrong,” I said.

Stephen said nothing. We passed by another chapel, out of which the congregation were just coming. Altogether there might be a hundred, mostly of the shopkeeping class. Very likely they had been in the habit of going there all their lives, and they seemed respectable, well-meaning people; but they took no notice of the crowds that went along who were regardless of both churches or preachers. According to the teaching of the preacher to which they had been listening, and according to their own belief,

the great mass of this godless throng was on its way to an eternal hell ; but the fact did not seem to affect them. They made their way without paying any heed to the godlessness which was manifested on every hand. For my own part, I had far more sympathy with the shrieking street-preacher than with the smug complacency of the chapel-goers.

We trudged on until we came to one of the entrances of Battersea Park. The Albert Palace stood in the near distance, a church close by, and a group of perhaps a hundred people stood on an open space near the park gates. In the midst of this assembly, too, was an orator, but of a different class from the other. He was declaiming against religion in general, and against Christianity and Christians in particular.

“What, me friends,” he shouted, “is the greatest henemy you have to deal with? Religion. What has religion done for you? It has made you poor. It has taken away your money to build churches, and pay fat, lazy parsons. And more than that, it has taken away yer liberty, and yer strength. It has made yer fathers poor, and you poor. Why, think. S’pose all the money spent in this cussed nonsense was given to the poor, do you think you’d have sich poor tommy as you’ve got to feed on every day? Here’s yer bishops with their thousands and thousands a year, a telling you poor blokes with less than a pound a week that if you don’t jist believe in their cussed nonsense, the whole lot of you will be packed to hell. They rob yer at yer birth, and they rob yer at yer death. They’ve made people afraid; made ’em like little babbies through believin’ in their lies. Whenever did any of yer churches and chapels do any good? They pretend to make people better. How much have they made the Battersea people better? Why, the white-livered beggars, they’ll take yer in,

if they can, every time yer goes into their shops and sich like. If ever I wants to be took in, I goes and has dealin's with a purfessin' Christian, that's what I does. They says as 'ow they 're against the drinkin'. When have either parson, or deacon, or any such thing tried to close one pub? No, they only care 'bout themselves. Tell yer, mates, I 've read 'istory, I 'ave, and I find that the money left to the poor, years agone, is all a swallowed up by the parsons. Down with the parsons! I say. I'm very glad that only very few people go to the gospel shops, for all they do is to make people think 'bout 'eaven and sich things, and do nothin' to make all the life we knows anything about wuth the livin' at all. Turn the churches into museums, and lecture halls, and science rooms, I say, and kick out these black-coated, white-chokered, lazy blacklegs, and use the money paid to 'em in makin' this life a bit like 'eaven."

The people listened in the same stolid way. One or two said "Hear, hear," but they were evidently supporters of the speaker. The motley crowd smoked, and laughed, and joked, just in the same way as they had done when the preacher farther up the road had warned them to "flee from the wrath to come."

We were just leaving, when a man from the crowd announced that there would be another meeting at the same place at three o'clock precisely. All who were interested in freethought and the welfare of their fellow-men were invited to come.

"It seems to me," said Stephen, as we walked towards our lodgings, "that there is no need for the man to declaim so vehemently against religion. No one appears to trouble about it."

"But there are several churches that I know of well attended," I said.

"Are there?" he replied. "Then I suppose the respectable old habit of church-going will last a little

longer among the well-to-do people. But, as far as I can see, the great masses of the people go nowhere.”

“Come, now, Steve, it’s not so bad as that.”

“Is n’t it? Well, perhaps not; but everything has seemed strange to me lately. In the old days, when I went to church with my father I never troubled at all. When I was in Manchester, I went to no place of worship; it was so difficult when one lived with such a fellow as Ilford. Up till a little while ago I went to a fashionable church — to — to please Isabella; but I did n’t trouble as to what these things meant. Now — everything is changed.”

In the afternoon we went out again, this time into the park. Tempted by the smiling sunlight, the people gathered in great numbers. Most of the youths smoked twopenny cigars, and held a girl by the arm. The older people stood around in groups, and those who were not minding the babies seemed to be busy gossiping. Here again were orators, singers, preachers.

Near one of the entrances into the Sub-tropical Gardens stood a larger group than was common. As we came up to it, a man announced that “Happy Elijah,” the converted chimney-sweep, would speak; and “Happy Elijah” stood forth in the middle of the circle. He was a little man, having a somewhat swarthy skin; but that which struck me as remarkable about him was his eyes. These were bright and kindly, and while we could not help seeing the enthusiast’s light shining from them, they also told of tenderness and truth. There was nothing out of the ordinary in what he said; his gospel was of the usual order: “believe and be saved,” was his cry; and yet we could not help seeing that the man was happy. His address aroused a great deal of enthusiasm, because of the gladness and joy of the speaker’s own life. Even Stephen could not help smiling at

the man's sallies of wit: for he was witty; neither could we help being cheered by the sunshine of his presence.

We wandered around the park all the afternoon, and everywhere some one had a message to proclaim. One preached temperance, another atheism, another socialism, another some peculiar religious creed. Perhaps the Socialist crowd was the largest, and perhaps it was the only one which listened with anything like interest to the orator. He (the speaker) had the happy knack of hitting off his ideas in homely, terse language; and, besides this, he poured red-hot socialism into the ears of his listeners. "Nationalize the land," was his cry; "nationalize railways, nationalize everything. Take away from the blood-sucking dukes and lords the wealth they have stolen. Make everybody work, and pay everybody the same wages. Give members of Parliament two pound a week all round, and let there be no humbuggin' nonsense."

"Well, Stephen, have n't you seen and heard enough?" I said at length. "It's all a repetition of what we have heard before."

"Let's go home and have a cup of tea," he said, "and then we'll come out again. To-day is a fine day, and we see the reformers in full force. I want an idea of what's being done. Everything's strange to me. You know, I've spent my Sundays indoors, except when the weather's been unusually fine, and then I've gone into the country. We are in Battersea on a Sunday; let's see Battersea on a Sunday."

"I'm afraid I can't come with you to-night," I said; "I've work to do."

"I shall be sorry for that, Dan; but if you can't come, I'll go alone."

As it happened, however, I was able to accompany

him ; and although nothing particular happened, I could not help being interested.

I suggested that we should go to one of the well-known places of worship ; but Stephen would not hear of it.

“ No, Dan ; we know exactly what we shall see and hear there. If we attend one of the Episcopal Churches, we shall go through their service, the congregation will be of the usual sleek church-going order, and they will have to listen to some conventional twaddle by the curate. The ordinary Dissenting chapel will be similar to what we saw this morning, only a trifle more respectable.”

Just as he spoke, a Salvation Army band began playing one of the Army tunes ; we stopped near them, and listened. There were half-a-dozen crazy instruments, which were awfully out of tune, and the people who tried to sing bawled terribly. After the music had continued for two or three minutes, some one prayed. He besought the Almighty to save souls, — that was the burden of his prayer ; and the fervent Salvationists said “ Amen.” Then some one gave an address. This time it was a woman. “ My dear friends,” she said, “ I stand here to-night to tell you that I ’m saved. Once I was a bad girl ; nothing was too bad for me. I drank, I swore, I went into all sorts of sin, I was on the brink of hell ; now I ’m saved. You, my dear friends, are on the brink of hell ; you are in danger every minute. The hearses are constantly passing, graves are always being dug, and if you die in your sin you ’ll be damned forever. Don’t you see it, my friends ? Well, then, I stand here to tell you that you can be saved. Come to the Blood, my friends, and so be saved from such an awful doom.”

This she repeated several times in almost the same words, and the Salvationists gave fervent ejacu-

lations; but the onlookers were still indifferent. They had heard the same story so often that they laughed at it.

Leaving the Salvationists, we went to a small hall, where it was announced that "The pure gospel would be preached every Lord's Day at half-past six." Well, we heard the "pure gospel." As far as I could see, the only difference between the gospel here and the gospel which other people believed in was that everybody who would be saved must be baptized as well as believe. To believe, they said, was not enough; we must be immersed as well. Of course those who did not fall in with their conceptions must suffer the consequences. Certainly, if they told the truth, heaven would be very thinly populated.

Their service over, we found our way into Battersea Park Road, and walked towards Wandsworth. The road was again full, but the shops were closed. It is true there were a few costermongers who sold nuts, oranges, and the like, but comparatively little business was done. On every hand, however, was preaching, preaching, preaching.

Certainly, if talking would have saved Battersea, Battersea would have been saved long since. It has been said that thousands of people in some parts of London have never heard the sound of the gospel. I do not see how this can be true of Battersea. If the people don't hear it, they have to stay indoors, or else literally close their ears. But this also must be said, opposite every little group, or within very short distance, stood a great glaring public-house. There was every kind of orator. Converted Jews, converted atheists, converted prize-fighters, converted street-singers, converted drunkards; and yet it seemed to me that all their preaching was a long way off. It was all hazy, and much of it unpractical. And yet all were earnest, all were trying to do good.

To me there was much that was saddening and disheartening in the apathy of the people ; but I could not help being struck by the evident desire of the workers to do good.

Two of the speakers interested me very much. One was a Jew, who told how he had been converted to Christianity through reading a book which, he said, proved that the English race was the ten lost tribes of Israel, and that only when the English race recognized this fact would the millennium come. Certainly he was very ingenious, and the novelty of his subject interested me. There was a great deal of Oriental imagery in his speech, and the picture of the world saved through England acknowledging the truth was, to say the least of it, fine word-painting. The other was a temperance orator, who stood not far from the Latchmere public-house. Certainly for street oratory I have never heard his equal. In a homely, forcible way he told the people how foolish they were when they emptied their pockets into the publican's tills ; but I noticed that although the crowd paid him a respectful hearing, and although oaths and curses were heard coming from another public-house close by, when he had finished, a number of the listeners entered the place he had been warning them against.

I will not describe the rest of the evening, for it was nearly a repetition of the night before. After a little while the street preachers and singers went home, and the churches became dark ; but the public-houses still remained open ; and it seemed as though all the religious efforts were in vain. The people that the religious enthusiasts tried to reach were left untouched, while the flesh and the devil still held them fast. Men and women still drank away manliness, womanliness, honor, and modesty in the public-houses, while in the streets vice walked un-

checked; and gross sin, as we had seen the night before, was still naked, but not ashamed.

It may be said that I have drawn a sombre picture, but I have written down what I saw and heard as faithfully as I can, not so much for the sake of describing what may be seen almost any Saturday or Sunday, but because of its influence on my friend.

When we reached home that night, Stephen, who had been very silent through the day, said to me, —

“Dan, do you know what all we have seen and heard to-day tells me?”

“No.”

“That everything and everybody is bad. The people preach because of this, — this is the meaning of it all. The world is bad; they feel it, and they have a desire to make it better, because they are discontented and miserable. That is the logic of everything that has been said; it is a bad world, and a miserable world.”

“You forget Happy Elijah,” I said.

Then a more gentle look came to his eyes again, and I wondered what he was thinking.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CYNICS' VIEWS ON LITERATURE.

Time was, ere yet in these degenerate days
Ignoble themes obtained mistaken praise.

BYRON.

FOR about three months after the experiences I have described in the last chapter, Stephen made no reference to his doubts or fears. Indeed, I saw very little of him. There was a great deal of sickness in the neighborhood, and my time was fully occupied in visiting my patients. Stephen, too, appeared to be very busy. He went to the City each day; and although he came back early, he spent very little of his time indoors. I discovered that he was getting well known in the neighborhood, and that he mixed with all shades and conditions of people. Sometimes he was seen talking with laundry girls, often with street singers; while I was told again and again that he was no stranger to public-houses and other places where loungers congregate. He did not drink, however; or if he did, he never betrayed the fact in any way.

I never spoke to him about his methods of life, partly because I knew that he was not in the mood to regard what might seem interference very favorably, and partly because I knew, or thought I knew, what he was endeavoring to do. When he had anything he cared to tell me, I should have no need to seek his confidence. But this I could not help seeing:

the old Stephen was gone. All the trustfulness, the gayety and enthusiasm which characterized him years before were of the past. He was suspicious, gloomy, and taciturn, save now and then, when for an hour or two he seemed to forget himself.

One evening — it was toward the end of February — it so happened that we were sitting together by a cheerful fire, when my landlady announced that two gentlemen wished to see Mr. Edgcumbe. On looking at their cards, I saw him start, and change color; nevertheless, he gave instructions that they should be shown up immediately. “It’s Uncle Luke and Ilford,” he said; “their visit promises a change, anyhow.”

A few seconds later, Luke Edgcumbe and Richard Ilford took their places beside the fire.

“It is the first time I’ve seen you since you made a fool of yourself,” said Luke, after he had been seated a few minutes.

I thought it was a brutal remark to make, but Stephen took it quietly. Without speaking, he opened his cigar-case and offered it to his uncle and Ilford, and then, having lit a cigar for himself, he smoked vigorously, looking steadily into the fire.

“And are you going on in this way?” continued his uncle, after a pause.

“I don’t know. I expect so — for a bit.”

“I suppose you know you’re an idiot?”

Stephen’s face flushed, but he remembered that the man was his relative, and that he was justified in taking liberties with him. Besides, no doubt the speech was meant kindly.

“Yes,” he said, “I’m pretty much of an idiot, no doubt; but what is your special reason for referring to it now?”

“Just this, my lad. You are cooping yourself up in these pesky rooms, — excuse me, Roberts, — you

are denying yourself all manner of such pleasures as the world is able to give, you are as poor as a church mouse, and you are more miserable than you need be, just because you will not accept your fate, and do as other people do."

"And what would you suggest?"

"Why, take the allowance I am able to give you, go into the City, and suck what little sweetness there is out of life. Just because you haven't met the matter boldly, you've lost caste with the lawyers and men of your profession; you've got out of the swim generally, and you make yourself a fool about a woman who does not, and never did, care twopence for you."

"You see, I have the remains of a conscience left," said Stephen.

"Conscience!" said Luke, with a sneer. "Yes, it's a very fine thing, no doubt. A grand thing to swear by, a very convenient thing to introduce when you want to make an impression; but a miserable thing to be serious about. My dear lad, who troubles about conscience nowadays? Not one in ten thousand! Do as other people do, and be as comfortable as you can. Look at my case, now."

"Well, what about it, Uncle Luke?"

"Why, he's settled his affairs amicably, and is in a fair way to do far better than he did before," interrupted Ilford. "You'll see him Lord Mayor of London yet, a patron of all sorts of charities, and an endower of churches."

"Is this so, uncle?" asked Stephen.

"Haven't you read the papers?" responded Luke.

"No; I've avoided everything that referred to you."

"Ha! ha! that's good. Well, yes, I've done pretty well. The smash is now done with, and I've

entered into negotiations that promise very well; far better than I could have expected."

"What did you pay your creditors, then?"

"Oh, the sum I mentioned to you."

"Of course you'll refund the whole amount when you succeed in building up your fortune again?"

"I don't know; it will depend."

"Depend on what?"

"Well, whether it is worth while."

Although I had for years been accustomed to his ideas, this cool remark somewhat staggered me, while I saw Stephen move uneasily in his chair.

"We understand each other plainly here," said Luke; "and so there need be no false sentiment. You seem a bit shocked at me. My dear boy, I only say what other people mean and do. Of course, if I were a candidate for parliamentary honors, or anything of that sort, I should say something quite the opposite of this; but then, I'm not. At present I'm in for making money, and of getting the whip hand of the man who got the better of me."

For a little while there was silence between us. Each of the three who had been speaking smoked vigorously, while I watched their faces anxiously.

"And what are you doing with your time?" asked Ilford, at length.

"Very little to any purpose, I am afraid," said Stephen. "I do what I can up in the City, which, since my uncle's smash, has been very little; then I write occasionally for the papers."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite; I am trying to study life here in Battersea."

"Studying life, eh? The game's not worth the candle, my lad, not worth the candle. But what led you to think of such a thing?"

"A desire to 'know,' for one thing. As you are

aware, everything has been upset for me lately, and I have had a desire to — to see the truth about things.”

“My dear Stephen, nothing can be known, save that men are discontented, miserable, grasping, and at bottom bad.”

Stephen nodded his head.

“Give it up, my boy ; it will only make you more miserable than ever. Accept the fact that life is failure ; then grin and make the best of the failure. That’s the best advice I can give you.”

“If it’s a failure,” said Stephen, “I don’t see the use of continuing to play the game.”

“We are prejudiced in its favor. We are living, and we want to live ; that’s why the world continues to be populated. Besides, most people foolishly hope that the future will bring something worth the having ; and while they have that hope, they will hold on. Of course, no hope will ever be realized.”

“Then you’ve no hope ?”

“Not a bit. I’ve seen the show ; I know all it has to give. I coolly accept facts. Life is bad, people are bad. I have no silly notions about reformation ; I trouble myself about no schemes for the improvement of various things. Nothing is worth the trouble. Let reformers shriek, and make speeches, sign petitions, and a hundred other things ; let them get more kicks than ha’pence for their trouble. Still, there is such a thing as comfort, — physical comfort, I mean ; there’s such a thing as intellectual pleasure ; there’s such a thing as pleasant society. So I get what comfort and pleasure I can. I expect nothing, so I am never disappointed ; but what pleasure there is in my way, I take it, and ask no questions.”

As I heard Ilford speak in this way, I could not help realizing the difference between him and my friend to whom he spoke. For my own part, I could not believe that Stephen’s old tutor was sincere. He

professed to give up hope in life, and said he believed that people were wholly bad ; yet he could laugh and enjoy himself. To me this man's pessimism was the outcome of pure selfishness. But Stephen was different. He was not selfish, and he was very much in earnest. Evil, hopelessness, failure, were more than mere names to him, they were terrible realities. Belief meant more than an intellectual assent, it meant a motive force ; consequently it meant infinitely more to him than to the cynical speaker.

"Then what is, briefly, your advice?"

"Be a stoic, my boy. Get what enjoyment you can, — of course there's no such thing as *real* enjoyment, — but get what seems like enjoyment, and don't bother."

"A grand ideal," said Stephen.

"Practical common-sense. Of course, as I've told you years ago, I had my dreams, my plans, my hopes ; but they are all gone. I believed in the virtue of women and the honor of men ; now, well, I accept facts, and go on."

"Then you are a mere time-server?"

"A time-server with this understanding. People profess a hatred of time-servers, therefore among certain people I keep my feelings in the background. We like to be thought good and virtuous, and all that sort of thing. We all wear a mask, and most people shriek if the mask is pulled off ; so I say nothing. Still, let me state the case as well as I can. If I were going to write a novel, I should pull off a part of the mask, because that kind of thing goes down with literary critics. I should join the so-called realistic school, and describe the cesspools and sewers of life. By the way, you used to talk about writing a novel ; have you commenced yet?"

"I've been studying life here partly for that purpose."

We all looked at him, expecting him to say something more; but he gazed steadily into the fire, and went on smoking.

"Ah," said Luke Edgcumbe, approvingly, "there's method in your madness, after all. A real slashing novel makes a sensation, and brings fame and fortune to the writer."

"Depends," said Ilford.

"Depends on what?" asked I.

"Well, on several things. It must be caustic, and it must be politely dirty. The novel must hinge on some — on something that touches on the social proprieties, and throw out innuendoes concerning certain phases of life that I need not mention. It must be devoid of all purpose, because literary critics and favorite novelists tell us that purpose destroys art. But, above all, it must be delightfully immoral."

"Come, come, now," I interposed.

"That is essential," went on Ilford. "Of course, I mean that it must be immoral, judged by Mrs. Grundy's standard of morality. Still, it must profess to side with Mrs. Grundy, while it goes the whole way in the other direction. Then the death-rate in the book must be high, and it must end miserably. If the hero and the heroine get married and live happily according to the old ideas, the book will die in its birth. Whatever else happens, the book must not end cheerfully, and the people the reader is most interested in must meet with some miserable fate."

"But why?"

"Because the critics will be down upon it otherwise."

"Again, why?"

"It is evident," said Ilford, "that you have not studied literary papers. If you had, you would not think of questioning my statement. As it happens, I am interested in these things, and read the reviews.

Of course my remarks do not apply so much to the old favorite writers. They have made their public, and are practically careless about reviewers. I am now referring to young and unknown writers. Why, think of the young novelists who have sprung into fame during the last decade, and then remember the nature of their work. All of them have fulfilled the conditions I have laid down. And, more than that, each one of them has been written up by these journalists."

"But there are writers who leap into fame without the influence of the press," I suggested, "and whose writings are pure and clean."

"But they are seldom admitted into literary circles," said Ilford, "and they are frequently told that their writings are '*not literature*.' Besides, where one succeeds in this way, a hundred fail. No, Stephen, my lad, if you intend to succeed as a novelist, you must make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, in the shape of the reviewers, and get written up."

Stephen did not reply, but he seemed to be thinking deeply.

"But, Mr. Ilford," I said, "after all, is the public so much influenced by the press as you say?"

"Dr. Roberts, scarcely anything is read until it becomes the rage; and when a book becomes the rage, no matter how imbecile it is, it is praised. But how does a book become the rage? How can it? Either the publisher or the author gets these newspaper men to insert hosts of puffing paragraphs, until the thing is talked about."

"Then the public——"

"Are like a flock of sheep. One goes, and the rest follow. I know this is rank heresy, but we must take things as we find them. Come, now, Stephen, you are very quiet; tell us what your ideas are."

“That if life’s as you say, nothing’s worth the effort,” replied Stephen.

“Quite true ; and yet things must be judged relatively. Life’s a poor affair ; still, we must make the best of it. Being popular, and praised, and all that kind of thing, is perfectly worthless ; but then, it’s better than being nobody, or being abused. To have money is more comfortable than being penniless ; therefore swim with the tide, and grasp at the things which the world calls sweet. Of course they are not really sweet, but they are less bitter than some other things, and they make life less painful and unbearable.”

“Ah, well !” said Stephen, wearily, “I shall see ; I can’t feel my feet yet.”

“Meanwhile,” said Luke Edgcumbe, “do you intend to stay here, and go on as you have been going ?”

“I suppose so — for a time. Why ?”

“Well, because I hope you will not. I came to-night to try and persuade you to be reasonable. I can give you a good allowance, and I want you to be as comfortable as you can. Forget all this business, and try to swallow your scruples.”

“Have you heard anything of — of — her ?” asked Stephen, with an effort.

“Yes ; I was down at Edgcumbe Hall the other day, — it’s still mine, although I shall keep it quiet for a time, — and I heard that she seemed very happy. She and that Hussey, it appears, go around like lovers.”

“No, no !”

“It’s quite true, I saw them myself. She held his arm fast, and no ’Arry and Mary out for the day could act more like lovers than they were acting. They were both laughing gayly, as though they enjoyed life.”

Stephen tugged at his moustache, and I saw his hand tremble; then I knew that he loved her still, and that his uncle's words were like daggers in his heart.

"What are you going to do about it?" continued his uncle.

"Nothing."

"Then you are a great fool!"

"Most likely."

"You still believe in her?"

Stephen was silent.

"Stephen, my lad," broke in Ilford, "don't trouble about her. It seems to me you've got rid of her nicely. There is not more than one woman in a thousand who is faithful and virtuous, and she is not that one. Let her go on in the way she's going; and if you keep your eyes open, you will soon get enough evidence against her to claim your freedom from her, even at a virtuous court of law."

There was a sneering taunt in the cynic's voice, as well as in his words; but I do not think he would have spoken in such a way, if he had known the effect he was having on Stephen.

"Do you mean," cried my friend, "that you believe Isabella capable of—of that?"

"Capable! Why, yes, all women are."

"Ilford," said Stephen, in a suppressed voice, "never speak in that way again to me. Do you hear?—never! If I believed that—I should—but never mind—*never* speak like that again—never!"

He had started to his feet, his face as pale as ashes, while his whole body trembled. Even Ilford changed color; he saw he had gone too far. An awkward silence ensued, and I tried to think how I could turn the conversation, when my landlady entered again.

"Another gentleman to see Mr. Edgcumbe," she said, handing him a card.

Stephen took the card, his hand still trembling.

“Colonel Tempest,” he read aloud. “Show him up.”

“Shall I get out of the way, Stephen?” I said.

“And I?” added Ilford.

“No, stay,” he said, — “at least for a time.”

A few seconds later, Colonel Tempest entered the room, panting and blowing his nose very loudly. He seemed surprised at seeing Luke Edgcumbe, and looked haughtily on Ilford, who regarded him very coolly. I noticed, however, that he eagerly went to the part of the room where Luke was, and shook his hand heartily.

“Ah, Edgcumbe,” he said pompously, “on your feet again! By Gad, you are a man to admire! I was having an early dinner at the Constitutional, with some friends of mine, and they were talking about you. They said you had got out of that affair magnificently, and that now you were on your way towards making a tremendous pile. Old Nathan Rothschild was a child to you, Edgcumbe. But I’m glad, my friend. I was a bit cut up at the time; but I knew you were not the man to sink under such a difficulty. Why, you’ll soon be richer than ever.”

This speech was delivered very pompously, accompanied by much panting and many theatrical gestures. Evidently the Colonel had some purpose in seeking to be friendly. Before Luke could reply, however, Stephen caught the Colonel by the arm.

“I want you to tell me about my wife,” he said slowly, in a low voice.

CHAPTER VII.

CURRENT MORALITY.

Be not righteous overmuch. . . . Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish.— SOLOMON.

THE Colonel looked at his son-in-law for a few seconds, as though he were in doubt how to proceed ; then he said loudly, —

“ Ah, Stephen Temple, my boy, I came to tell you — came to settle things. This is a very sad state of affairs ; I don't like it. I have said so to Isabella dozens of times. I should like to be alone for a few minutes with you.”

“ Gentlemen,” I said, “ there is another room at our disposal, if you will be good enough to follow me.”

“ Thank you, thank you, young Daniel, — that is Dr. Roberts and Mr. — Mr. Ilford ; so sorry to trouble you. I hope to see you again in a few minutes ; especially do I want to have a chat with Edgcumbe.”

As it happened, however, neither of us saw the Colonel any more that night ; but Stephen told me what had taken place.

“ I — I came with my daughter's — that is — consent,” began the Colonel.

“ Yes,” said Stephen ; “ why has she not answered my letters ? ”

“ Oh, young people will be young people. Why, even old fellows like I am get a bit huffy now and

then, when we don't get our own way — ha, ha!" and the Colonel laughed uneasily.

Stephen did not reply, but waited.

"Isabella is a Tempest," went on the Colonel, "and she has a temper; all the Tempests have; I'm glad of it. Well, Stephen Temple, she did n't like your — nonsense, neither did I. And although my girl is breaking her heart for you, she thinks you have n't treated her well, and her Tempest pride says you must make some — some — that is — concessions."

"What concessions?"

"Just like a lawyer. Stephen Temple, you nail me right down to one point. Well, she only wants you to be reasonable, and — and — you can be now — easily."

"Yes; how?"

"Well, my friend Edgcumbe has weathered the storm, and has brought his ship safely into harbor. Isn't that 'poetical — eh? Well, he's a rich man again, to all intents and purposes, and no doubt will give you a good allowance. After all, I'm almost glad you acted as you did, and I've said since, 'Stephen Temple was wise, after all;' it would n't have been safe to take an allowance then, with all those — those — pesky bankruptcy proceedings pending. But now it's all over. You can have a good allowance again; and when that is arranged, you — you can take your wife to your heart once more, and — and be — be happy. Come now, what do you say?"

At first Stephen was staggered by the barefaced audacity of the man; he could hardly understand how he could talk so.

"Am I to understand, then, that if my uncle will give me a good allowance, Isabella will consent to come back to me?"

"Yes, dear boy. We want to see you happy, both

Edgcumbe and I. Edgcumbe promised an allowance when — when we parted some months ago; and I know he is willing to renew his offer now everything is settled. Come, now, say yes, and I'll order a bowl of punch on the strength of it."

"And is this the only condition on which Isabella will come back to me?"

"Why, of course. You could n't expect Isabella, a Tempest, and the wife of a Temple," — here the Colonel expanded his chest, — "to go into lodgings and slave like the daughter of any Dick, Tom, or Harry. No, Stephen Temple; family is family, and blood is blood. Isabella Tempest Temple Edgcumbe must do nothing unworthy her name; she must live like a lady wherever she goes. I am a poor man; but, thank God, I've taught her the rights of a lady."

"Which is most worthy the rank of a lady?" asked Stephen: "to live in comparative luxury on money to which she has no right, or to live in comparative poverty on money honestly earned?"

"What do you mean?" asked the Colonel.

"What right have I to an allowance from my uncle?" asked Stephen. "He has not paid his creditors more than a third of what he owed them."

"The whole matter has been settled at a court of law; the law has passed judgment," replied the Colonel, "and thus Edgcumbe is free."

"The law has nothing to do with it. Whatever the law says, he owes this money; it does not belong to him, but his creditors."

"I respect the majesty of the law," replied the Colonel. "True, I don't like these bankruptcy proceedings; they are — are — well, *infra dig.*; but the affair is over; and what your uncle has now, is his own. Come now, Stephen Temple, you want your wife, and your wife wants you. Let us settle things amicably."

“I do want my wife,” said Stephen; “but if she will come under no other conditions than these, I must remain as I am.”

“Do you mean to say you will not take this money?”

“Certainly not.”

The Colonel turned purple. “Refuse a thousand a year?” he gasped.

“Certainly, if it is not my own, and does not come to me fairly.”

“You — you blackguard!” he cried. “You marry my daughter, you take her away from home, you low-lived scoundrel; then you discard her.”

“I don’t,” replied Stephen; “I will only too gladly welcome her back, if she will come as a wife should.”

“A Tempest come back to lodgings such as you can give her!” shouted the Colonel; “never! A pretty sense of honor you’ve got, to marry a wife and then expect her father to keep her.”

“You know it is a lie,” said Stephen. “Ever since she left, I have sent her, as you know, every farthing I could scrape together.”

“A paltry trifle!”

“It was all I had,” said Stephen; “and certainly not too small a sum for you to accept. Come, Colonel, don’t make me think worse of you than I think already. Have some sense of honor!”

“*You say this to me!*” gasped the Colonel; “but you shall suffer for it. But I’ll no longer breathe such polluted air.”

A little later, Stephen called us back again, and I knew from his pale, blanched face how keenly he had been suffering. He never said anything that night, however, and shortly after, both his uncle and Ilford took their leave.

“Look here, Stephen,” said Ilford, before they left,

“don't make your life more miserable than you can help. Make the best of this dirty world, my lad. Go into society, and drink what pleasures it has. Give up these foolish ideals of yours, accept facts, and make the best of them.”

“Thank you,” said Stephen ; and then he held out his hand to his uncle.

“I shall give you no advice,” said Luke ; “you know what I think, and what I will gladly do for you ;” and I could n't help seeing a look of real affection shining out of the cynic's eyes.

For some time after this I thought I saw a slight change for the better in my friend ; that is, he looked happier. He seemed to forget his dark, gloomy forebodings, and was more like his old self.

During the time I had lived in Battersea, I had become acquainted with several well-to-do families living at Wandsworth Common, and I was often invited to houses at Clapham Common. I had spoken about Stephen to people I knew, and had so interested them in him that on one or two occasions when they had invited me to their houses, an invitation had also come for my friend. Up to this time he had refused them ; but when one day — about a fortnight after his uncle's visit — I showed him a letter containing an invitation to a gathering at a house at Clapham Common both for myself and him, he told me he would be very glad to accompany me.

Accordingly, on the evening in question, we started for Clapham Common. On our way I called to see a patient who lived in one of the streets at the back of Queen's Road. She was an old woman nearly seventy years of age, and was troubled a great deal with bronchitis. Although the spring was now advancing, it was very cold, and I had told her that if she expected to get better, good fires were essential. When we entered the room which she occupied, — for

Stephen went with me, — we found her sitting beside the ghost of a fire, having sold, as she told me, an article of furniture to buy coals.

“I was ’bliged to do it,” she explained, “and ’t was ’ard; you see; ’t was bought by my ’usband afore ee died. Poor Bill, ee did n’ think ’t would come to this! But I ’m a-goin’ to start to-morrow, I am. Two of my old customers hev kept some things for me; so now, please God, I ’ll rub on all right till next winter.”

“What do you do for a living?” asked Stephen.

“I ’m a laundress,” replied the woman. “Ye see, I ’m not strong enough to go out a-charin’ like I used to, and I takes ’ome the washin’, and I does it as I ’m able. I ’ve got a good bit behind wi’ my rent while I ’ve bin poorly, and you know washin’ is bad for the bronchitis. Ye see, what with the steam, and the heat indoors, and then a-takin’ back the things in the cold, ’t is ter’ble tryin’, ter’ble; but summer is comin’ on now, so I don’t mind.”

“And how much do you owe for rent?” asked Stephen.

“I owe four weeks,” replied the old woman, “and that at five shillin’ a week do make a pound.”

“And how much can you earn when you are in full work?”

“Oh, sometimes I make as much as twelve shillin’, but it do seldom get to more ’n ten.”

“Then how will you manage to pay your back rent?”

“Oh, I ’ll have to do it by littles, I will. My landlord hev bin patient with me, ’cause I ’ve bin ’ere so long, and paid so reg’lar. I can do all right in the summer. It ’s the winter I dread so.”

“And how old are you?”

“I wer sixty-nine last Christmas. You see, I ’m not so spry as I was, and my joints ache a goodish

bit; but I'm a-goin' to try and keep out of the big house as long as I can."

"A most respectable, deserving old woman," I said to Stephen when we left the house a few minutes later. "Sober and industrious."

"Are there many like her?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, many. Battersea is crowded with laundry people."

"And are they all as badly off as she?"

"Most old people are worse. You see, she's sober and saving."

"Saving!" he exclaimed. "God have mercy upon them! It seems to me that those who drink and drown their care are best off."

Little more was said about the question just then, and, soon after, we reached the house of Mrs. Augustus Price. This lady's house was exceedingly popular, and that for many reasons. First of all, Mrs. Augustus Price was very popular. Mr. Augustus Price, who had been, when in the flesh, an egg and butter merchant, had left her in possession of a considerable amount of money. She had set up an establishment at Kensington, and tried to be a leader in fashionable society; but somehow she failed. It is true, her money gained her admission to many desirable houses; but she did not climb to the position she wanted. She therefore removed to Clapham Common, where, although the people were not so highly connected as those in Kensington, she established herself as a queen of a certain order. Mrs. Price, who was about thirty-five years of age, prided herself upon having many unconventional ideas. "I'm original, or I'm nothing," she often said; and so she sought to maintain her reputation by making her house a *rendezvous* for people holding all shades of opinions. And such is the power of gold, accom-

panied by an amount of beauty, shrewdness, and audacity, that she accomplished what she desired.

“I’m a woman of open mind,” she said. “What are opinions? A matter of temperament, education, and associations. All sorts of opinions shall be represented at my house.”

And, true to her word, all sorts of opinions were represented there. The High Church vicar and the Radical Dissenting parson met there; and, although each hated the other’s ways like poison, they pocketed their dislike and accepted Mrs. Price’s invitation, not caring to make any enemy of a lady who gave such delightful dinners, and whose checks were so acceptable. The Socialist also sat at her table, providing he were sufficiently respectable, as well as the rigid Conservative. Theosophists, atheists, agnostics, frocked curates, and believers in all sorts of New Jerusalems received Mrs. Price’s invitations.

“Let them be clever, well educated, well dressed, and — respectable,” Mrs. Price would say, “and the more curious their opinions the better. They give life, interest; they are like a dash of absinthe in bad water.”

Mrs. Augustus Price’s gatherings, then, were of a cosmopolitan nature; and, as I expected, when Stephen and I arrived, her house was full of people holding very diverse opinions.

Stephen immediately made a good impression on our hostess. She saw in an instant that he was clever, and his fine, interesting face, added to what I had said to her concerning him, won her interest immediately.

“You’ve been asked in a most unconventional way, Mr. Edgcumbe,” she said; “but then I’m an unconventional woman — in fact, I hate what’s supposed to be proper. So you’ll find people here holding all sorts of views, but mostly they are people

of — brains. In fact, whatever else I can dispense with, I cannot dispense with — brains. Money I care little about, social position does n't trouble me, but brains — I adore! So I try and make my gatherings feasts of reason. There'll be little or no dancing, and that kind of thing; but conversation on art, science, literature, and — religion — all sorts of it, you know."

I felt the speech to be loud, and not in the best of taste; but Mrs. Price was a fine-looking woman, and she smiled very sweetly on Stephen, who seemed to appreciate her welcome.

Certainly there was no restraint at Mrs. Price's house. The people were chatting very freely, and the conversation was not of the nature which one too often finds in polite gatherings. Society small-talk was at a discount. As our hostess had said, the people had brains, and thus music, pictures, politics, and books were discussed with a great deal of cleverness.

I was glad, too, to see that my friend was appreciated in the circle. For my own part I was never a gifted talker, and I wondered why Mrs. Price cared to have me; but I soon saw that Stephen would become a favorite. Before long I noticed him in earnest conversation with a young lady, whom I cannot describe better than by saying she was straw-colored. Her hair was straw-colored, including her eyelashes and eyebrows, her skin was straw-colored, the trimmings of her dress were straw-colored, — in fact, that was the chief characteristic about her appearance.

"I never go into ordinary society during Lent," she said, "and of course we are in the middle of Lent now. I wouldn't go to a theatre or to a dance for the world during Lent, you know, although I adore theatres and dances, as a general thing. But, of

course, Mrs. Price's evenings are different; they are so serious, so intellectual, you know, and we talk on all subjects seriously."

"Are you a Catholic?"

"A Catholic, but not a Roman Catholic. I belong to the Anglican Church, St. Mary Magdalene's, you know. It's delightfully high, of course. I hate low churches."

"And you don't call this going into ordinary society?"

"Oh, dear, no. Of course, I would n't come *here* on a Friday; but even our curate, the Rev. Mr. Cross, is here to-night, and I believe our vicar, the Rev. Canon Tovey, is coming presently; so you see I'm *quite* safe."

"Oh, yes, quite safe," said Stephen, with a smile.

"Is n't it delightful to see such trust and faith in our spiritual pastors and masters, Mr. Edgcumbe?" said some one close to him.

Stephen turned and saw a man about fifty, with blar eyes and an iron gray moustache, who had been introduced to him as Mr. Hunter.

"Delightful, indeed," responded Stephen.

"Not that I am guilty of such trust and faith myself," laughed the man, with a leer; "but I appreciate it in those who do, especially in Miss Coolie;" and he bowed to the straw-colored young lady.

"I'm a sad rake myself," he went on; "but perhaps I'll be converted at the eleventh hour — ha, ha!"

Before he could reply, a loud voice arrested his attention, and it was the voice of a woman.

"The great thing needed," she said, "is that our social laws be reformed. For my own part I'm a Socialist, and I'm proud of being one. Surely it cannot be right that three millions of people should be left uncertain of the absolute necessities of life,

while hereditary landlords revel in wealth they have never earned."

"Oh," said Mr. Hunter, "our fair friend, Miss Dart, is at it again."

"I have just been reading reports on the dwellings of the poor, and the condition of things is terrible, terrible in extreme. Seven, eight, and sometimes a dozen people living in one small room. This must be remedied."

"What would you suggest?" asked some one. "Would it not be well if you set an example by spending a few thousands on model cottages? You might immortalize yourself at the same time."

"No, indeed," said Miss Dart. "What is wanted, and what lies at the root of the evil, is the fact that the ground landlord is not sufficiently taxed. Nay, I am, after all, dealing superficially. What is wanted is that landlordism shall be destroyed. Landlords who have a clear right to the land to be compensated, of course."

"Miss Dart is a stockbroker's daughter," said the Rev. Mr. Cross to Stephen; "she is a Socialist and a Dissenter. Her father made money by being sharper on the Exchange than other people, and by taking advantage of other men's weakness and ignorance."

Dinner was announced, and Stephen sat next to Miss Dart, who seemed pleased at having him for a companion.

"Of course you are a Socialist, Mr. Edgumbe?" she said questioningly, after soup had been served.

"I hardly know," replied Stephen. "You see, Socialism is a subject with serious issues. How do you define it?"

"Oh, the land being nationalized; railroads, coal-mines, gas-works, and all those things made the property of the people; the House of Lords abolished, and all members of the Commons paid. I should

insist on payment of members, or how can we have proper representation, Mr. Edgcumbe? Everybody happy, and just a lovely time altogether."

"It is a beautiful picture, no doubt," said Stephen, "only there is the fact of human nature that comes in."

"Oh, I trust the people. I'm a friend of the people, and I perfectly dote on the working-man, Mr. Edgcumbe — perfectly dote on him. We had one speaking at the Advance Club last night, and he spoke splendidly. Oh, yes, I love the working man; don't you, Mr. Edgcumbe?"

"I'm afraid I'm behind the times, Miss Dart; but I'm glad to see you so enthusiastic;" and he gave her a look which was not lacking in admiration.

She was certainly rather handsome. She was not tall, but well formed, and finely developed. Buxom and healthy rather than graceful, she was still fascinating. She was handsomely dressed too, and on her fingers flashed costly rings, while on her neck hung a diamond necklace.

"I am glad I have met one so full of sympathy towards the poor. It so happens I am interested in a poor old woman just at present. No doubt you will be able to go and see her;" and he related the incident which I have described in the early part of this chapter.

"No, Mr. Edgcumbe, no," she said; "that is not my way of working. For my own part, I don't think much of individual help. Clothing societies and soup-kitchens are mere palliatives; they don't go to the root of the matter. And nothing can be done until we destroy the present system of things."

"And meanwhile the starving must remain starving?"

"Well, you see, we *must* work in our own way,

mustn't we, Mr. Edgcumbe? Of course you are in favor of the abolition of capital punishment?"

Stephen shrugged his shoulders ; he was getting a little weary of Miss Dart. Before he could reply, however, his attention was diverted by a conversation which was being carried on at another part of the table.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNCONVENTIONAL SOCIETY.

The man who worships in the temple of knowledge must carry his arms with him, as our Puritan forefathers had to do when they gathered in their first rude meeting-houses.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

“YES,” said a gentleman, who I afterwards learnt was a leader-writer for one of the daily papers, and whose voice had attracted Stephen’s attention, “there is no doubt about women having their rights. I hope the men will be getting theirs soon.”

“Men have always had their rights, but women are being emancipated at last,” responded Miss Dart. “Even young girls to-day are taking an interest in serious things.”

“Taking an interest, my dear young lady, — taking an interest; they are among the most important factors of our times.”

“And perfectly right.”

“Oh, doubtless. The world has suffered too long for the want of their experience and influence, far too long. But things are mending; they are taking the place of the old folks altogether. Time was when they were a little patronized. There were books specially written for young girls, and approved by the older folks; now, as was suggested in a leader in the *Daily* — the other day, the young girls ought to sample the libraries and pick out the books

not fit for the old folks to read. And really the suggestion is worth considering. Why should the old folks' morals be endangered by the books which our girls write and read to-day? You see, these old folks mostly believe in the sacredness of marriage, and such old-fashioned ideas. Why, then, should books be placed in their hands dealing with these questions? Of course, girls should be versed in the seamy side of things, and should grapple with marriage relations, improvement of marriage laws, and so on. They should study the life of these heroines who believe in making divorce easy, or, better still, do away with the marriage ceremony altogether. And of course the old folks should have such books kept out of their way; they would endanger their old-fashioned moral codes."

Stephen was attracted by the half-bantering, half-cynical tone of the speaker, and was a little astonished that the speech caused no surprise; but then he reflected on the words of his hostess. She hated conventionality.

"For my part," said Miss Dart, "I do not see why thoughtful women should be tied down to old codes of morality. We must think our own thoughts, and adapt ourselves to the times in which we live. If our codes are higher than those gone before, surely the old ones should die out."

"Hear, hear," said a man whom I had not seen before, — a man who, Mrs. Price assured me, pretended to believe in all creeds, so far as they agreed with his own inclinations, and who prided himself upon being called a latitudinarian. "I agree with our fair friend Miss Dart. Every age must work out its own system; every country must be guided by what it deems best, regardless of tradition. Besides, what is the use of glossing over matters? Questions are in the air, and they are talked about,

and I know no better place to properly discuss them than in novels. For my part, I regard the realistic school of novelists as being a great boon to our time."

"Meanwhile," said Mr. Holland, the leader-writer, "I think the old folks ought to be considered. And so I hope that a few writers of the Dickens and Sir Walter Scott order, who take no delight in so-called modern problems, will be allowed to write for these dear, ignorant old people. Of course the mental pabulum of our young people, especially our young girls, must be highly spiced, as they can't be expected to enjoy good old love stories; but I do plead for the mothers and fathers who, in spite of the spirit of the age, enjoy old-fashioned, healthy romances."

"Isn't Mr. Holland old-fashioned?" said Miss Dart to Stephen; "that is, he seems to be; but no one really knows what his views are."

Stephen answered her as briefly as possible, and then turned to Mr. Holland.

"Don't you think," he said, "that the kind of literature issued is altogether a matter of supply and demand?"

"I suppose so. The cry now is for realism. The critics laugh at books not realistic; the modern young lady throws aside the books not realistic. And so-called realism generally means dirt."

"And the publishers?"

"The publishers produce that which will sell. They are business men, and they respond to the call of the novel-reading public, which consists mostly of women — young women."

"Then the call of young women is for dirt?"

"Delightfully frank," said Mrs. Price; "but I *do* like frankness."

"But cruelly correct," said Mr. Holland.

"We move forward, you see," said Mrs. Price. "This is a truth-loving age, and we will have truth,

at whatever cost. Certain things exist, whether we know about them or not. How can they be removed unless they are brought to light?"

"Excuse me," said Stephen, "but do realistic writers describe certain phases of life for the purpose of reforming them? Are they not spoken of as necessary accompaniments of our existence, and the natural outcome of our natures?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Holland; "the modern society novel is delightfully free from moral purpose. You see, moral purpose is inimical to art, and the moment a writer condescends to point a moral he is regarded as a bore. Oh, you know we must have art, whatever becomes of morals. Art, as interpreted by a certain clique, is the god worshipped in literary coteries, my dear friends," and Mr. Holland's gray eyes twinkled; "if ever you write a novel that is to be successful, you must bow the knee to the critics' ideas of ART."

"And morals?" suggested Stephen.

"My dear sir, who troubles about morals? Did not Mr. Berryman tell us just now that morals were mere questions of taste, age, education, and nationality, — mere trifles, in fact; but art — of course art, as popularly understood, never changes."

A sally of laughter was the response to this speech; but I saw by Stephen's face that he saw no reason to laugh. His intense nature, which had been darkened by his experiences, was deeply moved by this talk.

"And what kind of a moral condition does this prove? What of the general condition of the people whose tastes lie in this direction?" he asked.

I saw a general shrug of the shoulders, and then Mr. Holland replied, —

"Logic is a bad thing, Mr. Edgcumbe; never trouble with logic. Don't you see where it will lead you?"

The conversation was becoming more and more painfully interesting to Stephen. To many who sat at the table the questions discussed meant little. True, anything slightly novel was interesting to them, especially if it had a tendency to destroy existing codes ; but as far as the deep, vital issues were concerned, there was little but indifference. Indeed, I am inclined to think that the ordinary diner-out, to whom such questions give the necessary relish to an evening's gathering, never troubles himself deeply. "Let us have things as highly flavored as we can," is his cry ; but he has no idea how his statements affect sensitive, earnest men and women. For my own part, I knew that Stephen was going through an ordeal, and I felt almost sorry that I had been the means of bringing him to this house. However, I could do nothing but wait and see what would follow.

"However," went on Mr. Holland, "things will be all right shortly. The women claim now that it is their work to reform that quintessence of iniquity called man. She says — and by 'she' I mean the emancipated woman — that she is in the majority. In the past, men have made our social codes, but in the future they will be made by women. In the past, men have governed the women ; in the future, women will govern the men. Ah, those will be glorious times ! Once let women's views, as expressed in society novels, become factors in our legislation, and the millennium will come. I hope I may not live to see that day, much as I admire the fair sex ; but then, you see, I am an old-fashioned man."

"For my own part," said Stephen, a flush mantling his face, "I trust, and I am trying to believe, that you are mistaken. I remember I had a mother ; and if I lost faith in the purity of womanhood — life would be — different."

“Mr. Edgcumbe, hold fast to your beliefs,” said Mr. Holland. “I, too, remember that I had a mother, — and I enshrine my ideal.”

“We are getting quite sentimental,” said Miss Dart.

“Quite,” said Mr. Hunter; “only unfortunately ideals were born in Utopia, and I suspect our mothers were like creatures to the fair sex of to-day, only — more humdrum. No doubt a pink of propriety looks nice in a picture, but she’s awfully slow and uninteresting. For my own part, I’m glad there is a little wickedness in the world; it gives zest, and something to talk about.”

There was a hideous leer on the man’s face as he spoke, which betokened him to be what he was, — a libertine at heart; but his speech went unchallenged, save for a feeble rejoinder from the curate, to which scant respect was paid. That gentleman left immediately afterwards, however, pleading an engagement but I saw that he had been very uncomfortable through the dinner, and seemed altogether out of his element.

The talk of the men over their wine need not be related here; at the same time I saw that it affected Stephen. The subject was the frailty of women, instanced by certain actresses and well-known names in certain phases of society. Nothing brutally plain was said, but by prurient suggestion and innuendo these men expressed their ideas concerning morality. Stephen said nothing, but I saw how keenly he listened, especially as Mr. Hunter sneered at those men who “believed in the sex.”

When we joined the ladies, several of them were chatting, while Miss Coolie, the straw-colored young lady, sang a song.

“I suppose you know that Miss Coolie is to be married shortly?” said Miss Dart to Stephen, who took a seat by her side.

“No; who is the happy man?”

“Mr. Hunter.”

“Mr. Hunter!”

“Yes; are you surprised? He’s a very good catch.”

“But she told me she was a communicant at some High Church near here. She gave me the impression that she was a very religious young lady, that she would n’t go to a theatre or dance during Lent, and so on.”

“Oh, yes, she’s *very* religious. Orthodox, you know. I’m religious myself, only not like her. I take a great interest in modern thought, and I belong to the broad school, which believes in destroying the creeds. I expect I subscribe to the broad-thinking Unitarian school, the tendency of which is towards agnosticism. That seems the drift of all thoughtful people nowadays. But Miss Coolie is very orthodox, and very high. Goes to early Sacrament, and all that, you know, attends the confessional, fasts on the proper days, and is quite a Church devotee.”

“But Mr. Hunter is — is ——”

“No, he’s not quite a saint, is he?”

“But Miss Coolie does n’t know that — that ——”

“Of course she knows, everybody knows; but then he’s a good catch, and it is regarded as quite the thing.”

And then, as Miss Coolie stopped singing, the conversation drifted into other channels.

As Mrs. Augustus Price said, she could forgive almost anything in people as long as they had brains, and were respectable. Anyhow, the gathering that night was not destitute of brains. Much of the after-dinner talk was brilliant, but it was comparatively heartless. No question was discussed earnestly, but every question was discussed brilliantly. The condition of the poor was regarded as an interesting

topic, and many clever things were said ; but nothing indicated an earnest desire to better it. Politics were spoken of, not as a means for the best possible legislation, but as a means whereby certain men made their mark ; journalism was not so much a medium whereby the wants and feelings of the people could be voiced, as a means whereby clever fellows might have a brilliant career. Religion was “ a very interesting study for those who liked that sort of thing,” and so on.

Even I, who had never been regarded as an enthusiast, could not help feeling how shallow and unreal it all was, neither could I help feeling that such an atmosphere was not suited to Stephen's temperament. And yet I saw that he was fascinated. I had come to see during the last few months, or fancied I had, that Stephen's mind, while of a high order, was still parasitical rather than constructive, — a class of mind which usually characterizes our sensitive and brilliant men. I believed that, clever and earnest as he was, it was his nature to fasten on the thoughts of others, and work them out to their inevitable issue, rather than to be what the world calls original. I knew, too, how much he was influenced by his associations. Not that I would disparage my friend's mental powers. Most men are of the parasite order ; only one man in a million can lay any claim to originality, and the writers and speakers who entrance multitudes often only give in another form the thoughts of others. “ There be many echoes, but few voices,” said Goethe. Still, the sensitiveness of his nature, and the earnestness with which he looked at life, made him far more liable to accept conclusions than men of a similar class of mind but of more phlegmatic natures.

I saw, too, that during the evening he conversed freely with a man who had spoken during dinner,

and whom Mrs. Price had described to me as a gentleman of latitudinarian tendencies, who was introduced to us as Mr. John Polden. I noticed, also, that after he had talked with Stephen a few minutes, he seemed most anxious to be friendly, and made every effort to be agreeable.

“I do so like your friend, Dr. Roberts,” said Mrs. Price to me. “It is refreshing in this cynical age to meet with one so frank, so trustful, so transparent. But, do you know, he looks as though he has had a great sorrow. In fact, some one was telling me that he had passed through a domestic trouble. Is it true?”

I made an evasive reply, at which Mrs. Price smiled knowingly.

“At any rate,” she went on, “he has quite made a friend of Mr. Polden. I am so glad. Mr. Polden is so sympathetic; and although so tolerant in his views, he has such a religious nature. He will be a great help to your friend. Is Mr. Edgcumbe wealthy, Dr. Roberts? Don’t think I trouble about money, I only care about people; but I ask out of curiosity. He is a barrister, you say; and young barristers are often wealthy, are n’t they?”

“He is not wealthy at present,” I replied.

“But he has expectations, eh? What a pity! Money may spoil his career. Still, John Polden’s career will not be spoilt by money. Poor fellow, he has not an over-supply.”

We left just before midnight, and, somewhat to my chagrin, Polden insisted on accompanying us home. I say chagrin, because I was not drawn to him; but Stephen had taken to him wonderfully, so I said nothing.

“Do you know, Edgcumbe,” said Polden, — “you’ll excuse me for dropping the Mister, won’t you, but I do hate such things among people I like, — I have

great sympathy with the way you spoke. I'm broad, you know, awfully broad; but I like to believe in people, especially women. I believe in their fine natures, you know. I believe that such men as Hunter misrepresent them, you know. '*Honi soit qui mal y pense*,' I say, although it does seem a bit strange that such a religious girl should marry him."

And so he talked on, mostly agreeing with what Stephen said, parading the broadness of his sympathies, but assuring us that he was intensely religious.

"There's good in all the sects, you know. What's the matter what we believe? Very little, I say. The question is, are we sympathetic? are we religious? if we are, everything'll square all right."

After a while he began to ask Stephen questions about himself, as though he were specially interested in him; but I was glad to see that Stephen had no intention of making a confidant of him. I believe, however, that Polden had an idea that I hindered Stephen from confiding in him, especially as soon after he asked for the privilege of being allowed to call and see him.

We were nearing home, and I began to flatter myself that we should shortly be rid of his company, when an event happened which, although seemingly small, proved to be of great significance in my friend's career. It began by our hearing a woman's scream, — evidently of fear and pain. The screaming of women at midnight in Battersea, however, is not so rare an occurrence as to call for special remark; and possibly we should have taken but little heed, had it not been repeated with terrible vehemence, accompanied by brutal words in a man's voice, with a threat to murder.

We rushed to the spot from whence the sound came, and saw a man, mad with drink, holding a woman by the hair, and dragging her brutally around.

Of course we at once freed the woman from his grasp, while Stephen with no gentle hand kept him from repeating the attack.

“Let me go,” said the man, with an oath; “she’s my wife. I was a fool to marry her; but now she’s mine, and I shall do just as I like, I shall.”

The woman was young, and not bad looking; but I felt sure that she, too, had been drinking; and it was evident, from what the man kept on muttering, that they had been quarrelling fiercely.

“Protect me, sir,” said the woman to Stephen; “he’ll kill me if you don’t; he spends every penny he can get, and he treats me ’orribly.”

“What shall we do?” said Stephen. “Take the fellow to a police-station, or what?”

The man seemed a bit subdued at this, and began to be more complaisant. “He did n’ want to bang Moll, he did n’; but if the gen’l’men only knew, they’d pity him, they would.” After a few minutes matters were arranged amicably, and the affair ended in our seeing the man to the rooms he rented close by, the fellow promising not to treat his wife unkindly again.

“What a shame that such a decent-looking woman should be tied up to such a fellow!” said Polden.

“It’s horrible,” said Stephen; “don’t you think so, Dan?”

“All such affairs are horrible,” I said; “but as to who’s in fault in this matter, I should n’t like to say. Of course, the man is a brutal fellow, or at least he behaved brutally; but the woman is, likely enough, as bad as he.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Stephen. “The woman struck me as a well-behaved, respectable woman, and ought to be shielded from such as he.”

“Hear, hear!” said Polden. “That’s chivalry, Dr. Roberts, chivalry. I think we may safely leave Edgcumbe to defend the lady. Eh?”

“I’m afraid a radical change will have to take place in both of them before they are very good,” I said. “I happen to know many of these people; and ‘blessed is he that expecteth nothing.’”

“It’s not like you to be cynical, Dan,” said Stephen; and as I saw the look on his face, I was almost sorry I had spoken. I felt irritable, too, and was impatient for Polden to leave us.

“I’m a bit tired, Steve,” I said; “it’s nearly one o’clock, let’s get home.”

“So it is,” said Polden. “Good-night, Edgcumbe; I’ll call on Sunday, then.”

A few minutes later we sat before the fire, and neither of us expressed any desire to go to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COMING NIGHT.

So far from rejecting appearances of virtue in the corrupt heart of a depraved race, I am eager to see their light as ever mariner was to see a star in a stormy night. — H. W. BEECHER.

“THIS night’s experience has been rather curious to me,” said Stephen, after he had been looking a few minutes into the fire. “As you know, I have never gone into society. In Manchester I was pretty much of a recluse, and while Isabella occasionally went amongst friends, I did not often accompany her. I’m not fond of dancing and that kind of thing, you know; besides, I had my profession. To-night has given me a glimpse of a new phase of life.”

“I’m almost sorry we went,” was my reply.

“I’m not; I’m very glad. It’s well to have one’s views widened. How in the world, though, did Mrs. Price think of inviting me?”

“I have her letter here somewhere,” I replied, looking into a letter-rack. “Here it is.”

DEAR DR. ROBERTS, — We are having a small gathering here on Wednesday next. Most of the people who will come, you will like, I know, — reading people, who are abreast of the times, and who think for themselves. I’m sure they will interest you. And please bring that Mr. Edgcumbe with you. Since you spoke to me about him, I have felt *such* a desire to meet him. *Do* prevail on him to come. I sha’n’t know you the next time I meet

you if you don't, so see that you obey me. Excuse this unconventional invitation; but you know how I dislike ordinary formalities.

Yours sincerely,

AGNES A. PRICE.

“What did you tell her about me?”

“Very little. I said you were clever, exceedingly interesting, and dead in earnest.”

“Did you hint anything about my — my experiences?”

“No.”

“Ah, well, it was an interesting gathering.”

“Very; but, believe me, Steve, people are not usually so — so little in earnest, are they? That circle does n't represent society. Mrs. Price is a character. As she says, she dotes on brains, and she wants her house to be famous for the intellectual and original character of the gatherings therein. Besides, many did not feel comfortable. That curate would n't have been there had not Mrs. Price been one of the largest contributors to the church funds. Not that she's any religion herself, only she has a fad to give to certain popular institutions. I was introduced there through two clever doctors who promise to be famous, and I've been since, because I like to know what's going on.”

“Just so; I'm glad I went. Mrs. Price is very clever, so is that Mr. Holland; but — but, my word, life's a curious affair, a dark, dark riddle!”

“Life as revealed at Mrs. Price's, Steve. I feel as much as you the veneer, the unreality of the whole business. I feel how little the so-called social reformers care about reformation; how little the so-called philosophers feel the reality and importance of the subjects they discuss; how little the supposed religious people care about religion; and I can see,

too, what price they set on honor, virtue, purity. But life and thought are not truly represented there."

"Where are they represented, then? In the streets, in the churches that we visited, in the public-houses?"

"But you have n't seen the heart, Steve."

"Have n't I? Perhaps not, perhaps not. But since I've had my eyes opened, and have seen at all, I've been staggered. Everything has gone to confirm what Uncle Luke and Ilford used to say. I've been disillusioned, if ever a man was."

"Steve, things are not so bad as they say. They have looked at life through glasses colored in the worst way, and they have tried to make you see what they've seen."

"Don't mistake me, Dan. I hold fast to a great deal that I believed in my boyhood days. You know, that often down at Edgumbe Hall, while Uncle Luke convinced my mind, he could n't convince my heart. He and Ilford often made my head believe, but my heart still clung fast to my ideals. Lately, however, since things have gone wrong, I've remembered what they said about virtue, about honesty, about the truth and purity of women; and although I'm still holding fast to what I hope, the grasp is weakening."

"There are vain, weak, silly women, no doubt," I said; "some are worse than vain, and weak, and silly; many, many are base, degraded, unclean; but there are more good than bad, Steve, more pure than polluted. Even in Battersea there are thousands of true, healthy girls, with minds as clean as a spring morning down at our old country home."

"Do you really believe that, Dan, really?"

"I do, Steve."

"I'm trying to believe, too, and the belief helps me. You know, Dan, I feel a lot; and yet many

people think of me as a fellow to whom goodness comes naturally. But, my God, it doesn't! Often I seem to be at the very brink of hell, and I hear with delight the curses coming up from the deep. Often I'm tempted to give up this struggle against seeming fate, and let the devil have his fling. Sometimes I'm only held to what is right by a very slender thread, and I can almost hear the little strings snapping as the powers of darkness drag me away. Somehow I feel as though I can't go halves about things. I can't pretend to believe in a thing, and then not care much whether it is so at all. I must really believe, or not at all; and belief means so much to me, more than you can think. To-night, when those fellows were so coolly discussing female frailty over their wine, I felt like getting up and throwing the decanters at their heads. Because they are unclean themselves, they believe women are too; and if the women are impure, they have made them so — and yet, oh, Dan, it's a terrible business!"

"Don't look for the evil, Steve; look for the good."

"Look for the good! I'm trying to, and sometimes I fancy I see it; but where can I find it? I was talking with a religious tradesman yesterday, and he told me that it was impossible for a tradesman to be strictly honest, and still get on; that all trades had their tricks; that each and all tried their best to make good bargains, and sought to prey on the ignorance of the men with whom they were dealing; and that the Sermon on the Mount set up an ideal which nobody regarded seriously, and which few took into account. Trade is rotten; I'm told so again and again. Go to the Church, and doesn't the whole thing strike you as a sham? Do you remember the Colonel's conception of religion? It was nothing but the merest convention. As for the parsons, was n't Uncle Luke right? Fancy archbishops and

bishops, with their eight, ten, and fifteen thousand a year, sending poor agricultural laborers, with ten shillings a week, to hell for not believing in their church! Fancy their calling these poor wretches brothers, while the mud from their carriage-wheels splashes them as they dash by! I say, fancy calling these men representatives of Jesus, and successors to His apostles! And this is the Church, the Church in the highest places. Fancy these fat Nonconformist parsons receiving salary from men whose wealth is won by iniquitous and unrighteous means! Can any one believe that the Church as it stands is good? Then where am I to find goodness? Among the Socialists? Lock, stock, and barrel, you feel the Socialists to be selfish; and if they occupied the same position as the rich men they denounce, they would act in a similar way. Where shall I look, Dan? Why, this Battersea is stinking with evil. I've gone through it by night and by day, and it makes me heart-sick. 'Look for the good,' you say; but where, Dan?"

He had started up, and was pacing up and down the room, his eyes flashing, his pale face drawn with pain.

"And so it often comes to this with me," he went on: "what's the use of trying? Is what is called sin, sin at all? Were n't the old Greeks right when they said, 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die'? What is the use of struggling against so-called wrong? Isn't the tendency of life that way, Dan? But there, it's no use talking now. So far, I hold fast to the old faith, or I try to. Good-night, old fellow!"

He left me then, and went to his bedroom, while I sat by the fire and brooded over what he had said, and what I had seen and heard during the evening.

Two days after, Stephen met the Rev. Mr. Cross, the High Church curate whom he had seen at Mrs. Price's gathering. They immediately entered into conversation.

"I shall never go to that house again," he said, after they had exchanged courtesies. "I'd rather resign a hundred curacies than sit and listen while faith and hope are maligned."

"Yes," replied Stephen; "from your standpoint it would be a godless affair."

"It was blasphemous. Those people sought to undermine the foundations of all that is good and true. Besides, I have much to do;" and he passed his thin hand across his forehead.

"There's plenty of work in Battersea," remarked Stephen.

"Work! But for the grace of God, it would kill me. Sin, sin, black sin, Mr. Edgcumbe. I've been here a year and half, and I think another year and half will take me to my grave."

"And what success have you?"

"Only a little, I'm afraid. There are so many forces against us. Our enemies are, in a sense, those of our own household. There is too little religion; and that little the devil often uses as a weapon with which to fight against us."

"I do not understand."

"I mean, there is so much free-trade in religion. Dissent is playing into the enemies' hands. You see, men as individuals, society as a whole, cannot be safe while they stay outside the Church. That is the only harbor of refuge. By and by there will, of course, be one fold and one Shepherd; but at present all is division. If all these schismatics would come back to the Church, be governed by her priests and receive her sacraments, then would the New Kingdom begin. I do not want to condemn Dissenters;

but if they only knew how they hinder salvation, they would surely repent."

Stephen, who had no wish to enter into a religious discussion with him, did not think well to present another side of the subject; but, instead, he recommended to the curate the case of the old woman we had visited on our way to the house at which they had met.

"I have visited her," said Mr. Cross; "but I cannot help her, because she will not be helped."

"How?"

"She is a Dissenter, and I cannot take the children's food and cast it to the dogs."

"Surely that is a strong expression."

"Mr. Edgcumbe, you don't know what I feel. I long to give these people help; but how can I? By so doing, I encourage the sin of schism. I promised the woman that if she would come to church I would help her; but I *dared* not, for my soul's sake, give her assistance while she remained outside the true Church, for by so doing I should condone her sin; I should act as though her being a Dissenter were nothing."

"But surely," said Stephen, "the claims of humanity are stronger than what at most is a mere matter of opinion."

"Matter of opinion! it is a thousand times more than that. It is essential to salvation, and I could not feed the woman's body, when, by so doing, I glossed over the starvation of her soul."

"But the woman struck me as true and pure."

"The devil will at times deceive God's own elect."

"But, Mr. Cross, don't you see where your actions drift? You will help some idle, thriftless, drunken person, who does n't mind telling a lie and coming to church in order to obtain your gifts; and by so

doing you encourage the evil, and refuse to help the good."

"Do you think I have not thought of that! the devil has tempted me with it hundreds of times. But what have I to do with it? If they deceive me, the sin is at their door, not mine. My garments are clean. I have given the professed children of the Church the offerings of the Church, and, by so doing, I believe I have helped on the coming day. If I can win a child from a Dissenting school to a Church school, I snatch a brand from the burning. The Church, Mr. Edgcumbe, is Christ's chosen means of saving the world; and as a servant of the Church I spare no means to win people to the Church."

"But, Mr. Cross ——"

"Forgive me, I cannot stay longer; there is so much to do;" and the young man rushed on to his work, the light of a fanatic shining from his eyes.

Stephen walked through Battersea Park, and on to Bridge Road, and was crossing the wooden bridge which in those days spanned the Thames, when some one touched his shoulder.

"Am I on the way to Chelsea?" said a voice in his ear, and he turned and saw a young man with black hair and beard standing beside him.

"Yes," replied Stephen.

"Thank you," he replied; "and now let me ask you, have you entered by the new and living Way, the Way that leads to heaven?"

Before Stephen could reply, the man had passed on, and, seeing two men carrying a heavy piece of wood, went up to one of them, and asked to be allowed to carry his burden. The man, with a laugh, assented. Then the strange character said in a loud voice, —

"'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Christ is the great

burden-bearer. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree."

And so he kept on until he reached the end of the bridge, while the people who passed by laughed good-humoredly.

"He's a strange character, Mr. Edgcumbe," said a voice close to him; and, on turning, Stephen saw Happy Elijah, who had spoken in Battersea Park, and with whom he had become acquainted.

"Is he in his right mind?" asked Stephen.

"I don't know. He thinks he's doin' the work of the Lord. Bless the Lord! He do make feeble interments powerful, He do."

Stephen talked a few minutes with the old man, and the talk did him good. It made him feel the beauty of genuine goodness and childlike faith; and when we met that night, I felt that his conversation with Happy Elijah had strengthened his grasp on the faith of his childhood.

The next day was Sunday, and John Polden came. He was smiling and suave as before, and was evidently desirous of being friendly. And yet I liked him no better at this our second meeting. He never looked either of us straight in the face, and the perpetual smile on his face was irritating. Stephen told him of his talk with the curate, in which Polden professed great interest.

"Edgcumbe," he said, "it is marvellous to me how people can be so narrow. I'm a very religious fellow myself; but my point is always to distinguish between religion and sects. The Anglican Church is a sect, and so is the Baptist, and so is the Presbyterian. Well, I respect them all. There are earnest men in them all. There are earnest, honest atheists, and agnostics, and theosophists. They have n't got *all* the truth, any of them, you know; in fact, we are all 'infants crying in the night, and with no language

but a cry'; but I like to give every one the credit for being honest."

Stephen looked at Polden and nodded his head assentingly, as though a thought had been expressed with which he desired to agree. And yet, although Polden uttered his apparently charitable platitude as if he were a leader of religious liberty, and notwithstanding the fact that I agreed with what he said, I respected the opinions of the fanatical curate a thousand times more. At any rate, Cross was in earnest, and, according to his convictions, he was real.

"You know," went on Polden, "I believe there's far more good in the world than we think. There's good at the bottom of all the evil that we mourn over, and there's a lot of real downright virtue in these so-called bad people. Hope for the best, I say, Edgcumbe. Let us think of the good, my friend. Let's think of the earnestness of Mr. Cross, and not trouble so much about his bigotry; let's remember the transparency and sunshine of old Elijah's life, and forget the foolishness of his views. Be glad in the world,—that's my motto; the world's in good hands, eh, Dr. Roberts?"

These were the beliefs I wanted Stephen to accept; but they lost all beauty to me as Polden spoke them. I could not help feeling they were cant phrases, and I was sure that he had an ulterior purpose in speaking them. And yet I could not understand what it could be. What could he gain by speaking so? Nothing. And so, accusing myself of unfairness, I tried to express my agreement with him. But I could not. Although I commenced my reply by saying, "Yes," I concluded by a tirade against fair-weather optimists.

John Polden did not take offence at my remarks, however; he smilingly admitted that there was a great deal in what I had said, and then turned to Stephen and asked him if he had seen anything of the man

or woman we had found quarrelling on our way home from Clapham Common.

“No,” replied Stephen, “I have not, and I know that I’ve been mean in not inquiring at the house. I cannot help feeling that the woman deserves sympathy and help; but it is an awkward thing to interfere between man and wife.”

“For my own part,” said Polden, “I would gladly help such a woman as she seemed to be, if necessity occurred. But, as you say, such a proceeding would be awkward, especially for young fellows like ourselves. But then, I’m not the man, neither are you, Edgcumbe, to allow convention to stand in the way when humanity demands our aid.”

When Polden left the house, I opened the windows and heaved a deep sigh, as though I would throw off a depressing influence which I had felt when he was in the room. Stephen, however, said he had enjoyed his company, and added that such a sunny religion as that professed by Polden was worth the having; after which he relapsed into moody silence. Somehow, I felt that my friend had been fighting with himself.

And now it is my duty to record that which it pains me beyond words to write, and yet which must be told if I relate my friend’s history faithfully.

CHAPTER X.

THE MORALITY OF THE "DESERVING POOR (?)"

Do good and lend, despairing of no man.

The New Testament.

DURING the next few weeks, Stephen saw Polden frequently, and, as far as I could see, learned to trust him. I said nothing to him, however; it was not for me to choose his friends, much as I might dislike this man. Besides, I knew nothing against him. My dislike was the result of instinct rather than reason, or, as Stephen would have termed it, prejudice. In addition to this, my friend appeared so much more cheerful; so that I began to hope he had either received favorable news from his wife, or that time was taking away the poignancy of his grief. He seemed to pay more attention to his profession, too, and told me that he had made a fair start with the novel he intended to write. I could not help seeing, however, that he showed less sympathy with suffering, less horror of filth, than he had done. One night I remember, in particular, we passed by a public-house, outside which two men, surrounded by a gaping crowd, were fighting; but he showed no desire to interfere.

"It's no use bothering," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders; "let them fight out their quarrel; we shall get nothing for our interference."

Neither did he show any interest when I spoke of interfering.

As the summer advanced, I saw rather less of him, owing to the fact, I was vain enough to believe, that I was increasing my chief's practice, and was often called away to patients who lived in the neighborhood of Clapham Common and Wandsworth Common. Anyhow, my time became more and more occupied, and, as a consequence, those parts of the day which we had been in the habit of spending together were spent apart.

One day I had been visiting a patient in the neighborhood of Mrs. Price's house, and was about to return to Battersea, when I saw John Polden coming down the road towards me, in apparently earnest conversation with another young man. I delayed getting into the conveyance until they came nearer, when I saw that Polden, when he had recognized me, immediately caught hold of his companion's arm and hurried up a side street. I do not know that this would have surprised me, — for I had a shrewd suspicion that Polden knew I had little respect for him, — had not I caught sight of the other man's face, and felt sure I recognized it.

“If that's not Ralph Hussey, it's his double,” I said to myself; and, jumping into the carriage, I told the groom to drive rapidly after them. I was not fated to get very near, however, for they were entering a house as I came up; but I was confirmed in my suspicion. There could be no doubt that John Polden's companion was Ralph Hussey, whom Stephen had saved from drowning years before, and who was acknowledged to have been in love with Stephen's wife. I saw, too, that they tried to keep their faces from me; and although I shouted out “Good-day,” neither took any notice of my salute.

As may be imagined, this incident set me thinking. Of course there might be nothing remarkable in their being together. They might have been

schoolfellows, college chums, or a hundred things. Hussey was a man of independent means, and could spend his time where he would; while Polden had no profession, and would be glad of a companion of the Hussey ilk. Why, then, should they not be together? So I said to myself, but I could not help being uncomfortable. Why were they anxious to avoid me, and why did Hussey seek to hide his face? Besides, I had heard Stephen mention Ralph Hussey's name in Polden's presence; but he had taken no notice of it,—had acted, indeed, as though he knew no such person.

But there, I, Daniel Roberts, had always been an over-cautious, suspicious sort of fellow, and I liked neither Polden nor Hussey. I determined to be home in good time that evening, however, so as to have a chat with Stephen, and to tell him what I had seen. Perhaps my hope was that he would in the future see less of Polden, when he knew of that gentleman's friendship with Hussey.

"Stephen, old man," I said, when we met at dinner, "is Polden friendly with Ralph Hussey, do you know?"

"Not as far as I am aware," was his reply.

"Have they ever been friendly, do you think?"

"I think not. I once mentioned Hussey's name casually, in the course of conversation with Polden, but he took no notice. Why do you ask?"

"Because I saw them together to-day. They were evidently very friendly, for they walked arm-in-arm."

He was silent for a minute, then he said slowly:

"Well, what of that?"

"I don't know," I replied. "I'm afraid I don't like Polden, and I'm sure Hussey does not like you. Your own judgment must tell you, better than I can, how you should regard Hussey; while as for Polden;

— well, I confess I did n't feel comfortable when I saw them together."

"Dan, old man," he cried, "I'm trying to trust in people; don't you seek to undermine that trust."

"Yes, Steve; but we must use judgment. I would n't trust a mad dog or an adder."

"Steady, old man; that's scarcely like you."

"How would you explain their apparent friendship?" I asked.

"I don't try to explain," he said. "What right have I to ——"

He stopped short in the middle of the conversation, and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Steve, old fellow," I said, "have you heard anything about your wife lately, and — do you love her still?"

"I've heard nothing, Dan, not a word, a syllable, since the Colonel was here, you know. I've written again and again; but I've had no reply, and my letters have not been returned. I've sent all the money I've been able, and I know by my pass-book that my cheques have been presented. Do I love my wife, Dan? — how can you ask!"

"Perhaps it was brutal of me to ask," I replied; "but it's a good while now since you separated, and I was wondering whether ——"

"Dan, my friend, I may speak to you, I know, — speak freely. I have wanted to for a long while, but it has been very hard to break the ice. I love her as much as ever, old fellow, — love her all I'm capable of loving. I cannot help remembering the glad, happy days we spent together; besides, I fell in love with her when I was a boy, — you remember, Dan; you know, too, how beautiful she was. I — I am trying to think the best I can about her. I remember that she was under the Colonel's influence

long before she saw me, and I believe she is very fond of her father. Well, I try to believe that she is more to be pitied than blamed. She has been taught to worship money, and no doubt she has been influenced by her father to keep away from me ; but, Dan, my ideal is shattered, my belief in her love for me has gone. I used to fancy her noble and true, and that's gone too."

I was silent.

"Mind you, Dan," he went on, "I still believe in her purity, and in a way I believe she is faithful to her marriage vow ; but the old Isabella is gone,—that is, the Isabella I dreamed about, the Isabella of my fond imaginings,—and some one else by the same name has taken her place."

"And do you hope ever to be reunited?" I said.

"Hope is a strong word. I long for it ; for even now, if she were to come to me as she did on our wedding-day, and tell me she was faulty, but that she loved me, I think I should forget the past,—I love her so. But I am afraid I don't hope, although at times I fancy I even do that ; and then I have energy, then I can work. Again, at times, the barriers seem impregnable, and difficulties laugh at me ——"

"Yes?" I said, as he hesitated.

"When I see things that way, I am paralyzed ; I go about with a weight on my heart. Still, I hold fast."

"Hold fast to what, Steve?"

"To the thought that she's still mine. Oh, Dan, if you ever loved as I love her, you would realize what a power it has on life. She may n't love me in the way I imagined ; but she's my wife still, and I hold fast to the longing that she'll see the truth about things, and come back to me. Then the past year or

so will be only a hideous nightmare, a ghastly time to be forgotten."

"But if she should never come back? Suppose she remains unfaithful?"

A strange look came into his eyes, and I was sorry I made the suggestion. Nothing further was said just then, however, for a servant came in with a note for him.

He took it, and read it quickly.

"You remember that man and woman who were quarrelling when we came back from Mrs. Price's some time ago, Dan?" he said, when he had finished.

"Very well," I replied.

"They are called Baker," he said. "The man, John Baker, is a bricklayer's laborer; the woman, Ellen, his wife, was a respectable servant. It turns out, as I suspected that night, the woman is a very decent woman, and the man is a drunken brute, often leaving her for days without food or money."

"How have you discovered this?" I asked.

"Polden and I have investigated the case," he said. "Polden was very much interested, and asked my advice, as a lawyer, whether they could not in some way be separated, and the woman and her two children helped."

"Have you visited the house?" I asked.

"Yes; two or three times."

"Alone?"

"No; Polden has always gone with me."

"It is quite interesting to see Polden and you acting as good Samaritans," I said.

"I'm afraid there's not much of the good Samaritan in my part of the affair," he said. "I am looking upon the whole thing as an experiment; I am wondering whether help is really appreciated by this class of people."

I remembered all the old harrowing doubts which had been troubling him, and wondered as to the future.

"And Polden?" I asked.

"Polden thinks the woman deserving of every help," he replied. "You are, I think, mistaken in him; he's such a kind fellow, and has great faith in these people. I was for letting the matter drop, for there must be hundreds of similar cases in Battersea; but he says no, let's help the poor thing, if we can."

"Then why not mention the case to some minister?" I said.

"Why should I?" he asked. "The world is bad enough; surely it's no harm to try and do a little good myself, without packing it on others' shoulders."

I felt rebuked, and yet I was not satisfied.

"Just so," I said; "and this letter you received a few minutes ago?"

"Is from her," he replied. "She asks my advice. She says her husband has left her, and she knows not what to do."

"Put the affair in the hands of the police and the parish relieving officer," I said.

"It seems a bit hard, doesn't it?" he replied. "Say, Dan, won't you walk over with me, and then you might be better able to give an opinion."

"Yes," I said, "I will." I had no sooner put on my hat, however, than I received a message telling me that my services were needed in another direction, and so Stephen went away alone.

When I returned from the patient whom I had been hurriedly called to visit, I found Stephen awaiting me.

"Well, you went to see those people?" I said.

"Yes," he replied; "they are in a bad way. I am not sure whether the woman deserves help, in spite

of Polden's high opinion; still, you can't see people starving."

"What have you done?"

"Very little; I've just given the poor thing enough to buy bread for a day or so, but nothing permanent. Bad or good, she ought to have something done for her."

"Has Polden been to see you lately?"

"No; I have n't seen him for several days."

Nothing more was said about the question at that time; indeed, poor deserted wives and starving children are too common in Battersea to call forth much remark. Of course, individual help to such people is necessary, and much suffering is averted thereby; at the same time, some radical change in the social circumstances of the people must take place before the evil is successfully grappled with.

One evening, about a week later, during which time I had seen comparatively little of him, I returned from my rounds to find him in a state of great excitement.

"What's the matter, Steve?" I asked.

"Matter!" he said. "I've been duped, befooled, that's all."

"That's nothing new with people nowadays," I said. "But what has happened?"

He lay back in his chair, and laughed in a bitter, sneering way. "You remember that woman whom I thought so respectable?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, she sent to me for help again to-day."

"Of course," I said; "that is only common. You did n't go, did you?"

"Yes, I went."

"You were very foolish."

"Foolish! Why, she's as bad—ay, worse than the strumpets who walk the streets."

I was silent.

"This is the purity of the working-classes!" he sneered. "Bah! But then I ought to have expected it. Why, the whole place is a cesspool. Everywhere, everywhere it's the same."

"Explain, Stephen, old man. What's the matter?"

"Nay, I'll not explain. The whole thing makes me sick, it is so loathsome. My God! the whole tribe of them must have been born in the bottomless pit. But there, I'll not bother; after all, I could n't have expected anything else. As soon as my eyes were opened, and I saw what a fool I had been, I came away with a feeling of loathing in my heart, worse than if I had been to a cancer hospital, or had come from a den where smallpox or some other pestilence prevailed. And I had hopes that I was doing good, too!" and again he laughed bitterly.

"Have you seen Polden lately?" I asked presently.

"No, not for some days. It's just as well, perhaps. Don't mention this business to me again, Dan; besides, I want to do a little work to-night. I've got an idea that I've found a publisher for the novel I'm writing."

"You haven't told me the subject of your novel yet, Steve," I said.

"Haven't I? Well, I was telling the outline of the story to a literary fellow to-day, and he told me it would be bound to make a hit, provided I had pluck."

"Pluck?"

"Yes, pluck enough to face Mrs. Grundy and tell the truth."

"Truth about what?"

"ILLUSIONS."

"Is that the subject of your book?"

“Ay, and it’s the title, too.”

“Well, what are you saying about it?”

“I hardly know yet. I’m not calm and unfeeling enough to be a realist, I’m not logical enough to be a philosopher, and I’m afraid I’m not plucky enough to tell the truth.”

“About what?”

“Well, say such a thing as responsibility. You see, I get wild at—at such affairs as that I’ve been speaking about; but, after all, why should I? Human nature is just as it’s made, isn’t it? and if it’s bad, well, whose fault is it? Were n’t those old fellows right when they said that no man was responsible for his acts? What’s the use of troubling? What’s the use of fighting wrong? Let nature have its fling, for fighting ends in defeat.”

“You don’t believe that, Steve?”

“Don’t I? Well, I suppose I don’t; and yet, are n’t all our old ideas about right and wrong, virtue and vice, purity and impurity, amongst the illusions of life?”

“Steve, old man,” I said, “I’m going to have a holiday, the first for a long time. I’m going to Wales, and I want to tramp through the mountain district. You want a holiday, too. Can’t you manage to come with me? We’ll have no luggage, save what we can carry in a couple of knapsacks, and we’ll have a right jolly time, free from work and worry. We’ll forget smallpox, cancers, and abnormalities, whether physical or moral, and we’ll live among the free air of the mountains. What do you say?”

“When, Dan?”

“In a week from to-day!”

His eyes flashed like those of Stephen in the old days.

“I’m your man, Dan!” he cried; and, rising to his

feet he seemed to shuffle off a heavy burden. "Just a right free time in the fresh air," he continued; "and when I come back, perhaps I shall see that I am suffering from 'illusions,' eh, old man?"

I almost dread writing of the time "when he came back."

CHAPTER XI.

A WIFE'S FAITHFULNESS.

And yet, within a month —
 Let me not think on 't — Frailty, thy name is woman!
Hamlet.

WE spent a happy fortnight in Wales. True, it rained now and then, and a "mist was on the mountains" very often; but we had some bright days, and many exhilarating walks. I saw health coming back to Stephen's cheek, and the bright look of hope to his eyes. Sometimes he volunteered a remark about his wife, and I knew that he was looking forward to a time when the dark cloud should roll away.

"If I could only persuade her to get away from the old Colonel's influence, and entice her to come here among these mountains!" he would say.

"Well, you have the right to demand it," my reply would be.

"Yes; but to demand would be to destroy all the gladness, all the charm. Nay, if she comes, she must come willingly."

He wrote to her, but no reply came. Still, he bore up cheerfully, and a better travelling companion I could not desire. When the fortnight came to an end, we were both bronzed, and in good spirits, — ten pounds heavier, he assured me, for our rest and recreation.

"Well, I shall have need of my renewed strength," I said, "for there will be no end of work to do. Will you be busy, too?"

"Fairly," he replied. "You see, I am not quite 'briefless;' besides, I write for one or two newspapers."

"Then there is your novel," I suggested; "a successful novel is worth a few hundreds of pounds."

"Yes," he answered; "I know of a fellow who made six hundred pounds by his first novel. I'm hoping to do something like that. Perhaps Isabella might come back to me then."

"Very likely," was my response; and yet I felt that my friend was living in a fool's paradise when he made plans which depended on his wife's love.

"My idea of the book has changed since we were talking about it in Battersea," he said, on the last day of our holiday.

"Yes, how?"

"Well, I think the mountain air has swept away the cobwebs from my brain; anyhow, my reading of life is different from what it was. Instead of showing that the illusions of life are false, it has come to me that the so-called illusions of childhood may be true to the truest life. Don't you see?"

I nodded.

"It will mean an amount of constructive work after the destructive is over, you know; and thus the book, as a whole, will be positive instead of negative."

Arriving at Euston station, we hired a cab and drove direct to Battersea, and, after having washed, sat down to dinner. A pile of letters lay before each of us, but I insisted that not one should be looked at until we had finished our dinner. I was glad afterwards that I did so; it meant half an hour more of happiness.

Dinner over, we both began reading our correspondence, and I had nearly finished mine when I heard Stephen gasp as if he were choking.

“What is the matter?” I cried.

He had turned as pale as a corpse; his eyes burned with an unusual light; his hands, which clutched a letter, trembled violently.

“No, no, Dan,” he cried; “it can’t be that; no, no!”

“Can’t be what?” I asked.

“Look!” he said, in a hoarse voice. “Read for yourself.”

I took the letter from his unresisting fingers, and read, feeling my blood recede from my face as I did so. At first I was staggered, I could not comprehend the issues of the situation; but by and by they became clear to me. All the while Stephen stood by my side as still and as pale as a dead man.

“You see — you understand,” he said presently.

“Yes, I see; I think I understand,” I replied.

“But, Dan, the whole affair is as false as lies, as false as hell!” he gasped.

“I’m sure it is,” was my answer.

“But how can they — why, nothing can be proved.”

“You should know best, you are a barrister,” I replied; “but I have been told that almost anything can be proved in a court of law, provided conscience is out of the question, and a long purse is behind everything.”

“Read the letter — every word!” he gasped. “I can’t believe it; I can’t realize it!”

I read it aloud. I will not quote it here. It is not necessary to this history that I should, and certainly I have no desire to write what was basely conceived, and more basely executed. Indeed, the whole matter shall be dealt with lightly; there is no gain in sullyng these pages with that which is un-

clean. Suffice to say, then, that the letter which had blanched my friend's face and almost overcome him, contained information that means were being taken to destroy his marriage bonds, because of his alleged unfaithfulness. It coupled his name with the woman named Baker, whom we had rescued from a drunken husband and who had so deceived Stephen, and informed him that proceedings would be taken immediately.

"It's plain, unmistakable," he said, when I had finished.

"Yes," I said.

"Can you explain it, Dan? Do, if you can; I can't think. I've received a blow, and it has staggered me. My head is swimming, too."

I caught him by the hand, and led him to his arm-chair, and then sat down by his side. He remained a few minutes with his head buried in his hands, then he started up and walked to and fro about the room.

"Sit down again, Steve," I said, "and let us both be as calm as we can."

"I can't sit down now," he cried; "I must be on the move. Perhaps I shall be able to think quietly presently, but not yet."

"Let us try and face the question, then; let us try and find out who originated the whole thing."

"Presently, Dan," he said, "but not now; I can't think. I must go out; I want more air—more room!"

He put on his hat and left the house, I following him. He did not notice me. With clenched hands, and pale, immovable features, he moved like one in a dream. Hour after hour he walked, I keeping near to him, yet not daring to speak to him, knowing that such an interruption would not help him. Sometimes I could hear him muttering; while once or twice I saw his hand uplifted, as though he would

strike an imaginary enemy. By and by I determined to speak; I felt sure he could not bear the strain much longer, especially when I heard him cry out as if in agony.

“Stephen, old friend,” I said, taking him by the arm, “let us go home.”

“Dan,” he cried, as though I had been walking by his side all the time, “she’s gone from me, lost to me. She’s my wife no longer. There’s no hope, not one bit anywhere. Everything is black — black.”

“We don’t know everything yet, Steve.”

“I know she must have consented to this; I know she’s gone from me; and I know, worse than all, that she’s false as lies itself. She has given her approval, — nay, instigated this vile scheme, which was born in darkness. She who was my wife, Dan; she whom I have loved like my life, — and I’ve never been unfaithful to her, even in thought, Dan.”

“Well, let’s get back, old fellow; we can talk over the whole affair together. Perhaps we can probe the thing to the bottom, and save disgrace.”

“Disgrace! I don’t care a snap of the finger for disgrace. What I care for is the fact that she who has laid her head on my breast, and called me her husband, is — is — is capable of — Oh, Dan, I can’t bear it! The other was bad enough, but she left me room for hope then; but now — Oh, my God! My God!”

“Come, Steve, master yourself, old man. Here we are at home; let us go in and sit down quietly.”

He stopped in the road, as though struggling with himself. By and by he heaved a deep sigh, then he said quietly, —

“All right, Dan; I think I can go in now. I’ve been to the bottom of the affair, I think, and know what I’m saying.”

A minute later we were sitting together, Stephen

outwardly as calm as though nothing had happened, and yet the dark circles around his eyes, and his drawn, haggard face, revealed how terrible were the experiences through which he was going.

"I can see through all this, my friend," I said; "I can probe this shameful plot to the bottom."

"Can you, Dan? What have you to say about it, then?"

"That visit of the Colonel's some months ago was the beginning of it. When he found that you would not accept money not lawfully earned, and preferred poverty to dishonesty, he went back, and a scheme was concocted whereby you might be got rid of."

"Who concocted it?"

"Well, Hussey and the Colonel."

"And — and the other."

"Anyhow, I believe that was the beginning of it."

"Well, what then?"

"Then I believe they began to have your actions watched, with no possible results in their favor. They knew that somehow they must have a plausible case to take into a court of law. Well, Hussey knew Polden, and Polden is one of those gentlemanly loafers who is always ready to do dirty work. You can see the rest plainly enough. I wondered at Hussey and Polden being together, and both desirous of shunning me; now I see the meaning of it."

He nodded his head in a cold way, as though he had lost all feeling, and had become a mere thinking machine.

"But that affair in the street after coming home from Mrs. Price's house — Polden could not have counted on that?"

"No; it was simply an accident in his favor. Afterwards both man and woman were bought. The rest is plain."

"I expect you are right," he said. "And still the

motive does not seem sufficient. Old Tempest is proud, and the Divorce Court has n't a pleasant sound."

"You know what his pride is worth where money is concerned; as for conscience, he has none. Then Hussey hates you and loves your wife; he has always been in love with her. He has come into some more money, too. I read about it the other day. Some old aunt or other died. The Colonel wants money."

"And she — she aids and abets."

"Anyhow, she must consent."

He sat gloomy and silent for some minutes, never moving; then he said, "Ilford was right, after all. His creed was true — true as death is true."

"What creed?"

"Every man can be bought, if the price you offer is big enough; and a woman is more easily bought than a man."

"Not all, Steve!"

A sneer curled his lips, but he did not reply.

"I suppose," he said at length, "that that Baker woman and her husband have learnt their lessons. Bah! I see the reason for her behavior now."

"No doubt," I replied, "both will be ready to swear to anything; and yet I believe their case will not hold water. It is full of holes."

"Of course it is," was his reply; "but that does not matter."

"Not matter; how?"

"How can it?"

"But surely you'll fight it to the end. You'll not let your name be dragged in the mire by such people."

"My name, Dan! what do I care about my name? The truth is, she wishes our relations to cease, she wishes to be free, and she does not scruple to use such means. I see her as — as she is, now. Well,

she shall be free; I will not move one finger — ay, and she knew I would not move a finger — to destroy their plans when she made them or consented to them. She knew that all I cared for was her love — her desire to be my wife; and when she determined to use the only means whereby our wedding vows could be broken, she was sure that I would not try and hinder her plans from being carried out.”

“Then you see the possible issue of the whole matter. You see that if you allow this evil scheme to triumph, by being criminally silent, you will allow her to add crime to crime.”

“I see,” he said, in a stony way. “But what is crime, what is sin? If it exists at all, it exists in desire, in the will. Well, let her go to the end. When their plans are carried out, she will be free to go through the mockery of another wedding ceremony. She will be married — married, eh? — that is, she will have this Hussey’s name, and his money, and she who was my wife will be an adulteress! Oh, the beautiful purity of women! Pure! Nay, there’s not a pure woman under heaven!”

“You don’t mean that, Steve.”

He laughed a bitter, joyless, cynical laugh.

“I thought my time of disillusionment had come when Uncle Luke’s smash came,” he said; “but it had n’t. It has come now, though. The vile thing is laid bare enough now. And I was such a fool as to believe, to trust in a woman’s promise, a woman’s chastity.”

“But, Steve,” I said, “you will surely do something.”

“Nothing, Dan, nothing. Why should I? What should I gain? Let hell triumph, if it will; I’ve no interest in the matter now. I’m but a piece on the chess-board which she can move so as to win her game. Life’s a grand thing, Dan, a grand thing! It

offers such inducements to truth and honesty, does n't it? Why, if I'd been wise enough to accept a thousand a year from Uncle Luke — money to which he has no right — that is, if I'd been willing to sell my conscience and be a rogue, I should have retained my wife's smiles, and should have been supremely happy. So happy! Oh, there are such incentives to virtue, are there not?"

After that, silence reigned for some time. Stephen sat like a statue, with his eyes fixed on the fireplace; but he saw nothing, his mind was far away, and I knew his thoughts were bitter as wormwood. For some time I fancy he was unconscious of my presence; he was down at Edgcumbe Hall again, or perhaps he was away at Bloomfields, seeing Isabella Tempest for the first time. As I watched him sitting there so still, his face so drawn with agony, his eyes so glistening and stony, I could not help thinking of him as I saw him first. What a handsome lad he was, so bright, so clever, so hopeful! What dreams he had, too; what castles he built! Then I thought of the influence that such a man as his uncle must have had on him, and the impressions that his tutor at Manchester must have made on his character. His healthy nature would have none of their cynicism and pessimism in the days of his hope and gladness. And yet all they said must have formed a deposit in his life; and now in the day of his darkness the seed they sowed was beginning to bear fruit. He was beginning to believe as they had taught him to believe; the so-called realistic literature which he had devoured was so much poison in his mind. I felt this to be true, and yet I was powerless to do anything for him; and a great pain came into my heart as I thought of the coming days.

I turned to the letter which conveyed the evil tidings, and read it through again. It was formal

and cold, as all legal letters are; but its meaning was plain, all too plain. His wife, so the letter said, had given instructions for the letter to be sent, and no doubt everything was done to make a hideous lie look like truth.

"Steve," I said at length, "this letter was dated three days ago."

"Was it?"

"Yes; and it asks for the address of your legal advisers."

"Yes."

"What will you say to them?"

"Nothing."

"But you must answer the letter."

"Must I? Very well; I shall simply acknowledge their communication, and tell them that no defence will be offered."

"Such a communication will at once make the public think you confess the truth of their accusation."

"Well, that does n't matter."

"But, Stephen ——"

"I shall offer no defence; I shall not appear at the court. Let them have it their own way; I have no interest in the matter."

"But you have every interest; your whole future ——"

"The future is nothing to me. She — she uses this means, vile as it is, to get rid of me; that is enough, — I care nothing for anything else."

His face never moved, and his eyes remained fixed on the fireplace; he seemed a mere automaton; he looked as though the hand of death were on him.

I saw no use talking further with him, and on looking at my watch I found that it was past midnight.

"Come, Steve, let us go to bed," I said.

“ Good-night, Dan.”

“ But you will go to bed ? ”

“ No ; I shall not go to bed to-night.”

“ Let me stay up with you.”

“ No ; I would rather be alone. Please leave me.”

I saw I had better do as he said, and so I left him sitting as still as a statue and looking into vacancy.

“ God bless you, Steve ! ” I said.

“ God ? ” he said ; and I knew by the tone of his voice that the Name we use in prayer was only a Great Question to him.

CHAPTER XII.

A LOOK AT HELL.

Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell;
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep
 Still threatening to devour me opens wide.

All good to me is lost.

MILTON.

THE next day I called at the house to which we had taken the drunken man Baker and his wife some months before, in order to ascertain, as far as they were concerned, the true position of affairs. I found the door locked and the rooms empty. On inquiring of the neighbors, I found that the family had left a week before. The man, they asserted, had gone no one knew whither, while the woman and children they fancied had come into some money, for they had "moved in a grand way like." Where she had gone, however, no one knew. She had paid all her debts, and had been very reserved as to her future movements.

"She was horful huppish," one woman informed me, "and would n't hev a drink nor nothink. She sed as 'ow she was n't a-goin' to throw away 'er chances by boozin'. I told 'er," the woman continued warmly, "as 'ow she was n't a hactin' like a laidy; and I ses to her, I ses, there's better nor you as is n't too proud to hev a drink, I ses. But she jist slams the door in my faice, while I hup and told wot she was."

“And what did you tell her?”

“I told her as ’ow she were n’t better nor the rest on us,” was the reply. Whereupon she repeated some gossip which I will not record here.

On going back to my apartments, I found that Stephen was just making a pretence of having breakfast. He had gone to his bedroom when daylight came, and had lain on the bed without taking off his clothes. He had not slept, he told me; and he spoke in a dazed, abstracted sort of way.

“I have just been to the woman Baker’s house,” I said.

“Yes,” was his reply. “Well, what of your visit?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing! Have you seen her?”

“No; she has gone away, no one knows where.”

“Just so,” he said, after musing a few seconds. “Everything is cut and dried.”

“Yes; I fancy that is true,” I replied. And then I repeated what I had heard about the woman.

“I dare say all you say is true,” he replied; “doubtless, she’s worse than what you have heard about her. But what of that? It is nothing to me.”

“But, Stephen, you ought, for the sake of right, to let the truth be known about this matter,” I urged.

“Sake of right!” he said bitterly. “Not I. Not one stone will I turn, not one word will I speak. What’s the use? The devil is stronger than I, and I’m not going to try and fight him. There, look at the letter I have written.”

I took it up, and saw that it was addressed to the men of law from whom he had received the communication which had made him in one night look ten years older. It was very brief. As near as I can remember, it ran as follows:—

“SIR,—I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated ——. In reply thereto, I beg to state that I shall

not offer any defence, nor take any steps with regard to the matter therein mentioned.

STEPHEN EDGCUMBE.

August —, 18 —.

“But, Stephen ——”

“Dan, let the matter drop now. Be my friend if you can, old man, and say no word further about it.”

An expression of anguish was on his face, a look of despair was in his eyes; and, according to his wish, I said not a word further on the matter.

Of the next few weeks I shall say little; of the trial, if trial it can be called, I shall refrain from speaking in anything like detail. It is painful for me to mention it even now, especially when I remember the terrible effect those dark days had upon my friend. I could not persuade him to go out of doors at all; and when I suggested that he should take care of the welfare of his profession, he told me that his career as a barrister was hopelessly destroyed, and that he had given up his City offices.

“You are working very hard here, though,” I said.

“Yes,” he replied, “I have been writing a little for the papers ever since I came to London, and the editors have not tossed me over. Of course none of my articles are signed, and thus virtuous people will not be called upon to give up the papers in which they appear. If my name had to be printed, editors would give me the go-by, not because they care a fig about morality, but because they must be respectable.”

“You seem to be writing a great deal,” I suggested.

“Yes, I am trying to work for *the costs* ;” and he laughed bitterly. “When they are paid, I don’t know that I shall care much what I do.”

“Nonsense, old man; surely that’s not the way to talk.”

He grimly went on with his writing, while I hurried away on my rounds.

Although he never said a word about the scene in the Divorce Court, I should have known when it came on, even although I had not seen announcements of it. He evidently tried to be self-possessed, and certainly he was very quiet; but I knew by his twitching lips, his gray ashen face, the far-away look in his eyes, how much the matter affected him. On the morning when the case opened, I managed to be with him longer than usual, for his dumb misery went to my heart. To me, who had known him in his glad, happy days, the sight of his agony was terrible to bear. I remember, too, how he could not remain in one position, or continue doing any one particular work. One minute he would be reading, the next hurrying rapidly to and fro about the room, the next pretending to be busily engaged in writing. When I touched him, too, I felt that his whole body was trembling, while his hands and forehead burnt like fire.

As evening came on, he said huskily, "Dan, three days like this would kill me. Hell must be paradise to what I feel just now."

"Things may turn out different from what you expect," I said, as cheerfully as I could.

"Don't, Dan, don't. I know exactly how matters will turn out — exactly; but then I am a fool. I fancy she will relent, I fancy that when the final hour comes she will allow her heart to speak; and my heart throbs at every knock at the door, and I keep on hoping that she will come and throw herself in my arms as in the olden days. I know she will not, and I call myself a fool for dreaming it; but then — you know, Dan, you know."

The trial was neither long nor notorious. None of the parties were well known, no defence was given, and so the jury had no difficulty in deciding the verdict, or the judge in giving judgment. In due

time Stephen, who had made arrangements with a friend to send him the decision as soon as it was known, received a telegram telling him what the papers announced shortly after, that the woman he had called wife no longer bore the name of Isabella Edgcumbe, but was in future to be called by her maiden name, Isabella Tempest.

I thought he would have fallen when he read the telegram; but he controlled himself after a time, and then went to an arm-chair, and sat down quietly, and remained there for hours as immovable as a stone. By and by we heard the newsboys crying the newspapers in the street. "*Hextra speshol! all the latest news!*" I heard a lad shout beneath our window, and then he turned to me and said quietly:

"Dan, get a newspaper, will you?—one that delights most in printing filth."

I got a paper, and scanned its columns eagerly. Yes, there was a column devoted to my friend's case. It contained his picture, also that of the woman who had been his wife, and I noticed that every sensational element in the case had been magnified. On Isabella Tempest no reproach was cast, no stain hinted at. Stephen Edgcumbe had been unfaithful, he had neglected his wife, and had gone away into paths of wrong; and so, of course, his wife had to use the only means in her power of being rid of a man in every way unworthy of her. The woman Baker gave shameful evidence, so did one or two others, each declaring the most sickening lies; while Stephen's silence was taken to confirm everything said. The judge, in summing up, remarked upon the sadness of the case, one especially sad to him when he remembered the brilliant qualities of the man whose professional life was, through his sin and folly, inevitably destroyed.

I hated the idea of giving him the paper; but it

would be useless to keep it back, so I handed it to him without a word. I watched him closely as he read; but he made no movement, save that his hands trembled; but when he had finished, he looked at me like a madman.

“Dan,” he cried, “had I known that she would have allowed this, had I known that such lies as these would have been printed, I would have told the whole story,—I would have let the world know what had happened; but there!” and he threw down the paper with a bitter laugh.

“Steve,” I said, “don’t worry about yourself! the world will forget all about this affair in a fortnight. Be glad you are freed from her. Evidently she never loved you.”

“Yes, I am free, Dan,” he said; “but it seems like the devil’s freedom. Can’t we go somewhere to-night? Let us see something that will make me forget.”

“There’s something decent on at ‘The Court,’” I said.

“Nothing so mild as that,” he said. “Let us go somewhere where the devil is let loose. Come while I’m in the mood.”

“Nay, old man” I said. “There’s enough dirt around, without going out of our way to get it.”

“Yes, but let’s go somewhere where dirt is made to look nice. As you say, dirt is everywhere around; let’s have it dished up in a tempting way.”

“Be yourself, Steve,” I said. “I know this is hard for you; but two wrongs don’t make a right.”

“Wrong and right. Dan, you have n’t been to hell; I have,—there’s all the difference; and, between you and me, hell upsets one’s notions. Besides, as Ilford and Uncle Luke used to say, life’s bad at bottom. If I’d listened to them, I should n’t have believed in goodness, and should n’t have been duped as I have been. Well, it will never happen

again. I know what the world is, at last, and it seems the best thing to take it as I find it! 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die;' ha! ha!" and he laughed in a hollow, mirthless way.

"Let's go for a quiet walk somewhere," I said; "a stroll will do us both good."

"A quiet walk in Battersea!" he said. "A quiet walk with drink shops at every corner; a quiet walk when girls are shrieking up and down! Do you remember that Saturday night, Dan? Do you want a quiet walk like that?"

"Every night is not Saturday night," I replied, "and we can find quiet roads even around here. If houses don't suit you, let us go for a stroll along the Embankment."

"Not to-night," he said, in a strange, husky voice; "the river looks too tempting. By the way, old man, did you ever get drunk?"

"Yes; I made a fool of myself once, when I was a student at Edinburgh; never since."

"How did it feel?"

"I hardly remember; I don't forget the following day, though."

"What of that?"

"Intense misery, aggravated by a splitting headache."

"But you forgot everything while you were drunk?"

"Yes; I was very hilarious, I was told; insisted on shaking hands with everybody, and sung two or three songs."

"I think I'll try it," he said.

A ring came to the door.

"If it is some one who wants you, Dan," he said, "don't go out to-night; don't leave me alone. I long to be alone, but I'm afraid. Don't leave me, old man."

As it happened, however, I had to leave him. A critical case which demanded my attention, and at which a stranger could not be present, forced me, much against my will, to deny his request.

“Well, I’ll go with you to the house,” he said feverishly, “and then I’ll go for a jolly long walk. I’ll get out on the Brighton Road, and tramp and tramp till I’m tired.”

It was now dark, and we started off together, and to all appearance he was in high spirits.

“Fancy,” he cried, “I’m an unmarried man again! I have no encumbrances—none at all. I can get married again if I like, I can do anything I will, and I have no one depending on me. I can be idle six days a week, and on the seventh I can earn enough for bread and cheese. Nothing ties me to anything, not even a spark of faith. Ah, well, life has its compensations;” and he laughed boisterously.

“You’ll be home by the time I get back, Steve?” I said anxiously. “This affair may not keep me a couple of hours.” I was standing on the steps of the house where my patient lay, and held his hot hand in mine.

“Don’t depend on me, Dan. I don’t know where I shall go, or when I shall come back.”

“Try and be quiet, old friend, and I’ll get home soon.”

He went away without replying, save to laugh aloud; and then with a heavy heart I placed my finger on the door-bell. The case which I attended was a critical one, and kept me till nearly midnight; but when I got home, I found that Stephen had not returned. I did not anticipate anything wrong, and yet I could not help feeling anxious. I could not forget the ghastly look on his face which the gaslight revealed to me when we parted, while his mirthless laugh was constantly ringing in my ears. Tired as

I was, I could not go to bed, so I sat and waited for him.

About two o'clock a cab drove up to the door, and a minute later Steve entered the room.

"Still up, Dan?" he said, in a highly pitched voice.

"Yes," I said; "I was kept a long time at the house where we parted. Did you take a long walk, as you said?"

"No."

"No?" I looked at him questioningly, but he did not speak. His face looked very pale, and his eyes shone with a strange light. He pulled off his boots, humming a song as he did so; then, putting his feet in a pair of slippers, he threw himself in a chair opposite me, and sat for some time in silence.

"I've been to have a look at hell," he said presently.

"To have a look at hell?" I repeated.

"Yes; just as you left, a hansom passed me. I got in, and told the man to drive me to the City."

"To the City?"

"Yes, to the City. I've been to the mouth of hell, and looked in. I have n't entered — yet; I've only looked in. The preachers make a mistake, Dan; hell's very beautiful."

"You are talking in riddles, old man."

"Am I? I mean no riddle, though. London is full of hells. I've been to three of them. Just at the mouth, you know. I've not entered — to-night. I wanted to see how they looked. I nearly went into one of them, but I was kept back. Perhaps I shall have better luck some day."

"Come, Steve, old man, this day has been too much for you. Try and sleep a little."

"I'm neither tired nor sleepy, and my brain is abnormally active. I'm all right, Dan."

"Then give me an account of your experience," I said.

“I could n’t bear to remain alone after I left you,” he replied. “I wanted light, I wanted movement, I wanted to forget myself. All the time I was in the cab I seemed to be enveloped in clouds of misery and pain; but when I got across Westminster Bridge, things began to get better, and by the time I got into the Strand, where the lights were blazing everywhere, I felt quite gay. I am an unmarried man without any ties, you know;” and he laughed bitterly.

“Yes,” I said, “you got into the Strand; what then?”

“I dismissed the cab, and was wondering where to go, when a fellow I know slightly, one whom I used to shun when — that is, a few months ago — passed me. He prides himself on knowing the shady side of London better than any man living; I believe, too, there is some reason for his boasts. Of course he has heard of my affair, and, after talking a few minutes, asked me what I was going to do with my night, and offered to go with me to any place I might care to visit.”

“But you did not accept his offer?”

“I did, though. As I said, I only stood at the mouth; I have not entered hell; but it’s very beautiful, old man. After all, I don’t think Faust did badly.”

He had started to his feet, and was walking rapidly up and down, while a look, half of despair and half of wild excitement, flashed from his eyes.

“After all,” he cried, “what is all this talk about right and wrong, — that is, what is it worth? Go to the bottom of everything, and you find nothing but corruption. I’ve been struggling against the tide, and what’s the use of it? The people I saw tonight, whom the pious world calls wicked, corrupt, loathsome, were happy. Their eyes sparkled, they laughed, they danced, they were merry. I’ve tried

to do right, tried to believe in the essential goodness of life, and I've been miserable. The sinner dwells in hell, so the preachers say; well, they seem happy in hell, while I——. There, old man, I dare n't talk any more to-night. But I'm an unmarried man, Dan; a bachelor like you,—is n't it fine? Good-night, old chap. I'm going to bed."

He left me then; but I heard him restlessly pacing his room for hours afterwards, while I sat in my arm-chair wondering with a sad heart what the end would be.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MARCH OF EVENTS.

When the heart sinks, the ship sinks.

THE next day Stephen did not stir out of the house. Hour after hour he sat brooding. I had, of course, to go out for several hours; but my landlady told me, on my return, that he had never left the room in which I had left him. He brightened up a little when I came home to dinner, but seemed to take very little interest in anything. I discovered that he had sent out for a large number of the daily papers, and these he had bought in order to discover further particulars of the trial in which he was so terribly connected. Beyond these I do not think he had read anything. After dinner a man called to see me, and Stephen would have left the room; but I prevailed on him to stay. I thought my visitor's conversation might cause him some diversion.

"What did you say he was called?" asked Stephen, when I told the servant to show him up.

"Amos Collet. He is a leading light among some Plymouth Brethren over in Chelsea."

"Collet! then I've met the man; but surely you've nothing to say to him, — he's nothing in your way."

Before I could reply, Amos Collet entered. He was what might be called a smooth man. His hands were soft, so was his face. His sandy hair was brushed smoothly down, while there is no word that

I know of which can describe his voice so well as "smooth." And yet there was an air of dogged persistency about him, while he possessed a kind of conceited assurance that was somewhat aggravating.

His business was of no importance, — a small matter not worth mentioning; indeed, I am pretty sure that his ostensible business was only used as a means to carry out his real purpose. Still, when the questions he first asked were answered, he seemed a little at a loss how to proceed.

"I suppose you are pretty busy over at Chelsea just now," I remarked.

"Very busy; always busy. The work is very great, and much effort is required," he replied.

"These elections always require much labor."

"Elections! I have nothing to do with elections. My time is filled up preparing for one GREAT election."

"Ah, Vestries and School Boards are nothing to you. You will work for nothing less than a Parliamentary election. To which party do you belong?"

"No party."

"No party?"

"No; my kingdom is not of this world."

"What great election do you mean, then?"

"Second Peter i. 10," was the reply.

I stared at him for a moment, scarcely understanding him.

"You are never wrong when you quote the Word, young man. What does 2nd Peter i. 10 say? 'Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.' That is the great business of life. I give all my time to it; I am constantly trying to prepare others for this great election."

I did not answer him; I did not think it best.

He spoke to Stephen. "Have you turned your attention to this?" he asked.

"I have turned my attention to many things," replied Stephen.

"What does Acts xvii. 21 say?"

"I don't know."

"My friend, you want the Word, and you want grace."

"No doubt," Stephen answered a little bitterly.

"You do. Excuse me, my brother, for speaking plainly; but your case has been pressing heavily upon me. Of course I've heard about it, and I've come to try and pluck a brand from the burning."

"Thank you, but you may spare yourself the trouble. Besides, you would burn your fingers."

"What does James v. 20 say?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"But you need instruction. You need to know the Word. Psalm cxix. 2."

"Dan," said Stephen, rising, "you'll not want me any longer, so I'll go into another room."

"No; I forbid you to leave. I forbid you. It is at your peril that you go. Mr. Edgcumbe, you are young, but you are lost. Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, but narrow the way that leads to life. That way I've come to tell you about. It was at my peril if I refused to come to you; it is at your peril if you refuse to listen to me."

"Ah," said Stephen, "and I suppose you think it honest to pretend to come here on business with my friend, while you really wish to insult me?"

"My reply again is James v. 20. It is also Amos i. 2 and Jeremiah iii. 8. I also bid you remember vi. Galatians 7 and 8, and Matthew xxv. 46."

"And my reply is, that you are an insolent fellow."

"I am willing to be reviled. I glory in it. I remember Matthew v. 11 and 12. Stephen Edgcumbe, you are an adulterer, an outcast. The papers to-day

tell of your sin. Think of Revelation xxii. 15, and repent."

"Mr. Collet," I said, "do you think you are acting like a gentleman in coming here in this way?"

"In my zeal for the great election, I care nothing for the world's ideas. Your friend is at the mouth of hell. I can almost smell the brimstone on his clothes. Revelation xvii. 5. I come to save him from doom, by giving him the Word, and only the Word."

I started up angrily, and opened the door. "Mr. Collet, this is unbearable," I said. "I don't wish to interfere with your religious notions, but I do object to your coming here and insulting my friend."

"Don't bother, Dan," said Stephen, with a sneering look at Collet; "let the maniac rave. He's a part of the make-up of the race. I'm getting too hardened to care much; let him go on with his drivel."

"Maniac! Drivel!" he cried. "I'm a leading man among the exclusive Brethren, while you are full of wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores. You are a moral leper; disease is bursting out at every pore of your moral skin. Leviticus xxiv. 7. You are an adulterer, you have ruined your wife by your sin; if ever man needed salvation, 't is you. I've come to invite you to hear a converted prize-fighter. He's a beautiful case. Once he was as bad as you, or nearly so. Come and see what we've done for him, and what can be done for you."

I could withhold myself no longer, so I caught him by the arm, and in no gentle way led him to the landing.

"Mary," I said to the servant, "show this man out."

"How dare you treat a messenger of the Word so?" he cried angrily. Then he controlled himself, and became "smooth" again. "I forgive you," he continued blandly, and in preaching tones, "and I wash

my garments of the blood of Stephen Edgcumbe. I have been faithful. Revelation xiv. 10 and 11. And although the devil holds him fast, I shall have my reward. I shall 'shine as the stars for ever and ever.' "

He walked into the hall, and then, seeming to have remembered something, stopped, and, putting his hand in his pocket, took out some tracts.

"I forgive you," he said, "and I leave these with you. They contain the gospel as set forth by our brethren; the only true gospel. There are only a few of us who have grasped it, according to the Scriptures, — Luke xiii. 24; but in this we rejoice, it shows the preciousness of our faith. Again I bid you beware. Read Isaiah xxxiv. 10; Revelation xix. 3; Psalm lxxv. 8, and remember that I am innocent of your blood."

I could not help laughing as he went away; and yet, as I saw the lines of bitterness and pain on my friend's face, I repented that I should have allowed such a scene.

"I have heard that some of these people act like this," I said, "but I did not really believe it."

"I can believe anything that's contemptible — now," said Stephen; "but let the matter drop, — I don't feel like talking about it. Anyhow, I'd rather take my chance with — but never mind."

As it happened, our attention was turned from Mr. Collet's visit by the knock of the postman, who brought a letter which deepened the lines of pain on my friend's face. When he had finished reading it, he threw it to me. It contained news that was closely connected with the trial, the thought of which seemed to break his heart-strings.

"I can't stay here any longer, Dan!" he gasped. "I must get away. I must be alone. I want to forget. I think I'll go and have another look at

those hells I saw last night. Don't come with me ; I can't bear company. Very well, then, I will not go to the City. I 'll stay in Battersea."

He spoke like one demented, looking at me all the time in a dazed sort of way. A minute later he had slammed the front-door, and I heard his quick step in the street outside. When he came in, two hours afterwards, he was to all appearances calm and self-possessed.

For the next two or three weeks he did no work. The novel about which he had spoken so hopefully while we were in Wales he did not touch. He spent his time in a listless, hopeless sort of way. I tried to rally him, but it was no use.

"What's the use?" he would reply. "I've paid the costs, and I have a few pounds left. What's gained by effort, by struggle? Let things drift. The whole business of life is n't worth troubling about."

About a month after the trial, I tried to rouse in him an interest in his novel.

"Steve," I said, "that's a fine idea of yours. Why don't you work it out?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Such a novel would bring you fame and fortune, and do a world of good."

He laughed bitterly.

"Come, old man, finish it ; I am anxious to read it."

"I could n't finish it, Dan."

"Why?"

"Because, first of all, I don't want to ; second, it's not worth while making any sort of effort ; and third, "I've a feeling that there's enough misery in the world without me adding my quota to it."

"I don't understand, Steve. Such an idea as you were telling me about would do a world of good, and is worthy of the pen of Victor Hugo or Walter Scott."

“Stop that, Dan. I don’t feel up to laying bare the miserable dirt of life. I feel its hollowness, its vulgarity, its rottenness, too much to write about it.”

“But, Steve ——”

“Old man, if I wrote a novel, I suppose I should want it read. Well, what is the kind of novel read to-day? People who subscribe to the circulating libraries ask for what’s vulgar and dirty. Either the heroines must swear, smoke cigarettes, be immoral and vulgar, or they must be cold, heartless, and bitter. As Ilford said, the rage is for realism, which means dirt, prurient suggestions, and coarseness, which is called wit. Well, I feel the fact of evil and deceit too keenly to describe it. I should feel as though I were dipping my pen into my own — But there; I won’t talk about it.”

“But, Steve, that was n’t your idea. You told me about concluding your book with the thought that those views of life seen through the eyes of innocence were only true.”

“Dan, that’s all gone. It was an illusion that has passed away. I’ve gone through mud since then. If I write what I believe to be true to life, I could n’t put sticking-plasters on the sores of life by society small talk. Besides, why should I? It is n’t worth while.”

“Not if by writing you could lead your readers to have nobler conceptions of life and duty?”

“Man, before you can make people believe in anything, you must first believe yourself. I believe in nothing that will help. I’ve thought out afresh the novel I began to write, during the last fortnight, and it can end only in gloom and misery. I have no hope in life, so why should I seek to disillusionize anybody? The only happy people in the world are those who don’t see the ghastly truth of life just as it is; well, I will not destroy their false happiness by

letting them see it. The subject of my novel was disillusionment; well, disillusionment to me means opening one's eyes to the fact that this life is a misery, that goodness and virtue, and all that kind of thing, are only seeming, and that at bottom lies and corruption reign. There, Dan, old man, it's no use talking."

"Then you believe that all virtue ——"

"Can be bought with a price," he said. "I've seen it again and again. Men and women are alike, —all goes if the necessary price is offered. It sounds like blasphemy, Dan, doesn't it? but it is true, terribly true."

I had heard his Uncle Luke and Richard Ilford talk like this; but with them everything was flippant. They pretended to believe in life's mockery and evil, but entered all they could into life's enjoyments. Their pessimism was little more than talk; but to Stephen all was real. The iron had entered his soul.

"My loss of faith has destroyed desire, it has destroyed motive-power, Dan," he went on; "nothing is worth while — nothing. What's the use of anything? Do the thing that's easiest, that's best. And so, Dan, I can't write; and even if I could, I would not add another wail to life's misery; for that is all my novel would be, even as that is the sum and substance of life."

The next day, as if to prove his position, Amos Collet, the Plymouth Brother who had made it his business to seek to convert Stephen by means of quoting texts, was found guilty of obtaining vast sums of money from a rich young man whom Amos had converted to Plymouth Brethrenism. This young man was of weak intellect, and that worthy had frightened him into giving to "the cause," in the name of Amos Collet, nearly the whole of his fortune. The

young man's relations had interested themselves in the case; and the trial resulted in Amos, who had quoted much Scripture during his evidence, suffering a severe penalty. Thus the "brother" discovered that although faith was counted for righteousness among the "brethren," in an English law court it counted for very little. Neither did the judge relent when Mr. Collet declared that "his zeal in the cause had eaten him up."

While one always has a sense of pleasure in knowing that a hypocrite is unmasked, I could not help feeling sorry when I saw the effect it all had upon Stephen. A spirit of utter abandonment seemed to possess him; he appeared perfectly indifferent to what in the past had great interest for him, while he expressed an utter want of faith in everything. The words of his Uncle Luke and those of his old tutor were often on his lips, while the shallow and flippant cynicism of the novels which were and are still the order of the day was frequently quoted. I grieved, too, to see how eagerly he devoured the so-called realistic literature of the time. He seemed to revel in writers who regarded virtue and purity as mere matters of accident, or as something that would be gladly given up for a sufficient price. To me, who had known him when his conceptions of life were so noble and his tastes so pure, it was terrible to discover that to him the sacred and the beautiful were rapidly vanishing.

I remember one day especially, we were riding together in a bus, when a bright young girl about eighteen or nineteen came and sat not far from us. Few, I think, could watch her without seeing on her the impress of innocence, and freedom from contamination with the mire of life. Her manner, as she spoke to a lady who was evidently her mother, was free from affectation, while her every movement pro-

claimed her a true child of nature. Not that she was ignorant of the sin of life; rather she was apparently able to come into contact with it, to fight it, and yet remain pure.

“What a beautiful, bright, winsome girl!” I remarked when she left the bus.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Most likely she is on a par with the rest of her sex.”

“She seems to me one of those who command trust,” I remarked, without noticing his sneer.

“Look here, Dan, old man, don’t you go and be taken in. Take warning from me.”

“I don’t know about being taken in,” I replied; “but certainly, to look at her face, and to hear her laugh, is to drive away all thoughts of wrong.”

“Dan,” he replied, “if she is pure, it’s because no sufficient price has been offered to purchase her purity. Her beauty, or what you call beauty, and her virtue, if she has any, have their price. When some one comes along who will pay that price, your saint will become like the rest. Bah! hundreds of girls who walk the streets to-night were a few years ago as good as she.”

I will not repeat our conversation further; I have said enough to show the bent of my friend’s mind. I do not profess to be better than the rest of my sex; and yet, during the remainder of our ride, I could not help thinking of the bright, gladsome face of the young girl; and where he saw vulgarity and corruption, I saw truth and purity.

I could perceive, too, that Stephen had lost all motive-power for action. When I asked him to do something, his reply, with a shrug of his shoulders, was, “Why should I?” He wrote for two or three papers, and earned enough to keep him in bread and cheese; and beyond that he cared nothing. Indeed,

at times he seemed indifferent about life at all. "If I weren't a coward, I should end up the whole matter. Nothing in this life is worth while."

In this way about four months passed. Stephen still regarded my lodgings as all the home he had, although he spent more and more of his time in the City. Then two events took place which I cannot help regarding as having a tragic effect upon my friend's life.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST STRAW.

And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again.

King Henry VIII.

THE first of the two events which I mentioned at the close of the last chapter was a letter from our Witney doctor, telling me that my dear old father was dangerously ill, — so ill that he, the doctor, despaired of his life. The letter besought me to come home at once, or, unless a great change took place, I should never see him alive again. The letter was a terrible blow to me; for although I have said but little about him in this narrative, few fathers loved their sons more than my father loved me, while, I say it with pride, I do not think many sons loved a father more than I loved mine. Often had I tried to persuade him to give up his profession, and to make his home with me; but he said no. He wanted something to do, and although he desired much to be with me, he could not bear to leave Witney, especially as so many people needed his services. Besides, he was not an old man, and it was against his principles to give up work. Perhaps in a few years, when he felt more feeble and I had a practice of my own, he would come and live with me, but not yet. The reader may fancy, therefore, that the letter caused me much anxiety and sadness of heart. Still, I hoped for the best, and immediately went to my chief in

order to make arrangements for my departure. Having attended to the most pressing matters, I was ready to start for home shortly after noon, and was just taking lunch prior to departing, when the postman dropped a newspaper into the letter-box. It was addressed to Stephen, who, when it was brought to him, tore off the wrapper listlessly, without taking any notice of the postmark or of the handwriting. I watched him while he scanned the paper, as if wondering why any one should have sent it to him, when his attention was drawn to a marked paragraph. He gave a start, and began to read eagerly; then I knew that the paper was sent to him because it contained news in which he was deeply interested. For a few minutes he sat staring at the paragraph like one demented; but he uttered no sound, he simply sat and looked.

“Anything the matter, old man?” I asked.

He paid no heed to my question, but kept on staring at the paper. I saw, too, that his face became paler even than usual, while his hands trembled.

“No bad news, I hope, Steve?” I said, rising from the table.

My movement seemed to arouse him, and he started violently.

“Bad news!” he repeated; then he laid his head on the table, while his form shook violently. “Read that, and you will see,” I heard him say in a husky tone.

I took the paper, and read the following paragraph:—

“We are pleased to announce that Miss Isabella Tempest is shortly to be married to Mr. R. Hussey, and that the banns will be called for the first time on Sunday next. We are delighted to congratulate the young couple on the arrangement, especially when we remember how cruelly the young lady was de-

ceived some time ago. Indeed, it becomes our duty to rejoice with the Tempest family, every member of which is entirely free from blame in the matter about which we have hinted, and to express the hope that the young bride, as well as all our readers, will forget the unfortunate relation she had with a scoundrel who was in every way unworthy to have his name associated with hers. Miss Tempest will now be wedded to one who is worthy of her; one who, during his constant visits to our neighborhood, has won the love of many and the esteem of all. We hear that the ceremony is to take place in about a month's time, after which the happy couple will take an extended tour on the Continent."

"'The Witney Gazette!'" I ejaculated.

Stephen did not speak.

"Stephen, old man, it is what you expected; don't give way."

"Yes, it's what I expected — and yet ——. Don't go for half an hour, if you can help; the ground seems slipping from under my feet."

I looked at my watch. "I need n't go for twenty minutes, old friend. I wish I had n't to go at all. Could you not go down to Witney and stay with me? It will be very quiet, but it'll be a change."

"Down to Witney, after reading that — no, Dan. I shall never go to Witney again."

"But what will you do? It will be terrible for you to remain here alone."

He rose to his feet, and by an effort mastered himself.

"I'm all right now, Dan; perfectly right. I'll be able to manage. After all, it is what I expected, and I must have been a fool to have been so affected. Let me see, a month; yes, a month — and — why, this paper is a fortnight old!"

I looked, and found his statement correct.

“Who sent this thing, I wonder?” he said.

I picked up the wrapper, which he had thrown on the floor, and looked at the handwriting; but it afforded no clue.

“Well, it does n’t matter,” he went on; “it is just what I might have known would take place. Dan, old man, I’ve been so taken up by my own affairs that I’m afraid I’ve not appeared a very sympathetic friend. I’m right sorry for you, though. The doctor says your father is very ill, does n’t he?”

“Very ill,” I replied; “so ill that, from what he says, I have grave doubts about his recovery.”

“Well, there’s no remembrance in the grave, Dan. He’ll be out of trouble and pain; and, after all, if he lives, the agony of life will be only a little prolonged.”

“My father has lived a very happy life,” I replied.

“Has he? Well, don’t let me keep you. Good-bye, old man.”

His sudden calmness oppressed me like a dead weight. I would far rather have seen him in a state of frenzy than that he should be so perfectly cool as he now appeared.

“What will you do while I’m gone?” I asked.

“I don’t know; it does n’t matter what I do. The programme is just the same wherever I go or whatever I do. I’ve seen the show, Dan, and discovered the tricks.”

The cab drove up to the door.

“Will you stay long, do you think?” he said, taking my hand.

“I can hardly tell; everything depends ——”

“Just so. But you will know all about — her. Dan, I can’t tear her idol from my heart — even yet. I know it is a thing that — does n’t exist — it never did exist; but — but you’ll let me know when — when the — affair comes off — let me know directly?”

“Yes; I’ll write directly I know the deed is irrevocably done.”

“No, not write — send a telegram.”

“Yes; I’ll send a telegram. Good-bye, old friend — just for a little while. God bless you.”

“Good-bye for — a little while,” he replied, repeating my words.

He pressed my hand eagerly. Never shall I forget the look in his eyes, the lines of agony drawn on his face. As I looked at him, I seemed to feel an icy hand pressing my heart. I left the room hurriedly, and then, when I reached the cab, I felt I must go back to him again and speak another word. When I opened the door, he stood as still as a statue, staring into vacancy.

“God bless you, brother Steve!” I said. “Don’t give way so; everything’ll be right some day.”

I do not think he heard or saw me — anyhow, he made no movement, he spoke no word; while I, with a heavy heart, turned away from him again, and told the cabman to drive to Paddington station.

When I arrived home, I found my father very ill indeed. I soon found, however, that the Witney doctor did not understand the case, and that he had been treating him altogether wrongly. Educated in the old school of medicine, he would not listen to any suggestions which I, as a student in the modern school, suggested.

“I take it that thirty-five years’ practice is worth more than your newfangled theories, Daniel Roberts,” he said indignantly.

“And I must insist,” I replied, “that if you insist on continuing the course of treatment you have adopted, you will kill him.”

“Very well,” he said; “then I throw up the case. But remember that you, a lad, have insulted a man who was respected, ay, and known widely in the profession, long before you were born.”

With this parting shot, he left the house in a very indignant manner. I did not hesitate, however, to take what steps I deemed necessary, although I immediately telegraphed to an eminent London physician who had made a special study of the malady from which my father was suffering.

The next few hours were exceedingly anxious ones for me. I knew that Dr. Grimes could not arrive from London until late the following day, while the course of treatment I adopted was so radically different from that followed by Mr. Bennett, the Witney surgeon, that I endured untold anguish while watching at my father's side. The truth was, my patient, whose life was so dear to me, had become in such a condition that only the most drastic measures would avail, — that was, supposing my diagnosis of the disease were right. Moreover, no doctor likes opposing a fellow-practitioner in such a way as I had opposed Mr. Bennett; and, during the long, silent hours of the night, I was constantly distrusting myself, and comparing myself unfavorably with the old Witney doctor, who for years had gone on his own way uncontradicted.

Towards morning my father gained consciousness for a few minutes.

"I thought my boy Dan had come," he whispered; "and, Bennett, I feel different."

"Dan is here, father," I said. "Dr. Bennett is not here. I am attending to you."

"I'm glad of that, Dan; so glad, my dear boy. Am I going to get better?"

"I hope so, father. I shall be better able to see how things go in two or three hours."

"Bennett has never seemed to be able to touch it, Dan; but I'm very sleepy, my dear boy, and I'm so glad to see you."

"Go to sleep, dad; I'll be here all the time."

“God bless you, my dear——” and my father dropped into a sleep.

When Dr. Grimes came, he shook his head sadly.

“That little surgeon must be worse than an old woman,” he said savagely; “far worse. In another twenty-four hours your father would have been killed. Why — But there, it’s no use going into a passion. But you’ve done the only thing possible, Roberts.”

“You think I’ve done right, then?”

“Quite right. If you’d been down twenty-four hours before, I should never have been sent for; but it’s a turn of a hair as to whether that little fool has n’t done too much mischief. We shall see in an hour or two. Anyhow, if your father lives, you will have to stay with him at least a fortnight or three weeks.”

I will not tire my reader by giving any details of my father’s illness. It has very little to do with my story, and is not, I imagine, of great interest to others, however much it affected me. Suffice it to say, that a few hours later, Dr. Grimes did a very undignified thing for such an eminent physician: he slapped me on the back, and declared, with great gusto, that he regarded my father out of danger.

“But, of course, you know, Roberts,” he said earnestly, “he’ll need a great deal of care and attention. I know how hard it is for a young fellow like you to be away from your work, but I see no other alternative to your staying here. You can’t give the case to Bennett again, while there’s no other doctor around to whom you could safely trust your father; so be a special medical adviser to a dear patient—and tell your people in Battersea that you can’t come. If, when you get back, you find some one in your place, refer to me, and I’ll get you something far better than being an assistant in Battersea.”

As may be imagined, the news made me very

happy. My only anxiety was about Stephen, whom I, of course, often wondered about, and to whom I wrote, telling of the result of my visit. In reply to my letter, he wrote congratulating me on the success of my treatment, and concluded with the hope that I should soon be able to be back at work again. The letter was, I thought, very cool, and did not seem like the production of my friend at all.

After a few days, I was able to make inquiries about the people in the neighborhood, and I soon discovered that the newspaper report which had such an effect on Stephen was perfectly correct; moreover that the wedding-day was fixed. I did not write and tell him this, but decided to wait until the event took place before saying anything to him about it.

"It's a terrible business, Dan, this about your friend," said my father one day when he was able to talk with ease.

"Yes, very terrible to him."

"And the girl?"

"I don't think she's to be pitied, father;" whereupon I told him my impression of the whole miserable business, and of the effect it was having upon Stephen.

"Then you believe he's perfectly innocent of the charge brought against him?"

"I'm sure of it, father."

My father was quiet a few minutes; then he said quietly, —

"You said nothing to me about it, Dan, and I was afraid — that young Edgcumbe —"

"I said nothing, because he wished me to be silent, father."

"Well, well, Dan, I shall see him soon, for I feel I must go and live with you now. I can't trust the country doctors;" and he looked at me proudly.

"I think of taking a house near Clapham Common,

father; there is a fine opening, and already many patients have come to me from there. It is a new practice I have made for my chief, and he, generously, has advised me to set up on my own account."

"Then, Dan," said my father, "I must have the pleasure of furnishing the house. And, mind you, my dear boy, we must get a place with enough rooms for a little den to be set apart for me where I can get out of the way and smoke a pipe in peace."

After that we talked a long time quietly, and made plans for our future days.

A day or so after, the woman calling herself Isabella Tempest was married; and directly I knew the wedding ceremony to be over, I sent a telegram to Stephen, apprising him of the fact. I got no letter from him in reply; and although I remained at Witney a week after this, and wrote him twice, he sent me no word as to how my communication affected him.

When my father was on the high-road to health again, and could do perfectly well without my presence, I wrote my landlady telling her the time I should be back. I also dropped a line to Stephen, asking him to meet me at Paddington station, so that we could have a chat in the hansom as we drove back. When I arrived in London, however, I could nowhere see my friend, and so rode discontentedly back to my lodgings alone.

When my landlady opened the door to me, I thought I saw an anxious look on her face. She seemed fearful, I imagined, of having done something to offend me.

"Is Mr. Edgcumbe in?" I asked.

"No, sir."

"No? Has he been out long?"

"I have not seen him for more than a week, sir."

"A week! Why did you not write and tell me?"

The woman looked much worried, and seemed afraid to answer. While the cabman was lifting my portmanteau into the house, I said to her,—

“Will you come into my room? I see you have something to tell me.”

She followed me into the room, and then burst out:—

“I’ve done what I thought I ought, Dr. Roberts, and I’m sure I’ve always wished the young gentleman well, although I haven’t thought as much of him as you have. I never had a son, Dr. Roberts, but I would rather not have one at all than to have a gentleman who goes around looking so sad and scornful and sneering as Mr. Edgcumbe did. Why, after you had left, I was almost afraid to take in his meals, he was so sour and miserable. He hardly ever spoke to me till the day on which he went away.”

“Will you tell me exactly what has taken place?” I said, a little bit sharply.

“Well, Dr. Roberts, he just went mooning around like any one walking in a miserable dream, till one day about a week ago he got a telegram, and then he seemed to go right mad. He got it about two o’clock in the afternoon. He sat in that chair, sir, and I came into the room two or three times, because I wasn’t easy in my mind about him. I spoke to him, but he didn’t seem to hear me. Well, about four o’clock I heard him moving around the room, so I went up again and asked him if I could do anything for him.

“‘I’m going away, Mrs. Blewitt,’ he said.

“‘Not far away, sir, I said;’ for, as you know, Dr. Roberts, I always like to be polite.

“‘I don’t know, Mrs. Blewitt. I may come back soon, or I may not come for a long while.’

“‘What shall I say to Dr. Roberts?’ I asked.

“‘Don’t say anything. Don’t let him know I’m

gone. I'll write him a letter, which you must give him when he comes back; and with that he began to go up and down the room as if he was in pain, — then he went mad."

"Mad! What do you mean, Mrs. Blewitt?"

"This, Dr. Roberts. I said to him, 'But where shall I send anything as may come to you?'"

"Yes; and what did he reply?" I asked eagerly.

"He said, 'To hell, Mrs. Blewitt; I'm going there to get a little happiness;' and with that he laughed in a way that made my flesh creep."

"And after that?"

"He told me to leave the room for a little while, as he wanted to be alone. A little while after he came downstairs with a portmanteau in his hand. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Blewitt,' he said; 'don't write a word about me to Dr. Roberts; and then, when he comes back, give him the letter I have left on the table for him.' He had a strange look in his eyes, and his face was terribly white. If I'd met him then for the first time, and anybody had asked me how old he was, I should have judged him to be forty."

"And the letter, Mrs. Blewitt?"

"It's there on the mantelpiece with the other letters, sir."

"And is that all?"

"That's all, sir. Oh, yes, I must say this: he paid me up to the time he'd been with me, and gave a week's rent in lieu of notice. He's a strange young man, and he's had a terrible look in his face. Sometimes I think he's had delirium tremens, or else is possessed with the devil; but he always paid like a gentleman, I will say that of him."

"That will do, Mrs. Blewitt," I said, eager to get rid of her, and with sad doubts in my heart. "Get me a cup of tea at once, will you, and get me a steak or chop."

I had no appetite, but I wanted to be alone ; and I knew that if I did not give her something to do which would keep her a time, she would rush into the room in order to see what Stephen had written.

I anxiously broke the seal of the letter, and read as follows : —

DEAR OLD DAN, — I have received your telegram. It has broken the last thread of — everything. I cannot say more.

It's no use, I can stay here no longer. Where I shall go or what I shall do, I don't know. Don't try and find me. I am going to be lost to the world. All motive power to work, to do anything or be anything, has gone. I live in perpetual darkness. It is hard to bid you good-bye in this way, but it is best. I could not bear to see you again. What the future has for me, I don't know ; it can't be worse than the past has been. You remember I told you some time ago that a thousand devils tempted me to run loose, and only a little kept me from yielding. That little has gone. Why should I fight — or struggle ? Who 'll be the better or who the worse ? What is the reward of virtue — so called ? But there — why should I go on writing this drivel ?

Dan, old man, everything is dark. Before, behind, above, beneath, — all is the same. Forget me, old man, blot me out of the book of your remembrance. And yet life opened up so brightly, did n't it ? What dreams we had down among the Witney fields ! I did n't believe in Uncle Luke's pessimism or Richard Ilford's dark philosophy then ; and yet how much have they had to do in making me what I am, I wonder ? If you should read of a suicide in the papers, if some body should be found like mine, don't be surprised.

Dan, I'm a bit mad, I think, and I feel like tearing up the paper on which I've written. All I've said is confused and disconnected, — but what wonder ? Don't expect ever to hear from me again, or to see me — alive. From this day, Stephen Edgcumbe does not exist. All

the love my aching, bruised heart is capable of giving, is given to you, Dan ; but the Idol is gone at last.

Good-bye forever. From one who was once worthy even to be your friend, and whom you used to call

STEVE.

I read through the letter again and again with tearful eyes and an aching heart. What could I do ? How could I find him ? I formed a dozen plans ; I devised all sorts of means for seeking him and bringing him back to me again. During the months that followed, I tried to carry them into effect. I hunted high and low ; I issued all sorts of advertisements ; but all means failed.

Five years and more passed before I ever even heard of Stephen Edgcumbe again.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER FIVE YEARS.

Impute it not a crime
To me, or my swift passage, that I slide
Over . . . years.

A Winter's Tale.

IN the five years which I mentioned at the close of the last chapter, my position had very much altered. I had secured a large and influential practice in the neighborhood of Clapham Common and Wandsworth Common, and as a consequence was possessed of a comfortable income. I had been able to rent a good house, at the back of which was a large old-fashioned garden; and although the garden abutted on to some cottage property, upon which was reared a large number of noisy children, and although I was not sufficiently far removed from some public-houses to suit me, I could not but be pleased that as a young man not thirty years of age, I had obtained such a good position. Moreover, I had risen to some eminence in the medical world, and it was no uncommon thing for my name to be associated with those of men whom a few years before I had regarded with fear and trembling.

Like all others, I had my time of struggling, and sometimes I feared I should never be anything but an unknown doctor; but my dear old father was my constant friend, encouraging me, and bidding me hope amidst days that were dreary and monotonous.

During those five years, as I stated in the last chapter, I never heard of the whereabouts of my friend Stephen Edgumbe. He had left me without giving an indication as to his movements, and all efforts to find him were unavailing. It is true I once heard his name mentioned, and that was about four years after he had left me.

I had called to see Mrs. Blewitt, my old landlady, who told me that a few days before a young lady had been to her house inquiring about him.

“A young lady, Mrs. Blewitt?” I said; “what was she like?”

“She was just like a picture, sir. Not what you call a fine-looking young lady, — she was n’t big enough for that; but she had such a sweet, beautiful face that I can’t help thinking about her.”

“Was she dressed like a lady?”

“Oh, certainly, Dr. Roberts. In my young days I was a lady’s maid, so I ought to know. Not that she had fine clothes, but they were very good, and fitted her just splendid. I thought she was a bit sad looking; and yet she had such a happy way with her that she seemed like a bit of sunshine on a dark day.”

“Well, what did she say, Mrs. Blewitt?”

“She asked if Mr. Edgumbe lived here now; and when I said no, she said she would like to see Dr. Roberts. Then I told her that you were gone.”

“Well, what then?”

“Well, sir, she began asking about Mr. Edgumbe, and so I — I — well — it is no use hiding the matter, I told her all I knew about him — about his being divorced, and about what he said when he went away, and all of it.”

I have discovered that landladies have a remarkable power in discovering all about their lodgers’ histories.

How they do it, I don't know ; but I know that Mrs. Blewitt, after I had been lodging with her six months, knew as much about my antecedents and history as I knew myself — indeed, a little more. This was also true concerning Stephen. Mrs. Blewitt had by some means acquainted herself with the history of Stephen's life ; and although I would never allow her to speak to me concerning his divorce from his wife, she knew the ins and outs of the whole miserable affair. Consequently when she admitted that she had told her young lady visitor all that she knew concerning my friend, I was certain a very voluminous account had been given.

“ And how did your news affect her ? ”

“ Why, sir, I'm sure she must have known Mr. Edgcumbe at some time, for she seemed very much cut up at the news. She went pale too, I thought, and seemed agitated ; but she said nothing.”

“ And did she tell you her name ? ”

“ No, sir ! and that was one thing I did n't like about her. She was never tired of asking questions ; but she would n't tell anything in return, — not a word. In fact, I don't think she was fair. I should n't have told her so much if I thought she would tell me nothing. I believe in exchange of courtesies, sir,” — and Mrs. Blewitt tossed her head a little indignantly, — “ but she did n't tell me her name, where she came from, nor anything. And yet I could n't help liking her, sir, she was such a dear young lady, and looked so sad when I told her that Mr. Edgcumbe had gone to the bad.”

“ And how old was this lady visitor of yours ? ”

“ Not more than twenty, I should think, and yet she seemed older in many things ; but she had such a kind face.”

What Mrs. Blewitt told me further concerning her mysterious visitor was a matter of imagination on

that excellent lady's part ; but as there was no substratum of fact, and as her logic was not always sound, I did not pay much attention to her ; and yet on my way home, I wondered often who could be sufficiently interested in Stephen to come to Mrs. Blewitt's and stop such a long time with her as this visitor of hers had evidently stopped. I thought of one of the Miss Tempests, also of some one in the City he must have known during his happier days. As my story will show presently, however, I was wrong in each of my conjectures.

Just after this another event happened which, while it was not directly connected with Stephen, was of such importance in my own life that I cannot refrain from recording it.

It happened one day that I had been invited to a friend's house to a small tennis-party. I had been able to engage the services of an able assistant by this time, and was thus in a position to indulge in an afternoon's amusement now and then.

"Dr. Roberts," said Mrs. Scobell, the lady who had invited me, "you are going to lose your heart this afternoon. The purest gem of a girl in all the world is coming here, and I am sure she is just your style."

I laughed good-humoredly, while some one suggested that I was pretty well confirmed in my sin of bachelorhood.

"Yes," said Mrs. Scobell, "but Dr. Roberts has not met Naomi Reviere. She is one among a thousand, and is as unlike the ordinary society girl as can be. She neither smokes cigarettes, talks slang, nor has she a mission. She's just a true, wholesome girl."

"I begin to tremble," I replied laughingly. "The question of the moment, however, is, Can she play tennis?"

"Oh, you'll find her your match," laughed our genial hostess, leading the way to the lawn, where through the foliage I caught a glimpse of men in flannels, and ladies in white dresses.

"Here, Dr. Roberts, I am first of all going to introduce you to my favorite," continued Mrs. Scobell, taking my arm. "There, that is Naomi Reviere fastening her hat."

I gave a sudden start.

"Do you know her?"

"No," I said; "but I want to be introduced."

The truth was, I recognized the face of the winsome girl whom I had seen more than four years before when riding with Stephen into the City. Often since then had my heart rebelled against the cynical words he had spoken, and I wondered if ever I should see again the pure, winsome face which had so attracted me. She was scarcely altered. Her blue eyes were as bright and laughing as ever, while the sheen of her glossy brown hair was just as noticeable as then. Her face, slightly flushed with the exercise she had been taking, and all aglow with health and happiness, her lissom form, undeformed by the cruel bandages which are supposed to be indispensable to a good figure, made a beautiful picture, and I, confirmed bachelor though I was supposed to be, felt strongly drawn towards her.

Mrs. Scobell introduced us in a kind, informal way, and then left us together.

"I have seen you before, Miss Reviere," I said.

"I fancy you must be mistaken," was her reply; "that is, unless you have lived at Hampstead. It is true, we have been living at Clapham Common about two months; but I've gone out very little. Neither my mother nor I are fond of much society; and so, while we had a few friends at Hampstead, we

were little known. As for Clapham, we scarcely know a dozen people."

"I saw you four years ago when riding in the City one day. You were sitting with a lady in one of the City buses. You did not ride far; you got out at St. Paul's Churchyard. I have not seen you since."

"And you remember me after all that time?"

"Yes; I remember your face perfectly."

"I feel a little flattered," she said, with a laugh; "it is something to have enough individuality to impress any one in that way. Dr. Roberts, you have won my respect."

"I am very glad," I replied; "but fortune is in my favor. To be respected for what I cannot help is like winning a game by a fluke."

"Yes, there is something of that nature in it, is n't there? But, do you know, whenever I am in the City, I am impressed with the great mass of people. People seem to lose individuality, and become like pawns on a chessboard; and I have such a strong love for myself that I hate the idea of being lost in the crowd. I say to myself that I should not be missed if I were to slip out of life, and yet I should want to be missed. So, when you said you remembered me after four years, although you saw me but once, and then only for a few minutes, I felt exceedingly gratified."

"But I cannot be gratified in the same way," I responded, laughing. "I remember you looked at me, but I had not sufficient individuality to make you recognize me again."

She looked at me, and then said, with a laugh:

"No; I must confess you had n't." Then she continued, after a pause: "But you were n't equipped for a tennis contest, then; perhaps that will account for it."

"Yes; I hope it's the clothes."

“That reminds me we had better start. Look, there’s a court empty; I’m impatient to begin. Are you a good player?”

“You must pass an opinion after the first set. I’ve heard of your powers already.”

“Come, Miss Reviere,” said a voice that sounded very unpleasant to me, “we want you to make up a set. You are to be my partner, because I am a poor player.”

“I was just starting to play a game of singles with this gentleman,” she said quietly.

“Oh, really, Miss Reviere, I’m depending on you, and at present there’s not enough to keep the two courts going.”

“Come, Naomi,” cried a lady’s voice, “we are waiting.”

“What do you say, Dr. Roberts?” said the young lady, turning to me.

“Dr. Roberts!” repeated the man, who had paid no attention to me, “is he here?”

“Let me introduce you,” said Miss Reviere. “Dr. Roberts, this is Mr. John Polden.”

I had recognized Polden’s voice from the first, and was wondering how to treat him, while he had been talking. I saw him change color; and then, with sudden decision, he came to me with outstretched hand.

“Oh, Dr. Roberts and I know each other,” he said; “we are old friends. I did not think to see him here, though.”

I took no notice of his hand, but turned to Miss Reviere.

“Don’t let me detain you,” I said. “Presently, when you are disengaged, my turn will come.”

She looked curiously from Polden to myself, then she went away to the court where her opponents awaited her; but Polden stood near me.

“ May I ask what I am to understand from this, Roberts ? ” he said, with lowering brow.

“ By profession I am a physician,” I replied. “ I took my degree at the Edinburgh University. I am not aware that we are on sufficiently intimate terms for you to drop my title. As to your question, there is no need for me to answer you.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I mean that it is not my custom to be intimate with people of your calibre, especially when I know their nature.”

“ You refer to —— ”

“ I wish no communication with you,” I replied.

“ You are mistaken,” he said, evidently desiring to be friendly. “ ’Pon my honor, I’ve done nothing to forfeit your respect, and I’m as sorry because of that affair as you can be.”

I really had not patience to answer him, but walked towards Mrs. Scobell, whom I saw coming from the house with other visitors.

“ Well, Dr. Roberts,” said my hostess, presently, “ and what is your impression of my favorite ? ”

“ That she is more than deserving of all you say about her,” I replied.

“ And Mr. Polden, I saw you speaking together ; what is your impression of him ? ”

I did not speak.

“ Because,” remarked Mrs. Scobell, “ the possibilities are that Naomi will become Mrs. Polden. Mr. Polden’s mother and Naomi’s mother were girls together, and I can assure you that John is very assiduous in his attentions. Do you know him at all ? ”

“ I met him years ago at Mrs. Augustus Price’s house,” I said ; “ but it must be quite four years since I saw him last.”

“It was his mother’s wish for him to be a clergyman,” she went on; “but he stumbled at the Articles. Still, he claims to be very religious.”

“The same old cant phrase,” I thought to myself. “This fellow, who professes to be so broad and charitable in his religious views, really believes in nothing but himself.”

“He does n’t favorably impress you?” said Mrs. Scobell, looking at me keenly.

I endeavored to turn the conversation into other channels, but I saw that a look of suspicion rested on her face. I did not refer to him further, however; and soon afterwards, to my very great pleasure, Miss Naomi Reviere was my partner in a severely contested game of tennis.

To say that I admired her would very feebly express my sentiments. Her healthfulness, the quick decided movements of her lithe, graceful form, her total freedom from society shallowness, charmed me. It was refreshing, too, to see how heartily she threw herself into the game; and how, when after a hard struggle we won the set, she expressed her gratification. I dare say to the society man, who admires the young lady of the day who smokes, swears, and swaggers, she would be voted slow; but to me she was charming. And so it was no wonder that I felt pained when I thought of the possibility of Polden winning her for a wife. I made up my mind, too, that if she accepted his attentions she should do so with her eyes open, although I could not decide as to the means of letting her know my estimate of his character, and of the grounds I had for despising him.

Before the day was ended, Miss Reviere and I were very friendly; and when I went back to my house that night, I, Daniel Roberts, was in love. I was never

a ladies' man, and was never sought after, as some men are. Besides, I had been wedded to my profession; and outside my love for my father and Stephen, I had few interests. For the first time, I could understand something of what Stephen must have suffered during those dark days I have tried to describe, and my new-found love led me to devise other means for trying to find him. I remembered what he had said when we together had seen her in the City; and while his words pained me, I thought of how I should feel if I lost faith in the purity of such a girl as Naomi Reviere.

For the next few months I saw her often; and while she was always kind and friendly towards me, I could never discover whether she regarded me in another light than that of a friend.

But it is not for me to tell my own story. Very few of my readers, I expect, are interested in Daniel Roberts; at the same time, these memories are pleasant to me, and I can scarcely refrain from writing them.

During those months I endeavored to find out who Mrs. Blewitt's visitor was. I went to her again and again, in the hopes that she might have received a further call; but she could tell me nothing. She had never seen the young lady before, and she had never seen her since. About seven months after Mrs. Blewitt's communication, I received an anonymous letter in a lady's handwriting. It ran as follows:—

“You are seeking your friend. You are not alone. There are others besides you interested in his welfare. Do not spare any efforts, as I shall not. Anyhow, I shall not cease my search until he is found.”

This missive bore neither date nor address. The

paper on which it was written was common, and yet I knew that the writer was an educated person. Who it could be, I had not the faintest idea. Still, the letter encouraged me, for I felt that I was not alone, that another and a more capable searcher was at work. The letter inspired me, too; for during the next few weeks I redoubled my efforts, and employed a capable detective to assist in the search. But all to no purpose. Week after week and month after month passed, and still no news of Stephen. He seemed to have gone out of the life of the world as he had said, and had left no trace behind. Daily I had scanned the newspapers, and eagerly read everything that related to suicides, but saw nothing that could be connected with my friend.

"It is no use," I said to my father one evening. "I am afraid Stephen is dead, or he would surely have communicated with me."

"Dan," said my father, "if he is dead, then as there's a God above, Luke Edgumbe murdered him."

I started.

"No, Dan; not in that way. The murder was more subtle than that. He poisoned his mind, he destroyed his moral courage, he placed him in the house of a man whose creed was the very genius of despair. Thus it was when trouble came he had no power to withstand, he had no anchorage, he had nothing upon which to rest. And when these things are gone, a man is really lost."

I said nothing, but I felt the truth of his words.

Just then we heard the postman's knock, and a minute later a servant came with the letters. On scanning the envelopes, I saw that the handwriting on one of them was identical with that of the anonymous letter I had received some months before. I broke the seal and read eagerly. Like the other, it

bore neither name nor address, and it only contained a few lines : —

“If you will go to 15 Chainly Alley, Blot Street, Strand, to-night, I think you will see your friend. If you do not see him to-night, go each night until you do. Do not be earlier than ten o'clock.”

CHAPTER XVI.

15 CHAINLY ALLEY.

Spots of blackness in creation
to make its colors felt.

Modern Painters.

“YOU look startled, Dan,” said my father, after an interval of silence, during which I stood staring at the letter.

“Yes, I am startled, father.”

“No bad news, I hope?”

“Only this,” I replied; and then I read the letter to him.

“You have no enemies, have you, Dan?” asked my father.

“I don’t know of any, father. Why do you ask?”

“It seems as though there might be some design to do you harm. I don’t like this Chainly Alley, Blot Street. Evidently, it is one of those slums which yet exist away from the main thoroughfare, and not the kind of place one cares about visiting. Besides, why does your letter tell you to go at night time, after ten o’clock?”

“I think I can see a reason for that, father. If this is a genuine letter, and gives a clue to Stephen’s whereabouts, I can quite understand why I should go at night.”

“You think he is in a bad way, then?”

I was silent, only looking at my watch by way of answer.

“You mean to go then, Dan?”

“Yes; I mean to go.”

“I will not try to hinder you, my boy. I know you love your friend, and I dare say I should have done the same at your age; only take care.”

“Yes,” I replied, “I shall take care. I have always been credited with being cautious and level-headed, but I cannot help going. I have a very strong feeling that I shall see my old friend to-night.”

“But you will take a policeman with you?”

“No; I think not.”

“But, my dear boy ——”

“I’m afraid it may not be best.”

My father looked at me very keenly, and then sighed, as though he were in doubt.

“I think this is a genuine letter,” I continued. “I believe the writer, although unknown to me, is a friend.”

“Why, then, is there no name to it?”

“I cannot say, and yet I begin to connect events. You remember that I told you a young lady had called at my old lodgings at Battersea, and that she had asked many questions about Stephen. Mrs. Blewitt spoke of her as an educated lady. I have tried to find out who she was, without any definite result, except that she is not in any way associated with the Tempest family. Well, shortly afterwards, as you know, I received an anonymous letter telling me that others besides myself were searching for Stephen. Now, anonymous letters which are evil in their purport, generally show some sign of this nature. There was nothing of the kind in this. As you know, it stimulated me to greater efforts to find my friend. Well, here is another letter in the same handwriting, telling me to go to a place where I shall possibly see him. The meaning of it, as far as I can see, is that Stephen has some friend unknown to us all, and who

has been exerting herself to discover his whereabouts."

"But why should she wish to remain unknown?"

"That, of course, I cannot say; this I am sure: if I failed to take advantage of this letter, I should never forgive myself."

"Perhaps you are right; and yet it seems to me you ought to take precautions for your own safety. That is a bad district, full of thieves and vagabonds of all sorts. Remember what you are to me, Dan, my boy."

"I will take every precaution I possibly can, father."

I spoke calmly; at the same time I was very much excited. For years I had been seeking Stephen, and all the time I had been harassed by haunting fears. Often, I feared that I should never see him again; while I could not help believing that, if he lived, his life had become a wreck, or he would have written to me, or in some way let me know his whereabouts. I could not help remembering the terrible words he spoke during the last months of the time we lived together: "I've had a look at hell, Dan, and it's very beautiful;" neither could I forget his parting words to Mrs. Blewitt, when she asked him where he was going, so that she might know where to send anything that came for him. "To hell, Mrs. Blewitt; I'm going there to get a little happiness." Knowing Stephen as I knew him, and bearing in mind all he had gone through, I had a great fear lest he had allowed himself to become the wreck which would be the natural outcome of the course he suggested. For that reason I had searched for him in those quarters given over to gambling and corruption, but, as I have said, always in vain. Of course, I knew the difficulty of searching for any one in London; and so, while I often became downhearted, I never quite gave up hope

of finding him. In spite of my fears, too, I tried to think the best concerning him. I tried to fancy him going away to some far-off country, and there, under healthier circumstances, fighting his battles, and coming back to me prosperous and healthy. A nature like his would not, I hoped, altogether succumb to the faithlessness of such a woman as his wife had been; and then again I remembered his training, and the influence it had had upon him, and feared for his future.

It was eight o'clock when the postman brought the letter; at nine a cab stood at my door, and I started for the Strand. It was a cold night in the early part of February. Cold showers of sleet and snow were falling, which made the streets of London dreary beyond description. As I looked, I saw the horse's hoofs splash the slush right and left; while the pedestrians on the side-walks hurried along, as though anxious to get by a warm fire away from the cold and darkness. Whitehall, I remember, was nearly deserted, and the great Government buildings looked grim and desolate; but as I drew near Trafalgar Square, there were more signs of life. Cabs and carriages were far more numerous; while painted, shivering creatures stood around, waiting to earn the bread of shame and death. I dismissed the cab at Morley's Hotel, and walked along the Strand till I saw a policeman.

"Where is Blot Street?"

The policeman told me.

"And Chainly Alley, that is off Blot Street, is n't it?"

The man looked at me suspiciously.

"There is a hole called Chainly Alley somewheres round there; but I would n't advise you to go there alone at this time o' night."

"I'm a doctor," I said, as if in answer to his curious look. "I suppose I can find it easily enough?"

“Oh, yes, you can find it; but you must be careful. There’s lots of alleys round there, and the lamps are none too thick; but the names are stuck up at the corners.”

I walked on until I came to Blot Street, which did not run direct from the Strand, but was an offshoot from one of the many thoroughfares which penetrate through some of the most dreary places in London. I found Blot Street to be a miserably narrow road, composed of grim, dark, cheerless-looking houses, and, though in the heart of London, but dimly lighted. Few think, as they pass along amidst the blazing lights of the Strand, that within two or three minutes’ walk from the glitter and gayety that meet the eye on every hand, are scenes as dark as the mouth of the bottomless pit. After searching some little time, I discovered Chainly Alley. I doubt whether I should have found it without again inquiring, but for the light which shone from a public-house at the corner. In spite of the cold and the sleet, the place was by no means deserted. Youths and girls swaggered up and down, talking and screaming, often garnishing their language with epithets I will not insert; while from the public-house a stream of people kept coming and going, and from out the constantly opening doors I heard the noise of ribald jest, quarrelsome language, and drunken laughter. No one molested me, however; some looked at me keenly, but all allowed me to pass without a word. Chainly Alley reeked with foul smells, which even the icy coldness of the night did not destroy. Through the gratings by the street side came evil-smelling vapors, evidently arising from the cellars, from which also came the sound of voices. Here I knew were thieves’ kitchens, doss houses, and the hiding-places of the dregs of London life. The light everywhere was very faint; but I quickly discovered Number 15, owing to the fact

that it was a small drinking-shop, called the Jolly Dog. The folding-doors of the place were partly open, through which I looked and saw some nine or ten people, but no one who in any way corresponded with the man I sought.

With a heavy heart I turned from the house, and began to wonder if I had come too soon, when I heard a neighboring church clock strike ten. I waited until the last sound died away, and then, looking around, I saw two female forms standing not far from me, and evidently watching me. There was sufficient light for me to see that they were not dressed like the ordinary women who might live there. Each was warmly and plainly enveloped in a dark ulster, while each wore a dark, sailor-like looking hat. At first I thought they might be nurses, or that they belonged to some Home where poor fallen girls are received; but seeing that their dress was not like any of the uniform I had seen among the nurses and sisters of the streets, I gave up the idea. Then the thought came into my mind that somehow they were associated with the anonymous letters I had received. Determining to know, I walked towards them; but no sooner did they see me coming than they vanished in the darkness. For several minutes I tried to find them, but in vain. Evidently they knew the locality, and were able to elude me without difficulty. Presently I again came up to the Jolly Dog, and, taking care that no one observed me, again peeped through the folding doors, but was quickly satisfied that Stephen was not among those who were there drinking. While wondering what step to take, I noticed a card in the window of the public-house, on which was printed the words: "Headquarters of the Jolly Dog's Club."

"That means that there is a room behind where the members of this 'Club' meet," I said to myself.

“The question with me is, how can I get admission, and what I shall do if I can manage to get there?”

I had taken care, before I started, to clothe myself in a comparatively worn-out suit of clothes. I wore no jewelry whatever, having left even my watch at home. I carried about two pounds' worth of change in my pocket, but beyond this I had no valuables. Still, I knew I had nothing of the tramp in my appearance, and might be regarded with suspicion if I sought an entrance to the Jolly Dog's Club without any kind of introduction whatever. Then I remembered that many of these places were used as gambling resorts, where men of position had been known to gather. Anyhow, I determined to enter, and then be guided by circumstances as to how I should proceed.

When I entered, a girl at the bar asked me what I might require, while the people who sat around eyed me keenly.

“I wish to know which is the club room,” I said; “a friend of mine, who is a member here, is coming to-night, and I want to see him.”

“All right, my dear,” said the girl. “Sal, take this gent up to the billiard-room.”

She asked no questions; evidently my behavior was not suspicious, and I was admitted without any trouble. I followed the girl called Sal, a poor goggle-eyed creature, who, from her appearance, was not far removed from idiocy, who led me along a passage and up a flight of dingy stairs. The place was very much larger than I had anticipated, so much so that I was led to the conclusion that another house in the rear had been attached to it for purposes known to the proprietor.

When we reached the top of the stairs, I heard the click of billiard balls and the sound of many voices. There was also a great chinking of glasses; this led me to the conclusion that the bar-room

which I had entered was an unimportant part of the establishment, — that the Jolly Dog public-house was altogether subsidiary to the Jolly Dog's Club.

The goggle-eyed girl opened the door, and I entered the club-room. It was large and well lighted, and was in many ways a surprise to me. In the middle was a billiard table, greasy and worn, but still eagerly used by a couple of fellows who played with considerable skill. On the wall a piece of cardboard was pinned, whereon was written the terms for using the board, which was designated as new. I gathered after that it had been lately bought cheap at a sale, and placed there to attract members to the Jolly Dog's Club. A number of people were watching the game, and bets were freely offered and taken as to the winners. At the opposite end of the room, several tables were placed, where men and women sat drinking and playing cards, while at the corner was a bar, which was patronized freely.

I had just time to see this, when a stout man, with a red face, came up to me. The room was very warm, and he had divested himself of his coat, evidently for the sake of comfort. He looked at me a little doubtfully, and then asked me what he could do for me.

"I wanted to look at the rules of your club," I said; "and, moreover, I want to find a friend of mine whom I am told comes here. I haven't seen him for years, but I heard that he came here."

"What might be yer friend's name?" he asked.

"I am afraid that may be a bit difficult," I replied.

"You are evidently come to the wrong shop, my fine feller," he said, eying me closely. "This is a respectable place, and only respectable gentlemen and ladies come here."

“Of course,” I replied, “or I should n’t think of coming here to look for my friend.”

“There’s nothing wrong here,” he went on, without seeming to notice my reply. “Everything is carried on straight and above board. This is a billiard board; there’s nothin’ agin the law in playin’ billiards. Here’s some ladies and gents havin’ a quiet game o’ whist, over somethin’ to drink; there’s nothin’ again’ the law in that, I hope. In about an hour there’ll be a little dance in the next room; there’s nothin’ agin the law in that, I s’pose.”

“Nothing that I know of.”

“And you are not a member of the Jolly Dog’s Club?”

“No; but that’s no reason why I sha’n’t be, I suppose?”

“As in all other respectable clubs, a new member is proposed and seconded, and voted on by a responsible committee. Where’s your friend to propose you? Who’s the gent as’ll second you?”

“I’ve come to see if he’s here. In every respectable club visitors are admitted.”

“Name your friend.”

I jingled the loose coins in my pocket. “If you’ll let me look around a minute, I may be able to tell you,” I said.

The man hesitated a minute, as if in doubt.

“Look ’ere,” he said presently, “you are no — spy, are you?”

“On my word, no.”

“There’s no underhand dealin’, is there?”

“No; nothing of the sort.”

“Be square, now. I’m friendly with the beaks; but this is no new dodge, is it? If it is, by —”

“Honestly, there is nothing wrong about me. I’ve been given to understand that an old friend whom I knew years ago is a member of the club. I want to

see if he's here ; if he is, to take him by surprise. There's nothing else."

"And your friend is n't 'wanted'?"

"Not that I know of."

"I'll trust you. What'll you have to drink?"

"Nothing as yet ; but" — and here I gave him half a sovereign — "here is something so that you may drink my health while I look for my friend."

"Well, look around," he said, taking the money.

I looked around. One or two eyed me curiously ; but the members of the Jolly Dog's Club were mostly too busy, either betting as to who would win the game of billiards, or playing cards at the tables at the opposite end of the room. I scanned the faces eagerly, but I could see no one who in the slightest degree resembled Stephen Edgcumbe.

"I don't see him," I said, in a disappointed tone.

"Look here," he said, in a low voice, "I believe you mean fair. This is the public room ; but we have two or three private apartments where my best members come to have a quiet rubber of whist. The rank and file is n't allowed there."

"Yes," I said ; "would it be possible for me to go there?"

"A gentleman who has a friend who's a regular member can certainly have a quiet game of cards with his friend," he said meaningly. "Come this way." I followed him with a fast-beating heart.

He opened a door which led into a small, low-ceiled room, where a party sat at a table, on which were scattered greasy cards and little piles of money. Before each player was a glass of spirits. Two of the players looked up from their game angrily, as though they were impatient at being interrupted ; the others took no notice of us. There was a great silence in the room, and the face of each player was pale and excited. A moment's scrutiny convinced me that

my friend was not there. The proprietor of the Jolly Dog's Club looked at me questioningly, and I shook my head.

"He's not there?" he said, when we had left the room.

"No," I replied. "Is this your only private room?"

Without a word, he led me through a long passage, and opened another door.

"There'll be more here," he said; and a minute later I stood within a room about double the size of the other, in which three tables were placed, around each of which sat a number of men and women. Some looked up at our entrance; but these also took but little notice of us. All of them were too intent on their play.

CHAPTER XVII.

A PRODUCT OF CYNICISM.

Now conscience wakes despair
That slumbered; wakes the bitter memory
Of what he was, what is, and what must be.

Paradise Lost.

I HAD not been in the room a minute before I felt the very atmosphere to be laden with excitement. I had often heard men talk about gambler's fever; and although I was not playing, and had no stake in the game, I felt what it meant. The faces of the players were hard and set, their eyes glistened greedily, their hands trembled. Whether the stakes were high or low, I know not; I only know that life and death seemed to rest on the faces of the players because of the turn of a card. Still, each had time to drink deeply of the spirits placed before them,—perhaps they would have said to steady their nerves.

I looked from face to face, but could not recognize Stephen's among them. Still, I was not sure he was not there. Some of the faces were completely hidden, none could be seen plainly. Presently my attention was drawn to a man who played excitedly — feverishly. He looked, as far as I could judge at the time, from thirty-five to forty years of age. His eyes shone with unnatural brilliancy, and his face was extremely pale; perhaps it looked paler than it really was, owing to the black hair and beard.

There was a reckless, dare-devil expression on his face, and he was the only one who laughed while I stood there. But there was no joy in the laugh; it was only in bitter mockery of his evident bad luck.

There was very little speaking, except when the game necessitated it; and for the first few minutes the man who attracted me did not utter a word. Almost unconsciously I stood by the table where he sat, and watched the game; and so interested did I become that for some time I almost forgot my errand there. Presently, remembering my object, I again scanned the faces present, and was again disappointed, when, by a turn of his head, the light fell on the features of the man I have described. My heart gave a great bound. While the man was unlike the Stephen I knew, he reminded me of him. I looked again, and was confirmed in my suspicions. It is true he looked ten years older than Stephen ought to have looked, and the lines of dissipation on his bearded face destroyed much of his resemblance to the Stephen of old days. Still, it was Stephen's face, — Stephen as hopelessness and dissipation had made him. At that minute I cursed the creed of his uncle, and cursed the woman who had made him, in spite of himself, believe in it. I could never, had I not seen for myself, have believed that in five years a man could have been so changed.

The party played on, unheeding the fact that I watched, and I noticed that Stephen was referred to as "the Duke." He played like the very genius of despair; but he never made a mistake, and after a few minutes I saw that his luck changed, and he held the winning hand. But his success made no difference to the expression on his face.

"Found the man you want?" whispered the proprietor to me.

I nodded.

“Is it the Dook?”

I nodded again.

“Then don’t interrupt till the game’s finished, or there’ll be —— to pay. The Dook’ll stand no nonsense.” He pointed to a chair as he spoke, and I sat down.

Presently there was a movement among the card party, and I noticed that money changed hands.

“Dook, you’ve won again,” said one of the players.

“Ah, and taken my last brown,” said another. “I say, Dook, lend us a quid.”

“Not I,” said Stephen.

“But I’m cleaned out. Some day I may be able to do you a good turn — and —— me, you know I would.”

“You would, would n’t you? I’d go fat if I trusted to you — but there, that’s the price of a drink and a bed for you;” and he threw a coin on the table.

“Dook, you’re a —— selfish fiend.”

Stephen laughed bitterly, and the others, enjoying the scene, laughed too.

“Come, Dook,” said another, “it’s early yet. Give me my revenge. I’ve got a few bob left.”

A look of interest came back to his eyes again, and he prepared to take his seat at the table.

I knew that now was my time, if I intended to speak to him, so I went to him, and laid my hand on his shoulder.

“Old man,” I said, “how are you?”

He started, and looked at me angrily.

“Who — who the devil are you?” he said.

“You remember me, old friend,” I replied; “it’s more than five years, but you remember me.”

“My God, it’s Dan — here!” he gasped.

“I found you out, old fellow,” I said, as cheerfully as I could.

His hand shook as I held it in mine, while his face became, if possible, paler than before.

"It's Dan — *here!*" he repeated; then he seized a glass of spirits and drank it at a gulp. "How did you find me?"

The people in the room were watching us eagerly; evidently they were interested in "the bloke as knew the Dook."

"Can't we have a quiet chat somewhere?" I said; "it's such a long time since we met."

"A quiet chat — here? By God, Dan, you're as green as ever." He caught me by the arm. "Go away, old man; forget me. I never meant you to see me again." This he whispered in my ear.

"No," I said; "now I've found you, I want a chat. I will not let you go like this, if only for the sake of the old days down at Witney."

"Old days!" he gasped. "Witney! Come on, let's get out of this."

"Come, Dook, we want our revenge," said a vulgar-faced woman. "You mustn't go away like that. As for yer friend, he'll take a 'and with us, and be my pal, won't you?" and she leered up into my face.

"Go to —," shouted Steve. "Come, Dan, let's get out of this — anywhere."

I followed him through the billiard-room, while the proprietor came up and caught my arm roughly.

"You're not a-goin' like this — so soon, and takin' the Dook with you?"

I placed another half-sovereign in his hand, at which he seemed pacified.

"Have you an overcoat, Steve?" I said. "It's cold outside."

"I forgot. Yes; I've got a rag here somewhere."

He took an old shabby ulster from a peg in the corner of the room, and led the way down the narrow

passage, through the tap-room and out into the street, while shouts and curses followed us.

"Don't you smell the brimstone?" he laughed. "Where shall we go?"

"Are your apartments near?" I asked.

"Apartments! My stars, Dan — why ——!" and he laughed bitterly.

"Come with me, then," I said.

"Where?" he asked, looking around. "Nowhere in the light. Besides, no respectable place would have me."

"All right," I said. I caught him by the arm and led him through Blot Street, and out into the main thoroughfare, where I hailed a hansom.

"Where to, sir?" asked the cabby.

"Homely Chase, Clapham Common."

"Yes, sir."

We drove across the Strand, and down one of the streets which ran off it, until we came to the Embankment. The road was comparatively free from traffic here, and we proceeded rapidly.

"You are there, Dan," said Steve, presently.

"Yes, old friend."

"It's —— dark, is n't it?"

"Yes, it's a bit dark."

"You don't see any snakes, here in the dark, do you?"

"Snakes, no; how can snakes get in a cab?"

"I reckon I've got 'em again," he whispered.

"Got what, old man?"

"The Blue Devils;" and he shuddered.

"You'll be all right presently," I said.

"I'm glad you are here — but, Dan, we shall see nobody where — where you are taking me?"

"Not a soul, if you wish it."

"That's right. Dan, you have n't a drop of brandy on you, have you?"

“No ; why ?”

“I wish you had. Seeing you has shaken me a bit, and it’s cold — but there’s nobody here besides ourselves, is there ?”

“No ; we are alone. How can anybody but ourselves be in a hansom ?”

“I thought I saw the grinning face of that — hag who spoke to you.”

“It’s all right,” I said ; “it’s cold, I know ; a cup of hot coffee and a good fire will set you up.”

We drove on until I knew that we had entered the Common. Then he spoke again.

“Dan, I’m not going with you ; I’m going back. I’m all right, old chap. I was never better in my life. Only I’m not in your line, don’t you see ? It’s no use really, old fellow. To tell the truth, Dan, you’re too green for me.”

“We’ll talk about that directly, Steve. I’ve not found a friend after five years to let him go so easily.”

“But, I say, Dan !”

“Yes.”

He did not speak, but his hand clasped my arm tightly and held it fast, until the cab stopped at the doorway of my house. Two minutes later we were together in a little room which I called my study, and where I usually spent my evenings when I was alone. I pushed an arm-chair before the fire, and led him to it. He held his cold hands over the glowing fire, evidently enjoying the heat.

“I’m going to order a cup of coffee, Steve,” I said ; “I’ll be back in a minute.”

I passed by my father’s room.

“That you, Dan ?”

“What, not gone to bed yet, father ? — Yes ; it’s all right. I’ve found him. More about it in the morning.”

I hurried to the kitchen, and asked the old servant,

whom I had told to sit up for me, to bring some refreshments to my study door, and then I went back to Stephen again. I found him still warming his hands over the fire, although he looked nervously around when I entered.

"I say, Dan," he said, "how did you find me out?"

"Never mind that now," I said, "we'll talk presently. The drive was a cold one, and we are both chilled to the bone. Still, this room is warm, and you'd better let me take your overcoat."

He pulled off the shabby garment, revealing a greasy, threadbare coat and trousers.

"I was a fool to let you bring me here," he said savagely. "I'm not of your sort."

"We'll talk about that after we've had some supper, old man," I replied, putting some more coals on the fire. "Ah, there's the sound of crockery."

"But I can't eat. If you have a glass of spirits, now!"

"Coffee made with milk is better than spirits," I replied. "I'm a doctor, you know, and you must allow me to judge."

I went to the door and brought in the tray myself, and soon placed before him a plate of chicken and ham, and a cup of steaming, new-made coffee. At first he could eat nothing, but presently I persuaded him. I saw, too, that the wholesome food had a good effect on him; and when we had finished supper, he looked more like the Stephen of old time.

"Now," I said, pulling the chairs before the fire, "let's talk. By the way, you are a smoker, and I've some capital cigars. Here you are."

He took a cigar with trembling fingers, and began to smoke, while I looked at him sadly. He was but the wreck of his former self. There was a stoop in his shoulders, his hands were trembling, his face sal-

low, and his whole form attenuated. He looked greasy and unkempt too, while his every movement betrayed the fact that he had nearly ceased to have any self-respect. Still, I saw that he was conscious of his condition; but the consciousness was not expressed in a look of shame, it was in bitterness and anger.

“You’ve got on, my worthy doctor,” he said presently.

“Yes, fairly well, Steve.”

“You must have done a lot of snivelling and lying to be able to keep up a house like this.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Bah!” he said, with a bitter laugh, “I know fellows with ten times your brains who can’t get fourpence for a bed, or a penny for a pint of swipes.”

“It’s very hard on them.”

“But there, what’s the use of talking like that? We were chums years ago, and I ought to be more polite than to disparage my host; but I’ve forgotten how to be polite — curse it!”

“Yes; we were friends years ago,” I replied. “I am glad of it, we are friends still.”

He looked at me in a hard, mistrustful way.

“You have dragged me away from my own domain, Dan,” he said. “I was made to feel a bit soft at the time by seeing you, or I should n’t have allowed it; but now I’m here, you’ll have to give me a place to lie down directly; and I’m not much fit for a clean bed, by Jove! You’ll have to pay for a cab to send me back in the morning, for I’m — hard up, as usual.”

“Of course you’ll have a bed, old man, the best in the house; but I’m not going to send you away in the morning. You and I are going to have a good time together.”

“Do you mean to say that you want a — a swill-tub like I am to stay with you?”

“Why, certainly, old fellow. Do you think I’m going to let you go so easily?”

“There’s no — no — cursed blarney about this, is there?”

“Blarney! certainly not. Steve, old man, you’ve had a bad time. You are going to have a good one now. You must stay with me till the sun shines for you again and you are on a fair way to win back the position you had years ago.”

“As well tell a paralyzed man to swim.”

“Nonsense,” I replied. “You are a young fellow — not thirty yet. You can yet win a grand position — if you try.”

He started to his feet, and caught me by the arm.

“Dan,” he said hoarsely, “you don’t know, you can’t think, what I’ve done, what I’ve been, what I am. I’ve waded through cesspools of London, man. Why, I’m the very refuse of life.”

There was a look of yearning in his eyes, as if, while he told of his utter ruin, he pleaded with me to believe that he was something better than he had described.

“Perhaps things are not so bad as you think,” was my response. “Tell me all about it, old man.”

“It’s no use. Let me go, Dan, old fellow; I shall only make you miserable by retailing the filth of my life.”

“Perhaps it will be a great deal of use. I believe it will. I believe God will make a man of you yet, old friend.”

“God!” he cried. “Make a man of me. Why, man, I’ve been to hell; I’ve drunk the very dregs of the bottomless pit. I’ve wallowed in all the slime and filth which this hell of London can produce. I’ve been so low that the only thing I’ve

gloried in has been that I've been more of an incarnate devil than any man in London. Save me! Why, from your pious standpoint I'm a mass of moral corruption, fit only for the flames of hell."

There was such bitterness, such hopelessness, and withal such cynical boastfulness in his words that for a moment I was silent.

"Yes, your smug piety is shocked, is n't it? You thought to find me a lachrymose, repentant sinner, did n't you? Well, I'm not. I'm simply what this heavenly world has made of me,—nay, I'm a sample of the kind of man your God turns out. Don't you think He ought to be proud of His workmanship? Look at me!"

He walked to and fro the room, as if to show himself.

"I'm a splendid specimen of the *genus homo*," he sneered. "I am a product of the nineteenth century. The only difference between me and a large number of others is that I'm no longer a hypocrite. I confess to what I am, I appear in my true light, I reveal my true self; while the likes of you wear a garb of righteousness to try and deceive yourselves and the world. I am what I seem to be, and I am what the rest of the world really is when the mask is pulled aside. You don't like to hear the truth, do you? Nobody ever does. That is the one thing the world shuns,—truth. I am one of the great preachers of the world; I reveal the truth. I tell the world what man really is."

"Come, now, old man, you don't believe this; you know you don't."

"Don't I? But I do, though."

"You don't, Steve. Do you mean to say that when you and I first met at Witney station we were incarnate fiends? Do you believe that when we used to run among the hills together, and dream

about the future, that we were what you say? Did your mother, your father, deserve your description? Nay, old friend, you forget. There is much bad in the world, but there is much good too. Friendship is real, and love is real, in spite of all you say."

A great sob escaped him; then he looked into the fire, as though he saw something there.

"Come, tell me, Steve; tell me what you've been doing since you left me. As God is in heaven, Steve, I love you as much as ever one man loved another."

"Love me, Dan?"

"Yes, you know I do."

He was silent a minute, then he said quietly, "Very well, I'll tell you."

CHAPTER XVIII.

STEPHEN'S STORY, — AND AFTER.

In the market-place lay a dead dog. Of the group gathered around it, one said, "This carcase is disgusting," Another said, "The sight of it is torment." Every man spoke in this strain. But Jesus drew near and said, "Pearls are not equal in whiteness to his teeth." Look not on the failures of others, and the merits of thyself; cast thine eye on thine own fault. — *Nizami (Persian)*.

"YOU got that letter I wrote you, the one I left with Mrs. Blewitt?" Stephen began.

I nodded.

"I expected that would be the last communication you would ever get from me. You know why I wrote it. I had been led on by degrees to that point. I often start reasoning now; I think of the past, and calculate the forces that have made me what I am. You know what Uncle Luke tried to make me believe.— By the way, have you heard anything about him lately?"

"I believe he's doing well in business; but I know nothing of him personally. I have n't seen him for years. I am told he has large colonial connections, and spends most of his time abroad; but go on."

"Well, you know what he used to teach me. I didn't believe in his opinions then, I could n't. Then, you know, I went to Manchester under Ilford, and I expect I was influenced by him,— influenced by his talk, influenced by the books he made me read. But, as you know, my heart—I had a heart then—

was always telling me that all their talk was lies. When they told me my disillusionment would come, I didn't believe them. You know why, Dan. I loved that girl. You know how ardent, how trustful my nature was. Well, I gave her everything,—except my honor. But, there, I needn't go over that business; you know all about it, and we've talked about it times enough. Well, when you sent me that telegram, the ground was knocked right under my feet. It had been going for months, and for months a thousand devils seemed to tell me to shake a loose leg, and drink the sweets of life. When I got that telegram, Dan, every hope in life went. I couldn't believe in any good. For months the rags that covered up the world's rottenness had been slipping away; but when I knew she was married, then I believed everything Uncle Luke and Ilford had tried to teach me. I hadn't a place to stand on anywhere, while every bit of moral purpose left me. You know how I told you one night that I had been to have a look at hell; well, I went to look two or three times after that. But I didn't let myself go. There was still one hope in life. I thought at the time my idol was shattered, but it was n't; it was hidden away in my heart, and I loved my ideal still. I hoped, in spite of myself, that at the last moment the woman who had been my wife would come to herself, and, in coming to herself, come back to me. And I should have forgiven all,—forgiven even the lies told at the Divorce Court, taken her back, and begun life afresh. But it was n't so; and when I knew she had carried the vile thing to the end, then the last vestige of hope went; I saw that everything was a sham. I looked over my life since I had come to manhood, and I could not see a bit of virtue or truth anywhere,—of course I could n't; there was none, there is none. From that minute

all love for Isabella Tempest went out of my life; she was nothing to me,— nay, no one was anything to me. If there was anything I could have believed in, hoped in, I might have struggled on somehow; but I could n't. Books, the daily press, experience in my past training, told me there was no such thing as purity and truth; that everything was a matter of price, from the parson's prayers down to the cesspools of shame. Hell! My God, I was in hell fast enough,— an ugly, dark, lonely hell!

“ ‘Get rid of your life,’ said something to me, and the suggestion seemed fascinating; but I had n't the pluck, and I was young. Besides, with the loss of faith in everything, and with the loss of hope, was also the loss of any desire to be what the world called good, myself. The picture of those tinselled, dancing things which I had gone to see in the City came back to me like a beautiful temptation; every low impulse of my life said to me, ‘There is no good; hell is beautiful, it is sweet: drink its pleasures.’ All the prurient suggestions to be found in the society novels circulated at the libraries came back to me, and burned like fire in my veins. ‘Why die?’ they all said; ‘the earth is full of sweets. There is no such thing as virtue; you can get everything by paying. You are young, you are fascinating; change your name, forget your past if you can. There is no God, no good, no heaven, except the heaven of sensual delight; no hell, save that of your own gloomy thoughts. Go to heaven, then; go to the gilded palaces of pleasure and have your fill.’

“ Well, I went. I gave everything like care to the winds. I had a few pounds, and I made the most of them. I would forget the past in the blissful present, I said, and I did. When memory began to work, I flew to brandy, to rum, to absinthe. I became a night bird; I lived in heaven, or hell,— which you

like to call it. Nothing restrained me from satisfying my desires. I was good-looking in those days; and under the excitement of stimulants, I was good company. I became a favorite with men — and women. By and by the pleasure from these things began to die away, and I realized that the one thing I wanted, and must have, was — excitement. So, from drinking in a moderate degree I had to drink more heavily. I drifted into gambling, — naturally, and so came to be — what I am.

“I won't tell you any details. Why should I? There is no need. You can guess; you can see. One thing always leads to another. By and by I wanted money, so I was led to get it how I could. You remember that Saturday night in Battersea, Dan, and how shocked I was because of what we saw. Well, I've seen twenty times as bad as what we saw that night, and have been able to laugh at it, — ay, take part in it. We are all incipient devils, you know, and given certain circumstances, it is a mere reversion to type. I've been all you pious people shudder at; I am just that now. You asked me to take you to my apartments, didn't you? Well, my apartments are a place where men and women live together, held by no law, legal or moral. When I am not at the Jolly Dog's Club — a most respectable place, as you saw — I am with my proper companions elsewhere. But I never appear in the daytime; I'm a thing of the night.”

“And are you happy, Steve?” I asked, for want of something better to say.

“Happy! my God, man, happy! A thing like I am, happy? When I can forget, and when I have n't got delirium tremens, I'm all right; but there — it can't last long.”

“No; it must not last any longer.”

“A few years more, and I shall be dead. I was

always one of those intense, sensitive fellows, you know. I could never do things by halves. Some can take everything quietly; I cannot. I can't last long. I expect I shall take a dip in the river soon. I am a powerful sermon, Dan!"

"On what?"

He hesitated a second, then he said slowly, —

"On what a man is almost bound to become when he loses faith and hope. I am a son of the times. I am an example of what the philosophy, the spirit of the age, is making men; only the devil of it is, the philosophy is true. When men say there is no virtue in the world, they speak the truth. I've tried, and I know."

The tone of hopelessness, of bitterness, with which he spoke was sad in the extreme; and when I compared the wreck before me with the Stephen I used to know, my heart became heavy as lead.

"Well, old man," I said, "and what is to be the end of this?"

"I told you just now. The river, I suppose. Anyhow, I can't live much longer."

"Not as you are."

"There is no other life for me. It's got hold of me, body and soul. I know that drink, and gambling, and — and — worse, mean death; but I can't do without them. I'm wedded to the devil. Ah, man, if I knew that death was the end of all, I'd quickly get out of hell; but it may n't be, there may be an endless existence;" and he shuddered, as if with fear.

For a minute I knew not what to say. Seeing him as I did that night, and remembering his words, I had but little hope for his future. But I would not give him up without a struggle.

"Stephen, old friend," I said, "you must begin anew from to-night. You must cross the Rubicon,

and burn the bridges. There is a better country on the other side."

"I've seen the show called life, Dan. I've been both sides of the river, and there's nothing but hell."

"It wasn't hell down at Witney in the old days."

"I was blind then; I did n't see life as it was."

"Rather you saw life at its best, which is always the truest. Begin again."

"I begin again! Look at me, and then you will not mock."

"Begin again, old friend. God lives, in spite of all."

"How can I? Why, I am an outcast. I have n't a friend in the world—besides you," he added hesitatingly.

"You have friends of whom you know nothing. I should never have found you but for that fact."

"How? Tell me," he said, with a show of interest.

I told him of my visit to Mrs. Blewitt's and of the letters I had received.

"Let's see those letters, Dan," he cried eagerly.

I brought them, pleased at the new tone in his voice. There was a memory of the old Stephen in it.

He read them through very carefully.

"Evidently a woman of education,—a lady. Fancy any one caring about such a poor devil as I! Dan, she must have known me as I was, not as I am."

"And you must become the man you were again," I said, "only better and stronger."

He was silent for a minute, as though thinking deeply; then he laughed mockingly. "No, Dan; it won't do. For a minute I thought I saw myself a better man; but a host of devils came and destroyed my picture. Dan, you have n't a drop of brandy,

have you? I'm dry as a hatter, and just longing for a drink."

"No; I have no brandy to give you. You know it's not what you ought to have. Come, old man."

"It's no use. If I had a bit of faith in myself, a bit of hope! But I have n't. The whole business to me is — There, give it up."

"But life is better than you think. There is good in it, there is virtue, there is purity, there is love."

"Where? I've tried to find it; and I tell you, I never saw anybody, man or woman, who had n't his or her price."

"That's because you've been led to look for the bad, and not for the good. There are hosts of pure, true people everywhere. Even among the poorest, those living under the worst circumstances, there is goodness and beauty. Why, don't you remember Shrimp, that little child you called Hope?"

"Yes; I've often thought about her. I expect she's like the rest. She must be a woman now. Six years and more will have changed her. Yes; I remember. I wonder what has become of her? Let's see, they trained girls for servants in that place, did n't they? Well —"

"You remember what you said to her," I said. "You told her you should call her Hope, and asked her to be true to her new name. Let's hunt her up to-morrow."

A look of interest came into his eyes again. The thought of having something to do seemed to lead him to forget the darkness of life.

"Very well," he said. "A stroll in that neighborhood will be — But how can I go with you in such clothes as these?"

"Oh, I can rig you out," I said; "that's settled, then."

We talked for a long time, I trying all I could to lead him to forget the past, and to paint bright pictures for the future.

“My father is here,” I said presently; “you’ll be glad to see him. You must try and look as you did in the old days. I’ll leave you a fresh change of clothes at the bathroom door, and I’ll send my hair-dresser to you in the morning; when your beard is cut off and your hair trimmed, you’ll look a new man.”

He feebly protested, but I prevailed; and by and by, when I left him at his bedroom door, I began to feel more hopeful.

I was aroused at half-past seven, after a very short sleep, to attend a critical case; and when I returned, at half-past nine, was wondering what had become of Stephen, when, to my surprise and pleasure, I found him conversing with my father in the breakfast-room. He had submitted himself to the hands of the hair-dresser I had sent, and, attired in a new suit of clothes I had just bought, looked a different man from what he had appeared on the previous night. I could not but admire the way my father talked. He had evidently grasped the situation at a glance, and with perfect tact had set Stephen as much at ease as, under the circumstances, was possible. I, too, greeted him heartily and cheerfully; and although he looked suspiciously at us both, as though wondering at our behavior, I saw that a step had been made in the right direction.

A servant brought the breakfast, and with it laid before me my morning’s letters. In looking over the envelopes, I detected the writing of Stephen’s anonymous friend, who the day before had told me how I might find him. I broke the seal at once, and found the following lines, which had evidently been hastily written:—

“You have found your friend. Be his near friend, as I shall always be. Tell him that, will you?”

There was no address, no date; but evidently it had been written and posted just before midnight, or I should not have got it by the morning delivery. Whoever was the writer, she was cognizant of my visit, and was aware of my success.

An hour later we were out together on the common. The weather had changed, and was now dry and frosty. The wind was very cold, but it was healthy and invigorating. For a long time we walked in comparative silence, Stephen scarcely giving an answer to my remarks, save the merest monosyllables. I saw that the excitement of the change was fast leaving him, and that the habits of past years strove for the mastery. Presently we passed a public-house.

“I’m going for a drink, Dan,” he said; “a drop of brandy will do us both good. Come.”

“I’m one of the exceptions in my profession,” I said. “I am a teetotal doctor.”

“You won’t come, Dan; then I’ll go without you.” He turned towards the public-house door, and his hands trembled with eagerness.

“Come, Steve,” I said; “no good for you lies that way.”

“It’s no use,” he said roughly. “I’m not a baby, to be dictated to like this.” Then he stopped; he saw the pained look on my face. “Give me up, old man; I shall be drunk before the day is out. Drink is food and lodgings to me, and I’d sell my soul for it. It’s hard for you, I know; but I can’t help it.”

“Then wait till we get to the next public-house,” I said, a thought striking me; “they are not so far apart. Besides, I’ve something to show you.”

“What?”

“A letter from your anonymous friend, — the one who told me where I should find you.”

“Very well, then,” he said; “let’s move along quickly. Where’s the letter?”

“It came this morning,” I said, putting it in his hand.

He read it slowly: —

“You have found your friend. Be his near friend, as I shall always be. Tell him that, will you?”

“What does she mean?” he said presently.

“What she says, — that you have a friend always near, always caring for you.”

“Then I’m always shadowed by a woman,” he replied roughly; and yet I knew he was not altogether displeased at the thought.

“It means that you are not alone; that a refined, pure woman cares whether you belong to the devil or to God.”

“A refined, pure woman — bah!”

“That’s what I believe. There are refined, pure women, I’m sure. She’s one.”

“There’s some devilry,” he said suspiciously; and yet I could see he was interested in his unknown friend.

“What devilry can there be?” I said. “What pure woman could gain anything by trying to save you?”

“Save me?”

“To save you, old man. To save you from drink and the devil generally. God’s angels still exist.”

I had created an interest; for a minute he had forgotten his thirst. It was my work to keep him interested.

“You remember that beautiful girl we saw in the City one day,” I said, and related the circumstances.

“Yes.”

“She lives in Clapham,” I continued. “I’ve seen her; she’s as pure as she looks.”

A sneer crossed his face, but I kept on talking. I told him of my meeting with Naomi Reviere, of my hopes concerning her; but I did not then mention Polden.

“And will you marry her, Dan?”

“I will if I can.”

“What, and trust in her?”

“If she will tell me what I hope,” I said, “I will trust her with my life.”

He laughed loudly and bitterly.

“Steve,” I said, “do you ever think of the life you would like to live? Do you ever dream of purity, and trust, and love? Do you never long for a life which is true and heavenly?”

“When I am mad, when I cease to see life as it is.”

“But life can be better than your fondest dreams.”

“Do you, old quiet, matter-of-fact Daniel, say that?” he asked, half cynically, half curiously.

“I am sure of it,” I replied. “And, Steve, does not your dream of a better life make you hate the life you have been living these last few years?”

“Hate it!” he cried savagely, “hate my life! I have n’t lived; I’ve only been a vile thing crawling through mud. But there, what’s the use? The whole thing is a bit of slime.”

“The whole thing is n’t that,” I answered, “and you can yet have the good, if you will. There are many fair flowers in the world, old man; but if you are to see them, you must begin again, you must be a new man.”

We had by this time come to Mrs. Morley's house, and so far I had kept him from drink.

"It's no good, Dan," he said wearily; "I have no hope. It has all been destroyed."

"Perhaps Hope is inside here," I said. "I reproach myself for not inquiring all these years."

"If it were only possible!" he said, as I rang the door-bell.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOGIC OF PESSIMISM.

Count o'er the joys thy life hath seen,
Count o'er thy days from anguish free,
And know whatever thou hast been,
'Tis something better not to be.

BYRON.

AS I stood at the doorway, waiting for my ring to be answered, I began to realize, as I had not realized before, how much might depend on our visit. Fallen as Stephen was, a wreck of his old self, lost almost to all that was good, I felt sure there were possibilities of good in him even yet. I saw that the great thing to be done was to establish an abiding interest, to inspire within him some hope, to create a purpose for which he could live. I remembered, too, how interested he had been in the little waif of the streets, and I called to mind the plaintive face of the child. If she had grown up to be a pure, true woman, would she not help to make him feel the goodness of life, would she not inspire within him a hope which might be a power within him restraining him from evil? I looked at him as he stood beside me so pale, so haggard, his nerves twitching painfully; and knowing that he had no true interests in life, I prayed that my friend might become the man God intended him to be.

The door was opened by a somewhat shrewish-looking woman of about thirty-five years of age.

Was Mrs. Morley at home?

“No.”

Would she tell us when she was expected?

“She is on the Continent, at Nice. Her health has n't been good of late years, and she has spent the last two winters in the South.”

“Then who is left in charge of the Home while she is away?” I asked.

“The matron and myself. I am the assistant matron.”

“Is the matron at home?”

“No; she's gone to London this morning about some cases.”

The term “cases” jarred on my ear, and I saw a sneer come on Stephen's face.

“We are come to inquire about a young girl whom we were the means of getting here some years ago,” I said. “I want to know, if possible, how and where she is now.”

“You had better come again, when the matron is at home,” she replied, as though anxious to get rid of us. “I've been here only a few weeks, and I know nothing about the work. I simply superintend the food and housekeeping department. Miss Ray attends to all the ‘cases.’”

“But I wish to know now,” I said.

“I'm afraid I can't assist you.”

I placed my card in her hand. “You must have some books keeping an account of those who have been here,” I suggested. “I can examine the books, I suppose.”

I saw, as she looked at my card, that my name was known to her, and that she could no longer refuse.

“Certainly you can, Dr. Roberts,” she said, in a changed voice, and led the way to the matron's private room. She took from a case two or three volumes, and laid them before us.

“What year did the girl you are interested in enter?” she asked.

I told her, and she found the pages containing the records for that year.

I soon found the name. “Hope Hillyer, aged fifteen years and six months. Taken from — Street, Battersea, S. W. Recommended by Mr. Stephen Edgcumbe.”

Further down the page, another entry was made, and dated three and a half years later.

“Gone to 3 Moss Grove, Kensington, as lady’s maid. Highly recommended.”

At the bottom was still another entry, dated nine months later, which made my heart as heavy as lead.

“Left Kensington under painful circumstances. Gone on the streets.”

I closed the book hastily, so that Stephen might not see; but my action was useless,—he, too, had read the entries.

“You see, Dan,” he sneered. “‘What’s bred in the bone,’ you know; besides, she’s a woman.”

“Who made these entries?” I asked the assistant matron.

“Mrs. Morley. Up to a year or so ago she attended personally to every case. It was only ill-health that compelled her to hand over the matter to Miss Ray.”

“You know nothing of what these notes mean, do you?” I asked.

“I know that Miss Ray jots down particulars of each girl,” she replied.

I opened the book again, and pointed to the words which were so painful to me.

“You think that means exactly what it says?”

“A bad case, evidently. There’s no trusting these girls. Yes, there is no doubt about it. Mrs. Morley keeps a fuller account than this, but I know nothing of it.”

“Do you know of any particulars other than these?”

“None.”

I made a rapid copy of the entry in my note-book, and turned to go.

“Does Miss Ray know this young girl?” I asked.

“No; she left before Miss Ray came.”

“And when will Mrs. Morley return?”

“Not until May.”

“Thank you. Most likely I shall call on Mrs. Morley when she returns.”

We left the house and walked down the drive together, Stephen, for the first few minutes, moody and silent; and then suddenly breaking out in a mocking song.

“There’s a mistake somewhere,” I said.

“Yes; the whole thing’s a mistake.”

“Poor thing!” I said musingly.

“Poor thing! eh? She’s happy enough in her own way. She’ll have fine clothes, plenty of pleasure, company of all sorts, and drink! Don’t bother, Dan; she’s as she was made, and a sample of other women. Let her go — and I’m going to have a drink! Are you coming with me?” he asked feverishly.

“Not yet, Steve. I’m going to Kensington; I’m going to call at 3, Moss Grove. I don’t believe she’s gone to the bad.”

“All right; so long! Here’s a pub, and I’m ——”

“No, old man; you’re going with me!”

“Going with you? I’ve had enough of it.”

“You owe it to her,” I said firmly. “Through you this little Shrimp was admitted into the home. Let’s see the end of it.”

“The end of it? that’s plain enough.”

“Plain or not, you must come with me.”

He hesitated a second, and then walked sulkily by my side. I was fortunate in getting an early

train; and an hour later we were at Moss Grove, Kensington.

The houses in Moss Grove were large and expensive, all evidently the property of rich people.

"Is Mrs. Jay at home?" I asked of the powdered footman.

"If you will give me your card, I will see," was the reply.

Three minutes later we were shown into the presence of Mrs. Jay, a somewhat vinegary-looking lady of about fifty. I told her my business very briefly.

"I remember her perfectly well," was her reply. "She was here nine months."

"May I ask why she left here?"

A waspish smile crossed her lips.

"Her — her — relations with my late husband's son were becoming — very painful, and — so she had to go."

"Have you any idea where she is now?"

"I do not know. I would rather not speak about her any more."

"And your stepson, could I see him?"

"I do not know where he is."

"That is, he is away from home just now?"

"I have not seen him for six months. Where he is now, I have not the slightest idea," she replied icily.

I rose to leave. "There is nothing further you could tell me?"

"Nothing." She placed her hand on a bell-knob, a servant came, and a minute later we were in the street.

"If the poor little thing did n't go to the bad in a house like that, it would be a wonder," said Stephen; then he added, after a pause: "and wherever she is, I'll wager my life that she's more virtuous than her late mistress. There, Dan, we've got to the end

of the matter — and just as I expected! I have no illusions now ;” and he laughed bitterly.

I looked at my watch.

“ We shall be just in time for a late lunch,” I said ; and, before Stephen could reply, I called a hansom, and told the cabby my address.

I will not describe our conversation as we drove home together. It was too painful. The genius of despair seemed to have possessed him wholly, and his expressions concerning our morning’s experiences revealed to me the fact that he had fallen lower, even, than I had feared. After lunch I was obliged to leave him for a while, and when I returned for dinner he was not to be found.

That night, between eleven and twelve, he was brought home hopelessly and helplessly drunk !

I will not write in detail my experiences with him during the next few weeks. If ever one’s faith, and patience, and friendship were taxed, mine were. Nothing I could say or do seemed to restrain him.

“ It’s no use,” he would say, when he had to an extent slept off the effects of his dissipation ; “ the devil’s got hold of me body and soul. I’m as helpless as a baby. I may as well go back, Dan ; I shall, at any rate, have a welcome at the Jolly Dog — until the end comes.”

There was only one hope left to me, humanly speaking, and that was, that he loathed the life he was living. He shuddered at the idea of going back to the City ; he hated the fatal power that held him down to drink and sensuality, even while he hugged it to his bosom. But he had no faith or hope in anything better, and thus he had no moral purpose.

“ I shall never be anything but what I am,” he would say, with a shudder. “ Don’t try and do anything more for me, — unless you can give me a strong dose of something, and send me out of time.”

“Nay, Steve,” I would reply; “you’ll be a man again yet.”

“A man, Dan!” And then he would pour out the darkness of his soul, as though he delighted in evil.

But he did not attempt to leave me. Again and again was he brought to my house in such a condition that when he came to his senses he would abuse himself for staying at Clapham Common and disgracing me; and although, after struggling for days, he would yield again and again to the basest desires, he shuddered at going back to his old companions.

“Dan,” he said one evening, “I’m going to end it all. I will not trouble you any longer, for I cannot live without worrying you. It’s only one leap, old man, a cold shiver, and then — it’s all over.”

“Do you ever pray, Steve?”

“I pray? Nay, I’ve tried, but I hug the devil too close to pray. I don’t believe in anything, Dan, — that’s it. If I could only believe there was a God who cared, if I could believe in goodness, I could hope then, — ay, hope that a poor filthy devil like myself could be saved; but I don’t, that’s the curse of it. Oh, Dan, I’ve tried since I’ve been with you. You and your old dad have together made me wish to; but there, what’s the use of trying? You see how I’ve got on. I revel in filth, after all. The other night I walked by the river, and it did seem enticing. It looked so calm, so restful. ‘There,’ I said, ‘if I could only have pluck to get in there and rest forever, forever;’ and I shall soon, old man, I shall soon.”

All this time I tried to find out who Stephen’s unknown friend was, but in vain. She was as mysterious as ever. From the first day Stephen lived with me on Clapham Common, I heard no word from her. If she remained his friend, she certainly took care not to allow herself to be seen. As the early

spring came on, I began to have more hope of him. He grew interested in my love for Naomi Reviere; and when I told him that my rival was John Polden, he became aroused into indignation.

"I am not fit to speak to a pure woman, if there is one; but I am better than that beast," he said, with a touch of passion. "Can you not tell her, Dan?"

"Scarcely," I replied; "at any rate, not yet. You see, we have no proof against him, and he is too clever not to turn the tables on me."

The evening after that, I remember, we were walking together on the common, when a woman came and took his arm familiarly.

"I've found you at last, Dook," she said.

She was a low, coarse woman, and had evidently been drinking.

Stephen started back.

"Get away, you hag!" he cried.

"No, no, Dook," was her reply; "you won't be hard on an old friend like this."

I need not describe what followed, except to say that he was able, after some time, to bribe her to leave.

"Let me get off somewhere, Dan!" he cried, as soon as we were alone again. "She'll dog me while I'm here. I must leave your house, old man; but I cannot go back again. I can't, and I won't."

While I was terribly saddened, I could not help feeling too glad, because of his loathing for the old associations. I saw that it was becoming stronger the longer he stayed with me. If I could only inspire hope and faith for a new and better life, I should not have been so downhearted. I must confess, too, that my own prospects looked anything but bright that night, as I had just heard that Naomi Reviere and her mother had gone away from Clapham for a lengthened visit.

As we drew near to the house, we passed Polden. He did not speak; but the recognition was mutual on Stephen's part as well as on my own. I thought, too, that I saw a look of triumph on his face.

Neither Stephen nor I spoke during our walk home; but I knew that he was passing through deep waters. Memories of the old life were weighing on his mind, — memories laden with darkness. We entered my study together, where my evening letters awaited me. Listlessly I read them, until I came to one from a friend at whose house I sometimes visited. There was only one passage which interested me; that was the postscript, which ran as follows: —

“You have, of course, heard that Mrs. and Miss Reviere are gone to Devonshire. I was told yesterday, by one who knows, that the latter's engagement with Mr. Polden is now a settled thing.”

“Anything the matter, Dan?” asked Stephen, who had evidently been watching me.

I passed him the letter, and, with a bitter laugh, pointed out the postscript.

“Ah! Poor old Dan! You are finding it out, like the rest of us. The world's a hell, Dan; that's all.”

He sat down in gloomy silence, and for hours he did not speak; while I, saddened, aye, and almost maddened, by my own affairs, did not try to make him talk. Presently my father came in, to whom I also showed the letter.

“I don't believe it, Dan,” said my father. “I know Miss Reviere, and I've seen that fellow. This is a lying report; she would never engage herself to him.”

But I would not be comforted, and sat despairing, while my dear old dad talked with Stephen. To me there was something noble in my father's faith; it

was so unostentatious, yet so real. To him, religion — God — was not a matter of books, or evidence, save the evidence of his own consciousness. The abiding assurance that God was at the heart of the universe made him at all times cheerful and strong. I remember, too, how he led Stephen to talk about this; and so buoyant was my father's faith that he aroused an amount of interest in my friend.

"Stephen," he said, "I don't close my eyes to all you say. The world seems bad. But there's a soul of goodness in things evil, and all that we see will be, in God's own time, made to work out His will. Behind pain, behind squalor, vice, misery, aye, behind hell itself, God is."

For a minute Stephen did not reply; and then, when he was about to speak, he was stopped by a terrible scream in the near distance, which was followed by oaths and curses.

"There's not much God in that," said Stephen.

"Murder!"

It was a woman's cry that rang out; and as it was now late, it sounded terrible in the silence of the night. All of us rushed out of the house in the direction whence the sound came. I saw a dark form lying on the ground. It was a somewhat unfrequented road, not far from the public-house which stood near my house, and which I mentioned some chapters back. I also heard retreating footsteps, but saw no one but the prostrate form of a woman.

On examination, I found her to be unconscious. She was bruised about the head, and severely cut about the neck. I saw at once that it was a case for the hospital; and as by this time several people had come from some small houses in the Battersea direction, I asked one of them to fetch a cab at once.

"I see 'er a-drinkin' with a feller in the Silver Jug," said one beetle-browed fellow who had come up.

I took his name and address; and then, while we were waiting for the cab, I gained all the information I could.

“Will you go with me, Steve?” I said presently, when we had lifted the woman into the conveyance.

“No,” he said, somewhat roughly. “I can do nothing.”

“Shall you be gone to bed before I get home?”

“Bed? I — don’t know. Perhaps — yes, and asleep. I can sleep. Fare thee well, old man.”

I did not like leaving him, but it could not be helped. Meanwhile my father went into the house, but Stephen told him he should not be in for a few minutes; he wanted to make further inquiries.

For some time after my father had left him he walked along the common like one in a dream; then he turned and went towards Battersea. It was now past midnight, and but few people were in the streets. He hurried quickly along — Street, until he came to Battersea Park Road, and then made his way towards Chelsea Bridge. When he came near to the bridge, he hesitated.

“No,” he said to himself, “I can bear it no longer. It is eternal misery — eternal misery. I cannot bear to go back to the old life, although a thousand things seem to beckon me that way; and I cannot face the future. I cannot live to be the plaything of every temptation. I am disgracing Dan; already people are beginning to fight shy of him, because of me. Besides, what is there to make it worth while? I believe I know that woman whom I saw nearly murdered just now. All life reeks with hell. Why stay, then? Dan will be happier without me.”

He came to the suspension bridge, and looked down on the river as it rolled slowly towards the sea. The tide was high, and was just now beginning to ebb. Lights of various colors flashed on the waters, illuminating it with a strange beauty.

“One plunge, and all will be over,” he said. “One plunge, then a choking sensation, then a struggle, and then — nothing! All my misery over; rest — forever. And yet, how do I know? how do I know?”

He walked on towards the Chelsea side.

“How ghastly that woman’s face looked, as Dan bound up her wounds!” he went on. “Eh — poor old Dan — and he’s a sad heart, too. How down in the mouth he was when that hag from the Dials came across us to-night! And she’ll come again — and I shall drink again; my mouth is burning like fire now! My God! — no, there’s no God! — and this is life. Everywhere is filth, lies, hell.”

He reached the Chelsea side, and walked up the river by the Embankment.

“Even that little Shrimp, whom I called Hope, was false to the name I gave her. Hope! Nay, all’s a delusion. What is there to hope for? Did I ever know a pure woman? Did I ever know one that could n’t be bought with a price? No; the world is a great lie. Let me get out of it, then!”

He leaned over the railings by the river, and looked down on the cold waters. They looked strangely restful, and made but little noise, only now and then a faint gurgle. The river was beautiful — and it offered peace.

“I am such a poor thing,” he went on musing, — “such a poor thing. I have n’t a bit of strength, a bit of pluck. I’d do the dirtiest — But there, what’s the use? And yet life opened up brightly, did n’t it? — and this is the end of it all. I wonder what it will be — after. Well, I shall soon know. I shall solve the mystery of death soon — and yet, how I cling to life!”

He climbed the wall. It was not high, and offered no obstacle. He saw the trees lining the river over in Battersea Park; he saw the broad stretch of water

between, shimmering in the many-colored lights. He looked around, but could see no one, and yet thought he heard a sound.

Like lightning, his mind flashed again through the history of his past; he tried again to face the future. No, no; there was nothing to live for.

What was that?

It was nothing; the great city was asleep. No one would see him, no one would know. He was strangely calm, he had no fears, and the river was so peaceful, so different from the life he had been living.

“What secrets the old Thames could tell,” he mused; “what a history of madness, and murder, and hell it could relate, if it could only speak; but it won’t. No, it will never speak.”

He thought he heard another sound.

“It’s some one coming,” he thought; “perhaps this way. Well, my father never thought this would be my end — and mother, — shall I ever see them again, I wonder?”

He hesitated another second. “That’s the sound of a footstep, I’m sure,” he thought. Then with a sob of anguish he fell into the river, and the cold waters closed over his head.

PART III.

HOPE.

CHAPTER I.

BEGINNINGS.

Oh that a man would arise in me,
That the man I am might cease to be.

WHEN Stephen again opened his eyes to the light of consciousness and reason, he was lying in his old bedroom at my house, and I was sitting by his side.

“Where am I? What is this?” he asked confusedly.

“It’s all right,” I replied. “You’ll soon be all right again.”

“But — but how came I here?”

“You fell in the river, — don’t you remember? Well, some one saw you as you fell. You were fished out after some time, and brought here. Since then you’ve been ill with brain fever.”

He remained silent for some time, as if he were in deep thought.

“It was a mistake, Dan,” he said presently, “a ghastly mistake.”

“Yes, it was,” I replied; “but you must have been off your head for the time. The events of that evening were too many for you.”

“No, not that. I was sane enough. I had been thinking about it for days. The mistake was in

dragging me out. I — I doubt if I shall have pluck enough to do it again.”

“Oh, no,” I replied, as cheerfully as I could, “you won’t do it again.”

“Why did n’t you let me be?” he said half angrily. “It would have been all over then; now I have come back — to — to — this!”

“Bless you, old man,” I replied, “there are brighter days coming.”

“I don’t think I could do it again,” he went on, without heeding me. “It was terribly hard to die — terribly.”

“You did n’t die,” I said.

“But I went through it all — all.”

Some days afterwards he told me about it, — told me, too, of his thoughts and feelings while he stood hesitating before going to what he believed would be his death.

“How did I get out?” he asked presently.

“You were watched — followed,” I replied.

“Who watched me — who followed me?”

“Your friend; don’t you remember?”

“My friend, — the writer of those anonymous letters?”

“Yes.”

“Was — that is — is my friend a woman?”

“Yes.”

I had aroused his interest, and I let him talk on.

“How did she know about me?”

“She has been searching for you for a long time, and watching you ever since she found you.”

“But why?”

“Because she was interested, I suppose.”

“Where is she now?”

“In this house.”

“In this house — here?”

“Yes; she has been your nurse ever since you were brought here.”

His eyes lit up, as if he were wondering. "Can it be possible that any one can be so interested in such a poor devil as I?" he said to himself.

"Evidently."

He lay for two or three minutes without speaking; then he said, with a shudder, —

"What and where should I have been now, I wonder, if I had n't been pulled out? A hopeless life is ghastly enough, but a hopeless death is ghastlier. Dan, I should like to see this — this lady; but no, she must scorn such as I."

At this moment the door opened, and a low, sweet voice spoke:

"Ah, he's conscious, then."

The speaker was below the medium height, and about twenty-two years of age. She had a thoughtful face, yet it was not sad; her great gray hopeful-looking eyes made this impossible. Strictly speaking, I suppose it was not a beautiful face; very likely, had she applied to an artist to become a model, he would have bowed her out, — reluctantly, and with regret. Hers was a winsome face, full of sunshine; a face to inspire the best and purest thoughts. Though below the medium height, there was nothing dwarfed or puny about her. Her figure was finely moulded, and full of energy. But what would strike the observer more than anything else, in looking at her for the first time, would be her eyes. Large, luminous, suggesting wondrous possibilities of sacrifice, heroism, love.

Stephen started as she came into the room, and looked at her eagerly, wonderingly.

"Who — who are you?" he asked, in a confused sort of way.

"I am Hope, master," she said, and then left the room hastily.

"Hope," he repeated. "Can't you call her back,

Dan? I want to know. You don't mean to say that ——”

“I mean that you must go to sleep, old man. You've talked enough for the time. When you are awake you will be stronger; then I will tell you all there is to tell.”

He wanted to remain awake, wanted to talk. This was a great deal. When he awoke again, he would not awake to utter dreariness; he would have something to inquire about, something to interest him.

I gave him a draught, and shortly afterward he fell asleep, looking more like the old Stephen than I had seen him look since the crushing blow of his life had fallen upon him.

When I returned to the house, after making some necessary calls, his nurse met me on the stairs.

“He's awake again, and seemingly perfectly conscious,” she said. “He will get well.”

“Has he seen you?”

“I think he just caught a glimpse of me. I watched him while he slept, but left the moment I saw he was waking. Your housekeeper is sitting with him now, and he is plying her with questions.”

When I reached his room, I found him propped up with pillows, evidently impatient at the way my old nurse, who was now my housekeeper, parried his questions. The old lady left the room as I entered, and we were alone together.

“Dan, old fellow, tell me — that is — everything.”

“Well, then, Steve,” I said, “you've been within an inch of death. You would have been ill, very ill, if you had n't — fallen into the water. You could n't have gone on as you'd been going. But your cold bath hastened and intensified it, so that we've had a job to pull you through. You see, you've done all in your power during these last few years to destroy

your constitution. Thank the pure life of your ancestors that you were not altogether successful."

"Yes, yes, I know," he said impatiently; "but tell me about my being dragged out of the water; tell me who my nurse is!"

"Your nurse? She told you herself, — Hope."

"But not little Shrimp, — Hope Hillyer?"

"Yes."

"The little thing we took away from that hag, and sent to Mrs. Morley's?"

"Yes."

"But — but they said she was — on the streets."

I nodded.

"But that was n't true?"

"Yes; it was true."

"Is n't there a mistake, Dan?" he asked wistfully.

"Do you mean to say that ——?"

"She was on the streets till a few weeks ago. She left them — to nurse you."

"And you — you took her in?"

"Certainly."

A great blight seemed to fall on his face. "Everywhere it is the same — everywhere," he said bitterly.

"Don't draw conclusions too quickly, Steve," I said. "Let me tell you her story before you say harsh things."

"Yes; tell me. Besides, what right have I to expect any other? My God, what have I been!"

"Of course you remember our visit to Mrs. Morley's house?"

He nodded.

"You remember the entry in the journal that she went to Kensington as a lady's maid, and left under distressing circumstances?"

"Of course."

"Well, I've made further inquiries. You see, she was not twenty years of age when she went to

Kensington. As you saw, too, she is by no means bad looking. Young Jay was a fast man about town, and he pretended to fall in love with her, and she was young and inexperienced. Besides, you know her early associations; you know how she was taught to regard life, and how hard it is for young girls in such a position to keep pure. Indeed, you have said again and again that none do keep pure, that everything is a matter of price. Well, think of the case of this orphan girl; remember all the circumstances; call to mind, too, the woman we saw, who, you said, was enough to drive any girl to the bad, and then think of her being in daily contact with this young Jay, who pretended to be madly in love with her."

"Say no more, Dan; I've heard enough."

"And yet, Steve, in spite of everything, that girl, reared as she was, with every allurements placed in her path, remained as pure as an angel."

"What?"

"I mean that she rejected young Jay's offers of love, and that, in spite of the most dreadful alternatives, she did that which needed the purity of a saint, and the courage of a heroine. She came through the ordeal untainted. I have seen young Jay and others; I have talked with them. Steve, if ever anything was proved to be a black lie, that ghastly creed of yours, the creed which your uncle and tutor taught you to believe, and which circumstances have seemed to confirm, has been proved to be the blackest lie the devil ever put it in the mind of man to tell. Jay admitted it to me. Persecuted and alone as she was, she kept as pure as the angels of God."

He started up in his bed. "Then, Dan," he cried, "what is the meaning of your other ghastly admission? Why, why on your own account she became a — a thing on — the streets!"

“On the streets, — yes, but not to sin, Steve!”

“What for, then?”

“To rescue — to save.”

“And she — she did not tell you this?” he said suspiciously.

“No; she did not. Mrs. Morley came home sooner than she anticipated, and came to see me. She told me the whole story, old man, — told me, too, how when Hope had a life of ease and comfort offered her, she refused it in order to rescue her poor fallen sisters.”

Then I saw what I was afraid I should never see again. Tears started to Stephen’s eyes and trickled down his cheeks.

“Is it possible, after all?” he murmured.

“It is more than possible; it is a fact,” I said.

He remained silent for some time, as if thinking deeply; then he said slowly, “And so I, who — who had something to do — with rescuing her, went straight to hell; she, with everything against her, lived in the purity of heaven.”

“Yes.”

A look of abject misery and shame rested on his face.

“What must she think of me?” he said slowly.

“She thinks of you with a great pity,” I replied.

“Pity,” he repeated.

“Yes, pity,” I repeated; “especially since she heard your story.”

“Then you told her?”

“There was little for me to tell. Mrs. Blewitt told her a great deal; the rest she had little difficulty in knowing.”

“Then she knows I am — what I am, and a suicide?”

“She knows what you were, old man — she hopes for the future. You see,” I went on, “she had a better chance than you had.”

“A better chance, man, — how?”

“Why, you taught her to hope, to believe. You gave her her new name, you know. She had something to which she must be true. You were not taught to hope, or to believe, save in a hopeless creed. Thus it was, when the one link which kept you in spite of your training, was broken, you drifted.”

“And now it’s too late.”

“Too late for what?”

“Too late to begin again.”

“No, old man; it is never too late to begin again.”

Again he was silent for a while, after which he broke out suddenly, “I say, Dan, how did she find me out? Besides, what led her to seek me out?” He asked this suspiciously, as though he thought there might be some ulterior and evil motive at work.

“You had better ask her,” I said; “she’ll be here presently.”

“No, no; send her away,” he said pitifully. “I shall be ashamed for her to see me.” Then, after a second, “How long do you think she’ll be, old man?”

“Not long, I expect,” I replied; “or it may be she’s resting. She’s had a weary time nursing you, you know.”

“Can it be really so?” he said, as if musing. “Can I really have been wrong, after all?” Then he lapsed into silence again, and by and by tired nature overcame his excitement, and he fell asleep.

While he slept, I began to try and think of the future. What was to become of Stephen? As he lay on his bed, he did not inspire any bright picture for the coming days. Thin almost to emaciation, and many lines of dissipation on his face, his youth gone before he should have entered into its fulness and strength; his means of livelihood gone, confidence gone, faith gone, ay, and moral purpose gone too, —

he was in a pitiful condition. Besides, what assurance had I that when he was able he would not again drift into drunkenness and all kinds of dissipation? Many bonds held him to the old life in Chainly Alley. Indeed, it seemed to me that the Stephen of the old days had gone forever. And even though he should break with the old life altogether, what could he do? The law as a means of existence was impossible to him now, while I had little hope that any editor would accept his articles as they had in the old days. Would-be journalists were as thick as blackberries, and he had no strength to face difficulties. He was too old to begin anything afresh. His whole life seemed an utter wreck. I tried to form plans concerning him; I tried to think of setting him up in some business; but nothing seemed feasible. Poor Stephen! his prospects looked black indeed.

I turned towards him, and watched him as he slept, caught some of the hopelessness that he murmured in his sleep, and noted the utter weakness of the man. My heart was very heavy.

"Does God live?" he said aloud. I thought at first that he was awake, and had asked me the question; but I saw he was only dreaming, and his question was the repetition of the one he had often asked when awake. His words staggered me, rebuked me. I pretended to believe in God. Who was I, then, to despair?

He awoke soon after, and for a long time lay thinking in silence.

"Dan," he said, "it may be that she is all you say; there may be hope for the world, but there is none for me."

I was silent.

"What can I do? what can I be?" he said, as if repeating my own thoughts. "I am a helpless pauper. But for you I might starve."

“I don't know what you can do — yet,” I said; “I do know what you can be.”

“What?”

“A man, Steve.”

“No; I've no strength, old fellow.”

I heard a rustle by the bed, and I saw that Stephen started.

“Yes,” said a voice.

Stephen looked up into Hope Hillyer's face piteously, beseechingly.

“You heard — you know?” he said.

She nodded her head.

“Have *you* any hope for me?”

“A great hope,” she replied.

“But how can you, knowing what you do?”

“How can I help?” she replied, with a little laugh that was half a cry. “You gave me a new name years ago, and I must be true to that, you know.”

CHAPTER II.

"I BID YOU HOPE."

For we are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope. — PAUL.

"WILL you tell me," said Stephen, after a few minutes' silence, "how you found out where I was?"

Hope Hillyer looked pained, and seemed in a difficulty.

"Shall I tell you everything?" she asked.

"Yes — everything."

A wistful look came into her eyes, as though she would recall the past. "You remember the night when you first saw me?"

"Yes."

"And you remember, too, the time when Mrs. Morley came to fetch me? You know I wanted to remain and be your servant?"

"I remember."

"And then, when Mrs. Morley's carriage came to the door, you told me you had given me a new name, and bade me to be true to it?"

Stephen nodded.

"I seemed to live a new life from that time. Before then everything seemed repression, resistance; but after that I felt as though there was something positive in my life, something to look forward to. You became a sort of hero, and the constant thought in my mind was, that I must do what would please you. I often wondered why you did not come and

see me, and again and again I asked Mrs. Morley about you. As time went on, and I heard nothing more from you, I thought less about you, but I never forgot your words. You heard about my going to Kensington, and why I left there. It was while I was at Mrs. Jay's that I was led more than ever before to look to One higher than you, One who alone can give strength for every difficulty. I seemed to have no one but Him on my side when I left Kensington. It was then I decided to help those who did not know Him. Then, when I had started on my work, I thought of you, and wondered what you were doing. So I made up my mind to go to Mrs. Blewitt's, and ask for you. She did not know me again, but she told me about you. At first I could not believe her story, it was so different from the picture I had drawn of you. Then I inquired about Dr. Roberts, and I was not long in finding out how he had sought to find you, in vain. I determined to find you, and to let Dr. Roberts know about you, so as, if possible, to repay you for saving my life. You know the work I have been doing; Dr. Roberts has told you. It was through that work I discovered you."

"How?" asked Stephen, a look of intense shame and misery on his face.

She hesitated a minute; then she said, with a slight flush on her face, "One night I came across a poor dying girl who lived near Covent Garden. She knew you, and told me where I should be likely to find you. Once you told her your real name, and something of your story. It was through her I was able to tell Dr. Roberts where you often passed your nights. She also told me of your way of life, and how she fully expected you would kill yourself."

"What was her name?"

"She told me her true name was Alice Bell. She was called 'Queen Belle' by those with whom she associated."

“And she, where is she now?”

“She’s dead. Well, when Dr. Roberts went to Chainly Alley, and brought you back here, I remembered her words, and so I wrote, asking him to watch you closely, and telling him I would do the same. I did not sign my name to the letters I wrote. I scarcely knew why, except that for some time I had been known as Sister Hope, and I don’t like the title, it seems so ostentatious; while as for signing myself ‘Hope Hillyer,’ I thought I would rather let him know who I was in some other way.

“You remember that you were brought here two or three times when you were unable to walk? Well, it was I who caused you to be brought home. I think you may remember one of the men who helped you, — an old man whom people call ‘Happy’ Lijah.’ He has often been my companion in doing my work.”

“But why did you take all this trouble about a poor wretch like I am?”

“I could not help it; I remembered what I might have been but for you.”

“But how — did you discover me that night at the — river?”

“I came, with the matron of our Home, to the place where Dr. Roberts had discovered that poor murdered girl, soon after he had gone away. Old Elijah was with us, and we heard Dr. Roberts’ father inquiring for you. We searched for some time; then some one told us that he had seen you walking towards Battersea. I remembered Alice Bell’s words, and determined to follow you. We heard you walk across the bridge; we were close to you when you fell in. A policeman whom we happened to see plunged in after you; the rest was very simple.”

She told her story simply, hesitating now and then for the right word, and sometimes stopping when she saw a look of pain flash across Stephen’s face. I saw,

too, that she seemed afraid lest we should think she was talking too much about herself; but her manner was free from any taint of immodesty, — free, too, from that goody-goody religiosity which is too common among those who profess to give their lives to work similar to hers.

“It was n’t worth while,” said Stephen, bitterly.

“What was n’t worth while?”

“Saving such a life as mine.”

“No, it was n’t, if you are going to be as you have been; but then you are not, you know.”

“You think, then ——”

“I think you are going to be a new man.”

His frame visibly shook. “If I could only believe that!” he said, with a sob. “Do *you* believe I can?”

“Yes; I believe you can. You remember that you gave me a new name, — Hope? Well, I am going to be true to it, so must you.”

“But I am so weak. I have no purpose; everything seems gone. You don’t know the past, perhaps; you don’t know what led me to take the road to hell.”

“Yes, I know; Dr. Roberts has told me all.”

“And knowing what you do, you bid me hope?”

“Yes; I bid you hope. And I shall hope, too, for I shall pray.”

I watched his face closely; I saw a light, which seemed to me to tell of resolution, flash into his eyes; I saw his lips tremble, even while he compressed them; I saw his thin hand, which rested on the counterpane, clench tightly.

“Then I will try and hope, too, and I will try and be something different from what I am,” he said slowly.

“And let me say something else,” she said eagerly. “I almost hesitate to speak of it, because it has been bandied about so much that with many it has lost

its true meaning; but it is truer than anything else in the world: you must hope and believe in our Father above, before you can hope and believe in yourself, or in others."

"But how can I hope in Him? I am not sure that He exists."

"Will you read a book that I will send you?"

"Yes; but you are not going away, are you?"

"Not yet; you will read carefully, thoughtfully, won't you?"

"Yes."

Thus Stephen began to try and find his way back to a new life.

A fortnight later, Stephen and I sat together in my study. Hope Hillyer had gone back to her work, — the saddest, yet the noblest that any one can do. She had been sunshine in my house, as my old house-keeper testified again and again, and made her feel, to use her own words, that she'd like to see Mr. Daniel married. "I don't want to give up house-keeping," she said vehemently; "but I would like to see Mr. Daniel with such a wife as Miss Hope; and what he means by living a bachelor, I don't know."

My father, too, had felt a new interest in life while Hope Hillyer was under our roof; but she had gone, and we had to live on as before.

"Well, Stephen," I said, "you are getting strong again. Isn't it time you thought of doing something?"

"That's where the difficulty lies, Dan. I don't feel I can do anything. Yet I promised her. Besides, I can't remain here on your charity."

"But you are going to remain here, Steve," I said, "and the friendship of our boyhood is going to continue in a real, true way."

“I’ve thought it over again and again, old man, and every door seems closed to me.”

“Except one.”

“What is that?”

“You remember when we lived together in Battersea, you contemplated writing a novel, which you thought of calling ‘Disillusionment.’ Can’t you write it now?”

“No,” he said decidedly; “what the world wants is a message of hope, not one of despair.”

“And you have no message of hope?”

“Don’t mock me, Dan. Can a poor thing like I, who can only inspire a feeling of pity for myself, a poor thing who has been crawling at the very bottom of the pit, give a message of hope?”

“I was not thinking of the man you are, but the man you are going to be,” I said; “besides, Hope sent you a book.”

“I will try, old man,” he said presently.

It would be painful to myself and wearisome to the reader if I were to try and record in detail all the struggles of Stephen during the months that followed. I could not help seeing that his old life had a strong grip on him, while it was evident that, try as he might, he could not shake himself free from his creed of despair altogether. Sometimes for days he seemed on the verge of giving himself over to his old habits. Six years of debauchery had shattered his strength, physically and morally. His craving for drink was sometimes terrible; every fibre of his being cried out for stimulants, and it was pitiful to watch him struggling against it.

Once I thought the battle was entirely lost; and if it had been, I should have been the means, with every good intention on my part, of his fall. It happened in this way. I had heard that his uncle Luke was in England, and I wrote to him to tell him

of Stephen, and asking him to come and see us. I thought he might arouse some interest in Stephen's life, and make the time hang less heavily on his hands.

Luke Edgcumbe came one afternoon when Stephen had gone for a walk on the common, to try, as he told me, to rid his brain of cobwebs, and to work out the idea of his novel.

"I heard the beggar had gone to the dogs," said Luke, "and had ceased to trouble about him. I was disgusted with the attitude the young milksop assumed when at your old place in Battersea. I knew he'd be going to the bad then. Your professedly conscientious men always do. He professed to be above the ways of the world, and then directly after became a swill-tub."

I gave him what I regarded as wholesome truth, telling him what I thought had made Stephen what he had been; but Luke would have none of it.

"That's all a pack of bosh," he replied; "your canting hypocrites always do turn out that way. And yet I always liked him; and since he is going to reform, or has reformed, I am willing to do what I can for him. I have a house in town; let him come and live with me. Excuse me, Roberts, but your Puritanism is enough to make an idiot of any one; let him come with me, and he can then, in a reasonable way, get the best out of this dirty world."

"Stephen can, of course, do what he will," I replied; "but I do not think the life you suggest will be best for him."

Soon after Stephen returned, his uncle commenced talking in the old way. He ignored the past, and asked Stephen to cease moping, and come with him. I could see my friend was in one of his low moods. The dark circles under his eyes indicated that he was

suffering terribly, and I could see that the prospect which Luke held out was like an incarnate devil tempting him. Since his illness he had touched no stimulants, and I knew that his safety lay in complete abstention from them.

“Uncle,” he said, “I believe you mean to be kind to me.”

“If you’d listened to me, and had n’t been a fool, you might have been in clover during all these years. I don’t profess to be a saint. Like one of your Bible heroes, I don’t believe in being over-sinful or over-righteous. Strike a middle line, I say. Recognize what the world is, and then do the thing that pays best. You’ve been a fool; come with me and make life as pleasant as you can.”

“Uncle,” said Stephen, “if you had said this to me a year ago, I’d have said yes in a minute; I’d have lived with you, although the money which paid for everything were stolen, or obtained through the vilest fraud or iniquity; but I’m trying to do the straight thing.”

“Straight thing, bah!” said Luke. “Look here, you’re my nephew; I promised your father I’d do my best by you. Come now, I’ll give you a good home, and a good time, at any rate until you pick up a bit. By the way, though, perhaps,” — this with a sneer, — “you’ll be wanting to know if I paid my late creditors in full. Well, I have n’t. Still, I have a well-furnished house, a good table, a cellar full of good wines. Come, now.”

My friend looked at me appealingly. The very mention of good wines intensified his craving.

“Steve, old man,” I said, “had n’t you better stay here and do the work you have set out to do? You know I am glad to have you.”

“You can do whatever work you like at my place, my lad,” said Luke, more kindly; “besides, I’m a bit

lonely. I shall be glad to have you ; it will remind me of old days."

I saw Stephen was on the point of yielding, and I knew what kind of an influence Luke Edgcumbe would exert over him. I thought of one thing which I hoped might restrain him.

"What shall I say to Hope, if you go, Steve?" I said, looking at him full in the face.

Immediately his eyes dropped.

"I will go and see you sometimes, Uncle Luke," he said, "if you will let me ; but I dare not go and live with you yet ; I dare not."

His face looked so drawn and haggard, and his eyes shone with such a strange light, that even Luke Edgcumbe did not press him further.

After his uncle had gone, he gripped me tightly by the hand. "If you let me go, Dan, I am a lost man. The one thing that tempted me was, to get away so that I could be without restraint. While I am with you, I feel I dare not be a beast, and I should be again if you did not hold me back. Besides, I promised — her, you know."

"Steve," I said, "she sent you a book, a copy of the life of the one Perfect Strength, the one Perfect Pattern. Have you read it?"

"I am reading it."

"Well?"

"It means so much or so little. It means so much if it is true, that I hardly dare believe ; if it is a sham, a lie — then ——"

"Steve," I interrupted, "years ago your faith depended on a woman. She failed you. Now believe in Him, if you can. It seems to me that Jesus Christ is the world's hope, — in spite of the sneers of the times. Try, old man. As you know, I seldom talk about religion ; it is too sacred to be paraded ; but faith in Him has kept me in many a

dark time. I am in darkness now, old man; you know why. The woman I love seems to hold out her hand to another, one who is unworthy. I don't know what to do, — except to hold His hand; and that is strength to me."

We sat for a long time talking; then we prayed.

Perhaps a sneer curls the lips of my critics as they read this. Let me ask them a question. Do they know anything that will help a poor, drink-sodden, morally diseased man, to whom life has been a bitter mockery, more than this? Will they give me some advice, whereby I could have better helped my friend, than by leading him to look up to One who I believe is the great universal Father?

I will look for their answer when I read the reviews of this history, and I will promise to weigh their words carefully.

CHAPTER III.

STRUGGLING UPWARD.

Our times are in His hand
 Who saith, "A whole I planned.
 Youth shows but half : trust God : see all, nor be afraid."
 ROBERT BROWNING.

AFTER Luke Edgcumbe's visit, Stephen worked very hard at his novel, — worked incessantly, worked with a dogged perseverance which made me fear for his health first, and afterwards for the quality of his work. I tried to remonstrate with him.

"You are not strong yet, old man ; take it a little more easily. You've been through enough to kill many people, and this constant toil is telling on you."

"It's medicine to me, Dan. If God ever answers a prayer, He's answering mine in this capacity for work which I've had lately. My story has got hold of me at last, and when I'm hard at it I forget my old craving, forget my old life. I feel as though a new and a better life were growing in me."

"But working in that spirit means hardness of tone in the work you are doing ; besides, a weary brain means weary work."

"My brain seems to know no weariness when my pen is in my hand. Besides, my story is a dream, — a dream of life."

"A pleasant one, I hope. A successful novel must have its humor."

“ I think the end will be pleasant. It is n't pleasant now ; it 's as bitter as gall.”

“ How is that, old man ? ”

“ I 'm writing my own past feelings ; I 'm living on memory ; I 'm telling what is the logical issue of a life without faith and hope ; and it 's a terrible business, Dan. I don't think I am doing bad work. You used to tell me I had a good literary style, and it seems to have come back to me.”

“ Are you working out the idea you had after we returned from Wales ? ”

“ Yes, in a way. Mine is a novel with a purpose. I could n't write without one just at present. I could n't tell a story simply to amuse. I seem to be dipping my pen in my own heart's blood. Yesterday and to-day I have been writing about my life in the City, — those years of hell, you know. The very writing has made me hope in myself a bit, I loathe it so. By and by I think the man I write about will be disillusioned ; I don't know yet, but I fancy he will become a child again : a child's faith and a child's heart will come back to him ; then he will see that there 's good, after all.”

“ That means that you are beginning to see the good ? ”

“ I can't help it when I think of Hope. The world 's a mystery, a big mystery ; but if God 's at the back, it 's different. After all, we don't know much. In looking back, too, I can think of evidences of something holy, something divine, in the poor outcasts around Drury Lane. If there 's a God, He has n't finished with them yet, has He ? Our existence here is but a fragment of life, — not a whole. The dross can be purged away, can't it ? and the love may remain. I can't say I believe it yet, but it 's becoming a part of my dream.”

“ Then you are dealing with the dark phases of life ? ”

“Only to make the reader shudder at them, as I do. Besides, I will write nothing that need make a young girl blush; there will be no prurient suggestions. I think I'm beginning to be saved, Dan, for I love purity again. But, for all that, I am trying to make people see things as they are. One need n't wade through a lot of loathsome details to do that, and I am sure it's not the highest art.”

“And when will you finish?”

“If I can keep up as I'm going on now, in another couple of months, I think.”

“And to whom will you take it?”

“I used to know a fellow who was reader for —— . I always thought him clever, and I think he'll read it fairly.”

It was pleasant to me to see his eyes flash again, and the look of interest resting on his face. He was still pale, but the haggardness was becoming a thing of the past; the lines that always made me sad were fading away, and his bearing was becoming decided again, as it had been in the old days.

“I hope it will go,” he said; “then I shall be able to repay you.”

I did not reply to this, but let him think I should expect remuneration for his long sojourn with me. I thought it would make him feel more independent, and would add to his motives for continuous labor.

“By the way,” I said at length, “have you heard what has become of the woman who betrayed your trust?”

“Do you mean my wife?” he said.

“If you still regard her so, yes.”

“She will always be my wife,” he said; “I can't be unmarried through that affair in the Divorce Court.”

“But she's married to another man.”

“According to the laws of the country, yes; but not according to anything true and high. If there's

a God, she's mine — yet, and will be while she lives. No, I've not heard from her; I do not know where she lives. I've inquired, though, and I hear she spends most of her time on the Continent."

"Old Colonel Tempest is dead," I said; "father heard from Witney to-day. He died insolvent."

"Then she will be at the mercy of Hussey now?"

"Have you any love for her, Steve?"

"No; and yet I am each day more and more feeling that our boy and girl marriage was the true marriage, and that all those after-events don't nullify it. Eh, Dan, but the first month of our marriage life was heaven — yes, there *must* be real, true marriages, pure marriages. If she had been all I fancied!"

"I was wondering if you would care to go down to Witney — for the funeral. You might see her."

He hesitated a second. "No, I'd better not," he replied; "the thought of seeing her arouses all the bitterness of my nature; it makes me want to curse her for those — years. I am trying to think the best of her, to think of her as I thought she was in the old days. When you and I met — first, you know, after our years of parting — I felt so careless of life, so hardened against everything, that I fancied I had no feeling towards her. Now I cannot help hating her for wrecking my life — and yet she's my wife — and living under the sanction of a hideous mockery as the wife of Hussey. Perhaps she has children! Ugh! — Dan, let's talk of something else. I cease to believe in virtue, in love, in light — in everything, when I think of her in that way."

As fortune would have it, the door-bell rang at that particular moment, and a minute later a servant entered, bearing a card with the name of Amos Collet printed on it.

"Amos Collet," I said to Stephen, "you remember him, don't you?"

“That text-quoting fellow — yes. He was sent to prison for five or six years, was n’t he?”

“Shall I let him come in here?”

“As fàr as I am concerned, yes.”

Amos Collet was still smooth, although his prison life had left its marks on him.

“I should like to see your father, Dr. Roberts,” he said, when he had taken a seat. I ought to say, too, that he was accompanied by another man, a fat, greasy individual, to whom he constantly referred as “pastor.”

“My father is out at present,” I said; “I can’t say when he will be back.”

“I should like to see him very much,” he said. “I have been told he is a religious lawyer. I myself practised for a few years, but I gave it up to do the Lord’s work.”

“Had you a good practice?” I asked.

“The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light,” he said sententiously. “You see, I had a conscience.”

“But you had some connection with the law after you called on me in Battersea some years ago,” I said; “and if I remember aright, you felt its whip rather keenly.”

“The ashes of the martyrs have always been the seed of the Church,” he replied, with an upward turn of his eyes. “I was working for the Lord, and had snatched a young man as a brand from the burning, and the law was the devil’s instrument for being revenged on me. But I am not to be beaten, Dr. Roberts. I am on the Lord’s work still.”

“Trying to snatch more brands from the burning?” asked Stephen.

“Ah! I remember you, Mr. Edgcumbe. You thought cruelly of me in those days, did n’t you? But I forgive you, young man. I hear you have found

out the truth of my warnings, too; I hope your sufferings have softened your heart. This young man, pastor, is a good subject for your ministrations."

The pastor looked at Stephen, then he took from his pocket a circular.

"Here you will find a summary of the views and doctrines of 'The Church of the Grace of God,'" he said solemnly. "I, as pastor, expound them week by week."

"Yes," said Mr. Collet, "we called about this church. As you know, Dr. Roberts, I was a member of the 'Brethren,' but I could n't agree with them doctrinally. They began to make their faith too easy; they admitted people too easy; in short, they were too—too broad for me; so the pastor and I have started a new church. The great thing London wants is sound doctrine, and we are going to give it. When doctrine is sound, London will be converted in a day. Isa. lviii. 2. The truth is, the churches want Grace and the Word. We have come to ask you to join us. You are a wealthy man, Dr. Roberts; what shall I put you down for?"

"What will the money be expended on?" I asked.

"The extension of the doctrines of the Church of the Grace of God," said the pastor, solemnly. "I am the ministerial agent, and Brother Collet is the lay agent. We want to print ten thousand tracts, and we want to have meetings all over London. Then, if London will not be saved, we shall be free of London's blood. Young man," turning to Stephen, "I call on you to give your heart to God, and to join our church. Rev. iii. 1. I only speak according to the Word."

It was some time before we could get rid of these worthies; and when at length we did so, I found that their visit, in spite of the ludicrousness of the whole affair, had made Stephen hard and bitter again.

"I find it almost impossible to believe in religion when I think of such fellows," he said.

I wonder how many young people, struggling to find a sure anchor in life, have had their little faith wrecked by the advocates of many of the churches?

Stephen went on with his work the next day, however, and about two months later he finished his novel.

"Will you read it, Dan?" he said. "I should like your opinion before I submit it to a publisher."

I consented with eagerness. I wondered often if this story, on which he was spending so much time, would prove a failure and a disappointment, and I almost trembled at the issues. The book was in many respects his hope. He believed it to be God's answer to his prayer. If it were a failure, then I feared the consequences. It would seem as though his first effort to struggle back to a better life were a vain mockery. At least, so I thought, but I was mistaken. I found that his faith rested on something surer than outward success.

"Steve," I said to him, "suppose this work of yours is voted a failure?"

"Most likely it will be," he said; "but it will not be a failure to me. It will have been to me a bridge across an awful gulf. Are you fearing for it, Dan?"

"Books and their successes are very curious," I said, "and I don't want you to build too much on this."

"Don't fear, Dan. It will be an awful blow if it fails; but I can never drift back again,—at least, I think not. Anyhow, I can't while hope lives in me."

I took his novel to bed with me one night, and read it through with great interest. Its great feature was its intensity. I sometimes found myself reading with set teeth, and it carried me onward as with a flood. He entitled the volume, — "VISIONS: A

Novel;" and divided it as follows:— First, A Vision of Ignorance; Second, A Vision of Hell; Third, A Vision of Heaven. The most powerful portion of the book was undoubtedly that which he called "A Vision of Hell." In it he painted certain phases of life in lurid colors. He showed, as I had never seen shown before, the ghastly nakedness, the bitter mockery, the cruel hollowness, of a great deal that is so much sought after. All the bitterness of his soul seemed poured out here. He laid bare the mockery of much so-called religious life, of church-going, of marriage, and of the real belief entertained with regard to life's successes and virtues.

Had I closed the book at the end of this second part, I should have said, "This earth is a hell. The pessimists are right!" When I read the third part, the vision of Heaven, I was moved by the pathos of the circumstances. This vision was not clear. I could see the struggle of my friend's life. I could see the forces at work within him which led him to try and see the soul of goodness in things evil. I could see him trying to catch a ray of the sun which was hidden by the clouds. His writing was not jubilant; there was no great conviction, but there was hope. He described the blackness of night with far greater power than he told of the brightness of day. Nay, there was no day in the book; it was only the first streak of dawn; but it was dawn. I could almost see the red disk of the sun, and it was morning.

In many respects the novel was a failure—as a work of art. There was little or no humor; he allowed the reader no time to rest. The scenery was always rugged, wild; the wild winds blew continuously. There were no restful scenes, and the laughter of children was seldom heard. And yet it was work of immense power. It was written by an earnest man,— and it was real.

When I came down the following morning, I found that Stephen was suffering from a great reaction. He had finished his work, he was tired, and he had nothing to occupy him. He had dreamed his dream, he had described his visions, and, as he told me, hell was real, but heaven was only a shadow. He should not take it to a publisher, he said; he would tell no lies, he was not bad enough for that. If he were to take only the first two parts, it would be a true book; but he could n't send it out to the world in that way. The novel then would only be the description of a ghastly cancer; it would only tell of life as an incurable malady. It would be a sin to ask people to read such a production. If the last part were true, it would be different.

"But was n't your vision of heaven true to you when you wrote it?" I asked.

"Yes, but I was buoyed up at the time. I was excited. On calm consideration, it is n't right, Dan."

"Steve," I said, "this is because you are suffering from over-work, and because you have forgotten God. That book must go to the publishers, if I take it myself. Besides, look here," I continued, as I opened the letters that lay on the table before me, "your nurse is coming to-day at noon. You must have a talk with her. Can you think of her life, and not believe in your vision of heaven?"

His eyes brightened. "Perhaps you are right, Dan; yes, you must be; but I have seen so much of hell that the sight has blinded my eyes so that heaven is often hid from me."

"Still you hope," I said, "and Hope is coming."

"Are you going to tell her about this novel?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Certainly," I said; "and you must ask her to read it."

“Must I?” he said; he was in one of his vacillating moods, which were becoming rarer as his strength came back. “Well, if she thinks it worth while, I’ll take it to a publisher.”

I hurried through my morning calls as rapidly as possible, and when I got back, Hope Hillyer had arrived. I found her chatting gayly with Stephen, who had brightened considerably under her influence.

“I’ve called for two reasons, Dr. Roberts,” she said: “the first is on business, in connection with my work; the other is to tell you that Miss Naomi Reviere has asked me to go down to Devonshire to spend my holidays with her. You see the summer is nearly gone, and I’ve had no rest yet, and I feel the need of it.”

“I did not know you were acquainted with Miss Reviere,” I said, somewhat stammeringly.

“Oh, yes, I know her well. She has visited our Home, and her uncle is one of the most liberal subscribers we have.”

“Do I know her uncle?” I asked.

“I don’t know. You may. His name is Gray, — Edward Gray, head of the house of Gray Brothers.”

“Oh, yes,” I replied, “and I know his son too, who promises to be as great a philanthropist as his father, — Walter Gray. Do you know him?”

A flush mounted her face, a flush which both Stephen and I saw plainly. “Yes, I know him,” she replied; and immediately changed the conversation.

“Has my friend told you about his novel?” I asked after a while.

“Oh, yes; I’ve got it. I’m going to read it at once,” she replied.

“Do you know that it depends on your verdict as to whether he takes it to a publisher?”

“Yes, he has told me that. I am sure it will be a great book.”

She said this quietly, and in an almost reverential tone, I thought.

“ You will let us know how you get on in Devonshire ? ” I said.

She looked at me earnestly for a minute, then she said : “ You look as though you want a rest, Dr. Roberts, nearly as much as Mr. Edgcumbe ; and the air of Ilfracombe is very good.”

After she had left, it seemed as though a cloud had hidden the sun, and both of us were silent for a time ; then Stephen broke out huskily, —

“ Dan, I believe in heaven ; I can't help believing when I see her. But it's not for me, old man, it's not for me.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE CURSE OF THE PAST.

God pity them both! and pity us all
 Who vainly the dreams of youth recall,
 For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
 The saddest are these: "It might have been!"

WHITTIER.

THREE days later, Hope Hillyer sent back Stephen's MS. with a letter:—

"I have read your story," it ran, "and I do not like it — enough. Perhaps, though, it is only a preparatory work, and some day you will finish it. You have n't seen a vision of heaven yet, and you did n't see any heaven in your vision of hell. That was wrong. I have seen heaven in hells worse than those you described. Love is heaven, so is kindness, and sacrifice, and forgiveness. I've seen all that around Drury Lane. You described the mockery, the hollowness, of much of the religious and social life; you told in terrible words the utter heartlessness of much of the social movements. Your vision is only partly true. There is good in the churches, and there are pure homes and noble business men. Some day you will see this, and then your visions will be of a different nature.

"But you must try and get it published. It is a great book, but not great enough to be worthy of what the writer will be. The man who took a homeless, persecuted waif, and inspired her with hope, will write a greater book than this by and by. It pulls down more than it builds up, but it is needed. Forgive me for what I have

written ; your novel was one of the most thrilling, lurid word-pictures I have ever read, but it is the book you *have* written, not the book you *will* write when your sun rises."

Stephen's eyes flashed. "My vision of heaven *is* real, Dan," he cried. "I know it is faint and unsatisfactory ; but it is true, and it suggests more than it tells. I'm going to the City this morning."

He made his way to one of the principal publishing houses, and asked to see the man he knew years before, George Kent by name.

George Kent was a literary man in the strictest sense of the word. He was a worshipper of art. Everything that interfered with art must be got rid of. He wrote reviews for some of the leading literary papers, and he sneered at the novel with a purpose ; but art, no matter if it were dirty, no matter if it were unfit to place in the hands of a young girl, that was to him the god to fall down and worship.

He looked up suspiciously as Stephen entered the room, and scanned him from head to foot. Evidently my friend's appearance recommended him, for he cordially invited him to take a seat.

"It is years since I saw you — and I heard that you were — off it."

"Yes, it is years since we met. I've been in some curious places since we last saw each other. But I've come back to life again. I've written a novel, Kent."

"Give up that idea ; the game's not worth the candle. Look here" — and he pointed to a great heap of papers — "all this is rejected MS."

"Yes, I dare say you have a lot of rubbish to get through ; but I had an idea you'd look through anything I might write."

"Certainly, my dear boy, — yes, I'll look at it.

Leave it with the firm in the ordinary way. What is it about?"

Stephen told him.

"Very good idea. With artistic treatment, such a subject might be made to tell. You've introduced no moral claptrap, I hope."

"You'll be the best judge when you've read it. But can you let me know soon? I don't want to wait three months."

"Yes; I'll let you know in a day or two. You'll excuse me now; I'm very busy."

Three days later Stephen received a letter from Kent. "Come up and see me — if you can, at once," he wrote; "I want to talk with you about your novel. You have the making of something good in it."

When Stephen entered George Kent's office the second time, he found that gentleman far more courteous and desirous to talk.

"I didn't think you had it in you, Edgcumbe," he said. "If you will recast certain parts of your story, cut away one part of it, and tone down some of your statements, you've got something that'll cause a stir."

"Let's go into details a little," replied Stephen.

"Very good. Well, then, your work is not artistic. You've been writing a sermon, and not a novel. What have you to do with copy-book morality? It's not the author's business to try and make immorality repulsive; it is for him to describe it and leave it. You've told of the blackness, the misery of what is called sin, but you haven't told of its joys, its pleasures. That kind of thing will not take in circulating libraries. You must recast two or three chapters on your vision of hell, and you've done something that will be talked about. Then you must finish at the proper ending of the book.

Your vision of heaven is opposed to every canon of art."

"Then you think the book should end with hell?"

"Yes, for artistic purposes. At the end of your second vision you have a fine dramatic scene. You leave a gloomy impression on the reader. Your villain does n't get killed, and your hero does n't live happy ever afterward. Of course that game is played out now. Only people of the old school work on those lines, and they are, many of them, far from artistic. But you have wanted to tag a moral on to your story; you have wanted to end it well; in short, you have made it a novel with a purpose, — the most detestable thing under heaven, — and thus spoilt good work."

"Then a novel should not have a purpose?"

"Certainly not."

"What should it have, then?"

"It should be artistic."

"Would you call Dickens artistic?"

"Oh, no. In many cases he was clumsy. Of course, Dickens had his own style; but for an artist, now, commend me to Zola. But, to return to this novel of yours, you absolutely must omit the last part. It would be suicidal to keep it in."

"But, Kent, I should n't have written the book but for the last part. I dare not let the book go out into the world without it. God knows there's pessimism enough in life without contributing my share to it. Why tell people there's sin and hell, that everybody's bad, and that goodness is a vain dream? If a purpose makes a novel a failure, mine's a failure. And if it can't go with its purpose, it shall not go at all. I tell you, Kent, I've written it with my own heart's blood, and I could n't tell of hell without trying to tell of heaven too."

"But art demands ——"

“Let art demand. It was my work to tell my dream as I dreamed. I have been damned through believing only in the bad; and if there has been one bit of salvation wrought in my life, it has been wrought by a glimmer of hope, and faith in goodness. Man, I should be untrue to the one little saving force in my life if I cut that out, or if I modified what you suggest.”

Kent sighed. “I am sorry, Edgcumbe. Your sacrificing art to purpose like this seems defiling the sacred for a fad. I thought better of you — I did, indeed.”

“Defiling the sacred for a fad? Nay, man. Kent, you know something of my history, but not all. I know, too, that many of you fellows sneer at morality as an old woman’s foible. Well, I don’t pretend to be any better than the rest of you; nay, I’m not as good, perhaps. But I’ve got as far as this: I loathe myself as I have been, and my hope is, that I may be better some day. God knows I’ve nothing to boast about, but ——”

“Come, now, I want no sermonizing. I’m no saint, but I hope I am a disciple of art. Let’s have art.”

“And is it art to leave a picture unfinished? Is it art to paint only one side of life? Is it art to see only the ugly? Is it art to see only sewers and gutters, and never see the green fields? There, Kent, if you can’t recommend your publishers to take the story without your suggested mutilations, then I’ll take it somewhere else. Thanks for your kindness, old fellow, but I couldn’t do what you suggest. It means so much to me, more than you can think.”

“Of course I’ve heard about your experiences; I saw an account of them in the papers. I don’t know as to the rights of the matter, and, after all, marriage is simply a matter of arrangement; but I should n’t

have thought you'd have bothered. Still, I don't say we won't take the book, but I must recommend that it be laid before another reader first."

And so the matter was arranged, and Stephen left the publishing house with a strange feeling at heart. It seemed as though even his friends were leagued to destroy the only force that was working out his salvation.

Why have I described this episode? Possibly it may not have much interest for the reader; and yet I think I have revealed something of my friend's real life by telling it.

A week later the book was accepted, and orders were given for it to be printed at once, so as to be ready for the late autumn season, the publishers, with great generosity, sending on a check in part payment. The sum was not great, but to Stephen it was the promise of independence.

"And now, Steve," I said, "let's go for a holiday. You've been overworking yourself, and you need a rest."

"But I want to get this thing through the press first, Dan."

"You can as well do that by the seaside as here."

"But where can we go?"

"To Ilfracombe."

He looked at me eagerly. "When shall we start, old man?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"Good; but why not to-morrow?"

I have not wearied the reader with my own troubles and fears in telling about my friend. Not, however, because I did not feel much, fear much, or hope much, but because my story is of Stephen Edgumbe, and not of Daniel Roberts. Still, those months in which my friend was struggling and fall-

ing, hoping and despairing, were for me fraught with intense anxiety. For I learnt to think of and love Naomi more and more each day. And yet I was constantly haunted with the news I had heard. She had promised, so I was told on good authority, to be the wife of a man who was in every way unworthy of her. Still, what right had I to judge her actions; and, if she loved him, what could I do? In spite of this, however, I could not help hoping. I could not believe that she could give her life to a man whose every action betrayed his worthlessness, and whose pretended religiosity carried the impress of sham. But then, love went by opposites; and I had known people altogether unfitted for each other, and altogether unworthy of each other, linked together for life.

It was not without a struggle that I decided to go to Ilfracombe. I felt I had no right; besides, I hoped to be brought into contact with a girl who, humanly speaking, had become the light of my life, and would thus fan to a greater flame a seemingly hopeless love. Still, I went. I remembered Hope Hillyer's words when we had parted, and I felt sure she had discovered my secret.

The visiting season was over at Ilfracombe when we arrived, for which I was very glad. I am anything but fond of the ordinary English watering-place, with its promenade, its piers, its noise, and its crowds. The weather, however, was delightful, and the rough coast, the fine scenery in the near distance, and fresh pure air were truly welcome, after long months of work and anxiety.

We had no sooner arrived than I bought a paper containing the list of visitors, and eagerly scanned it in the hope of finding the name of Reviere. In vain, however. I had expected that Hope Hillyer would have written telling me how she fared, as I had

asked her to do; but no letter had come from her. Still, I had no doubt but that she was with Miss Reviere, and it was because of this we had chosen Ilfracombe. I saw Stephen scanning the list of names, too, and I noted that he was very silent for some minutes after he laid down the paper.

After dinner we walked out together. The daylight was fast departing, but we could see the rolling waves and the outline of the coast. We walked northward, the roar of the surf sounding in our ears.

"After six years of London this is Paradise, Dan," said Stephen.

"What, have you not left London for six years?"

"Never since we were in Wales together. You remember."

"I remember."

"I shudder at almost everything that has happened since then, Dan."

"Yes?"

"It's a great black mystery, is this life, Dan. Those old men who wrote the Bible saw the truth, though. 'He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption;' that's true enough, isn't it?"

I was silent.

"I realize it, anyhow," he went on; "and yet God seems to laugh at men's conceptions of His laws."

"How?"

"Why, think. You remember how we found — Hope, you know. A little thing they called Shrimp. A child of shame. She had no father according to the world's ideas, and her mother, by the dictates of the world, was an outcast; and yet it was through her, a child of sin, that I was led first of all to believe in purity. I am hoping, old man, that there's more real goodness among the class from which she springs than the world credits it with."

“ I am sure of it.”

Neither of us spoke for some time after this, but presently he broke out suddenly, —

“ Everything reproaches me, everything upbraids me — everything.”

I tried to make him explain, but he would not speak again ; and by and by, when we went to bed, he said good-night with a bitter sigh.

The next afternoon we walked out together again ; I, sad at heart because, in spite of all my endeavors, I could not discover whether Naomi Reviere had left Ilfracombe or not, and because I was haunted with fears concerning her. We had not gone more than a mile away from the town, however, before my heart gave a great throb, for coming towards us we saw the woman I was longing to see, while Hope Hillyer walked by her side.

In spite of my excitement, I could not help noting the effect of the meeting upon Stephen. It was really the first time he had come into contact with the society of the outer world since he had begun to rise. It was true he had met and talked with Hope, but that somehow was different. There was a painful flush upon his face, and his eyes were averted, as though he were afraid. He was wondering, so he told me afterwards, if Hope had related his history to Naomi, and the thought of her having done so made the bright day as black as night.

But Naomi spoke to him kindly, far more kindly, I thought, than she spoke to me ; and yet, as we walked away together, it fell out that Hope dropped into the rear with Stephen, while I found myself by the side of the woman I loved.

I have never been able to talk fluently with women. No one can be more ill at ease than I when society small-talk is the order of the day ; while as a conversationalist, at the best of times I was always at a

discount. But this afternoon I was unable for a time to speak a word. And yet I wanted to tell her so much, wanted to ask her so much.

“You are not well?” she said at length.

“I’m afraid I’m a bit run down,” I stammered; “that’s why I came here for a rest, I suppose. I hunted the visitors’ list to find your name, Miss Reviere, but I could not see it. Why?”

I said this stammeringly, blushing like a schoolboy all the time.

“I would n’t have it put on any list,” she said; “besides, we are not staying in the town, but at a farm-house. It is so much better, so much quieter than in the town.”

“You have been staying here a good while?”

“Yes; mamma was not strong. The visit has done her such a lot of good. What led you to come here?”

“You,” I said, before I had time to think.

I saw a flush rise on her face, and I thought a look of anger flashed from her eyes.

“Excuse me, I’m afraid I’m not well, and I’ve said what I did n’t mean; that is —” and I stopped, feeling that I was making a fearful bungle.

“Thank you, Dr. Roberts,” she said a little stiffly, I thought; “of course I know you did n’t come because I was here. But people say Ilfracombe is healthy.”

“Oh, excuse me,” I stammered, “I am getting confused. I did n’t mean that, that —” I looked around me, as if beseeching help; but Stephen and Hope were some distance away, and almost hidden from us; then I went on blundering wildly, “Miss Reviere, Naomi, is it true you are engaged to Polden?”

“Dr. Roberts!” she said, as if in astonishment.

I went on in the same confused way, feeling all

the time that I was making an egregious ass of myself, yet not knowing what to do; then, while my heart thumped madly against my ribs, I made a great resolve.

“Miss Reviere,” I said, “you must forgive me talking like this. I wonder at my audacity. I never thought I should be able to dare to say what I am going to say. I *did* come here because I heard you were here. I—I could not help it. You—you see, I’ve been living in the hopes that—that—— Oh, forgive me, Naomi, but I love you like my own life.”

It was out now. What I was afraid I should never dare to say, I had told in the most blunt way.

“You’ll forgive me telling you so abruptly,” I went on stammering; “but somehow I could n’t help it; besides, I was afraid that—you know that people said—that is, about you and Polden—Oh, won’t you give me a little hope? You are not engaged to Polden, are you?”

“How dare you?” she cried; and her eyes flashed fire. “How dare you hint at such a thing? What have I done that you should come here to insult me?”

Her tone of voice angered me. After all, I had done nothing wrong. I had offered her an honest man’s love. Why, then, should she speak of my insulting her?

“I beg your pardon, Miss Reviere,” I said quietly. “I did not mean to insult you; I did not think the offer of the greatest thing I could offer would do that. Shall we return to your friend?”

Then I saw how mistaken I had been.

“No, no,” she cried; “I meant how dare you think I would engage myself to such a man as—him—you speak about—when—— Oh, don’t be angry with me. I couldn’t bear it! Besides, you said——”

The next moment, Naomi Reviere was sobbing on my breast, and her tears were not tears of sorrow.

"I — I never thought I should — tell you — like this," she sobbed presently; "I — I, oh, what will you think of me?"

I need n't tell any more. We stayed long together, talking of a thousand things. We wandered over hill and dale, forgetting Stephen and Hope, supremely happy in the love we had each revealed to the other.

Late that night I told Stephen what had happened.

"And she has promised to be your wife, Dan?"

"Yes, old friend; I'm the happiest man in the world."

We were together in his bedroom, and he was sitting resting his arm on a table. He was silent for a time; then I saw that his whole frame was shaking with great sobs.

"What's the matter, Steve? We sha'n't be less to each other," I cried.

"No, no, Dan, it is n't that; and I am glad — so glad, because of your happiness, so glad. But, Dan, there's no hope for me. God may forgive me, and I may become — a man in time; but I — I — but I can never feel what you feel. No pure woman can ever lay her head on my breast; no pure woman's lips can ever touch mine. I'm a polluted thing, Dan, although I'm young; why, I should scarcely have reached my prime yet. But there's no hope for me. I must drag out my life alone, always alone. I a — a polluted leper; a suicide; how can I ever hope to — to win a pure girl's love; how can any woman, knowing my past, be to me — a wife?"

He started up, his form trembling, his eyes flashing.

"Oh, curse the men that made me believe in a creed of despair; curse the woman that wrecked my life, robbed me of hope, of love, of moral purpose, and

made me what I have been! Oh, had those men taught me to believe in God, in goodness, had they taught me to look for purity instead of filth, I might, in spite of my wife's unfaithfulness, ay, I believe I should have been saved from becoming the thing I have been! But they kept on ringing the death-knell in my ears, and now there is no hope — can be none!”

Then I felt, as I had never felt before, the outcome of a creed of despair.

I tried to comfort him as well as I could, — tried to tell him that he was painting the future darker than it would be; but he paid no heed to my words. He wandered to and fro about the room in misery, his eyes burning with a dull red light.

“But surely, Steve, my happiness does not give you pain, my joy ——”

“It is n't that, Dan, it is n't that — only in this way: while you have told the story of your love, and discovered that it has been returned, I have discovered that some of my old life has come back; I have found out the secret of my heart. I, who thought I could never love again, love the girl who saved me, — I love Hope Hillyer!”

CHAPTER V.

HOPES AND FEARS.

Of all the Virtues, Hope is the most distinctively Christian.

JOHN RUSKIN.

I SLEPT very little that night. The fact of my own joy would have destroyed the possibility of much sleep, had not the revelation of Stephen's love given me so much food for thought. It seemed hard that in the midst of my own supreme happiness the sorrow of my friend should so press upon me; and yet there was nothing unreasonable about his love. What more natural than that he should be led to think fondly of the woman who had brought him back to life, not only in the literal, but in the truer, deeper sense? Nay, more; why should he not love her — marry her? He had married years before, and his wife had acted unworthily. They were now no longer legally man and wife. What was there to hinder him, Stephen Edgcumbe, from making Hope his?

This question opened up many problems. The remembrance of his misery, as he said that no pure woman could lay her head on his breast, caused a score of thoughts to flash through my mind. And so, although when thinking of my own prospects I was supremely happy, I could not help being sad when I thought of my friend.

The following morning I went to meet Naomi among the hills, but he would not come with me.

He dared not, he said. He must fight his battle alone. Not that he was going to give in; the old past should be past forever. He loathed the old life too much to return to it; and although his love for Hope could never be returned, he would not be untrue to it. Besides, Hope would not expect to see him; he was sure of that.

I am afraid I thought little of Stephen during the next few hours. What wonder? For months I had despaired of winning the woman I loved, and then happiness had come back to me in a moment. It was impossible for me to think sad thoughts that morning; impossible for me to take gloomy, cynical views of life. How could I when I had won the love of a young girl whose every look declared her pure? I will not try and tell of the things we talked about, of the explanations that were made, of the castles we reared, of the plans we made. They were only for us, not for others. The sun shone for us, the green fields were for us, the sea sung songs of hope for us, while the birds that still chirped on the tree-branches told each other of our love.

We arranged that I should see her mother that very afternoon, and ask her for her daughter's hand. Ah, that one morning repaid me for all the weary months of watching and waiting. Indeed, they became as nothing. When we enter into a great joy, we forget the sorrows that are past.

It was only when we parted at the farm gate that morning that I remembered to ask for Hope; and then I saw that Naomi looked thoughtful.

"She received a letter this morning — Dan." She said the last word hesitatingly, and with a blush. But I need n't have told that; everybody who has wooed and won a young girl knows all about it, and every young girl who has been wooed and won knows too. Still, it's natural for me to write about it, for I

love to think of that happy morning, the promise of many, many others.

“Well, there’s nothing strange in her receiving a letter, is there? Still, I hope it’s not to tell her to return to her work yet.”

“No; it’s not that — far more important. It is from my cousin, Walter Gray. He has made her an offer of marriage.”

“What, Hope?”

“Yes. He is coming this afternoon.”

“She’s a very noble girl,” I replied, wondering how the news would affect Stephen. “Does the family know of her history, her antecedents?”

“Yes. It was some time, I believe, before Walter could win his parents’ consent — that is, to be allowed to ask her to be his wife. My mother’s family are proud — she — she — that is, mother did n’t at first like her coming down here. For Hope has never made a secret of her past. However, Walter did n’t mind, and has at length persuaded his father and mother. My mother got a letter from my uncle this morning.”

“And do you know what Hope’s feelings are?”

“No; we have n’t talked much about such things. Anyhow, she’s never told me. I think she’ll accept him, though. I know she admires him very much, and I know his letter affected her very much this morning. Besides, he has been paying her marked attention for a long time.”

“Well, she’s worthy of the best man that ever lived,” I remarked, still thinking of my friend. Poor Stephen! it seemed as if the fates were against him, and that he would have to learn to crush the love that had newly sprung into his heart. It was not for him to love a woman who would soon be the wife of another man.

I did not tell him the news I had heard when I

returned to the hotel. I dared not. The marks of suffering were too plainly written on his face for me to intensify the pain he felt. And yet might I not as well have told him at once?

He tried to be cheerful with me, tried to laugh at my past fears, and pretended to tease me for leaving the noble band of bachelors; but I saw that his mirth was only seeming.

“By the way,” he said at length, “how did the news get abroad that she was engaged to Polden?”

“I think he circulated it himself,” I replied. “It is true he asked Mrs. Reviere for permission to pay attention to Naomi; and it is also true that that lady gave her consent. She seems to think very highly of him. He impressed her much with his piety, his broad theological views, and his prospects.”

Stephen shrugged his shoulders.

“You still feel bitterly towards him, Steve?”

“I don’t know. I hardly think so. He was but the tool in the hands of others, and had he failed to do what they wanted, some other means would have been discovered. Nay, Dan, I will not blame circumstances any more than I can help. Perhaps — well, by and by the sun may shine again, who knows?”

The news I had received that morning kept me from replying; knowing what I did, his prospects looked very dark.

“I will walk a little way with you this afternoon,” he said presently, “and then I will come back and correct some of the proofs that have just come. It will seem strange to see my name on the titlepage of a book.”

We went out together; the sky had become overcast, and threatened rain; but Stephen paid no heed to the weather. His eyes were dull, and there was a wistful look in them. We passed several groups

of people, but he did not notice them, until by and by, when we had got away from the houses, we saw a man and a woman coming towards us. I could see from the distance that the woman was tall and finely formed, while the man was insignificant to look at, and had a shambling gait.

“Look!” said Stephen, in a hoarse whisper. “Don’t you know who they are?”

“No; who are they?”

He did not speak, and a minute later we passed them. Then I saw that the man was Ralph Hussey, while the woman was she whom Stephen had once called his wife.

Our eyes met, but we did not speak. The mutual recognition was plain enough, however, and I shall never forget the expression on the face of Hussey, or the look that shone from the woman’s eyes. I saw, too, that she had changed much since the time I had last seen her. She had developed into a large woman, while her face looked florid and, I thought, coarse. His face, too, was bloated, and there was no happiness expressed on it.

“You saw, you know!” gasped Stephen.

“Yes, I saw,” I replied.

“They recognized us. You saw that, too?”

“Yes.”

“And she lives with him as his wife?”

“Evidently.”

We walked together for some minutes in silence; then he said, —

“I must get away alone somewhere, Dan. It all comes back again. Is it possible I ever loved that woman?”

I watched him while he strode away towards the sea. I could not help being sad, and yet I felt hopeful in spite of everything. He did not walk like a conquered man. There was firmness in his tread,

and he carried his head high, as though he meant to meet the future bravely. Then I knew that Hope, although lost to him, had inspired in him a faith which made him strong.

I need not tell of my interview with Naomi's mother. Suffice to say, after many questions, and some little persuasion, the matter was settled, and we were engaged. I stayed to dinner with them that evening, and sat by Naomi's side. Mr. Walter Gray was there, too, who seemed, I thought, well satisfied with himself and with life generally. He was rather a good-looking young fellow, with a fair, smooth face. Born into wealth, and reared in luxury, the battles of his life were few. He was not one who could enter into a great joy, neither was he capable of suffering much; but he was a well-behaved, entertaining fellow nevertheless, and I did not wonder that he was a general favorite. Hope seemed ill at ease, I thought; still, she chatted cheerfully, and entered with some degree of eagerness into the plans we were making for excursions.

When I left the house that night, I asked Naomi if she knew how Gray had fared in his wooing.

"It's not quite settled," was the reply; "but I think it is nearly as good. Hope has not told me about it, indeed, she seems reticent; but from what I can gather, she thinks Walter may regret his hasty choice. I fancy she has been raising her parentage and her early life as an objection, and will not allow anything to be settled. Anyhow, that is the impression Walter has left on my mother's mind. The whole matter is to be brought up at Christmas; meanwhile everything is to go on as usual."

"Then Gray is satisfied?"

"I should judge so, from what mother told me a few minutes ago; besides, as you saw, he seems very happy. Oh! I've no doubt it will be all right. I'm

so glad ; nothing would please me better than to have Hope as my cousin."

As I walked back to Ilfracombe that night, I wondered what course I ought to take, and presently came to the conclusion that it was better for Stephen to know the whole truth. Accordingly, as we sat in our room that night, I told him what I had heard from Naomi. He waited quietly until I had finished, but I saw how deeply my words moved him ; then he said slowly, —

"That doctrine of Hope is beautiful to think about, but hard to realize, Dan. After all, there is, can be, no hope for such as I."

"Don't say that, Steve."

"It's no use hiding the fact, Dan ; I am hemmed in on every side. It is no use grumbling ; my life is ruined. Not that I cannot be a man even yet ; I will be that, come what may, I will be that. At one time I despaired of it, but I've gone through that darkness, and have come out on the other side. It's a dark world in many respects, and it's hard to do right ; but a man can be a man, nevertheless. But reaping follows the sowing, and I've sowed, and others have sowed for me, so I must reap — and the reaping is terrible."

"But let's hope that the worst is over, old man. You've left the old life, you've entered on the new."

"Yes ; the worst is over — in a way. I'm no longer the thing I was. I am not the sport of every passion — now. I can say 'no' to a temptation ; but it's terribly hard, even now. The new life is but little developed yet ; and my old creed of despair had destroyed nearly all the manhood within me. But this is the ghastly fact that is always haunting me. I cannot *undo*. I cannot undo the fact that for years I lived a corrupt, loathsome life. I excuse myself ; I trace the forces that made me what I was ;

I say-I was more sinned against than sinning: but the fact remains. I feel I have no right to be in the society of pure people. Once, you know, I did n't believe in purity; but a new faith has come with a new life. I don't feel as though I've a right to take a little child in my arms and kiss it. Memory is a reality, and it haunts me until I am almost ready to despair again. Oh, I mean to be a man yet! Hope made me feel I could be; but the happiness and joy that others may feel is not for me."

"Hope still, Steve."

"Think, Dan. We saw my wife to-day. She is my wife; divorce or no divorce, she's that. I married her, and the decree of a judge could n't undo the marriage."

"But did n't her own action undo it? In spirit she's not your wife; the tie is broken."

"I can't get away from my vows so easily. I promised to be true to her as long as we both should live. She became false, and then I—— But don't let's talk of that; it's like looking at darkness. But since I've been trying to be a new man, the marriage vow becomes a reality again. Besides, if this were not so, the only woman I love, or ever can love, has, on your own confession, as good as promised herself to another; and if she had n't, what pure woman, knowing what I have been, would marry me? I am poor; I am unknown; behind me is a past at which I shudder; before me, in this life, is nothing but toil and sorrow."

"Come, now, Steve; that's a creed of despair restated."

"No, it's not. My outlook is wider. This life is but a fragment of existence. I think I believe in God, and because of that I hope that somehow good will be the final goal of ill. If I did n't hope that, I should drift again. It's the only thing that holds me to the better life, that makes me feel that, in spite of

all, the heart of the world is not evil, but good. It's only that which keeps me from trying to commit suicide again. Why, Dan, when I think of those years when I drifted, when I let every evil passion have free course, when I cast everything good to the winds, and remember that, do what I will, go where I will, live as long as I may, I can never undo the fact that I have been an evil thing which fed on moral corruption, I feel like going mad! Who am I, that I should have happiness? Who am I, that any woman can love me? But Hope made me believe in God, her goodness made me feel the possible goodness of the world, made me realize a Greater Goodness; then I said, 'He has n't finished with me yet,' and perhaps some time in the far-off future 'He will make me clean,' then I shall be worthy."

"And what of this life?"

"I hardly know. I am so weak, I lack will — resolution; but I mean to go back to London, and write."

"What about?"

"Hope; perhaps, by and by, love; but not yet, I could n't. A worthier than I must write of that."

"And you think you can bear the idea of Hope marrying Walter Gray?"

"Don't talk of it yet, Dan. I only realized my love for her last night, and for a moment the thought was heaven. I pictured her living with me, working by my side, and loving me. I forgot my own past, I only remembered hers. I thought of her as a little wizened thing with great gray eyes, which expressed a longing for a brighter life. Then I thought of her passing through the fire of temptation; I thought of her with everything to lead her to yield to wrong; I remembered the thousand seductive things which I was sure were said to her; and yet I saw her come out of the furnace unburnt, neither was the smell of fire upon her, for she had with her One who is greater

than temptation. Then I saw her giving up a life of ease and pleasure to do the work of a savior; and my heart burned with a great love which was full of joy. She seemed to be within my grasp; she was God's gift and message to me, until the memory of *my* past flashed before me and blasted my picture. Then I saw only darkness, and I cursed the men who had sown the seeds of despair in my life, cursed the books which wrecked my faith. But for them I, in spite of my wife, might have been worthy of her."

He had scarcely finished speaking, when a knock came at the door.

"A gentleman to see Mr. Edgcumbe."

"What is his name?"

"No name. He said he wanted to see Mr. Edgcumbe pertickler."

"Show him in."

A moment later, Mr. Ralph Hussey stood in the room.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW STEPHEN PAID HIS DEBT.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you. — JESUS CHRIST.

I SAW at once that Hussey had been drinking. He entered with a staggering step, and his breath came heavily.

“Do you wish to see me alone?” said Stephen, “or is your business of such a nature that my friend Dr. Roberts can remain?”

“Oh! it does n’t matter,” said Hussey, thickly. “There’s not much I’ve got to say; besides, you two were always together, and what one knew the other knew.”

“Very good,” said Stephen; “then my friend can stay. Please proceed.”

“You saved my life once,” said Hussey; “don’t you remember? I should have drowned but for you. I never liked you; and you might as well have left me to drown. I don’t know, though; I’ve done you a good turn since.”

“What?” asked Stephen. “I don’t remember you ever doing me a good turn.”

“Yes, I did; and jolly sorry I’ve been ever since. I took your wife off your hands, I did; and a nice life she’s made me live. I thought I was just paying you out for stealing her from me; and instead of that, I did you the best turn possible.”

Stephen did not speak.

“When I saw you to-day, I told her I’d have a talk with you; so I found out where you were staying, and I’ve come.”

“Is that all you have to tell me?”

“Not quite all. I told her I’d tell you another thing just to spite her.”

“Excuse me, I don’t wish to enter into any of your quarrels.”

“Oh, you need n’t be particular. There’s no love lost between us. We go out together sometimes, just to keep up appearances; but we are both heartily tired of each other, and I for one should be downright glad if some one would serve me as I served you.”

His brutality was sickening; and I saw, on watching his face, that he was a hard drinker.

“What I was going to tell you is this,” he went on. “By the way, of course you know that divorce affair was a make up from beginning to end?”

Stephen did not reply.

“Well, it was she who suggested it. She said she was sure you’d make no defence, and that whatever statement was made you would not deny it. Well, I was a fool about her in those days, so I got hold of Polden, who would do anything for me, and told him what I wanted. He arranged the matter. But it was Bell who suggested it in the first case;” and he laughed a half-drunken giggle.

“But why tell me this?”

“Oh, just to vex her. She thinks more of your good opinion than of anybody else’s. She used to be often wondering what had become of you. I think she’s half in love with you now.”

“Mr. Hussey,” said Stephen, striding up to him, “remember that in the eyes of England she’s your wife; remember, too, that she bears your *name* as your wife. Don’t degrade her as well as yourself.”

He looked at us stupidly. "Oh! you still take the high moral tone, do you? Well, she's knocked all that out of me. We are a sweet couple, we are. You don't thank me for coming, then. Good-night."

The warmth of the room had evidently caused the drink which he had been taking to have greater effect upon him, for he seemed more drunk when he left than when he came.

"Do you think what he said is true, Dan?" said Stephen, after he had gone.

"What about?"

"That it was she who suggested the means whereby our marriage might be nullified."

"Yes, I believe that was true."

"If that is true," said Stephen, slowly, "she has destroyed that marriage. No wedding tie, however binding, could make her my wife."

"That's what I think," I replied.

He was silent a few minutes, then he said quietly:—

"No, Dan; neither her sin nor mine can undo. If she has sinned against me, I have sinned too."

"If there could be an excuse for sin, there was excuse for yours; but there can be none for hers. Through her your life has been wrecked."

He started to his feet. "Wrecked," he cried; "yes, worse than wrecked. I wonder if ever I shall have the opportunity of paying the debt I owe her."

I asked him what he meant by his statement, but he would not reply. Hussey's visit had excited him much — I knew it was a terrible strain for him to speak quietly to the man who was the husband of the woman he had once called his wife.

When I came down the following morning, I found Stephen reading a letter. He looked very pale, and his hands trembled. He scarcely responded to me when I spoke, but sat and looked into vacancy, as though he were oblivious of my presence. Presently

he passed the letter to me without a word. This is what I read:—

“ Will you for the sake of what we once were, meet me to-night at ten o'clock at the entrance of the Torrs Walk? There is something I must tell you. I know I am asking more than I deserve, and yet I am not as bad as you think. We cannot speak ill of the dead — but you know I had a father. Meet me for your own sake as well as mine. If you will do this, you will make the burden of my life a little less heavy to bear. Till then think as kindly as you can of the woman who was once your unworthy wife.”

“ Shall you meet her?” I asked.

“ Yes,” he replied; “ I have sent a reply by the bearer of this letter.”

After lunch, while passing by one of the principal hotels in the little town, Stephen clutched my arm eagerly. “ Do you see?” he said in a whisper.

I looked, and saw Hussey sitting on the driver's seat of a carriage, to which was attached a handsome fiery horse.

“ Come, Bell, are you ready?” he shouted. “ This black Jack of a horse won't stand waiting for you here all day.”

His wife came out and climbed into the carriage, assisted by a well-dressed young man.

“ Where are you driving, Hussey?” asked the young fellow.

“ To the devil!” was the response.

“ Well, I can't say Mrs. Hussey will have congenial society,” laughed the other, “ but of course you'll be perfectly at home.”

They both laughed; then Hussey saw us. “ Look, Bell,” he said loudly, “ don't you see your old friend?” and again Stephen and the woman who had been his wife exchanged glances. Neither of them spoke,

however; and the next minute Hussey lashed the horse, which started off at a swinging pace.

“I say, ostler,” said the young fellow who had been speaking, “I don’t think you should have given him that horse to-day.”

“He would have ’im, sur. I zaith to ’im, I zaith, Sam is offul fiery, I zaith; but he roared out top me, sur, like anything. He ’th been a-drinking all the forenoon.”

“Well, I should n’t like to ride behind Sam with him driving,” replied the young fellow. “If I had n’t an engagement, I would get you to saddle a horse, and I’d follow. Is the road good?”

“The road’s all right, sur. Jist a bit hilly, and there’s one or two narrowish bridges; but tes saafe enough, Mr. Rogers.”

We walked on together towards the farm where Naomi was staying, for Stephen had consented to go so far with me. He would not enter the house, he said; he was too excited to see Hope; perhaps in a day or two he would be able to meet her calmly.

On arriving, however, I learnt to my chagrin that Mrs. Reviere, Naomi, and Hope were from home; but I found a letter from Naomi awaiting me. It stated that her mother had, without consulting her, arranged to call on an old friend that afternoon, and had promised to take Hope and her. She, Naomi, was awfully disappointed; but she could n’t help it, but hoped that I would come over again in the evening, when she would explain more fully. When I turned away from the farm, I saw Stephen slowly returning; but on my calling him back, he seemed only too delighted that I was going to spend the afternoon with him.

“Let us go for a long walk,” he said. “This country reminds me of Witney, and a ramble among the hills will bring back old times to us.”

“I’m afraid I’ve been a poor companion,” I replied; “but you’ll forgive me, I know.”

“I’m only too glad that you are happy, old chap,” he answered, almost cheerfully. “I’m not enough of a dog in the manger to grudge you joy, and yet it’s a bit hard for me to bear up.”

“Dan,” he continued presently, after a few minutes’ silence, “can you guess what she wants to speak to me about?”

“No; I am sorry you are going.”

“I don’t want to go, and yet I feel I must. She was my wife once, and I want to think the best I can of her.”

“Surely you don’t care for her still?”

“No, no — that’s all dead. It is n’t that — her existence is a burden to me. While she lives, she will haunt me like a nightmare. I — I believe I hate her. But for her, Dan, in spite of everything, I would go to Hope and tell her I love her, and ask her to take the life she has saved.”

“God has saved your life, not she,” I said.

“Yes; but God saved it through her. She is the channel through which He works. I’ve been thinking about Hope and that Gray. Would n’t she, if she had loved him, have accepted him at once?”

“I should say not,” I replied, thinking he had better try and destroy a love which was hopeless. “She would naturally feel that her birth and early associations were obstacles in the way of her accepting him.”

“Perhaps so,” he answered, with a sigh; “besides, it’s no use my troubling about it. I could not ask her while the — other woman is living; and yet the thought of winning her is like my dream of heaven. I’ll meet her, Dan; but” — and his eyes gleamed savagely — “I feel as though I could kill her.”

“What’s come over you, old man?”

“I feel that it would be heaven just to give myself over to the devil for one day again; not to be as I was, but just for revenge. That’s why I’ve made up my mind to meet her.”

“Then Steve, old man, don’t go.”

“Yes, I shall go,” he laughed; “I shall go. I was a hypocrite just now. I said I wanted to think the best of her. I don’t. I want to make her feel what I’ve felt, to make her suffer the hell I’ve suffered, to drag her where I’ve been dragged.”

“Come, old man, that’s not worthy of Hope.”

“Hope!” he cried, “it’s for the sake of Hope! Does n’t she stand between Hope and me ——” He stopped suddenly. “Nay, Dan, you are right, and I’m far from being a man yet.”

We trudged on mile after mile without speaking, but I could see his lips trembling, and his hands clenching nervously.

“I’m wanting to think the best of her, Dan, wanting to forgive her,” he cried at length; “but it’s hard. If she were dead, perhaps I might; but when I think of her ruining my life, driving me to ——. But there, one day I think one thing, and another the next; I’m just like a child, and as weak as a child.”

We were standing, I recollect, at the time in a narrow lane. On one side was a hedge, on the other was a bank about three feet high, with a flat top. This bank sloped up to a hedge. The lane was on the side of a hill, and sloped down to a narrow valley, or gully, where a river ran. Across this river a bridge had been built, which was flanked with iron bars. To the ordinary country traveller there was nothing dangerous about the place; the farmers had for generations driven along this road to market, while the ordinary traffic of the neighborhood had, so

I was afterwards informed, never been attended by a serious accident.

I was about to reply to Stephen, when our attention was arrested by the sound of horse's feet and the rush of wheels.

"Whoa!" a loud voice shouted; "whoa, you black devil! D—— you! Stop, I say!"

Just then the conveyance swept into sight, and my heart seemed to stand still, for seated in the carriage were Hussey and his wife. Hussey was sawing at the reins by which he tried to hold the excited horse, which dashed along as though the carriage were a bit of thistledown, while his wife sat paralyzed with terror. Their danger was imminent. The horse was going down hill; the bridge was only a few hundred yards away, and was barely wide enough for the carriage to pass when carefully driven; beneath, fifteen or twenty feet below the bridge, was a river, not deep, but its bed was a mass of rugged rocks. Hussey had completely lost control of the horse; evidently the animal had got the bit between his teeth, and had been probably maddened by his drunken driver's treatment.

"Save me, Stephen!"

She had seen us, then, and had realized her danger. It was the first time she had spoken to him for many long years.

Involuntarily I looked at him, and I shall never forget the look on his face. At that moment he seemed to realize everything. All the past, the present, the possible future, flashed like a beam of light before his eyes. Love, hatred, hope, despair, were all present with him at that moment.

The carriage came nearer and nearer, Hussey scarcely checking the speed of the maddened horse.

"Save me! Oh, save me, Stephen!"

It was madness, worse than madness, as I thought

then, and still think. There was but one means of stopping the terrified beast, and that was to grasp the bridle, and drag his head to the ground. But what chance was there of doing such a thing? Where there was one chance of success in such a perilous undertaking, there were ninety and nine of failure, in which case the wheels would sweep over the body of the one who would rescue!

There was not a moment's time for hesitation, and I, irresolute, and not physically courageous, would have stood by, while horse and people swept on to destruction. I saw the light flash from Stephen's eyes, and then I realized that he was not by my side, but that he was swinging by the horse's head, his right hand holding fast by the head-gear.

With half-blinded eyes I followed, and although the horse's speed was checked, I had difficulty in keeping close to the carriage. The next thing I can remember was hearing a horrible crash, while I could dimly see that Stephen was dragged along the ground, close to the horse's head.

I heard a shout from a field close by, and fancied I saw some men running towards us; but I was too excited to be sure, for at that moment I heard another crash as of breaking, and then the wheels ground against the rocks by the roadside, and a moment later the carriage overturned with a tremendous thud. By this time the horse was nearly mastered; but it was too late, for at that moment he dashed the body of Stephen against the iron bar which flanked the bridge, and then stumbled forward heavily towards the gully, dragging the shattered carriage behind him.

I rushed to the horse's head, and pressed it to the ground. It was all I could do at that moment, and it was the only way to finish Stephen's work of salvation, if salvation were possible. In another minute

the men I thought I had seen running towards us arrived, and began to talk excitedly.

“Both dead, don’t you think so, Dr. Roberts?” said the country surgeon whom I had sent a man to bring. I did not like to take the responsibility under such circumstances; especially as I had no surgical instruments.

“Yes; they are both dead.”

“And your friend?”

“I don’t know yet. What do you think?”

“He’s quite unconscious now, as you see. Two of his ribs are badly fractured, his left arm is broken, and then there are those terrible bruises on the head. It was a grand thing he tried to do; but it was madness, pure madness, to endanger his life like that. However, he did his best; and could he have brought the horse to his knees a few seconds before, he might have saved them; but those rocks, the narrow bridge, and the gully did for them. Have you seen the carriage? It is split up like matchwood.”

“Yes; it was a terrible affair.”

“They were not friends of his, I suppose?”

“No.”

“Well — ah, here’s the hotel proprietor; he’ll know all about them.”

I turned and saw a group of men and women gathered together. They were looking with a kind of subdued wonder at the bodies of the man and woman who had been killed. One bolder than the rest had pulled aside the cloth which had been thrown over their faces, and the crowd, seemingly fascinated, whispered one to another.

Hussey’s face was cut and bleeding, but his wife’s was scarcely touched. She looked handsome, even in death, and revealed much of that beauty which made Stephen her slave years before.

"'T'es a ter'ble sudden death," said one of the laborers.

"Ter'ble," replied another, who was evidently religiously inclined, "ter'ble. I wonder ef they was boath prepared to die, for by this time they do stand at the bar of God."

"Ed'n she purty," said another.

And so they went on talking until I, sickened and faint, turned again to the spot where Stephen was lying. The blood was slowly trickling down his face, and his mouth twitched as if he were in pain.

I took his hand in mine, where it hung limp and unresisting.

"Ah," said the doctor, coming up, "the stretcher will soon be here. What do you think about him, Dr. Roberts?"

"The sooner he is taken to bed, the better," I said; "and then, all that human skill can do shall be done for him."

I had sore misgivings, however; and I remembered his promise to meet the woman who lay dead, that very night.

"Would he meet her?" I wondered.

A group of men came up with a stretcher, upon which we gently laid him, then we started on our walk to Ilfracombe.

I turned towards the bodies which lay so still by the road-side. Well, she who had wrecked his life had run her course, and Stephen had offered his life to save hers; he had wiped out the debt he owed her in blood.

"What had she to tell him?" I wondered; "what would she have said to him had they met? Anyhow, the words she would have spoken would never be uttered this side the grave. And if she would have pleaded for forgiveness, she would have to wait

until he too had crossed the line she had crossed, the line to which he was so near.

“The last words she had spoken to him were a cry for help, and he had responded to that cry, even though his life were the forfeit of his response.

“Yes, Stephen, my friend,” I said; “you have wiped out the debt you owed her.”

“Would he die?” I wondered; “would all these long years of struggling and pain end thus?” It would seem terribly hard if it were so. And yet, after all, as he had said, our existence here is but a fragment of life. Still, there was a great pain in my heart, for I loved him as much as one man ever loved another.

CHAPTER VII.

BACK TO WORK AGAIN.

Through labor to rest, through combat to victory.

THOMAS A KEMPIS.

ALL through the time of the inquest, the asking of questions, the hundred gossiping stories, and the funeral, Stephen's life was trembling in the balance. At one time I despaired of his recovery; but after some days of weary waiting and watching came a change, and then I knew he would live, that his strong vitality would overcome the terrible shock he had suffered, and that in a few weeks he would be restored to his normal health.

Hope Hillyer nursed him through his unconscious hours,—nursed him tenderly and well; and yet I thought I felt a difference in her. A change had taken place since that other weary time of watching we had undergone together, after he had been pulled out of the river. Naturally I attributed it to the fact that she regarded herself as in some way engaged to Walter Gray, who would perhaps resent the idea of the woman who had practically promised to be his wife nursing a man of whom he knew nothing. And yet I thought she could hardly do less. She was skilled as a nurse, and was, moreover, the only woman in Ilfracombe whom he would care to have by his bedside. Besides, she owed much to him,—owed, perhaps, what was dearer than life itself. When he showed signs of returning consciousness,

however, and was practically out of danger, she pleaded her work in London, and left Ilfracombe. Still, the worse part of the work was over, and by the aid of a good, motherly old soul, I did what was best for him.

As may be imagined, the affair caused a great deal of gossip, and presently it leaked out that the woman he had tried to save had once been his wife. Then, I do not know how, rumors were started in the papers that the divorce was but a concocted affair, and that Stephen, instead of being a man who wronged his wife, was himself wronged, and had now almost given up his life in the vain hope of rescuing hers. The laborers who had been working in the fields, and who saw the danger of the man and wife, testified to what Stephen had tried to do; and altogether Stephen was the hero of the hour. But he was unconscious of it all. He lay very near the dark river, and the noise of its waters drowned the clamor of men's tongues. But Hope listened to the reports, and read the newspaper paragraphs eagerly.

Thus, after influencing him so terribly, Ralph Hussey and the woman I first knew as Isabella Tempest passed away from the pathway of my friend's life.

I told him these things as he could bear it; and as the days passed away, and he grew strong enough to go out, we talked of this and a thousand other things. I noticed, too, that a great change came over him after this last illness. During the time he had been writing his book he had passed through strange moods. Sometimes he was bitter and despairing. He complained of circumstances, he cursed the forces which made him what he was. I knew, too, that as he realized the wreck of his life, he felt, instead of a hard carelessness concerning the woman he called wife, a bitter hatred which led him to curse her, and

the day on which he had first seen her. - But all that passed away, and one evening, as we sat watching the setting sun, and listening to the waves as they broke upon the rocks, he told me of the change.

“You remember how bitter I was that afternoon, Dan,” he said. “You remember what I said. I felt as though I would be glad to see her dead, that I could sharpen the knife to place in the hand of her murderer. Just then, you know, she cried for help, and at that moment everything evil within me seemed to tell me to let her die. I think I lived my life over again during those moments the horse galloped towards us. Then I made a great resolve, and, realizing the danger I courted, I leaped at the horse’s head and caught the bridle-rein. With that resolve, and with that act, I knew that a great purifying power passed through me, that a greater life had entered me; I felt that the work Hope began was a reality at last.”

I looked at his eyes, and I saw they were lustrous as in the old days, — saw, too, that his face, though worn and thin, was the face of a man who had entered into a great victory. I knew then that Stephen was a new man.

A few days later, Luke Edgcumbe came down to Ilfracombe. He had seen the newspaper reports, and wanted, he said, to tell how glad he was that his nephew had escaped. He wanted to congratulate him too, he said, on some of the reviews he had seen of his book.

I ought to have said, in this connection, that Stephen’s book was published two or three days after the accident. It had not made a great sensation, but it was beginning to be talked about in certain circles, and letters of congratulation had been sent to him.

“I seldom read a novel, but I got a copy of yours

and read it," said Luke. "I wanted to see what sort of a mess you made of it."

"Well," said Stephen, "and now for your criticisms."

"From a money standpoint it won't be worth £50," replied Luke.

"No, I don't think it will."

"Then why did you write such a story? Such a lurid picture as you drew made me feel uncomfortable for days. People don't like to be harrowed up. You did make it a bit brighter at the end, but I saw that one of your critics complained of you even for that."

"Yes, more than one has done that."

"Then why write such a book?"

"Because I wanted to leave an impression. I wanted my book to be a warning and a promise."

"Warning and promise. Don't bother, lad. If you will be a fool, and not share in what I've made, then write something that will make money. To be frank, I believe you have the power to make a hundred or two a year that way; but don't bother about people, let them all go their dirty, mean ways."

I hardly remember the exact words Stephen gave as a reply, but I know that a few minutes later the younger man was telling the older one the story of his dark days, and telling, too, of the influences which helped him to become what he was. He did not speak harshly, but quietly, earnestly, Luke Edgcumbe listening attentively all the while.

When Stephen had finished, his uncle's face was a study; but he did not speak. A look of wonder, incredulity, and sorrow seemed to rest there, and he sighed as though in pain.

For a long time we were all silent; then Luke broke out abruptly, —

"And you say that Hope saved you?"

"Yes, that was it. A hope for my own life, a hope for the life of others, for the life of the world.

A struggling faith in an Eternal Goodness at the heart of things, — but for that I could never have risen.”

“And that little girl — that girl you called Hope — where is she now?”

Stephen told him, a flush mounting his pale cheek all the while.

Luke Edgcumbe looked at his nephew keenly.

“Engaged to Gray, is she?”

“I suppose so; I’m told it’s as good as settled.”

“Steve, my boy, you love this little thing you saved, do you? Is that your secret?”

I never heard Luke Edgcumbe ask a question so gently before. I am not sure, but I thought his eyes were dimmed with tears.

“Yes,” replied Stephen.

“Poor lad! poor lad! And you hope?”

“Not in that way,” replied Stephen. “No; I dare not. But I believe in her,—her purity, her goodness.”

Again Luke was silent; then he broke out again:

“And if she marries this Gray, this heir to that precious philanthropist, will it not sadden, embitter your life?”

“Sadden it,—yes; but the other,—while I believe in God,—no.”

“What has God to do with it?”

“If God is God, this is but the fragment of life. He will complete, make all things right.

“That is your hope?”

“My ultimate hope.”

Again there was a silence; then Luke spoke again:

“Steve, my lad, I loved your mother, worshipped her; and when she married your father, I felt a great empty place in my heart. Since then — But there — if I’ve done you a wrong, forgive me, my boy. You — you are like her, and I find my heart is n’t dead

yet. But you've found what I have n't found. There, don't let's talk any more to-night!"

Half an hour later, Luke Edgcumbe was grim and satirical as before, but he was n't cynical.

As soon as we could, we returned to London; indeed, I had often been obliged to take a journey to the City, in order to attend to matters which needed my presence; for although my assistant was much trusted and respected, I found it difficult to remain at Stephen's side as long as I did. Arrived there, the old work awaited me; ay, and the old joys too, for a doctor's life has its joys. But more than all, a bright prospect was before me, for Naomi had promised to link her life to mine when spring came.

Stephen still stayed with me; and, his novel being fairly successful, he started to work on another. He worked hard to prepare for it, and spent many a long day and night in Battersea, studying the life and condition of the people.

"What is to be your title?" I asked.

"I have two," he replied; "I hardly know which to take yet."

"A great deal depends on the title," I said; "what are they?"

"They are both from Browning's 'Pippa Passes.' One is 'God's in His Heaven,' and the other is 'All's right with the World.' Both mean the same, but I hardly know which is best."

"And you believe this after studying the life of Battersea?"

He gave me a quiet look, and I was answered.

"You are going to be the prophet of hope, then?"

"I'm going to try."

"Hope for yourself, then!"

"What do you mean?"

“Just that. Christmas has come and gone, and there’s no news of an engagement.”

“You know something?”

“Nothing but that.”

He was silent for a few minutes; then he said quietly, —

“It may be, Dan, it may be; but she’s not for me. After all, the fact of the ghastly past remains. Dan, do you think a man with such a past as mine, no matter how sincere his repentance, no matter the life he lives afterwards, has the right to ask a pure girl to be his wife?”

I was silent. It was a question I dared not answer. I know that impurity among men is regarded by many as a matter of no importance. I know that satiated *roués* are often regarded by enterprising mammas as brilliant partners for their young daughters. But was it right to have two codes of morality, — one for men, and another for women? Was it right that the fallen woman should be ever excommunicated from society, and from all that her heart might long for, while the man who made her what she was could be received into the “best houses” with open arms?

“Dan,” he continued presently, “have you read any of this new literature which has come out, this work of the ‘modern woman’?”

“God save me from such a thing, old man!”

“You have not read this new novel, ‘The Superfluous Children,’ then?”

“No; I tried, but I could n’t get on with it.”

“Most of it is poor, drivelling stuff, I’ll admit. Effeminate bosh, with a good deal of dirty innuendo thrown in; but it raises this question, it puts it strongly.”

“And what is the answer given? How does the writer solve the problem?”

“In the only way she says it can be solved. The writer contends that it is the duty of every woman to demand purity on the part of the man she marries. If he cannot testify to this, it is for her to refuse him. Listen to this: ‘I contend that a woman sins against her body, sins against her soul, blasphemes her God, if she consents to be the wife of a man who has been impure. Every man demands that the woman he marries shall be able to show a clean past; then let every woman also demand that the man she marries shall be able to prove a clean past; and if he cannot, let her leave him, even although it be at the marriage altar, or at the marriage supper. When a woman falls, her life is ruined; let this be true in the case of men. When this becomes a part of our moral code, marriages will be pure, and the dawn of a new day will come for the sex which has been crushed by the tyrant heels of sensual brutes.’”

He stopped reading. “What do you think of it, Dan?”

“If the woman did n’t write so bombastically, there would be an amount of force in what she says.”

“She tells the truth, old man.”

“You think so?”

“I’m sure of it. But even if my desires and plans were not impossible, she rings the death-knell to my every hope of taking a pure woman to my heart.”

Just that moment my father came into the room, and I asked him whether he had read the book in question.

“Yes,” replied my father, “I have read it.”

“Well, and what is your opinion?”

“I think it is written by a woman.”

“Evidently; but what may your remark mean? You would not condemn a book because it is written by a woman?”

“Certainly not. What I meant was, that the

woman has got hold of a truth ; but, woman-like, she has expressed it in a one-sided way. It is true, she pretends to see the many sides of our nature, and has wandered far and wide in order to make it appear that she has taken a broad grasp of things. But she has not. She fastens on one sin. Who shall say that sin is worse than another ? Sin does not depend so much on the particular way in which it expresses itself, as on the condition of the life of the sinner. A man debases his mind to find satisfaction, he lies, he concocts foul schemes, and by it makes a fortune ; and the writer would not regard this sufficiently heinous for a woman to leave a husband or refuse a lover. He debases his body, and she goes into hysterics. Yet which is worse ? ”

We were both silent.

“ Is this woman so absolutely pure that she takes such a high hand with men ? ” went on my father. “ Do not all of us need to read that story in the New Testament where those hypocrites brought the sinful woman to Jesus, and quoted to him the law of Moses ? Would any of us, men or women, be quick to condemn if we heard the Divine Carpenter’s words, ‘ Let him that is without sin cast the first stone ’ ? Mind you, there is much truth in what the woman says : there are at present two laws, one for men, and the other for women. The man may have an evil past, and nothing is thought of it ; the woman, if she has an evil past, is a leper, an outcast. In insisting on the same moral code for both, she does a good work ; but when she starts out to proclaim the superiority of either sex, she is one-sided.”

“ But do you not think women purer than men ? ” asked Stephen.

“ As far as certain forms of sin go, probably ; but deadly sin is not confined to lust. Still, this book

will have an influence on the times ; only there is a danger lest it lead women to be vain and foolish."

"There is truth in what you say," said Stephen, eagerly ; "but it seems to me you have left much unsaid. What, for example, would you say to ——"

He did not finish the sentence, for at that moment a knock came at the door, and a servant entered bearing a letter. It was addressed to Stephen, and when he looked at the handwriting, his hands trembled.

"I must go," he said, giving me the letter. It ran as follows : —

17 BILFORD ROW,
CHELSEA, S. W.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Will you come to the above address at once ? A woman named Baker says she wants to see you. She has told me why. Please come if you can, for she says she cannot die happy until that which is preying on her mind is removed.

Yours sincerely and gratefully,
HOPE HILLYER.

The next minute Stephen was on his way to Chelsea.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REFINING FIRE.

Darkness fled,
Light shone, and order from disorder sprung.
Paradise Lost.

WHEN Stephen arrived at 17 Bilford Row, he was at once ushered into the room where the woman Baker lay. The place was lit by a small paraffin lamp, which smelt badly, and, in addition to the unwholesome atmosphere of the room, made it almost impossible to breathe at the first entrance. On a bed in the corner lay the woman whom Stephen had not seen for long years, and by her side sat Hope Hillyer.

“I’ve come, you see,” said Stephen, on entering.

“Yes; I told her you would come. Look,” she said, turning to the woman, “Mr. Edgcumbe is here.”

The poor thing gave a moan, and then started coughing. It was a consumptive cough; and from the way she panted and gasped when the fit was over, Stephen judged that she was near death.

She looked up into his face beseechingly, and Stephen saw the havoc which sin and dissipation of all sorts had made upon her face. “You know all about it,” she gasped; “do you forgive me? I—I was a bad un—then; I’ve been worse since. It was a dirty trick—and it just makes me wild—forgive me, will you?”

“Yes; I forgive you,” replied Stephen.

“You mean it really? I didn’t like to do it; but it meant a good deal o’ money, and, after all, I was too far gone to mind so much, — only the doctor and this young lady says as ’ow I can’t live, and I’d like to die square if I can. I don’t mind Jack, he never cared a —— for me; but you never did me no harm. The chap that was with you that night put me up to it. Said you was a chapel-going hypocrite, and all that, so I said I would; but now I can’t sleep for it, and I can’t die for it.”

“Don’t trouble,” said Stephen; “the past is past, and I — I’m not the one that ought to be hard.”

“Thank you, thank you — you can’t be a bad bloke. Do you think God is anything like you?”

Stephen did not speak.

“I hope He is,” gasped the woman, after another fit of coughing. “He might give me another chance then, for, honor bright, I don’t think I’ve had a chance to be good here. I was taught to go on the loose when I was a little un, and it’s jolly hard to git off a track like that.”

“I believe God will give you another chance,” said Stephen. “I’m sure He’ll do the best for you.”

“Why do you think that?”

“Jesus Christ tells me so.”

“Ah, that’s what this young lady says. I am glad; I — I — think I’d like to sleep a bit. You’re sure you forgive me. I was —— mean; but you do, you’re sure?”

“Yes; I’m sure.”

The woman sighed contentedly, and closed her eyes.

He turned to Hope. “Thank you for writing me,” he said. “I am glad if I have been able to give the poor thing any peace.”

Hope led the way to the passage.

“We can talk better here,” she said. “And I don’t want to disturb her.”

“Where did you find her?” asked Stephen.

“Down by Chelsea Barracks, at midnight, last Wednesday. The matron and I were there together. She was ill then, and we were full at the Home; but she paid for this room, so we brought her here. I’ve been here ever since. It’s been terrible, but the doctor says most likely she’ll die at midnight. She told me the story about — you, yesterday. That Polden must have been a most —— But there, he was employed by others.”

“And they are dead. Let them rest,” said Stephen, quietly.

Hope looked up into his face; and then, as they both heard a moan in the room, she went by the bedside for a minute, and then came back again.

“It’s terribly sad, is n’t it?” she said.

“God has n’t finished with her yet,” said Stephen.

“No,” she said; “life would be a mockery if He had.”

“Hope,” said Stephen, “I would like to have a talk with you some time. Not now, — I could n’t say what I want to say here, — but some time when you have a free hour — alone. May I?”

She hesitated a second; then she said slowly, “Yes; that is, as soon as I can.”

“And you will let me know when? Or say next Sunday night — after all the churches are closed? I’ll come to the Home.”

“I may be engaged then.”

“But if you are not engaged; and you can drop me a line if you are, telling me when you will be at liberty. I will meet you at church if you like.”

“Yes; come on Sunday night, if I do not write — to the Home. You would not care to go to the same place of worship that I go. It is a humble little

place, where unlearned preachers come and talk to us. Do you go to any church? And do you believe in them now?"

"Yes; I go sometimes. There is much that's wrong, *very, very* wrong in the churches. There's bigotry, narrowness, caste, and hollow formalism; but many of the people are really trying to do good, and after all they are the greatest force for good. A people without a religion is hopeless."

"Yes, you are right; but I must go in now. She needs me, and the doctor will soon be here. Good-night."

"Good-night, Hope. Don't think too ——" He did not finish the sentence, but dropped her hand suddenly, and hurried down the street.

During the next few days Stephen was strangely agitated, especially as Sunday drew near. On the Saturday night, I remember, he accompanied me to Naomi's home, and once during the evening he seemed almost entirely to lose control of himself. Mrs. Reviere was one of those dear, motherly old souls who are always talking; and when Naomi and I were taking part in one of those foolish conversations in which lovers of all ages indulge, Mrs. Reviere appealed to Stephen whether we ought not to be ashamed of ourselves.

"Especially dignified Dr. Roberts, with whom I can hardly feel familiar enough to call Daniel," said the old lady; "ought he not to know better? But there, I expect you'll be the same when you've got the chance. I've been looking out for a young lady for you, and I've got my eye on two or three that I think will suit. I used to think that Hope Hillyer might do; but I suppose, when she leaves that awful work she's doing, she'll marry my nephew, although I must say Walter has been very quiet about it lately. Any one might think nothing was to come

of it, after all ; although I must say Hope seemed very friendly with Walter, and Walter is no doubt very fond of her, and seemed quite confident when we were down in Devonshire that the matter would be settled by last Christmas."

The old lady was continuing in the same strain, when Stephen got up and rushed out of the room.

"It's most extraordinary behavior," said Mrs. Reviere; "but I think he must be ill. Go after him, doctor, and give him some *sal volatile* or something. Here, take my smelling-salts; they are splendid for a headache."

Stephen came back immediately, and apologized for his rudeness; he seemed outwardly calm, yet I knew he was suffering.

The next day he went for a long walk in the country, but came back in time to keep his appointment with Hope; and when half-past seven came, he started for Chelsea, his face pale to the lips.

When he arrived at the Home, and knocked at the door, a lady about fifty came and spoke to him.

Yes; Sister Hope was in her sitting-room, and, she believed, expected him, was the lady's reply to his inquiry. A minute later, Stephen and Hope were alone together. For a few minutes they talked of the woman Baker, who had died on the night of Stephen's visit; for Stephen found it hard to speak of that which was nearest to his heart, and on which hung such issues.

"And your health?" she said to him after a while; "you do not suffer from — what you suffered down at Ilfracombe?"

"No," replied Stephen, "I am quite strong now, and I can work with ease. You will be glad to hear that I am taken on the staff of a fairly influential daily paper. My novel, too, the one I called 'Visions,' has just appeared in a popular edition, and is, I am told,

selling rapidly. I am quite a prosperous man, you see."

"I am very glad," she replied; "and you will continue to live with Dr. Roberts?"

"I think not. Dan is to be married next month, and I do not feel like being there. Somehow, it does not seem right. Not that Dan would object; you see, we have been friends so many years, and he remained true to me — through all that dark time; but there's Miss Reviere, I am afraid it would not be pleasant for her."

"She is a true girl," replied Hope, "and I am sure she would consent to whatever Dr. Roberts thought best."

"Yes, she might; only ——" He hesitated a second, not knowing how to proceed, then he burst out suddenly: "Are you engaged to young Gray?"

"No."

"But he asked you to be his wife?"

"Yes."

"You do not wish — that is, you do not care, that is — well enough to be his wife?"

She did not reply, and Stephen, with trembling voice, went on speaking.

"Hope, may I tell you something?"

"Yes, if you will."

"You — you know you saved me. Through you I was dragged out of — hell. I should have died but for you — a suicide."

In his eagerness he drew his chair nearer to hers, but she did not speak.

"If I have become — a man again, it has been, humanly speaking, through you. I had given up all hope, all belief in virtue, in truth, in goodness. You made me believe again, you made me hope for myself — you know, don't you?"

Still she was silent; but Stephen saw that her face had become very pale.

“ Well, because of these things, nay, I do not know ; but Hope — I — I love you with all my life. You are listening ? ”

“ Yes.” She spoke very low, but Stephen heard her answer.

“ I know I am daring ; I know that I ought never to expect one like you to care for such an one as I have been ; Hope, my darling, forgive me, but the hope you inspired within me has led me to dream that even you might care for me. Do you ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ But I have hoped you might love me — love me as a woman should love her husband ? I know that I am — that is, I — I dare not think of my past ; I loathe it, shudder at it, even although it *is* past. But God has forgiven me, and I dared to think, even although I was a thousand times unworthy, that you might love me so. Do you ? ”

“ Yes.”

She spoke calmly, almost coldly ; but Stephen started up in great joy, and seized her hand.

“ Then, Hope,” he cried, “ my sky will be bright, after all. Darling, you have made the world heaven ; with you I can — that is — you will be my wife ? ”

She let her hand lie in his, but she said steadily :

“ No ; I cannot be your wife.”

“ But why ? You — you said you loved me ; you are not deceiving me ? You do love me, do you not ? ”

“ Yes ; I love you.”

“ Then tell me why. Oh, do not mock me ! ”

She started to her feet, and her eyes shone with passion.

“ No ; I do not mock you,” she cried.

“ Then why do you say you cannot be my wife ? ”

She snatched her hand from his, and moved a step from him.

“ Because — because — ” She hesitated a second, then she went on : “ Look, Stephen Edgcumbe, suppose you had been reared amidst squalor, and drunkenness, and vice. Suppose you, in spite of it, had kept pure. Suppose you had resisted cruel temptation, and had kept yourself unsullied. And suppose that I, Hope Hillyer, had been tenderly reared, and yet had fallen ; had given myself over to evil, had allowed myself to become vile, corrupt, the willing companion of evil men, for six years. Suppose that I had been reclaimed, would you, remembering my past, marry me ? ”

She spoke passionately amidst her sobs ; spoke as though her words came between spasms of pain.

“ Tell me, Stephen Edgcumbe, would you — would you marry me ? ”

The question staggered him ; he did not know how to answer it, and he was silent.

“ You do not answer. Well, now, let me tell you something. You remember the time, — that night when I, a poor shivering little thing, was cursed by a drunken woman who bade me go and sin, that I might get her money. You know, too, that through your kindness I was sent to live with a pure, good woman. As I told you before, from that time you were my hero, my ideal, a sort of god whom I worshipped in secret. I thought no one like you. I remembered your words, telling me to be true to the name you gave me, and I treasured everything you said and did, in my heart. But I always regarded you as up so far away from me, so good, so grand. Well, after years I left that Home, and went to Kensington, and — and you have heard what happened there. Then I made a resolve to find you. I do not know why I had not tried to do this before, except that I regarded you as so much above me, so far away from me. You seemed to exist in my

thoughts rather than as an actual being. Well, I went to Mrs. Blewitt, and she told me that you were a married man when you came there to live; that your wife had obtained a divorce from you. She told me also that she believed, as Dr. Roberts believed, that you had gone away to live a bad, dissolute life."

She stopped a second, and dashed the tears from her eyes; then she went on again:—

"You cannot think what this meant to me. It shattered my idol; it made me feel as though something beautiful had gone out of my life. Then I remembered what you did for me, what you—you might have saved me from, and I made up my mind to give my life in helping poor fallen girls, who are often more sinned against than sinning, and I resolved, too, to try and find out where you were.

"You know with what result. I followed you with a sort of a dog-like faithfulness; I seemed to feel that your salvation belonged to me. I owed it to you; I loved you,—I think something like a dog loves its master. I called you 'Master' to myself, and determined never to give up trying to save you.

"I will not talk about that awful night when you tried to end everything, or of the days that followed; but when your friend told me, when I saw you had started on a better life, a strange joy came into my heart. I think I loved you then, but I did not know it. I found it out down at Ilfracombe, and then—the man who had been paying me attentions for months became as nothing to me. Although he would not take no for an answer, I told him I could never be anything to him. How could I?—I loved you! Then that fact that you loved me was revealed to me, and I felt sure this night was coming. I knew that some time, if you lived, you would ask me what you have asked me. Then came that—accident. I

came to you then ; I nursed you till you were out of danger. I could not help that ; but when it was over, I could stay no longer. I loved you, and yet I loathed you. I could not think of those years when you — you were down yonder, without shuddering.”

She stopped suddenly, and, laying her head on the table, sobbed convulsively. Presently she went on again : —

“ I love you now ; every part of my life cries out for you. I would so willingly, if need be, lie down and die for you ; but when I remember the — the life you lived, and then to be — all that a wife should be to you — no ! no ! I cannot — I should go mad ! ”

Stephen stood before her like one stunned ; he could not answer her ; his heart became as heavy as lead, and it seemed as cold as ice.

“ Would you — you, Stephen Edgcumbe, marry me if the cases were reversed ? Supposing that I had been as you have been, would you, knowing it, marry me ? ”

He hesitated again before replying.

“ It’s a terrible question, Hope ; but — but as God lives, if you repented as I do, if you loathed the past as I do, if you were cursed as I was, and it was — *you*, all the time *you*, — yes, I would marry you ; I would, and would find heaven in doing it. You see, I love you ! ”

She looked at him, her gray eyes blazing with a strange light ; she seemed trying to make some great resolve ; then she said, with a shudder, —

“ I love you, I love you — but no — I cannot ! I cannot ! ”

“ Think again, Hope ! — cannot ? Oh, try and remember, try again. Daniel has told you how my uncle and my tutor — ay, how everything and everybody — dinned this creed of the times in my ears. He has told you, too, how I, as a boy, madly worshipped

a beautiful idol. You know the whole history of it: know how I fought, struggled; know how everything conspired to make me believe the world to be a hell. People, churches, books, societies, all seemed to say the world is corrupt, there is no good, everything is rotten at the core. Oh, remember, Hope, my faith was gone, hope was gone; the woman to whom I had given everything proved to be a creature without a heart, without love. What had I to live for? I despaired of everything, while every bit of impurity in the world seemed to lure me to sell my soul for sensual pleasure. Perhaps it is wrong for me to try and find excuses for myself. I know I ought not to have done what I did; I know it! You cannot think how I loathe that life, how I shudder at its memory! And still it clings to me. I have repented, God knows that; I have entered a new life, I know I have; but the remembrance curses me, and whips me like the sting of scorpions. But, Hope, God has forgiven me; cannot you? Will you let my life be lonely and desolate — forsaken? Is not your love for me great enough to burn up that terrible past? I — I am clean now, Hope; can you not love me for what I am — and try and forget what I was?"

She stood like a statue, so still was she, and she spoke like one in a dream.

"I love you, Stephen — I love you; but I cannot — cannot be a wife to you. I would if I could; but I cannot, I cannot."

"That is your final answer?"

"It is. Yes — oh, you see, I knew those women — and — don't! You will kill me!"

"Very well; I will go, then." He staggered to the door, then he turned around, his face rigid as if with pain.

“God bless you, Hope!” he said hoarsely; “you have saved me, after all. Perhaps, perhaps —”

He did not finish the sentence, but walked into the hall, and fumbled in the dim light to find his hat and overcoat.

Hope stood alone in the room as he had left her, and her heart was torn with pain. When he left, brightness went, joy went. Like lightning her mind swept over the past, and in a second she seemed to live it all over again. What should she have been but for him? Ay, and if she had fallen, and repented as he repented, had she been purified as he had been purified, would she not have been worthy to be the wife of a pure man? Was not Mary Magdalene worthy? And if she were worthy, might not he be? Besides, who was wholly pure, in thought, in heart? Did she love him truly — really? Did she love the God who had saved him?

Then it seemed as though a greater love entered her life, — a love more pure, more unselfish. A great refining fire began to burn in her heart, a fire from heaven.

She heard him stagger to the door with a heavy tread; and she knew his heart was breaking.

“Stephen!”

He came back, and saw her standing with love-lit eyes. He knew that the gulf was bridged.

He went towards her. He only spoke one word, but in it there was unspeakable joy — in it was heaven. The past, blighted, corrupt, was gone; before him was light.

“Hope!” he cried; and it meant everything to him.

THE END.