·FIDELIS·

BY

ADA CAMBRIDGE

Emma Morse Phinney.

No. 1854

Holland.

FIDELIS

FIDELIS

A NOVEL

Emma Morse Phinney

No. 1854

BY

ADA CAMBRIDGE

AUTHOR OF

THE THREE MISS KINGS, NOT ALL IN VAIN, MY GUARDIAN,
A LITTLE MINX, A MARRIAGE CEREMONY, ETC.

NEW YORK
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
1895

FIDELIS.

CHAPTER I.

A GOOD many years ago, when the present mistress of Dunstanborough was the baby of the house, the then mistress, Lady Susan, engaged her children's first governess. She was a novice of eighteen, head pupil of Miss Pyke's well-known school at Lyntham, in which Lady Susan's mother took an interest. It was, in fact, the countess who recommended the young person.

"A highly respectable young person, my dear—daughter of Armour, the bookseller—thoroughly well educated. She won our prize at Christmas; and now, being finished, is looking for a place. Miss Pyke spoke to me about her; and I at once thought of you. Baby, of course, needs no teaching at present; but it is quite time that Barbara was taken in hand. And a young, bright girl, you see, my dear, is better than an older woman. She is more cheerful for the children, and—which is of the first importance—you can use her more freely."

"Yes," said Lady Susan; "but a young, bright girl—when there is a tutor in the house."

"I thought of that—naturally. But Dicky ought to go to Eton now. He is nearly two years older than his brothers were. Send him at once, and dismiss the tutor. You can dismiss one of the nurses, too. I am sure, my

dear Susan, you will find this an excellent arrangement. The girl will come for fifteen pounds a year, and Miss Pyke says she is a beautiful needlewoman. I shall speak to Roger."

While she lived, the countess liked to manage the affairs of all her family; and even Roger, her very haughty son-in-law, who thought her a vulgar person, permitted himself in certain matters to be swayed by her strong mind. Whereas he was a poor man for his position, she was one of those wealthy people who love the saving of a penny better than the spending of thousands of pounds; and occasionally she effected convenient economies on his behalf which he could not and would not have stooped to suggest.

She talked to him about Miss Armour; and he said, in his high and mighty way, "Just as Susan pleases,"—all that was necessary, seeing that Susan was as wax in her mother's hands. And he consented to send Richard to Eton because he was ten, which in those days was quite an advanced age for the first form, and because he was not under satisfactory control in the hands of the tutor, who had been one of the countess's cheap bargains. With pleasure Mr. Delavel dismissed the tutor.

Then Miss Armour came. She was a pretty girl,—always a disadvantage in a governess, even when there is no young man in the house,—and she had a great deal of manner. It was an elegant manner, for the bookseller had brought her up genteelly, never allowing her to wait in the shop or do anything that was considered unladylike; but it went beyond the requirements of the nursery schoolroom, to which she was desired, but did by no means desire, to confine herself. Her little head was full of her own concerns, when it should have been wholly occupied with the responsibilities of her post. It was a

young head upon young shoulders; and her transformation from schoolgirl to governess, even governess in so great a family, did not convert it into an old one. Though she had been Miss Pyke's head pupil and the winner of the earl's prize, though she had been specially trained for the profession on which she had so prosperously embarked, her interest in teaching was the least of the interests of Miss Armour's life. She had regarded it all along as a mere pathway to sentimental adventures, which in their turn should lead to a comfortable marriage, involving release from teaching and all unpleasant things. She regarded it now as a base from which to commence the campaign forthwith. The schoolroom had bound her, with her wings to her side, like an unfledged butterfly; but now she was an independent woman, out in the world, and free.

As soon as she had recovered from her first awe of the house and family, and grown used to her own exalted station, she began to look about her.

The tutor was no more—a person who would naturally have been her chief support. The eldest of the three sons—now dead and gone—was then not quite sixteen, and all three were at Eton. Even a boy in the house would have been some comfort. She used to meet Mr. Delavel on the stairs sometimes, or in the drawing-room on Sundays, and make pleasant observations to him, with dimpling cheeks and coquettish gestures; and he simply stared at her, bowed, and passed on without remark or smile. There was no nice young curate to be asked to informal meals. Maxwell Delavel Pole—Maxwell Delavel then, the Pole falling to him later, with property attached to it—was at school with his cousins, and his humble dummy at Dunstanborough was an old man. The family pew was a room with oaken walls, sur-

mounted with close-drawn curtains of blue silk, higher than one's head, and was cut off by the rood screen from the pews of other folks. The only man to be seen from it was a man in marble who had been dead for 350 years, and he had a marble wife and ten marble children. They knelt together under a canopy fixed to the chancel wall—five sons behind him, and five daughters behind her, with a sort of altar in the middle inscribed with their names and honours, and their combined arms above them—sixteen quarterings of his, "differenced" with a crescent impaling sixteen of hers. Sir Roger, in his plate armour, was a great knight, in whom our young lady was more interested than she was in Mr. Woodford's sermons; but a village doctor or some such person—not in marble—would easily have eclipsed both. Even church decorations offered no opportunities in those days. Large bows were tied to the pew-ends by the parish clerk for Christmas only, and members of the congregation never thought of meddling. Delavel dinner parties did not include the governess, nor did rent audit banquets.

But a young woman in quest of a young man is like a black tracker in the bush. Where no one else can see the trail she sniffs it out, and no difficulties baffle her. Miss Armour was not to be circumvented.

There was a rent dinner in the great hall of the great house—a place which stood empty save on such occasions, and when sons came of age, and so on—and her ears caught the sound of tenants' boots on the ringing flags, and the sound of tenants' voices echoing from the wainscoted walls. Those walls were two stories high, and bisected at one end by a gallery—the "minstrels' gallery" of old time—leading from disused dining to disused drawing-rooms on the first floor. From this gallery many generations of proud ladies had looked down upon their lords'

feasts, in those splendid days bygone; and in like manner Miss Armour felt that she would enjoy a sight of the present vassals at their milder entertainment. Farmers are of various sorts: there is the boor in fustian suit and "highlows," who is as though he were not to a genteel young lady; but there is also the gentleman in broadcloth and long whiskers, who rides to hounds and sometimes drives his carriage.

She took her pupil with her to show her her papa, but did not lift the child to the rail over which she was too small to peer. Plumped down upon the floor, and bidden to keep still on pain of a whipping, Barbara was left to imagine the spectacle below, while the governess enjoyed it to her heart's content. Her fair head and shoulders, set upon that background of age-blackened oak, lighted by light that fell softly yellow through high stained windows, were as attractive to the farmers—such of them as could see her—as their features to her. First one and then another looked up, until she had half a dozen admirers, amongst whom she selected a local bachelor for her special favour, leaning like another Juliet over her balcony to ogle him. The great squire had his back turned, fortunately.

From this delightful pastime she was rudely disturbed by Lady Susan, who had found Barbara crying in a lonely corridor, whither she had strayed and lost herself. Lady Susan wanted to know, with something of asperity in her comfortable voice, what the governess was doing there; and Miss Armour said she was studying the glass in the windows, being very fond of heraldry. She had come to the gallery for a moment to please Barbara, who had teased to see her papa, and she had become fascinated by her discoveries in the genealogy of the family.

"I never realised before," she burst out rapturously,

"what a magnificent place it must have been in the olden times!"

"Oh, pretty well," said Lady Susan, her frown melting into a smile; "I don't suppose there were many to equal it. But now, my dear, go back to the schoolroom if you please. I would not for anything have Mr. Delavel see us here. He would be much annoyed."

"Come, darling," said Miss Armour, with her cheerful promptness, "you have had your wish."

"I haven't," wailed Barbara. "I haven't seen him *once!*"

"Don't tell stories," adjured the governess. "Mamma won't love her little girl if she tells stories, will you, mamma?"

"Certainly not," said Lady Susan, sternly. "I am afraid you indulge her too much, my dear. If she thinks she can have her own way in everything, she will never be satisfied. You must try to be firm as well as kind."

Miss Armour said she would, and retired from the banquetting hall with the child in her arms. Reaching the schoolroom, she stood her in a corner with her face to the wall, for being naughty, and sat down to trim a bonnet for Sunday—a bonnet that should further subjugate the farmer of her choice, with whom she hoped to exchange a glance at any rate between church porch and chancel.

It was her business not only to teach Barbara, but to take her for walks. Barbara's legs were small and her powers limited, and the park and grounds were large. Outside the park and grounds neither of the little girls was allowed to go; for fear that, in air contaminated by common people, they should "catch something." It was Lady Susan's rule. So that the mother was concerned one day to hear her eldest daughter talking about Mr.

Drewe and his horse, and a ride she had had up and down some lane, apparently on that horse's back.

"What lane, my dear?" was the natural inquiry, "and what were you doing with Mr. Drewe and his horse? I hope, Miss Armour, you don't take her outside the park. You know my wishes, I am sure; I was so careful to explain them to you."

"Of *course* I never do," Miss Armour vehemently asseverated; and looked at Barbara with meaning in her eye,—a meaning which the child rightly interpreted into a threat of slaps if she should say any more.

"One never knows what rough characters one may meet," said Lady Susan; "and there is always the danger of infection from the poorer cottages."

"Oh, I should not *think* of taking her outside," Miss Armour repeated. "We happened to be as far as the west lodge to-day, and I was speaking to Mrs. Toogood, when Mr. Drewe rode up. He wanted to speak to Toogood, and while his horse stood there he set Barbara on it, to please her. Just for a moment. He held her all the time most carefully."

"Well, my dear, Mrs. Toogood's baby is not at all in a healthy state, and I would rather you did not go to the lodges at present. Keep to the grounds about the house."

"I do, Lady Susan—I always do. It was only to-day that we went a little further. Barbara begged so hard."

Lady Susan had lost a child between Richard and Barbara, and another between Barbara and the baby, both of scarlet fever. It was probably the grounds about the house, a chief feature of which was a duckweedy moat just under the nursery windows, which had proved fatal to them; but sanitation, as we know it, being an unborn science at that date, such a theory had not occurred to her or to the family medical adviser. They attributed

those deaths to contact with the village people through the medium of unprincipled nurses. This explained the mother's anxiety to limit the range of the present infants, and her relief when Miss Armour assured her that she had never taken Barbara to the confines of the park before, and never would again.

On the following day the Lord and Lady of Dunstanborough left home together to dine and spend the night with a neighbouring squire, who lived about ten miles off. When she was ready to start, Lady Susan summoned her little girls to say good-bye to them. Baby came in the arms of her nurse, and Barbara led by Miss Armour. The fond mother took leave of them with many anxious exhortations.

"Don't be out after schoolroom tea," she said to the governess; "and remember what I said about keeping strictly to the grounds, my dear."

"Oh, yes, Lady Susan! I will be very careful. Little darling! You may trust me to watch over her." Miss Armour lifted her charge to her breast and cuddled her vehemently, showering over her a mass of fair ringlets, like two bunches of laburnum blossom. The child began to struggle; but, warned by a quick pinch, desisted, and watched her mother's departure with a drooping lip.

Perfectly easy in her mind, Lady Susan walked down the great stairs to her carriage in the courtyard, maid and dressing-case behind her; and Miss Armour waited at a convenient window to see her disappear under the arched gateway which had commanded the drawbridge in olden times. Then she hustled Barbara to her tea, and, ere she had swallowed two mouthfuls, to the bedroom they shared together, where she clothed the child and herself in "spencers" and cylindrical bonnets; then rushed her downstairs and out of the house at breakneck speed. The

head nurse saw them go; but, with a tea-party of her own on hand, had no time to interfere.

Meanwhile, the squire's carriage rolled through the park, and through the village, and along the quiet country road, until, at about two-thirds of the distance to its destination, it met a mounted messenger, who informed Mr. Delavel that his intended host had been stricken with apoplexy, and that there would be no dinner party in consequence. The carriage then turned round, and rolled leisurely home again.

The countess's paragon was enjoying the twilight hour of a very chilly evening in pleasant converse with Mr. Drewe—a full half mile on the wrong side of the park gates—when, to her consternation, the carriage bore down upon her, and she saw the stern eyes of her employers fixed on her crimson face. Barbara was trailing behind her, whimpering with fatigue; her beaver bonnet hung upon her back, and the cold wind whistled about her throat and ears. In those days children—even common people's children—were not allowed to expose their ears to out-door weather; it was thought to be as terrible a risk to health as the opening of bedroom windows.

Next morning, Miss Armour was packed off without a character. It was Lyntham market day, and farmer Morrison drove her home in his gig. Weeping she flung herself into her mother's arms, in the parlour behind the shop, and declared she had done nothing—nothing—nothing to deserve such disgrace; that there was no pleasing Lady Susan, try as one might; and that she was sure the real cause of her being sent away was her good looks, of which Lady Susan had from the first been jealous.

Mr. Armour, being told this tale, with variations, made a journey to Dunstanborough, to see Lady Susan, who explained matters to the bookseller, in a manner which con-

vinced him that she was not the tyrant his daughter had described. And, while he was in Dunstanborough, and in consequence of what he had heard at the Hall, he determined to interview Mr. Drewe also.

This gentleman showed no reluctance to be interviewed; on the contrary, he was very glad to see any one who could tell him what had become of his sweetheart, torn from him so suddenly. He welcomed Mr. Armour, gave him a good dinner, disarmed him of his reproaches, and sent him home with an exulting heart.

"Now, look here," was what Mr. Drewe had said, thumping a great fist on a handsome mahogany table, "If she's been sent away because o' me I'll stand by her, as 'tis only right I should. Say the word, boss, and I'll marry her any day you like, with all the pleasure in life."

He was a solid, hearty, red-faced sporting farmer, whom the squires of the neighbourhood did not disdain to associate with on public occasions; he had a good house, and he was generally well-to-do. The bookseller, though a superior bookseller, of high repute in his town, was still no more than a retail tradesman at any time in the eyes of the squires; and he had several children to provide for. He did not feel justified in rejecting, or even trifling with, the opportunity so generously presented to him.

"Well," he said, as he vainly strove to knit his brows, "I've no wish to stand in the way of my daughter's happiness. I will speak to her mother, and see what she says to it; and if she's agreeable, I will let you know."

Then he went home, turning the matter over in his mind as he drove along, more and more convinced that this was a fine thing for Arabella, who, with all her education, did not seem cut out for a governess.

When he arrived, he did not give her the severe talking to he had promised Lady Susan to administer; he

made allowances for a girl in love, and for the fact that she had come out of her scrape with a profit, instead of with a loss. He put Mr. Drewe's offer before her, with her mother's consent, and bade her do what she pleased about it.

She decided at once that she would have him. To be married—to him, or to another—was her one aim in life, and to be able to say that she had left Dunstanborough Hall, because her engagement was a relief from many embarassments. The only thing she objected to was Mr. Drewe's name,—it was Abraham.

"I could never call him anything so vulgar," she said. "I shall alter it to Algernon."

The gentleman was written to, and next market day he dined with the bookseller's family. He was a straightforward sort of person, hating to shilly-shally over anything to which he had set his hand; and, having "passed his word" to Mr. Armour, he desired at the earliest moment to redeem it. Arabella would have liked a series of Lyntham tea-parties, at which to parade him before envious girl friends; but he did not accept the rôle of captive gracefully, and it was thought advisable not to cross him. Moreover, the glory of being a bride at nineteen, in a silver-gray satin, was greater than the glory of being engaged.

Thus Miss Armour became Mrs. Drewe at an early date, and could defy the countess and Lady Susan.

She returned to Dunstanborough in a carriage with white horses and a postilion, and was cheered in the village as she passed through it to her new home.

On the following Sunday, she appeared in church in all her bridal garments, a white lace veil hanging from the brim of her flowered bonnet over her pretty face and pendant flaxen curls; and never had a bride caused so

much sensation there since Lady Susan herself had been one.

Lady Susan looked with the rest, and thought in her kind heart, "Poor little thing! After all, you can't expect a girl of that age to have the sense of an old woman, and no doubt she was desperately in love. Now that she is married, one must forgive and forget, especially as her husband is one of our most valued tenants. I shall go and see her to-morrow, and I will take her a little present."

Which she did.

CHAPTER II.

Abraham Drewe, like many others of his kind, had succeeded his father and several grandfathers in the whitewashed gabled house and the good farm that he occupied; and the former was old-fashioned in its appointments, even for its day. He said it was good enough for him, and objected to radical changes. But Arabella soon contrived to throw an air of elegance over her rooms such as they had never worn, and such as conferred distinction upon herself as well as them. Her wax flowers and leather flowers, her antimacassars in crochet and tasselled sofa cushions in Berlin wool-work, her water-colour paintings and morocco-bound books, her beaded mats and fire-screens, her piano, her finger-rings, her ermine tippet, her Paisley shawl, her two silk gowns—in days when one was Sunday best for half a lifetime—all these things, together with her beauty, her manners and her education, served to fix her rank in a society where all ranks, at that date, were inflexibly defined. Until she married him, Abraham had been rather a hanger-on of the gentleman farmer class, than an established member of it; but after his marriage his footing there was assured. Nevertheless, he flatly refused to be called Algernon; and his ambitious wife had trouble in her endeavours to polish him up to the requisite standard of gentility.

Lady Susan, to whom, even more than to her own

merits, her social successes were due, made a protégée of her. The bride had gladly humbled herself to beg forgiveness at the earliest opportunity, and thereafter had no greater enjoyment in life than to brag discreetly of her intimacy with the family. Lady Susan took wine and cake in Mrs. Drewe's parlour, and inspected each new piece of fancy-work, and gave advice upon housekeeping matters. And by and by, when it was known that Mrs. Drewe "expected," the Delavel carriage was seen constantly at her gate. The mother of seven, though she was her great ladyship, she took under her guardian wing all the incipient mothers on the estate, as far as circumstances permitted; and that Mrs. Drewe had once been of her household gave her an excuse that was gladly availed of for doubling the ordinary attentions.

She gave the cradle and the basket, and a little hair brush, and a powder-box, and a best cap with four yards of fluted lace border and a rosette on it, such as cruelly scraped the soft heads of the new-born in that benighted age. She advised on the selection of a nurse, and conferred with the village doctor, and instructed Mr. Drewe as to his duties in connection with the impending event. She fraternised with Mrs. Armour when that anxious matron arrived upon the scene; and when Mrs. Drewe was really and truly taken ill, after many false alarms, she was as excited about it as if the young person had been one of her own people. Like love and death, motherhood is a touch of nature that makes all kin—at least, so far as women are concerned.

It was summer time, and, after the early dinner of the period, Lady Susan had a long, light evening before her. She had left Mrs. Drewe's house at a critical moment in the afternoon, and she felt impelled to return thither to satisfy herself before she slept that all was well. She

called the governess—who, this time, was a middle-aged widow—to take a walk with her, and by a short cut through park and churchyard, they descended upon the farmhouse, to the pleased surprise of its agitated inmates.

"A boy, my lady!" said Mrs. Armour at the door; "and she is doing as well as can be expected. Thank you very kindly for coming to inquire."

"We happened to be passing," corrected Lady Susan, "and I thought I would just call for news. I am so glad she is all right. Ah-h-h! Dear little creature!"—as a thin, small cry, very quick and hoarse, just reached her ear—"let me have a look at it!"

She signed to the governess to stay below; and, gathering up her skirts, tip-toed after Mrs. Armour up the creaking stairs to the smart "spare bedroom"—an apartment sacred to these state occasions.

"It's a funny-looking little thing," said the grandmother apologetically, "but quite sound and healthy. His legs and arms are beautiful."

"Oh," said Lady Susan, "they're all funny-looking at first. They soon get over that."

The young mother lay sunk in the great down bed, as in the trough of a billowy sea, and the flowered damask curtains of the four-poster were carefully drawn all round her. Of course, the windows were shut, and the fire to dress the baby by burned smokily in the grate, which had lain cold and empty behind a paper apron for years. The nurse sat by the fireside, with her implements spread round her and the newly born infant on her knee. Lady Susan discovered, to her great satisfaction, that she was in time to see it dressed.

But first she went to the bedside to murmur congratulations to Mrs. Drewe, and impress a kiss on the girl's flushed face—an unprecedented condescension.

"Have you seen him?" cried Arabella, anxiously. "Oh, dear Lady Susan, do tell me if all young babies are as ugly as that! Oh, how dreadful it would be to have an ugly child! And why should we? *We* are not ugly. He'll be different in a few days, won't he? He won't be like this always?"

"Of course not," said Lady Susan, smiling at the innocence of this inexperienced young thing; "they are always ugly at first—that's nothing. I am sure he is a beautiful child. I am now going to look at him. Lie still, my dear, and don't excite yourself. Be very thankful you have got over it so well."

She drew the curtains together again, leaving Arabella in the dark; and she tip-toed across the room, and took a long look at the newcomer, whom the nurse displayed in silence.

"Is he all right?" called Mrs. Drewe, sharply. "Do you think he is all right? Lady Susan, you have had so many—you ought to know!"

"Oh, quite—quite," answered Lady Susan, "as right as possible."

"A dear little fellow!" said Mrs. Armour.

"As fine a child as you'd wish to see!" said the nurse.

But they glanced at each other in a confidential way. And certainly Lady Susan was perturbed. She had seen a great number of babies, but never one like that. Apart from its crinkled skin and undeveloped complexion, it was phenomenally ugly. All its features were down at the bottom of its face, instead of being fairly distributed over it. The eyes, under the great bulging forehead, were large, and the ears enormous; the rudimentary broad nose and mouth were puckered together as if a weight had squeezed them. He was exactly like a little goblin in a fairy picture book.

"I'm sure you think him hideous," wailed Arabella from her bed. "And so he is! and I don't believe he will ever be different!"

"Oh, yes, he will," said Lady Susan, cheerfully: "you will see an immense difference in him when he begins to fill out."

"And Abe insists, if it's a boy, on calling him Adam," the young mother continued to lament. "As if it wasn't enough to be ugly himself, but he must have an ugly name, too! I wanted him to be Guy Vavasour."

"Adam was Mr. Drewe's father's name," said Lady Susan.

"Yes; and that's why he insists on giving it to the child. He says it *shall* be Adam, whether I like it or not."

"Well, my dear, leave off talking and go to sleep, and be grateful for all that God has done for you," Lady Susan exhorted. Then she sat down to see the baby dressed.

Poor little Adam Drewe! He was no worse off than others of his age when that monster—to him—the monthly nurse began to soap and sponge him; but it was none the less a pathetic circumstance that his first taste of life should have been so bitter. He squirmed and shrieked in her calm, hard hands, beside himself with the fright and shock of his new experiences, so suddenly and so violently rushing upon him; and the more he shrieked the better pleased she was, because it showed how sound his lungs were. The two tender mothers, sitting by, regarded his agonies unpityingly. It was the custom to treat infants thus. It is the custom still. They are in the temporary position of dumb brutes, which cannot state their case; and therefore they have no case, and therefore nobody ever does pity them.

When the ordeal of the first bath was over, and the

victim simply ached to be rolled in warm flannel and laid down to rest and recover from it, the first toilet was made —in that desperate haste, and with that deadly determination to spare nothing, which marks the correct procedure —the brutal operator all smiles and jokes, the helpless babe lamenting bitterly.

She strapped him tightly in a straight piece of flannel, which reduced his lung-and-rib-filled chest and his soft stomach to a uniform shape and size, in order to supply the "support" which Nature had not thought of giving him. Those of us who understand our business take great care in the selection and adjustment of that bit of flannel—it is the least that we can do—fixing it delicately in its place with needle and thread; but only the other day the present writer found a professedly qualified monthly nurse putting it on a new-born body with safety pins. Even poor cart horses and working bullocks, that would never lead the life they do if they had the gift attributed to Balaam's ass, are not used much worse than that. *We* might feel fairly easy if rolled in a strip of baize that was stitched up with piping cord, but not if the baize was held together with the sugar tongs. This nurse did not use safety pins because they had not been invented; but Adam's mother had supplied the deficiency by trimming his binder with silk button-holing at the edges to make it smart, whereby he had, from this sad hour forth, continual red creases under his arms and across his breast, that did not begin to straighten out till he was short-coated.

Being as tight as a German sausage in this woollen skin, he was laid on his face, which crumpled helplessly against the inexorable knee, and his shirt was put on. Custom had happily decreed that this little thing should be made of finest lawn; otherwise the broad fold down

the back, where it came above the cylindrical flannel, would have been another mortification to the tender flesh. Still, the usual provision for making a dumb creature uncomfortable was not wanting. His short sleeve was trimmed with lace, and a little flap made to button down over the shoulder strap of his next garment. The lace was fine Valenciennes, as it always was, and is, in well-regulated families; but if the corresponding article of attire in Arabella's trousseau had been frilled round the armhole with one of her crochet-work antimacassars, she would have felt just as he did—not so badly, indeed, because he had never been accustomed to textile fabrics, whereas she was hardened to them. As for the button, it was, of course, a very small one—to *her*—but to him it must have felt like lying on a cobble-stone when the nurse put him down upon his side. Over the shirt more flannel was swathed around him, cut to his figure, so to speak, and strapped across his breast in lappets which fastened behind with strings, so as to make sure that when he was not lying on a shoulder button there should be a hard knot to take its place.

Then came the flowing skirts—about five times the length of the little legs that had to bear the weight of them—which were the pride and joy of his tormentors, to whom it never occurred to imagine themselves carried along with a blanket and a sheet and a pair of Nottingham window curtains tied round their waists, with perhaps an eider-down quilt over all. The full-dress robe, with sleeves tied up with ribbon, was withheld for the present; and little Adam was put into a "monthly gown," the neck of which had a frill of cotton embroidery, with scalloped edges, calculated to act on the adjacent skin like a toothed saw, especially when wet, as it mostly would be with such a mother as Arabella to look after him. Like-

wise the day-cap, with the ribbon-looped lace border and protuberant rosette—not quite completed, because the cockade was a distinction confined to boys, and therefore it was necessary to ascertain the sex of the wearer beforehand—was held in reserve for the moment, and a night-cap was put on. It had an embroidered crown the size of a five-shilling piece, and was full of little runnings of fine bobbin, which were drawn up the size of his head and tied in bows at the top, the tyings being inside,—next the skin, of course. Round the face there was a triple row of cambric frills, crimped with a penknife, and hemmed cambric strings were tied tightly under the chin. Then a much-worked head flannel was wrapped about him; and his first toilet was complete. His first meal followed immediately—a large spoonful of castor oil—than which nothing could be better calculated to make a human creature sick of life at the very outset. In his bewildered misery he sucked it down, with the aid of the nurse's finger thrust into his mouth; and then it did seem that his troubles were at an end for a little while.

Lady Susan took him up, and hushed him against her tender breast. "Now, let him go to his mother to get warm," she said; and she carried him to the bedside. The very feel of the little body in her arms sent maternal thrills all through her. "Take him, my dear," she crooned softly, "and cuddle him to sleep."

Arabella looked with gratified eyes at the nice white bundle, sweetly scented with violet powder and old brown windsor soap, as it was lowered into its nest in the feather bed. But when the little goblin face appeared, peeping from its shawl, her expression changed to one of disgust, and she flung herself away from it.

"Ugh! nasty little ugly thing!" she cried, with a pettish burst of tears. "I can't help it, Lady Susan! Who

could be pleased with such a baby as that? You couldn't yourself. It's simply hideous! I wish it had never been born! I shan't care if it dies—I hope it will!"

"You are a wicked woman—you don't deserve to be a mother," said Lady Susan, outraged in her most sacred sensibilities; and she marched downstairs without another word.

Mr. Drewe was in the parlour, talking to the governess.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Drewe, on the birth of your son," said the squire's wife, her bosom heaving with indignation, while her kind face smiled. "I do hope and trust you will look after him, and be good to him, poor dear little man!"

"Why, surely," replied the farmer, staring, half inclined to be offended. "It would be a queer father who wouldn't be good to his own child—his first-born into the bargain."

"There are such fathers," she rejoined, severely,—"and mothers, too."

This father, when his visitors were gone, obtained permission to see the new member of his family; and then he understood what Lady Susan had meant.

"Whew!" he whistled in dismay. "Is *that* him?"

"Did you ever see such a little fright?" wailed Arabella. "Where *can* he have got that monkey face? Not from *my* side of the house, certainly."

"Hm—m—m! Well, old girl, we must make the best of him," said Abraham Drewe, after a troubled and thoughtful scrutiny. "There ought to be some brains in that big forehead, at any rate."

"Brains!" retorted his wife. "What good are brains if you are ugly? Oh, it's too bad! It's too, *too* bad!"

CHAPTER III.

ADAM DREWE did not grow handsomer when he filled out; his forehead and his eyes seemed to bulge, and his flat nostrils to expand, rather more than less, as his face settled into shape. Nor did he die, though many opportunities were given him. Not that Arabella deliberately put him in the way of catching colds and fevers; but, as he was not precious like the other children, she made no effort to take care of him. He could go out without wraps in an east wind, and without strong shoes when it rained, and sit in wet clothes, and eat green fruit, and do other things that would have killed a boy whose mother's heart was set on him; and she did not bother. And he took no harm. On the contrary, he grew tough and sturdy, as a young oak, ruddy and strong like his father, but without his father's gallant height and bearing, as without his comely countenance. Adam's figure in those early years was almost as ill-favoured as his face,—stumpy, clumsy, and ungraceful; and his appearance generally deluded his rustic neighbours with the idea that he was not "all there," like normal children. But, in fact, nature had put into that unsuitable body a soul of perfect symmetry, and was as indifferent to the sufferings she thereby laid in store for him as the mother who had irreverently presumed to call him out of the Unknown.

It is not too much to say that his first really happy day—happy enough to be remembered with pleasure for the rest of his life—did not come to him until he was six years old.

It began in misery, as happy times must do, the misery arising from the circumstance that his father was not at home. His father was not fond of him, as he well knew; but he was a just father, and treated all his children alike, as he believed—as far as a real partiality for the second and third over the first would let him. Before going away, he had given each of his sons a shilling to spend at Lyntham Mart; and it had been understood that Mrs. Drewe was to take them both, with the baby daughter, to that great festival—one of the annual fairs surviving from old times—which for a few weeks in early spring was the centre of attraction to half the county.

This was the day appointed for the expedition. All night had Adam dreamt of the booths and the shows and the wild beasts and the dinner at "Gra'ma's," of which the family had talked so long; he had an imagination which pictured these things to his little mind in the hues of fairy-land. At the break of day he was sitting up in his crib, trembling with eagerness to be dressed and off; as his brother Tommy told him, his protuberant eyes looked ready to jump out of his head. Tommy was five years old, and, like his curly-headed sister of three, good looking enough to do his mother credit.

They were all up early, and put down to their bread and milk in makeshift garments, while Arabella flew hither and thither, getting out their smart ones and her own. She was to meet other guests at her father's house, at noon; and the Mart itself was the rendezvous of all neighbouring gentlefolks in those days: so she was anxious to make the very best appearance, particularly as

the cold February morning showed no prospect of rain to injure her carefully preserved finery.

Well might little Adam watch her anxiously, and feel that the joys he was anticipating were too good to come true! Before he had finished his breakfast she called him to her bedroom—to dress him, he hoped; but the wheedling amiability of her tone made his heart sink.

"Now, Adam, look here," she said, as she laid her best bonnet on the bed with a handkerchief over it; "you don't want to go to the Mart, do you? You'd be far happier at home with Sar' Ann; she would give you lots of treat—don't cry, now! If you do, I'll slap you. You know you never do like to go where there are lots of people, because they make game of you—and I'm sure I don't wonder! *I* wouldn't go where I was stared at and laughed at, if I were you. Stay at home like a good boy, and I'll tell gra'ma you'll come and see her another day, when she hasn't such a houseful of company. And I'll buy you something nice with your shilling, and we'll tell you about everything we see when we come back. And Sar' Ann will give you some cake—stop that, you nasty, horrid little thing!" He screwed up his eyes and opened his mouth, and howled, in his sudden woe; and he looked so much more ugly than necessary while doing so that she could not bear it. Up flew her slender hand, and his great ear rang to the blow she gave him. "Now, I *certainly* shan't take you, Sir—just for being naughty."

Instead of making him cry more, this treatment quieted him. He sobbed and snuffled stealthily, wiped his face on his little sleeve, and resigned himself to fate.

"That's right," said Arabella, when she and Tommy, baby and nursemaid, were dressed, and the square-hooded family vehicle that they called the sociable standing ready at the door, "You know you like stopping at home much

the best. Be a good boy, and Sar' Ann will give you some treats. Won't you, Sar' Ann?"

They drove off in their gay clothes and high spirits, waving their hands to him as he stood forlornly at the road gate.

"What'll pa say, ma?" inquired Tommy.

It may here be stated that Abraham Drewe did not enjoy being called "pa," contrary to the custom of his house, but considered that so small a matter was not worth fighting about.

"I shall tell pa that he preferred to stay at home," said Arabella. "So he did. He always does."

"Oh, ma, he didn't! He wanted to see the wild beasts dreadful."

"Hold your tongue, Sir, and don't contradict me, or I shall box your ears. He wanted nothing of the sort."

When the sociable was out of sight, Sar' Ann retired to the stackyard for a talk with Andy Toogood, who was at work there; and little Adam sat down under a hedge beside the empty road and cried his heart out, there being nobody to slap him for it—cried for the wild beasts and the marionettes, and the peep show of the Battle of Waterloo, and the Punch and Judy, and the roundabouts, and those infinite vistas of toys and gilded gingerbread, the booths, down the planked alleys of which little boys could trot all day without coming to the end of them. He had seen them last year when his father had led him by the hand, and he had dreamed for twelve months of seeing them again. And now he was not to see them! He wept and sobbed until his little ugly face was all pulpy and blotchy, and Sar' Ann never thought of comforting him. If she had taken him into the house and given him a piece of cake, he might have borne his trouble better; but she

did not want him listening with his big ears to her talk with Andy Toogood.

Presently the empty road was filled with the rumble of wheels and the measured throb of trotting hoofs. There was not time for the little boy to run away, and he was too scared to stir when he saw the big carriage from the Hall come thundering towards him.

"Why, what is that?" cried Lady Susan, noting the spot of brown holland under the hedge. "Why, I do declare it is that unfortunate child! And all alone on the public road! And not a bit of hat or coat on in this biting wind! Stop the carriage, Dicky, and get down and open the gate for him. He has evidently shut himself out and can't get in again."

The tall Eton lad, who was escorting his mother and sisters to the Mart, promptly leaped to the ground.

"Hullo, young shaver, what are you doing here?" he cried, as he bore down on the shrinking child. "Can't you open the gate? Why, bless my soul, I wouldn't cry about it. That's not like a man. Why didn't you climb over, hey?"

"It's not shut," sobbed Adam, with his arm across his eyes.

"Then what's the matter? What are you here for? Poor little devil! They've been scolding you, I suppose?"

Adam pointed down the road. "They've all go—one to the Ma-art, and they w—w—wouldn't take me!" he burst out, and howled aloud, responsive through all his being to that sympathetic voice.

"What a burning shame!" cried Dicky indignantly. "And why wouldn't they take you?"

"M—m—ma didn't want me."

"Nor your father either?"

"Pa's away; but he said I might go. He gave me a

shilling to spend. He didn't mean me to stop at home. But he's gone away. He did—he *did* say I might go!"

Dick Delavel surveyed the child thoughtfully for a moment; then picked him up and carried him to Lady Susan.

"Isn't it a dashed shame?" said the boy to his mother, "when Drewe told him he might go and gave him a shilling to spend. Look here, mother—you won't mind—let us take him with us."

"Oh, my dear, nonsense!" cried Lady Susan.

"Why nonsense? I will look after him; he needn't bother you."

"My de—ear boy!"

"But why not—if I keep him away from all of you?"

"Why—why—we can't interfere with Mrs. Drewe's arrangements."

"Oh, yes, we can. His father meant him to go. *Do* let me bring him."

He urged and urged, and she wavered and gave way. It was what she always did in the end.

"Well, my dear, you must take the responsibility."

"All right. Come on, young 'un, and let us find somebody to wash your face." And Dicky took the child pick-a-back, and scampered with him to the house, where he gave Sar' Ann a shock that she did not get over all day.

"Oh, sir," said she as she shook little Adam into his Sunday clothes, "I'm sure Missus will be in a dreadful way at you and my lady putting yourselves to so much trouble, just for him. And you'll catch it, Adam, for complaining to the gentleman—my word, won't you!"

"Never mind, Adam, I'll take care of you," said Dicky. "I won't let anybody scold you; don't you be afraid."

Adam was not afraid. No one ever was afraid to trust to Dicky Delavel. In a dream of joy the child, when he was dressed, put his hand into the strong hand of his protector, and trotted with him to the carriage; for somehow he had no shyness with these great folks, who had stood by him more than once against an inhospitable world. He was to them but one of many dependents whose infirmities made them a sacred charge on the benevolence of the landlord's family; but all he knew was that they were not ashamed of him, and that was all he cared for. When Mr. Richard hoisted him over Lady Susan's knee, that kind lady, and the young ladies with her, smiled at him as his mother smiled at Tommy; and the little guest, thus made to feel at home, beamed back at them with his goggle eyes, as happy as a prince.

"Now, then, he shall have a spree for once," declared Dicky, delighted with himself for what he had done; "I will take him to everything."

"You must mind you don't lose him," said little Katherine.

"Oh, I won't lose him. I'll tie a string to his ear"—pretending to do it.

Adam laughed at this sally. Then his laugh died suddenly.

"Perhaps ma will see me," he whispered, "and be angry, and take me away from you."

"She won't," Dicky confidently assured him. "I shall not let her. We will keep you out of sight until we bring you home. Then we'll give her a surprise." He chuckled at the prospect.

They had great fun presently, when the carriage overtook the one-horse vehicle in which Arabella was jogging to the fair. She craned her neck to see the occupants of the barouche, ready with her sweetest smiles and bows;

and Lady Susan had a momentary idea that it would be proper to stop and explain to her the liberty that had been taken with her domestic arrrangements. Dicky, however, flew at his mother, and nipped that impulse in the bud. He said he would like to stop and make kind inquiries after Adam, and why he had been left behind, just to hear what Mrs. Drewe would say; but this Lady Susan objected to. So they compromised—passed the sociable without stopping, while Dicky held Adam down on the floor of the carriage under his own long legs, and lifted his hat with exaggerated courtesy to Mrs. Drewe. Lady Susan said it was teaching the child to be deceitful; but they all laughed so much when he was dragged up again, grinning from ear to ear with joy at his escape, that it was useless to moralise.

"He is going to have a holiday," said Dicky, "and I am not going to let it be spoilt for anybody. Hey, little shaver! come and sit on my knee and let us have a talk."

Adam climbed into his friend's lap, and was comfortably covered in the fur-lined carriage rug, for the wind was cold and his clothes not as warm as they might have been; and there he lay in a rapture of contentment such as he had never known. To be spoken to in this tone of voice, to be treated in this human fashion, was bliss unspeakable; and "a little shaver" became a term of endearment sweeter to the memory than any other.

He was cathechised as to what he did with himself all day, and whether he could spell "cat," and tell what two and two came to. He answered that he had not been to school yet, and that nobody had begun to teach him.

"No school!" cried Dicky. "No lessons! No swishings! Blessed mortal!"

"But it is quite time he began," Lady Susan inter-

posed. "I shall speak to Drewe. They must not neglect his education, whatever else they do."

"Please, sir, what's swishings?" inquired Adam—a curious child, who could rarely satisfy his curiosity.

"Swishings, my little man, are the painful consequences of being complained of by a master," said the Eton boy, who went to school in days when the birch was a flourishing institution. "If you do something you shouldn't—or even if you don't do it—you are condemned to the block, so to speak, without benefit of clergy,—like King Charles, you know. But I forgot; you haven't been to school, so you don't know King Charles. Well, two fellows hold you down, and—er—after due preparation, the executioner, with a horrible instrument made of twigs tied together—worse than any axe that was ever forged ——"

But here Dicky's sisters interrupted the blood-curdling narrative. They told him he should be ashamed to speak of such things, and that he would make the child frightened of going to school.

"But not *you?*" gasped little Adam, looking up into Dicky's laughing, handsome face.

"Yes, I—even I," confessed Dicky, a "swell" of the Upper Fifth, and "in the boats" by this time. "I am tingling now from the last one. Twelve cuts."

"What was it for?"

"Ah—h—h! You wouldn't understand," said Dicky, whose countenance was lit up with delightful remembrances. "A terrible spree it was. And you can't have terrible sprees, you know, my little man, without paying rather dearly for them."

"Then," said Adam, after a moment's serious thought, "I shall have—oh, I *shall* have to pay for this." He added with violent energy, which provoked much amusement, "I don't care. I don't care *what* I pay for it!"

CHAPTER IV.

THEY drove into Lyntham half an hour in advance of Mrs. Drewe, so Adam could stand up boldly in the high carriage and see all the glories of the fair crowding the great market place. Flags were fluttering, brass bands braying, drums banging, whistles and rattles and bells and penny trumpets squealing and tinkling in all directions; and he heard the thrilling yawns of the lions in Wombwell's menagerie; under that babel of merry sounds, and over all, like angels up in the air, the chimes of the church clock striking eleven. O, Paradise! O, Paradise! He was as a disembodied spirit in this enchanting world.

The carriage clanged under a dark arch into the courtyard of an hotel, and Lady Susan and her party were escorted to rooms that had been prepared for them. She took off her bonnet and pelisse, and sat down in her large-bodied satin gown, with its large lace collar, to wait for the countess and Lady Elizabeth, who had arranged to join her. The girls sat down also, for girl cousins were expected; but Dicky could not endure inaction, and Adam's little hand in his quivered as if full of electric wires.

"Mother, we had better go," said the lad, "before granny and aunt Elizabeth appear"—glancing significantly at his small charge. "Tell us when you want to start home, and we will be here to the minute."

Lady Susan remonstrated a little against his leaving them, but yielded to his wish. She gave him money, appointed four o'clock as starting time, and let him go.

Then did Adam drink his fill of pleasure, for the first time in his life. Dicky knew that he was an ill-used child, and delighted to be the purveyor of happiness to one so well prepared to appreciate it. He found all his own amusement that day in amusing his little charge; and he said afterwards that he had never enjoyed a Lyntham Mart so much. Adam's inexpressible rapture was reward enough for that kind heart, which was to suffer so much itself in after years.

The first thing they did was to have their lunch, early as it was. There was a pastry-cook's shop in Lyntham High Street, that had a little nook like a tiny arbour in it. There they settled themselves and feasted, after the manner of growing boys. Adam was allowed a free hand in his choice of fare, and began virtuously with a sausage roll, because Dicky thought it imprudent to make a meal wholly on sweets. After the roll he had a three-cornered tart, then a cheesecake, then another three-cornered tart, then a jelly, then a cream. Dicky, who had a pint of stout, gave him sips out of his glass between the courses, and a bottle of ginger beer for himself. What a feast! Better than gra'ma's best dinners, at which his pleasure was spoilt by perpetual admonishments to behave himself and not make ugly faces. He could not quite finish his cream, though he tried his best. And that was the end of this delicious and ever-to-be-remembered meal.

Dicky temporarily sustained his growing frame with three sausage rolls and five tarts, and further entertained himself and his guest with a warm flirtation. A young lady who waited on the lunching customers, having served his table, could not tear herself away from him. She hung

about the doorway of the alcove, twiddling the corner of her silk apron, and blushing like the pink bow that fastened her embroidered collar, evincing a desire to forestall his little wants that could not fail to touch so susceptible a heart. He begged her not to put herself to trouble, and she answered sweetly that trouble was a pleasure. When she set fresh tarts before him, he took the dish politely from her, catching—quite by accident—her finger as well; and when he apologised, she again assured him that it was no matter, but confessed to a budding whitlow which pained her when it was squeezed. She coyly displayed it to him, and he examined it tenderly, and prescribed a certain poultice that was his mother's remedy for such things; and he told her that her hand was too pretty for its work, and asked her if the cornelian ring she wore on it was an engagement ring. When she vehemently denied having a young man, he said he was glad to hear it; and when she further explained that she had never met one good enough for her, he expressed his entire belief in the statement. This pastime seemed to exhilarate him greatly; and Adam looked on with the deepest interest, feeling that he had never been so honoured in his company before. He shared his host's admiration of the young lady's charms and their mutual homage, grinning happily as he stared at them. But presently an ugly fat woman, with a scolding voice, called the girl away. Then Dicky paid the bill—propitiating the fat woman with pleasant speeches while he did it—and the pair of adventurers plunged into the revels of the market place.

First they strolled through the long booths, banked up on either side with toys of every description, ranging from gigantic dolls and satin-lined work-boxes, tea services, guns, musical boxes, etc., etc., costing pounds and pounds, to little things that could be bought for a far-

thing;—a dazzling display, indeed, calculated to turn the head of any little boy. Guided by his companion's face, which if ugly was very expressive, Dicky began to make reckless purchases. He presented Adam with an article in painted wood, which, drawn down one's back, made a noise as of clothes violently ripped asunder; and he bought a cake rabbit with two currants for eyes. Suddenly, they had a glimpse of Mrs. Drewe in the distance, and Tommy blowing a tin trumpet; at which they fled precipitately to the wild beasts.

There they spent an entrancing hour—an hour which covered gra'ma's family dinner, during which it was not necessary to watch doorways. In the straw-strewn oblong space surrounded by the barred cages, crowds of people gathered; but there were no enemies amongst them, and they were too much occupied with the animals to stare at the little oddity whom Dicky carried on his shoulder that he might see above their heads, and who had long forgotten to be conscious of himself. This pair walked round and round, the happy child and the stalwart youth embracing each other, following the showman as he passed from beast to beast, stirring one occasionally with his long pole, and explaining where each had come from. Dicky made running comments on the official narrative, and told hunters' stories—stories that discovered a realm of romance hitherto undreamed of,—another world for little Adam to live in apart from that sad and narrow one over which Arabella reigned.

There were the lions and tigers on the right-hand side, the leopard and hyena, the sloth bear and the wolves. There were the two elephants, the big and the little one, at the end opposite the door; the big one came out and walked about, and Adam fed it with buns and apples. He was a little timid until his hero called on

him to be courageous, showing him there was nothing to be afraid of; then he dared all, with unspeakable pride. After that, they watched the funny tricks of the monkeys, and gave them nuts. One of them tried to snatch their hats off, and Adam laughed till the tears ran out of his goggle eyes. They looked at the giraffe, with his head up in the roof, and at the gorgeous birds, and at the snakes in their blankets, and the slim-legged antelopes, and all the other wonderful creatures that lived in such wonderful countries, and had such wonderful lives when they were free. Adam had a thought that does not often occur to a child of six in a wild beast show.

"How they must want to get out!" he said, as he watched the tiger lithely plunging to and fro. "Do you think they lie awake and cry in the night when it is dark and the people are gone?"

"I expect they do, poor brutes!" said Dicky, feelingly.

At last they dragged themselves from this fascinating place, and went to other shows—the Battle of Waterloo, the giantess and dwarf, the performing dogs and the Indian jugglers, and they turned the wheel of fortune, and let off pistols at a shooting gallery, and rode on a roundabout, and watched Punch and Judy, and a monkey on a barrel organ; watched also a sweet angel in tights and spangled skirts—lovelier even than the young lady at the pastry-cook's—who danced on a platform in the cold air, and less interesting, but more miraculous, acrobats, who tumbled on a square of carpet on the ground. It was here that Arabella nearly caught them for the second time; and to escape her they plunged again into a labyrinth of toy-filled booths; and Dicky spent the last of his pocket money on a whip, a top, a ball, a drawing slate, a Noah's ark, and a packet of bull's-eyes; wherewith he

overwhelmed the happy little fellow, who had scarcely ever received a present until to-day.

Then the church bells chimed, and they returned to the hotel. The cobbled courtyard was ringing with the noise of departing vehicles when they entered it, but the Dunstanborough carriage was not waiting for them, they were glad to see. Dicky's grandfather and uncle were in the bar, with half-a-dozen other squires, telling sporting stories over their hot brandy and water, and in no hurry to separate; and upstairs the ladies of the family still sat without their bonnets, fortifying themselves for a cold drive with sherry and cakes.

Adam was introduced to his mother's patroness, and graciously received. The countess had never forgiven Arabella, and now took no interest in her interests. But she had been told that this little boy was despised and neglected by that unnatural wretch, which recommended him to her favour. She asked him his name and his age, and whether he had enjoyed himself at the Mart; and when, in his great happiness, he answered prettily and earnestly, she patted his back and gave him a piece of cake.

"A very well behaved and intelligent little fellow!" she said to Lady Susan, nodding her old head, with its grey sausage curls. "If he had inherited the good looks, he might have inherited the rest with it."

Adam did not know what this meant, but he understood and remembered the remark which followed.

"Very likely he will turn out a clever man; these odd children often do. The size of his brain is enormous, Susan; and brains are better than beauty, my dear."

Lady Elizabeth, who had a sweet face, smiled at him encouragingly. "Mind you learn all you can, and grow up a clever man, and beat them all," she said.

"He will, he will," Dicky broke in. "There's a lot of sense in that comical pate of his. Come here, young shaver, those legs must want a rest."

Adam was standing at the countess's knee, in classroom attitude, with his hands behind him, ordering himself lowly and reverently before his betters, as the Catechism bade him; and the kindly lad took the tired child in his arms. Now that even his looks had won approbation, nothing more was wanting to complete the little fellow's bliss. While the gentlefolk continued to talk around him, he lay smiling on Dicky's breast until his eyes closed. His protector carried him downstairs when at last a start was made—hours after Arabella with her infants had been despatched home by the careful gra'ma—and he slept the sleep of peace under the carriage rug nearly all the way to Dunstanborough.

Just before they reached the village, smelling of the sea in the wintry night, he woke up, realising where he was and what had happened. "She will be so angry," he whimpered; "she'll whip me for going away with you."

"She *won't*," replied Dicky, "or I'll know the reason why. It's all right, little man; I'll take care of you."

The next moment the carriage had drawn up at the gate—not the gate at which he had crouched and cried in the morning, but a green-painted wicket dividing the garden from the road. The latticed casement of the keeping-room glowed with firelight, which dimly showed a figure shuffling round the circular grass-plot on that side. It was Abraham Drewe, in what he called his slipshoes—"slip-shews" in the local dialect—looking out for his truant son.

"Pa!" ejaculated Adam, now wide awake. "Oh, I'm so glad! Pa is back."

Dicky descended from the carriage, laden with the

child and his numerous fairings, all of which he deposited in the father's arms. He explained how he had passed his word that Adam should not be scolded, and Lady Susan backed him up.

"We did think it hard that the poor boy should be left behind, when his brother and sister were taken," she said; "I cannot bear to see a child treated unfairly, Mr. Drewe, and I am afraid his mother *does* make a difference between them."

"She sha'n't do it again, my lady," said the farmer gruffly. "When I came home and found what had happened, I gave her a piece of my mind, my lady. The child is our child the same as the others, and he shall be treated as such. As for your kindness, my lady, I don't know how to thank you for it."

"You must thank my son," said Lady Susan; "it was he who insisted on taking him to the Mart with us."

Drewe held out his hand to the tall lad, with the other he supported Adam and the toys.

"You've done a kind act, sir," he said, with much feeling, "and I sha'n't forget it. It is a lesson to me, sir. I am afraid I haven't considered him enough, poor chap. But I'll look after him better in future. Good night, sir, and thank ye; thank ye kindly."

Dicky laughed off these grateful protestations, flung a joke to Adam, who reached out his burdened arms to embrace his ever-to-be-beloved friend; and the carriage vanished in the night. Drewe carried his child to the house in a very fatherly fashion. His heart reproached him for parental shortcomings, and unconsciously he held his son of more account since the greatest of great folks had done him honour. "If he is good enough for them he should be good enough for us," was the thought in his mind. Adam was at once aware of his father's affection-

ate attitude, but took it as part and parcel of the happiness life had brought him that day.

They went into the keeping room, where his mother sat by the fire with a sullen air. She did not scold him; she hardly spoke to him, or to anybody, and her eyes showed that she had been crying. The fact was that Abraham Drewe, when he chose to assert himself, was not a husband to be trifled with.

"Now you'd better go to bed," he said to his son, kindly. "Tom and Prissy are asleep long ago. You can tell us about the Mart to-morrow. Bella"—with a decided change of tone—"come and put him to bed."

Mrs. Drewe silently followed the pair to the nursery, and perfunctorily undressed her son, Abraham standing grimly by to superintend the operation. If Adam had been fond of his mother her demeanour would have been the one shadow upon his perfect bliss; but he was almost as indifferent to her—when she did not actively illtreat him—as she deserved that he should be. He waited until she had gone—and she went as soon as she could—and until he had said his prayers at his father's knee; then he poured out his tale of the day's delightful doings, of which his little heart was full. Never had his tongue wagged so freely, and to such a tune, since he was born.

His father sat beside him for half an hour, lending an attentive and sympathetic ear. These events were as wonderful to him as to the child, his landlord's family being greater than royal personages in their tenants' eyes; but his chief interest lay in the surprise of finding how much the little chap had in him now that he was moved to be communicative.

"Pa," said Adam suddenly, "may I go to school?"

"To be sure you may," his parent promptly responded, and began to make arrangements in his mind immediate-

ly. "But what's put that into your head? What do you want to go to school for?"

"I want to learn," said Adam. "I am going to be a clever man when I grow up."

"And I shouldn't be at all surprised," thought Abraham to himself, as he stole downstairs in his carpet slippers to finish his pipe and his lecturing of his wife, "as like as not he'll beat the handsome ones yet. I'd no idea he was so sharp and noticing. Now, Arabella, listen to me—you treat that child as a mother ought, or you and me'll have a falling out. Don't you let me find him chucked on the roadside, like a bit o' dirt, for strangers to take pity on, again."

So little Adam's happy day was happy to the last. He fell asleep with all his toys around him, and had wild and lovely dreams—not being accustomed to so many tarts at once. He hunted lions and tigers all night, and had tremendous and terrible adventures, but never came to any harm, because his father and Mr. Richard were with him.

CHAPTER V.

DICKY disappeared from Adam's view that night with the vanishing carriage, to be seen no more for a long time; and in the morning Adam's father went out a-hunting on a vicious horse. He kissed his little son before starting, and exhorted his wife to bear in mind what he had told her, and take care that she treated that child as a mother ought. Otherwise, he said, she would hear of it. Then he rode away, curvetting and plunging, lashing with his heavy crop; and Arabella slapped her eldest born as soon as the coast was clear. "Who was he," she demanded, "that the great Delavels should notice him, while poor Tommy and Prissy were left out in the cold? She'd teach him to tell wicked stories—*monkey face!*—and if he blabbed to his father again she'd—she'd—she'd flay the skin off his nasty little back—that she would!" And she set her pretty teeth together, and cuffed him till his big ears were as red as a cock's comb. But Adam bore up well. The thought of his father's new love supported him. It was like wine and a warm coat, to keep his spirit from getting chilled.

All day he looked forward to his father's return; and when the time seemed drawing near, he strayed to the road gate to look for him. It was foggy and cold; but weather was never considered in his case, and he did not fear a scolding to-day. Rather, he anticipated a ride on his

father's horse from the road to the house—a much-desired privilege, which Tommy and Baby monopolised as a rule.

When he heard the thud of approaching hoofs, the little boy's heart leaped. It sank when he discovered that the horseman wore a red coat, and therefore was not a farmer, but a fine gentleman of the hunt—the rector of a neighbouring parish, who used to go to church with spurs on, and even show colour through a ragged surplice at times, without greatly shocking the congregation. Instead of riding by to his home, Mr. Edwards pulled up, and shouted, "Hi, boy! open that gate!" And when Adam had climbed on a bar and laboriously opened it, the stout parson galloped up to the house without further words. Adam did not wonder what he had come for, but set the gate wide for his father, and fastened it; for evidently the hunt was over. He hoped it would not be wrong to let his father stop and take him up, before he divulged the important news that Mr. Edwards had come to see them.

The next time he heard hoofs he attributed them to horses from the common, meditating trespass, from a knowledge that the gate was open; and he placed himself on guard to circumvent them. Instead of one clear trot or gallop, several sets of legs advanced at a loose and shuffling walk; and it was not in that style that Abraham Drewe rode home. Peering through the deepening dusk, the child saw red coats, again—several red coats—drifting through the fog like the beaten remnant of an army, the horses hanging their heads and yawing about the road,—not pounding home out of the damp and cold to their warm stables and mangers, their comfortable dinners and teas, as usual. Why did they travel thus? He had but a moment to wonder; and then he knew. They had made themselves a guard of honour to a Thing lying on a gate,

upborne upon the shoulders of some labouring men, who staggered as they walked;—a long heap under a horse-cloth, with two upright boot heels at one end and a reddened handkerchief at the other. As it loomed through the twilight, nearer and nearer, the little boy understood that it was his father—dead! He was a little boy of six years only; but he was old for his age, and had learned many things from the servants, amongst whom his life was chiefly spent. They liked nothing better than to talk of coffins in the fire and winding sheets in the candle, ticking death-watches and night-braying dogs, and the fatal disasters that these phenomena had portended in their respective family circles. He remembered at once that Sar' Ann's sister's brother-in-law, a keeper at the Hall, who had been shot by poachers, was brought home on a hurdle in the dark night. That, she told him, was the way people always were brought home when they had been killed suddenly.

The procession turned in at the gate, passing him closely, without deigning to notice him. He could hear the panting breaths of the bearers, marching unsteadily under their load; he saw Ajax, the big hunter, riderless, being led on a long rein behind the other horsemen; some of them halted in the road to talk to Andy Toogood and others who ran from house and farmyard to meet them. Andy's broad Norfolk tongue sounded clear through the subdued but distracting confusion, when the Thing revealed itself. He protested that it was impossible his master could be dead. And the answer came from a dozen throats at once, solemnly—"Dead as mutton! Dead as a door nail!" Adam heard, and quite understood. It meant that his protector and comforter had been for ever taken from him.

He shuffled home at the heels of Ajax, who shuffled,

too, apparently overwhelmed with remorse for what he had done; and he stood in the crowd of big men while they laid the gate on the gravel, and uncovered his father's battered face on the kitchen floor; and no one noticed his presence or thought of his childish woe, the horror that was searing his imagination like an ineffaceable burn. Presently, when the face was covered again, and his mother's shrieks were calmed, a gentleman pointed him out to Sar' Ann. Then Sar' Ann snatched him up, ran with him to the nursery in breathless haste, bundled him into bed, and abandoned him in the lonely darkness to his visions of blood, to terrors and sorrows that nearly turned his brain. When he cried to her to stay with him because he was so frightened, she told him she had something better to do, and that if he didn't go to sleep at once, like a good boy, she'd smack him. And she relentlessly departed, shutting him in and turning the key upon him, that he might not intrude where he was not wanted again. Yet no one in the house was so kind to him as she, with the exception of that kind father whose kindness would shelter him no more. His wails sounded all night—"Pa! Pa—a—ar!"—but no one listened to them. Tommy and Prissy, his familiar companions, were put to sleep in their mother's room, because *she* was too frightened to sleep alone.

When Arabella had recovered from hysterics and swoons and dressed herself in her widow's weeds—crape to the waist gathers, and a large white cap that covered the whole of her flaxen head, curls and all—she began to sit about in attitudes, grouped with Tommy and Prissy, for her many sympathising friends to look at. She made a touching picture,—so young a mother with those two pretty children, the addition of Adam's ugly face would have spoilt it! Therefore Adam did not pose, even in the

background. Where he went, or what he did, that mother neither knew nor cared. For the most part, he clung to Sar' Ann, who sometimes smacked him and sometimes gave him cakes, and who initiated him into whatever mysteries were still to learn concerning the processes of death and burial. "Poor Dadda is gone to heaven," she would tell him, pointing to the sky; but, having heard her talk with her cronies, and seen the coffin and the hollow grave, he drew his own conclusions.

The day came when the spare room, in which he had been born, and where the dead man had lain in state, was restored to its usual order; and the blinds were pulled up, and as many mourners as the parlour would hold sat round, amongst the wax flowers and antimacassars, to hear the will read—the widow in the armchair of honour, with Prissy on her lap, and Tommy at her knee. Mr. Pritchard, from Lyntham, officiated; and informed the company that the deceased had made the usual and proper provisions for his family, appointing as his executors his father-in-law, James Armour, and his friend, Alfred Holditch. Mr. Holditch was a neighbouring farmer and fox-hunter, red-faced and black-whiskered, still on the right side of forty, and still unmarried. He supported the widow on this occasion, and seemed quite willing to continue to do so under the terms of the will.

Later, when some conferences had been held, it was decided that Arabella should continue to live at the farm, which had been tenanted by Drewes for so many years, and that Mr. Holditch should manage it for her. "All places are the same to me now," said Arabella, with her black-bordered handkerchief to her eyes. But she knew that her present home would be more to her taste than her father's house,—her home, with its sympathising neighbours, summer visitors, sisters and friends to stay

with her, and the liberties of a matron in full command; so she wept very much at the thought of being torn from the sacred associations of her happy married life and from her beloved husband's grave. Mr. Holditch could not bear to see her tears, and said she should not be turned out if he could prevent it. Lady Susan, who could so well understand these sentiments, folded Mrs. Drewe in her arms and assured her it would be all right—that no one would deprive her of her melancholy consolations—not for the present, at any rate. And the lord of the manor, being interviewed by his agent and the executors, graciously consented to allow Mr. Holditch to administer the farm for Mrs. Drewe, reserving to himself the right to revoke his consent should the experiment prove unsuccessful.

It did not prove unsuccessful—from a landlord's point of view. Mr. Holditch was everything that an executor and friend could be to a lone and lorn young widow. There was hardly a day that he did not come to consult her about something; and her business was managed as thoroughly and as profitably as his own.

Before Lady Susan could suggest it, Arabella took steps to provide for her children's education. She engaged a nursery governess to take the whole of them off her hands, that she might the more conveniently attend to farming affairs and other engagements. Lady Susan had a staid old person in her eye, a chaperon for Mrs. Drewe; but the latter's choice fell upon a showy, coarse, uneducated girl, who could be made to keep her place in the background, and to keep the children out of the way when they were not wanted. From her little Adam learned a new experience—to hate. She was allowed a free hand in her treatment of him, and used it heavily; and Adam would not receive her corrections as he did his

mother's. He called her all the bad names he had picked up from his field friends, and kicked her till she was black and blue. Then she complained of him to Arabella, with many malicious lies; and Arabella begged Mr. Holditch to take him in hand, as she was incapable of coping with so incorrigible a boy. And from time to time Mr. Holditch thrashed him with a buckled strap or with his riding-whip, roaring at him to know how he dared behave so to such an angelic mother, and to warn him of far worse penalties in store for him should he be caught vexing her again. After which the child, his little shirt sticking to his bleeding back, would return to the smirking and triumphant governess, and the unequal duel would immediately begin afresh. However, she put him in the way of learning to read and write, which, in spite of the painfulness of the process, repaid him for what she made him suffer. No stupidity on her part could make him stupid, or dull his desire to learn as much as he could. He and his brother began on the same day, but Tommy had not mastered his alphabet when Adam astonished Mrs. Armour by reading a dozen words from the family bible.

"I declare," said gra'ma, then on a visit to Dunstanborough, "this child is going to be clever, Arabella. He takes after his mother's family in *something*, at any rate."

"What's the use of being clever," retorted Arabella, "with a face like that?"

"Oh, my dear, a great deal of use," her mother assured her, in the encouraging tone that she felt it her duty to use whenever this subject was discussed. "His face will matter very little if he has a great mind and can make his way in the world. Clever people mostly *are* plain—in fact, almost always."

"Plain!" echoed Mrs. Drewe, with a disgusted look at him, "if it were only *plainness* I wouldn't care."

Adam, frankly admitted to these discussions, got himself out of the room in shame, and presently went to seek comfort from Sar' Ann, who was now his only friend; for Lady Susan had again withdrawn her countenance from the Drewe household, and consequently from him. Not only did she disapprove of Mr. Holditch's exaggerated ideas of the duties of an executor, but she had made the discovery that her own two sons, Roger and Keppel, who had left Eton for Oxford, had fallen into the habit of calling upon the widow when they were at home for their vacations; dropping in with their guns and dogs at convenient and unconventional hours, not both together, but one at a time, and having long interviews—yes, even after their mother had forbidden them to do so. Naturally, she was very bitter against Arabella, whom she now styled "that woman," and was very sorry that she ever persuaded Mr. Delavel to allow her to keep the farm after her husband's death. Young Dicky was, of course, not allowed to accompany his brothers when they went to cheer up Mrs. Drewe; so that Adam never saw him either, except sometimes at church. Sar' Ann was his only friend. But Sar' Ann was a better friend than she used to be, because, like Adam, she hated the nursery governess. He asked her if she thought he would be a very ugly man when he grew up, or only a plain one; and she did her best to reassure him.

"I'll tell you what you must do," she said, regarding his weak points with a reflective air, "you must grow plenty of whiskers round your face—great big ones, that spread all over, you know; and you must wear blue spectacles—large, thick, dark blue spectacles. Then you'll look quite nice—not ugly at all,—to speak of." Seeing

that this did not wholly comfort him, she patted his big head, and bade him not mind what rude people said. "Don't you take no notice, bor. Remember that handsome is as handsome does. Beauty is but skin deep, and passeth away like the flower o' the field. God don't care about looks. He made you; so He thinks you are all right, depend on it."

"It is not God that I mind," said Adam. "I can't see Him looking at me, and I'm sure He *can't* see plainly all that long way off. It is people. I wish people were all blind, Sar' Ann."

"Oh, you wicked boy! God 'll strike you blind yourself if you say such things. Then what 'd you do? Be thankful you've got good sight and good hearing, and good sense to get along with. Why, you might have been deaf and dumb, or a drivelling idiot! How would you have liked that?"

"So might you," returned Adam.

"Don't you be rude, sir. There never was any danger of my being an idiot, thank you."

"But you are not clever. You can't read like I can."

"I daresay not. I don't want to. There's better things than being able to read books, I can tell you." She smirked at an imaginary looking-glass.

"Is there?" cried Adam. "Is there really? Isn't it any use to be clever if you are not pretty, Sar' Ann?"

She hastened to correct herself when she saw how he hung upon her words. "Yes, it's all the use in the world," she assured him,—"for *boys*." Not for her sex, but for boys and men. "You grow up clever, Adam, and you'll turn the tables on 'em,—that you will. You'll get rich and grand, and drive your carriage, as like as not; and beasts like that Miss Whittaker will feel proud if they can black your boots."

Adam looked at her thoughtfully.

"Will people *like* me better if I grow up very clever?" he asked.

"Sure to," the girl responded, heartily. "They'll dote on you. Oh, there's nothing like cleverness. It beats everything."

Then Adam took heart and went back to his books, determined to learn all he could from Miss Whittaker, though she was a beast.

CHAPTER VI.

In the late autumn of the year that Abraham Drewe died, when Adam was seven years old, with the mental stature of an ordinary child of ten, winding sheets began to form upon the candles, and coffins to spring out of the fire—with the usual result. His brother Tommy fell ill and died. Tommy, who was always wrapped up so warmly and taken such special care of, caught a bad cold which attacked his lungs, and was carried off after a few days' illness. This was a fresh and terrible aggravation of the hardships of our little hero's lot, for two reasons. Tommy had been his nursery mate and playfellow, despotic but adored, and his loss was irreparable, and the mother of them both, when one was gone, turned against the other more violently than she had yet done. She hated her eldest son, and did not disguise that she hated him, for having presumed to keep alive and well—for having usurped, as it were, his brother's right to the favour of Divine Providence.

"Get out of my sight!" she raved passionately, as she sat weeping by Tommy's coffin. "Don't dare to come near me with your ugly monkey face! Oh, that *you* should be left, and my pretty darling taken!—my little beauty, with his blue eyes and his golden curls!"

All the mothers of the village, with tender-hearted Lady Susan at their head, came to condole with Arabella

in her bereavement, forgetting her faults in their pity for her supreme misfortune; but no mother seemed to remember the unmothered living child, who was equally in need of sympathy. He kept out of the way, and no one troubled to inquire about him. He was too constantly unhappy to have the habit of tears; but he did shed some bitter ones at this time, under cold hedges and in dark attics, where no one could see him, crying for the just father who would never have punished him because Tommy was dead.

However, there was a silver lining to this cloud, as usual. The governess took her ease when Tommy had left the schoolroom, and immediately after the funeral she was sent away. Mrs. Drewe did not feel able to afford twelve pounds a year merely for Adam's advantage; she said he could very well go to school, being so robust. There was a little day-school in the village, about a mile from the farm, where a genteel education was given for a shilling a week. Thither Andy Toogood took him and his dinner bag one morning, and fetched him home in the afternoon; and after that he trudged to and fro alone, in all weathers, and began to enjoy himself a little. His teacher was a severe old woman, and his fellow-pupils teased and mocked him, and sometimes he got bewildered in a snowstorm, and sometimes met bullocks on the road; but a new world of interest came into being when he began to watch the opening of hedge-row buds, and the ways of birds and beetles, and the aspects of the sea—the sea, whose breath had been in his nostrils always, but whose beauty and mystery had never been brought home to him until now. He was still a very little boy—far too little to go that distance alone, and often in the dark as Lady Susan indignantly asserted (but not to Arabella, whom she dropped again when that bereaved

mother went to a party with Mr. Holditch only five weeks after Tommy's death); but the circumstances of his life had developed him so far that he was no longer blind and deaf to the romance of Nature, like most little boys.

The happy hour of his day was the dinner hour, when the days were fine. He could steal away from his companions into the road that ran to the sea between the "Delavel Arms" and the Coastguard Station, and, taking a field-path from the inn, and a flight of steps to the beach, find himself amongst the boulders under the chalk cliffs in about five minutes. And here was Paradise! While eating his dinner, or after bolting it in haste, he wandered from rock to rock, and from pool to pool, or, when the tide was out, over broad acres of corrugated sand, finding wonders and treasures that filled his soul with joy. He used to stuff his pockets with sea-weeds, shells and starfish, bits of jet and cornelian, and things of that sort, until his mother smelt them and saw the stains on his clothes, after which he made a museum in a hole in the cliffs, which he visited almost daily. On two occasions his schoolmates tracked him, discovered the hiding-place, and threw the contents into the rolling surf; and he found another and another, which he stocked by degrees, and guarded with the far-sighted cunning of a smuggler defending the secrets of his cave. In this interesting pursuit he learned a great deal of natural history, and absorbed the spirit of the sea to such an extent that he was never afterwards wholly happy when away from it.

On a certain delicious April noon, when Dunstanborough woods and lanes, and the fields above the cliffs and the beach below them, all reeked with life and beauty, and more wonderful things were presented to Adam's view than his voracious intelligence could grasp at once—at

the moment when, morning school being over, he was making for his lair under the lighthouse, to eat his bread and cheese and watch the tide come in—his enjoyment of the world he had found for himself was crowned in an unexpected way. He suddenly met his old friend and hero, Richard Delavel. The lad had shot up into young manhood since the Lyntham Mart adventure, and Adam had grown out of his nursery childhood; but they recognised each other at a glance, and renewed friendship on the spot.

"What, Adam! Well met!" cried the young squire, in tones that thrilled the listener's heart. "And how goes it, little shaver? Here, I haven't seen you for ages. You come along with me, and have a talk. I'm going to buy a present for a young lady—you need not tell anybody—a young lady friend of mine at Lyntham. Then I am going for a sail with Sam. Wouldn't you like to come and have a sail? It's such a jolly day to be on the water."

To have a sail had been Adam's dream of bliss ever since he could remember. He had never been on the water yet, though born so near it. But, alas! there was school to be considered, and his mother, and Mr. Holditch's buckle strap. He told Dicky that he would give anything—*anything*—to go with him; but that if he was not back in school at half-past one he would "catch it."

"From whom?" demanded Dicky; "old Mother Dunford? Oh, never mind her. I will tell her it was my doing; she won't scold you then."

"And if I was late home, sir——"

"If you are late I will go home with you and explain. What's that bag for?"

"My dinner, sir."

"What have you got?"

Adam showed some bread and cheese, which looked dry.

Dicky wrinkled his nose.

"We'll go to the 'Arms' and have a bite of lunch together," said he; "only first I must buy my present. You can help me to choose something pretty, Adam—as pretty as she is."

"The lady we saw when we went to the Mart?" queried Adam.

"Oh, no," said Dicky; "another one."

They turned in at a white gate, leading to the neat white houses of the Coastguard Station. One of the men who lived there was an ingenious worker in pebbles and jet, and used to keep a little stock of ladies' ornaments, which he sold to the summer visitors. As yet the summer visitors had not arrived, and Dicky expected to have a good choice.

He was received by the coastguardsman and taken into his parlour, where the trays of pretty things were spread out upon the table. Jet bracelets and brooches, strings of amber beads, crosses, hearts, and anchors for hanging on neck-ribbon or watch-chain, cornelian finger-rings were submitted to the young man; and all were so charming that he did not know which to choose. Adam was so keen to know how they were made, in view of the fact that he had quantities of jet and amber in his private museum, that he could hardly give his mind to help his friend. Finally they decided upon a large amber heart and a "Faith, Hope, and Charity"—*i. e.*, a cross, an anchor, and a heart cut out of red cornelian and strung together on a ring, as a charm for a watch-chain—which Dicky decided were the very things. Adam asked if both were for the young lady at Lyntham; and the purchaser admitted, in strict confidence, that they were not. The

heart was for her; the "Faith, Hope, and Charity" for another young lady, in another place.

The trinkets being packed in wadding and pocketed, they repaired to the "Delavel Arms," where Adam complied with his host's command to have "a good tuck-out." Fish, roast chicken, jam tart, were placed before him, and he ate as much as he could stow away, and more than was good for him. But Dicky liked to see him enjoy himself in so natural, if gross, a fashion, and would have been disappointed if his hospitality had been less appreciated. It turned out that the "Faith, Hope, and Charity" was for the daughter of the landlord of the "Delavel Arms," a charming young lady who came to talk to them, through the window, at intervals, while they had their lunch. The gift was offered and received over the window sill while Adam was finishing his second helping of tart, and the parties to the transaction retired for a few minutes thereafter, the donor returning in great spirits to his guest.

"That's all right," he remarked, in a tone of extreme satisfaction. "Now, if you are ready, Adam, we will go for our sail."

The little boy heaved himself up, also with a sense of satisfaction; and when Dicky had sent a message to "Mother Dunford," they took the field path to the black stairway descending to the beach, and found Sam and his boat awaiting them. Sam was the only resident waterman in those days, and a great friend of Dicky's; and Sam was good to little Drewe that afternoon, because of the young gentleman's example.

Oh, what an afternoon it was! As a festival it ranked next to the day at Lyntham Mart, to be remembered for ever and ever. Adam was not ill, as under the circumstance, might have been expected, and the buoyant flight

of the boat over the water made him feel as if he had wings himself. The sea ran briskly under a fresh spring wind, and the little vessel skimmed along as if she were alive, dipping and dancing, leaning over, sometimes, till the foam she made was nearly flush with the gunwale. But there was no being afraid, with Mr. Richard at the helm and Sam holding the sheet, and Adam was never a coward at any time, in spite of all that had been done to make him so. They visited a fishing smack, and approached the shores of Lincolnshire, which was like seeing France; and, while Sam conducted some business of his own, the little boy explained his life as best he could to his questioning and sympathising friend. He told Dicky, amongst other things, that he had the "scratch-back" still, hidden under a loose board of the nursery floor for safety; and that his other keepsakes had been taken from him for Tommy and Prissy, who had destroyed them. Then Dicky presented him with his own pocket-knife, to cut string and sharpen pencils with; and Adam felt as if a patent of nobility had been conferred upon him. Dicky was a great man now, and smoked a cigar, but he was not above considering the interests and aspirations of a neglected little boy. Adam simply worshipped him.

Of course, they were late in getting back—so late, that Dicky stood in as much risk of a reprimand as Adam himself. The sun was flushing the red and white cliffs and blazing on the lighthouse lantern as they ran the boat on Dunstanborough sands, and Sam took Adam on his back through the shallow surf to shore. It was a beautiful hour for the walk home, in that low and mellow light—almost the first perfect evening of spring that year, with the first nightingale singing in the Hall woods. But it was after Adam's bed time, and Dicky had lost his dinner.

"Well, it can't be helped," the latter remarked, cheerfully. "In for a penny, in for a pound. I shall have to take you to your mother now, and see that you don't get licked. How have you enjoyed yourself, eh, young shaver?"

"More," said Adam, "than I ever did in my life—except when you took me to the Mart. And I don't mind being licked, sir—for this."

"Poor little devil!" Dicky ejaculated, patting the boy's head benevolently. "We will have another lark together, some of these days."

But it was many years before they had another lark.

Twilight was coming on as they neared the farmhouse, but it was still light enough to see what was to be seen. And Dicky saw something more than the green gate in the green hedge that he was making for, while still a good way off. He saw a female form leaning over it from the inside and a male form leaning over it from the outside, so that the two heads were in contact. He saw, moreover, that these forms belonged to Mr. Holditch and Mrs. Drewe. At this time of night, and on that very quiet country road, they naturally assumed themselves to be unobserved.

Dicky paused in his stride, and checked Adam's hasty steps.

"Hullo!" he muttered under his breath, and then laughed to himself. "I think we had better go round by the other gate, Adam. Mr. Holditch is bidding your mother good-night, and you don't want to meet him, do you?"

In the many confidences of the day, Adam had frankly admitted to his friend that he hated Mr. Holditch.

They slipped into a by-road and approached the house by the route used for the farm carts and cattle, the same

by which Abraham Drewe had returned home for the last time. Dicky designed thus to come upon Arabella by degrees, giving her time to prepare for him. But as he entered the garden from the dairy side of the house, which was a tree-sheltered walk, she turned a corner into that path and met him face to face; and Mr. Holditch was not gone. He walked beside her, with an arm around her waist.

All four were dismayed by the encounter, and even more displeased. Dicky blushed furiously, but was otherwise cold in his demeanour, and very Delavel-like indeed; and Adam glared strangely with his goggle eyes. The lovers jumped apart, as lovers stupidly do when thus surprised, too late to save appearances—the man angrily shamefaced; the woman all foolish simpers and giggles. Arabella knew what to do at this awkward moment. She promptly introduced Mr. Holditch as her affianced husband.

"We did not intend to announce it quite so soon," she said sweetly; "but, after all, it is not so *very* soon—I have been a widow much more than a year. And with the heavy burden of this farm, you see, Mr. Richard, and for the sake of my family—— Adam, don't stand staring in that idiotic way! Speak to your new papa, sir. It is well for him, if for nobody else, that there's to be a man at the head of things again. What has he been doing now, Mr. Richard?"

Dicky explained; and she thanked him profusely, but eyed her son in no friendly way.

"I suppose he has been getting over you with all sorts of tales of how he's treated at home—wanting you to pity him—when he has everything that heart can wish—ungrateful boy!"

"Not at all," said Dicky, stiffly; "I took him because

I like to have him, and I thought it would be a little treat."

"He is always having treats. It is because he is indulged so much that he's such a naughty boy."

"But I don't think he is a naughty boy, Mrs. Drewe."

"You don't know him, Mr. Richard. He doesn't show his true self to *you*—of course not. But you just ask Mr. Holditch; he can tell you. If it hadn't been for Mr. Holditch, I don't know what I should have done with him sometimes. Believe me, it is more for his sake than my own——"

Dicky lifted his hat abruptly. "Excuse my interrupting you, Mrs. Drewe; I really must be getting home. My mother will be wondering what has become of me."

"Ah, what a good son!" she enthusiastically exclaimed, "to think of your mother's feelings! Would there were more like you! But won't you come in and have something? Dinner at the Hall will be over, and my supper is ready on the table. Do now, *do*."

But Dicky would not, hungry as he was, and despite the persuasive clutch of Adam's fingers. He bade her a cold good-night, and strode home in a rage on his little friend's behalf, seething with all sorts of benevolent plans, which, however, came to nothing,—like nine-tenths of benevolent plans.

CHAPTER VII.

ARABELLA had begun to tell Dicky that it was less for her own pleasure that she was making a second marriage, than for the profit of her son, who was going to ruin for want of a father over him, and she subsequently completed this statement to a great many people; and yet the first thing she did upon becoming Mrs. Holditch was to beg "gran'pa" and "gran'ma" to take Adam off her hands.

"Dear Alfy," she said, "can't endure him at all—and can you wonder at it? He doesn't mind Prissy,—in fact, he likes her; anybody would like such a pretty little thing: but he says that to see that boy's face before him, morning, noon, and night—and not his own child, that he *must* put up with—is too much altogether. He is making me quite miserable with his fuss about it, and the house is never at peace, with the rows and floggings that are continually going on. Of course, Adam treats him as badly as he possibly can—never will call him papa, though I have whipped him till I'm tired to make him do it. He is just as obstinate as a mule. I declare it is ruining all the happiness of my married life"—putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "*Will* you, mammy dear, take him to live with you? It would be *such* a kindness if you would. He is getting a big, strong boy, and he has plenty of

sense, if he likes to use it. Papa might find him very useful for running errands and doing odd jobs."

Of course the grandparents demurred. They had some of their own children still on hand; and it was hardly to be expected that they should provide for hers, especially as Abraham Drewe had left property. But Arabella pointed out that gran'pa was the executor to that property, and could do as he liked with it—that he could pay himself out of the money set apart for Adam when he should come of age. She was sure the other executor would have no objection. When Mr. Armour told her that this could not be done for legal reasons, and formally consulted the stepfather, an arrangement was come to whereby the former engaged to take the child for a time, and the Holditches to pay for his board and schooling. But gran'pa wished it to be distinctly understood that he consented under protest. The boy was too young to be of much use to him at present, and he hardly thought it was dealing fair by the dead father. Moreover, the aunts at Lyntham looked coldly upon the prospect of having a nephew so unattractive to take about amongst their friends. Had he been a pretty child, they said, or even tolerably decent-looking, it would have been quite another matter.

But the deed was signed, and Adam was handed over. When his grandmother, who had some bowels of compassion, even for an ugly boy, undressed him in an attic which contained great stores of books and papers, as well as his little bed, she found his body covered with wheals and bruises, old and new, which showed her what his experiences had been of the tender mercies of a stepfather. No doubt he had been a troublesome child; but there was reason in all things, she said to her husband, when telling him about it, and no little creature of seven should

be beaten like that. Alfred Holditch was a fine man, certainly, and Arabella thought the world of him; but, for her part, she should never care for him again—never. She hid Adam's wounds as well as she could from her children and friends, but she never forgot them; and she was a much kinder gran'ma than he had expected her to be. In fact, they became great friends in course of time. From the night that she first put him to bed, and pitied him for the way he had been ill-used, he loved her—being keen for the smallest excuse to love anybody, and as she grew an older and older woman, and consequently an object of less and less account to an active husband and daughters in the prime of life, it was pleasant to have a grandson ready with cushions for her back and stools for her feet, and glad to hunt for her spectacles when she mislaid them; *one* member of the family still treating her with honour and respect, instead of good-humouredly despising her as a person who had had her day. There even came a time when she declared, in all sincerity, that that dear boy was the comfort of her life, and that she did not know what she would have done without him.

This was fortunate for Adam. Because, when she had once got rid of him, Arabella was quite resolved never to be saddled with him again. And she never was. Once or twice he went on a visit to his father's house, which was now Mr. Holditch's; but then he was taken by his grandparents as a matter of duty, and not at all for his pleasure or his mother's. When the grandparents and Holditch fell out over money, and one of those slow animosities which people had time for in those days was set up between them, all communication ceased except through lawyers. Mrs. Armour became Adam's mother, and Arabella thought no more of her eldest son than if he had never belonged to her. Even Prissy's

nose was put out of joint long before she died—at ten years old—by Holditch's children, Guy Vavousour, and Gladys Geraldine, and Rodolf Mortimer Montagu, and Ruby Rosamond Evelina Eugénie, who came crowding into the farmhouse, close upon each other's heels, to feed upon the substance of Abraham Drewe. By the dead man's will, executed soon after marriage, his wife had the use of his money until his children were of age, and of a third of it for life, on condition of maintaining those children in a suitable manner in the meantime; but out of the very comfortable income thus secured to her she gave but a pound a week towards Adam's support, and that only when she could not help herself. More often than not, he paid for his keep with his own services; and this was how the coolness arose between the house at Lyntham and the farm.

Adam's services almost from the first were worth the food he ate and the bed he slept on—a bed around which rats disported themselves in great numbers, attracted by leather bindings and other nourishing matter amongst the bookseller's stores. As a very small boy, sleeping in the attic alone, he suffered much from these creatures; they represented the first of the great trials of his Lyntham life. They used to loom through the shadows like malicious hobgoblins, even on the sheet close to his nose —awful apparitions on a moonlight night. They used to knock down the wire cage that held his rushlight, and roll it about the floor, making sounds like the clanking chains of escaped maniacs. Once, when gran'ma had poulticed a sore finger, he woke to find them trying to eat the poultice through the rag; which suggested that they would eat him bodily some night, if he slept too soundly. But time and custom hardened him to these things, and then he set himself to catch the rats that damaged gran'-

pa's property; whereat gran'pa praised him, to his inexpressible delight.

He learned his way about the town in no time, and became the most reliable of errand boys. He swept, dusted, sorted, in the shop, and kept watch over it while gran'pa ate his dinner and his tea; he cleaned windows, and the knives and boots; carted coals, washed bottles, stirred jam, chopped suet; in short, did all he could to please and be useful, and thereby prove that beauty is not everything in this world. He was dreadfully put upon, of course, especially by his aunts; but that he did not mind. As long as they allowed him his human privileges, as long as he could feel himself of any value and importance, he was satisfied. And they acknowledged what a good boy he was, when properly managed; and they never beat him, and never even jeered him about his looks.

But what he did for himself in these years of boyhood was the great achievement of all. His conscientious guardian sent him to a good school, and at home he had access to books of all descriptions. Where there's a will there's a way; and his will—with a stout body to support it—was indomitable. In addition to the labours enumerated above, he worked, at every opportunity, in every spare minute, to store his mind with wisdom and knowledge;—for the love of it in the first place, and, in the second, to get the better of his physical disqualifications for success in life. Either Nature compensates her ungainly children by giving them better brains than common; or the pretty ones, distracted by their frivolous interests, fail to turn good brains to account: but it is as Mrs. Armour said, and as the portraits of famous men and women indicate—the clever people are almost always plain. Adam's cleverness was in proportion to his ugli-

ness; it was very marked indeed. The rate at which he assimilated his intellectual food—devoured in his attic at night, and in all sort of strange places by day—was quite bewildering to gran'pa, whose extensive acquaintance with the literature of his country was mainly confined to its external forms. When it dawned upon him, all at once, that his grandson was a genius, who might possibly set the Thames on fire some day, an actual credit to the family, with a right to all the advantages that family could give him—a new and brighter day had come for Adam Drewe. It was the realisation of Sar' Ann's prophecy in part.

Only in part. Even when he had reached that dizzy height which had seemed so inaccessible, where people were proud of him, there was something wanting. It was a something without which everything was unsatisfactory. This he felt for a long time, but did not fully understand. It grew clearer and clearer the older he grew; and he discovered what it was at last—when between sixteen and seventeen.

His school gave a break-up party. He had just finished his studies there, and the earl and the countess, as they were respectfully designated, had bestowed a silver medal upon him, the highest honour that a Lyntham schoolboy could obtain. The evergreen countess had added some compliments—paid in public, before all the parents and friends, on the festive speech-day—and the decrepit earl had given him a sovereign, and said something kind about his dead father, and about his early patroness, Lady Susan, who was also dead. His proud master had shaken him by the hand, and all the boys had cheered him. Therefore he was in great feather, to use gran'pa's words, gran'pa having become a braggart in respect to his clever boy. The bookseller wanted Adam to

wear his medal on his coat, as a permanent article of attire; failing that, he desired to exhibit it in the shop window. The old gentleman was like his daughter Arabella in some things.

Adam hid his precious bauble in a locked drawer, but he displayed his "feather" openly enough in his brightened aspect. Probably, he was at his very ugliest age at this moment—half boy and half man, with a downy stubble, that was not enough to hide it, creeping out upon his face. "Why is Piggy's moustache like a cricket match?" was a favourite conundrum of his schoolfellows, "Piggy" being one of the least offensive of his many nicknames. The answer was—"Because there are eleven on each side"; and this is a trying state of things, even for handsome youths. Adam would have shaved, again and again, but for his steadfast reliance on the wisdom of Sar' Ann. She had advised a beard and spectacles as sovereign remedies for his misfortune; and he wanted to get them as soon as he could. Let me say here that her advice was sound. A few years later, when the queer lower half of his face was thickly covered with crisp hair, and his protuberant eyes with learned-looking glasses, he was enormously improved. As an intellectual young man, people then ceased to see anything so *very* out-of-the-way in his appearance.

However, even though there were as yet but eleven on each side, on account of which he suffered like a branded Cain, he was pleased to go to the break-up party. The scene of the party was the scene of his late triumphs; he had a standing there, amongst approving masters and pupils who had not won medals. The thought of his importance gave him confidence in himself; and when he went to his room to dress, he felt quite as other young folks feel on such occasions. But he did not know how utterly and perfectly happy he was going to be.

Gran'ma went to his room with him—it was a real room now, and not an attic shared with rats—to make him as smart as possible. For the first time he had a new pair of trousers, instead of gran'pa's old ones cut down, and a new tail coat to go with them; they had been purchased chiefly for the earl and countess to look at during the medal function. As the boy had now a very decent figure, broad and strong, if not as tall as it should have been, he did unexpected justice to these garments, and was quite proud of himself as he turned round and round before the glass to look at them from all points. They enhanced his confidence in himself greatly.

Gran'ma oiled his hair, and brushed it into a big feather at the top and a curl at either ear. He had nice, bright, brown hair, in which she could take legitimate pride; it had the quality of health and wholesomeness which characterised his clear and ruddy skin, and which was, physically, his saving grace. She helped him to squeeze his sturdy hands into white kid gloves, and she put a camellia into his button-hole, and his dancing pumps into his tail pocket. Then, when she had displayed him to an admiring household and rolled him in great coat and comforter, she kissed him, and sent him forth into the wintry night.

"Dear boy!" she said, returning from the street door, satisfied, to her armchair by the hearth. "I declare he looks quite handsome when he is well dressed." She was an old woman now, and her eyes were growing dim.

Adam found himself amongst the first arrivals, and received a warm welcome from his master's wife and daughters, who congratulated him afresh on his school distinctions. This so emboldened him that he asked the eldest daughter if she would give him the first dance. She said at once that she could not, as she would have to be

looking after the guests, but that perhaps her sister Ellen would. He went to Miss Ellen, who declared she was already engaged, and told him to ask Agnes. Agnes, almost a child, but highly desirable nevertheless, giggled as she looked him up and down, and said she "really couldn't," evidently regarding the proposal as a joke.

"Why can't you?" inquired Adam, with rising colour.

"Oh, I couldn't," laughed Agnes, feebly.

"Do you think I can't dance?" he demanded. "I can, then. I have been learning of my aunts for a long time."

He had an uncertain bass voice, with casual treble squeaks in it, and its tone betokened that she was giving him deep offence.

"Don't be angry, Drewe. I'm sure you can dance as well as anybody—of course—why not? But—but I have promised so many of the boys, I really haven't a dance left."

"Where's your programme?" he bellowed. It was hanging to her sash, and he caught it as he spoke.

She snatched it back violently, and made an ugly grimace at him.

"As if they could write their names before they've come, stupid! Now I *certainly* won't dance with you, just for being rude."

"Agnes!" called her mother, sharply. The girl flounced away, evidently to be scolded, and did not return. The hostess came up to Adam, and said, blandly, "*I'll* dance with you, Drewe, with pleasure. Not the first dance or two, as the people will be still coming, but as soon as I can get free. You may put my name down for as many as you like."

She was an immensely fat woman, and her hair was nearly white.

"Oh, never mind," said Adam, "I don't really care about dancing, thank you. I would just as soon look on."

"Well, find yourself a nice seat, my dear. There will be chess and backgammon in the card-room presently."

As guests were now arriving in shoals, she had to leave him hurriedly.

The big schoolroom was turned into a ball-room, beautified out of all likeliness to its every-day self. Instead of maps, festoons of evergreens and paper roses adorned the walls, with candles, set in coloured ham frills, dotted round amongst them. The desks were gone, but the forms were ranged in a continuous line against the wall. A glorious Christmas fire burned in the oft lukewarm grate, with a nursery guard in front of it. The small inner class-room was arranged for whist and table games; and thither the fathers betook themselves, while the mothers remained to look at their frisking children. But Adam did not desire the fathers' company; he stayed with the mothers. They congregated in groups on the forms, and, while they watched the revels, talked in a domestic way. It was not seemly that boys should hear that talk, and therefore they avoided Adam's immediate neighbourhood. And after the music had begun, all such things as medals were clean forgotten. Had he worn his prize upon his breast, it would have been as useless to him as his aunts' dancing lessons.

He sat lonely against the wall, his big hands in their wrinkled gloves outspread upon his knees, and felt much as he had done that morning, years ago, when his mother went to the Mart without him. Though he wore a stolid mien and was too old for tears, his spirit wept within him as it had done then. This, he told himself, was to be his place in life—to sit apart, and look on at the happiness of others, himself for ever out of it!

He would go home as soon as he had had his supper. He was still young enough to think supper a most important feature of an evening party, and was already conscious of an appetite for it. He determined not to allow himself to be taken pity on by that old woman, and that he would never, never again ask a young lady to dance with him. And he wished—he wished from the bottom of his heart, the sensitive heart of a budding man—that he had had the proper pride to stay at home.

But he felt better presently.

CHAPTER VIII.

AMONGST the latest comers to the party there was a little girl, who had to sit on a form the whole evening, as well as Adam Drewe. She had a folded silk handkerchief bound over her eyes, and could not see to romp about; so she was a companion in misfortune, for the time. Apart from that charm, she was a sweet-looking little girl; the fair brow and tender mouth and chin answered for what was hidden of her face; and nothing in the way of costume could have been more engaging than the book-muslin frock and pale blue sash, the smooth silk stockings and bronze kid slippers, that she wore.

From the moment that she appeared, clinging to an elder sister's hand, Adam watched her, fascinated. Here, he felt, was the ball-room mate for him. The bandage, which was like a shutter put up between her and the other boys, was as an unobstructed window between her soul and his, through which he might communicate with her on equal terms—through which she would look at *him*, if he could get near enough to attract her attention, and not at his face.

He began at once to approach her by sidling movements, as she was led from form to form. First, her sister handed her to the hostess, and went off to dance and amuse herself. Then the little girl was passed on to the

daughters of the house, and by them to some matrons who appeared to be family friends. These ladies talked to her a little, asking her how her mother was, and what the doctor said and did about her eyes, but quickly returned to their own gossip; and the interest of the young folks being concentrated upon a sprig of mistletoe over a doorway, they could not be bothered to attend to her. She sat quietly, her little toes hardly touching the floor, her hands folded in her lap, listening to the scuffles and bursts of laughter in that doorway, with an air of eager longing to know what was going on. Adam edged up to her, and seated himself noiselessly, shaking with nervousness. The hostess and others, noting the manœuvre, were sensibly relieved.

"If only those two children will sit together and amuse each other," the former ejaculated, "they will be off my mind. Drewe is just a skeleton at the feast, glaring at us with those uncomfortable eyes of his; and what possessed the Plunkets to bring Fidelia, when she cannot see to do anything, I cannot conceive."

Adam, having recovered from his embarrassment, was informed by the little girl what her name was, and went the surprising length of declaring his opinion, audibly, that it was the most beautiful one he had ever heard. She was astonished, thinking him in fun, and told him she was called Delia by her family, except when the boys said, "Here, Fido, Fido," to tease her, as if she were a little dog. In fact, she had suffered from what was considered an eccentric name, and had often wished it was Guinevere.

"Don't!" cried Adam, who had read his *Idylls of the King*. "It won't suit you at all. Fidelia—think of what it means!—it is the very one for you. I should always think of you as Fidelity. Delia sounds weak and com-

mon, a Dresden shepherdess sort of name. Anybody might be Delia."

The little girl fluttered in this strong air, so suddenly arising.

"And what is yours?" she inquired timidly.

"Adam Drewe."

"Oh! The boy that won the medal?"

"Yes."

She glowed visibly. Small boys had been her portion hitherto. This was the biggest boy, in every sense of the word, who had ever deigned to notice her. "How clever you must be!" she sighed. "I wish I was clever." She wanted to live up to him.

He said he was sure she was—a thousand times cleverer than he—a thousand times better, at any rate; and she protested earnestly. But since one eye had been hurt, she explained, the doctors had forbidden her to use either of them; and of course you *can't* be clever if you don't read. "Even you couldn't," she ventured to say, respectfully.

"How was it hurt?" asked Adam; and the tenderness of his new man's heart for this incipient woman thrilled in his voice, the deep notes of which were singularly rich and sweet.

"I don't like to tell you," she faltered, hanging her head.

Adam hastened to apologise for his indelicate curiosity, and bade her never mind. Upon which she declared that she didn't mind telling him in the least, and stated that a boy had thrown a stone at her.

"A boy!" cried Adam. "A boy *hit* you! You don't mean for the purpose?"

"Well, it wasn't quite an accident. I had been teasing him."

"And he threw a stone at you—*well!*" Adam drew his breath through locked teeth. "I wish I had been there—that's all. I would have given that boy something to remember."

Fidelia beamed with pleasure. Her very hands expressed it, fluttering along the edges of her muslin tucks. "What would you have done?" she asked him, turning the bandaged face towards his, as if to look and smile at him!

He shrank from the seeming scrutiny, but instantly returned to bask in her blind loveliness, which warmed him like a sun; and he said, with passion, "I would have *killed* him."

"Then I am glad you were not there," she gasped, still pleased, but sobered. She added, after a pause, "No, I am not glad. For if you had been there he would not have done it. You would have stopped him."

"I *should*," said Adam.

They drew a little closer, and were silent for a while, full of the sense of their proximity; she, like a little purring kitten at his side, and he thrilling and throbbing with the joy of the promotion that he owed to her—or, rather (but he forgot to think of that), to the doctor's bandage. She broke the silence to ask what the boys and girls were doing, who laughed and scuffled so continuously in the doorway near.

Not for the world would Adam have told her they were kissing each other. They were "fooling," he said, with a blush, under a branch of mistletoe, at which she blushed also, and questioned no more. Adam remembered they would have to pass through that doorway on their route to the supper-room, and fought against suffocating thoughts that he felt to be profane under the circumstances. But one thought he seized and held;—no

other fellow should be permitted the chance to take unfair advantage of her helplessness.

Thinking of fellows, his mind turned again to the miscreant who had hurt her, and he wanted to know who it was.

Fidelia replied, bashfully, that she would rather not tell.

"Why?" queried Adam. "Is he anybody I know?"

"He is one of your schoolfellows."

"*What?*" He glared about the room, from boy to boy, murderously.

"And he has been punished enough," said Fidelia. "He never meant to hurt me seriously, of course. When he heard me shrieking—I could not help it—the pain was so awful—it was like fire—and saw the blood running down my face——"

"Don't!" cried Adam, writhing. And she stopped short to beam on him, and tell him how good he was to care so much about it.

"No one could have been more cut up," she continued, pleadingly. "Of course we forgave him at once, for we knew he never meant it; and you must forgive him, too. He cried—he cried himself. You must not *speak* to him about it; he says he can't bear it. Promise me you will not."

"I think it will be better," said Adam, inflexibly, "if you don't tell me any more. I don't want to know his name; I might be tempted some day. He lifted his hand to you—to a *girl*—to YOU! It would be the same if the stone had not touched you. I could *never* forgive him."

She became frightened at this vehemence, feeling that she had already said too much. "Please—*please*," she begged, with her hand on his sleeve, "for my sake."

"Well—for your sake," Adam murmured, touching the little glove with trembling reverence; "if you put it that way——"

"They are getting ready for supper," she broke in, nervously, "and he will be coming to look for me. He is my cousin; he lives here. I don't; I am only staying with my aunt, to be near the doctor who attends to my eyes. He said, before we came, that he would take me in to supper. He always tries to be kind to me, because of what he did."

"Kind!" echoed Adam, fiercely. "You shall not go with him. How dare he? Kind, indeed! He must have a cheek of brass."

She named the villain, and it was Harry Bowen, his rival for first place in the school, and one of the handsomest lads in Lyntham. Not handsome only—a "swell" also—the son of a solicitor, the grandson of a Church dignitary, and not of a retail tradesman. Hearing that name—already sufficiently repugnant to him—Adam's heart swelled with rage, and then sank with despair, all his new-born dash and valour evaporating in a moment.

"Of course," said he, when he could speak, "you would rather go to supper with him than with me. He is far above me, I know, though he *is* a coward. A big fellow like him to throw a stone at a girl—even to pretend to throw one. Well, I'd rather be as I am, and know that I'd die sooner than do such a thing."

"I am sure you would," his little companion ventured to say, troubled by his bitter tone. "You are very different; and—and I wouldn't rather go to supper with him at all"—blushing at the bold avowal, like a coquettish woman.

"Do you mean," cried Adam, plucked back to strength and courage, "that *I* may take you in?"

"If you don't mind—if you haven't any one else. But I am afraid you will be quite tired of me," she murmured; "I am so stupid—compared with you."

"Stupid!" echoed Adam, in rapture. "*Tired* of you! oh, my stars! of *you!*"

He sprang from his seat, with an eye upon Harry Bowen, who was prancing about the room with a young lady of whom he was evidently not yet tired; and Fidelia rose at the same moment, fluttering with joy. Somehow her hand became locked in Adam's, and neither knew which had been outstretched first.

"Let us go before Bowen comes to look for you," he whispered, under his breath.

"Let us," she whispered back.

He led her through the door that had the mistletoe over it, and imagined the blissful impossible under stern self-control, and he escorted her along a passage into the supper-room, and tenderly lowered her into one of the few chairs, in the most retired corner he could find. There, presently, he fed her with small dry sandwiches and jam tarts, and sips of tepid negus, disregarding the claims of his own healthy appetite; and crowds of boys and girls and fat fathers and mothers stood in front of them, with backs turned.

"Tell me," said Adam, softly, "do you like books?"

Misunderstanding the question, she said she liked some books, and instanced them. The *Heir of Redcliffe* was her favourite.

"I mean *books*," said Adam. "Lots of books—all sorts of books. Do you like reading better than anything in the world?"

She hesitated, anxious to believe that she did, but also to be truthful; then told him that she liked reading when she could see to read herself. It was a different thing

having to get somebody to read to you. Either people had not time, or they would choose books you did not care for.

"I wish *I* could read to you!" sighed Adam.

"Oh, if you could!" she sighed in response.

Then he honoured her with the most precious secret of his life.

"If I tell you something," he whispered, "will you promise never to breathe it to a single living soul? It is something that I have never told anybody."

She leaned towards him, palpitating with pride and eagerness.

"I don't intend," he continued, "to let anybody know about it—except you—until I am famous."

Her grateful smile sobered to a sweet solemnity as she assured him that she would keep the secret safe to her life's end.

"Well, then"—Adam's voice trembled, and his face was red—"*I am an author myself.*"

The effect of this announcement was all that he could have hoped.

"*What?* Oh—h—h!" she gasped, under her breath; and was lost in awe.

"Yes. I am writing a book. I have not done much of it yet, but I shall work at it all holiday time. It's a historical novel,—time of Elizabeth."

"Oh!" she sighed again, "I wish I could read it."

"You shall, when it is finished."

"Will it be published? But of *course* it will."

"Oh, yes. I wrote a ballad to put into it, and they published that in a magazine I sent it to."

"Did they? Oh, how splendid! Oh, how clever you must be! What was the ballad about? If I could only see it!"

A young author does not mislay these treasures, as a rule. Adam's verses were in his pocket book, which he wore by day and put under his pillow at night. He stealthily withdrew them from the pocket of his new coat, unfolding with shaking hands the sheet of blue foolscap to which he had pasted his printed page when it began to fall to pieces. "Perhaps," whispered he, "I can read it to you, if you care to hear it. But, no, I won't; it is nothing but rubbish,—utter rubbish." He made a feint of resolutely refolding the paper; but, yielding to her expostulations, kept it open in the shadow of a bended arm, and began to stumble through a few lines about a belted earl waiting for his beautiful lady at a postern gate. He stopped in the middle of the second verse and glared at the people round him.

"It's—it's magnificent!" sighed Fidelia.

"But I can't read it here," he muttered, angrily. "We are too public. They are all listening and staring."

"Horrid people! Whisper more. I can hear you."

"I can't."

But he could not bear to deprive himself and her of their expected treat, and volunteered to lend her the paper to read when she was able to use her eyes again. She had already told him that the bandages were soon to come off, and also that she was to leave Lyntham on the morrow.

"Oh, would you? Would you, *really?*" she exclaimed, as if overcome by his generosity and condescension.

"If you like," he replied. "If you will take care of it until you have a chance to give it to me again. But be sure you put it in a safe place, where nobody will find it. I don't want anyone to know me as an author until I am a great author."

She had but one safe place at present—her little four-

teen-year-old bosom—into which she tucked the precious document, holding it down outside her frock with a reverent outspread hand.

"And you are going to be a great author!" she ejaculated with ineffable pride.

"Hush—sh—sh! Yes, some day," said Adam, firmly. He was not arrogant, as a rule; but felt it necessary to recommend himself, as strongly as possible, against the day when she might see him, as well as his verses, with unbandaged eyes.

Here they were parted suddenly by Harry Bowen, sent to fetch her to her friends. Harry, having routed his rival, informed her that she had been spending the evening with a fellow as ugly as a laughing hyena.

Fidelia, with only his kind strong voice to imagine Adam by, smiled serenely.

"The head boy of the school, at any rate," she retorted.

"A boy," pursued Harry angrily, "that no girl would take up with if she didn't wish to make herself a laughing-stock to everybody."

Fidelia judged this to be mere schoolboy jealousy, and just smiled on.

While, as for Adam, he went home intoxicated. He was so wildly happy that he could not settle back into the groove for days, nor sleep of nights, for thinking of it.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Holditch sent word to gran'pa that Adam was to be confirmed. She was not in the habit of remembering his existence, except when some squabbling was going on concerning the money for his keep; but Mr. Delavel-Pole had been making inquiries, and pointing out her maternal duty to her. The rector of Dunstanborough was the great squire's nephew, as well as a faithful son of the Church.

Gran'pa at once made answer to Arabella that he knew what was right and proper without requiring her to tell him. And then he called upon the incumbent of his parish, who was preparing classes for candidates, and entered Adam's name.

Adam instinctively objected to be confirmed; but as he did not exactly know why, and was accustomed to defer to others, he yielded to the general wish, that he should make himself as other good boys of respectable family, and not grow up like a low dissenter. But he went to his preparation, as he went to everything, with an open and an honest mind, determined to see just where he was going, as far as his lights would serve him.

The results were curious, and, to his relatives, as unforeseen as they were scandalous. For he slowly groped to the conclusion that it would not be right to commit himself. Having attended all the classes, and given the

most anxious attention to every point raised by the poor young curate, his teacher—whom, by his unconventional counter-questions, he drove to a perfect frenzy—he respectfully but firmly announced his determination to withdraw from the final ceremony, on the ground that he thought it wrong to stand up before God and man and make pledges about things that he couldn't properly understand, and therefore pledges liable to become perjuries, through no fault of his. Vows, he gravely opined, were always a mistake; especially vows when you were young and didn't know what you were going to grow to. He had internal premonitions that he was not going "to believe and to do" what his pastors and masters expected of him, and the course of his examination only made this more clear; so that he really felt it would be putting himself in a false position to submit his big ugly head to the bishop's hands. It would do him no harm, he knew, to have a good man's blessing; but there was more than that in it. He begged everybody's pardon, and was very sorry, and not at all defiant or opinionated; but he was quite firm. In a small way it was the ordeal of Richard Delavel over again; but Adam was not of his friend's importance, and the consequences to him were comparatively trifling. His mother wrote in a rage to say that he was no longer to consider himself a son of hers, while declaring that his present contumacy was all of a piece with his wicked conduct in the past: but there was no fresh sting in that. And gran'pa and the aunts, having expostulated, scolded, and sulked while the matter was undetermined, soon recovered themselves when the bishop was gone, seeing that Adam was of too little account for his vagaries to attract much notice, and having many more important affairs of their own to attend to.

Gran'ma all along stood out of the dispute. She

tacitly conceded to her domestic superiors when they talked to her about it, that her boy was a bad boy; but when they left her alone she forgot all about it, and loved him and "cosseted" him as foolishly as ever. Indeed, they became closer friends than before. Now that he was a man—and this episode marked the point of change—and had begun to deal on his own responsibility with the grave matters of life, Adam found himself more solitary and more misunderstood than he had been as a child; and daily poor gran'ma became more of a toddling old lady, lagging superfluous upon the stage when her work was done. Her children ignored her unimpressive little person, and pooh-poohed her innocent suggestions; they smiled patronisingly upon her old-fashioned opinions, and soothed her with perfunctory platitudes when she complained of feeling "sadly," and that her sight or her hearing was not what it used to be. But Adam never did. He talked to her as if she were still a feeling woman, and a person of the first importance; and when she was ailing he sponged her wrinkled face, and brushed her scant grey hairs, and held and patted her gnarled, soft, shiny, old hands, as if she were still young and pretty. And gran'ma's heart and mind were in excellent preservation, though the case was so dilapidated. Adam knew it, and she knew that he knew it. So they comforted each other.

She had the habit, common to superfluous old ladies, of sitting at home in the chimney corner, while the vigorous members of the household pursued their various diversions out of doors. In fact, she was left there. And Adam, being almost as much out of touch with general society, was frequently left there also. Then he used to read to her,—not the bible, nor sermons, nor even the county newspaper; and of course not the solid works on

which he mainly fed himself. Gran'ma's taste ran to novels—most old people's do, only they are foolishly ashamed to own it—novels full of love and tragedy, like *Jane Eyre*, which was rather a new book then. She would thrill, and weep, and thoroughly enjoy herself, forgetting that she was old and out of date, as she listened to her boy's beautiful voice, breathing life into every scene and character. To give her enough of this entertainment, and protect her tender feelings from ridicule—to which she was absurdly sensitive—Adam contrived a garden arbour, and other places of retirement, to which they might surreptitiously repair; and in the warm weather he took her for little walks, upon his arm, when they would talk over whatever story they happened to be engaged on.

And at last he confided to her his great secret—even though he was not yet famous—seeing that she was always hovering around it with him, and that he had not another sympathetic soul to speak to. Gran'pa and the aunts—women as sternly practical as gran'ma was sentimental—had no patience with anything that seemed to them like waste of time on the part of a youth who had to make his way in the world; and the particular way that he was to make had been by them appointed for him. He was to be a partner in the old-established family business when he became of age and inherited his father's money, and he was to become its responsible head at gran'pa's death. Daily they impressed upon him the importance of his high mission, and his duty in preparing for it. They would inevitably have disapproved of anything that interfered with this preparation; and, moreover, while knowing a great deal about books, they knew nothing of literature, and cared less. So that Adam guarded his secret from them, as he had guarded his cave

in the cliffs from his schoolfellows at Dunstanborough. But dear old gran'ma—a fellow outcast from domestic sympathy, conscious of an inner romantic youthfulness that he only had divined—was another person. She could feel for him. And she did. In fact, he became her favourite author.

Then, when the bright day of success began to dawn, this beloved companion began to fail. Their last walk together coincided with the last chapter of *The Revolt of the Stepson*, Adam's first published work, which he had been writing during the summer, and reading to gran'ma as he wrote it, page by page. Chilly Autumn had now arrived; and the thoughtful grandson was, perhaps, less thoughtful than usual, being so full of his book. Gran'ma caught a cold that day from being out too late, and never managed to shake it off. She, like him, was too full of the book to be conscious of setting suns and rising mists, of damp creeping up her legs and shivers running down her spine, until suddenly it was gas-lit night,—and the mischief was done.

The stepson absorbed them. He was the hero of a full novel, and a most striking personage. Gran'ma had all along protested that he was too singular to be natural, and too advanced in his opinions to be popular, especially with editors; and now, surveying the dramatic *dénouement*, she was deeply excited and concerned. She told Adam that he really *must* alter it; and Adam said he really *couldn't*. She declared in effect that it was a mistake in art and in morals alike; and he replied that it was true to life and the probabilties, and, therefore, true to art; and that as to morals, he had nothing to do with them. Gran'ma urged the indispensability of a moral tone; and they had an affectionate wrangle over that point. She was too weak and fond a gran'ma to be severe

upon his incipient heresies, which would have made her hair stand on end in earlier days; and so he flaunted them freely, and took pleasure in making them appear to her much worse than they really were.

"Gerald, you see, dear, is Gerald, and not a curate," he explained, by way of justifying his hero and himself. "Therefore he had to kill his stepfather. He *had* to do it. When he found that Moggs had stolen Lilian's letters, and read them, and then gone to bully and insult her—to frighten her into the illness that caused her death—I don't see how he could help it." Adam glared fiercely along the misty road, which should have been taking them towards Lyntham instead of away from it.

"And she such a sweet angel!" sighed Gran'ma. "Well, she never would have been happy with that blood-thirsty man."

The author felt hurt. "You don't understand," he said, gently. "You can't enter into Gerald's feelings when he learns the truth."

"Perhaps not," she cheerfully rejoined; "but, my dear boy, I know what the editors' feelings will be when *they* learn the truth. They will treat the book as Gerald treated Mr. Moggs—mark my words. They will never endure that ending. It is not fit for family reading. The more I think of it, the more I feel that it spoils the whole story."

"No," persisted Adam, with the artist's, especially the young artist's, thorough confidence in his own methods. "Given a man like Gerald, it is exactly what he would have done. It is the inevitable climax. Any *other* ending would have spoiled the whole story."

"No—*no*—NO! Not his *father*, Granny! That would have been *quite* another matter. His own father would have been privileged,—however great a fiend.

But Moggs was no more to him than the man in the street—much, much less."

"In the place of a father, my dear—just as one's sister-in-law is the same as a sister."

"Never!" retorted Adam, firmly; "never!"

And gran'ma divined that he was thinking of Alfred Holditch, and she turned the subject. She remarked that the light was going very fast, and that the dew was heavy.

They turned then, and Adam trotted her home as fast as she could go; but a fairy rime overspread her Paisley shawl and her flowing lace veil, and her feet were clammy, and her skin all creeky-crawly, as she expressed it, before she got indoors; and, sinking into her armchair, she said she had never felt so dog-tired in the whole course of her life.

She was ill next day; and she was ill, off and on, during the winter, failing a little more and more after each attack. She was nearing seventy; therefore, as her family cheerfully recognised, such failure was in the order of Nature, and only what was to be expected. Poor gran'ma was generally spoken of as "breaking-up fast." Adam alone refused to see it, and prophesied that she would rally and be her old self again in Spring; and his devotion to her was as that of a mother to an ailing babe.

"I never had a son of my own," said gran'ma one evening, when he brought her a little posset of his own manufacture, as a "nightcap," and fed her with it. Her lips, open for the spoon, shook loosely, and her faded eyes overflowed. "I never had a son of my own—and many's the time I've fretted about it—but my Heavenly Father's made it up to me. No mother's son was ever such a son to her as you've been to me, my precious, ever since I took you; and to think that I grudged taking you,

and gave you the attic to sleep in! Oh, my boy! my boy!"

She leaned to him as he sat on the pillow beside her, under the flowered damask bed-curtain, and he put his disengaged arm round her, and she sobbed upon his breast. He was so stout and strong, and she so small and helpless. But there was a time, as he reminded her, when the case was otherwise.

"What should I have done without you in those days, granny? And haven't you been all the mother I've ever had?"

Then Aunt Harriet, hearing sounds, came in to scold the old lady out of her dismal mood, and to scold Adam for pandering to it. Her medicine for her mother's complaint was a hard and exaggerated cheerfulness;—this was, in her view, the treatment proper for all ailing people, whose state naturally disposed them to imagine anything.

"It is the greatest mistake in the world to be sympathising," she would say. "It only makes them worse. The truest kindness is to help them to forget their troubles." Then she would remark, with a mournful shake of the head, that "ma" was evidently feebler, and agree with her sisters and the still active "pa" that it would be a happy release for her, poor dear! when the Lord took her.

They agreed thus on the present occasion, while Adam was surreptitiously wiping her eyes, and tucking her up, and making her comfortable for the night, as no one else could do; but their prediction appeared to be falsified next day when he brought her the wonderful and joyful news that *The Revolt of the Stepson* had been accepted.

"Now, then!" he exclaimed, entering her room like a tornado, waking her from an afternoon doze. "*Now*

what do you say, granny? You were so sure that Gerald was going to be kicked out every time, weren't you? Aha!" He flourished the editor's letter over his head. "He is welcomed—as he ought to be—at the very first place he goes to! I knew it—I knew it! Oh, you blind old mole! You couldn't see what a splendid piece of work it was!"

But gran'ma saw it now; and, in order to see still better, she asked for her specs, through which she laboriously perused the document submitted to her, flushing and palpitating like a girl over her first love-letter. It acknowledged receipt of the MS., posted two months ago, and in unmistakable terms notified that the same had found favour, and would appear in due course.

"Oh, Ad—am!" she quivered, as she reached to kiss him. "Oh, my boy! My dear, darling, precious boy!"

"Now, don't cry, gran'ma," he warned her, quite in Aunt Harriet's manner; "there's nothing to cry about in *that*. Do you understand what has happened, granny? *My fortune is made.* Oh, they don't say anything about payment, I know—that's nothing; it is the *start!* Such a start is worth millions. And no influence, mind you—nothing but my own merits—the real goodness of the writing," said Adam, with the candid complacence of the literary beginner,—that most "cocksure" of mortals. "It will come out in the magazine, where everybody will notice it first; then it will be published as a volume, of course,—a six-shilling volume, I suppose. I daresay they will give me half-profits; that's the usual thing. Four or five of the six shillings will be pure profit—the mere printing and binding is nothing; so I shall have at least two from every copy sold. A successful book—if it should be successful—runs into fifty thousand or so in no time. That would bring me—let me see—five thousand pounds.

Perhaps by this time next year! Then, granny, you and I will do things. You shall have a carriage to go for drives in, and when you are quite well we'll have a little trip to the seaside; perhaps we will go for a travel on the Continent—at any rate, we'll go to London, and you shall see the sights; you can have a Bath chair if you don't feel able to walk about in the picture galleries and places—and a sable cloak to keep you warm and comfortable. Granny! Don't spoil good luck by crying over it! If you cry somebody will be coming to see what is the matter, and you will be letting the secret out."

She recalled the freshly starting tears, and smiled tremulously.

"Mayn't they know *now?*" she queried, surprised that he should object to have his triumph publicly proclaimed.

"Certainly not. It must be our secret still—until the story is out. Then, when we hear everybody talking about it, and asking who 'Ewerd' is—*then* we'll hurl the thunderbolt, granny!"

He lived to congratulate himself upon this self-restraint. For the editor—that editor for whom he had felt such enthusiastic admiration, as one with brains to discern the difference between good work and bad—a thing beyond the capacity of all other editors of his acquaintance—turned out to be a human fiend, not less detestable than the stepfather himself, and a prodigy of unbelievable ignorance, dumbfounding to contemplate.

He kept back the story for two more months, while he flooded his pages with schoolgirl rubbish of the most sickening description; but that was nothing, though Adam fretted himself thin over the strain of such suspense. When it appeared at length, its appropriate title had been removed from it, and nothing could have sounded more weak and meaningless in the author's ears than the one

substituted—*Gerald Vaughan and His Stepfather.* Why, why had his rights, not to say his title, been set aside in this way? the author questioned the universe; and then—in a note that he struggled hard to make courteous and business-like—the editor himself. No answer was vouchsafed. "Oh, well," thought the author, "it doesn't much matter, so long as the thing is out at last. I can alter it again when the book is published." And he ordered copies of the magazine to send to his friends; one set for Sar'Ann, now the wife of a Dunstanborough labourer and mother of children who had learned to read; and one to be sent to Richard Delavel in Sydney, if, haply, it might find him at that vague address. Adam would have liked to order a set for Fidelia Plunket; but he did not dare. Perhaps she had forgotten him by this time. Or—happier thought!—perhaps she would recognise him in his *nom-de-plume* of "Ewerd," knowing what his profession was to be.

But, alas and alas! His splendid and powerful work, when given to the world, was discovered to have been edited out of all likeness to itself. Its finest passages were all cut out, or so watered down as to have no taste left in them. Gerald the implacable, with his set teeth and his flashing eyes, masqueraded as a poor chicken-livered nincompoop (the author's phrase), while Mr. Moggs—a cross between the Devil and Bonaparte Blenkins—became a commonplace nonentity, with all his swear-words eliminated. Even the angelic Lilian was not allowed to make love, or to be made love to, in the impassioned terms required by the art and nature and the circumstances of her sad case. When she would have declared her willingness to burn in hell-fire for ever and ever—of course for the hero's sake—she was made to say merely that she would "do anything" for him. Worse still,

pious platitudes were put into both their mouths, in place of strong-minded sentiments of a robustly pagan cast. And—worst of all!—the grand climax was left out altogether. When Gerald "learned the truth" and was about to walk quietly to the gun-rack, and Adam was quivering with dread of what his masterpiece might have suffered at the ruthless pen, lo! there appeared, in place of the masterpiece—the tragic episode that was to dignify the whole—two little words in small capitals. Nothing more! The last chapter was suppressed bodily. Gerald never killed his stepfather, never even remonstrated with him. The man who should have been a man indeed was, for all the reader could tell to the contrary, indifferent to his own infamous wrongs and his lovely sweetheart's fate.

Adam, who had writhed in anguish for weeks—from March to May—broke down under this last blow. He retired to his old attic chamber, unseen by the household, locked himself in stealthily, cast himself prone upon the rotten floor, and there lay and wept for hours in the dark, while the rats played round him. It is useless to attempt any description of his feelings, for only an author could understand them, as only a mother can understand what it is to lose a child.

CHAPTER X.

GRAN'MA never knew how right she had been in her view of Gerald's case. She could neither triumph over the stricken author, nor support and console him. For when May and Easter came, instead of renewing herself in the balmy air, she continued to decay, like an Autumn leaf that young Spring treads underfoot. One half of the mutilated chapters were never read to her, because she would not have been able to remember the originals; and those two words in small capitals, marking their untimely and unhappy close, signified also that the gentle story of her life was at an end. Almost at the moment when Mr. Moggs should have paid the penalty of his shocking crimes in the most dramatic manner, and on the most public scaffold, it was discovered that she was about to pass from the little stage of her humdrum existence,—unobtrusively as she had always occupied it, her small part played out, her humble work well done.

Adam was roused from his too absorbing grief by the news of a "change," which, under other circumstances, he would have been the first to notice. Gran'pa and the aunts called him to the bedside of the invalid, and afterwards to a consultation in the keeping-room, where it was decided that poor gran'ma was certainly going this time, and that in such a case family feuds must be ignored and Arabella sent for.

"What would people say," quoth Aunt Harriet, with real tears in her eyes, "if she let her own mother die without being reconciled to her? It would be a disgrace to us all."

"It must not be," said gran'pa, with a tremor in his voice; "I will fetch her myself, in case that fellow makes objections."

"That fellow" was Mr. Holditch, Arabella's scapegoat. He was supposed to be responsible for the breach that had occurred, and the transformation of a dutiful daughter into an undutiful one; whereas the man who bullied his labourers and had ill-used a helpless child was completely under the thumb of the little woman, who pretended—when it suited her—to be dominated by him.

"Ah," the Armours would ejaculate, whenever the painful subject was mentioned, "if only dear Abraham had lived! He *was* a man, if you like!"

They would perhaps honour Adam by stating that he was like his father, except in looks.

Arabella came, leaving all the babies at home for Alfred to take care of, and bringing with her a spirit of love and charity that was beautiful to see. She was glad to rest again in her father's comfortable house; glad to have her spinster sisters to talk to, and to talk down from the elevation of her matrimonial experiences; and keen to be on the spot when shawls and gowns and bits of jewellery were to be apportioned to those who had the right to them. She was also charmed to renew acquaintance with her son, who was so wonderfully improved, who was nearing his twenty-first birthday, and whom nobody could prevent inheriting the considerable fortune left for his offspring by Abraham Drewe. Tommy's and Prissy's shares would be added to Adam's own, and quantities of interest—she called it a burning shame; but there it was

—so that that ridiculous boy would actually be quite a rich man in a few months, doubly as rich as all the Holditches put together, and trebly as rich as his own mother. Before gran'pa came to fetch her, she had begun to tell Alfy that the family feud was a nuisance, and to propound a new policy. The invitation to gran'ma's death-bed was the very opportunity that she desired.

"Where's my boy?" Adam heard her exclaim, a few minutes after entering the house. "Now that I am at last permitted to see him, don't keep him from me!"

He was watching at gran'ma's bedside, while the others devoted themselves, with much bustle and emotion, to the returned prodigal. His air was cold and calm, and he had listened to the stir of her arrival without moving a muscle. When she asked for him, and Aunt Priscilla, the softest-hearted of the aunts, eagerly called his name up the stairs, he turned red as fire, but he did not budge. He was not a weathercock, like his mother, to change with the wind; and his broodings upon her treatment of him had been long, profound, and bitter.

Aunt Priscilla, getting no answer to her summons, ran up to the sick room.

"Adam! Adam!" she whispered, excitedly, "your mother has come, and she wants to see you. Go—go! It is not her fault, poor dear! that she hasn't been before—that wretch wouldn't let her. She wonders why you weren't downstairs to welcome her—your own mother!"

"No," Adam quietly interposed, looking upon gran'ma's pinched and dull-eyed face; "here is my own mother, and I can't leave her, Aunt Prissy, unless some one comes to take my place."

"I'll stay. She's asleep and doesn't want anything, but I'll stay while you go. Don't be hard, Adam; a mother is a mother——"

"Not always," he persisted, resolutely.

"And it's wicked to bear malice and to be undutiful to parents; and we don't want her made miserable as soon as she comes into the house. Goodness knows we have trouble enough."

She looked at the bed, and laid her hand on Adam's shoulder. He slowly rose, stooped to kiss the poor face of his best friend, who as yet always knew when he kissed it, crooning a faint response; then went slowly downstairs, looking more like his sturdy, stubborn father than he had ever done in his life.

Having the idea that the impending interview was something peculiarly sacred, gran'pa and aunts had retired for the moment, and Adam found his mother alone. She at once flung herself into his arms, to his extreme embarrassment. He looked over her head—golden as ever, and ornamented with a large chignon and a braid, stuffed with horse hair and set on edge like a coronet—while she snuggled into the hollow of his shoulder, and did her best to weep and be overcome. But his heart thumped, and he trembled all over.

"Have you no kiss for me, darling?" she pleaded, when he blinked at her upturned face, and she snuffled pathetically, and rubbed her eyes with a dry handkerchief. "Have you quite forgotten your poor old mother?"

"Poor old mother," indeed! She was barely forty, and had the secret of perennial youthfulness, possessed by women of her character, even under the severe disadvantages of a large young family. Trim and smart as she could be from top to toe, in a new and stylish costume of mauve delaine and a bonnet of white lace and daisies, she was as impressively feminine now as when gallant Abraham succumbed to her. And Adam was the

son of his father, and had the feelings of a man. He felt with Aunt Priscilla, that a mother is a mother, when all is said and done; and—apart from that—his sex disabled him for warfare with such a dainty creature. So he bestowed the filial kiss, and thereafter pursued the filial course to which that act committed him.

He took Arabella to her room, and fetched her wine and cake, and hot water to wash with. The eager aunts—who seemed so much older than she did—would have forestalled him, and so would gran'pa; they wanted to do for her what we always want to do for those of our belongings who reflect credit upon us—our belle of the family, our flower of the flock—whose charms and value we have unaccountably overlooked; but all felt that Adam had first claim to whatever privileges were going—himself included. And Mrs. Holditch allowed no one to come between her and her dear son; all her choicest favours were lavished upon him.

And Adam thawed, melted, warmed, under her artful blandishments, in the idiotic male person's manner. He took her at her word, and sucked down her gross flatteries as he had sucked down castor oil when a baby, under the impression that it was mother's milk. Even when she said to him, in a thoughtful, meditative way, "Do you know, darling, you have grown absolutely good-looking—really almost *handsome*—since you have grown up!" he merely blushed and simpered foolishly. Her lies were all so silky-soft and sugary that the biggest of them could not choke him.

They sat together at gran'ma's bedside. The old lady's faculties were no longer in order, and her weakness was so great that it was difficult to discover when she was awake and when asleep. Adam generally seemed to know, and sometimes he would not allow his mother to

talk lest she should disturb the sufferer. At other times, when he was sure that gran'ma slept, and when he could subdue the conversation to whispers, Arabella prattled to him by the hour, in the most maternal fashion.

"When this dear soul is at rest," she would say, assuming for the moment an aspect of the deepest grief, "you will want a change, my love. Yes, indeed, after this terrible strain! I can see what it is, Adam, and how it is telling upon you. You must come away at once, darling—as soon as the funeral is over——"

"Hush—sh—sh!"

"Oh, she can't hear; if she could, she wouldn't understand, poor thing! You must return to Dunstanborough with me, and recruit in your native air, and in your own father's house, which is your proper place."

Then she would describe to him how she had felt his loss, and pined for him, and only by sheer force been prevented from recalling him, in such moving terms that he half believed her. But not altogether. In this matter he felt that facts were at variance with her representations, though he credited her with the wish to deceive herself rather than him. And he always had his answer ready.

"It is not my own father's house, but Mr. Holditch's. I have no proper place there, mother."

Whereupon she would go back on all her former statements concerning her present husband's tyranny, and his responsibility for Adam's wrongs, and declare that Mr. Holditch not only bore no malice, but was almost as anxious as herself to welcome his stepson under the old roof. These discrepancies Adam would put down to a kind heart, desiring to make the best of things; and he would continue to shake his head, gently but resolutely.

However, one day it was his resolution that was shaken, and not his head. She was gossiping of Dunstan-

borough and its little social vicissitudes, and happened to mention that new people had come to Thurlow Hall, which was the fine old homestead of one of the squire's best farms.

"Plunket is the name," she said; "and they are such a charming family! Real gentlefolks, with a carriage and pair. I went to call on them as soon as they came, and they were *so* affable! They have not returned my call yet; I hope they won't till I get home again. It is such a comfort to have people of that class to associate with in a country place. We shall be great friends, I am sure."

Not only his beard and spectacles, but the darkness of 10 P. M., made rather darker by the single night-light burning in the bottom of a hand-basin, obscured Adam's face and protected his sacred feelings.

"What family?" he inquired, after clearing his throat carefully.

"Five," said Arabella. "One son at Cambridge—a charming young man; I just caught a glimpse of him. One daughter married, and two at home. The youngest has something the matter with her eyes; but the other is charming—the most elegant girl I ever saw. Then there is Mr. Plunket himself—a charming old man—quite the gentleman—a perfect aristocrat. Mrs. Plunket is dead; but her widowed sister, Mrs. Hetheringon, keeps house and chaperons the girls. A most charming woman—like a duchess."

From this moment Adam began to wonder whether it would be possible, with any sort of pride or decency, to accept—some day—his mother's oft-repeated invitation. Strange, how his memory of Dunstanborough—the sea, the fields, the hedges and the birds, and stately Thurlow Hall, with its tile-roofed gables, and elm trees, vocal with

nestling rooks—became all at once like a picture gallery when the window shutters are thrown open. He could see it all, and his beautiful Fidelia in the old garden, and in the nut-walk, and amongst the rosy-blossomed apple trees of the orchard behind the house; and a great home-sickness seized him—a new complaint. He had no sympathy with his mother's ambition to be "great friends" with Fidelia's family; not for the world would he obtrude himself upon their notice or hers; but, oh, to see—only to see, a long way off—that beloved friend, that true soul's mate, once more! The very spirit of the Spring she seemed, in his thought of her, growing up to womanhood amongst these vernal scenes. Thurlow Hall in May! His longing to be there kept him awake all night. He even dreamed of it in the sick room—where a bunch of violets stood on a table amongst the medicine bottles—instead of giving all his mind to gran'ma.

Gran'ma at this juncture was like a passsenger on a departing ship that takes a long time to get under weigh after the anchor is up. The friends stand on the wharf and wave handkerchiefs, and wave, and wave, until they get tired of waving, overstrained by a crisis so long drawn out. The old woman was evidently dying; she was too far gone to communicate with her friends any more; yet she was still there, and the doctor could not say for certain that she would not be there for weeks. This was an opportunity for Adam's strong youth to take advantage of him. It was also an opportunity for gran'pa's business instincts to assert their sway. There was plenty of life in gran'pa yet, though his years were more than gran'ma's; for men do not work themselves old before their time, as women must—being good women, like her—the heaviest burdens falling to their lot, who have least strength to bear them.

One day gran'pa called for his grandson, and said to him, "Just run round to Mr. Bowen's for me, Adam, like a good boy. Take him this proof, and ask him if he wants any alterations. It's quickest to go yourself, and you'll understand about it. Besides, the walk will freshen you."

Adam came down from the sick room and his dreams of Thurlow Hall, and set forth on this prosaic errand. All the way along the street he thought of hawthorn hedges, and fluting blackbirds, and things of that sort, and of the spirit of the Spring that dwelt amongst them. On the roof of Mr. Bowen's house there were pigeons patting up and down puffing and bobbing, croaking and cooing to one another; but it never occurred to him to notice them.

"Mr. Bowen at home?"

The maid who came to the door said he was not. On hearing that Adam had particular business with him, she asked him if he had not better wait a bit. She did not think her master had gone far, or would be away long. She would go and inquire.

Adam passed into the lawyer's study, which was close to the street door, and sat down there. It was a comfortable, well-worn, much-littered room, with a warm, dusty fire dropping ashes that made a noise in the silence. A large cat slept on the hearth-rug. There were pictures on the walls, and many books on shelves and tables, in which the visitor would have been interested had his mind been free; and the general aspect of things impressed him with its alien charm, the distinction of the class to which it belonged, which was not his class. He had a little bitter feeling in the thought that it was not his class—that, superior as he was to Harry Bowen, his place in the room was on a stiff chair against the door; whereas Harry had a right to swagger through it as he

pleased, and through others like it, and fling himself into any armchair that stood empty. Sentiments of this kind were incidental to Adam's time of life, and were soon outgrown.

Sitting in his corner, peering at his surroundings through the goggles which falsely accused him of imperfect sight, he listened for the footsteps of the lawyer or the returning parlour-maid, and for some time heard only the ticking of a clock and the tinkle of falling cinders. Then, with no preliminary sound, the door softly opened; and there stood a slim, tall girl, in a white frock, with a bandage over her eyes. Fidelia herself was before him..

CHAPTER XI.

FIDELIA herself,—Fidelia dressed for dinner was before him—he knew her at once—so close before him that when she put out her hand to feel her way into the room she touched his breast. It was no more than the touch of a flitting butterfly, but it stunned him like a sword-thrust, and it caused her to reel as if he had been there to knock her down.

"Did you—did you wish to see my uncle?" she inquired, blushing to the roots of her fair hair and the soft white frill around her neck. "I am so sorry he is out. But he cannot be long now." Then she made an effort to say, "Isn't it Adam Drewe?"

"Do you remember me?" stammered Adam, hardly daring to take the hand she proffered. "After all this time!"

"Do you remember *me?*" she returned, a smile on her angelic mouth. "I made sure you must have forgotten all about me years and years ago."

"Never! Oh, never, never!" cried Adam. "Never for a moment! I—I——"

But she gently withdrew her hand, and his courage went with it.

"I have had your poem to remember you by," she continued, smiling still, a happy, bashful smile, full of sweet welcome for him and a kindness too exquisite for words.

"I know I ought to have returned it to you ages ago. But I never had a chance. Perhaps you know that we have been abroad? We have not been back very long; we are only just settled down again. But I kept it safely in my desk, in a locked drawer. I have it still."

"Oh, burn it!—burn it!" he exclaimed, frowning and reddening. "Such utter rubbish! Such unspeakable twaddle! What was I thinking of to let you see such stuff? But I was a boy then."

"And now you are a man," she breathed.

The hidden eyes seemed to scan him through the silk bandage; and he shivered and shrank. But he need not have done so. They did not look at him. What they saw was Apollo in a coat and trousers, the figure of the Fairy Prince himself. For relenting Nature had deepened and enriched his voice to organ strength and sweetness, and it was only by his voice that she could imagine him. As she blindly gazed at him, he gazed at her, with reverence unutterable. He would have liked to kneel. For if he was a man, she was all but a woman—the sacred mystery of mysteries, the informing spirit of his new man's world. And with that lovely mouth, that tender throat and chin, that exquisite curve of her young breast! He stood spell-bound before her, suffocated with emotion.

As if she heard his heart thumping, and was frightened by it, she shrank away a little and turned her head.

"Won't you," she said, "won't you come a little nearer to the fire?"

She moved into the room, and he followed a step or two, then put out his hand to guide her.

"Your eyes—your poor eyes!" he murmured. "They are still——!"

"Ah, they have been so well!" she answered quickly. "I have had to be careful of them, of course, but I have

been able to use them like other people; they have been all right till now. I think I was reading too much, or I might have caught a cold—I don't know; but they have got worse, all at once. I was sent here to see my old doctor, and he did something to them yesterday, and I have to wear this for a week. I never, never thought I should have to put it on again!"

She had reached the hearth-rug, and stood, with a foot on the fender, leaning against the mantel-shelf. Adam divined a tear under the silk handkerchief, and became a bottomless well of pity.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked politely.

"No, thanks," he replied panting. "I would rather stand."

They both stood, and kept silence for a minute, while the clock ticked aggressively. The big cat rose, and rubbed itself against the foot on the fender. Adam stooped to stroke that happy, happy cat; and she purred, and arched her back, and curved about his legs caressingly, for he was the friend of all dumb beasts.

"Pussy! Pussy!" he murmured.

"Kitty! Kitty!" breathed Fidelia. "She loves the fire—as I do. Isn't it rather a cold evening?"

"Very cold," said Adam, "for the time of year. You—you must be extremely careful when you go out of doors, Miss Plunket,—the wind, you know."

"Yes, I must—I am. Oh, I wish, I wish I had eyes like other people!"

Her lips quivered, and she pressed a hand over the bandage.

"They don't hurt you now, do they?"

His voice was beautiful in its depth and manly tenderness, as he put the question; and she felt it all through her.

"No," she said, turning to him, sweetly confiding. "They only hurt me when the stuff is dropped in. It isn't that. But—but I can't help feeling frightened when they fail like this. I can't help thinking—suppose they should fail altogether some day, and I should go *blind!*"

A little laughing sob accompanied the dreadful word. It came from the depths within her, thrilling with fear; and Adam's young heart, yearning over her, felt bursting.

"Oh, don't—don't!" he cried, "don't think of such things!"

"Such things do happen," she persisted. "Why not to me as well as another? But if it did—oh, if it did!"

"If it did," said Adam, suddenly illuminated, electrified, by his thought, "every soul belonging to you would—would spend himself, like water poured out, to make it up to you—to be eyes to you—to comfort you—to work for you——"

"Ah, no," she broke in, sadly, but blushing beautifully, "that is not how blind people are treated. They are gradually left out of everything, and forgotten. People get used to it, and get tired of it, and are glad to be rid of you. That is how it was when I was a little girl, and wore the bandage for so long. They found it a bother to dress and undress me so often, and to have to lead me about when they wanted to do things. They said they didn't, but I knew they did—I heard it in the tones of their voices—I seemed to feel it in the air—that I was a trouble to them, hampering their free movements, like a clog tied to their legs. I never thought"—she stopped a moment, as if to swallow something—"it was going to be like that again!"

"It can never be like that again," Adam protested, with passion. "Sometimes people don't mind, with chil-

dren; but it is different now—oh—oh——! If I—if I——"

And at this eloquent moment the still house broke into coarse and hateful tumult. A great deafening dinner-bell clanged in the hall, the front door was burst open and banged to, Mr. Bowen was heard questioning the parlour-maid in a loud and peremptory manner, and Fidelia was slipping from her young lover's side as fast as she could feel her way.

"A gentleman is waiting to see you, uncle," Adam heard her say—and blessed her sweet voice.

"All right, my dear," the bluff lawyer answered her. "There's dinner—I'm late—go in, and tell them to begin. I won't be five minutes."

One minute was enough for business; and then Adam sailed home, with his head in the clouds, feeling more like a winged archangel than a man.

He was brought to earth again, with a sharp shock, on hearing that gran'ma had taken a bad turn in his absence, and was apparently going fast. He rushed through the house, where all was confusion—maids and neighbours whispering in the passages, the muffins and the lamb chops growing cold on the tea-table—and upstairs to the sick room, where he saw gran'ma half sitting up in bed, with her family around her. She was more awake than she had been for weeks, restless with her laboured breathing, and talking—talking—in a delirious kind of way. The doctor, they told him, had been and gone, saying that he could do no good, though ready, if they wished it, to return at any moment. It was a question of hours. They were all crying, more or less, except Arabella, who appeared to cry the most, contorting her face, and using her handkerchief freely. In reality she was thinking of dyeing her mauve delaine, and other garments, and wonder-

ing anxiously whether they would come out a good black. She sat against the bed, facing gran'ma, who hitherto had hardly noticed her married daughter's presence. Suddenly the wandering eyes were fixed upon her, with a strange look.

"She knows me," said Mrs. Holditch, in the feeling voice that had no feeling heart to back it. "Mamma, dear, you know me, don't you—your little Bella?"

The dying woman continued to gaze at her for some seconds, panting for breath. Then she said, vehemently, "What have you done with Adam?"

"He's here, dear! He's here," they murmured in chorus. And Adam came forward and put his arm round the pillows that supported her.

"There are wheals on his back," said gran'ma, "that you can lay your finger in. Bruises black and blue. His poor little calves cut through with the whip——" She stopped, and pointed a witch-like claw at Arabella's reddening face. "You call yourself a mother? Pooh! Don't you call yourself a mother! You're no mother!"

"You're no mother yourself, to talk to me in that cruel manner, and at such a time as this," Mrs. Holditch was moved to retort—for her feelings were hurt. "*I* didn't do it."

"Be quiet," said Adam, sternly.

"I won't be quiet for you," she snapped, viciously, turning upon her son. "How dare you, sir, say 'be quiet' to me?"

"Hush, Bella!" her father interposed. "No bickering here, if you please."

"Don't you mind," murmured the aunts, who were making so much of their sister just now. "You can see she is wandering, and doesn't know what she's saying."

"His dear little throat," continued gran'ma, whimpering, "all swelled inside, so that it hurts him to swallow, and the blue finger marks outside, where it was gripped hold of——"

"That's all done with, dear," said Adam, trying to stop her. "Long, long ago!"

"Deaf o' one ear for weeks, he was—and blood dried in it, like black treacle—boxed and boxed till the blood came—a little babe like him!" Again she fixed her eyes on Arabella. "You call yourself a mother? Pooh! You're no mother."

"Papa," said aunt Harriet, "we had better send for Mr. Nethersole."

Mr. Nethersole was the curate of their district—the curate who had attempted to prepare Adam for confirmation. Since that unfortunate affair there had been a coolness and a sense of awkwardness between the Armour family and their pastor; wherefore they had delayed to send for him—delayed far too long, as they now recognised.

"Adam," said gran'pa, "go and fetch him."

But gran'ma turned and clung to her boy. "No, no," she cried, in her toneless, breathless voice. "He is not to go! He shan't be sent back there to be beaten like a dog! James, he is not to go—he is not to go!"

"Very well, dear—very well, he sha'n't," said gran'pa, who was greatly distressed by this strange and inappropriate mood; and he whispered to aunt Priscilla, "Send Betsy."

Then poor gran'ma's excitement calmed down—beaten down by the rising tide of anguished insensibility in which she was drowning, beyond reach of help. For some time they watched her silently—the sinking eyes, the dropping jaws, the irregular, dragging respiration,

the failing pulse—and, when nothing happened, they stole away, one at a time, to snatch a bite of food and a cup of tea, and stole back again. Only Adam never stirred from his post, though every bone in his body ached. Gran'ma lay on his numb right arm, and lay there till she died. The last thing she saw was his face bending over her—the ugly face that love had made beautiful; and her last thought and words were given to him.

"He's—to have—my watch—my gold watch—and chain. Do you—hear, James? Adam—my watch and chain——"

"Yes, my poor old girl, he shall," said her husband, weeping.

"For his wife—Adam's wife—in memory—of me."

Adam's heart swelled as he stooped to kiss her, in acknowledgment of the precious gift. His wife! The piercing thought went through him that his wife—the only wife he could bear to think of—might never be able to tell the time.

Then a stir downstairs, and the group about the bed announced the arrival of Mr. Nethersole. The clergyman came up with his official face and a little black bag, out of which he drew a surplice, a red-edged prayer-book, and some tiny silver vessels in a morocco case.

Mrs. Holditch, in a soft bustle, moved the medicine bottles from the bedside table, and procured that fair white linen cloth, which he required to complete his preparations. Presently she was kneeling by the table, with bowed head and hands folded on her breast, like an ecstatic nun.

They asked Adam if he wished to partake, and he said "No." They asked him if he wished to withdraw, and he said "No" again. Then they went on with their

little ceremonies, ignoring him as he ignored them, while gran'ma's fixed eyes filmed over, still gazing into his. He and gran'ma were outside together. They put a crumb of bread into her mouth, and a drop of Lent wine from the Lilliputian goblet; but she did not swallow either. She knew less of what was doing than a christened baby when the sign of the Cross is made in water on its brow. In fact, before the rite was over she was dead, though only Adam knew it.

And when she was dead, and even before she was buried, unseemly disputes arose in the family as to who should have this and that of her little duds. Arabella was the eldest daughter, and as such claimed right of choice, and even sole heirship, just as an eldest son would claim to succeed his father. On the other hand, the aunts pleaded their husbandless, houseless, futureless, condition as entitling them to all and everything—little enough, as they said, compared with their sister's possessions—and passionately upbraided her for being mean and selfish. There was a diamond ring that became a terrible bone of contention, because a diamond ring was a great distinction to a family in those days, and in that class of life. The stones were not bigger than pins' heads, but they were more to the Armour ladies than koh-i-noors to princes. There was also a Paisley shawl—middle-aged matrons can remember what a Paisley shawl represented when they were young—as well as a good black silk gown that could be turned and made like new, and was specially desirable in conjunction with crape. But the gold watch and chain were above all these things in value; and Arabella declared that she would have them. Gran'ma had left no will, and what she had said when her mind was wandering needed not to be considered for a moment. The mother's watch *always* went to the eldest daughter—

it was a sort of heirloom, naturally entailed; more than that, Mrs. Holditch boldly asserted that it had been promised to her ever since she was a baby. She rummaged all gran'ma's drawers and boxes, looking for it—it was a fine, fat, handsome, gold, English watch, whereas her own was a poor Geneva—but she could not find it anywhere.

"Adam," she said at last, "do you happen to know where they put poor gran'ma's watch and chain?"

"Yes, mother," said Adam. "I have them."

"My dear boy, you don't suppose—you haven't been taking that seriously? Of course, she was only wandering in her mind when she spoke of your having them. Why, the watch was promised to me ages and ages ago, before you were born or thought of."

Adam looked stubborn, like his father. He neither moved nor spoke.

"Give it to me," Arabella ordered, extending her hand.

"I can't," he said.

"Adam, give me that watch this instant, or I will go to gran'pa, and he'll make you."

"Gran'pa brought it to me himself, mother, the morning after gran'ma died. She wished me to have it. I cannot give it up to anybody—not to anybody—until—until——"

"Until what? Until you have a wife, I suppose? A *wife*, indeed! *Your* wife!" She threw up her head, and wrinkled her nose, and laughed offensively.

Adam turned as red as fire, and grimly locked his teeth.

And so all the work of reconciliation was undone again, and they were as much estranged as they had ever been. More—for now her son could understand her better.

But in a few weeks after gran'ma's death, Adam came of age, and came into his money; and the first thing he did with it was to buy the most beautiful watch that Lyntham could produce—gold all over, with her monogram on the back of it, and a wreath of jewels round the face—and send it to her for a present. Whereupon Arabella wrote to him to say that he was a darling and a dear, and that she was pining away for another sight of him.

CHAPTER XII.

And Adam was actually in Dunstanborough once more.

Mr. Holditch had behaved well at gran'ma's funeral; he had behaved still better over the business of his stepson's majority. It really seemed as if the undoubted trials of his married life had softened and improved him—as if his wife had somewhat drawn upon her imagination in her account of his character and conduct. And for this reason—so he told gran'pa and the aunts—Adam consented to accept that invitation, which he had so firmly declared he never would accept. Of course, there were other reasons. The bread of the enemy largely lost its bitter flavour when the eater of it was a comparatively rich young man, with power to make ample return for it; that was one. And for another—which covered all the rest—Fidelia was at Thurlow Hall, and Thurlow Hall was in Dunstanborough.

Yet he seemed to go with reluctance, putting it off until Summer—the proper time to recruit in the country and at the seaside—was past, and stealing thither like a thief in the night, when no one expected him; choosing a Monday evening, when it rained, to avoid Sunday, lest his mother should plague him to go to church.

He was not at all grotesquely ugly at this time of his life; indeed, from a little distance, he appeared quite a

fine fellow. He had grown well during his later and happier years, and developed an excellent figure, though still short for his breadth. He wore the goggles that Sar' Ann had recommended, and his young beard and moustache covered his mouth and chin; both improved him enormously. And no empty-headed dandy could have been more fastidious about his clothes, or shown a better taste in the selection of them. This was particularly the case after he had come into his money, and could buy to please himself. He looked strong, and he looked gentlemanly; and if he looked odd, it was with no despicable oddness now. It is quite possible that he would have passed muster with Fidelia, had he allowed her to see him, and given her time to get used to it, considering her predisposition to exalt him.

But that she should see him—see him at the wrong time, too soon or too suddenly, before he had assured himself that both or either of them could bear it—was the terror of his life. The older he grew, the more sensitive he grew; the better-looking he became, the keener did he feel his ugliness; the more he loved Fidelia, the more he dreaded to be separated from her; and he had good reason to know what was most likely to part them. So he put off going to Dunstanborough until he could no longer restrain himself; and when he went it was in fear and trembling for the consequences.

Would the bandage be on or off? That was the great question. And there was this greater one—would she eventually get well, or would she lose her sight?—her sight, which his life and all his love could not buy back for her, if it was to go. He turned these questions over and over in his mind, as he drove to his old home alone in a hired gig, under cover of the September dusk. He told himself that he ought to have waited to hear the

answer; at least, to hear what was likely to be the answer. But he also told himself that to wait longer was impossible. After all, he was going to see, and not to be seen.

His mother's children, for whom he had brought a wonderful box of toys, were all in bed, and so was the stepfather. Mr. Holditch, suffering from the farmers' perennial bad times, had all he could do to feed his wife's necessities; such a luxury for himself as a bailiff to get up at four or five in the morning to set milkers and carters on their jobs, was not to be thought of. Arabella, getting supper for her son, told a moving tale of poverty and hardship, and said she wondered what his poor dear father, who had thought nothing too good for her, would say if he could see her now.

As Adam saw her now, she appeared blooming and comfortable. *She* didn't have to go to bed, "dog-tired," in daylight, and get up in the dark to work. Her keeping-room was much handsomer than it had been in the old times, and she used what used to be the best silver teapot in pouring out his tea. She had a better teapot now for company occasions—gran'ma's bridal teapot, wrested violently from Aunt Harriet and Aunt Priscilla after gran'ma was dead.

"There's no doubt about it," she remarked, with an air of motherly candour; "I ought, at least, to have had the use of Tommy's and Prissy's portions until they would have come of age—and that's years off yet. I'm sure my dear old fellow never intended that money to lie by idle, while I was pinching and struggling for want of it."

"I suppose father left it to you," said Adam, "for their support, as he left it in that way."

"Of course he did; but it was for my use as well. Do you suppose that he ever imagined for a moment that

they were going to die?—fine, strong, hearty children as you would wish to see! No; he expected them all to grow up around me, and then take care of me when they were men and women."

She looked at Adam, and waited for him to make comments. But he ate in silence. He forbore to mention the funds of the trust that had provided for his own legal infancy, and how they had been administered. When he spoke it was to praise the veal and ham pie as the best he had ever tasted, and to ask her if she still brewed her own beer.

"Oh, dear, no!" she replied to this question. "We can't afford to brew beer in these days."

"I should have thought it was cheaper than buying it," said Adam, "since you have the brew-house and plant. You want such a lot at harvest time."

"Oh, we have to want a good many things that we can't get," sighed she; and she hastened to block the subject of autumn crops, which she saw him about to lay hold of. "I often think if my dear, dear Abraham could have foreseen——"

But here Abraham's son was irresistibly moved to suggest that things would probably have been no better had his father foreseen that Mr. Holditch was immediately to step into his shoes.

"It was not immediately," protested Arabella. "It was years and years afterwards. And let me tell you, Adam, he was the last person in the world to have any mean jealousies of that sort. All he thought about was my comfort and welfare. He would have been the first to wish me to marry again, left as I was, if it was for my happiness."

"Well, mother, if you have been happy——"

"I have not been happy! Far from it! But I did

not marry for happiness, Adam. I did it, my boy, for *your* sake."

Adam thought it time to give up arguing after this. He asked for some of that nice cold bread and butter pudding, and racked his brains for a fresh subject. She gave him no time to find one.

"What's a third?" she ejaculated. "Oh, it's well for you, that are rolling in money—interest and compound interest—to talk about my third!" (He had not mentioned it, and his great wealth amounted to about £500 a year.) "Do you suppose I get any of it?—with a husband who never seems to know how to make a shilling for himself, and seven children depending on me? Poor dears, I don't know what's to become of them—I don't, indeed. There's my eldest boy—I mean my eldest of Alfred's—a fine, handsome, clever fellow—but you've seen him haven't you?"

Adam thought he had seen him at Lyntham once or twice, at the Tuesday market, with his father. To look at, he was a lumping lout.

"There he is—only just thirteen—working out of doors like a common person's son, when he ought to be at boarding school. His papa makes him—says he can't afford expensive schooling, with so many others coming on, and that it's time for him to be doing something. I've seen that boy go out in the dark of a winter morning, in thick highlows, like a common labourer, to cut hay out of the stack when it's covered with snow and icicles——"

She whimpered, and took out her handkerchief. Adam began to look grave and thoughtful. He had his sentimental impulses, but not in connection with money; here, as in many other things, he was his hard-headed father's son. Quite plainly he saw her designs upon his newly-acquired property, and quite resolved was he to circum-

vent them. Not only had she no right to anything, but Fidelia had the right to all. He meant to be a miser for her sake—until that day when she might possibly come to him, blind, to be taken care of. At the same time, he wished to pay handsomely for the veal and ham pie, and the bread and butter pudding; and the subject of a boy's education was one upon which he felt strongly. He did not like to think of Guy Vavasour cutting hay for the cows when he ought to be at school. He knew what good schooling had done for himself. So he said to his mother, "Perhaps Mr. Holditch will allow me——" And was unable to finish the sentence, because at this point he was suddenly strangled by her arms around his neck.

"Oh, you dear, darling boy! Oh, you good son! I knew your generous heart—your poor father's, all over! I knew you would help us as soon as you had the power—as soon as you knew how things were!"

"Say," added Adam, cautiously, when he could articulate again, "say for two years."

"Yes, dearest; I will speak to his father. I'm sure he will only be too thankful to accept your offer. It will be the making of our poor boy. Then, perhaps, he will be qualified for a lawyer's office, or some gentlemanly profession of that sort—something worthy of him."

"I can't make any promises about the lawyer's office," said Adam.

"Of course not—that's all in the future. Have you had a good supper, darling? I wish I'd had something better for you—I would if I had known. Not a little bit of cheese, love, and a biscuit? A gingerbread nut? You used to be so fond of gingerbread nuts when you were a little boy."

Adam said he had quite done, and that he would like

to go to bed if she would not mind. He was sure that was where she ought to be herself at such a late hour.

"Late? It's only half-past nine," she returned, joyously. "I could sit and talk all night."

"That would be very bad for you, then. Come, let us go, and do the rest of our talking to-morrow. I might be obliged to go home to-morrow — I don't know——"

"Oh, no, no," she cried; "I will not hear of such a thing. Now we've got you, we are going to keep you. Where's *home*, I should like to know, if it isn't here—with your own mother?"

He laughed; he could not help it. "Good-night," he said. "If you want to keep young and pretty, as you are now, you must have your beauty sleep. Where are you going to put me?"

He found that he was actually going to be put into the spare room, which was never intended for such common use. He had not given her time to think out another plan, which should respect his new importance without deranging the order of the house. He protested against an honour unto which he was not born, and said that any shakedown would do for the likes of him; but she made a joke about the fatted calf, implying that nothing was too good for him under the circumstances, while she folded away the best quilt and covers, and put the lace-and-satin pin-cushion into a drawer. So, after an affectionate good-night, she left him, and he retired into the downy interior of the big four-poster, the feel of which was somewhat cold and clammy from long disuse.

He slept little, and was up early. The fresh morning, lightly foggy, with sunshine struggling through the fog, was grateful to his healthy lungs and nature-loving eyes; and his little prowl about the place before breakfast, with

his memories and reflections, was deeply interesting. There was not time to reach the sea, nor any point from which Thurlow Hall was visible; but he saw the grey towers of Dicky Delavel's home amongst its woods, from the old road gate—the gate of sorrowful associations. Dicky, like himself, was an outcast from his father's house—because he had married a "common" girl, old Morrison's pretty daughter. John Morrison passed the gate in his gig, already on his way to Lyntham Market, for it was Tuesday morning. Adam stopped him to ask if he had any news of his brother-in-law, but John surlily shook his head. Mrs. Richard, he said, was "above" remembering the existence of the likes of them—meaning himself and his shrewish wife, Rhody Appleton that was. In this Mrs. Richard was like Mrs. Holditch; the latter positively refused to "know" the Morrison family, even though they had become connected by marriage with the great Delavel house. Adam had a speaking acquaintance with John, dating from the old days; and no one who knew them ever made the mistake of confounding Adam with the Holditches.

"Didn't expect to see *you* here," was the farmer's first remark, when the young man accosted him. And Adam replied that he was rather surprised himself, when he came to think of it; but that, after all, it was his birthplace, and he found it pleasant to renew acquaintance with the old scenes. He supposed he would find many changes after so many years.

John said "yes," and spoke of them—particularly of Dicky Delavel's marriage and sad departure.

"Many others gone?" queried Adam.

John instanced a few; first and foremost his old father, though he had been a long time dead.

"Any new people come?"

The farmer enumerated several; amongst others, the tenant of Thurlow Hall.

"Do you know him at all?"

"Of course I don't—no more than I know the squire—'cept as I meet him in the way of business."

"What family has he?"

"Know nothin' about his family. I've heard he's some connection of her poor ladyship's. Ah, there was a loss, when she went! As good a woman as ever stepped. She'd ha' forgiven Master Richard if they'd ha' let her."

Then farmer John resumed his journey, for Adam had no more questions to ask. Many years ago he had learned all there was to know about Master Richard from Sar' Ann, who had come to Lyntham for her wedding tour at the time when Dunstanborough was ringing with his exploit and disasters. The news required now was news of Fidelia, and Adam proposed to go to Sar' Ann for that also, as soon as he could find an opportunity. Greatly depressed by what he had heard concerning his darling's rank in life—for to be a connection of the Delavels was to be a sort of princess of the blood royal, in the eyes of a Dunstanborough native—he returned to the house along the old cart road which was so full of his childish footprints. Going to and from school, he had never been allowed to use the front gate and gravelled garden paths; in all weathers he had tramped this way, over the ridges and furrows made by the waggon wheels. In winter, when the deep ruts were full of frozen slush, his little feet used to slip and stick in them, and his rubbishy boots to squelch with water for the whole cold day: and then at night he would scratch his chilblained heels and toes to pieces, and have terrible wounds for his socks to tear the half-healed skin from—wounds which were never mollified with ointment, or protected with wash-

leather, or, indeed, taken the slightest notice of, until gran'ma observed them. He thought of these things as he approached the paved backyard and the kitchen door —hard by the cool, lattice-windowed dairy under the elder trees, where Sar' Ann used to work—and heard his mother calling him in endearing accents to come to breakfast.

She had an excellent breakfast for him—ham, and brawn, and new-laid eggs, and cream for his tea—and the keeping-room wore a cheerful and hospitable air. The whole family had assembled in it to give him formal welcome. Mr. Holditch, who had finished his repast, though it was barely seven o'clock, and done a couple of hours' work besides, apologised quite handsomely for having been abed on his stepson's arrival, and told him, with every appearance of sincerity, that he was glad to see him. He really bore no malice to speak of, and had no idea that he had been particularly cruel as a stepfather. It subsequently transpired that Guy Vavasour and Rodolf Mortimer Montagu had had painful experience of the whip and the buckled strap; and that even Algernon Herbert, aged four, was liable to either, whichever happened to be handy, when he was a naughty boy. The British farmer is very much of the old times; and in old times it was held that to spare the rod was to spoil the child more thoroughly than you could spoil him in any other way.

The elder boys had seen their half-brother before, and merely hung their heads and shuffled their feet when called upon to be brotherly. The darling of Arabella's heart was particularly sulky and mulish. It had been explained to him how much he owed to dear Adam's goodness, and how grateful he ought to be to show himself; but to go to boarding school was the very

last thing that Guy Vavasour desired. Indeed, he had privately asked his mother if she "didn't wish she might get it"—*i. e.*, get him to go. The younger members of the family were not acquainted with her first-born, and she now proudly introduced them to him, one by one. He beamed on them through his spectacles, and they gazed up at him with pert curiosity.

"Oh, what a funny man!" growled Algernon Herbert.

"Oh, what a funny man!" piped Maria Louise Victoria.

"Funny man!" echoed Antoinnette Isabelle, the baby.

And they all cackled together, in great enjoyment of his appearance, until their mother boxed their ears for being rude.

Then Adam consoled them by telling them of the toys he had brought them, and they became very good friends with him. But still, as they sat over their basins of bread and milk, they kept their eyes intently fixed on his face; and whenever for a moment they looked at one another, they giggled again as much as they dared. Adam did not like it a bit.

However, he made a hearty breakfast; and after breakfast, having received their presents, the children were sent to school and elsewhere out of the way. Then Arabella apologised for being obliged to leave her guest for a little while; and Adam begged her to make no company of him, for that he could perfectly well entertain himself. And as soon as she had gone about her domestic duties, he snatched up his hat and sallied forth in quest of Sar' Ann.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE was no railway in Dunstanborough then, for the old squire was still alive; there was no high farming as yet, to spoil the lovely hedges and scatter the birds that lived in them; and Adam walked through the lanes and stubble fields, as his mythical first father walked through Paradise, finding all that his soul desired—except the one, last, chief thing, without which neither Adam was a perfect man. The mists of dawn had melted into a sweet blue sky, crossed and crossed with the silver gleam of white pigeons' wings, wheeling and rising and dropping over the fields where the yellow wheat had waved but yesterday. The blackberries were ripe, and the wildbines still in flower, and little harebells amongst the grass; and the Hall woods were kindling into autumn colour, and the perfume of fresh-ploughed earth was in the air. But to enumerate these things was not to describe their effect upon the soul and senses of our young man, now in his "magnetic" years—the enchanted morning of his life.

Dunstanborough revisited—after years of shops and streets—was a new garden of Eden to this Adam, far more beautiful than he had remembered it. But Sar' Ann—poor Sar' Ann, who had been so perky and pretty and proud of herself—alas! she was almost unrecognisable. She lived in a two-roomed cottage, and she

had five young children, and she fed mainly upon cabbages, and she worked in the fields—turned hay with a pitchfork in summer, and reaped corn in the burning days of August, with the latest baby lying under a shock or a hedge near by. The once blooming face was hard and shining; the once plump neck and dimpled arms were stringy and leathery, tanned brown by the harvest sun; the once trim figure was bent, pulpy, collarless, almost buttonless, with no youth or grace left in it. Adam had to look twice before venturing to accost her as his old friend. She, however, frankly affirmed that there was no mistaking *him*, because he was, and always would be, entirely different from other people.

"But," she said, as she dusted a milking stool for him to sit on, while her barefooted progeny gathered around to stare, "but you're quite the gentleman, Adam! I really thought for a moment that it was Mr. Roger coming along. Well, you do look grand! I mustn't call you 'Adam' any more. And you've got the property, too! My word, I was glad when I heard o' that. She'd ha' done you out of every penny, if she could. You'll excuse my speaking so boldly of your mother. But she never was a mother, to call a mother, as everybody knows."

"I would rather you didn't," said Adam, with that air of the gentleman which so cowed her native self-assurance. "Tell me about yourself, Sar' Ann, and how the world has gone with you. Not very easily, I am afraid."

"You may say that," she sighed fiercely, "with a husband that earns the wages of a ploughboy, and spends half of that at the public house."

And she proceeded to talk about herself at such length, and with such multitudinous detail, that Adam found no chance to mention in a casual manner the subject he wanted to introduce. He was obliged to force it on her

during a necessary pause for breath, and probably would have failed to fix it upon her attention then, had he not relieved her mind of some of its burdens by the proffer of a handsome present.

"You were good to me in the old days," he had said, "when there were not many to be good to me. I could not repay you then; but I can do a little towards it now, if you will let me. You won't be too proud to take a five-pound-note, as a little token of friendship, will you?"

Sar' Ann was not too proud. She would not have been so in any case; but as things were with her now, five pounds meant all the difference between bliss and woe. She took the potent wisp of paper, and was transfigured in the act, as by the hand of enchantment. Her wrinkles were smoothed out, her complainings died away; she became benignantly maternal—lauded the natural charms of her unkempt brats, and declared that, now she could get them boots and clothes, they should certainly go to Sunday School. Whereby Mr. Delavel-Pole, who was always "at her," would be appeased, and the great gods of the village placated. And then Adam asked her who Mr. Delavel-Pole had now to teach in the Sunday School, and she named the "new young lady at Thurlow Hall" amongst others.

"Which?" Adam breathlessly demanded.

"There is only one," said Sar' Ann. "The eldest Miss Plunket is married. They do say her husband's mother's cousin was a Miss Delavel, but I don't believe it."

Adam hoped it was true; he had feared a closer connection.

"But I thought there were two unmarried Miss Plunkets," he exclaimed; "I am sure I was told so."

"There's two, counting the one with the eyes. But *she* can't teach in Sunday School. She can't see."

"What, not *at all?*"

Adam was barely able to articulate this query, and his heart leaped and thumped. "Oh, darling! darling!" he sighed to himself, pitiful beyond expression, but solemnly exulting, too. "Oh, my poor, poor little love!"

"Well," said Sar' Ann, "she's been seen with her eyes uncovered, and they do say she looks awful—for all the world like a blind person, peering and poking. But what *I* say is—if she couldn't see a little, how could she take music lessons?"

"Who gives her music lessons?"

"A man from Lyntham. He comes over twice a week. She's very fond of music is Miss Delia, so they say. She plays the organ in the church, behind the curtain. Mr. Delavel-Pole has got a new organ put in since you were here, Adam. But I beg your pardon—I shouldn't say 'Adam' now."

"Every Sunday?" inquired Adam, wishing he had come to Dunstanborough two days sooner.

"Oh, no; Miss Katherine mostly plays o' Sundays. Miss Delia comes by herself o' weekdays, when nobody's there. They drop her at the church when they go for walks and drives, and pick her up on their way back. Or else a servant comes with her—a very nice girl—Esther is her name; the cook at the Rectory is a great friend of hers, and she goes and sits there while she waits. They do say Miss Delia means to earn her living as an organist, if the doctors can't cure her. She's so afraid of being a burden on her family."

"Oh, do they?" thought Adam. "I know more about that than they do, or she either—poor, precious

child! Earn her living, indeed—while I have eyes and hands, and five hundred a year!"

"And, of course," continued Sar' Ann, "no one would *marry* her if she went quite blind. Though, for the matter o' that, it's a'most as well to be blind as to have such a husband as I've got. Perhaps better."

She sighed from force of habit, though still irradiated by the comfortable thought within her. Adam smiled behind his beard and spectacles.

"Who blows the bellows for her?" he asked, casually.

"A boy in her sister's class—one of the young Toogoods. She gives him something for doing it."

"Don't the young Toogoods go to school on weekdays as well as Sundays?"

"Of course they do; Miss Barbara sees to that. She's as particular about the children going to school as my lady used to be, and far more severe with them. My lady, poor thing! had a kind word for one and all; but Miss Barbara's like her pa,—she's too high for anything, except finding fault and giving orders."

"Then," said Adam to himself, "it is between four o'clock when young Toogood comes out of school and half-past five when she must go home to get ready for dinner, that Fidelia comes to the church to play."

He rose from the milking stool, and bade Sar' Ann farewell.

At three o'clock of the same day he was—of course he was, in spite of Arabella and other difficulties—looking at the graves of his forefathers in the old churchyard. These graves were many and interesting, for there had been Abraham Drewes and Adam Drewes in Dunstanborough for, at least, two hundred years; the record of the weathered headstones went back to dates undecipherable, and commemorated men and deeds more worthy of their coun-

try and more valuable to it than all the Delavels, and all their battles and achievements, of which the church itself was the monument. He, the last of the sturdy line, found unexpected satisfaction in the tracing of his humble pedigree from one honest farmer to another, as he waited for his lady's coming; he had not, as a sojourner in his native place, been old enough to read and understand it until now. The long mounds, in a double row, lined a footpath on one side from gate to porch; and his father's grave, and those of little Thomas and Priscilla Mary, were in an angle of the latter, and there was no room for any more. Moreover, they were making a new cemetery for Dunstanborough.

The churchyard elms were yellowing, and the yellowest leaves floated down upon the grass. The air was so still that the smoke from the Rectory chimneys across the road went straight up into the mellow sky, the colour of which was so beautiful a contrast to the grey masonry and the green sod. In that stillness the wings of wayfaring birds were distinctly audible, and the echo of gunshots came from many miles away. The waiting lover, so sensitive to the moods of Nature, waited without restlessness, though he waited long.

At a little after four, young Toogood slouched up the footpath with his hands in his corduroy pockets, whistling. Adam intercepted and questioned him; learned that Miss Delia Plunket was still wearing her bandage occasionally, and was indeed coming to practise that afternoon; also that Tommy Toogood was her henchman, at a wage of a shilling per week. Sometimes she kept him for an hour, and sometimes for more, Tommy said, with the air of a boy whom church walls suffocated.

Adam tendered half-a-crown and liberty. The first was pocketed on the spot, the latter held over until Miss

Plunket should have settled down to work—because Adam, much as he desired the pleasure and novelty of blowing bellows, first wished to see how it was done. He also reserved the right to back out of the job, should he subsequently feel unequal to performing it without risk of annoyance to the young lady. Other little arrangements were made, not without misgivings as to their propriety on the part of the maker; and then Tommy fetched the keys, and the conspirators passed into the church.

It was a greatly altered church, internally. There was a new altar, with candles and vases on it; new carpets and new hangings—red, with a pattern of yellow fleur-de-lys—and curly brass-work that glinted in the dusk; new oak benches in the nave, in place of the old square pews, and new colours and stencillings on the once whitewashed walls; above all, a new organ—tucked into the little transept where rustic schoolboys used to sit, under the shadow of a punitive ash-rod, wielded by the parish clerk. The three-decker, which was his awful throne, had also disappeared, and the eagle was in another place; so that Adam wondered for a moment where he was, in the soft gloom that was almost darkness after the light outside. But not all was changed. The stone knights and crusaders still lay on their stone beds, and knelt in their mural niches, and were otherwise represented in every part of the fabric, as of old; and the high-panelled, silk-curtained enclosure in the chancel, sacred to the living potentate, was still untouched.

Behind the squire's pew—between it and the altar rails—there was a rather large space of floor, empty save for the old brasses inlaid in it, the overhanging effigies of Sir Roger and his family, and one lowly wooden form. On this form—terribly exposed to the eyes of their liege

lord as he came in and went out through his own chancel door—surplus school children or very naughty ones used to sit; also candidates for confirmation, and women being churched, and brides and bridegrooms waiting to be married. Adam found it in its old place, to his surprise and satisfaction, and promptly sat down upon it. There was he, perfectly lost to view from anywhere in the body of the building, three feet of oak panel and silk curtain rising up above his head.

As he sat there, facing the new altar and the old east window—full of saints and the arms of the family—he heard Fidelia come in. Some one was with her, and they clattered at the organ for a few minutes, then the some one passed out, and there was a rustling and a silence; then the sweetest strain of music he had ever heard. I think it was the andante from Mendelssohn's violin concerto,—at any rate, the sound of it made his head swim and his heart swell.

He looked cautiously round the corner of the squire's pew. There she sat. He could just see her dear face, outlined against the organ curtain, lifted upwards, and the white bandage was on it. He emerged from his hiding-place, stepping softly; shook his head in response to Tommy's craned-out neck and questioning eyes, and, pausing by the brass eagle, stood there, with his arm on the Bible and his chin on his hand, listening, rapt in dreams, like St. Paul in Raphael's picture of St. Cecilia.

But he was not St. Paul. He was a young lover, thrilling with strong young life, and having the soul of a poet in him. Also, she was not a saint, but a most human woman, as full as he was of the feeling of their tender years. And she, too, had the poetic soul—it breathed through her fingers into the organ pipes, unmistakable to the soul it called to—and it was Mendelssohn's andante

that she played. Not everybody will understand the situation. Only a reader here and there.

He did not know what it was he longed for, but his longing grew and grew, until brain and heart seemed bursting. He moaned inaudibly, in his swimming rapture and pain—much as a dog will do, audibly, when its emotions are similarly played upon—and clutched the lectern with convulsive movements of the hand. When the delicious melody sank into murmurs and whispers, his eyes closed in a swooning way; he shut his teeth together, drawing long internal sighs, while the tongue of his soul, which only the ears of the soul can hear, uttered what may roughly be interpreted as "My love! my love! my love!" over and over again, without knowing what it was saying.

Then came silence, and some new self rose up within him—some worm turned—unsuspected until so mightily provoked. Tommy Toogood was peremptorily waved from his stool and from the church—so hurried away that his highlows clattered as he went, and the door clanged like a cannon fired after him; and the sound of the strange step, ringing and resolute, made Fidelia wonder for a moment whether burglars and murderers were upon her.

Only for a moment. Then she knew whose it was—because she had been listening for it ever since she came to live in Dunstanborough. In every line of her quivering little form, as she stood by her stool—in the pink flush that streamed from beneath the white bandage into the neck of her white gown—was evidence that she divined what she could not see. Yet she cried, in a tone that sounded sharp with fear, "Who—who is it?"

"It's me," said Adam; and a soft wave seemed to pass over her. "It's only me—don't be frightened. I came to—to—to blow the bellows for you—Adam Drewe."

"Oh, Adam Drewe! Oh, I knew your voice the first moment! Oh—h!"

She spoke as if little singing birds were fluttering in her throat. And he answered as if something in his choked him.

"Oh—h—h—h!"

There was only one way in which to express the inexpressible. He took that way. He simply could not help it.

But the moment after—when she cowered down with that pitiful, reproachful cry—the magnitude of his crime, of the sacrilege that he had committed, overwhelmed him. He could not speak, even to beg her forgiveness, so stunned and shocked was he, so utterly swallowed up in his remorse and despair. When she sank upon her stool, with her blind face in her hands, he turned and fled, as if Furies pursued him; got home, he knew not how; harnessed his hired horse to his hired gig, and drove through the night to Lyntham and his lair in the bookseller's attic —like Cain with his brother's blood upon his hands. He locked himself in, and sat in darkness till morning, fighting a trouble compared with which the disaster to his story and the death of gran'ma were as nothing.

"She can never forgive me! She will never be able to bear the thought of me again!" was his passionate lament. And yet a tragic exaltation possessed him, despite his shame. Never more would he be what he was before he kissed Fidelia. That kiss had indeed made him an older and a wiser man, had given him new strength to fight and strive. He would make atonement for his sin in great deeds for her; he would get money and power to spend in her dear service. The dreadful joy in the thought that blindness might give her to him in the end, and the resulting visions of his powerful imagination, uplifted him

as on the crest of a mighty sea-wave; but every wave had its sickening fall into that black trough of despair.

"I have profaned the Holy of Holies. I can never forgive myself, or be forgiven!"

It may be said here that his physical conscience—if one may thus designate it—which had so fine a quality in youth, did not grow insensitive with years, as is the case with most men.

CHAPTER XIV.

ADAM set to work forthwith, determined to be famous, and not to see Fidelia again until his laurels had made him worthy.

He had already recovered from what may be called the measles of his literary infancy, and became much stronger than before. Bitter as is the discipline to which a budding author is subjected, he is always the better for it, if he has the right stuff in him. There is no teacher of style like the unfavourable reviewer who for the moment breaks his heart, provided that the reviewer be fair and serious and properly qualified for his work. And even the editor who cut him up so cruelly—which is a thing no editor should do, since he is free to refuse what does not suit him—prompted Adam to a self-restraint that was decidedly advantageous to the next story.

The Revolt of the Stepson was hurried into oblivion as fast as he could send it. No friend received copies of the magazine containing it; no revised volume was attempted, to lead the reader's memory back to the unauthorised first version; the very sight of the offending periodical, long after he had done with it, gave him a cold shudder; and he never read his tale in type a second time. But he wrote another tale—*Morning Glory* was its name—a tale of young love, more full of blood and fire than any *Warcry* ever was, yet as chaste as his own pure

heart, and treated in the light of his better knowledge of artistic requirements; and this tale was printed, with the text intact. Oh, happy fortune! And it was paid for, moreover. And a critic pointed out that here was something rather above the average. It was, of course, immediately followed by a third—which had a like success; and the fourth was not offered, but asked for. And thus Adam became an author—a full-blown professional; and gran'pa was respectfully given to understand that he must find another man to sit upon his throne. This was a blow to gran'pa at first; but when a most capable new assistant was installed, and almost immediately engaged himself to Aunt Priscilla, the old gentleman was consoled. And he came to see that Lyntham and the shop were too narrow for his boy's greatness—that London was his natural heritage and home.

To London Adam went, still—after long months of separation from Fidelia—with the consecration of their kiss upon him. It was the inspiration of his genius, of all that was highest and finest in his work and in his life. It is not too much to say that the memory of that moment—that moment of moments—was a vision that never faded from his inward eyes. Never, save in sleep, and not always then; and many an hour of precious sleep was squandered for the sake of seeing it in quiet hours, when he could give it all his thoughts. In the gallery of his recollections it was a picture always in the light. *The* picture! All the rest had become daubs, and valueless.

He endeavoured continually, and often with success, to sweetly persuade himself that it was not all his fault. Not even the fault of nature, which had made his strong mind and body, one and indivisible, at the most critical stage of their development, responsive to the provocation of a fair girl's friendliness, as sleeping gunpowder to a

lighted match. Not even the fault of the music, which to such as he was more intoxicating than wine. It seemed to him—sometimes—that Fidelia herself had had a hand in the catastrophe. The earth turns her dewy morning face to the sun before he shines upon her; and Fidelia, unknowing—oh, doubtless unknowing!—had turned to her young adorer as if on purpose to be flooded with the passion that hitherto had spent itself in space. He saw her again, saw her perpetually, the slim, white creature—she had always come to him white-robed, like an angel—thrilling at the sound of that long "Oh—h—h!" which burst like a groan from his heart, her pretty blush fading quickly to that frightened paleness—ah, poor child!—so strangely at sea and helpless, with the bandage on her eyes. The bandage had concealed her terror of the looming monster, whose beauty she had to know to understand; her blind stillness had misled him. And yet—and yet——!

Well, some day, perhaps, he would know—some day, when he was worthy to ask.

And so he laboured and struggled, with all his soul and with all his strength. And he finished his great work—the first of his great works. Then he started for London. The new novel was in his new portmanteau, with his new clothes; he and it were going to London together to seek fame and fortune for Fidelia's sake.

But on his way thither a tragic adventure befell him, the result of which, was that he never carried out his plan.

He was walking up and down the platform of a country station, where he changed his train, when his attention was drawn to a lady also walking up and down. She was on the arm of a grey-moustached gentleman, who appeared to be her father, and she looked at Adam as she

passed—looked but once, in the cold way that he was accustomed to, and then took no further notice of him. But he looked at her with great interest every time she passed him; for it seemed to him that he had seen her before, though he could not remember the circumstances. She was very young; she was beautifully dressed, in the simple, well-bred manner; and she had, he thought, the loveliest face in the world—the loveliest eyes, particularly. When she looked at anything, she puckered them up and peered through narrowed lids in a near-sighted way; but that little trick only added to their charm. Where—where had he seen her before? He searched memory in vain, and finally searched for the labels on her luggage, when her back was turned. And there he found enlightenment. "Miss F. Plunket, passenger to London." Of course! He might have known it. Fidelia, with the bandage off!

The bandage was off, and she was now as other women, only more so; consequently, she was dead to him. Oh, no, not dead!—more divinely alive than ever!—but lost, hopelessly! He had not known till now that he had ever believed in the possibility of possessing her; yet he felt his bereavement as if all that was his very own had been taken from him. The very manuscript in his portmanteau, and every hope inwoven with it, turned to ashes, as if consumed in fire.

Her father—if he was her father—put her into a carriage of the up train; a young woman accompanying her, who appeared to be her maid, took her place in another of a lower class; Adam sought a third, as far from both as he could get, in dread of his identity being discovered by either of them. The look that Fidelia had cast upon him, not recognising her soul's affinity under his mask of flesh, was burned indelibly upon his brain. She must

never see him with those sweet eyes uncovered again. Like the fallen Lucifer, when no reinforcement could be gained from hope he extracted resolution from despair; and this it was. He would save the memory of himself as she had imagined him, at all costs. If necessary—if there seemed any danger of chance meetings, which should destroy the image still honoured in her thoughts—he would emigrate to some far country, which should, for her, become his grave. He would go to Mr. Richard in Sydney—that friend of friends, who had known all and forgiven all—and come back no more.

But while he braced himself thus sternly, sitting rigid in his corner seat, peering at the flying landscape through his blue goggles and a window that might as well have been a schoolboy's slate—while he fiercely resolved never to risk another meeting with Fidelia, until, perchance, they met in another world—cunning Fate was contriving to circumvent him in her unexpected way. She presently caused the train into which she had put them both to run off the line.

It was not much of an accident, but it was enough. The engine buried its fore paws in the soft earth of an embankment, where engines were not meant to go, and then paused abruptly in the attitude of a little dog hiding a bone in a flower-bed; the embankment sloped down instead of up, and the monster hung upon the edge of it, nose to the ground and hindquarters in the air, looking as if a baby's touch would send it over. Several carriages, violently running upon it and being checked suddenly, stood on tip-toes, so to speak, and fell into each other's arms with a vehemence that completely overset them; one rolled right down the bank, head first, and the others tumbled upon its kicking wheels. It was all over in a moment; and the dazed passengers, realising in a second

moment that the end of the world was still an event in the future, picked themselves up as best they could. No one was killed, but some were badly shaken, and most of them screamed horribly. The sound of those screams, mingled with the clanking and crashing of riven wood and metal, and the hissing of escaping steam, conveyed the idea of such an appalling catastrophe as would make history for the world.

Needless to say, Adam forgot all about his appearance and how it would affect Miss Plunket (as his), and started off to look for her the moment he could extricate himself. He was in one of the upper of the fallen carriages, and had to draw cut legs out of one window to climb to the other, from which he emerged, like a Jack-in-the-box, to find nothing but sky above him. There were fiendish glares and flares of light dancing about the wreck, but the darkness which they intensified was impenetrable. And it was a lonely bit of fen on which they had chanced to come to grief; not so much as a cottage within hail, apparently.

He raged from point to point, swarming like a monkey over the tottering pile, tugging and tearing at jammed doors and splintered panels, while frenzied females stretched arms to him which he disregarded or repulsed, because they were not Fidelia's.

"Where *is* she?" he groaned—a wailing, bursting groan—as from time to time he pounced on a woman's form that looked like hers, and found that it belonged to another. "God! God! What has become of her?"

Then, when all were out—all miraculously alive as he was told—and help had been sent for, he suddenly heard her voice behind him, a mere whisper in the loud confusion, but more penetrating than screams.

"No," she was saying, "I am not hurt. Only I feel so dizzy!"

Turning, he saw her staggering out of the crowd, leaning upon her maid, who supported her with a sturdy arm. Instantly he flung himself after her, in a frenzy of joy.

"Oh, thank God! Thank God!" he sobbed. "You are safe, after all!"

She knew his voice, as he had known hers, and responded with a quick cry, full of gladness that he dared not recognise: and she put out her hand, and he seized it, and they stood shaking together, as if their two bodies were one, with an electric current running through them. The lights of the train were in her face as she turned to him, and he saw her eyes narrowing and peering as she tried to make him out. But her sight was not good, and a perfect blackness of darkness hid all but the outline of his sturdy figure; seeing which, and that he was saved for the present, he shifted his hat, and determined not to shift his position.

"You are not hurt? You are not hurt?" he kept saying, unable to control the tremulousness of his eager tones. "You are sure, *sure* that you are not hurt?"

The shock of seeing him seemed to have taken from her the power of speech, but her maid answered for her. She said she believed no bones were broken, but that her young lady was so faint she could hardly stand.

"Make her sit down," said Adam; and he tore off his great-coat and spread it on the ground (it was October, and the ground was damp). "I will go and get her something." By which he meant one of the several spirit flasks he had seen handed round amongst the wounded.

But here Fidelia found her voice. "Do not go," she pleaded, with a timid touch upon his sleeve. "Stay with me, or we shall not find each other again,"—words which caused him to doubt the evidence of his astonished ears.

Could she, he asked himself, even under these distracting circumstances, have forgotten his sin against her? Apparently she had.

He sent Matilda in quest of stimulants, and remained with his beloved as a matter of course. He did more—he moved her right away from the circle of lights and people, so as to place her where she could have support for her back, against an invisible gatepost. And Matilda, having wandered far and wide in search of brandy, and found the supply exhausted, groped about with a borrowed smelling-bottle, seeking for them, until she lost herself.

Fidelia shook all over with the fright of the accident—she said it was that which so upset her—but recovered from her faintness rapidly. And even then she did not remember that Adam had forfeited all claim to her regard. The tone in which she spoke to him was not only forgiving; it was caressingly affectionate.

"You are sure, you are *quite* sure, you are not hurt? *Do* tell me the truth," she urged, again and again; it was all they could say to each other while their agitation lasted. And Adam, with hot tinglings in his leg, and a foot audibly squelching in a blood-filled boot, declared every time that he was as right as possible.

Then they gathered, from calls that came to them across the darkness from those infernal-looking figures in the light, that nothing very dreadful had happened—no lives lost, and no serious casualities; and the tension of their minds was relieved, and they talked less awkwardly. Other questions were exchanged. "How are you? How did you come to be here? What have you been doing? What are you going to do?" And meanwhile she wistfully tried to scan his face, and he resolutely kept it in the shadow of the night, which was black as the proverbial wolf's mouth. Trusting to this cloak, he slid to his knees

before her, and gradually sunk upon the ground at her side; and when they had brought their personal history roughly up to date, they came to the silence which was their souls' real meeting-place.

It was the opportunity of their lives. And—as we mostly do, because the conventions have made cowards of us—they lost it. In that silence he might have heard her heart calling to him—"Adam, Adam, why did you go away?" And she certainly understood the language of his shaking pulses, which thrilled the air around her. And yet they counted the precious moments, knowing all their preciousness, and dared not speak. So their great chance passed.

"I hear the relief train coming," whispered Fidelia, breathing quickly.

Adam heard it too, and despair seized him; also a qualm of physical sickness that made his head swim and his legs give way under him, as he rose with her from the ground. People were looking for them and shouting for them. It was the last good-bye.

"Well," he said, with bitter calmness, "you will be all right now. Other people will take care of you. And when you are out of this—when you are back in your own world—you will never give another thought to me."

"Isn't it the other way?" she retorted, in a low, quick tone. "Don't you forget that I exist, except when you come across me like this, once in a dozen years, by accident?"

"Never, *never* do I forget it, for a single instant, night or day."

It was a bold statement, but the voice that made it was weak.

"Then why—why——? You have not even inquired after me!"

"I have not dared."

"Oh, what nonsense! Why not?"

"Because I am not worthy."

"Not worthy! You—*you!* Oh, no, it's the other way; it is I who am not good enough."

He groaned a passionate dissent; but he felt so ill at the moment that he could do no more. And he could have killed Matilda, who took that moment of all moments to bring the outside world upon them.

"Is that you, Miss Delia? Oh, miss, I've had such a hunt! They have sent a train for us, and we shall soon be safe in our beds."

"All right, Matilda, I am coming," said Fidelia, suddenly bright and self-possessed. "Go on and find the things—I am coming."

Then she turned to Adam with an inviting gesture. She wanted him to bring her to the light, that she might see him. She expected him to travel with her to their journey's end.

But Adam held back. "I—I will come presently," he mumbled; and such was his air of embarrassment that she concluded he had some reason a lady could not pry into for wanting to be by himself—probably torn clothes. "And—in case I don't see you again—good-bye, Miss Plunket!"

She thought she heard him sobbing, and she went up to him anxiously—so closely up to him that he put his hand over his face.

"You *are* hurt!" she cried.

"No—no; I think I feel a little scratch, but it's nothing. I am going to tie something round it."

"Ah, I knew it. Take my handkerchief. Let me bind it—can't I?"

"No, you can't. Thank you all the same."

Their hands, which it was too dark to see, knew the way by instinct to each other; they clasped tightly. Adam's head was turned away.

"Miss Plunket," he panted, making an effort to understand what he was going to say, "promise me something before you go."

"What is it?" she murmured tenderly; "of course I will."

"Read my new book when it comes out."

She replied, with a soft laugh—"Oh, as *if* I shouldn't!"

"It was written for you. They will all—all—be written for you. Remember that."

"I shall not flatter myself. But, you know, you *know* I shall read them, every word. I have read"—dropping her voice—"that lovely *Morning Glory*—I *knew* it was yours——"

"Miss Delia," wailed Matilda, "they'll go without us if you don't make haste."

Adam still stood by the gatepost, feeling the need of a prop in his increasing giddiness; and Fidelia, seeing that he really was not coming, sadly bade him good-night, and surrendered to her maid. When she had gone a lagging step or two, she turned back, and spoke to him with a wistful sweetness that, under the circumstances, was heart-breaking.

"You will call on me in London, Mr. Drewe? My married sister is there—I am going to her; she will like to thank you for taking such good care of me."

Adam made one more effort.

"I am afraid I cannot," he said. "I think I am going away—too far away——"

"Just as you like, of course," she rejoined, deeply wounded—wounded by *his* hand. And then, in pain and shame—asking herself whether he indeed had kissed her

because he loved her, or whether she had wholly misunderstood him—she left him finally. He traced her shadow through the darkness to the light, and saw her in the light looking back to where he stood—still, still expecting him—still trusting to the instinct of her true heart, which vouched for his sincerity. He clung to the gatepost until the relief train had gone, taking her with it, and leaving only workmen to flit all night, gnome-like, about its prostrate brother; then he sank down where he stood, and lay there until dawn revealed him, slowly bleeding into insensibility, and wishing that he was dead.

CHAPTER XV.

RICHARD DELAVEL—whose story has been told in another place—was living in Sydney, and, so far as his worldly interests were concerned, prospering exceedingly. He had a valuable partnership in an extensive shipping firm, which was the business to which he mainly devoted himself, and was also making much money in the share market, as seemed so easy to do in those good old times. Domestically, he appeared equally fortunate. His comparatively low-born wife, for whose sake he was an exile from his home and country, had developed into what is known as a perfect lady, and their only child was a daughter, in whom he saw no fault at all. His new house on Darling Point—his "place," as it was called, being so much more than a house—was an ideal home to look at, even in that paradise, and it was ordered perfectly. No lack and no waste, no hurry and no muddle, no dust on the books nor dead flowers in the vases, no mistakes in tradesmen's accounts, nor accidents with the wine or with the mutton, were permitted in that establishment, whose mistress was not merely the pearl of housekeepers, but an exceedingly pretty woman, with an admirable taste in dress. And Richard himself was still young, though grown sedate beyond his years, a fine tall fellow, handsome as he always was, with very keen eyes that were

colder than their wont; a man of grave affairs, whose wild oats were sown—and perhaps reaped also.

One day he sat in his room at the Pitt Street office, quietly attending to routine matters. He was interrupted by a message through his speaking tube, intimating that a gentleman wished to see him.

"Who is it?" he called impatiently; "ask his name and business."

The unexpected answer was—"Mr. Adam Drewe, from England."

Then did the coldness melt from those steel-bright eyes, and all official stiffness from the body belonging to them. It was Dicky Delavel once more, as he was in the old days before his troubles sobered him.

"Adam Drewe! Little Adam! Gracious powers! Why, Adam, of all people! Well, this is a surprise! Come in, come in, my dear fellow, and give an account of yourself. Where on earth have you sprung from? And what are you doing in these parts? How well you are looking, Adam! I shouldn't have known you."

"Oh, I think you would have known me," said Adam, smiling rather grimly behind the beard and goggles. "I am not so like everybody else that you wouldn't know me again."

"Well, I see it is you, of course. But you are looking splendid." He meant that Adam, well-tailored and well-barbered, had the air of a gentleman, and of a gentleman in prosperous circumstances; wherein he differed pleasantly, not merely from his old self, but from the every-day new chum in quest of successful old acquaintances. "And how goes it, Adam? It is strange indeed to see an old Dunstanborough face again. How has the world been using you, old fellow? Well, I hope. Sit down—sit down. What'll you have? Whisky and soda, or beer?"

Both were rather overcome by their meeting, and the memories revived, and, of course, did their best to hide it from each other. Richard fumbled with bottles and glasses at a cupboard, while Adam winked away an incipient tear.

"Thank you, I'll take a glass of ale, if you have it handy," said the guest. "Oh, the world has used me very well, Mr. Richard—in one way. I've come in for a nice little sum under my father's will, and my book is selling—it's in a third edition; I got word at Adelaide, by telegraph." His face lighted up.

"What book?" queried Richard, staring.

And then he had the amazing news that Adam was an author, and an author fairly afloat, with the wind in his sails. Richard knew the book that had gone into its third edition; he had just read it and been delighted with it—a strong and original study of life in the shopkeeping class, which was new material to the novelist. Desperate struggles and triumphs on the part of a gifted shop-boy were graphically depicted, leading to the touching climax of a love-match with a duke's daughter. Not only was the story as real as art could make it; the literary style was terse and powerful, faintly—very faintly, of course—resembling that of the prince of tale-writers, who must have been a child in pinafores at that date, incapable of being plagiarised.

"What!" cried Richard, with the beer cork half out of the bottle, and there sticking, in the paralysis of his surprise; "you mean to say you wrote *In Spite of all? You!*"

Adam sat and beamed.

"*Well!!!*"

Then the cork came out, and the creaming ale, and the distinguished person was toasted enthusiastically. "More

power to your elbow, Adam! You are going to be famous, man. Why, how old are you? Not much over twenty, eh? If this is your beginning ——! Oh, I am glad indeed! I do congratulate you. But you were always a clever little chap. Don't you remember my old granny and my aunt Elizabeth prophesying that you were going to beat the—that you were going to do something out of the common—the day I took you to Lyntham? Have you forgotten our little spree at the Mart, Adam?"

The young man shook his head emphatically. "Never!" he burst forth, as if the word were a lead bullet.

Richard drained his glass, set it down gently, and looked at it.

"I suppose you haven't heard anything of the old folks, Adam?"

"Not much, sir. It is fully a year and a half since I was in Dunstanborough."

They sat silent for a space, Richard listening for news, and Adam wondering what he could say. For Lady Susan had died since their last meeting; Mr. Keppel had died—destroyed by his own hand; Miss Katherine had married the enemy; and the old squire had shut himself up in his old house with his eldest daughter, who was too proud to notice people in whom her mother had taken an interest.

"There have been great changes," said Adam at last.

"Yes," sighed Richard.

"The new earl, your uncle, seems very much liked in Lyntham."

"Oh, does he?"

"Mrs. Roger, your sister-in-law, is a great beauty, they say."

"Oh, is she?"

But these details were mere straw and chaff to the hungry man, and he impatiently turned from them.

"When did you come, Adam?" he asked, reverting to the matter in hand.

"Only this morning," replied the visitor. "We landed just after breakfast, and I have been settling myself at the hotel, and finding my way about a little—looking for you. I thought I might venture——"

"I should think so, indeed! You must let me do all I can for you. Are you going to stay any time? Are you merely travelling, or are you thinking of settling out here? It is a fine country, Adam. Lots of new material for novels, and all that sort of thing."

"I was thinking of settling," said Adam, gravely, "but I have no definite plans as yet. I thought if we could talk things over together—some time when you are quite at liberty——"

"We will—we will; I am at liberty now, and for the rest of the day." He opened and shut his watch. "Come home to lunch with me now, Adam, and this afternoon I will row you down to my camp, where we can be quiet and comfortable. I've got a place away down there"—waving his hand vaguely—"right in the bush, on the edge of the water, looking over to the Heads. It is my smoking-room—my bachelor den, so to speak——"

"But you are not a bachelor," Mr. Richard.

"Oh, no! Oh, *dear*, no!"

"I think I remember Mrs. Delavel," remarked Adam, modestly; "she went to the little school I went to. She was an elder pupil when I was the smallest of them all."

Richard laughed, as if this reminiscence amused him; and he took his hat from its peg, and sallied forth. "Come and let me introduce you to her," he said, "and

after lunch we'll have the boat out, and a jolly afternoon all to ourselves. How do you like Sydney, Adam—as much as you've seen of it? What do you think of our harbour?"

The harbour—as to which Adam readily endorsed the prevailing opinion—lay outstretched beneath the windows of Mr. Delavel's house, between which and it dropped terrace upon terrace of one of the loveliest gardens in that Eden of the South. It was early winter—chrysanthemum time—six months from the October night of the railway accident—and a typical Sydney morning. Never in his life had Adam seen Nature through such an atmosphere. He looked at the emerald-green foliage, the jewel-bright flower borders, the sapphire-blue water, the turquoise-blue sky, then up at the house, which was a palace to his old-fashioned, provincial eyes, shining in the sun like washed alabaster; and he said, impulsively, "Well, sir, you ought to be happy in a place like this!"

Richard laughed as his eyes roved lightly over his domain.

"A little heaven here below, isn't it? But I doubt, Adam—I doubt very much whether I was ever meant for heavens—of any sort."

Adam understood that he had spoken without thought.

"It is a charming residence," he remarked, more gravely.

"It is," the proprietor assented (though, in fact, it was not conceived in such perfect taste as he and his guest supposed). "I had a first-rate architect, and I told him that money was no object."

That money evidently was no object impressed Adam even more than the fine things which illustrated the fact. It was a pleasure to see such proofs of success and pros-

perity, but not all a pleasure. He felt the want of harmony between his old hero of romance and an Australian merchant prince who had risen to his position from a common office stool; and indeed, Richard was variously out of his element in the present surroundings (as has been elsewhere recorded). An Englishman of his class—not to speak of his personal temperament—has no business to become rich as he had done. He could, with Renan, have proved the nobility of his house by the fact that it was habitually defrauded when it attempted to engage in commercial business. "When it comes to taking the best pieces out of the dish which is handed round, our natural politeness stands in our way." He should have been a Jackeroo—say, on a big cattle station, where the Jackeroo is in his glory—a wild horseman of the desert, got up for the part in the young English gentleman's delightful stage-bandit fashion, running his horses and the milking cows, mustering and drafting the mobs from the run, store-keeping, boundary riding, and so on and so on; this, to all appearances, had been the destiny prepared for him. But fortunes have a way of making themselves in this part of the world; at least, they had. Any man, going to bed anxious about his bank overdraft, might wake up and find himself to all intents and purposes, a millionniare—merely, perhaps, in consequence of a fall of rain. And Dicky Delavel, not having the means to buy big boots and stock whips, and otherwise establish himself in the unprofitable calling of a rouse-about, to which he must have been naturally inclined, being tied to the city which first received him, was driven to mere trade for a living—with his unexpected and hardly sought for result. He had been in luck's way, and the times had served him.

The mistress of the house, when he was re-introduced

to her, was more of a surprise to Adam than the house itself. She was passing through the stately hall as Richard led him into it, and, being called to, turned with the air of a queen to survey him. Lady Susan had never worn that air, nor the old countess in her best days; it seemed to him impossible that so regal a lady could be a Morrison of Dunstanborough, sister of farmer John; yet he saw the family likeness in her handsome face. At Dunstanborough, the Morrisons had ranked far below the Drewes in social consequence, and at the present day Mrs. Holditch utterly refused to know Rhody Appleton that was; but here the representative of the Drewes, a highly cultured man and a successful artist, bowed before the least worthy of the Morrisons with a feeling that he ought to have entered her house by the back door. Her magnificence compelled him.

"Annie, my dear, here is an old friend of ours," said her husband, in a light tone. "An old friend from Dunstanborough."

A flush rose to her cheek, her lips tightened, her chin lifted a little. Richard regarded her mischievously, but his eyes were hard.

"You ought to know him," he continued, "for he was at school with you."

"At Mrs. Dunford's," murmured the guest. "Adam Drewe—Abraham Drewe's son."

She pretended to smile and make a feint of welcoming him, but such a reminder of her humble past was the most annoying thing that could happen to her. She was enraged with him for intruding upon the present, and with her husband for permitting it; so that her smile and the cold touch of her hand barely indicated the letter of hospitality, while the absence of its spirit was unmistakably proclaimed.

"Come in, dear old fellow," cried Richard, laying his hand heavily upon Adam's sturdy shoulder. "Come upstairs with me and have a wash. I must introduce you to my little girl. Here, Sue! Sue!"

"Do not disturb her at her studies, Richard," Mrs. Delavel remonstrated, with an air of gentleness, belied by the severity of mouth and eyes. "She will come down to lunch."

"She is not in school at one o'clock," he returned, shortly. "And she will come when I want her. Sukey! Where are you, Sukey?"

Mrs. Delavel slowly turned and swept away, and her husband ran upstairs, calling to his friend to follow him. As Adam did so, glancing to right and left at pictures and carvings, he reminded himself that little heavens here below are not constructed by mortal architects. "What would the people at home say," he thought, "if they could see her now? And if they could see *him!*"

On the first spacious landing a door opened, and a little girl came out—flying to her father's arms.

"Here she is!" exclaimed Richard, in his old boyish way, running over with pride. "What do you think of her, Adam? Who is she like? This is an old friend of daddy's, pet—a very dear old friend. Shake hands with him."

She reminded Adam of Fidelia when he saw her first; but she was much younger, and she was not half—not a quarter—oh, not a hundredth part as pretty! Yet she had a taking little face, sweet and frank and fresh, and in every other respect was a delightful child to look at, being well grown and healthy, and beautifully dressed and cared for.

Adam looked at her earnestly, and she shrank and hid from him.

"I don't know," he said. "I can't see any likeness to anybody."

"Not to my mother, Adam? She has my mother's name."

Richard tried to expose his daughter's bashful countenance; but little Susan objecting, Adam begged that she might not be teased. She then returned to her governess to be prepared for lunch.

This was quite the daintiest meal that Adam had ever partaken of. The artistic side of him was gratified by the delicate dishes and the refined prettiness of the table arrangements; and again, thinking of Mrs. Delavel's upbringing, he wondered at her elegance. But he had seldom enjoyed his food less, because she steadily, though silently, counteracted every effort of her husband to make the guest feel welcome and at home. A hostess can do this without being distinctly rude. She asked no questions of Adam concerning his circumstances or plans, and when he tried to make conversation by informing her that he had seen her brother at Lyntham on the last market day before he left, and that Mr. Morrison was looking well, she froze him with the "Indeed?" which was her only response to the remark. The governess had evidently been taught to keep her place, for she scarcely spoke at all; and little Sue, equally dumb, stared at him across the table, as if there was some magic in him to hold her eye fixed. In vain her father admonished her to attend to her dinner; she could attend to nothing but this odd-looking man, who was strangely disconcerted by her direct gaze.

When Mrs. Delavel rose, announcing that she had an engagement at Government House, she inquired of her husband whether this "gentleman" would give them his company at dinner. Outwardly it sounded like an invitation, but another meaning underlay the words.

"He will dine with me at the club," said Richard, looking at her. "Yes, Adam"—waving aside the guest's hastily concocted excuse—"I am not going to part from you yet, old friend. Have some more wine? No? Then come into the smoking room for half an hour. Then we'll go down to my camp. That's the place to be thoroughly comfortable in."

In the smoking room they sat for a space, quietly, in two deep armchairs, the master of the house with his pipe, which had become very dear to him; and they did not impede the processes of digestion by talking too much. In fact, the near neighbourhood of Mrs. Delavel, who was not due at Government House before three, depressed them slightly, like a damp atmosphere. But when the pipe was finished, and Richard led the way down his terraced garden to a little landing stage at which a boat was moored, the weight was off him, and he was another man.

"Now," said he, "now we can yarn till all's blue. We've got the whole afternoon before us. Can you manage the tiller, Adam?"

Adam said he could, and seated himself astern. Richard cast off and swung his oars out, dipped them lightly, and was soon sweeping over the water with a long strong stroke, reminiscent of the years of his single manhood that were so glorious and so short. His friend, watching him, remarked that he was in fine training; and he replied that it was his custom to row to his camp in Middle Harbour about every other day.

"It's not much better than a black fellow's gunyah, but—but it's my second home, all the same—I don't know that it isn't my first," he said, with that light laugh which had no merriment in it. "Stone walls do not a palace make, Adam. I've got to hate walls, stone or otherwise. Climate, I suppose."

"I think I should feel the same," said Adam, "in such an air as this."

"I like the smell of the bush and of the sea. And I like peace and quiet—shows I'm growing old, don't it? I put a sheet or two of bark together one day, so as to have a shelter from the weather; now I've got a shed that I can lock up, and therefore keep a bottle and a bite of grub in. Also a truckle bed. I often sleep there when nights are fine. Some day I'll make a still better place of it, if I'm let alone—a place where I can board and lodge a friend, as well as myself. Only then I must have a housekeeper, —some old sea-dog, past other work, who'll be able to keep off trespassers and cook a decent chop."

Adam listened, and understood. He made no comment. And the panorama of the opening shores, as the boat sped by them, was too exquisite for words. It had been hardly daylight when his steamer came up over the same course, and an autumn fog had blurred the scene; now it was in all its glory of enchanting colour—or fast approaching it, as the sun declined—a bloom of rosy mist that did not blur, but changed mere earth into the semblance of a dream.

CHAPTER XVI.

SKIRTING Double Bay and Point Piper, with Clark's Island to the left—then Shark Island to the right and Bradley's Head against the sun, over the spot where, years afterwards, Richard's wife was drowned—past Chowder Head and George's Head, and the three beautiful bays, with all the lilac-tinted points and coves on the other side—the little boat came at length to the great gateway of that Paradise, and rocked to the swell of the Pacific seas.

The rudder was unshipped, and each man had an oar; they rested upon them for some minutes, while they looked, and listened, and wiped the perspiration from their brows. Richard spoke of the "creeping tide" of Dunstanborough, with the yearning of a homesick exile; and Adam, of the colour of this liquid light around him, bluer than English water ever was, with the rapture of a young traveller newly let loose upon the world. To the ears of both the murmur of thundering surf was the sweetest music made by any instrument; it came to them now, across the rippling sound, low and soft, like a dear voice out of the past.

"Do you remember," said Adam, over his friend's shoulder, "that day when you took me for a sail—my first sail—when I was a little chap?"

"I remember it well," returned Richard, dreamily.

"Ah—h—h! What things have happened since that day!"

"Yes," sighed Adam; and he thought of Fidelia, standing in the glare by the wrecked train and looking into the night behind her—looking for him. Was she looking for him still? The passing thought quenched the glory of the shining afternoon, as if a cloud of rain swept over it.

Middle Head—looking upon the great North and South Heads and the ocean highway between them—was rounded with some effort, and the two friends rowed into the bay behind it, and into a solitude strange to find on that side of the sea gate and so near a crowded city. What it may be now I cannot say, but when Richard's camp was there, as it was for many years, and when he died there at last, not so very long ago, that bit of Middle Harbour was virgin bush and shore, save for what he had done to it; a strip of fine, firm beach, with green heights behind and the lovely sea before—the Sound, and the surf, and the wayfaring ships—and between hills and beach a rude log hut (afterwards a nest of tents in a little garden with a two-foot palisade around it); a sanctuary of peace for the world-weary owner, who held his property as a gift from Nature, though ready to buy it at any moment, if necessary.

The wild scrub came to within a yard or two of the tide, which ebbed but slightly; a tough hedge grew out of the low ridge of sand that marked high water, and screened the hut from view seawards, while permitting a wide outlook from its door upon all that passed. The only signs of human habitation that Adam could see, as he approached, were a little staging run out into the water and—when it was laboriously pointed out to him—the apex of a small zinc roof.

"It is hideous," said Richard, "in such a place, but it catches the rain and runs it into a tank. By cleaning the tank every now and then, and keeping the key of the tap, I can have water to make tea with and to wash in, without going into the bush to fetch it. However, I shall abolish the whole arrangement presently, and start a better system."

Adam was sufficiently satisfied with the present arrangements. He could scarcely understand the attraction of the hut as a constant place of resort, to a householder in his friend's luxurious circumstances, but thought it an admirable base for picnic purposes, and its site and surroundings exquisitely adapted to the moods of a tired and misanthropic man.

They pulled their boat up to a post, and fastened it, then plunged through bushes into the clearing where the building stood—mere walls and roof, rude but strong, the seaward front formed of two stout doors, padlocked together. These the host unfastened and flung back, as one opens the front of a child's doll's house, leaving the whole interior exposed.

"Let us air it first," said Richard, sniffing fastidiously; and Adam merely looked in for a moment. He saw that the end of the shed was partitioned off into cupboards, on the top of which stood a lamp and books; and that the other furniture consisted of a bed, a stout table, and two comfortable wicker chairs. The raised floor was roughly planked, and the walls panelled to keep draughts out and lamplight in. Numerous nails studded the walls, supporting cooking utensils, towels, and an old coat, boating gear, a lantern, and other useful but unornamental things.

"I'll have canvas next time," said Richard, "and a separate pantry. I hate the smell of grub in the wrong

place. But it'll be gone directly. Come and let's sit on the beach, Adam, and make believe that we're at home again. I wish you smoked; you don't know what you lose. Oh, Lord, what should I have done all these years without my pipe?"

He spoke with the empty pipe between his teeth, and pared tobacco into his palm, as an old woman knits stockings, with a hand that needed no direction from the brain. When he had stuffed the bowl and lighted it, he spread a rug upon the sand, and the two lay down together, their shoulders against the ridge under the bushes and their boot-soles within a yard or two of the ripples, that tinkled in the silence with so soft and sweet a sound. For some time the echo of Richard's last remark seemed to fill the air. Then Adam made his comment upon it.

"You are home-sick, sir."

"Drop the 'sir,'" returned Richard.

"Thank you; why don't you go back, if you feel so?"

"Oh, that isn't how I feel—not as you think. I don't crave for Dunstanborough; at least, not much. You can be home-sick for another sort of home—I couldn't explain it."

"Yes," said the young lover, banished from his mate, "*I* know that."

"What! do you know it too? You are not old enough to know it, Adam."

Adam smiled in a convincing way, and remarked that he began young.

"Well, now, interpret," said his companion, "for I don't think we quite know what we are talking of. Tell me all about it; that is, if you care to tell me. Some things, of course, one can't ever speak of." And he took his pipe from his mouth as if afraid of biting the stem through, and sighed fiercely.

Adam divined that the well of sympathy, to which he had brought his bucket from so far, was fuller and deeper than when he had last drawn from it; and it was not long before his tale was told, without any reservations. Never was tale of young love crossed more kindly listened to, more unselfishly considered, by one not an actor in it.

"And so you came away because you could not trust her to love you in daylight!" ejaculated Richard. "You should have tried her first, Adam."

"I had tried her," was the reply. "I shall never forget how she looked at me when she passed me on the platform. Once was enough."

"She would not have looked that way if she had known you."

"Oh, I am not fit for her! I felt it all the time."

"That's nonsense, you know."

"You wouldn't think it nonsense, if you could see her, Mr. Richard. She is the loveliest woman ever born."

Richard smiled to himself.

"And she thinks me—I don't know what she thinks me—but, whatever it is, she shall always think it. And some day, perhaps—well, I may get famous and rich, and be able to do something for her still. I've got that to live for."

"Poor old chap!"

Ashamed of being pitied, after the manner of young Englishmen, Adam opined that he was not so very poor, as the world went. He had no doubt there were many poorer.

And Richard said, with an odd touch of sombre passion, "You are right there—those who haven't your grit, Adam—those who let themselves be floored by their troubles, instead of standing up like men."

Not understanding the allusion, and not knowing that he had been heroic, the lad held his peace; and his companion, feeling helpless to improve the situation, made an effort to detach them both from the grasp of a useless melancholy.

"Now, look here," said he, knocking the ashes from his pipe, "if you are going to stay in this country, we had better think out what's best to do. Have you any friends here, Adam?"

"None but you," was the reply; "and I particularly don't want any more."

"Then why not stay with me? I don't mean in my house—of course, I know you'd rather have a place of your own—any man would—but in my business. It is a big business, and interesting when you get hold of it. Perhaps you are too well off to want any business; but even if you are, it's a great help to have plenty of work. You've got your books, I know; but it isn't well to be writing always. Writing is thinking, and that's what we want to get away from."

"Yes," said Adam, looking with some intentness at his old friend; "yes, I feel that."

And then they talked over a plan for making a clerk of Adam, while he learned the shipping trade, so that he might have wholesome distraction from unhappy thoughts as well as fraternal companionship. For Richard Delavel, though he had become rich, was not a true man of business. He made no inquiry into Adam's qualifications for the offered post, being satisfied with the fact that the boy loved him, and came from Dunstanborough.

It had grown late by this time. So absorbed had they been in their many confidences that evening had stolen upon them unawares; and what an evening! The water was shining still, pallid and silky, and its fringing waves

ran white along the sand; but the velvety hills and headlands were turning from indigo blue to black, and the fairy gauze, shot with so many hues, that had veiled the brows of some of them was gone. Little winds of night were springing up, keen with the breath of the salt sea, but sweet to feel and taste, whispering in the trees and bushes; and through the autumnal dusk and the delicious quiet and solitude came the boom of breakers outside, a gentle, continuous murmur, in perfect tune with all.

"Well," said Richard, suddenly, "if we don't go, and make haste about it, too, you will get no dinner."

"As far as I am concerned," said Adam, "I am not used to getting it at this time of the day, and so it would be no loss. Tea and bread and butter, with perhaps a taste of jam, was my evening meal at home, year in and year out. But you——"

"Oh, I! Anything does for me; and I've got some tucker, of a sort, in there"—pointing over his shoulder with the pipe. "Tinned things and a box of biscuits, and some beer, besides flour and stuff to cook with, and tea, of course. Shall I make you a damper, Adam? I can; only it takes rather a long time; or will you have roast potatoes? It is very unhospitable, but—there's going to be a lovely moon now directly."

They agreed not to light a fire, but to feed upon what the cupboard could supply at once, waiting only for the moon. So the host locked them both inside the hut—in order that no casual prowler should suspect a cellar on the premises—and they spread the table together. It had no damask cloth, and the meats and biscuits were served in their tins; but that did not matter. Both were excellent to hungry men, who were not obliged to live on them; and the tumblers of good Bass, clear as topazes, with the foam running over, were superlatively excellent. They

sat *vis-à-vis*, with the lamp between them, and talked as they ate of the historic feast at Lyntham, the old times that were so pathetic now; and each scrutinised the other's countenance when he was not looking.

"How splendid he is!" thought Adam. "Why, *why* should he be so unhappy—with a face like that?"

"How much he has improved!" thought Richard; "and yet I think he was wise not to let her see him."

Neatly, when the meal was over, was the refuse of it collected to be deposited in a kitchen hidden underground, or in the sea; for Richard respected his camp as he did a house, and left no mess upon the carpet, which his hostess Nature spread for him. It was one of many trifling indications that he was a born gentleman. He washed the vessels that had been used, and returned them to their pegs and shelves; he extinguished the lamp, and set wide the doors of the hut to air the smell of food out of it; and he begged for one more pipe before starting on the homeward voyage.

And now it was night—more beautiful than day; and as they sat upon the edge of the hut floor, which was the doorstep, with feet in the loose dry sand, watching through the darkening bushes the gradual whitening of the water and clearing of the misty air—as they listened to the mighty voice that was the voice of their oldest friend—the two lone men felt less lonesome than they were accustomed to. They dumbly comforted each other.

"This is the hour I like," said Richard, musingly, with the glow of the rising moon in his fixed eyes. "About this time I come down now and then, and sleep here. I sleep with the doors open like this, so that I can see out as I lie in bed. Sometimes the wind blows the bed-clothes off me. It isn't often I bring anybody here, Adam. It is the one place that I keep to myself."

Adam murmured something in acknowledgment of the favour done him; and they relapsed into sympathetic silence until the pipe was finished.

Then the hut was locked up, and the boat unmoored, and they returned to the busy world once more; and Adam saw the exquisite harbour in still another aspect, and confessed it more satisfying than the finest dinner ever cooked. For now the moon was up, a radiant crescent in a clear, deep blue sky, without a feather of cloud, or a shred of sea-spun mist.

The many hills embracing the labyrinth of waters had "come out" like a perfected photograph, every outline sharp and true, on that divine background. And below —it was like fairyland, with those innumerable fixed and moving lights, studding the velvet blackness of the shore, and the satin surface of the stream. And above—the airy Infinite was unspeakable.

"Paradise!" sighed Adam.

"With the serpent all alive and kicking—as usual," said Richard.

"One would prefer not to think so."

"Oh, one would prefer it. One would prefer a lot of things!"

The words were the mere froth of words, but the tone was full of dreary meaning. Adam wondered for the fiftieth time what was the matter; but, of course, he did not ask. All that Richard revealed was the fact that they were companions in sorrow, and, therefore, able to feel for one another.

But they were back in the world now, and it was time to cease being sentimental. The boat having been stealthily housed in its own boat-house, and a cab having surreptitiously borne them from adjacent stables to the free and independent city, a good supper was insisted upon—sup-

per of the choicest obtainable, with champagne of the best, in which to drink the health of the new comer, as guest and author.

This took place at Richard's club, and was a cheerful function; for he still had the art of social popularity with the best about him, and he introduced Adam to a group of men, who, as far as he could detect, absolutely ignored his personal appearance, while they thoroughly understood his position as the author of *In Spite of All.* In fact, Adam never was in such good company—as a man and a brother—in his life as he was that night. And his tongue was loosed, so that he spake of what was in him, and became as good company himself as intelligent men could wish for. And both host and guest were as merry as could be, forgetting for the moment that they had a trouble in the world.

They parted in the small hours at Adam's hotel, Richard promising to call after breakfast, and take his friend to some lodgings that he knew of. And, elated with wine and kindly fellowship, and the delightful surprise of finding that his book and its fame had already made the circuit of the world, our hero laid his head on nice soft feathers and clean white linen, and could not sleep for thinking how lucky he was.

And then in the morning he got his letters from the post office; and there was one from Fidelia, which made him curse himself for having left her, and turned his blossoming desert into a howling waste once more. She had sent it to his publishers, and they had forwarded it by the very mail that brought him out. He had travelled with it from Egypt to Adelaide—her first letter to him—without knowing it.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIDELIA'S letter was simple, modest, womanly, like herself. It ran thus:—

"MY DEAR MR. DREWE: As you asked me rather particularly to read your book, I thought you might like to hear that we have all done so, and that my aunt and sisters join me in congratulating you on the production of so beautiful a work and in thanking you for the great pleasure that it has given us. As we are in London just now, with my married sister, we are in the way of hearing about it from a great many quarters, and I do not wonder that it is (as a gentleman belonging to the press told me last night) making you quite famous. Do you remember foretelling this when I first met you, and you were so good and kind to me, at the break-up party? I feel so proud of the confidence you reposed in me, and to see how our prophecies have been fulfilled! I was quite as sure as you were that they would be, particularly after I grew older and knew you better.

"My sister quite envies me my acquaintance with you, and wishes she could share it. She is nearly always at home at about five o'clock, and her little parties are much pleasanter than most, because she tries to get clever people; but I daresay it would bore you to come and see us when you must have so many better things to do.

"It is odd to think that I have never really seen you, and perhaps should not know you at a first glance; but there are plenty to know you now, and I never go to an unusually large or select party without hoping to have you pointed out to me. Not that I think I should need to be told. Rather, you would fail to recognise me, now that my eyes are well. The bandage must have made a dreadful fright of me. I am half tempted to send you a photograph, just to spare myself the ignominy of being cut dead when we do happen to come across each other again. The chance would be one I could not afford to lose in that way. There is so much that I want to say to you, and still more that I want to hear, after so long a time and the happening of so many great events.

"I have not said anything about the book—it is very hard to do so in a letter—I'm afraid you would accuse me of 'gush,' which is a thing I really am not given to. I think Roderick the most splendid man that ever lived in any story. I hope you won't mind my saying that Dorothea seems to me not half good enough for him. The idea of a girl—such a woman as he would think worthy to love—caring about his family connections, or whether he was poor or not! The real Dorothea would not have waited for him to be a great man and a millionniare, even though she was so beautiful and a duke's daughter (I don't think much of such dukes' daughters as I have met, by the way; I don't believe there is a real Dorothea amongst them). She would have seen his greatness for herself long before that time, and been only too proud to be his choice.

"But, after all, the *Morning Glory* is my favourite.

"I have them both, in copies of my own, which I don't lend to anybody. I got a bookbinder to put them into strong calf, and I have a fancy for having my name

written in them by the author himself. May I ask that favour? I would send them to you, only I don't know your London address. Perhaps it would not bother you to write it on a post card, and post it to me? I am staying with my sister, Mrs. Pelham-White, and shall be here for a long time.

"With kindest regards, in which my family join,

"Believe me, dear Mr. Drewe, most truly yours,

"FIDELIA PLUNKET.

"P. S.—I enclose a photo, in view of the contingency I mentioned. I wonder if you would send me one of yours, for the same purpose?"

Out of the letter, when his trembling fingers opened it, fell that photo—the sweetest picture that maddened lover ever gloated on. In fact, it flattered the original, who was quite pretty enough to need no flattering; and probably that was why she sent it. The soft pure lines and artistic lights and shadows made a face too lovely for this world—a face for dreams; and yet it was Fidelia's unmistakable own face—her "living image," in her lover's eyes.

He held it, shaking as in palsied hands, and stared at it; set it up like an altar-piece and knelt before it; hugged it to his breast; kissed it; groaned over it; wept over it; and came anew to the conclusion that such as she was not for such as he—that more than ever, now that she so sweetly, so significantly called him, was he bound to respect her ignorance of what he really was, and refuse to go to her, even in the guise of a photograph.

"She expects a Roderick—my beautiful Dorothea!—made to mate with a prince of men. What would she say if she saw *me?* How would she look? Oh, I know

how—as she looked when she saw me on the platform that last day!"

For he had not found courage to make the hero of *In Spite of All* different from other heroes. Like the ass in the lion's skin, he had wooed Fidelia in his book through the person of a shop-boy of six feet four, whose splendid lineaments and fascinations put those of the great Launcelot himself into the shade. Even there, where he had so good a chance of pleading for his rights—where he might have tested her on the subject of physical versus moral charm—he had been afraid to make the attempt, lest he should lose but a little of what he had already gained. And now she was wooing him—and it was *not* him! This was indeed the bitterness of death.

"Oh, go to her! Go to her!" said Richard, when he came about the lodgings, and found his friend qualifying for a lunatic asylum. "Go straight back to her, man, and chance it. Mind you, when a woman *is* a woman, she's heaven and all the angels rolled into one for the man she loves. There's *no* camel that she won't swallow for him. I don't say it because I think it, but because I *know* it."

But Adam did not know it, and could not believe it. He said that his camel was just the one camel that no woman had been known to swallow—or, at any rate, to digest; and he refused to go back. So, when he was calmer—with the calmness of despair—they went to look at lodgings.

And when he was settled in his lodgings—they found them in Macquarie Street, with the beautiful gardens by the shore in front of them, for him to moon in—he sat down to answer Fidelia. He was all the time until the mail went out—several days and nights—answering her, and wrote fifteen letters altogether. The last of these,

and the one that got posted, was a poor thing compared with any of its fourteen predecessors.

"My dear Miss Plunket: It was indeed good of you to give me the pleasure of knowing that you had read my book, and liked it. I wish I could persuade myself that I deserved your kind thoughts and praise, for there is nothing in the world that I value more. I cannot express my gratitude to you for writing to me, and for sending me the beautiful photograph of yourself. It is indeed beautiful, and I can see that it is a perfect likeness. You can have no idea of the value I set upon your gracious gift, and what it will be to me in the solitary years to come.

"Your letter was posted just a week after my departure from London. I only wish I had known, so that I could have waited for it. I trust you have heard by this time where I am, and are not blaming me for delaying to acknowledge your goodness; I am of course doing so at the very earliest opportunity, and if I dared I would beg for another letter some day—when you have nothing better to do, and if it would not trouble you too much; for I shall always be anxious to know if your eyes are keeping well, and you are so kind in giving me news about my books, which I am not likely to get elsewhere. I could not hope to make my replies equally interesting, but still it might amuse you to hear something of this country and my experiences in it, from time to time.

"I find it really an amazing place. No words could give you an idea of what Sydney is (considering its years), and of the beauty of its site and surroundings. If I might take such a liberty, I should like to send you a set of photographs and a map of the harbour, which must, I think, be the most extraordinary piece of water in the

world. It has more limbs than a centipede, each lovelier than the rest; but its charm of charms is the atmosphere, which no photograph can give. Perhaps you have found something like it in your European travels, but I never have.

"I suppose you do not remember Mr. Richard Delavel, who left home some years ago, having made a marriage that his father disapproved of? He is living here, in a very beautiful house, and has one sweet little girl. I am afraid he and his family are still unreconciled. The loss is theirs, for a finer or better man never lived, I am convinced. When I was quite a small boy, he was my dear, and I might say, only friend; and I find him quite unchanged after these many years, except that he seems to me more true and good than ever, and more noble and handsome. It was to see him again that I chose Australia, when, for a reason that I cannot explain, I felt obliged to seek a home out of England; and it has indeed been a pleasure to find him as he is.

"I must have made a sad bungle of my portrait of Dorothea, if you can imagine that Roderick was too good for her. By the way, as you are kind enough to wish me to write your name in my books, and as it takes so long to send them out and back, I am having some bound here (where they do first-class work), and will post them to you, duly inscribed, by the mail following this. As a fair exchange, will you send me your copies, with my name in them in your handwriting? But I am afraid I am asking so much that I shall get nothing.

"Dear Miss Plunket, I could write many booksful in writing to you, but I must restrain myself, or there will be no chance for me of hearing from you again. Please convey my respectful regards to your aunt and sisters, who are so kindly interested in my work, (*In Spite of All*

has, I hear, gone into a third edition,) and believe me always Your humble, grateful, and faithful friend,

"ADAM DREWE.

"P. S.—I have ventured to send you a few views of Sydney and neighbourhood. Also a newspaper containing (in the shipping column) an account of my voyage, which was very pleasant."

Thus were all the passionate phrases eliminated—even the hope, expressed thirteen times in thirteen different ways, that she would reach the altogether impossible happiness of marriage with some one worthy of her—even his non-committing statement that he would pray for her night and day if he could believe (also an impossibility) that she would be by one straw's worth the better for it; and the message, as it left his hand and reached its destination, metaphorically broke Fidelia's heart.

However, she kept the fact to herself, like the lady that she was. Being recovered from an attack of illness, due, the doctor said, to weather and a neglected drain, she indited the following rejoinder:

"DEAR MR. DREWE: No one had told me that you had gone so far, and therefore it was a great surprise to me to get your letter. I had fancied that perhaps you were too busy to answer mine, and was sorry that I had troubled you with it; I am glad, at any rate, to find that I was mistaken there, and that though you had left England without bidding me good-bye, you had not altogether forgotten me.

"How good of you to send me those lovely photographs! What an exquisite place Sydney must be! I wish I could see it. I have always had an intense desire to travel out of beaten paths and see quite new countries,

so I can understand your enjoyment. But still I wonder that you should have left us at this particular time, just as you had become so well-known and were being made so much of. You speak of being 'solitary,' but surely that is from choice? No one need be less so than the author of *In Spite of All.* I am glad to tell you, if you do not already know it, that the seventh edition is just out; and I enclose you a few reviews which I have collected, and which will show you what the public think of it. I also send you my two copies that you asked for—your beautiful ones have arrived safely—thank you so much. But where is the photo of yourself? If we are to make the 'fair exchange' you suggest, you must keep your part of the bargain. Please do not forget to send it when you next write.

"I shall indeed be glad to have news of you from time to time, and will, in return, keep an eye upon your interests here, and tell you everything I can find out. As I have not been very well in London lately, my father wishes me to return home, and I go in a few days; so that I shall be rather cut off from the literary world now. But I take a good many papers, and, happily, I am now able to read them, though I have still to be careful of my eyes, which get tired easily. By the way, I trust that it is not for health that you have gone abroad? The general impression is that you are seeking original material for the next book. You do not tell me when that is likely to appear, nor the probable date of your return. You speak of 'seeking a home,' but surely you would not settle down in one so far away from the centres of intellectual life and from your friends and business? Perhaps you will tell me your plans when you write again.

"I do not remember Richard Delavel at all, but have always heard that he was a nice boy and poor Lady Susan's

favourite. It is very interesting for you to meet him again, and I am very, very pleased to know that altogether you are enjoying yourself so much. Trusting that you will not quite forget your other friends,

"I am, dear Mr. Drewe,

"Most truly yours,

"FIDELIA PLUNKET."

This letter, so long and feverishly expected, chilled the heart of the recipient, as his had chilled hers. He hunted it through and through, and a hundred times through, phrase by phrase and word by word, and found nothing under the dry husks of commonplace to nourish and comfort him.

"She does not care for me," was the conclusion he came to. "Not even for the man that she thinks I am!"

And Fidelia at the same time was spending nights in tears and days in dolour, because of her conviction that he did not care for her. The kind of stupid thing that lovers do, when they ought to know better!

Adam tried to write to her again, but somehow could not manage it. Weeks and months went by, while he composed paragraphs describing the wonders of Australia, and explaining in various ways why he had not had his likeness taken; and always the manuscript went into the fire or the waste paper basket, and not into the post. It was hot November, and he was spoiling paper still, in the vain attempt to produce a letter that would neither tell the truth nor convey wrong impressions, when he sustained the unexpected shock of another one from her. And such another!

"MY DEAR FRIEND: Though I have not heard from you for a long time, I am still in hopes that I am kindly

remembered, and I do not like any great event in my life to take place without at once acquainting you with it.

"I am engaged to my cousin, Harry Bowen, of Lyntham, whom you may remember as a former schoolfellow of yours, and I believe we are to be married at about Christmas. I know that I may confidently count upon your good wishes.

"I suppose you are wholly occupied in the preparation of your next book. When is it coming out? Many people are asking about it, and we are all impatient to see it.

"Excuse a very short note. I have a great many to write just now. Yours very sincerely,

"FIDELIA PLUNKET."

This closed the correspondence; or, rather, the brief word of congratulation with which Adam replied to her, closed it.

On the arrival of the English mail thereafter, he went to a public reading-room to look at the marriage column in the *Times*. When he saw the little paragraph which told him that she was indeed no more, he took her photograph out of his breast and set it on his table in a frame of solid silver, for which he gave five pounds. He would have given ten or twenty and framed her in gold, but for the danger of having her—all that was left of her—stolen from him.

"So that is over!" he said to himself—meaning that, to all intents and purposes, he had lived his life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

But he had not lived his life. Far from it.

Manhood is manhood in the ugly as in the beautiful. What is more, it is far stronger, keener, more insistent, in the ugly who are intellectually gifted than in the beautiful who have common minds, other things being equal. In spite of which—the laws of literary romance being so much at variance with the laws of Nature—Adam will be held to have disgraced himself as a hero, when it is stated that he continued to hunger for feminine sympathy as well as for his daily dinner.

Like Richard Delavel, he was faithful to his true love, through the many years of his separation from her, but not so wholly faithful; and that was because the circumstances of the two cases were altogether different—it is not necessary to describe how. Let the reader try to imagine him as a man of the world we live in, and not of the world of sentimental fiction, and he will at once understand that what he did was not merely inevitable, but no discredit to him whatever.

In the first place he moped for a long while—wrote morbid verses and a very fine novel with a "problem" in it, horribly tragical; and as for women—except "her," and the creatures of his imagination, and a housemaid at his lodgings, who merely endeavoured to earn the extravagant tips he bestowed upon her—they were to him as

though they were not. In other words, he was ill. Many are the obscure complaints which derange the human organism without calling for the doctor.

When he began to recover, he began to take an interest in the housemaid, a good honest girl, who waited on him as a servant loves to wait on one who considers her little feelings, and as no one, male or female, had ever waited on him before. She was clean and wholesome, she could read and write, she was not bad looking, nor unintelligent, and she was kindness itself. The more he tried not to give her trouble, the more she took—thoughtfully, unobtrusively, avoiding thanks and half-sovereigns when she possibly could; that is to say, they treated each other as interdependent human creatures, rather than as employer and employed, because that was Adam's way, due to his peculiar temperament and experiences. And the natural consequences ensued. The habit of domestic comfort grew upon him—so well fitted to appreciate it—and with his grateful regard for her to whom he owed it. Her name was Tryphena, and they called her Triffy—Triffy Miggs. He said to her one day, when she had resolutely kept out three unimportant callers who wanted to disturb him when he was in a mood to write, "I don't know what I should do without you, Triffy."

She answered, in her cheery way, "Well, you won't have to try—not yet awhile, at any rate."

"Never, I hope," said he, with thoughtless impetuosity. For he had just done a beautiful chapter, that would have been spoiled but for her care.

"Oh, as to that," she laughed, "never is a long day. I don't look to be a servant always, any more than other girls."

He was struck with this remark, pregnant with so many suggestions. He turned it over in his mind as he

sat alone, and when she came about him again, regarded her as from several new standpoints.

"Why not?" he asked himself, in the spirit of the hero of *Locksley Hall*, desolate and desperate. "What's the use of crying for the moon? Who am I, that I should ask a lady to marry me? At least, I am good enough for Triffy. I couldn't love her, of course—nor anybody—but I could make her a good husband, and she would make me a peaceable and capable wife. Because I am not allowed to enter Paradise, am I therefore not to have a home? Because I cannot get the moon, am I to be deprived of bread and butter? Because I have lost my true mate, am I to die childless? Triffy's children would be sound and strong, and her house warm and cheerful, and her dinners excellent. Well, is that nothing?"

The young blood in him determined the reply, and life began to be interesting again when he began to court Triffy. It was a sober courtship, not to be confounded with love-making, but, once it was started, the domestic conditions kept it from becoming stale. I should be afraid to say how the matter grew upon him, from day to day, and from hour to hour, owing to constant propinquity and their peculiar social relationship; it is certain that he did no literary work for a long time except that which had for its object the improvement of Miss Miggs's mind. He made her neglect her duties to read books of his selection, and to listen to his disquisitions thereupon. But such was his modesty and his delicacy, as a suitor and a man, that he never made her understand what he was driving at.

And then she came to him one day to bid him good-by, because she was going to marry the grocer's man—to whom she had been engaged, she explained, "for ages." Genuine tears were in her eyes when she spoke of leaving

her good place and the service of one who had been so kind to her; but when she mentioned her prospective husband, smiles clothed her as with a garment. It was quite evident that she was satisfied with him.

"What's he like?" inquired Adam, in a rage of jealousy.

"Well, it's not for me to say," Triffy modestly replied. "But they *call* him 'Handsome George.'"

"Oh," said Adam, "I know that sort of man."

"Begging your pardon, sir, I don't think you do," said Miss Miggs, firmly; "judging by the way you speak."

"Handsome is as handsome does. I am only hoping, my dear girl, that you have borne that in mind."

"Indeed, indeed, I have good reason to know how true it is!" she ejaculated, with an affectionate look at him—intending a grateful compliment. "But my George, Mr. Drewe, is as good as he is handsome."

"Then nothing remains but to give you my blessing, Triffy. May you be happy, dear—may you—there, go and get my tea ready."

"You won't want for anything when I'm gone," she assured him, soothingly. "A cousin of mine is coming here in my place, and she's the best servant you ever saw—far better than what I am. I wouldn't go—I told George I wouldn't—till I'd seen you made comfortable."

So she married the grocer's man, and Adam presented her with a big cheque on her wedding day. And that episode was closed.

Shortly afterwards, he left his lodgings in Macquarie Street, to escape from the offensive familiarities of Triffy's cousin, who—as Triffy's cousin—could not be kept in her proper place.

Then the novel with the problem in it—a sex problem,

of course—came out, and made a great sensation, as works of that sort do. Usually they may be described as problems with novels in them, kites that any paper tail will fly; but this book was literary as well as startling, distinguished by those qualities of thought and workmanship without which no book is a real book, however fascinating its theme.

While the general public smacked its lips over the shocking marriage theory propounded, the fine palate of the cultivated reader was charmed with the skilful manner in which the dish was cooked—those delicate flavours of good style so rarely associated with the conventionally indelicate subject, evidences at once of a practised hand, a sound mind, a pure heart, and the genius of a born artist. It was not the novel of the day, but it was one of the good books of the season, admitted to that intellectual good society from which the novel of the day is sometimes a hopeless outcast, with any number of letters of introduction to recommend it.

As a community, Australia takes the advice of England as to what it should read and admire and what it should leave alone; but there are individuals amongst us —and small choice groups of them—who can guide themselves aright without assistance. Their noses are as keen for the scent of good things as the nose of the professional London critic—so curiously at fault, sometimes, in his headlong hurry; and they keep themselves almost as closely in touch with the affairs that concern them. Such a group, representing a small, informal club of pressmen and artists, and their various confederates, including men like Richard Delavel, as well as seedy Bohemians, possessed of nothing but their brains, made an oasis in the literary desert upon which our author was cast. Its humble rooms in a back street—the bushel from under

which more than one light has since been taken and set upon a hill, to give light unto the world—were his haunts and home after Triffy had forsaken him, attaching him to Sydney for several years; and his warrant of admission to full membership of the society was *The Law Made Flesh*, to which a royal welcome was given, and to him for its sake, while yet the right of the book to be successful was undetermined by the high authorities.

The Society proper was composed of men, who, in the dingy hole that was their headquarters, and in their own unfashionable way, were extremely select and unapproachable; but most of them were family men, and at times they gave parties to which ladies were invited. They covered their walls with their unsaleable paintings and newspaper drawings, and their tables with scientific instruments and curiosities, and set up a black-board to make lightning sketches on, and hired a piano, and ordered largely of the confectioner—no wife being allowed to interfere with any part of the arrangements; and then the company came, and was so tightly packed that one could scarcely turn round, especially the stylish person with a long train to her gown; and all dripped with perspiration, and were very jolly notwithstanding. The artists played and sang and recited, and made wonderful pictures on the black-board with a few strokes of the chalk, in one room; while the scientists conducted experiments and explained phenomena in another; and the press writers, joying in the sense of Saturday night, showed photographs and talked nonsense to the fair guests crowded out from the special entertainments. And by and by plates of sandwiches and cakes, and trays of coffee cups and wine glasses, circulated at arms'-length overhead, and were with difficulty distributed, often in the wrong place; and then the ladies reluctantly departed, leaving the men to recruit

after their labours—to riot until daylight in excited talk, over pipe and whisky bottle.

In the republic of intellect one does not need to be handsome, any more than to be rich, to command attention, and Adam found himself quite a lion at these parties, when he began to go to them. Not men only, but clever women also, were interested in him for the sake of his achievements, and took pains to show it in the most acceptable way. It certainly was the case that the particular clever woman to whom he felt most grateful was rather plain herself, and by no means so young as he was: but that was of no consequence. It was her cleverness that drew him, as his drew her—the cultivated mind and quick intelligence, which so thoroughly separated her from Triffy and her class.

They sat together at an artists' conversazione, side by side. Chance had determined the position early in the evening, and it became almost a physical impossibility to alter it. The chairs and rows of chairs were so close together and completely filled that the two were built in, so that Adam was not even able to offer his seat to a standing lady without giving and taking more trouble than it was worth. And the desire to move was not in him nor in his companion, who did not get the whole ear of a lion every day. She wore her hair short and curled, and a pince-nez, and a high-necked dress. And she talked to him about his beautiful book until one could almost see him purring.

The way she talked about it rather shocked him at first. But then—as she put it to him—where was the difference between writing things and speaking things? She supposed he considered his novel fit for women to read? Then why not for women to discuss? And was it not better to be frank and honest about those things which so seriously concerned them, than to make silly conventional

pretences, that were *really* immoral? He conceded that it did seem better—in fact, he was sure of it—when he had got over the uncomfortable strangeness of the thing; but when he thought of Fidelia talking modern marriage problems with a young man—good heavens! It made him feel hot all over. However, Fidelia was Fidelia, and Mrs. Staines was quite another sort of woman, living in quite another world.

And he liked that world, and he liked the modern relationship between him and her,—the frank, equal comradeship, as between man and man, which she always declared was the one designed by Nature and ruined by the practices of a wicked world. He soon grew accustomed to speaking his thoughts to her freely, upon problems of all sorts, and she taught him many things that were very useful to him.

For years she was his confidential friend—only that, according to his view. Richard Delavel was not very accessible, and had become a moody and silent man, moreover, sombrely preoccupied and reserved; besides, a man can never be to a man what a woman is—and *vice versa* —no matter how they stand to one another. Adam thought it was purely intellectual sympathy, and not sex —they both averred that it was not sex—which made Mrs. Staines such a constant comfort to him: but in the harvest time of experience one gathers the knowledge that either the second nature of habit has destroyed our angel innocence or that primal nature is on the side of the Philistine who disbelieves in platonic attachments. We know, as soon as we are old enough to know, that brothers and sisters are born and not made. When Adam attained to his ripe thirties, he discovered his self-deception under painful circumstances.

Mr. Staines, who was a painter, sought a divorce from

his wife—why or wherefore Adam could not conceive, because the men he consorted with were always careful never to mention her to him. She flew to him in her distress, with cruel tales of her domestic martyrdom; and his raging pity and indignation were such that he could not express them save by taking her in his arms and kissing her. Alas, yes! But she put her head upon his shoulder first.

"Poor girl! Poor darling!" was what he said to her in the excitement of the moment and the intoxication of the sweet compliment she had paid him. "I am glad you came to me. *I* will stand by you! *I* will see you through it! *I'll* defend you against the slanders of that beast—to the last penny that I possess—to the last drop of my blood!"

And off he went, like a knight with his sword buckled on, regardless of her timid suggestion that it might be better if he did not appear in the matter. He secured the best lawyers that were to be had, and marched into court himself along with them, determined to do or die as became a true champion of helpless and innocent womanhood. By that time he had discovered, as he thought, that he had been her unconscious lover all along, and she his, and had made up his mind to abide the consequences—a painful but delicious prospect; but he was quite convinced that, apart from him, she was as innocent of wrong-doing as she declared herself to be.

However, there was a co-respondent—black-haired, shifty-eyed, a stranger to the artists' club—and there was evidence, convincingly corroborated, that made the hair of the author of *The Law Made Flesh* to stand on end with horror. That the lady was in a position to plead her conduct as merely a literal translation of that great work—that, with the desperate courage of a woman at bay, she

affected to glory in it, taking her stand upon high principle—did not tend to soothe him. And when, as the trial proceeded, he found himself mixed up with it—a red herring drawn across the trail—held up to the public view as a Don Juan of the co-respondent's type, and absurd at that with his lack of the first essential to the character—well! his state of mind was such that words are inadequate to describe it. When the affair was over Mrs. Staines found herself much where she was before, because Mr. Staines, being tarred with the same brush, was put out of court as an injured husband entitled to relief; but Adam found himself a changed man, utterly sickened with life and with his own shame and folly, with his books, with Sydney, with everybody and everything.

"I must get out of this," he said to Richard Delavel, sitting in the new tent of the old camp, his head bowed over his knees and his face in his hands. Richard was the only person to whom he could reveal his heart; and even that best friend, with his cool and easy cynicism, was a disappointment now.

"Why should you?" was his unfeeling response. "What does it matter? We are all mortal—we are bound to fall into women's traps, one way or another—nobody that knows you will think the worse of you, and it'll all be dead and forgotten by the day after to-morrow. I wouldn't care a twopenny damn, if I were you."

"You wouldn't *care?*" Adam almost shouted, staring through his tear-blurred goggles at the callous man. "Not care to be dragged through mire like this—to have made yourself a common divorce court beast—after you had known what it was to love a—oh, Lord! How little you understand!"

"I don't think I misunderstand," said Richard. "But I'm older; you'll be older some day."

"If I'm not old enough now—to know better than this—I never shall be."

"We never are—we are young all the time, up to the last moment. I'm a fool too—and worse—only not quite such a fool as I have been. Cheer up, Adam! It's all in the day's work. Go away for a spell if you want to, till you get your nerves steady, but don't root things up like a wild boar of the woods, in a savage fit like this. Come back in a couple of months, and you'll be surprised to find how little damage has been done."

"I could never," groaned Adam, "come back to this cursed place."

"Then go and live in England. Go and wear your laurels in London, where you ought to have been all along."

"Live in England! Breathe the same air with *her*—my white lily! my—oh, when I think of her! But I am not worthy even to think of her."

"Nonsense. Go on thinking of her, night and day; it'll be a disinfectant. Go on worshipping her, if she is only a shade—however, you're not in a condition to be argued with. Go for a sea voyage—that's best. And when you're tuned up again, if you still don't like the notion of returning here, go and take charge of the Melbourne office. We want somebody there—and you don't want to chuck the business, I suppose—and it's as good a place as another to make a new start in."

"That's what I will do," said Adam, when he had cooled down and become practical again.

And that was what he did.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN Adam settled in Melbourne, a year or two after he had shaken the dust of Sydney from his feet he was a rich man—rich and intensely respectable. No more Bohemian Clubs; no more revolutionary novels; no more platonic friendships; an austere reserve and exclusiveness now marked his mien and manner of life; his hair had a thread of grey in it, and he was sober as a judge. The little misfortune that was so much greater to him than it would have been to another had blown over by this time, and he might have had all the social attentions so readily bestowed upon the wealthy and the notorious, no matter what else they be; but he had lost his taste for sweets of that kind, and also took the view, proper to a proud man, that he was disqualified for good society by the public obloquy that he had undergone.

Business, strict business, was the order of the day. He took a small suite of rooms in a hotel—the "Esplanade," at St. Kilda—went every morning by train to the office, lunched in the city, and, returning in the afternoon, dined alone, with a book beside his plate, and spent the evening at his fireside, or in a bow window overlooking the sea, at steady work upon the novel that was his world for the time, and eventually his greatest achievement. Society will not run after people who do not run after it; and an author who does not advertise himself is in no

danger of being pestered by his admirers, particularly in a country where "letters" are scarcely acclimatised.

To his sincere satisfaction, our author discovered this —which, under other circumstances, might have pained him. His name, he knew, was a household word in many lands; here, where he lived, he was as the hero to his valet, and could drop out of notice almost as easily as a common person. Certainly he remained a hero in the office, by virtue of his position as a "boss" of the great firm, and he was an important person to the secretaries of many benevolent institutions; otherwise his money and his distinctions were, like gala clothes, laid away in a locked drawer. Not being seen, they were forgotten; and he was a nobody without them. Just now he desired the privileges of independence which pertain to that humble state; and he enjoyed them for a long time.

Yet still—still he had good red blood in his veins. And still the earth was fair—and particularly the sea, his passion for which had not grown cold in Sydney. And still the sweet face of a woman had its rightful power to please him.

When the weather was warm, and the Esplanade Hotel was crowded and fashionable, he took to the water in a yacht of his own, and lived upon it more and more. He had naturally been a yachtsman in Sydney—every lover of a good craft, who can afford it, is, in that paradise of waters; and all the charm came back to him as soon as he set foot upon a floating plank again.

What he missed in beauty was made up in space, and the joy of a bay whereon one could sail for twenty miles on one tack, compensated for the lovely shores that had heretofore hemmed him in so closely. The pursuit grew upon him, as it always must upon one born with the sea in his ears, and in his blood; and he presently exchanged

his pleasure boat for a racing cutter, joined a club again, and looked forward to Saturday afternoons with the zest of a schoolboy. Sometimes he raced, sometimes he idly cruised about by himself, and picked up friends amongst other water lovers, who, caring nothing about his money or his books, and very little about his personal appearance, took his boat and his seamanship as guaranteeing him a good fellow.

He also attached to himself as crew an excellent old man, remarkable for the scar of a burn that had deprived him of an eye, and crumpled his face out of shape, called Obadiah Spiers, and a smart lad, with a squint, who went by the title of Obadiah's wife's nephew, his own name—Sennacherib—being even more inconvenient to pronounce. To them were added, on important occasions, a young fellow, called Jim—simply Jim—who had lost an arm from an accident in a ship's hold. Good seamen all, in spite of their little peculiarities, and devoted to their master.

One summer afternoon, when he was cruising off Williamstown with the old man and the boy, he had a little adventure.

The yacht was shearing through the water in a delicate wind, and he was lying along the deck, with his head on a pillow and his hat over his eyes, when Obadiah and his wife's nephew simultaneously called to him, rousing him from a delicate reverie. When he sat up to see what was the matter they pointed to two objects—a boat coming round the breakwater pier, violently propelled by a woman, and, at a good distance from it, a little skiff, drifting bottom upwards, with two small heads bobbing round it. In a moment the yacht was heading for the wreck, and in five minutes Adam had fished up the castaways with a boat-hook, and deposited them, unharmed,

upon his own spotless deck, which they messed horribly.

"It's them young Frenches," growled Obadiah, with the air of one who knew them well. "Young limbs they be, to be sure!"

They looked the character. Staggering in their exhaustion and the weight of their steaming clothes, throats and eyes full of salt water, they grinned at their preserver and at each other as at some joke too funny for words. The youngest was still in knickerbockers, the eldest could not have been more than fourteen; they had impudent, bright-eyed faces, deeply tanned, and were evidently experienced as well as notorious persons. Their first spluttered words were a request that the skiff might be righted and made fast, and the floating oars rescued.

"That duffer," said one, indicating the other, "leaned over the gun'le and upset himself, and then he upset the boat trying to get in again."

"Because that idiot let his oar go," was the prompt defence of the accused. "I tried to get it for him, and reached too far. It was his own stupid fault."

"You have no business with a boat—brats like you," said Adam, paternally severe. "If we hadn't been here to pick you up, you'd soon have been drowned, with those heavy hob-nailed boots on."

They scoffed at the absurd suggestion. Drowned, indeed! No, fear! Not they! They could have got ashore, easily enough, only they didn't like to go back without the boat, which did not belong to them.

"And who is it that gives you boats to fool with in this way?" inquired Adam.

"Nobody," they confessed. They took boats as they wanted them. This one did not seem to be in use, and so they thought they might as well borrow it for an hour

or two. They were sure the owner would not mind. "He knows us," they remarked complacently.

"And your poor mother——"

Adam turned to look for the boat with the woman in it, and saw it drawing near, but slowly and heavily, as if the rower's arms were tired. She had ceased to look over her shoulder to see where she was going, and he prepared to stand by with the boat-hook to assist her to the little gangway he had thrown out.

"Oh, *that* isn't our mother!" cried the urchins in a breath. "That's only old Sal."

Being questioned, they explained that "old Sal" was their sister, who made it her business to harry them at every turn, and to spoil all their innocent pleasures as far as she could.

That afternoon they thought they had given her the slip, but, lo and behold! they were not fairly off before they saw her coming after them. It was in trying to row away from her, and generally to lead her a dance, that their little accident had occurred.

"Take off those boots," said Adam; "empty them over the side, and set them in the sun. Pull off your jackets, and then go below, and my boy shall find you something to put on while your clothes are drying."

Obadiah's wife's nephew came forward, having secured the derelict on a tow-rope, and the three were bundled into the cockpit rather hurriedly—in order that the pursued may be placed in a position necessitating their detention on the yacht for an hour or two, before the pursuer could arrive to prevent it. For this was an opportunity to be hospitable and pleasing which did not present itself to Adam every day.

Obadiah attended to the yacht, while the skipper—very smart in white flannel, and with his hat brim all but

touching his nose—manœuvred to get the second boat alongside. As soon as it was near enough for the lady to look at him, he bowed his best bow; and the friendly response of her anxious eyes delighted him.

She had a strong and good rather than a pretty face, and none of the little affectations common to young ladies when they speak to a strange man. Her attire was homely—a cotton gown, a sunburnt hat, and no gloves—and her figure large and substantial; she had no air of fashion, of "blood," or of money, and she looked about eight and twenty. Such as she was—wholly unlike Fidelia, of course, but still more utterly different from Triffy Miggs on the one hand and Mrs. Staines on the other—Adam took to her at once. He seemed to know by instinct that she was a nice woman.

"They are all right," he called, as he drew her boat to the steps. "Just a ducking—that's all." And if he had been taken with her honest face, she was won by his voice, every note of which was pure music, ringing true as minted gold—as a cathedral bell.

"Mr. Drewe, I think?" she hastily interrogated; and he bowed again, pleased to find himself better known than he had supposed. "Oh, Mr. Drewe, I cannot thank you! No one else seemed to see them, and I was in such terror of the sharks! The boys themselves were fishing for a big one yesterday, with the piece of meat that should have made their own dinner—close to that very place! Of course, they never thought about it—they never think of anything. They are *dreadful* boys!"

But she laughed in an indulgent, sisterly way, even while she abused them.

"Boys will be boys," remarked Adam, bending down to pull her to the gangway.

"Oh, don't trouble—I can hold on here until you

fetch them. Please tell them to be quick. I must get them home and out of their wet things."

Then Adam explained that, having dry togs on board for these emergencies, he had already sent the boys to change. It was always more or less dangerous to remain long in wet clothes, and it seemed inexpedient to alarm their friends on shore by returning them thither in an apparently drowned condition. In short, he persuaded her to take charge of them where they were, until all damage was repaired, and she had no choice but to do so. Never had he been less troubled with shyness in an encounter with a strange young woman, and in half an hour from the time she stepped on board, most reluctant to "intrude," as she called it, but otherwise willing to be there protected and entertained, they were all at home with one another, like a comfortable family party.

Nothing could exceed the delight of the boys in the issue of their adventure. Their appearance in Adam's clothes, the novelty of the yacht, the goodness of the provisions on board, the comradeship of Obadiah's wife's nephew, the prospect of a sail while their garments were drying—everything was full of amusement for them; and their sociability and their liveliness kept even Obadiah on the broad grin. No one could possibly be dull where they were, and a cheerful atmosphere is to budding friendship what warm sunshine is to a budding flower.

Miss French, when she had given her brothers a piece of her mind, and been "cheeked" for her pains—which she did not resent, but Adam did, and summarily put a stop to—sat on deck with her host for the whole of a summer afternoon, apparently without once asking herself what the time was. Chaperoned by her young com-

panions, spurred by their ceaseless questionings and confidences, she told him her simple history—how her father, who had been in the Customs, was dead, her mother in somewhat narrow circumstances, herself engaged as a daily governess in Melbourne, near the school which the boys attended (in order, as she implied, to look after them as they went and came, and to assist with the expenses of their education); and how those boys were dear good boys and affectionate brothers, appearances notwithstanding.

And Adam described his domestic solitude in the crowded hotel, and how the racket of the children in the corridors disturbed him at his work, and how he loved the sea, and so on.

There was no need to speak of either of his professions, for she had read his books, and was acquainted with a clerk in his Melbourne office.

And all the time she looked at him with kind frank eyes, that never once reminded him of his life-long misfortune.

Before another Saturday the yacht was furnished with a Goy's Amateur's Canteen, and a jar of spirits of wine, but to-day—to his extreme mortification—there was no appliance for making tea. However, he did his hospitable best for her with cooled wine and soda water, and crisp biscuits from a newly-opened tin, and she was more than satisfied; while the boys "wolfed" preserved meats and gingerbread in the most gratifying manner.

And during their repast and for some time after it was finished, the *Kittiwake*, under Obadiah's direction, gently wafted them to and fro—to the St. Kilda shores, to the *Cape Verde* wreck, round the lightship, and back again.

It was six o'clock before the boys' clothes were found to be dry enough to put on, and it was nearer seven than

six before the party separated; the breeze was then dying with the dying day, unheeded by the skipper, who was so far from home. He rowed his guests ashore in one of their own little skiffs, towing the other, and adjusted matters with a waterman who was inclined to be irate—the man who, as the boys said, "knew them."

He did know them, evidently, but not in a way to boast about; like Obadiah, he called them "limbs," and threatened to trounce them handsomely if he caught them meddling with his boats again.

"You'll excuse me, miss," he added, with an amiable nod to Sarah.

"Oh, yes," laughed she. "Please, do—if you *can* catch them."

And then Adam assumed the airs of a father on her behalf.

"Look here, boys—if you will promise not to go out by yourselves without leave again, I will take you for cruises with me—if your sister will trust me—any Saturday afternoon that you like to signal for me from the pier, or come over to St. Kilda, where my moorings are——"

"Oh, no, no!" Miss French broke in, while her brothers shouted to her to hold her tongue, and mind her own business. "You must not be troubled with them—indeed, we cannot allow it, Mr. Drewe. It is *awfully* kind of you, but if you knew what you were undertaking——!"

"Shut up!" howled Bunny and Billy, in their polite fraternal fashion. "We wouldn't be any trouble at all, Mr. Drewe. We'd help you to work the yacht—we'd be no end of use. *She* doesn't know anything about it, though she thinks she's so clever—always poking her nose where she isn't wanted."

"Oh," said Adam, and paused gravely; "if you don't know any better than to speak to ladies in that way——"

He made a gesture signifying that, this being so, he washed his hands of them.

Whereupon they hastened to assure him that they were never rude to Sal unless she forced the necessity upon them, and that, in any case, a sister was not a lady; and they begged that they might sail with him on the following Saturday, promising to get over to St. Kilda somehow, to save him the inconvenience of coming to fetch them.

"Try us," they implored, with passionate earnestness, "and then, if you find us troublesome, don't take us any more."

To this arrangement Miss French gratefully but reluctantly consented, when Adam had pleaded his own loneliness on board, and desire for their entertaining company; and when they had pointed out to him the group of trees which indicated their abode, they all shook hands cordially, like old friends, and said "Good-bye," in a way that meant "Until we meet again."

As Adam drew away from the pier, he watched the brothers and sister walking up and off it. The tall girl was in the middle, and the uncivil boys on either side of her, affectionately hanging upon her arms.

When crossing the piece of open ground that kept a view of the bay for the shops in Nelson Place, they turned to watch him board his yacht, and Bunny waved his cap on high, and Billy his grey-hued pocket handkerchief.

The signal was eagerly acknowledged.

"We've lost the wind," growled Obadiah, "after them young imps."

"Oh, I think there's enough to take us across," said

Adam, happily; "we are in no hurry—at least, I am not."

There was enough to take them a little way—just far enough to show them Williamstown transfigured into a carmine sunset, between the golden water and the heavenly sky—beautiful as any Venice of one's dreams in that beautiful hour, in its fairy veil of pinky-blue mist—a picture that Adam felt he had never appreciated before.

"What a peaceful place!" he thought. "How quiet, and homely, and unpretentious! Not overrun with summer lodgers, like St. Kilda. I should think one of those old houses on the Strand, buried in those old gardens, would be awfully nice and private, and good to write in; and just as handy for the office, too."

"Well," sighed Obadiah, to whom the old port and town were no more than the traditional primrose, "we shall have to take to the oar, sir, unless we can get a tow from sombody."

"Not yet," said Adam, softly; "have a pipe, old man. I don't care if we are out all night. There's plenty of grub on board."

He was hot from rowing, and his flannels felt sticky, and the water irresistibly invited him. How still it was in that last gleam of the summer day!—like a shining inland lake. But not really still, any more than he was. When, seeing no sign of sharks about, he dropped into it and sank to the cool floor, he heard all the little pebbles rolling and rubbing against each other, polishing themselves ceaselessly in the deep breathing that stirred them even there. The sea was only sleeping lightly, like his own spell-bound spirit.

He swam upward through the paling glimmer, passive as a rolled pebble, filled his lungs with the sweet air, sank again, and again rose, effortless, to lie and sway upon the

surface as in a hammock of dove-blue satin. How happy he felt! How young! How strong! Merely because he was warm and without his clothes? Or because Nature had again taken him to her mother's breast? He was too idly contented to ask why, or to care. Sufficient for the delightful hour that he was as he was.

CHAPTER XX.

THE following day was Sunday, which Adam liked to spend at sea, "out of the dust," as he expressed it, when weather permitted. This particular Sunday being particularly fine, he was away in the *Kittiwake* before the church-goers were out of bed; but he had her at moorings again by noon, and after lunch set forth in full Sunday costume to call on his new friends at Williamstown. It seemed to him the civil thing to inquire if the boys were all right after their wetting.

Train to the Bridge, tram from Flinders Street to Port Melbourne, and the "Gem" from pier to pier across the bay—this was the way of his journey, two stages of which were to become as much a part of his daily life as his office work and meals. As he neared the old town, which had the charm of not being a watering-place, though the water almost surrounded it, he considered it thoughtfully as a place of retirement for a literary man; and though it made no pretence to be pretty at three o'clock in the afternoon, its daylight face had a homely, work-a-day air that pleased him, as something sincere and appropriate to the artist's calling. The flavour of the true sea hung round it, which one could rarely get at the "seaside," and made even old tumble-down sheds and rotten hulks poetical. As he sauntered along the quiet Strand, between the salt water and the sweet gardens, sniffing the scent of the seaweed

and the roses, the merit of his bright idea grew more and more conspicuous. And his mind was made up when he came to Mrs. French's house.

A plain, single-storied, long, low cottage, on a raised verandah, all built of hard wood that was grey with age—a substance and colour that go with trees and flowers like nothing that a paint-brush can produce—and all as unlike a St. Kilda lodging-house as it could possibly be—Adam stood at its old gate to look at it, snuggled in its green old garden, and thought that if ever a place was made on purpose for an author to write his books in, that place was here. From the high verandah one could see the ships all day going into the river and coming out, all the life of the port on both sides of the water, all the lights at night; but no traffic of men and trades on shore. The lanes of Dunstanborough were not so out of the busy world as the asphalt-bordered roadway leading to and past it.

"If I could only buy it!" was his first thought—the natural first thought of a rich man concerning the thing he covets.

But he was to do better with it than buy it.

Mounting the grey steps, between two lovely rose-bushes, he looked across the wide verandah—lined with tubs and pots of plants in the perfection of condition—to the cool hall of the house; and there he saw nothing to disappoint his expectations. The pattern was almost gone from the linoleum on the floor, and there was no colour in the wall paper, and the furniture was as plain as possible; but the shining cleanliness of every part, the suggestion of pure soap and water, of habitual orderliness (in spite of Bunny and Billy), affected him like positive beauty of the most refined description. This was a matter of race instinct, doubtless. The every-day artist, being the graft of a more or less lawless stock, has another eye for such

effects. At the back of the hall a French window opened into a small fernery, neatly walled and roofed with green lattice work and matting, some of it moveable in the form of light shutters, the whole an evidently home-made contrivance. In the broken lights sifted over them he could see that all the fern-fronds, big and little, were as dewy fresh and green as constant care could make them.

A fat woman with a homely face—Sarah's face as it would be some day—answered his knock upon the open door, and it gave him a pang to see how immediately she identified him, how easy it had been for her children to describe him to her. But he was comforted by the unhesitating manner in which she almost threw herself into his arms. Had he been the Fairy Prince himself, she could not have looked at him more adoringly through her maternal tears.

"They have no father," she said, "and we can't always be after them—we do our best; but two fine, high-spirited boys—not a bit of vice in them, you understand—but boys that want a father's hand—and that big shark not caught yet—oh, to think!—to think!—and now I have them safe and sound—and but for you—but for you——"

Adam protested that he had done nothing at all; but she would not hear him; and the velvet richness of his voice, and the way he laid his left hand over their two clasped right ones, only made her feel more and more inexpressibly; for she was a soft-hearted, susceptible creature. She led him into her charming old-fashioned sitting-room, so simple, so comfortable, so threadbare, so exquisitely "nice," and put him into a worn armchair, and talked to him at length about her dear boys, as if she had known him for years and been in the habit of confiding in him. He had the sweet conviction that it was to Sarah's report of him he owed this, and felt filially drawn

to Sarah's mother. She reminded him a little of poor gran'ma, with her side-curls and her black silk apron —things that old ladies in general had long ceased to wear.

"And do you think," said Mrs. French, anxiously, "that their school is a good school? Sometimes, I fancy their want of—their wilf—their flighty little ways must be due to faulty discipline in the school; for better boys than they are at heart you could not wish to see."

Adam said he did not know the school—which she named—but that he would certainly make inquiries about it. It was a subject, he explained, about which he felt very deeply—the education of boys. For his part, he had great faith in a public school—the larger the better—for the high-spirited ones, and thought it best for those without a father to be boarders, if possible.

"Ah, but it isn't possible," sighed Mrs. French. "It is all I can do to make ends meet as it is, with my dear girl to help me." And here she went into details concerning her income and investments, some of which had turned out badly. "We can manage at present by being careful, but when it comes to putting the boys out into the world—there's where it is, you see. That's what makes us so anxious. Often and often have we talked over ways and means for making a little fund, against that time comes; but I really don't see what more we can do. My daughter sometimes thinks of opening a school, but then she might not make so much as she does now, the place being so out of the way; and I—I am too old—unless I took in a boarder. Of course I could do that. But the boys do so hate the idea of strangers in the house —we all do—and not having our home to ourselves. And it wouldn't do, either. A lady boarder is quite out of the question, and there are objections to a man—when you

have a young daughter—and no father—and growing boys——"

Here Adam broke into her innocent prattle, which he knew was not addressed to him as a rich man, though it might have appeared so to a less discriminating person in his place. "I wonder," he said, with impulsive earnestness, "whether there would be any great objection, any insuperable objection, to *me?* I am not a young man, Mrs. French, and I am looking for some quiet house—just like this—where I can write my books in peace—a place not too far from my town office, and yet out of the way of people who would interrupt—a couple of rooms that I could call my own—which I could furnish with my own things—and board with the family, or not, just as they liked—you understand? Five pounds a week, even ten, would be a cheap price to pay for what I want, the comfort, the tranquillity, the homely life, of a house like this—with friends—for I feel as if you were friends—and out of the bustle of Melbourne, which is a constant distraction—if you don't think it a great impertinence for me to propose such a thing?"

Mrs. French did not think so—no, indeed! she said, in a voice broken with emotion, that it really seemed as if he had dropped from Heaven to be their good angel in the time of trouble. Calling him an angel did not prevent his feeling rather painfully that she never for a moment placed him in the category of gentlemen boarders dangerous to have in the house with a fatherless young daughter. He was not like a stranger, she remarked; his beautiful books had made him known and loved wherever they were read—and there they were, on the bookcase beside her.

She felt it a great honour that he should think her house good enough for him to live in—humble folks as

they were—and was sure it would be the greatest happiness to her daughter and herself to do their utmost to make him comfortable. She thought she would have to consult her daughter before giving him a definite answer, though she was quite sure Sarah——

And here he heard Sarah's voice at the gate, calling to Bunny, the eldest of the boys—telling him to be home at half-past five—and was horror-stricken. For he saw what a mistake he had made in embarking upon these negotiations with her mother instead of with her. An old woman might regard him as a mere producer of income; but a girl, he still hoped—Sarah, if no other girl—would consider him to be a man also, not essentially different from other men. He felt with shame that he had not behaved like a gentleman in proposing to thrust himself as a house-mate upon Miss French before he knew whether it would be agreeable to her. All the more, when seeing him, her sincere face became one broad smile of welcome.

"Oh, Mr. Drewe, how kind of you!" she exclaimed. "How kind of you to give my mother this pleasure! I believe she had no sleep all night, thinking of what you had done for the boys, and worrying for a chance to thank you."

"I did not come to be thanked," stammered he, as he took her kind hand, blushing all over.

"We don't need to be told that. You came——oh, yes, I know——to inquire if the boys were all right——"

"Yes."

"They are, thank you. They always are. It is one of the most striking of their many striking points, that whatever the trouble they get into, they get out of it unscathed. They carry charmed lives. Boys do, somehow. Otherwise we should have no men—and there

would be a solution to all the problems of life that vex us so!"

"Do they vex you?" Adam inquired, standing beside her while she took off her hat and gloves. She had a fatigued and worried air; noting which, he had an impulse of strong resentment against the fate which proposed to sacrifice her for the advantage of "the boys."

"Oh, rather!" she replied. "Why, for instance, should one have to teach Sunday School in these days, when one knows one is a false prophet all the time—particularly in roasting weather, after slaving at the real thing all the week?"

"Does one necessarily have to do that?"

"Yes, if one has young brothers who won't go to Sunday School unless they are personally conducted, and who, if they were not there, would spend Sunday afternoons in continual scrapes of the most scandalously secular kind—like yesterday's."

"I think I should rather chance the scandal, if I were you."

"Not if you were me. I do my little best. You see mother gets the opportunity for a quiet snooze in her armchair, which does her good. In fact, the great incontestable value of Sunday Schools is in the relief they afford to overtaxed parents and guardians. Do sit down, Mr. Drewe, and I will get some tea—if you are not above tea. I am dying for a cup. They have gone for a walk in respectable company, so I hope they are all right for another hour."

"You'll make him think," said Mrs. French, "that they are perfect demons, instead of being the best little fellows—when not carried away by their high spirits——"

"Oh, no, mother dear, not the best," interrupted Sarah. "Not *quite* the best. But then we don't want them to be, Mr. Drewe. Not unnaturally good, like some

boys—the boys that die young, or become directors of bubble companies in after life. Not too good for this world, don't you know?"

She went out, laughing. To his consternation Mrs. French begged him to excuse her for a moment, and went out also—of course to confide his insolent proposals to her daughter. In their absence he composed sentences with which to propitiate the latter and persuade her to her mother's view of him.

"I could be a lot of use with those boys," he thought, "if she would only see it. I could take them for walks on Sunday afternoons, so that she might rest at home—I could make them behave themselves better than they do—I could superintend their evening studies—I could relieve her of them in scores of ways."

Considering the character of the boys, and that he was leaving St. Kilda because the children in the hotel disturbed him, it was odd that he should be so pleased with the idea of becoming a sort of nursemaid to Bunny and Billy. He regarded those "limbs" as the attractive feature of his scheme.

When Sarah returned, bearing a comfortable tea-tray, her mother staying behind her to watch the still lukewarm kettle, he saw at once that no persuasion was needed to bring the views of the old and young woman into accord. This, being the fulfilment of his hope, should have relieved and gratified him; to some extent it did. At the same time it caused him almost to regret what he had done—such is the perversity of human nature, even in the most sensible of men. It was convenient to have Miss French, like her mother, regarding him as a mere income producer; but it was also mortifying. However, the pang was brief. No one, he reflected, could foresee what would happen to-morrow and the day after to-morrow.

"Mother has been telling me," said she, cool, cheerful, and business-like, "of your proposal to come and live with us as a boarder. It would be a splendid thing for *us*, but I am really afraid you have overrated the advantages of such an arrangement to yourself. I don't think you'd find you liked it—not a little bit."

Adam said, in effect, that he knew better what he should like than she could do. He did not want grandeur or luxury, but only a quiet life.

"How can you possibly have a quiet life in the same house with the boys? You evidently don't know those boys."

He answered that, five days out of the seven, their studies would leave them no time to molest him—that he meant to have them in the yacht on Saturdays, for company, being lonely by himself (and perfectly devoted to boys)—that it was easy to have double-doors, if it came to that—and, in fact, that he should awfully like to try it, if she didn't greatly dislike the idea of an interloper in her family circle. Not that he proposed to be an interloper; he would live to himself just as much or as little as ever she liked.

"Well, come and take a look round while we are waiting for the tea," said she. "There are just two rooms that we can do without, if you really like to take them—on trial."

She showed him the rooms, which adjoined each other. One, the drawing-room of the house, which looked unused, though not uncared for, fronted the bay, and had great capabilities; the other, a spare bedroom, had the same aspect from one window, while the other opened upon a green nook of the garden, most grateful to the æsthetic eye and the fastidious nose; and the little suite could be shut off from the rest of the house, if ne-

cessary, by blocking a short passage with the suggested double-doors.

Adam said it must all have been designed on purpose for him. And there and then the bargain was struck. They haggled dreadfully over terms,—the landladies, contrary to the habit of landladies, refusing to accept as much as the tenant wished to pay; but eventually they agreed upon a compromise and settled the matter. Adam stayed to a second tea, at which Bunny and Billy assisted, sitting affectionately on either side of him; and they and their sister walked with him to the station in the summer moonlight, when he set forth at last.

During the following week Mrs. French turned out her drawing-room and guest chamber, and distributed her knick-knacks through the house. The painter and paper-hangers made both rooms fresh and bright, and in the passage that led to them the carpenter put up green baize doors with strong springs and bolts to them. Adam sent over his big writing-table, his book-shelves and books, his leather chairs and sofa, his rugs that he had bought out of the Exhibition, his valuable ornaments and pictures—including the photograph of Fidelia in its silver frame. When Sarah, helping him to arrange his things, saw this treasure of treasures in the place of honour on his writing-table, she looked at it long and earnestly.

"What a lovely face!" she ejaculated.

"Yes," said Adam. "A friend of mine at home. I will tell you about her some day."

And he told her—that, and the whole story of his life—before another week had passed; by which time he was in the position of a son of the house, as settled and comfortable as if he had always lived there.

CHAPTER XXI.

THERE comes a time—anywhere between thirty-five and fifty, according to the quality of one's intellect and experiences—when one looks back, and looks down, upon the splendid fervours of youth as from a clear hill to a hot and dusty valley, full of the still blindly struggling (who are so sure that they have not only sight, but second-sight), for whom one's heart bleeds. Poor children! —who know no better. The grand passions, and ideals, enthusiasms, the noble intolerances and rebellions—the cryings for the moon, in fact—one's change in view with respect to these things does not mean that they have palled upon a stale and worn-out palate, but that the education of life has taught one to understand them, to discriminate values, to fix the limits and the bearings of the possible and the true. It means that one has been carried past that stage to a higher and a better—yes, a better!—unless one is incapable of learning, a mere animal with an appetite, spiritually sterile, without wings to rise.

We are not thinking of such in this connection, but of men and women of the quality of Adam Drewe.

He was nearer forty than thirty, and had lived his time with much more intensity than from this poor chronicle would be supposed. Many bubbles had he pricked, many delusions fathomed, many truths and un-

truths proved; and he could now appreciate the beauty of a great many things which are necessarily above the comprehension of unchastened youth.

And it became evident that he was born for a domestic life. To the gentle, but efficient, guardian of dependent women, the firm-handed, patient ruler of "high-spirited" boys, the care-taker of a nice garden, the cheerful playmate of winter evenings and Saturday afternoons—the interested, sympathising, devoted nurse of poor, common headaches and cut fingers—the support and stand-by, generally, of a wholesome-hearted, simple-minded family—this was his true vocation.

What the Frenches did before he came, they said they didn't know; nor how they should ever again manage to get along without him.

A feeling of this sort is not all on one side. He came to regard it as practically quite out of the question that he should attempt to do without them. The roses that he budded, and the poultry yards that he laid out, and the arbour and the aviary, and the summer meat-safe that he builded, and the dogs that fawned on him, and the cats that rubbed against his legs, represented the beloved and peculiar interest of a home that he felt was his own home—as no other house had been, even gran'ma's in her later years. His money, literally was not "in it." He hardly remembered how rich he was, wanting nothing for himself that five or six hundred a year was not sufficient for—over and above what the affection of his house-mates gave him.

Warm-hearted Mrs. French, enjoying the kind of treatment that gran'ma had so much appreciated, and never having received the same from any male relative, adored him openly. He had charge of her little financial affairs, and by mysterious methods that she never under-

stood, caused her small investments to increase and multiply, until they produced what to her was a handsome income; and she so relied upon his judgment to guide her to profit in other things that she was not happy even to buy a pair of boots without consulting him beforehand. And nothing was too trivial for him to interest himself in and attend to. Her served her like a son, and advised her like a husband—as sons and husbands should be, not as they usually are; and she bragged about him to her friends, when he was not by to hear her, as an angel from heaven dropped down upon her path—which greatly amused them.

To Bunny and Billy he felt like a father, and to all intents and purposes was one. The authority of the domestic ruler was ungrudgingly conceded to him by the two poor women, neither of whom had been strong enough to wield it effectively; and never was there a more judicious and conscientious acting-parent. He made those boys behave themselves by the constraint of affection and a firm hand; they "minded" him, though they would not mind anybody else, except because he bade them.

Owing to escapades in Melbourne, he removed them to a local school, the work of which he was able, as a munificent patron, to usefully supervise; and every night they prepared their lessons in his room, under his eye and with his expert assistance. It seemed to him more important than writing novels, which pursuit languished greatly in these days.

And what holidays they enjoyed with him! What football and cricket! What excursions into the bush! What cruises on the bay! What racings of the gallant *Kittiwake* against the *Kiwi* and the *Magpie*, her presumptuous rivals! What circuses and pantomimes, and cycloramas, and agricultural shows!

The boys, like their mother and sister, had had nobody to take them to such things till now. Now they were always going somewhere, under the escort of the odd-looking man in spectacles, whose beaming family face was so noticeable in a crowd.

To Sarah he was *not* a brother. But Sarah was the large element in his happiness at this time, which was the happiest time he had yet known. He could not get her to give up her teaching labours, but as a set-off to this he had her company on the journey from Melbourne to Williamstown five evenings a week. All day he used to look forward to that trip across the water, and their talks by the way.

The monotony of this peaceful life was varied by visits to Sydney, to carry matters of business to and from the firm's fountain-head, and to have a yarn with his old friend at the camp in Middle Harbour.

It was a much improved camp in these days, and as delightfully out of the world as ever. In place of the old shed there was a cluster of tents—nice, airy, weather-proof tents, with boarded floors to raise them from the sand—set in a neat garden of stocks and marigolds, intersected with shingled pathways that crunched under-foot, the whole enclosed on three land sides in a little fence about two feet high. And Richard kept a house-keeper—an old mariner, long superannuated as such—who was the best of servants and care-takers, save when over-come by a particular weakness, which would have dis-qualified him for service under a less easy master. Never was there a camp in the world so tidy as this camp! Not a bottle nor a bone, not a shred of potato rind nor a scrap of waste paper, was allowed to become litter when it became refuse, while the bo'sun was capable of preventing it.

The mathematical flower beds and borders, that were the amusement of his many leisure hours, were never permitted to bear a weed, or to conceive one; and nothing in the shape of dirt, nothing but impalpable sand and salt, could get lodgment on floors and furniture. And his pet toy, a flag-staff and halliards, was as correct an indicator of the time of day as a good cook's kitchen clock; regularly at sunrise a bit of bunting was run up to the top of it, to flutter all day like a bird's wing above the trees; punctually at sunset it was hauled down and a ship's lantern substituted—a lone little pin-point of light in the darkness of the folded hills, but answering its intended purpose of showing the way to the master when he came down at night. And yet, within a step of the threshold of the big tent, on the other side of the wild bushes that screened it just enough without shutting out the view, there was beautiful Nature unadorned, the lily without any paint, nothing but her dear form before her lover's eyes.

Thither would Richard and Adam betake themselves on the rare occasions when they were free to do so—occasions which all but ceased after the second Mrs. Delavel came home; and the bo'sun would make them a dinner of fried sausages, or of chops and stewed tomatoes, or of beef steak and onions, or of eggs and bacon, with potatoes roasted in their jackets; and they would sit in the moonlight on the edge of the tent floor, or out upon the slip of beach, to digest the delicious meal; and Richard would smoke and gaze into the infinite, in his meditative way; and Adam would talk to him about books, his own and other, and his social views, and his private feelings—all the things that one keeps for the ear of one's old friend, and cannot discuss with mere acquaintances. Nearly all—not quite. For he never talked of Sarah.

Whether he was ashamed of his backsliding, in the company of one who had never backslided, did not appear; he did not ask himself the question. He probably did not notice that he left the topic out.

And, after all, he did not slide far this time—not even so far as he had done before.

When, in the long light evenings, he built the summer house, and Sarah, with her needlework, sat by to watch him do it, it was not his fault that he did not slide all the way to that bourn of matrimony whence no traveller returns. She looked the very incarnation of Home, with her cheerful healthy face, her strong busy hands, her neat hair, her neat dress; she suggested every idea of comfort to the constitutionally domestic man, whose tastes in the matter were largely determined by his humble breeding. In particular, she suggested the bright-eyed, wholesome progeny which was his heart's desire in these maturing years. She might have sat for a statue of Motherhood—of Charity, with a babe at her ample breast, and others clinging to her supporting hand; Nature had so evidently intended her to play the part. Not less unmistakably had the Mother of all designed him to be the father of a family—the pattern father, who would get up o' nights to hush a fractious infant, and enjoy it. And the thought of his non-existent children—the boys and girls who should long ago have been preparing the crown for his old age—began to mix itself with all his dreams.

He was hammering at the trellis of the summer house, and Sarah was sitting by with her well-filled work-basket, a ragged stocking drawn over one hand, a needle flying to and fro in another; and they paused simultaneously to kill mosquitoes. In a garden so carefully watered every evening they were numerous and deadly.

"Look here," said Adam, "you can't sew with those things teasing you. Wait a bit, and I'll fix you up."

He flung down his tools and ran into the house, whence he emerged in a few minutes with an armful of mosquito netting. In his kind and clever fashion, he contrived a tent of this, upon the framework of his skeleton building, and enclosed her and her chair and basket in it.

"Oh, how nice!" she exclaimed, looking at him through the veil. "What a relief it is! How comfortable you do make people, Adam! You are a perfect genius at it!"

He beamed upon her through his goggles, with a satisfaction that fully equalled hers.

"I wish the boys had a tithe of your thoughtfulness," she went on. "Do look at this knee!"—displaying the upper part of a stocking, with her large fist thrust through it. "How would you like to have to mend a hole like that?"

"But surely that's past mending," he returned, surveying it seriously. He thought how charming it would be to see her darning *his* socks; but he carefully bought new pairs every week or two, so that not even a thin place should be discoverable when they passed through her hands from the wash-tub to his drawers.

Not a feather would he add to the burden of hard work which she never seemed to throw off, and which—though she was quite strong enough to carry it—was such a constant distress to his kind heart. He knew that she dusted, and even swept, besides making the family beds and devising the day's meals, before going off to Melbourne in the morning, and that she spent all her leisure hours, as she called them, in darning and patching; and it took away his comfort in his own easy life.

Merely to feed fowls and water flowers and hammer nails for her was not to help as he wanted to help; and she would permit no more.

There was but one way in which he could get the better of that pride of independence which so pleased and exasperated him. He had thought of it many times, and now he thought of it again. And at last he spoke of it. He had ever been a bashful wooer, and it was perhaps the mosquito net which emboldened him.

"To waste time and darning cotton on a rag like that," said he, "seems a false idea of economy to me. I should think it would be far cheaper to buy new ones."

"Oh," she laughed, "one might be always buying, at that rate!" She added, inadvertently, "And we haven't all a purse like yours to go to."

She saw the slip she had made. She felt that Adam was opening his mouth to say in effect that it was hers if she would have it. Strangely, it had not occurred to her, any more than to her mother, to imagine this dear friend in the character of a lover; all in a moment she recognised the transformation, though he stood with his back turned. The woman-instinct is like a hound's scent in these cases. And her first impulse was one of repugnance and revolt.

He began to stammer, in a thick voice, "I wish—I wish——"

And she broke in—rapidly, flippantly, violently tugging at her work, and averting her flaming face—"Oh, it's a pleasure to do for them, poor little brats, while I can. When I am married—I suppose you know that I've been engaged for some years?—I shall not be able to mend their socks and patch their torn clothes; and I'm sure I shall miss it dreadfully," etc., etc. She gabbled on

as long as she could; and Adam listened, while he mechanically measured laths and posts.

A painful silence ensued, which neither seemed able to break. Then he said, quietly, "I had no idea you were engaged—not the faintest."

"No? I thought mother might have mentioned it."

"Not a word. I can't understand why she didn't."

"Well, we don't talk about it much. I see him so seldom. It is a very old affair."

"And I should have thought the boys——"

"Oh, we keep it from the boys, advisedly—we always have done. You see they are such imps of mischief—nobody would have any peace."

"And you don't wear a ring."

"I have never had one," laughed Sarah, with a new blush. "However, that was my own fault. He was very poor at the time, and I forbade him to buy one. I knew he could not afford it."

Adam hammered for a time, in a desultory and clumsy way; then he threw down his tools, and seated himself on the grass beside her. "Tell me about it," said he.

"Won't you come under the net?" she returned gently, thrilled by the tone of the kind voice, so out of keeping with the plain face. She could not see his face, but only the top of his hat and part of his brown beard.

"No, thanks; I'm all right. Was it long ago? Before I came here, I suppose?"

"Oh, Adam—a thousand years before you came here! I was only eighteen. Now I am twenty-five."

Then she told her tale. A simple young-girl tale of a dance, a picnic, a moonlight walk—the usual thing, in short. Nothing out of the common in it, but her own faithful and steadfast heart.

"And where is he now?" inquired Adam, looking up.

"He is in your office—the Sydney office," said Sarah, looking down. Her face was quite pretty at the moment, viewed through the mosquito netting—like a bride's behind her veil.

Adam ran over in his mind the names and histories of the Sydney clerks, and said, "I don't think I know him."

"No. He was in the Adelaide branch for some time. His family are Adelaide people—distant connections of ours. We knew each other as children. They all went to Sydney some time ago, and his mother got Mr. Delavel to transfer him. She died soon after, poor thing."

"You don't see him often, I suppose?"

"Oh, never!" she sighed. "Hardly ever. It costs too much."

So, once more, Adam had to give up his dream of a home for himself, and sons and daughters to be the staff of his declining years. And he felt it far more now than when he was young and sanguine and sentimental. He had grown wise enough to recognise in Sarah the potential pattern wife, made of sound stuff that would wash and wear for ever, and the potential good mother whose children would call her blessed. He had grown old enough to understand that a man can hardly hope for anything better—in the long run.

Having swallowed the first bitterness of his disappointment, and thought the matter over, he wrote to the senior partner of his firm.

"Can you give me Richardson for the Melbourne office, and make it a rise for him? I have a particular reason for asking. Young Murray here might take his place—a capital young fellow, who deserves promotion and would like the change. I want Richardson to have a *considerable* increase of salary, even if he does not quite deserve it."

Richard Delavel, then in the full enjoyment of his Indian summer—the "three years out of fifty" which closed his life—and apt to be brief and perfunctory in his dealings with business matters, replied, as follows—

"Certainly. You can have him and welcome. Glad to be rid of him."

And Sarah's *fiancé* came over to the Melbourne office, and over to Williamstown to tea. He was a champion footballer, six feet high, with a Greek profile and a curly-brimmed high hat—very "swagger," to use the expressive definition of the boys. In his presence the homely Sarah (in a new and fashionable frock) blushed and paled, and simpered self-consciously, like any empty-headed ball-room belle.

"Oh, of course!" thought Adam, sighing bitterly. "*Of* course!"

And he threw up the game.

CHAPTER XXII.

All thought of self was driven from his mind when the news was telegraphed to him that Constance Delavel was dead.

The message reached him at his office; and he left for Sydney the same afternoon, arriving at Darling Point by noon next day—the day of her funeral.

Noel Rutledge, the son-in-law of the house, only just returned with his wife from a two years' European tour, received him.

As he entered the hall, darkened by the closed blinds, he heard the little cry of the new-born baby.

The two men gazed at each other when they met, incapable of speech. It was all too awful for words. But presently Adam was able to make inquiries, and Rutledge found it a relief to talk to one who so thoroughly grasped the situation.

"Yes," he said, "we were just back in time. I'm afraid it was our coming that did it—exciting her too much. And her death, no doubt, upset my poor girl, who did not expect to be confined for a week or two. But she's all right, and the child, too; and I'm thankful it has happened so—to give her a bit of comfort, and to keep her out of the way of seeing her father. Not that he makes any fuss—I wish he would!—he's quieter than any of us; but he looks—upon my soul, I

daren't look at him—I'm afraid to go near him. He is in with her now. They'll be coming for the coffin in an hour. I wish somebody would have the mercy to shoot him. *How* do you suppose he will be able to go on living without her?"

"He won't," said Adam; "he can't."

"Ah, we all say that! But grief does not kill people."

"He is not like other people," said Adam; "and this is not a grief like other griefs."

He spoke with a noble envy of one who could reach such heights and depths of love and woe.

He would not go to the funeral of Richard's wife, nor assume the rights of a member of the family to intrude upon the widower.

"If he cares to know," he said to Rutledge, "tell him that I am looking after the office for both of you."

And he then went to Pitt Street, and took command of a somewhat disorganised staff; and spent all the miserable afternoon working at accounts and business letters. However little such things might matter now, still they did matter; and the only help he could give was to attend to them.

At the hour of the funeral—as has been elsewhere recorded—a heavy thunderstorm broke into the sultry stillness of the day; the dark rain on the windows made it difficult for him to see to write. But when the office was closed, and he turned into the nearest restaurant for a chop and a cup of tea, there was the promise of a fine evening. The then wet, hot, muggy atmosphere felt stifling within streets and house-walls, and, not knowing what to do with himself in his restless mood, he took the fancy to go out to the camp and sleep there. He had done it several times, at Richard's invitation, using the tent and

bed that were Mrs. Rutledge's before her marriage, and had no fear of intruding now, when he supposed the place deserted. Even the bo'sun, he imagined, would not think it worth while to remain on guard, now that the master's wife was dead, and the value taken from all his possessions, a conjecture which seemed confirmed when Adam came over the hills from Mossman's Bay, and saw the tip of the camp flag-staff with no lantern on it. It was long past sunset then. The last streak of colour—soft, rusty red, the tint of elm blossoms in spring—had faded from the cloudy west, and the moon was coming up behind the black North Head, and the South Head flash-light was at work, making darkness visible.

He wandered down the winding pathway, brushing showers of rain drops from bush and bough, halting at every turn to survey the prospect, and to drink the fresh-washed air, fragrant with earthy and leafy breathings and the ineffable scent of the salt sea. As night deepened, as the moon brightened, as the delicate sky cleared more and more, and the waters of the Sound began to twinkle and glitter, and the shadows ashore to fall in patterns like black lace upon silver brocaded satin—the charm of that hermit solitude took possession of him, stirring to beautiful thoughts and images the poetic spirit which informed the graceful pen. Williamstown and Sarah's garden had no such inspiration to give him. Nor had life in her sober household and companionship the power of these tragic Sydney circumstances to uplift his soul. He descended into the soft gloom, in which the roofs of the tents made vague white patches, and passed out of it, beside the low fence, to the clear level of the beach, open to the wide night and the wide sea, all flooded now with the rays of the risen moon; and as he stood to gaze, he saw in the fairyland of his imagination visions that matched

the enchanting scene—visions whereof the relics would be found embalmed in printed pages some day. They were infused with Richard's passion and sorrow; but Richard personally was not in them—only the creations of the author's brain. He was forgetting to be conscious of actual people and events.

And suddenly he saw a boat floating at the landing-stage. Almost at the same instant he saw a figure, black and rigid, carved like a cameo upon the pearly haze—Richard himself, sitting on a log of driftwood close to the shore, his arms round his gaunt knees, his eyes fixed on the illimitable beyond the Heads, where thunderings of the late storm still sounded in the heavy surf, that made a continuous booming roar like an approaching railway train. It was the electric beam which discovered his face to the shocked intruder, showing in the momentary glare its hopeless immobility; and the same flash revealed to the mourner that he was not alone.

"That you, Adam Drewe?" he called gently, turning from his blind contemplation of fate.

"Oh, sir," cried Adam, drawing near, "forgive me for disturbing you. I wouldn't for the world have come if I had known. I believed the camp was empty—I saw no light——"

"I took it down," said Richard; "and the bo'sun—he was drunk, as usual. I don't blame him, for I know he's unhappy—I wish I could do the same—but I thought he'd be the better for a little holiday amongst his friends. Did you come over by the steamer? Sit and rest a few minutes after your walk; then you may take my boat back, if you like. I'm going to sleep here—I shan't want it."

"Oh, I won't stay——"

"Yes—sit down. I'll get you something to drink be-

fore you go. You're not like the others, Adam. You and I were boys together—in old Dunstanborough—Oh, my God!" He caught himself back, on the very verge of madness, and muttered, in a tone of apology, "You won't mind if I don't talk to-night? Go and get yourself some whisky, won't you? The kegs are there."

Adam went to the tent, and returned with a stiff nobbler for his friend, who straightened himself to receive it, fighting for the decorum which to a British gentleman is dearer than life.

"Thanks—thanks. I hope you helped yourself. Do you know, Adam, that I am a grandfather?"

Adam intimated that he did.

"A very fine child, they say. Poor little child! Poor human creatures—that have to grow up——"

"Do you know, sir, that you are dripping wet? Your clothes are simply saturated."

"Are they? I didn't notice it. It has been raining a good deal."

"Hadn't you better get them off and go to bed at once? If you'll let me, I'll light a little fire and dry them for you."

"It isn't necessary; the sun will dry them in the morning. You take the boat and go home to your own bed, and don't bother about me."

"May I come again, to see if you want anything?"

"Oh, I shan't want anything. There's nothing to want now."

"Not food?"

"I have plenty."

"Not to hear how Mrs. Rutledge and the baby are?"

"Come and tell me if everything is not right; otherwise, never mind. I shall conclude that no news is good news. Have an eye to the office, like a good fellow. Rut-

ledge won't want to leave his wife. And if you can keep them all away for a little while—the condolences—Adam, for God's sake—I am trying to bear it—but I can't stand any more——"

. . . . . .

Two nights later, having filled the intervening days with office business, Adam returned to the camp, driven by unspeakable forebodings. He went down by boat alone, hoisting a little sail to the upspringing evening wind; and in the now moonless twilight had a difficulty in making port, owing to the bo'sun's beacon being still absent from his masthead. No one appeared to receive the visitor on landing, and when he walked into the fenced enclosure he found all dark and silent as the grave. "Gone!" he thought. "Or *dead!*" He noted that the front of the big tent was open, and in his mind pictured his friend on the bed within, as he expected to find him—mercifully released from his intolerable pain—the keen face set in the expression he had last seen on it, the blank stare seaward fixed in the glassy eyes. No circumstance hitherto conceived by the fancy of the novelist had the dramatic elements of this awful situation.

But as he drew nearer, fumbling in his pocket for a match-box, a sorrowful sound of life fell suddenly upon his tingling ear—a harsh cough, ending in a prolonged moan. At the same moment the electric ray passed over the cavernous tent entrance, and into it like a flood-wave, revealing the hermit on his bed—not stark and stiff but tossing restlessly, with his arms thrown wide.

Feeling Adam's shadow in the light, he lifted his head, and called, "Who's there?" Adam hardly recognised the voice, and the glitter of the peering eyes was like a knife thrust in him. He ran into the tent as the beam

passed, and groped for the hand he had seen stretched out in greeting. It was like touching fire.

"Oh, why did I leave you by yourself?" he cried, in passionate concern. "What—*what* is the matter?"

"I am not very well," said Richard, breathing quickly. "I've caught cold, I think. It's of no consequence. Get me a drink of water, like a good fellow. There's none left in the filter, and I don't feel quite able to go out after any more."

"Where's the bo'sun?"

"He's not back yet. I told him not to hurry."

"Where does he live when he's at home?"

"Oh, don't you go after him. He'll turn up soon. He's a faithful old beast—he won't feel easy to stop away after he gets sober. Don't you go. You're not like the others—we were boys together in old Dunstanborough——"

"I am not going, certainly," Adam broke in, seeking matches and candle when the South Head light returned. "Except that I must get somebody to fetch things. You're in a high fever, and you've got to be properly attended to."

"Nonsense! I don't want anything—except a drink. It's only a cold—it's the sultry weather, and not being able to sleep—it's nothing. You hear, Adam?"—as Adam took up lantern and water-jug to go out to the tank—"I won't have anybody fetched—I *won't!*" He sat up to emphasise the command, coughed like a horse, and fell back with a long, tired groan. "I can't be bothered," he muttered, hardly above a whisper.

Then Adam turned up his shirt sleeves, and set to work to do what a man and an amateur might to supply the place of the required nurse. He found mustard in the bo'sun's stores, and made it into paste, and spread it on Richard's chest, which it presently denuded of filmy skin.

Remembering that gran'ma used to give him hot drinks when he had a feverish cold, to throw him into a perspiration, and then load him with blankets to keep him in that state, he lit the spirit stove, boiled water, poured it on squeezed lemon juice, and administered the compound —a cruel substitute for the cold draught called for; having done which he lowered the curtain of the tent, smoothed the ruffled bed, and sat down in the confined air to his anxious vigil. The sick man yielded to the treatment so far as to sleep for some hours; otherwise his fever did not seem to subside. The hurry of his hard breathing, the nightmare mutterings, the open mouth and half-open eyes, were no signs of rest or recuperation; he was as far from "the balm of woe, the poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release," as the wakeful watcher beside him. Even this semblance of sleep passed off before half the night had gone. He called "Constance!" and the word seemed to rouse him as if some one else had called it; he held his breath for a moment, listening, and then said quietly, "Isn't the moon up, Adam?"

"Yes," Adam answered, reaching for a cup of Liebig that he had stealthily prepared. "I expect it is up by now."

"Why are we shut in like this? It's stifling. I *never* sleep with the curtain down, even when it rains. Roll it up, there's a dear fellow."

When he found there was no perspiration, Adam obeyed; and the lovely summer night poured in—an air as fresh as the breath of life itself, and as soft as down feathers—a celestial radiance of moon and sea. And the voice that was never silent—the speech of the Eternal to human ears—filled all the midnight solitude.

"Oh, how cool it sounds!" groaned Richard. "If I were only in it—out there! Shall we go for a long swim,

Adam? I have always had a fancy to go for a swim at night. How cool it sounds! And I feel like a lump of fire. Give me a drink of water—*cold* water!"

"Take this first," said Adam, and made him swallow the nauseous tepid broth, that he might not die for want of nourishment.

The stuff seemed to stimulate him, for he did not sleep again, but talked a great deal. As the night wore on, his talk became slightly incoherent; still he knew what he was saying.

"We have been through the mill together," he remarked to his old friend; and he repeated the significant phrase again and again, as he did the statement that they had been boys together at old Dunstanborough. "We understand what it is, Adam—you and I."

Then he asked questions about Fidelia; and Adam's spirit called her back, to take her old part in the divine tragedy.

. . . . . .

Ten days later, the camp was a centre of attraction to crowds of people who had previously been unaware of its existence. They blackened the hills above it; they swarmed in the surrounding bushes and invaded the bo'sun's garden; they congregated on the water in a fleet of miscellaneous craft, the yachts all flying their little flags at half mast, like the ships in harbour; they stood, in black clothes, on the deck of a steamer lying at the small jetty, which had never given accommodation to anything of her size before. The object that drew them was a long coffin, of which they could see nothing but the polished wood and the silver plate and handles as it was borne on sturdy shoulders—Adam's amongst them—to the funeral barge.

In that coffin Richard Delavel left his camp for the

last time, and was laid at the side of her whose death a fortnight earlier had killed him.

. . . . . .

In du Maurier's beautiful second book—a possession, exclusively, for the beautiful in mind—there are touches of truth which to the initiated are more clear than day; it is, indeed, as full of them as a ladder is full of holes; and none more true than that contained in the final paragraph—the picture of Mr. and Mrs. Wynne, "tired, yawny, sleepy, and very sad," walking home to their hotel in the small hours, and thinking "that a week in Paris was just enough—and how nice it would be, in just a few hours more, to hear the rooks cawing round their own quiet little English country home—where three jolly boys would soon be coming for the holidays."

"There," says the author, who, happily, did not begin to write novels until he was old enough to know what he was writing about, "there we will leave them to their useful, humdrum, happy, domestic existence—than which there is no better that I know of, at their time of life—and no better time of life than theirs."

Oh, we know it—we know it some day, if we live long enough! The great passions that break our hearts and that we never get over—the great dreams and plans—we have to do without them as best we can; somehow they don't seem to fit into the scheme of married life—better that it is so, perhaps, both for it and them; but there are compensations still.

The father and mother out for their second honeymoon while the boys are at school, the intelligent man and woman looking at the world with instructed eyes, bound together by long habit of companionship and mutual dependence and sympathy, by their innumerable common interests and intimacies, by all manner of kindly

compromises and forbearances—well, they can afford to let the young lovers turn up their noses at them.

Circumstances, however, alter cases. There are exceptions to every rule. Men like Richard Delavel and Adam Drewe are apt to stand out even from their own class, which is itself so small, so distinct and distinguished. The dead man did not die until long after his passion time was supposed to be past, and after he had reached, or should have reached, the greybeard's haven of domestic peace, which becomes his heaven as well, after the storms of youth. He had had many years of luxurious housekeeping, and a daughter to rear and rejoice in, books, and boats, and good company, and an important and exacting business; and yet none of these things had deposed the idol of his young manhood from her first place. Time and change, and absence and silence, that steal the fire from the morning altars, never stole from his. It was sacred to the last, and more so at the last than ever.

And this shining example of faithfulness unto death —of immortal love, if death be not the end of all—had a deep effect upon Adam; that, or the revival of so many poignant memories. When he went back to the little house at Williamstown—after some months spent in Sydney, to attend to business on behalf of the bereaved family —he did not feel that he was going to his home.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SARAH, too, had changed in the interval, which had seemed to both of them so much longer than it really was.

For the first time they regarded one another reticently, and yet wistfully, as not quite understanding how they stood in each other's mind. He had never been so indifferent to her since he had known her; she had never been more interested in him. It was, in fact, another instance of that perversity of human nature which is like a natural law, independent of other laws, the only one which persistently defies our calculations. They were playing the part of the man and woman of the rustic barometer, one figure of which is only out while the other is in. Real men and women seem quite as helpless as the puppets to prevent themselves from doing it.

"We thought you were never coming back to us," she said to him soon after his return, hovering about his room as if she could not tear herself away; poking his fire—the first of the autumn fires—and touching up the flowers on his table and mantelpiece. "We have all been lost without you."

He thanked her, in his kind way, with an absent-minded gaze at Fidelia's photograph. He did not notice the significant "all." There were lots of things he did not notice. And she felt the difference in him that she could not define or understand.

"I'm afraid it's been a sad time for you, Adam?"

"Oh, heartbreaking!" he ejaculated. "He was my oldest friend. I loved him—no one knows how I loved him! I feel as if I should never get over it." He turned from her with a quick sigh. "Boys all right, Sarah?"

"Oh, yes. They've been a bit unmanageable, of course—without you."

"Have they? I must lecture them about that. I must take them in hand. Where are they?"

"I've sent them—they are out to tea. Never mind about them now. Rest yourself"—looking at him with the tenderest, anxious, maternal eyes—"rest yourself, after all your worries, now that you're at home, and can. Let me bring you a little tray in here, and have tea quietly by yourself—by your own fireside, comfortable——"

"Certainly not," he interrupted. "The idea of it! As if I would let you carry trays about for me!"

"Then Emma shall. I'll send Emma with it. I can see you want quiet—not the nuisance of a lot of women and boys. Do you know you're quite thin? The heat of Sydney summer is not good for you at all. It's high time you were back at home."

He allowed her to persuade him to have his evening meal in private, on the understanding that it was to consist of tea and bread and butter only, and that Emma, the maid, was to bring it to him. For he did crave for solitude. He wanted to think of his novel—the new novel into which he always plunged at these crises of his life. He had not been writing for a long time—actual affairs had been too pressing; now—now that he was adrift in a sort of fog of disappointment—the fever was on him to go a-wandering again in that enchanted world where dreams came true and the noble heart was satisfied.

Then as he sat in his deep leather chair, the pleasant

firelight dancing on his spectacles and warming his slippered feet, in came Sarah, with the step of a sick nurse, and softly cleared a table, and lit the gas, and drew the blinds over the sad twilight windows. And he never even heard her. A second time she entered, weighted with a big tray that contained a whole substantial meal—a flounder on a hot plate, roast chicken on another, shavings of toast, a delicate pat of butter, a little teapot—everything, in short, that he could want, and all of the utmost daintiness—and had put it down by his elbow before he realised that she had disobeyed him, and was not Emma after all. Then, indeed, he rose and rebuked her roundly, daring her ever to do such a monstrous thing again. But somehow a scolding, even a scolding so kind and so altogether Adam-like, was not exactly the result she had anticipated.

When Bunny and Billy came home, she informed them that Adam was tired, and they were not to bother him until the morning. She implored them to go to bed like good boys, and let her give them lollies. She laid violent hands on them to force them from the baize doors; she barricaded those doors with her own person. All in vain, of course. The boys had not been five minutes in the house before their arms were round Adam's neck and their legs astride his knee, and they were asking him what Mr. Delavel had died of, and whether they couldn't have a whole day's cruise next Saturday.

"We've been having such beastly Saturdays," they told him. "She wouldn't let us go out with Jim and Obadiah, though you said we might."

"She" was standing at the door, clucking like a hen, as Bunny expressed it.

"Come to bed, boys. Don't tease Adam now. Adam, do please make them come to bed."

"Boys, you must obey your sister," said Adam, gently disengaging himself from their twining limbs. "She wants you to go to bed, so go—pack off."

"Oh, not yet, Adam, when we haven't seen you for such ages——"

"I'll give you three minutes," said Adam, taking out his watch. "If you are not gone then, there'll be no presents to unpack to-morrow."

"Well, we'll have the *Kittiwake* out on Saturday, won't we?"

"Oh, yes! Good-night."

"Every Saturday, Adam?"

"Yes, yes. Be off."

And they went off, hustled along by Sarah, who had a painful impression that Adam was glad to be rid of all three of them.

. . . . . .

One evening there was a party—a little party for whist and round games and a sandwich supper. Two old ladies, four girls, and four men—Lovell Richardson amongst them. Sarah dressed herself in her Sunday tweed, but two of the young ladies came in low necks and short sleeves. One was a very pretty Miss Alderson, whose brother was in the office, and a friend of Richardson's; her pretty little frock was of pale pink silk, rudely criticised by the boys.

Sarah went to Adam after the family high tea, and said to him in a confidential way, "Don't you bother yourself about this affair to-night. Stay here, comfortably, and get on with your book. If you bolt the passage doors no one will disturb you, and you won't hear a sound."

But Adam would not listen to such a suggestion. Already his tender conscience was accusing him of self-

ishness in having allowed his new book to withdraw him so often from the family circle, and he knew his value on an occasion of this kind. Who would be butler and house-father, to draw corks, and look after the old ladies, and keep the boys in order, if not he? Besides, there was his microscope, and his photographs, and all sorts of things, with which he could amuse the guests; and it would be a convenience to the house to give them his room to overflow in.

"Of *course* I am coming to the party," he replied to Sarah. "I like to come. I want to come."

He locked away his papers, tidied his always tidy room, changed his clothes, and plunged at once, and with the customary thoughtfulness and thoroughness, into his duties as host.

The visitors all knew him, and had ceased to look at him curiously out of the corners of their eyes; most of them treated him with vast respect, as a partner of the firm, suspected of untold wealth; and each fairly contributed to the entertainment of the rest. They played nap together, and whisky poker, and solo whist, and sang songs, and looked at the microscope, and laughed and jested, and did not seem to have a dull moment from first to last.

A slight disturbance of the harmony occurred when Bunny and Billy stealthily laid a young kitten upon Miss Alderson's back. The little animal could only hold on by digging its claws into her, and this it did with such terrified energy as to provoke a genuine shriek of pain. The marks of the claws showed red on the white skin, and the chiffron frill round her bodice was ravelled up and torn; and Adam came down upon the offenders heavily. He made them apologise there and then, and told them, before all the company, that if they misbe-

haved themselves in that way again they should be sent straight to bed. They were so much affected by the severity of the reprimand that he had to forgive them five minutes afterwards. But it did them good for a long while.

The evening was nearly ended, when they announced, breathlessly, that there was a fire over in Melbourne. Of all things they loved a fire—they would have danced for joy at the spectacle of the whole city in flames—and when they discovered that one had started they always watched it hopefully, being convinced that the fire brigades were powerless long after the foe had been subdued.

"Such a *monster!*" they cried, in ecstacy. "I do believe it's the Mutual Store again!"

It was only a four-roomed wooden cottage that had upset its kerosene lamp; and the blaze on the horizon died down in ten minutes, leaving the usual band of thick-set lights unbroken. But all rushed out upon the verandah to watch it, and some seemed too fascinated by the sight of the mere place where it had been and gone to go in again.

It was the best sort of night for seeing fires—intensely dark, without moon or stars. It was also very cold, after the heat of crowded rooms, and, therefore, unfit for young ladies in evening dress to be out in. Much these young ladies cared for that, however! The old ladies exhorted and entreated them, and they said, "Yes, yes—in a minute," and went on murmuring to their companions, without attempting to stir.

Adam stood back from the several groups, and leaned against the house wall, for there was nobody to murmur to him. He was presently aware of Sarah at his side; she seemed in the same position.

"Shall I fetch some shawls?" he asked her. "Those girls will get their deaths."

"Oh, no," she replied, in an indifferent tone. "We won't encourage them in their folly; besides, we don't know where they are. It's too dark to see one girl from another."

In that darkness the host and hostess permitted themselves to rest for a few minutes with their own thoughts; and so absent-minded did they become that they missed the warning conveyed by certain whisperings and gigglings near them. Suddenly a match was struck—flamed for a moment, causing a strange commotion—and as suddenly went out.

Adam dashed into the garden after two small flitting shadows, and Sarah thought he had not seen a black arm round a pink silk waist. But he had; at least he thought he had; and he began to comprehend things—partly.

. . . . . .

Adam left his office one afternoon, with a grave face and a heavy heart; as he walked to the station he made inaudible ejaculations.

"Poor girl! Poor girl!"

The poor girl was on the platform, as usual. Until his hat appeared over the gate behind her, she had been watching for him; as soon as she knew that he had come, she put on the appearance of ignoring his existence. Then, when he spoke over her shoulder, she turned with a warm, sudden smile, as if agreeably surprised to see him.

"You got away in time to-day?"

(He did not seem to get away in time now, as often as he used.)

"Yes; and glad enough to get away. It has been a day of worries."

"Has it? I'm sorry for that; but so it has with me."

"What's the matter with you?"

They had seated themselves in an empty carriage, and its lamp was being thumped into the hole above them. The light flashing into her face showed a passing flush that indicated embarrassment; it drained away quickly, leaving her noticeably pale. She had shadows under her eyes, and she sat limply, with lateral creases in her closely-fitting coat.

"You *do* look tired!" exclaimed Adam.

"My children have been naughty," she said, smiling. "And I have been stupidly wakeful these few nights—I suppose it's that."

"I thought you were such a sound sleeper."

"I am, as a rule."

"Well, you must go to bed early to-night, and try to make up arrears. You can't work properly if you don't rest properly."

He said to himself—bending over an evening paper, and opening another on his knee—"I wonder if she knows? I believe she knows. No, she doesn't; she only fears. Shall I tell her? I ought to tell her. It is not for me to warn him, but she might do so; to-morrow it may be too late. What will she say to me if I let him fall into the clutches of the law, when I might have saved him? Yet how can I save him? How can she? He must lie upon the bed he has made; he must face the consequences of his folly. It may do him good in the long run. It will do him no good to encourage him to be a coward as well as a thief—more of a coward than he is already. And as for her—let us hope this will open her eyes. Let us hope it will save her from him, for a better fate. It will, if she is not stupidly, viciously, immorally self-sacrificing, as women in these cases so often are—poor, dear, soft things!—imagining that they are noble and high-minded. Surely *she* is not so weak——"

He gazed at her as he mused, while pretending to read the London telegrams, and he hoped she would feel about it as he did—that dishonesty was social leprosy, and that the clean-handed owed a sacred duty to one another. All human frailties were tolerable, when they were not actually loveable—except this one; this only one was the unforgiveable sin, carrying the doom of moral outlawry.

Such was his creed, and never before had he felt such stern satisfaction in it.

"After all," he thought, "there is something better in the world than a fine profile. Perhaps she will see that now. Indeed, I believe she already sees it. She would not look pale and tired, and have wakeful nights, if she were happy. How blind women are! How blinded by their very eyesight!" And he thought of Fidelia, who without eyes had seen more clearly than any of them.

They passed down the pier together, side by side, as their custom was. The breeze was rough and cold, beautifully fresh, full of the sound of running waves; they faced it with bent heads, holding on their hats, and occasionally bumped against each other.

Through the noise of wind and water came the sweet, sharp tang-tang of ships' bells, from the looming cluster of vessels moored alongside, dim and distant in the dusk, across which bands of black and red on the horizon denoted Williamstown and sunset, both fading fast.

Lights were coming out, like flowers of the night, in all directions. The *Gem* was indicated by her impatient signal; to see her one had to stoop until the top of her twin funnels, with the lantern between them, cut against the clear upper sky. Little did they think, as they plodded towards her, that this was the last time they would be companions in the daily journey.

"Shall I tell her?" Adam continued to ask himself. "It must come out soon, and another might not do it so considerately as I." But he thought of her tired face, and the day of worries that she had had, and decided that she should sleep first. It would keep till morning.

So the last journey was not spoiled for a memory. They hardly spoke while crossing, sitting on an outside bench in the fresh wind. Other passengers sat on either hand, but no one interrupted their silent converse.

It was too dark in the shadow of the deckhouse to identify one's nearest neighbour. The ticket collector trusted entirely to the honour of those who should have tickets, and they had to grope for his outstretched hand. Adam merely asked Sarah if she felt cold and whether she would like to go inside, but the depth of kind solicitude in his voice went far beyond such questions. Peace rested upon her long-troubled soul.

An acquaintance accosted them as they left the boat and accompanied them to their gate, where the boys awaited them, bursting with the announcement that they were going to an entertainment after tea. Sarah had to brush clothes, trim finger nails, attend to collars and neckties, and, generally, make herself their slave for an hour; then they were conveniently disposed of—they, and their mother too. The profound tranquillity of the house after their departure so overcame Mrs. French that she could not keep her eyes open. She retired early, upon Adam undertaking to fetch the boys home and see them safely to bed.

"Now," thought Adam, "I must tell her—now that we are alone and quiet. I shall not get such another chance."

As he thus resolved, calling up all his courage for the ordeal, he heard the gate bang, and a voice at the door

hurriedly inquiring if Miss French was in. Sarah's scarlet face denoted who the visitor was.

"Shall you see him?" inquired Adam. His voice shook a little.

"Certainly," she replied, trembling too. "I have long wanted to see him."

Adam at once walked out of the room, and disappeared behind his baize doors.

And no sooner did Lovell Richardson present himself than he proclaimed the catastrophe, without need of words. It was writ large all over him that he had done something disgraceful and been found out. The look of a person in such a case is not the look of one suffering from common trouble.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WILD-EYED, unnerved, terror-stricken, the young man flung his hat upon the table, and cried violently, "Sally, I'm ruined! I'm ruined!" Then he sat down, and sobbed and wept.

Strange to say, she resisted the appeal which of all others is supposed to be the most overwhelming to a spectator with human feelings—that of a strong man in tears—and surveyed the demoralised figure from the other side of the table unstirred by the natural feminine impulse to caress and console. He felt at once her insensibility to his surpassing woe—that she did not pity him as a man in trouble expects to be pitied by his own woman.

"And you don't care a bit!" he burst out, savage at the fresh wound,—the (to him) unfair blow. "Oh, I'd better go and cut my throat and have done with it! I will, too."

He jumped up as if to do it forthwith. But even this did not melt her hard heart—perhaps because she knew he had not the stuff in him for such a deed. With the air of a calm governess reasoning with a passionate schoolgirl, she adjured him to collect himself and explain what had happened. In face of her pale composure, which was an assumption of superiority over her natural lord, not to be tolerated at such a time, he found it a severe

task; it was easier to rave about fair-weather woman, all honey and butter to a fellow while he was prosperous, and all vinegar and gall as soon as fortune deserted him. This he did at length, and with much bitterness.

But eventually he told his tale.

No clerk of the firm, it appeared, had been more useful, more conscientious, more indefatigable than he. His entire being had been concentrated upon the task of promoting and conserving its many important interests. Self had not entered into the question. It was for the firm's sake that he had striven to keep himself respectable and maintain a gentlemanly appearance. The firm had made this a cruelly difficult thing to do by its niggardliness in the matter of salary; he had been obliged to find ways of supplementing his absurd income, and had done so through the usual and honourable channels. It was not his fault that sharebrokers were rascals, and that the deadest of dead certainties had inexplicably miscarried. The babe unborn was not more utterly innocent of wrong intentions—though he confessed that he had been weak, under irresistible pressure of circumstances, the best of men being liable to make mistakes at times. And yet the firm was now down upon him, as if he were the wickedest of the wicked and the lowest of the low! Mr. Rutledge himself, who had none too good a record of his own, had telegraphed directions for an investigation, which at this stage must necessarily be disastrous. A few more days—a few more hours even—and all would have been made right. But there it was. Those you do the most for are always the most ungrateful, and the men who have risen from nothing have the least feeling for the unfortunate. Behind this moving tale the silent truth stood plainly visible—he had borrowed the money of his employers without leave, and the transaction had

been prematurely discovered. The law, which called it embezzlement, was about to step in.

Adam could not regard that class of misdemeanour with greater loathing than did this austerely scrupulous, proudly independent girl. He need not have feared the effect of the revelation upon her, coming on the top of many fatal dissatisfactions. She stood before the narrator, impervious as the law itself to his tears and self-justifications. But he did not see it for the moment. He was incapable of understanding it.

"I have come to you for help," he said, reaching towards her, overcome by the pathos of the case as he had just put it. "My darling, darling Sally!"

He attempted to clasp her waist. She firmly held his wrists and prevented him.

"Why to me?" she inquired. "I don't know whether you have noticed it, Lovell; but it is just six weeks since you came to me for anything."

"Can you wonder?" he rejoined. "Imagine what I have had to think of! It would have been selfish indeed to have involved you in my troubles, and I could not have helped it, if I had seen you. I have been trying to keep you out of it, Sally dear."

"And Bessie Alderson? Oh, excuse my speaking of her—it is a vulgar thing, I know—but I must. I ought to have written to you months ago, but I expected every day to see you—to tell you that I knew about that—I thought I knew—I was not sure until the night of our party——"

He burst into a forced, sarcastic laugh.

"Well," he said, "I certainly never thought *you* were so small-minded as to object to my saying a civil word to another girl."

"I don't think I am," said Sarah. "This is not a case

of civil words. I don't blame you—not at all—we can't help ourselves when we change—and I felt how it was long before I knew—I was very glad to know for certain—when I saw you with your arm round her——"

"I *never* had my arm round her."

"Lovell, I saw you. When the boys struck the match on the verandah, I was standing just behind you. I saw you as plainly as I see you now—her too—though it was only for two seconds."

"I'll wring the necks of those boys, some day."

"It was very naughty of them, of course. But I never was more thankful——"

"Thankful! Why thankful? You never said anything *then;* it is only now that you've thought of being thankful—six weeks afterwards! But I see how it is—oh, I see how it is—you are just like all the women! Hit a man when he's down—throw him over as soon as he's no more credit to you—and invent a lot of plausible excuses so as to lay all the blame on him!"

He raved wildly. And Sarah waited until the paroxysm was past. Her gentle silence provoked him to say as many insulting things as he could think of—until it suddenly occurred to him that the object of his present visit was to propitiate her; then he took the more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger tone.

"Here," he said pathetically, "here have I been sticking to you for all these years, when I might have had my pick and choice amongst the prettiest girls in the country."

"Exactly," replied Sarah; "so you have. And very good of you too—I see that more and more. I have nothing to reproach you with, Lovell. We both made a mistake, that's all, and we have both found it out. I suppose everybody makes a mistake the first time—perhaps several

times. Let us say no more about it. It's of very little consequence indeed, compared with this other affair."

He seemed to be of her opinion; for he dropped the subject at once, and they began to discuss the other affair.

And now they quarrelled seriously.

In the first place he could not stand what he called her "cursed puritanical nonsense" in regarding an excusable and unfortunate error of judgment as a criminal act. It mortally offended him. It cut him to the heart.

"I said to myself all along—it was my one comfort—I said, 'Well, my Sally, at any rate, won't turn against me, whatever the rest of the world may do.'"

"You said quite wrong," she replied, steadily. "If it had been small-pox, and you had come to me full of it—if it had been murder, and you had come with your hands all over blood—I would not have turned against you. But this—this—oh, how much it means! And you can't see it. That's the worst of all."

He did not know how to contain himself when she took this air with him—with *him!* A girl, who knew nothing about business and the ways of business men!

And then, in their views as to how the difficulty should be dealt with, they were hopelessly at variance. It transpired that the object of his visit was to get her to intercede for him with Mr. Drewe—to beg money and clemency as a favour to herself, and for the sake of their private friendship. And against any such proceeding she set her face like a flint—yea, though by so doing she consigned the lover she had pretended to be so fond of, and who had made so many sacrifices for her, to a felon's cell and grave. Her proposal was that he should make a clean breast of everything, and put himself in the hands of the firm; and to this end she exhorted and pleaded, kindly,

sternly, humbly, passionately, while he remained as deaf to all her arguments as she was to his.

He realised at last that his mission had failed, and turned upon her savagely.

"You are quite right—I *did* make a mistake," he snorted, "when I imagined you were the sort of girl for me. I have known it, too, for a good deal longer than you have. You talk of my being dishonourable!—if I'd not been honourable I should have got rid of you years ago. Oh, Bessie Alderson is worth a dozen of you! And I've loved her all the time; and I *did* have my arm round her. Dear, little Bessie! *She* won't tell me to go to prison and to ruin—*she* won't turn her back on me when I'm in trouble——" Etc., etc., etc.

It was very gross indeed; and yet Sarah did not mind at all. In fact, she liked it.

But when he was gone—by which time the boys had been fetched home from their entertainment and quietly smuggled to bed—she felt rather shattered and unnerved. She sat down in her room to think over the painful interview, and cried considerably. She found it impossible to rest after such excitements, and had not begun to undress at one o'clock. At that hour she pulled up her blind, and looked out upon a singularly clear and peaceful night. A horned moon silvered the placid water, and the thick-set lights on the other side burned like yellow stars. She raised her window gently, and sniffed the dewy odours of daphne bushes and violet beds, and the sweeter perfume of brine and seaweed. Their invitation was irresistible, and she stepped forth. Though winter yet lingered, the refreshing air was mild—or so it seemed to her in her fevered state; and out of doors she could realise the extent of her new freedom better than in the shut-up house.

She was not inhumanly selfish. She really thought a great deal of Lovell Richardson's terrible position, and still more terrible moral state; but under all—over all—she was conscious of a sky full of hope, a bottomless sea of peace. He was rid of her, as he had delicately expressed it, and she of him. She stretched out her arms and sighed broadly, inhaling the cool air—the air of liberty, that is the sweetest thing in life.

A mysterious constellation moved through the shining gloom, from the river to the sea—an otherwise invisible ship making a midnight departure, hooting a message to Williamstown as she passed—and then all was still as still could be. The girl walked to the gate and leaned upon it, her strong knuckles supporting her square chin, and had no fear of being seen by passers-by.

The camp at Sydney was not more secure in privacy at this hour, and was less silent in its lovelier solitude. There waves splashed and seethed continually; here, in a windless night, the spent tide crept up without a sound.

When she turned to re-enter the house, she saw that Adam still occupied his sitting-room; rays of light streamed from the bow-window upon lawn and laurel bushes.

"He is busy with his novel," she thought, and stood to gaze at her imaginary picture of him, bending over his big writing-table, under Fidelia's eye. As she watched she saw a shadow pass across the blind, and wondered, with a leap of the heart, whether he was coming out for a look at the night before he slept. He did it sometimes when he had been working late and exciting his brain; it would be a strange thing if he did it now.

At once she resolved not to run away from such an opportunity but to remain and meet him, and walk in the garden with him, and tell him what had happened. Her

mood of exaltation, engendered by the romantic hour and her deeply-stirred emotions, held her above petty considerations of conventional propriety; they seemed just now to belong to another world.

She heard the side window, which she could not see, pushed gently up, as by one anxious not to arouse sleepers; and a figure dropped out of it upon the flower bed beneath. As soon as it emerged into the moonlight, showing its slender length and its light grey clothing, she recognised not Adam, but her lately-dismissed visitor. And now there was not time to withdraw from view. Her heart bounded and quivered, the blood poured into her face, she clenched hands and teeth.

When he saw her figure looming in the dusk, he started and stopped short, as dismayed as she. He seemed to cringe before her.

"Sarah!" he faltered, "were you waiting to speak to me?"

"*No*," she answered, fiercely; "I thought you were gone hours ago. What—what are you doing here?"

"I came back to see Drewe. I wanted his advice. A man—a man is not like a woman—to turn his back on a friend as soon as he's unfortunate," panted Lovell Richardson, with a dramatic air. "Good-night again—I am going to get ready for a long journey; and good-bye—for ever. It is not likely that we shall ever meet again."

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, never mind! I shall be out of *your* way. And that's all you care about, I am quite sure."

Though he tried to pose as a martyr, there was an air of triumph about him, of hurry and elation, that told its tale. He passed, leaving her standing where he had found her, in a dumb rage.

Adam, hearing their voices, conjectured a lover's im-

passioned interview—a second one—and as he turned his gas out, heaved a sigh of pity for his misguided friend. The very thought of eavesdropping was, of course, impossible, but he could not deny himself a glance into the moonlit garden when his room was dark. Then he saw that the lover was gone, and his friend standing on the lawn almost under his window, looking up at it. He raised the sash swiftly, and leaned out.

"It is all right," he called, under his breath, as if answering her look. "Have no fear. Before they can issue the warrant I will have him beyond their reach. I am going to put him on board one of our ships, that will take him out of the country—you won't mind that?—till I can get the matter settled. After that we will think what is best to do. I'll telegraph to Rutledge in the morning."

She could not speak, to ask what lies had been told him—on what grounds Richardson had claimed his help; shame tied her tongue. But she continued to gaze at him, as he saw by the position of her head. He could not read her face.

"Go to bed, dear—go and sleep in peace," he urged. "They shall not take him. He shall not be disgraced, if I can help it. I shall be away early to get the yacht ready—I may not see you before we start; but make your mind easy——"

"Adam—Adam——"

"Hark! That's your mother getting up to see what all the noise is about. She thinks it's burglars. Better not take anybody into the secret, so go quickly. Good-night—Good-night; keep your heart up!"

A door was heard to open in the hollow-sounding house, and he waved his hand impatiently. Thus she was obliged, after all, to surrender the golden opportunity, and leave him under all his wrong impressions.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE passenger was on board early, stowed away below, with his luggage and provisions necessary for a voyage of uncertain length. There is not much cabin space in a fifteen-ton racing cutter, but what there was had been so ingeniously planned out that a dozen men could find sleeping accommodation at a pinch.

Richardson was quite luxurious with an apartment to himself, in which a sofa berth against the side, a canvas shelf—hammock or table, according to circumstances—hinged to the centre-plate case, and some racks and lockers, provided all that a sea-voyager could reasonably require. It was, in fact, the ladies' cabin. Mrs. French and Sarah had frequently slept there, the mother on the cushioned bench, the daughter on the upturned flap, side by side, with the summer air pouring down upon them through the hatch above their feet.

"Oh, would that it were summer now!" was the thought of the present tenant, as he listened (because he dared not look) for the returning dinghy; "and would that it were dark—if it were not so dangerous!"

He was in an agony of fright lest daylight should discover him, and could not agree with Adam that a night-start in winter would be giving themselves away.

When the skipper came aboard at nearly noon, with

the usual crew of three, the passenger begged for a nip of whisky, on the ground that long suspense had unnerved him.

"I had no idea you would be so late," he complained, "when time is so precious."

"As we don't happen to have steam," said Adam, "we must wait the pleasure of the wind. The *Kittiwake* won't sail in a dead clam."

"Is it a dead calm? Oh, Lord! I never thought of that."

"A breeze is coming now. Don't be alarmed—we shall have more than we want before we've done."

"Shall we? Shall we? I say, Drewe, isn't it awfully risky to go outside this time o' year? I'm not afraid for myself; I'm thinking about you."

"Well, you see, if I were afraid, I shouldn't do it. Say when."

He held the whisky bottle poised over a glass.

"Thanks—thanks. It's awfully good of you, old fellow; I can't tell you how I feel it. But I don't want you to risk your life for my sake."

"I shouldn't risk it for your sake—never fear!"

"You think the yacht staunch enough?"

"Oh, she's staunch. She can't capsize, anyhow. She can only founder."

"Founder!" The man's jaw dropped when it had emitted the word.

"If she's filled, you know."

"But she can't fill, can she, with a deck all over her? You'd shut the hatches, wouldn't you, if you saw squalls coming?"

"I've never had to do it yet."

"But there's no use in being foolhardy, is there? *I* should say, keep battened down altogether, when we get

outside—seeing that it's the depth of winter, and this a mere cockboat, so to speak."

"You'll see whether she's a mere cockboat," retorted the naturally indignant owner. "And as for being battened down, you'd be the sufferer. Come now, you must let me sail my ship in my own way. If you haven't confidence in both of us, you'd better go ashore. There's plenty of time."

Mr. Richardson protested, in an unsteady voice, that he had perfect confidence; and then Adam went to help the men to get sail on the yacht, which was already stirring joyously, as if alive, in the freshening wind—like a chained dog when he feels you beginning to unfasten him.

Down below the fugitive sat and listened to the lap and gurgle of the water under him, with his heart in his mouth. "Now or never," he whispered, with parched lips, and fancied that every sound betokened a policeman. But the eye of the law was searching elsewhere; the long arm did no reach him this time.

It was a beautiful start which onlookers appeared to consider natural to so fine a day, though it did not happen to be Saturday; and the *Kittiwake* was soon airily winging her way in space, with other sea-birds. At three o'clock Obadiah set the balloon jib, in a fine east wind; and they raced a steamer from Portarlington to Queenscliff, and beat her. Relieved from all fear of immediate unpleasantness, reassured by the bright sky, and soothed by a good cigar, the passenger came out of the cockpit and sunned himself upon the white deck, pillowed in a coil of rope at the foot of the mast.

He conversed affably with the crew, who were pleased to inform his ignorance of nautical affairs; and Adam, attending to the tiller, was at liberty to entertain himself

with his own thoughts, which he preferred to conversation. He had a good deal upon his mind this voyage.

"'Pon my word," said Lovell Richardson to him, in the calm of approaching sunset, when air and water were all aglow with the hues of doves' necks and the linings of pearly seashells, "'pon my word, it's well to be you, old chap! If ever I have your luck and my pockets full of money, I'll set up a yacht of my own—be hanged if I won't! I call this just perfect. I'd no idea it could be so delightful."

Adam merely said—speaking to Obadiah—"Wind's falling to nothing. I doubt if we shall get through on the ebb, after all."

"What's that? Through where?" cried the passenger apprehensively; and he sprang from his couch under the boom, and joined Adam where he sat aft, with his legs over the coaming of the hatch.

"Rip," said the captain, briefly; and, calling Jim to take the tiller, at once went forward to avoid the necessity of further speech.

They just managed to scrape through, as they called it, clearing Point Lonsdale as the first quarter flood signal was hoisted; and the delightfulness of yachting soon palled upon the landsman after that. The fall of night disquieted him. The heavier swell, which the boat rode like a duck, provoked that fear of seasickness which is its own fulfilment, and a foolish choice of whisky and water as a substitute for a comfortable meal. The returning wind, so welcome to the crew, and blowing now as if it meant business, had an awful sound in the dark illimitable ocean waste, which had, as he knew, swallowed many a fine ship, compared with which the *Kittiwake* was no more than the toy of a baby. And when he saw the process of "snugging down"—reefs taken in, spars lashed to the

rigging, everything on deck made fast or stowed away—his forebodings were expressed in terms that made Obadiah's wife's nephew shriek with rude amusement.

"What's that for, Drewe? Is there a gale coming? Good God! When you think of the big ships that couldn't live in these seas, to bring out a flimsy little cockleshell like this! She'll be pooped, to a dead certainty! She'll fill—with that open hatch—and founder, before you can say Jack Robinson!"

"Oh, go to bed," said Adam, in a tired voice.

He did consent to go to bed (being very ill) at about his usual hour. Split Point Light was off the beam, and that was some comfort to him, as showing that the skipper did really know where he was, and where the wild blast was driving him; and a small moon was shining cloudily, making a phantom of the flying yacht. As soon as his guest had retired—groaning, and declaring his belief that he would be drowned in his berth like a rat in a hole—Adam turned in on the other side of the centre-plate case, thankful for the privacy that it secured to him, and slept as a seaman should for just the number of hours that he had allotted himself. Jim snored in the forcastle, and Obadiah and his wife's nephew kept quiet watch together.

By three in the morning the captain reappeared on deck, as fresh as ever; and the sight of the heavy sea, brought up by the wind, and the behaviour of his darling in it, would have been delightful to him had he been sailing for the love of sailing. Obadiah pointed to a steamer's light, like a star in the gloom, and bragged at having kept it astern for a matter o' two hours.

They grudged to admit the expediency of reefing down again, and of heading towards Apollo Bay for shelter. But for their passenger they would have carried on as

they were, and got round the Otway before daylight. It would have been a fine performance, and the worst part of an ungracious business would have been over.

As it was, another day was breaking when they turned the corner in a languid south-west breeze, having been becalmed in the chopping seas for about eighteen hours, in pouring rain, to the great injury of all their tempers—even Adam's, which was generally so good, and even Lovell Richardson's, though he had so much objected to a blow.

"*This* ought to suit you," the host sarcastically remarked, as the boat bobbed up and down like a pea in a boiling pot.

"I suppose you are trying to be funny," replied the guest, whose dirty and unshaven face, showing under the dripping tarpaulin half drawn over the cockpit, was the colour of tobacco ashes. And he swore, that never again, as long as he lived, would he trust himself to a fifteen-tonner that gave itself the airs of a man-o'-war.

"Certainly, I shall never ask you," said Adam.

"Oh, it's beastly ungrateful, I know. But if you only knew how I felt—this awful motion!—I say, can't you trim the sails somehow, so as to steady her a bit?"

"Not at present," said Adam.

"It's sickening down there—I can't breathe! I can't stand it, Drewe! It's killing me!" Tears were in his eyes; seeing which Adam hastily turned his own eyes from him.

"Come up here," said the skipper, kindly. "You'll feel all right in the air."

"There's nothing to hold to," wailed the wretched man. "It's like sitting on a board. I'm too weak—I should be washed off."

"We will lash you, if you like."

"And the cold's awful, on an empty stomach; it cuts like a knife."

"I can wrap you up warm, and put an oilskin over you. Here, come on!"

The crew were all on deck, and while Obadiah took charge of the idle vessel and surveyed the proceedings of his companions, his leathern countenance crumpled into a fixed grin. Adam and the young men made the passenger comfortable as they would have done a lady in like circumstances; cushioned and shawled him, and tucked him up, and covered him in, finally lashing him to the mast, clear of the slack boom, and leaving him to swing limply to the jerking rolls of the yacht, like a baby in a perambulator driven by a rough nurse over a newly-metalled road.

"If I was you," said Obadiah to his chief, as the latter passed him to go downstairs, "I'd top up all with a good stiff nobbler. Then he'd be real happy."

"I am going for it," returned Adam, smiling; and he presently returned with a dose which, combined with the fresh air and the state of his digestion, made the passenger not only happy, but fearless, and better company than he had promised to be under these sad conditions. He said again that, if ever he were a rich man, he would have a yacht of his own, and he proclaimed Adam "a jolly good fellow" in a song of many verses, all very much alike, a chorus being demanded at the end of each, and sometimes in the beginning and the middle also. Jim and Obadiah's wife's nephew answered to the call, and while they shouted the captain sat below, lest the sight of his displeasure should spoil their sport. For he had not meant to make Sarah's lover of so many years tipsy and ridiculous, and did not enjoy the spectacle. Alas, poor Sarah! Pity, he thought, that she did not come with

them, to see what stuff her hero was made of when his society trappings were pulled off.

There were troubled waters around the Cape and for the rest of the passage; and the Jonah of the company, having exhausted his artificial courage, sang and laughed no more. The lightness of the wind, puffing all ways at once, and the weight of the running ground swell, and the persistent fall of the glass from hour to hour made even Adam and Obadiah feel that they would have preferred to be at home; and when, towards the third night, the threatened blow came on—a real gale this time—and they were besought in tones of piercing anguish to put in somewhere, when it was quite impossible to do so, then the good young man who is the hero of this tale was guilty of language unfit for publication, even in his own plain-spoken books. Obadiah abetted him.

"I can't think," roared the old man, under cover of the howling wind, "why you bother yourself about such a —— ——, as ain't wuth it."

"I can't think why, either," Adam roared back; "unless it was to make things a bit easier for Miss French."

"Oh, ay," rejoined Obadiah, satisfied. He was the only one of the crew aware that they were not making the trip for pleasure.

A thoroughly "dirty night" off Cape Otway—off Moonlight Head, it was now—is a thing to try the mettle of the most hardened sea rover, as the ghosts of many wrecks do testify; and the little *Kittiwake* must have looked absurd indeed in a bird's-eye view of her. But fools ride safe where angels come to grief (to slightly vary the proverb); and that ambitious morsel, with mainsail balance reefed, storm staysail set and jib stowed, literally turned up her little nose at the Power which had crushed the *Loch Ard* to matchwood. She swung up the steep

sides of those mighty storm billows, and swooped down the backs of them into depths where she lost the wind and sat as at the bottom of a well, with everything flapping and shaking, only to swim lightly up again, and poise for another dive, like a feather-breasted gull—which at a little distance she might have been mistaken for. When the moon, emerging from the clouds, permitted them to witness these manœuvres as well as to feel them, the hearts of Adam and Obadiah sang in their breasts for joy and triumph.

"Ain't she a daisy?" the old man shouted, again and again.

"I'd take her anywhere—*any*where!" the skipper shouted, in reply.

But down in the cabin, rolling hither and thither, listening to slap of the spray upon the deck planks—"seas breaking over" he called it—and the yell of the gale, the passenger lay and writhed in mortal terror, groaning and crying, cursing and praying, repenting him of his sins because they had brought him to this pass, and offering bribes to his Maker to let him off this time. Let him fall into the hands of the police—let him go to prison for the term of his natural life—but not, oh, not into the jaws of death, the maw of the hungry sea!

It was a happy release for all parties when he was transferred to the *Dunstanborough*, which they picked up in the dusk of a fairly quiet evening, as she came out of Portland Bay. It had taken them so long to beat so far, that the ship had been obliged to start without him. Adam, being a business man, had given no orders for her to be detained for the convenience of the Melbourne passenger—certainly not, though he was Sarah's lover in a scrape; and as sea and wind permitted him to board his ark in the open, it was better that he should do so than be

taken into port. But he was deeply hurt by the discovery that he had so narrowly missed safety—that all he had endured would have gone for nothing in another half-hour. He seemed to think that his debt of gratitude to Adam was fairly cancelled by this circumstance.

"However, all's well that ends well," he said, affably; when the moment of parting came; and no sooner was he over the side of the *Dunstanborough*, with a substantial floor beneath him, than he cocked his hat, and twirled his moustaches, and remembered that he was a man once more.

The ship faded into the night, and Adam heaved a sigh of thankfulness when he saw it go.

"Shall you run in, sir—to telegraph to the young lady—and maybe get a few hours' sleep—or a bit of fresh bread?" Obadiah questioned, wistfully.

His captain looked at the sky, and sniffed the wind, and thought of his neglected business.

"No," said he; "let's get along home while the weather suits us."

And they had a beautiful run all night—four hours to Port Fairy, and five more to Port Campbell, sighting Otway Light at dawn; and by noon of that day they were struggling round the Cape, hoping to make port and their beds at Williamstown by the end of it.

However, at nine o'clock they were on the wrong side of Point Lonsdale still, and the ebb was so strong that they could make no headway against it. They had to stand off and on until past one in the morning, when the tide made; and then it was too late to think of getting home. They dropped anchor off Queenscliff in the small hours—a lovely moonlight lay upon fort and town—and Adam cast himself on a sofa bench and slept for half-a-dozen hours like a dead man.

Then, under weigh again, with whole sail and a south-west breeze, the *Kittiwake* went skimming over her familiar course, a mere bay yacht once more. After clearing Spit Light the big spinnaker was set, to drive against the strong ebb; and she was up to Pile Light half-an-hour before noon, and moored, stripped and locked up in time for her captain to get home and have a fresh-water wash before dinner.

As he swung from the little dinghy to the pier, Sarah leaned over to welcome him.

"Oh, thank God!" she cried, with a solemn, tragic face. "I have been watching the weather telegrams—hearing nothing from you; I have been frantic with anxiety! It wasn't until you were gone that I realised what you had undertaken, Adam!"

"Same here," he answered with a smile.

"You never should have done it."

"Well, I'm free to confess that I think it was an idiotic proceeding. However——"

"It was against your judgment, I am sure."

"Quite against my judgment—as far as he was concerned. But I did not do it for him. I did it for you, simply and solely; and for your sake, Sarah, I'd do it again to-morrow."

The crew of the *Kittiwake* here claimed his attention, so that she was unable to explain the mistake he still evidently laboured under. Attending to them, he did not notice how she quivered and blushed.

When they were again alone together, hurrying homeward side by side, he said to her abruptly, "Sarah, you owe me something for this."

"Oh," she murmured, "I *always* owe you—more than I can ever repay."

"No," he rejoined, turning the light of his spectacles

upon her red face. "You can repay me fifty thousand times over, and double that, if you will."

In the thoughtless moment it seemed that he *did* know, after all. Another thing that seemed was indicated by the answer that she made him—in breathless jerks.

"Here are the boys! They are coming to meet us. It must be dinner time."

"Shall I tell you how you can repay me, Sarah?"

"Oh, Adam——"

"By promising me to have nothing more to do with that worthless scamp. If you had only seen him on board——! Sarah, I'd give my right hand——! It is no proper sense of honour that holds you bound——"

She broke in with a joyful cry.

"But I am *not* bound! I have broken it off—he ought to have told you—everybody knows it now—we are no longer engaged to each other. He is in love with Bessie Alderson."

"How? What? Where? When? Oh, my dear——"

"A long time ago I began to feel that—that—but I'll tell you all about it after dinner."

For the boys had fallen upon them. Their arms were round Adam's arms, and his waist and his neck, and they were crying out to him that he was a mean sneak to go for such a gorgeous cruise without them.

"We *should* have enjoyed it so!" howled Bunny.

"It *would* have been so awfully jolly!" wailed Billy.

"Oh, it would—it would, indeed!" assented Adam, with a laugh. "What's for dinner, boys? I'm one ache all over with hunger. Ahi, how nice it is to get back again—to get back like this! There's no place like home, is there?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHILE her relations and friends were telling each other how sorry they were for her, and meeting her with half-averted eyes and subdued embarrassed voices—thinking that surely the disastrous ending of her long engagement must have broken her heart—Sarah's heart was rising like a cork in water, whole and sound; fresh life was pulsing through it with every breath she drew. Many a long day had come and gone since she had felt, without permitting herself to acknowledge it, that her supposed support had become a burden, sinking her to muddy depths; and the release that she had not asked for, and that yet had been given her, made her feel like a prisoner unexpectedly set free.

In the land of romance, the true woman loves her worthless man, in spite of all his worthlessness, to the bitter end; in this common world of common people she does not. She sticks to him—which is another thing—for various silly but honourable reasons, and she *seems* to love him; but that love is maternal wholly. The other love implies respect. No flesh-and-blood woman, of the best sort of women, gives it to a man whom she cannot look up to; if she would, she could not. And that is why Sarah, who was even as ourselves, only, probably, better, did not weep and lament for Lovell Richardson when he turned out badly, but grieve as a disappointed mother—

perhaps I should say as a disappointed good stepmother—for a prodigal son, who disgraces the family, and at the same time removes a contaminating presence from a respectable house.

She was very much upset and ashamed; very much concerned for the ultimate fate of the deserter, who could be separated from the present but not from the past; still more concerned for the immediate fate of the *Kittiwake* while the wintry seas had hold of her; very uncomfortable in a great many ways; but it was all mere froth on the surface, subsiding as the excitement passed. Inwardly, she felt the serenity of a redeemed soul. She told her mother so, in the strict confidence between them, ascribing her evident happiness to her recovered liberty and the providential rectification of a proved mistake. But there was another explanation lying deep down under that one. A feeling of delicacy prevented her from even owning to herself that it was there—at present—so, of course, she did not mention it.

But when she heard Adam's step in the house, on the very morning after his return from his long cruise—at the absurd hour of eleven, when he should have been at his town office, overtaking the work that must have accumulated in his absence—she thought the time had already come for confessing the secret of her courage under mortifying disaster. The boys were at school, her mother in Melbourne, herself alone in the sitting-room, patching Billy's ever-damaged knickerbockers after making the pudding for dinner; she knew that Adam knew this, and made sure that he had come back because he knew it. What else should he have come for?

She schooled her trembling frame to a reposeful attitude; and, at his entrance, looked up to inquire, with an air of unconcern, what the matter was. But in a moment

the flying colour left her face, and she put the question in her natural voice. For it was plain enough that he was in no dallying mood.

"I have had a letter," he said, in a stern but excited way. "I found it on my office table. It was sent to the care of the firm, by my publishers. I ought to have had it days ago."

"Oh!" she ejaculated, sympathetically, laying down her work. "Some bad news, I fear?"

"Not bad, but important—of the very last importance. About *her*."

"Oh!" cried Sarah again, less distinctly than before; and she felt the sword of Fate go through her, wondering that she had not all along foreseen what was so likely—so almost certain—to happen at just this particular juncture, when one was daring to expect so much.

In silence he drew a letter from its envelope, and handed it to her.

"Am I to read it?" she asked, taking it shrinkingly.

He nodded, and turned to the fire, laying his arm along the mantel-shelf and his forehead on his arm. From beneath his arm he stared at the red coals and his glowing imaginations, while she read the letter at the table behind him.

The address that headed it was, "Sea View Villa, New Dunstanborough."

"I never heard of *New* Dunstanborough," Sarah remarked, flutteringly.

"It's since my time—a sort of suburb, I suppose."

"And 'Harry P. Bowen'—is that her husband?"

"No, her son. Read it."

She did so without further words, shading her eyes with her hand.

"MY DEAR SIR: I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in writing to you; but I have heard my mother often speak of you as a friend of hers, and I thought you might know of some berth that would suit me in Australia, where I should like to go, for there seems to be no opening here, there are too many applicants for everything you apply for, and you are crowded out of everything. I am told that things are bad in Australia; but an Australian friend of mine says that the worst is made of it by interested parties, who are jealous of your splendid country, and that there is plenty of room for good men there, and have always had the wish to see it. I am seventeen next birthday, and have had the best of educations, bookkeeping, &c., and could turn my hand to anything. Since my father died, about six years ago, we have had a struggle to make ends meet, for he was rather given to extravagance and let his life insurance run out, so that all there was for us was my mother's little money under the marriage settlement, which does not come to a hundred a year. She used to take a few pupils to eke out with; but her sight was never good, and she is now quite blind, I am sorry to say; and I think I could do more for her if I could get an opening in Australia than here, for you can make money so much easier than here,—Richard Delavel for instance, who went away without a penny, as I have been told, and died a millionaire. An aunt of mine, who is well off, would, I am sure, take her and my sister to live with her till I can give them a better home, and that would leave me quite free, and also keep mother from feeling lonely. I may say that my mother does not know that I am applying to you. I thought it better not to tell her, as I am old enough now to decide for myself, and I am sure you will not take it amiss from what I have heard of your kindness to her when she was young.

We have all your books, and admire them very much, and she still likes us to read them aloud to her. As I do not know your address I am sending this through your publishers, and hope it will reach you safely, and that you will favour me with a reply at your earliest convenience. Any clerkship or place on a station would do to begin with. I am not at all particular, and would do my best to give every satisfaction. I would start at once and chance it, working my passage, only my mother would not like me to go with nothing to go to; and I would rather settle it without unpleasantness than go against her and leave her fretting, as she is not very strong, and of course feels things more than when she was young and had her sight. Trusting you will pardon the liberty I am taking in addressing you, and hoping that my request will meet with your favourable consideration.

"I am, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

"HARRY P. BOWEN."

Sarah read it twice over, and tried in vain to think of something to say about it. Adam wheeled round suddenly, and their eyes met.

"Nice boy, isn't he?" said Adam, with a sharp edge to his voice.

"I think he seems a nice boy," faltered Sarah.

"He is her only son, you see—for whom, as I very well know, she has spent her heart's blood—and now that she is a widow, and poor, and blind, he wants to desert her."

"Oh, no; he wants to make her a home, Adam."

"He wants to see the world and have adventures—that's what he wants; to be what he calls 'quite free.'"

"And that is natural."

"Oh, quite so. And as soon as he has fulfilled his

intention of getting money and a home, it will he his own home that he will get, you'll see, not hers."

"Well, that's natural too—though it might not be so."

"Perfectly natural. From the point of view of Harry Bowens, father and son, it is the business of the wife and mother to serve them as long as they want her, and never mind what becomes of her after that."

"This young fellow evidently does mind. He is anxious that she should not fret and be lonely."

"Therefore he shunts her upon the well-off aunt who doesn't seem to have done anything to save her from working her eyes and her health to pieces. I know those aunts. They handed her to anybody who would take care of her at the break-up party, only too glad to be rid of her. I am not going to have her left to the tender mercies of an aunt."

He glared through his spectacles at the blank wall. Sarah looked down at the tablecloth, pale and powerless, well aware of what was happening. Suddenly he held his hand for the letter, full of hurry; and she gave it to him.

"How shall you answer it?" she asked, in a dull way.

"I have answered it," he replied. "I telegraphed just now, before leaving town."

She drew in her breath quickly.

"What did you say?"

"I said I was returning to England immediately, and would discuss the matter on my arrival."

"Oh, Adam!"

"Why, what did you think I would do?" he returned, as if surprised at her tone. But perhaps he was not so surprised as he wished to believe, and something troubled his mind that he would not inquire into—because it was now too late, and he had no time to think of anything but

Fidelia's need of him. "Don't you understand that she is a widow—six years a widow, though I never knew it! —widow of a man who spent his all for himself, and left her to shift as she could, grudging even a few pounds for a life insurance? Don't you hear that she is *blind?* Really blind at last, and with nobody to take care of her —only me! This is my chance, Sarah. This boy, though he doesn't know it, is the instrument of Fate. I shall join that boat at Adelaide."

He pointed from the window, and her eyes followed his across the water to where the P. & O. steamer lay at the Port Melbourne pier. She had only just come in from Sydney—rather earlier than usual—Wednesday noon; in three days she would go out again; in one week she would leave Adelaide. In one week at the outside—practically in six days, or three—from the receipt of young Bowen's letter, Adam would be off to his old love; and nobody would have him, or any share in him, again.

"Therefore," groaned Sarah to herself, with pangs unspeakable, "he can never, never, never have cared as I thought he cared for me!"

But she kept her emotions down, and her brave head up. What was it to her whether he had cared or not? She sternly reminded herself that it was, of course, nothing to her.

"I must go to Sydney to-night," said Adam, pocketing the letter and looking round for his hat. "I must arrange matters with Rutledge. It will take all my time. Will you help me to pack up here this afternoon? I'm going now to settle little scores in the town, in case I should be rushed at the last. I will be back to lunch."

Mrs. French came over by the 12 o'clock boat, fagged but cheerful, and laden with little parcels. She knew, she said, that Adam would give her a good scolding for

not having them sent to the office for him to bring, and seemed to triumph in having disobeyed him. The boys, returning from school to their dinner, had joined her in Nelson Place, but had not thought of taking any of her burdens from her; they only did that when Adam made them.

The consternation of all three when Sarah broke the news of his imminent departure was ludicrous. He returned while they were still too stunned for speech; but as soon as he came amongst them the old lady fell upon his shoulder weeping, and the boys howled and railed at him, in the tone they used on Saturday afternoons, when crying "Shame" on a football umpire.

He took them out into the garden to explain.

"I *have* to go, Billy—I really am wanted in England, Bunny—most important business. But look here—I'll leave you the *Kittiwake*. She shall be all your own, share and share between you, when I am gone. I will engage a sailing master to take you out until you are old enough to manage her for yourselves. And"—fumbling—"here's something for your pockets. I shall write to you often, and send you parcels every now and again. You just think of what you'd like, and let me know."

Thus he subdued them to a mood of comparative resignation, and on returning to the house they managed to eat a hearty meal. Of course they strenuously objected to go to school in the afternoon—on Adam's last day—and were difficult to convince that they would make the task of packing, with only a couple of hours to do it in, impossible. They said they could "help no end"; but their elders knew better, and Adam found a way to get rid of them peaceably. With visions of a free hand at the tuck shop, they bade him an affectionate farewell, and set off as usual; and they never realised that, in all proba-

bility, they would never see his ugly, but beloved, face again.

When they were gone, he told their mother and sister of his bequest to them, and was greatly disappointed to find that they would not be allowed to accept it. Mrs. French, now fairly composed, and hard at work for him, pleaded their wilful ways and the risks to life involved, declaring that she would never know a moment's peace when they were out of her sight if they had the yacht to play with; and Sarah, as he saw, was too proud to be beholden to him for so costly a gift. If he had had millions per annum, while her family wanted bread, she would not have taken, or allowed them to take, an unearned sovereign from him; it was one of the perverse and exasperating "fads" for which he loved her.

He represented that his word had been passed, and he must redeem it in one way or another; but he had to leave unsatisfied, forming secret plans for compensating the disinherited ones later on. The *Kittiwake* was to be sold, and the proceeds, the rightful property of the boys, to be given to the poor or thrown into the sea—whichever she pleased; and the same arrangements were made for the things he left in the house. He could not pack them—he did not want them; and if Mrs. French was so unkind as to refuse to keep a few trifles to remember him by, she could just fling them into the street. A bundle of photographs and his clothes were all he could be burdened with, and of these several suits that no thrifty mother of schoolboys could bear to waste upon beggars at the door were cast aside for that purpose.

By a frantic effort on the part of the three, assisted by Rebecca (who wept copiously, but was comforted by a parting present, equal to half a year's good wages), he got off by a train which landed him at Spencer Street about

half-an-hour before the Sydney express started. To save that half-hour, Mrs. French and Sarah accompanied him into town; and they all tried to think of appropriate last words, but could not in the distracting circumstances. But the two dear women looked at him, as he was borne away, with eyes that haunted him painfully through the uncomfortable night.

On the following afternoon, having lunched at his Sydney Club and "arranged matters with Rutledge," he had another fit of heartache—Fidelia notwithstanding. But Susan Rutledge, who knew nothing of Sarah French, was warmly sympathising, enthusiastically convinced of his unclouded happiness and complete good fortune.

"Oh," she exclaimed, when she had heard all about it—and only then did her cheerful face grow sad—"Oh, Adam, how glad *he* would have been! How I wish he could have foreseen it! He felt for you so much, always. He was able to feel—because he *knew*."

"Yes," sighed Adam. "I never missed him so much as I do to-day."

"Would you," she said, in a low voice, looking away from him, "would you like to go to the camp once more?"

His eager murmur answered the question almost before it was put, and she sent an order for the boat to be brought to the landing stage, and went upstairs for coat and hat.

After that they scarcely spoke to each other until the camp was reached. She with the tiller ropes and he with the oars, they glided through the rose-red glory of just such an evening as Richard would have chosen for the same journey, had he still been with them; and they were held silent by their thoughts of him—thoughts better understood without words than with.

It was winter in Victoria now; but here it was dawning spring, and the day had been fine—enough to say of Sydney Harbour to those who know it. Never will Adam forget his last sight of those enchanting shores, transfigured in the low sunlight, from which their loveliest robes were always woven. In the gallery of memory it hangs, a masterpiece of colour; and he realises that life is not all it might have been, when he tries to describe it to Fidelia.

As the boat swept into view of the hills behind the camp, the pink and gold was changing to blue and silver —sun and moon were in the sky together; and before it came to moorings, the South Head Light, like a bright sword, was flashing in the twilight, and the velvet shadows of the night were looming near.

"Ease her," said Sue.

He paddled gently, and ceased rowing, without looking behind him. Her gaze over his shoulder was fixed upon the spot where the bo'sun's lantern used to wink above the trees, and her quiet eyes were such wells of sorrow that he could not bear to picture what they saw. He floated up to the landing stage, and fastened the rope to its accustomed post. The bo'sun was not there to receive them; within a few weeks he had followed his master, and the camp was quite deserted. Sue had made up her mind that no one should live there again. "Not in *that* camp," she said.

Already the tents were removed. One or two short piles sticking out of the ground were all that remained of Richard's sea bedroom, his "lair," in which he had died of his heart's wounds. The flagstaff was lying with other poles under the hedge; the old flag halliards bound them together. The little garden was obliterated; beds and paths had been dug up, and levelled down, to become wild bush once more.

"It does look dreadful," said Sue, reading Adam's thought. "But we are going away, and I could not leave it as it was, to be jumped by strangers."

"No," said Adam.

They stood silent in that utter desolation, imagining the past. Then they stepped over the loose mould where the marigolds use to grow, and through the gap in the hedge, to the sandy shore; and there it was all as it used to be, and even more beautiful, if possible. The moon hung low in the clear sky, which was still blue and luminous; and the moonlight and the electric beam that traversed it showed them every feature of the familiar scene in its most touching aspect—as the bright eyes of the discoverer had loved it most—full of poignant suggestions of his dark hours and his death, and the emptiness he had left behind him.

There had been winter gales along the coast, and the sound of the surf outside the Heads was like the sound of a strong wind, playing bass to the singing treble of the waves running at their feet; and a real wind, a delicate spring wind, made an æolian harp of the trees behind them, breathing a soft dirge for the departed days.

"He ought to have been buried here," said Adam.

"Yes," said Sue. "He and she together."

"If we could have kept the place for them."

"Which we couldn't. And it does not matter. I only wish I knew that they were together now!"

She looked at the pellucid sky—the revolving light swept her upturned face, and showed the hopeless eyes—and remembered how he had faced that pathless Infinite unbeguiled by any illusions.

"He had three happy years, at any rate," Adam murmured, comfortingly; and he added, after a pause, "I wonder if I shall have as much?"

"Ten times three, I trust," she answered.

"And if I shall be—all that—to her?"

"And if she will be all that to you?"

"Ah, as to *that*—if I know myself——"

"You don't know yourself," Mrs. Rutledge broke in. "You have not the least idea of your own worth—of what a fine man you are. I hope she is half as worthy to be your wife as you are to be the husband of the best woman ever born."

He made an inarticulate noise, deprecating this monstrous view of him; but proper speech failed in the swelling of his heart, which seemed to rise into his throat and choke him. Her voice was so true that he was fain to trust it, and the friendly hand held out to him as she spoke sent the words right home.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, not only to her, but to the divine Unknown behind her, he took her hand in his, and stooping low, reverently kissed it.

"Everything I ever longed for seems to come to me now," he said, when he had swallowed down his heart, which was a mere bag of tears. "I am afraid to believe in it."

"You may believe in this—that only the crops we have sown come up," was her quiet answer.

And then they turned to look once more upon the camp—what used to be the camp—before he left it for ever; visions of the vanished figure and the vanished tents, and the reality of the hills and trees that had nursed and sheltered them—ghostly enough in the gleam of the lighthouse ray. As that weird glare passed slowly by, every little twig and flower showed itself, and Adam picked one that still lingered on the site of the big tent, by a stump of the old doorstep where Richard and he used to sit and talk; and he laid it between the leaves of his

pocket-book. During five revolutions of the light he silently photographed the scene; then Sue whispered to him that they must go. For there was still a world of living interests behind them, and dinner had to be considered.

And that was Adam's real good-bye to Sydney and his Australian life. All the next day, until the express left in the afternoon, he was too deeply immersed in counting-house business to have leisure to think or feel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

When Adam arrived at Spencer Street from Sydney, he had but five and twenty minutes in which to catch the mail boat, which was to leave Port Melbourne at noon. He might have had a quiet Sunday and Monday at Williamstown, and gone overland to Adelaide and joined her there; but he could not, he thought, face the trial of having to say good-bye to Sarah all over again. The whole of his luggage had been sent on board, save a Gladstone bag that he carried with him; all his Melbourne affairs had been wound up, and a last explanatory letter to Mrs. French had been despatched; so he considered it better to get away at once than unnecessarily to prolong a painful business. Jumping upon the penny train with his bag in his hand, he reached the other station just in time for the 11.45 train to the Port, which allowed him five minutes to run down the long pier and climb the ship's side before the hour of departure struck.

However, his design was frustrated to a certain extent. As he rushed from the covered way connecting platform and pier, he perceived the *Gem* hauling into her berth, as usual; and looking a last good-bye to her as he sped past, he saw, amongst the more or less familiar figures of old neighbours streaming up from her deck, the most familiar one of all—Sarah, with a face so pale, so old, so hard-set, that he scarcely knew it for hers. He stopped as if shot,

red with surprise; and she smiled, as if suddenly galvanised, and waved her hand towards the pier end, calling to him to go on, or he would be too late. But he waited for her.

"There's time enough," he said, gripping her hand so that the bones ground together. "They are seldom punctual to a minute. I never thought of this, dear, or I would not have shaved it so fine."

"I just thought I might as well come over and wave a handkerchief," she said, with affected nonchalance. "You wouldn't see a handkerchief from the house."

"Please don't wave a handkerchief," he returned. "Stand where I can see you as long as possible—that's all that's necessary. Oh, my dear Sarah, this makes going away rather miserable——"

She laughed, or sobbed—it was difficult to tell which—and they hurried along between the interlacing rails and shunting trucks, and were nearly run over without knowing it.

"It isn't those that go away that are miserable—they have new things to interest them—new things to do and see—things to go to," she said. "It's those that stay behind—to emptiness——"

"Not emptiness," he broke in. "Your turn will come, sooner or later, as mine has."

"Oh, I suppose so! What a splendid boat she is, Adam! I wonder if there's time for me to go on board? They have not done loading yet, and I am sure that crowd of people on deck are not all passengers."

"Come on," said Adam. And they squeezed up the gangway together, through a packed doorway, and into a soft deep seat in a curved corner of what might be called the outer drawing-room, separated from the room where the piano was by the staircases to the saloon. The seat

was upholstered in beautiful raised brocade, of just the right blues to go with the terra-cotta carpet and the cream-white panels and gold freizes of the walls;—a luxurious seat to sit in of a fine night, listening to music in the distance and the sound of the sea—visible through the doorway, perhaps with moonlight on it. "But, oh, for the dear *Kittiwake!*" groaned Sarah in her heart. "Oh, for the little cabin just large enough for two, and the happy Saturday afternoons that would recur no more!"

The splendours of brass and silk, the patterns carved upon the ivory wainscot, ran together in her swimming eyes; and she clenched her teeth and her hands in the effort to keep the sobs struggling in her breast from bursting out. "What a fool I am!" she gasped spasmodically, feigning to laugh.

Adam responded merely by blowing his nose—that short, stout nose which she had long ceased to compare with the classic profiles of other men.

Then—before there was time for a word of farewell—the signal sounded for strangers to leave. The last truck was empty, the last hatch was closed; already people were securing seats in the special, from which to view the ship's departure.

"Well——!"

The kiss that had so often been thought of, but never yet bestowed, loomed imminent, and terrified them. Sarah saw it first, and violently controlled herself—a true act of heroism under the circumstances—determined that nothing should be left behind for either of them to regret or be ashamed of. She jumped to her feet, strangling the sobs that were trying to strangle her, so that they lay dead in a moment; and she held out her hand with a smile that was almost natural.

"Well, we won't say good-bye, Adam. You will be

coming back some day perhaps—or I might go home—who knows? It is the unexpected that happens."

"Oh, I wish you would!" he cried, as he crushed her fingers in spasmodic grips, and showed tears on the inch of cheek between the rim of his spectacles and his moustache. "Oh, how I wish you would!"

"Some of these fine days perhaps—when, as you say—my time comes——"

"And meanwhile you will write to me? You will write to me often? I shan't be out of mind when I am out of sight, shall I?"

"Ah, it is I that shall be that—not you!"

"Never! Never!"

The crowd, pouring to the only gangway left down, wrenched them from each other. For a moment their strong hands held, at arm's length, stemming the tide; and they tried to speak with their eyes, but their tears were too thick to see through. Tears were not dangerous now, and hearts were bursting for relief.

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

"Take care of yourself!"

"Oh, yes."

And the strong hands unclasped and dived for pocket-handkerchiefs—but not to wave farewells with. A sailor put his arm round Sarah, and lowered her to another sailor, who did the same; and the crowd on the pier swallowed her.

Adam turned, and fought his way down the grand carved staircase and some long passages, until he found his cabin—a cabin that he had taken whole—in order to hide the shame of his childish blubberings in the privacy for which he had paid his fare twice over.

And as he opened the door of his cabin a delicious per-

fume greeted him. He stopped to look and sniff, and saw a great bunch of spring flowers lying on his bed. They were fresh and dewy, the flowers of to-day; and he knew them all. Had he not dug and watered and weeded and pruned them, since most of them were born? Their countenances were as familiar as if they were his own children. The violets were from the warm border under the windows of his old bedroom, the daphne from the bush at the corner of the verandah, the lovely rosebuds from the trellis of the summer-house—Sarah's favourite roses, and the summer-house that he had built for her—the precious ferns from the pots in her little greenhouse, which she used to forbid him to gather from, even for a small button-hole; and she had gathered them for him, the best of everything, and brought them here! She had been over by an early boat and gone back, and then came again at the last moment to see him go—doubtless not intending to let him know of it. Dear, dear Sarah! Surely she was the dearest woman in the whole world! Except, of course, Fidelia.

He put the flowers in a rack, in a tumbler of water, preserving a choice few to wear in his coat; which few, before he pinned them in, received the kiss that, for Fidelia's sake, he had (so narrowly) withheld from the giver. And if, for an hour or so, the giver was more prominent in his thoughts than the beloved one whom he had not seen for over twenty years—well, that is only to say that he was a human being, even as ourselves.

When he went on deck again, the great ship was slowly drawing from the pier, and he fancied he saw Sarah's blue hat speeding over the water on one of the Customs' launches. The *Gem* was at Williamstown, just starting on another trip; he was glad she had not had to wait for it. Lovingly he looked at the dear white paddle-boxes and

twin red funnels, and thought of the innumerable journeys they had made on that old boat together, wet and fine, winter and summer; and he almost wept again to think that she would ferry them no more—that Sarah would go alone in future! And there was the little *Kittiwake*—dearer still, and more pathetic in its suggestions!—lying over at her old anchorage; just a sketch in two strokes, one horizontal and one perpendicular, but with how much unseen detail for imagination to paint in! And this was Saturday afternoon; and Saturday week at this time he and Sarah were having a cold-meat lunch, while the boys hoisted sail for the weekly cruise—that cruise which they had so little expected was to be the end of the series. Who would own the *Kittiwake* now, and race her against the crack yachts? He could see the *Kiwi's* jib going up, and the *Magpie* was already standing off the breakwater, with everything set and full, leaning to the most beautiful sailing wind that they had had for weeks. But the *Kittiwake* remained a sketch in two strokes, for she had no master now; and he could imagine her feeling deserted and disconsolate, like a new-made widow, and had a pang of remorse for having abandoned her.

However, ere she was out of sight—she, and Williamstown, and Sarah's blue hat—he had begun to plan a new boat in his mind, larger, handsomer, costlier, than anything that Williamstown could show; with steam perhaps, so that Fidelia could be taken to warm climates and pretty places without delay when she desired it. The new boat was, of course, to be a passenger boat, and not a racer. His racing days were over.

And so he passed away into his new world; and Sarah went back to the old one which he had left so empty—so unexpectedly, so irretrievably despoiled!

The boys stood on the pier above the steps where the

launch landed her. Their idle hands were in their pockets, their faces were as long as fiddles, their tempers were dreadful. They had seen the four slim spars and the two fat black funnels glide solemnly out of sight, as one sees a hearse going to the cemetery, bearing away the friend who had made Saturday holidays so happy for them; and now they saw the *Kittiwake*, in which they might have been skippers both, idly rocking in the suggestive breeze, lost to them and of no good to anybody else! And it was all Sarah's fault! They growled at her anew, in the bitterness of their hearts, and informed her as she came up the steps, that she was to hold herself answerable for any mischief they might fall into for want of the rational amusement she had deprived them of.

"Well, at least," she answered wearily, "I shall not be responsible for you drowning yourselves."

"Drowning your grandmother!" they retorted, savagely, and asked the Customs' officials whether the *Kittiwake*, built as she was, *could* capsize under any conceivable mismanagement. Not that they didn't know how to manage a yacht as well as another—it would be a pity if they didn't, after all the practice they had had. But some people thought themselves so clever!

Well, a little more or less was of no account; they could not make her unhappier than she was. Merely inquiring if they had had their dinner, and thankfully finding that such was the case, she passed on quickly and went home; and there she found her mother crying over her knitting at the fireside. Mrs. French bravely tried to conceal the fact, and her daughter to ignore it; but their first words undid them.

"Alone, mother?"

"Yes, dear; the boys had something and have gone out. I'm glad—they were rather tiresome in the house.

Somehow they seem to have got so cross since—since he went."

And here she gave a sniff, and Sarah gave another; and the next moment they were crying and sobbing in each other's arms.

"Oh, mother!"

"The h-house doesn't seem the s-same, does it?"

"It never will—it never will again!"

"I f-feel as if I'd lost a s-son!"

"He was like a brother to me—only no real brothers are so good!"

"Never cross to anybody! Never thinking of himself! Always helping at every turn! Oh, bless his dear kind heart! He does deserve to be happy, if ever anybody ever did; and she, poor thing——"

"She isn't a poor thing. She would be rich with him, if she was deaf and dumb as well as blind. So would anybody."

"Well, *I* think so; but then I'm an old woman, and when you get old you get to feel that people's looks don't matter much. Inside is of more consequence than outside."

"Of course it is. Only fools think about people's looks—when they are people like him. And when they grow to know better, then it's too late. We never learn the value of things till we have lost them!"

Mrs. French understood, but could not put her feelings into words. She tightened her arms round her daughter's waist, and Sarah seized the grey head and hugged it, pressing indiscriminate kisses upon face, hair, and cap; and they wept for some minutes in silence, save for little moanings and croonings of the surcharged maternal heart. Then the girl shook herself upright, and dashed the tears from her eyes.

"She is more worthy of him than I—she must be," Sarah declared, bravely; "and of course he loves her best. He only fancied that he cared about me—she was the real one always; it was easy to see that when he got her boy's letter. It is a good thing I did not help him to make a mistake. It is all right now—quite right. He belonged to her, and she to him; and it had lasted more than twenty years! Who else would have been so faithful, so true?—for with me it was only a passing fancy, because we lived in the house together, and were such good friends—because he thought her altogether lost and gone. It was just like him to go straight off to her; I am proud of him for it. Oh, yes, he does indeed deserve to be happy! He has had a long, lonely time—while none of us seemed to care for him—and she always cared—lucky woman! her blindness saved her from being such a fool as I was. We won't grudge him his reward, mother. Our loss is his gain."

"But, oh, what a husb——"

"Don't, don't! I can't bear to think what it would have been. Not to me only—to you and the boys as well! Oh, don't cry! Don't cry over spilt milk! You mustn't make me cry—it's too degrading. After all, we have got each other; I am not going to leave you. I am not going to inflict an inferior son-in-law on you—after him."

"You don't suppose I want to see you an old maid?"

"It doesn't matter how you *see* me. You said you didn't consider people's looks. You need not mind my being an old maid if I don't."

"But you do."

"Oh, I do! I do! But he has spoiled me for any ordinary man, and only ordinary men are left. However——"

She shook herself afresh.

"However," Mrs. French suggested, "it may turn out, after all, that she doesn't wish to marry again."

"*That* wouldn't alter it."

"She may have loved Mr. Bowen—she may have given up all thought of Adam—except his books——"

"She hasn't forgotten anything. It's not the sort of thing to be forgotten, especially by one who had not seen his face."

"And he may find that he has been cherishing a delusion——"

"It is we who are cherishing delusions. Come, we must respect ourselves. We must keep our imaginations from running away with us. Don't let us talk of it any more, mother. Let's have a nice cup of tea."

They had a cup of tea—a very nice one, hot and fresh—and it comforted them immensely. It enabled them to discuss the domestic situation with calmness, and even with interest, once more.

"I suppose," Sarah said, "we shall not require to take another lodger, shall we?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. French. "No more lodgers—after him."

"Then I suppose I might—it is not so large as mine, but I like the outlook better—change into his room?"

"Yes, dear, of course, if you prefer it. It certainly has a nicer view."

Sarah busied herself for the rest of the day in sorting drawers and moving small furniture, so that when she went to bed she could lay her head upon the pillow where Adam had been used to lay his. This—though it caused her to weep as if it were a full cistern and she its open tap—comforted her more than many cups of tea.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHEN we go "home" after twenty years we do not go back to our old place. There is no old place; it has been washed away—grown over—obliterated. Much pathos hangs about this fact, which is melancholy enough; but it should not be forgotten (though it mostly is) that we could not take it if it were there—and if we could, we wouldn't. For we too have suffered the sea-change. The old person that fitted into and filled it has also been wiped out.

Adam felt this when he landed in London, and sat down to consider where his investigations should begin. He was at home in the abstract, breathing his native air—it was late autumn, and foggy—but no "hallowed spot" drew him, as the particular nest-hole draws the migrating bird. He was his own man, in his own hands, as detached as a ghost revisiting its grave. Under all the circumstances, he much preferred to be so.

Gran'pa, of course, was long since dead. Aunt Priscilla's husband had the shop, and an assistant lived there; Aunt Priscilla, a spectacled old dame, aged out of all knowledge, was taken care of by her grandchildren, as she had taken care of gran'ma, at a comfortable villa on the London Road—a present from Adam. And Aunt Harriet was a professional nurse, conducting a private hospital in

a manufacturing town; the materials for which enterprise had also been Adam's gift.

Overjoyed would they have been to know of his arrival, and to welcome him to their bosoms;—but not, as he knew, for pure love's sake. Oh, no; for the benefit of the children, and the grinding of all kinds of axes.

And in Dunstanborough, he was nothing to anybody, and nobody was anything to him.

His mother was dead. She was a gossiping and mischief-making old woman, with a shrivelled skin and a butter-colored wig, a grandmother several times over, when the event occurred. Her husband, overwhelmed by pecuniary misfortunes and acute rheumatism, incurred in her service, had left his farm to end his miserable days in a back street of Lyntham under Guy Vavasour's roof (which arrangement, it may be here said, was altered as soon as Adam heard of it); and a son of John Morrison's, assisted by his cousin in Sydney, had become the squire's tenant in Holditch's place.

And the squire now was the parson, Mr. Delavel-Pole-Delavel; and his wife, that was Miss Katherine, was the only member of the old family left in the old hall. She was the one thing less congenial than a parson to Adam's taste—a parson-imitator; and they ruled the village, on a strictly ecclesiastical basis between them.

Mr. Plunket, deaf, blind, and helpless as a child, still lingered at lovely Thurlow; but all his former children were married and scattered; and a big and masterful second wife and somewhat numerous second family were in full possession of all that had been theirs, except their father's secret heart.

Old Dunstanborough was outwardly unchanged, but there was a new Dunstanborough a few miles off, where, in Adam's young days, there had been nothing but beach

and cliffs, and fields above the cliffs, and a single ancient inn, chiefly patronised by brides and bridegrooms. New Dunstanborough was the late squire's commercial enterprise, his little fashionable watering-place, wherefrom he had drawn the funds to restore his house, which had been so beautiful in its dilapidation in his father's time, and provided an ample revenue for the son, who did not live to spend it. No sharper contrast could be found in England than that between the two Dunstanboroughs, old and new,—the one so mellow and the other so raw; and the late lord of the manor had been well advised to separate them as far as the limits of his estate permitted. Not only had he done that; he had carefully supplemented the cheap shops and stucco-fronted lodging-houses with a brand new church, gay with patterns in coloured bricks all over it, so as to keep his family mausoleum apart and undefiled and the irreverent barbarian in his proper place, if possible.

It was in this crude new settlement, where all but the bare site was strange to him, that Adam was directed to search for his only home—Fidelia. He was informed that Harry Bowen's widow had had a little school for the children of the new residents, while her sight remained to her; and that since her blindness she had taken in such lodgers as were content to board in a hugger-mugger style, in consideration of low charges and her former condition of life. Just at present (he was told at the hotel where he put up) she had no lodgers, though it was still the season and the place was fairly full. People could not stand being "done for" by a slipshod slattern of a maid-of-all-work and a girl who thought herself too fine to sweep and cook.

"No one could be more particular than Mrs. Bowen, sir, as long as she could see; it ain't her fault that the

house is so dirty now that it isn't fit for decent folks to stay in."

Adam shuddered, and left his informant hastily, that he might hear no more. And ten minutes later he was reading the numbers on the doors of a row of small white houses, some of which were smart and some shabby, though all were built to be exactly alike. And quite the shabbiest—because the windows were dirty and the blinds askew—was number seven, the goal of all his travels. It had a minute strip of neglected garden in front of it, enclosed by an iron railing and gate; and over the gate hung a dirty girl in curl-papers, jesting with a butcher boy. The latter took himself off on the visitor's approach; the former remained to be accosted.

"Can you tell me," inquired Adam, "whether Mrs. Bowen lives here?"

"She du," the Norfolk girl replied, while her saucy eyes roved over his flushing face. "Did you want to see her?"

"Er—er—is Master Bowen in?"

"No, he's out."

"Isn't there a Miss Bowen?"

"She's out, too. They've gone for a sail."

"Is there any one else at home?"

"Only missus. She's at home. She never goes out."

"I—er—I'm an old friend of hers," said Adam, full of internal tremblings, due to the thumping of his heart. "I should like to see her, if she is disengaged."

"I'll go and inquire. What name?"

"No, don't go. If you'll kindly show me the way, I will introduce myself. I am a very old friend."

"I don't think she'd like that. She's blind, you know."

"I know. But she won't mind me. I will take the responsibility."

"Oh, well—there's the room," and she led him up a narrow, dirty passage to a certain door, edged with a cloud of her own black and greasy finger-marks. "In there."

"It is not a bedroom, I suppose?" gasped Adam, as she was passing on to her kitchen, humming a street tune. "She's—she's dressed and able to see people."

The girl nodded and disappeared. Adam tapped on the grimy door, and held his breath to listen for the response within.

When he heard Fidelia's fluty voice, unchanged, he thrilled as if it had been an electric shock. She did not say "Come in," but "Who's there?" And as he could not explain himself with the door between them, he silently turned the handle, and entered.

And there she sat—still so fair in her lover's eyes that the first thing to strike him was the unworthiness and unsuitableness of her surroundings to be the frame for such a figure. The room she sat in was neat in its arrangements; but the defects which she could not see,—dirt, and stains, and vulgar colours,—degraded it, showing him one of the saddest sides of her misfortune. On the ink-splashed magenta table-cloth was spread a newspaper, and on the newspaper lay forks and spoons that glittered in the dusty light. Plate-powder and wash-leathers, lying beside her, showed that she had done what she could to prove her house the home of a lady; all else indicated that her helplessness had deprived her of the respect due to her as such, instead of gaining a double share, as it ought to have done.

Her gown was of black stuff, puritanically plain, green-hued and rusty; the tucker at the neck had come grey from the wash-tub and brown from the ironing-board,

though she supposed it to be fresh and white. But out of all this ugliness the fair head rose like a delicate flower—the fine, pale, cool face even more touchingly sweet, to his long-trained sense, than the young and flattered photograph—crowned with bright hair that had its old colour of the sun, and almost its old plentifulness. She was looking at the door when he opened it, and no seeing eyes could have gone through him as those did—the eyes that had met his but once in his life. Blind as they were, with the blankness in them, they were soft and beautiful—not only no disfigurement, as so many blind eyes are, but the tragical charm of a most impressive countenance. At any rate, to him. His heart leaped with joy that the concealing bandage was gone for ever. Next moment it leaped with deeper joy at the perception that she knew him.

There was no mistake about it. By faith, and not by sight, she apprehended his presence before he had time to speak to her. As far as a blind face could light up as if it saw, hers did at the moment when he looked upon it. She rose as if he had drawn her by invisible machinery out of her chair, and moved to meet him with her hands spread before her; and she made a curious low murmur that was like an imprisoned sigh—a note that told him in one beat of the pulse what he had been puzzling to find out for so many years.

"Fidelia!" he ejaculated, without knowing that he spoke. He had never called her Fidelia to her face, but that was the title by which he had always thought of her.

She bounded to his cry like a dog to the call of a long-lost master. She answered it as a bird answers the whistle of its mate, almost in the same breath.

"Adam Drewe! Adam! Oh, Adam!"

Remember, she was in her thirties still. We who are in our forties know how young that is! More than that,

we know how young one is even in the forties; and Adam had not been there long. All in a moment the twenty odd years that had separated them—marriage, love affairs, births, deaths, great matters of business that had seemed in their time so all-important—were forgotten as though they had never been. It was as if the railway accident had occurred an hour ago, and, instead of leaving him in the dark alone, Fidelia had come back to him—instead of resisting her tender invitation, he had accepted it and taken her, as he should have done, into his arms.

For that was where she was now. And neither he nor she could understand how it happened that she got there, within two seconds of the meeting of their hands.

"Oh, Fidelia!" Adam moaned, in aching ecstacy; "Oh, my sweet Fidelia! My love! My only love!"

Not a thought did he give to Triffy Miggs, to fascinating Mrs. Staines, to his good Sarah, who proposed to die an old maid for his sake. *They* were never his loves—no, indeed; pale shades and ghosts of love—no more! This was his true mate, as he had always known from the beginning of time. With their two heads together, in darkness that was greater than the darkness of that far-past night, they sobbed, and kissed, and crooned over each other. It came as natural to him as waking up after he had been asleep; and her abandonment on his breast was as that of one who had been nearly drowned, and only found and rescued at the last moment.

He knew all about it now. She had loved him always. It was because he had abandoned her that she had been persuaded to marry Harry Bowen. What her life with him had been was not to be thought of now—it was a page turned over; what her widowhood had been—poor, struggling, neglected, helpless, every day in greater need of the care and comfort that only one in the world could give

her—that also was not to be thought of now. But love never knows the material it works with; and it was from the blight of cruel years that the bloom of this sweet day was woven.

They recovered very slowly from the shock that had so suddenly overtaken them, sitting upon a little green rep sofa, side by side; and Adam rallied those reasoning powers which hitherto had not had time to act. With her head on his shoulder and his sturdy arm round her slender body, Adam inquired of Fidelia how it was that she had known him before he had given any indication that it was he.

"My boy showed me the telegram you sent from Melbourne, telling him you were returning immediately," she replied. "I was not aware till then that he had written to you. That was wholly his own doing."

"I owe that boy—well, I will try my best to repay him," said Adam. "Were you angry with me, Fidelia?"

"What for? I was angry with him—at first. He should have consulted his mother."

"He should. But I thank God he did not."

"So do I. I could not have told you what he did. At first I felt very badly about it. I even thought of trying to stop you. But I could not afford a telegram. And in any case I could not have stopped you—could I?"

"No."

"So I counted the weeks and the days till you could get here. I had given you another fortnight. *I* did not think it possible for you to be so quick as this. But still I felt that you would not lose any time, and the moment I heard your step I seemed to know it must be you. I don't have many visitors, and nobody would come into the room in just that way—would open the door so gently. I knew at once."

"After all these years! And when you have *never* heard me open a door, Fidelia."

The wonder of it thrilled him, awed him, stirred him to the soul. But an even greater mystery confronted him, clamouring for an explanation.

"Fidelia!"

"Yes?"

"What I cannot understand is—how does it happen that we meet like this? I never expected it. Did you? But of course you did—you must have known. But how did you know? How did we both know? We are not like everybody else, I am well aware; but still we are not divine, to read the secrets of all hearts—to know what people are thinking and feeling who live on the other side of the world, and with whom we hold no communication for twenty years at a stretch."

"No communication!" she ejaculated, with a tender laugh. "Have you not been writing books all the time? And have I not been reading them? I learned all I know out of those books, Adam. *You* were in every one of them—and so, I think, was I. It has seemed like your voice always in my ears, teaching me all about it, explaining everything. I could put my finger on passages—I will do it again, so that you can prove it—and say to myself, 'This is meant for me. It is not the hero talking to the heroine, it is Adam talking to Fidelia. And they are beginning to understand each other, now that it is too late!' I used to think that it was too late, Adam. I thought so up to half-an-hour ago."

As he did not speak for a minute, she added, in a quick, frightened way, "I was not wrong, was I? You *did* talk to me in your books?"

"I suppose I did. Naturally I did. But—but I can never have made you quite understand, Fidelia. You

couldn't. Do you remember how I kissed you in the church? Oh, my love!—and I went away after *that*—and still you have trusted me——"

He clasped her to him, unable to say more, overwhelmed by the thought of their costly sacrifice, and the thing that had made it necessary. She turned quickly to his embrace, and her hand went up to his bent neck.

"I *do* understand," she murmured deeply. "I understand it all."

Mechanically he caught her straying fingers and imprisoned them, holding them down upon his breast. Under that hard grip she could feel the thumping of his heart, and knew what it meant as well as he did—that, finding it impossible to deceive her, he was nerving himself to the confession that had been delayed so long. She waited, groping for his lips with her blind face, to support him through it.

"Fidelia, did you know—did any one ever tell you—that—that—Fidelia, you have never seen me, have you?"

"Yes, dear. I think I saw you once."

"When? How? I don't believe it."

"On the platform—that last day——"

"Oh!—when you looked at me as if I were a leper! You knew it was I?"

"Of course I did not. But I was told—a long time afterwards, I remembered—it struck me one day when I was reading your book, *The Inward Sight*, about the soldier who came home a cripple from the Crimea, and found that his sweetheart shrank from him. All at once I got the key to the puzzle, and after that everything you wrote convinced me more and more that it was the right one. Oh, Adam, to go away for that—for nothing more than *that!*"

"Put your hand over my face," he whispered. "I don't believe you saw me after all."

"I am not afraid of your face"—and like a butterfly's wing her finger tips touched it all over. "Do you suppose I have no eyes but those that have gone blind? *The Inward Sight*, Adam—what a beautiful title! What a sweet, true story! It was our story exactly. You ought to have known that when you were writing it. Even if I had been silly for a moment—for a day or a year—I should not have been silly always. And now"—she sighed as she laid her head down and let her hand drop—"now, of course, it is a matter of no concern whatever."

"You are sure of that?" he questioned in broken tones. "Or do you say it only to cajole and comfort me?"

"Adam," she returned, "you are making me remember that *I* am old and blind and unattractive——"

"You! You were never lovelier in all your life.

"Oh, I know better! But I didn't expect you were going to make such a point of looks. I should have been afraid to receive you, and to act as I have done. Am I not very shabby, Adam? I have worn this poor gown for years. Is not my complexion gone? I am sure my eyes look dreadful, and that wrinkles are coming round them. But I can't see myself in the looking glass any more."

For answer, Adam laid his spectacles aside, and let his tears fall upon her face.

"It is better for you than for me," she murmured. "The sound of your voice, all your thoughts and ways, your strength, your gentleness, your goodness—that is you, and the effect is all beautiful—an atmosphere of beauty; you cannot speak without making me feel it.

But I—oh, I did not realise how absurd it was for me to behave as if I had any charm, any use, like I used to have! I feel defenceless in the light of your seeing eyes. A faded, worn-out, blind woman! For me to presume to——"

"There, there!" broke in Adam, with a laugh and a sob. "That's enough. We'll dismiss the subject now. Two poor objects, let us say, but sufficient for each other. At any rate, I am satisfied. To go any further in the way of satisfaction—if one could go any further—would be to over-wind the instrument, and the strings would snap. It might produce inflammation of the brain, or some fatal catastrophe of that sort. That's how I feel. I don't know how it is with you."

"You know well enough. I told you—how *could* I have done it?—even before you asked. Adam, there hasn't been a day, for years and years, that I haven't thought what it would have been to have you to take care of me, as you did at the party where I met you first——"

"As I ought to have done all the time, Fidelia—from then till now. It was what I was born for—I always felt it was, and now I know it beyond a doubt. If I had only known sooner! Why didn't you write to me? But of course you couldn't. And I hadn't the sense—I hadn't the cheek—to imagine the truth, or anything like the truth. Of course, I talked to you in my books, but I never supposed you heard me. I seemed to be talking to your ghost—to my memory of you—to your photograph, which has been under my eyes all the time, standing on my writing table—a little faded now, Fidelia——"

"Like me."

"You are not faded. The pure is just a little more purified—that's all."

"Stupid!" she ejaculated, like a happy girl, and

kissed him—kissed him as if he were the Fairy Prince and she the Sleeping Beauty just wakened to life, with no sense of physical incongruities whatever,—such a kiss as he had never dreamed of knowing in this world.

"Stupid I may have been," he retorted, "though there is still an uncertainty about that, whatever you may say; but I am not stupid now, and I shall not be stupid any more. I know exactly what to do for the best now, Fidelia."

"Do you, Adam?"

"Don't you?"

"Oh, I don't know——"

"Well, leave it to me. There's one thing I can see plain enough—if I can't take proper care of you, nobody can."

"They have done their best," she said, in a voice of apology, reading his thought. "Only people with sight don't understand what it is to be blind—young people especially." She lifted her head, as if suddenly remembering something. "I wonder where the children are? Have you seen them, Adam?"

"Never mind about the children now. They will be all right. Leave them to me. I think I can persuade them that I shall be a good father—appearances notwithstanding."

Fidelia's delicate face flushed pink, as if she were still a girl of eighteen, and Adam's swarthier visage reddened sympathetically.

"Am I taking too much for granted?" he whispered.

"Not," she whispered back, "if you are sure that it is for yourself as well as for me."

"You know I am sure."

"Oh, Adam!"—her breast began to heave hysterically—"Oh, Adam!—to have you to take care of me—to stay with me always—after all!"

Suddenly she broke down, weeping wildly, and for several minutes his hushing croons and caresses entirely failed to soothe her. When she had grown quiet, her look of pale exhaustion brought him his first misgiving, a fear that effectually sobered his happy heart.

"I'm afraid you're not strong, my precious one. What is the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," she replied. "Nothing is the matter with me now that I've got you. Only I have been so lonely, Adam—so overburdened—so tired out." She turned to him again like a child to its father, rather than as a lover to her mate. "But I shall rest now," she sighed.

"That you shall," he responded, setting his teeth. "That you shall—from this moment—here and now. Give me *carte blanche*, Fidelia. There is no time to waste."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WITHIN an hour Adam was arranging the programme with the children. He treated them exactly as if they were grown-up and the legal guardians of their mother, who, being blind, had become a ward once more. The boy was a handsome fellow, the image of his father at the same age; the girl wore her fair hair hanging down and her skirts still at some distance from the ground. She was very animated and pretty, and had a look of Fidelia, Adam fancied; but not Fidelia's gentle air. He led them out to a bench upon the beach, and there talked to them with all the magical tact and charm that had tamed Bunny and Billy and won every child of his acquaintance to love him.

It was rather hard work at first. The old bar was there. When he announced himself as Adam Drewe—the famous author and their mother's revered old friend—it was at once apparent that their mental picture of the great man had been drawn entirely from imagination. "*You* Mr. Drewe!" they ejaculated, with the colour rising in their cheeks; and then they made that painful effort not to stare rudely which was so much worse than doing it. The girl supposed herself successfully dissimulating, but the thought in the boy's mind was obvious enough.

And it was not the custom in these days for our poor

hero to be thus regarded, as far as he could judge. The dear friends in Australia, and the men of business with whom he had been associated, and the clerks and servants and sailors who knew him, had ceased to consider the shape of his features, which indeed were not what they once had been. It is the privilege of plain young men to grow better looking—often positively good looking—as they grow grey of head and portly of figure; and this exceptionally plain young man had never been so comely in his life as he was now. Perfect health and moral uprightness are, after all, the valuable elements of physical beauty, and the one as much so as the other. He showed the good blood of his father's race in his tough stout frame, and his wholesome brown skin; and from the modest dignity of his bearing one inferred the sterling character without which surface graces are of slight effect. Since he had come to manhood his instinct for right dressing had been always faultless, and his beard was the admiration and envy of many handsome people. Nevertheless, in the presence of Harry Bowen's boy—one of those curly-headed, graceful angelic-looking young scamps who break the hearts of so many doting mothers—Adam had a peculiarly bitter consciousness of his unusual face. Harry the second looked at it with Harry the first's insolent blue eyes, though without meaning to be disrespectful.

"You are wondering," said Adam, abruptly, with a hand on the lad's shoulder, "how your mother came to make a friend of such an ugly old fellow as I am. You are both thinking that."

The children blushed and protested, stealing guilty glances at each other. Dora, with great presence of mind, declared that such an idea had never for a moment occurred to her. For Dora was going to be a woman soon.

"It is certainly nice to be handsome," he remarked,

pleasantly conversational. "But it is more useful to be rich. Don't you think so?"

Even while he said it, he felt ashamed of himself for trying to secure their goodwill in this way. We all have our weak moments, and he had not been a novelist from his youth up for nothing. A few general questions satisfied him not only that they were sharp and bright young creatures, who could be made to understand reason if properly approached; but that both had a tendency to shallowness and selfishness, like their father before them. He may be forgiven for availing himself of this discovery to make a difficult task easier.

"Money, after all, is a power beyond beauty—in some ways," said he, though in his heart he did not believe it. "Eh, Harry?"

Plainly Harry thought so. Already the expression of his eyes changed.

"I suppose," he said wistfully, "it's your books that have made you rich?"

"Your *beautiful* books!" Dora ejaculated.

"Not altogether," said Adam. "It takes very, very beautiful books indeed to make authors rich. I get a few hundreds a year from them. But my other businesses—ships, mines, wool-broking, and so on—bring me in a good many thousands."

"A *year*, sir?" cried the boy gaping.

"A year," said Adam, with a smile. "I suppose about fourteen thousand, roughly. Sometimes more and sometimes less, of course, according to seasons and markets; but about that."

"Oh—h—h!" sighed the children, as with one breath. And they looked at their strange visitor with an odd respectfulness that hurt him more than their young insolence had done. He wanted to see the mother as well as

the father in Fidelia's children, even though it was the father element which furthered his designs.

"And I want," said he, "to use it for the benefit of my friends, since I have no family of my own. I want, Harry—I want, Dora"—he laid a hand on each—"to make your mother comfortable, first of all, if you will let me."

Dora smiled a ready welcome to the proposition, but Harry looked confused.

"I don't see," he stammered—and Adam blessed him for the words, worthy of Fidelia's son—"I don't see how she can take your money, sir, when you are not a relation. Though certainly——"

But Adam would not let him unsay what he had said.

"You are right, my boy. I understand you. I know she cannot. But now, look here—Harry, you are nearly a man, and I am going to confide in you—I am going to speak to you as one man to another——"

Harry, straightening himself, interrupted to ask whether his sister had not better walk on a few paces, and come back presently.

"No," said Adam; "it concerns you both alike, what I am going to say. The fact is—the fact is"—he cleared his throat and took his courage in both hands—"I have loved your mother ever since we were boy and girl together, and I have come from Australia now, to ask her to marry me."

Harry again played the part of a proper son. On the spur of the moment, he ejaculated, "Oh, I say!" in an aggrieved and resentful manner.

Dora flung a perplexed glance, first at Adam's stumpy nose, then at her handsome brother, undecided how to act.

"Only in that way," urged Adam, rapidly, "can I do for her what I want to do—give her a large comfortable house, and good servants, and rest and ease—a carriage, you know, and all that sort of thing—and take every worry from her, and take care of her as she ought to be taken care of. And you two, both of you—you could have lessons in everything—be trained for any profession you like to choose, Harry—and get shooting and hunting, and all that sort of thing. I always keep a good yacht—and we'd buy a house in London—and Dora could go into society, if she fancied it—her aunts would bring her out—all the pretty frocks and things you wished for, Dora—whatever your mother liked you to have——"

"Oh," interrupted Dora, bursting with eagerness to express what was now her fixed opinion, "I'm sure, I'm *sure* she cares for you, Mr. Drewe. She has so often talked about you—hasn't she, Harry?—and she just adores your books. She likes us to read them to her, now she can't read them for herself. She called me Dorothea, after a character in one of them."

Adam laid a caressing palm on Dora's shoulder, but he looked to Harry for the decision, which he made them both believe was left to them.

The boy took a few minutes to think, then he said, slowly—"Well, after all, she is blind. That does seem to make it about fair."

"Thank you," said Adam, grimly. He turned his spectacles seawards, and stared silently.

Dora moved closer to him, and slipped a hand into his—a hand which he grasped eagerly, valuing the token at fifty times its worth. It seemed to him at the moment that Dora was her mother's child all over.

"I had a stepfather myself," he said to her, "and I hated it—I can't tell you how I hated it. But if ever I

am so lucky as to be stepfather to you, *you* sha'n't hate it. Neither of you."

"I know we sha'n't," she murmured, and snuggled closer still. "Oh, I do hope you will be."

They rose, hand in hand; Harry sat dreaming, his mind full of boats and guns.

"Well," said Adam, looking at him, "is it a bargain, Harry?"

"What, sir? I beg your pardon—I wasn't listening."

"If I try all I can to make you happy, my boy, you'll do the same by me?"

"I will, sir," said Harry; "I really will. Did you—did you say that the yacht was in England?"

"No; I left it in Australia to be sold. But we will have a new one built, with all the latest improvements; we will see her fitted up under our own eyes if your mother likes to go to Scotland or Cowes, or some of the places where the big yards are. We will have her made comfortable for a family cruise when she wants a change of climate. Oh, we'll do all sorts of things."

"Ah," responded the boy, his eyes shining, "it will be better even than going to Australia."

"I hope so. I hope so, indeed. Now, dears, do you mind going for a little walk for half an hour, while I return to speak to your mother?"

They assured him they did not in the least. And they charged him to tell their mother that they hoped she would favourably consider his proposals, because they did not mind that either.

"Very well," said Adam, with a submissive air, "go for a little walk, and come back in half an hour."

"Half an hour?" they exclaimed; "is that enough?"

"Plenty. Then you must all come and dine with me at the hotel, to celebrate the—the occasion."

Dora smiled seraphically, and kissed him—kissed him boldly, without wincing. She was a little artful minx, but she made him feel like a real father, and not a step-father. Tears were in his eyes as he kissed her back again, and in broken whispers blessed her for being so sweet. Then they parted for a while. Adam went to the post office to send telegrams, and to his hotel to order the best rooms and dinner it could supply, and found the balance of the half-hour sufficient for his private business with Fidelia. Meanwhile the children walked on the Marine Parade, and were lost in gorgeous air-castles.

. . . . . .

One of the telegrams was to Fidelia's sister in London, Mrs. Pelham-White. She was the prosperous mother of many children, much occupied with them and with social strategies on their behalf; and she had not seen or heard of her poor relations at New Dunstanborough for years. Down she came, mystified, remorseful (believing Fidelia to be at death's door), and quite excited by the prospect of meeting the well-known author, who had so unaccountably signed the message. He received her on her arrival, and showed her into the shabby drawing-room, and shut the door upon them both, as if Fidelia's house belonged to him, and as if Mrs. Pelham-White were not a fashionable lady of whom a humble-minded person of his appearance should stand in awe.

"Madam," said he, calmly—for he was not afraid of fashionable ladies now—"forgive me for putting you to this trouble. I should have gone to you myself, but I could not leave Mrs. Bowen."

"Is she ill?" cried the sister, sincerely alarmed. "Is she dying? My poor girl! and I have been neglecting her so! But I didn't know——"

"She won't be neglected any more," interrupted Adam.

"She is going to be married to me as soon as I can make arrangements for the children to go somewhere for a few weeks or months. I sent for you to ask if you would take them—perhaps until our return from abroad. Though Fidelia is not ill, she is in delicate health, and will be better out of England during the winter."

Mrs. Pelham-White simply stared at him, bristling like an insulted porcupine.

Adam gazed at her benignly through his spectacles. "Of course," he said, quietly, "I don't expect you to be at any trouble or expense on their account. I should wish to make any terms you thought proper. I have about fourteen thousand a year, and nobody to think of but my future family"—he smiled at her changing face—"so that money is no object happily. I thought if you would accept a sum for their board—temporarily, of course—and if I put a few hundreds into your hands for their education and personal expenses, that would be the best arrangement. I could easily make others, but not any so satisfactory to Fidelia. Strangers, you see, are not like one's own. I have already given a few orders in London with regard to outfit. In fact, the dressmaker has just arrived; she must have come down in the same train with you. Dora is consulting with her now. But Dora is rather inexperienced, and I, of course, am worse, and we should be very grateful for your advice. We were talking of grey velvet—Fidelia seems fond of grey, and the weather is getting chilly—for the wedding dress, and a cloak with a good quantity of chinchilla fur about it. Chinchilla fur is soft, and I want her to have nothing but what is soft in future. Life has been altogether too hard for her in the past, especially of late years."

"Oh, it has—I can see it has!" Mrs. Pelham-White assented, looking about her with shocked eyes and deeply-

crimsoned cheeks. "She should have told me—she was always so reticent—and somehow, when you have a large family of your own, you forget about other people's affairs if they don't remind you. I had *no* idea of this. Besides, I knew that her husband's relatives were close by, and her father in the same parish. Poor father is old, and a good deal hampered these days; but still——"

"Well, it doesn't matter now," said Adam.

"It does matter. It matters a great deal—when it comes to you proposing to buy my sister her clothes to be married in. What sort of people do you take us for, Mr. Drewe?"

"I haven't thought about her people," returned Adam, with a smile. "Only of her. And she is not too proud to take her wedding gown from me."

"Poor girl, she must have lost all pride, all common self-respect in such surroundings as these! I must speak to her. I must see my father about it. After marriage, of course, you can do what you please, but before—that is our business. We cannot allow even you to take too many liberties, Mr. Drewe."

But she smiled deferentially at the privileged and powerful rich man, and was soon persuaded to submit to him. She was an intelligently worldly woman, with the breeding of a lady; and her affection for her blind sister, always existing, and sincere as far as it went, now sprang into new life—Fidelia's offence of poverty being done away, and the reproach to her family wiped out. Indeed, Adam was inclined to jealousy when he saw how they rushed into each other's arms, the one all contrition, the other all sweet forgiveness; and how it pleased the little household to have Aunt Fanny to consult with and to look up to—as if she had the first right to control the situation. Her way of permitting him to have his will

was a woman's way, and when he found himself taking the children's attitude and saying to her, "Please, Mrs. Pelham-White, let us be married here, quietly and at once," she answered him, gently but firmly, "No, dear Mr. Drewe, certainly not. You must all come to London with me. Fidelia must be under proper protection, and her own people must be round her at such a time."

Strange to say, though no one had invited them, a stream of relations and friends poured into the narrow house, all full of the notion that Fidelia must be protected, and that he or she was by nature designed for the duty.

Aunt Fanny was closely followed by Aunt Florence, a Manchester manufacturer's wife, who, having sent frequent bundles of cast-off clothing to her younger sister, claimed the right of a benefactor to supersede the elder. She demanded that Fidelia should be relinquished by those who had done nothing for her, and given up to her who had done all. Then Mr. Plunket, junior, Q. C., leaving his gun and partridges and all the delights of a hard-earned holiday, came down to New Dunstanborough to assert his prerogative as the (acting) nearest male relative; and, last but not least, Mr. Plunket, senior, white and wizened, drove over from Thurlow Hall—or, rather, was driven over by his monstrous, purple-faced wife, who made her first effort to be amiable to a justly hostile stepfamily. And while they were all crowding about the bewildered bride-elect, and crowding the bridegroom from her, the great squire appeared upon the scene, and the squire's great lady—Miss Katherine that was. Mrs. Delavel-Pole-Delavel was in mourning for her two dead brothers, and distracted Adam from his bridal thoughts with her sad face and wistful questionings.

"Adam," she said—"forgive me for calling you Adam,

but seeing you is like going back to the old times when we were children together—I hear from my niece that you were much with our poor Dicky in his last years, and can tell me about him. When will you be able to spare me an hour?"

"I have been thinking, Drewe," said her stately consort, "that it is not very comfortable for you here. Suppose you come to us until the wedding-day?"

No wonder that Adam had no words for the moment wherewith to suitably acknowledge this vast condescension,—the crowning honour of his successful life. He gazed at the urbane speaker through his glasses as if wondering whether he could possibly have heard aright. Recovering from the shock, he declined the invitation with becoming modesty, on the plea of distance. He desired to stay as near as might be to Mrs. Bowen for the very short time that, he hoped, remained before their marriage; and the hotel, which he only used to sleep in, was very comfortable.

As the squire, Mr. Delavel-Pole-Delavel begged Adam to please himself; as the rector, he insisted that the bridegroom-elect should please him.

"With regard to your marriage," he said, in his official voice, "I hear Mrs. Bowen's relatives have made various suggestions; but, of course, it will take place in her parish church—hers and yours, and her father's also—the church where you were baptized, Drewe, and—not confirmed, I think?—baptized in infancy, and where your good father worshipped, and his father before him, and where they now sleep, 'the rude forefathers of the hamlet', so to speak—ahem!—Nature's true gentlemen, according to all I've heard. The old registers are full of their names. You will add yours to the list?"

"I should like to," said Adam, with a sudden vision

of the place where he kissed Fidelia. "I should like to very much. I will speak to Mrs. Bowen about it."

"Do so, and let me know. I shall be very happy to perform the ceremony for you myself," said the rector-squire, who was no common working parson in these days.

Adam consulted Fidelia as soon as he could get her alone, and she agreed with him that Old Dunstanborough was the place, and not London, nor Manchester—Old Dunstanborough Church, which had seen the beginning of this long end. "I know my way there," she said. "I know what is around me. Not that it matters where I am, if I have you to lead me and take care of me. What I dread is going amongst strangers without you."

Then Adam put his foot down; and the family, protesting in vain that *he* was the stranger who would not know her needs and ways, found themselves deprived of all authority and power in the matter, except as concerned the temporary care of the children and the winding-up of Fidelia's poor little affairs. He said to Mrs. Pelham-White, "Wrap her up well; I am going to take her for a drive."

And on their return from that expedition he announced that he had made arrangements with Mr. Delavel-Pole-Delavel to have the marriage celebrated on the following day.

"On the whole," he said, cheerfully, "that seems the best plan."

CHAPTER XXX.

WEDDING dresses and such things were being discussed in the Plunket family. Patterns had been sent for and described to Fidelia, and she had been directed to choose a brocaded satin thick with silver threads—since she was so fond of grey. Her sensitive finger tips were examining the glistening morsel, shrinking from the scratchy feel of it, when Adam called to her sisters to get her ready for the momentous drive. But the box with *his* wedding dress in it was already at the station. It was a large and heavy box, accompanied by numerous other boxes, all being in charge of the staid, kind, clever, elderly woman who was to be Mrs. Drewe's maid. She had been recommended by the squire's wife, who called her Pettigrew; in the old, old days she had been the pretty Alice kissed by Richard Delavel behind the schoolroom door. She had known Fidelia from childhood, and when Adam brought her to the carriage to introduce them in their new relations to each other, the blind bride all but wept for joy.

"Oh," she said, when maid and boxes had been handed over to the landlord of Adam's hotel, "I had been wondering how I should manage in strange places about the things you couldn't attend to—the little things a man can't do—though you seem able to do everything! And yet I couldn't bear the thought of a stranger always going

about with us, blocking up the way, so to speak, between me and you. And I did not like to speak of it."

"There ought to be nothing you don't like to speak of," said Adam, "to me. But it wasn't necessary to speak. Of course I knew."

"You know everything," she sighed, in voluptuous content. "You think of everything."

"And now," said he, "now that the things are here, and Alice to get all ready for us, the sooner we put an end to the present state of fuss the better. They are all quarrelling as to who shall carry you off—and you don't want to be carried off—and have all set their hearts on a grand wedding, with lots of people to stare at us, which wouldn't suit us a bit. Let us drive on now to the Hall, and arrange with Mr. Delavel-Pole—I have already seen him, and I know he will be at home—to marry us quietly, say to-morrow morning?"

They were already bowling along the road to Old Dunstanborough.

"Oh!" sighed Fidelia, and coloured to her toes. But she was merely startled for the moment, not alarmed. A second marriage is not like a first; if less happy in one way, it is more so in a dozen ways, though orthodox sentiment will not admit the fact; and there are bridegrooms and bridegrooms—the incalculable and the sure. No woman, loving and understanding Adam Drewe, could fear for a moment to give herself into his power, though blind and helpless, and with a bitter experience of selfish strength behind her. His hand, gentle as it was strong, sought that of his true mate, and she gave it without hesitation or misgiving, knowing herself in safety.

"But won't they be vexed and disappointed, Adam?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so. Perhaps for a moment. It will save them endless bother, as well as ourselves. I

can easily make it right with them. Alice will get things packed—I have already told her—and bring what you want over to the house in the morning. We can get away to Lyntham during the afternoon—we'll drive, shall we?—and then to London next day, or anywhere you like. I've got a splendid man, I think, to travel with us—to go on forward, and get rooms, and attend to luggage, and so on. He will have dinner ready for us at Lyntham tomorrow, and fires nice and warm for you after your drive. Your sisters will be glad enough to get back to their families. Mrs. Pelham-White will take good care of our children—I've arranged all that—and we'll see them again in a few days. Your brother is dying to be rid of us all, and after the pheasants. And I want to have you out of England before winter sets in, and not to have you hustled and hurried. Will you be satisfied to leave it all to me, Fidelia?"

She said she would. And so they went straight to the Hall—the great Hall, that should have been Richard's now, but had passed out of the direct line with the death of the seventeenth lord and his brothers; and Adam made business arrangements with the squire, while Fidelia was kindly entertained by Miss Katherine that was. At the close of the interview Mr. Delavel-Pole-Delavel gave his arm to the blind lady, and himself led her through the galleried hall and down the steps to the courtyard where the hired carriage waited; and his wife, sauntering behind with Adam, talked to him familiarly, as Dicky used to do, reminding him of that beloved friend, and of dear Lady Susan, the mother of both.

"I am so sorry you are not able to dine and spend the night with us," she said, in a sincere voice. "Perhaps you will come together and spend a few days with us, on your return from abroad?"

He bowed deeply over her gracious hand, for the spirit of the place was still strong upon him. Had the Queen asked him to dine and sleep at Windsor, he would not have felt so honoured.

All the way home, through the beautiful autumnal woods and along the shore, he talked to Fidelia about Miss Katherine when she was a child, and Richard when he was a boy; about Lyntham Mart, and the Earl's medal, and the countess's grey sausage curls, and the moat when it had water and duckweed in it, and the old times generally; while she lay back in ease and peace, wrapped in Florences's sealskin jacket and Fanny's fur boa, listening sweetly to all he said, but thinking only that she was to be married to him to-morrow.

The news that she was to be married to him to-morrow made a commotion at Sea View Villa. But it passed. His voice and his arguments prevailed over the natural annoyance and resentment of the family at having had, as they thought, a trick played on them; and they soon flung themselves into his scheme, which was so remarkably complete. Alice came over from the hotel, with a porter's barrow behind her; Fidelia was sent to bed; the aunts and Dora worked till midnight to prepare a festive house and a wedding breakfast, and to fit out Harry for the office he had volunteered for and was most anxious to fill—that of best man to his stepfather.

By this time Harry was calling "Adam"—the title preferred by the stepfather—all over the place, following him and hanging about him, just as Bunny and Billy used to do. Adam took him over to the hotel with him for the night, to have him out of the women's way; and the pair sat over their little supper, and in armchairs by the fire, and had a delightfully confidential talk—"as one man to another"—a method of treat-

ment to enchant a boy of seventeen, and win his everlasting gratitude.

In the morning they set forth to Old Dunstanborough together, and passed the Hall carriage going to New Dunstanborough, by the squire's orders, for the service of the bridal party; horses and servants wearing satin favours, and a basket of flowers reposing on the cushions within. And when they reached the old church—for this quietest of quiet weddings—lo! the church was full. Nobody had been told, and yet everybody knew! And such eager faces were those that met the bridegroom's astonished eyes when he entered gate and porch and pillared aisle! And such a multitude of hard old hands were held out to greet him as he passed! All had known him as a boy, or their fathers and mothers had known him; they had been to school with him at Dame Dunford's; they had done this, that and the other for or with him, which Adam was bidden to remember, and could not, for the distraction of his mind. There was toothless Sar' Ann, bustled about by tyrannous grandchildren; and old Andy Toogood leaning on his stick; and fat Mrs. John Morrison, with gaudy, black-eyed daughters, and a host of friends, whom he had never known for friends,—all anxious to recall themselves to his recollection and to wish him joy. Oh, well they knew that funny face of his—or had heard tell of it—and how badly his mother had treated him! And lawk-a mussy, to think what that boy was now! A lady's maid and a vally, and fi'-pun-notes as plentiful as blackberries, and the squire's own carriage to fetch the bride to church!

"Didn't I say so?" yelled Sar' Ann, in a witchlike falsetto. "Didn't I say, from the fust, as my boy'd beat 'em all?"

"Hold your tongue!" commanded Sar' Ann's granddaughter. "Don't you know you mustn't talk in church?"

Then the bride arrived in the squire's carriage, and was led into view by Mr. Plunket, Q.C., her daughter and sisters in attendance upon her. And the young best man cried, "By George, ain't she stunning!" in a voice almost as loud as Sar' Ann's, though he was much more in church than she was. Mouths dropped open and round eyes stared at the lovely woman in her velvet robes, so transfigured and transformed. What velvet it was! What folds for light to fall on! And the great lengths and breadths of delicate fur upon the long grey cloak—and the gleams of silvery silk lining—and the little velvet bonnet, throwing up the gold tints in her hair and the fine purity of her face—these things were wonderful to the spectators of them, who had never seen the like. Even Mrs. Delavel-Pole-Delavel, with her head on one side, gazed at the delicious costume, fascinated, wondering what it had cost. Adam, it is needless to say, never considered what it cost.

He stood in the rosy glow of the east window, amongst the tombs of Dicky's ancestors, to watch the approach of the slender grey figure; his heart thumping, his brain whirling, his blood tingling with life and passion in every nerve of his strong frame. Fidelia seemed conscious of the many eyes upon her; but he saw only hers, pathetically fixed on the blank ahead of her where she felt he was. Sightless as they were, they had a peering, seeking, anxious expression that he could not withstand; and in defiance of signs and frowns from her brother and sisters, who desired him to adhere to the etiquette prescribed, he marched down the nave and met her in the middle, instead of awaiting her at the chancel rails. The moment she felt him near, the nervous look went out of her face, and such a smile came into it as caused a murmur of emotion to breathe through the congregation, touched to its simple heart. Lack-a-daisy, what that boy had come to

indeed, when a beautiful woman could turn to him like that!

She took his hand, while still holding the arm of her proper escort, and held up her fair head, and walked with the assured step of one who could see her way before her, to where the great squire stood—the rector now, in full panoply of state, with his book open, and a deferential cross-embroidered curate on either side of him. Gently checked by her lover at a row of cushions, she paused for a moment at his side, turning a questioning confiding face towards him; then with one impulse they sank on their knees, and both faces were buried in hollowed palms.

Why, they did not know. It was instinct that prompted them to it.

"What a relief that is to me!" whispered the sister from London to the sister from Manchester. "I was so afraid there would be something scandalous. For he's a thorough-going atheist, my dear, and she is nothing but his shadow."

Both Florence and Fanny were good churchwomen themselves; but they condoned atheism in a brother-in-law worth fourteen thousand a year, so long as he did nothing scandalous.

As a matter of fact, however, Adam was not an atheist.

So the life-long dream came true. The kiss given in that place so many years ago was ratified. Adam took Fidelia to be his wedded wife, and remembered no more the heart-thrills and heart aches that other women had caused him. When the ceremony was over, and the signings in the vestry, and the congratulations of family and guests, and of all those new old friends who wished to shake the hand of the bride of their early pal and schoolmate—when curates and clerks and bell-ringers, and dozens and dozens of honorary officials, had had gold poured

into their hands and pockets, and everybody was happy and satisfied—then the squire's carriage dashed up to the gate again; and the hero of the village was borne away, like Elijah in the fiery chariot, to the great world whence he had come and whither none could follow his return, leaving the aroma of a good name and of unlimited roast beef behind him.

"Adam," whispered Fidelia, as the sound of clanging bells fainted on the autumn air, drowned in the thud of trotting hoofs, "Adam, how did I look?"

She was in her thirties still, and the precious toilet mirror was denied her.

"*Look!*" he echoed, and paused to take a long breath. "The only person I can compare you to is my Dorothea in *In Spite of All.* I wish you could see yourself, my princess, without seeing what a poor figure I cut beside you."

"Ah," she rejoined, "you must not say that! I shall not be satisfied that we are perfectly married until I know that you wish me to see you too."

He kissed her within the drawn blinds, silently.

They had the wedding breakfast, which was a family luncheon with an iced cake and champagne, at Sea View Villa; and then Fidelia parted for a time with her two children—a prolonged and touching business. She had so much to say about practising regularly, and wrapping up in cold weather, and writing often, and so forth, that Mrs. Pelham-White declared her feelings hurt and her character as a guardian of young people discredited; while sister Florence tried to hint that Adam's position was being made uncomfortable.

Doubtless another bridegroom might have felt a little injured by such maternal clingings and preoccupations at such a moment, but Adam was not made that way.

Had she been less motherly, she would not have been Fidelia and his ideal woman.

She kept on her velvet dress and bonnet, and early in the afternoon resumed the magnificent cloak, because nothing was to be "saved" now, and she was never again to dress in anything but the best. And from the hotel came a brougham, with Alice on the driver's box, and no impediment of cumbrous luggage—all of which had been sent forward by train; and she who had known so little of physical comfort was deposited in a billow of down cushion and opossum rug, her feet cuddled in a foot-muff, wrapped about with warmth and softness like a new-born infant. No monthly nurse ever tucked a babe into its cradle with more deftness and tenderness than Adam tucked his wife into this silky and furry nest before they started on their wedding journey.

"Oh, how you will spoil me!" she cried, sinking down and sinking back, for once happy in her helplessness. "Oh, what perfect rest!"

Adam laughed for joy and triumph. "Now," said he, "now I know what it means to be rich. I never did before."

At last they escaped from the too numerous eyes, the too pressing attentions of the world which doats on wedding ceremonies, and were away upon the high road, alone and free.

Adam knew every inch of that old road; it seemed lined with ghosts of his unhappy childhood, bidding him farewell. Changes had come to the villages and fields; "improvements" had taken place; some dear old hedges were gone, and the steam plough engine hummed through the golden silence; but the main features were as distinct as ever, and he painted them to Fidelia, one by one, with their memories around them—mostly memories of

her. It was just at this time of year, on just such a mellow, tranquil day, that he had driven from Lyntham to Dunstanborough to meet and kiss her—ah, me! more than twenty years ago. The same faint perfume of burning couch was in the air—air so still that, listening, one could hear the dead leaves drop.

"It seems like yesterday, Fidelia!"

"Does it, Adam? To me it has always seemed like something that happened in another world."

Half way to Lyntham they changed horses; and she was put out of the down cushions into an armchair, to have a good cup of tea and a few shavings of bread and butter. And she had a little stroll on her husband's arm, to see the sunset through his eyes, and get the stiffness of long sitting out of her knees. Then on again, refreshed and gay—on through the gathering dusk, and the deepening twilight, and the thick darkness of night, with the lamps flashing into the trees as they passed by; with a gradual silence of the tongue, and evergrowing eloquence of clasped hands and heads laid together. And then the lights of the old town, and the rattle of the streets, and the clang of the archway under which they drove into the hotel yard; and Cuthbert, Adam's new man, so quick and quiet, waiting at the foot of the stairs to salute his blind mistress and escort the party to their rooms—the rooms that Lady Susan used to have when she visited Lyntham—where Adam had been patted on the head by the old countess, and nursed in beloved Richard's arms.

The same rooms, but more luxurious now than they had ever been made for those great folks. So warm, so soft, so sweet with flowers, so filled with every comfort that love and money could command, all ready for instant use, all inviting to ease and rest—"like a dream!" Fi-

delia said, as she moved about amongst them on her husband's arm, feeling and touching, making a chart for herself; "like a fairy dream, Adam!"

"We'll regard the other as a dream now," said Adam, as he gently lowered her upon a sofa, unclasped her cloak and untied her bonnet strings.

She breathed deeply, turning her head from side to side.

"There's a nice warm bath for you," he murmured. "It will refresh and revive you after all your fatigues. And you must put on this loose gown"—leading her hand to a light mass of cream-white chuddah airing at the fire beside her—"and these slippers"—touching her cheek with an edge of fur; "and then dinner will be ready for us. I will go and change, while Alice attends to you, and you can call me when you are dressed."

She clung to him as he was about to rise and ring for Alice, and suddenly burst into a storm of tears.

"Oh, Adam, if I could see! If I could only see!"

"Ah!" he groaned, gathering her passionately into his arms. When all had been done that love could do, there was yet the something wanting The attainable was unattainable. The dream of perfect happiness was still a dream.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BUT they had an enchanting honeymoon. Fidelia's journeyings were like a royal progress from place to place; many a princess might have envied her. Her chief subject was a man of genius, as all the world knew by this time, but he never showed how clever he could be until he undertook to be eyes to a blind woman. He filled her life full of happy interest and occupation, giving the whole of his own to the task. Nothing was allowed to pass her by as an outsider. Not a landscape, nor a notable object in it, not a striking face, nor a fine picture, nor anything that was funny or novel in any way, did he enjoy without making her enjoy it with him, describing it with all the force of his desire for their complete companionship and with the literary art of which he was a master. He read to her for hours daily—and to be read to by him, in that deep-toned, cultivated, sympathetic voice, was far more delightful than reading to one's self; and he gave her the pleasure of playing for hours to him on what she declared to be the most perfect piano ever turned out by any maker.

Pleasure of *that* kind is not to be described in human language, when it is a case of souls like theirs—music lovers by the grace of God, with the divine sense to understand it. Flowers, birds, dogs, perfumes, textures, ex-

quisite cookery, downy chairs and carriages hung as if in air, everything that could feed and nourish the senses that were awake, were provided for her, and everything of the best.

While as for the sense that was asleep, she never complained of loss, never after that first moment, when, without meaning it, she so cut him to the heart.

She would say sometimes, "Are you tired, Adam? Are you doing too much for me, while you pretend to be doing nothing? I wish I could satisfy myself that you are not pale with a headache for want of active exercise." Or she would say—turning her head this way and that—"Are we alone, Adam? I wish I could always know when we are alone together." That was all.

But he—living with her night and day, his whole being incorporated with hers, and hers with his—he came to understand what it means to be blind, as no mere outsider can understand it. The secret loneliness, the secret fears of unseen surroundings, the secret consciousness of ignorance, of degradation, of captivity—she tried hard to keep them secret; but he divined them all. And it seemed to him that he could not bear it—though she could.

Once upon a time he had had the appalling cruelty to feel that it was rather fortunate than otherwise that she could not see; now, if he could have bought her sight back with his life he would have done it, and thought the bargain dirt-cheap—but that she valued her precious lost sense less than she valued him. Suppose she became the mother of a child she could never look upon, from first to last!—the tragic possibility made his blood run cold. As for any terror of consequences to himself from being looked upon—that was all gone by. As husband and wife they were above such pettiness. It was—and he well knew

it was—by the eyes of her true soul that she judged and loved him.

And so it was not long before the suggestion was made that money, which could do so much, might do a little more; and the wane of the honeymoon found them in Germany, surrounded by famous oculists. They came from three countries to consult together, and made their delicate experiments, leisurely and elaborately, with every aid and incentive to success about them; and they took several months about it. The result they announced to Adam when it came to the time of paying their prodigious fees, answered their wildest hopes as well as their reasonable expectations. The verdict of such doctors as Mr. Plunket had been able to consult was entirely reversed. With care and the strict observance of certain rules, Mrs. Drewe should be able to see sufficiently for all ordinary purposes for the rest of her life.

It was the noblest of all her husband's gifts to her, and she proved herself worthy of it. The first thing she wanted to look at was her own face in the glass; the second, the faces of her children who were but little ones when she had last seen them, and were now tall and changed. (Adam telegraphed for them before the final bandage was removed.) Whether she remembered to look at her husband's face or not, he did not know, and did not care to ask. It seemed a matter of no importance. Lying in his arms that night, she told him she had all along so well known what he was like that it wasn't the least bit necessary.

So then they had another honeymoon, better than the first. To recruit her health after the ordeal she had gone through and take her from temptations to use her eyes too constantly, they all went for a cruise in the new yacht—children, servants, tutor, governess, doctor, nurse, girl and

boy cousins, a companion for everybody who might otherwise feel bored or become troublesome—and saw more beautiful places than they had imagined the world could hold. Such a yacht, moreover! Steel screw, steam, electric installation, triple expansion engines, cold chamber, hot pipes, naphtha launch, &c., &c., with kitchen and cabin accommodation calculated to make a crowned head hide diminished!

It was splendid, indeed. Which is not to say that it was absolute perfection. Alas! You can't have everything in this world, as has been before remarked. It was not true sailoring. As Clark Russell happily puts it, a steamboat is no more a ship than a railway locomotive is a stage-coach. It was glorious to be able to go whither one desired, straight away, without asking permission of the weather; it was delightful to have all the comforts of home around one; it was delicious, in any case, to be upon the sea; but there was no inspiration in it as in the wings of the little *Kittiwake*—nothing to remind the owner of that gallant dash to Portland through the night and the storm a few months back. How grand that was in the retrospect! How much more so than at the time! He was in danger of getting soft at the muscles, and liverish, and podgy.

When the unexpected happened, as usual. The crisis in Australia arrived, and, like many another in his commercial situation, he ceased to be rich—with far greater rapidity than he had become so. All the rewards of virtue—as they are understood in the realms of fiction—were snatched from him in quick succession; until he was reduced to the modest competence and comparative obscurity of a successful literary man. He can no longer indulge his family with fine carriages, and steam yachts, and court dresses, and things of that kind. In fact, we

have to leave them in quite humble circumstances—a little house in Kensington, and a cottage in the country, and only two servants under Alice and Cuthbert—three, including the baby's nurse, recently added to the establishment.

A very good thing, too, for all parties. When the skill of the oculists had been bought and paid for, there was not much advantage or enjoyment to be got out of their wealth. Dora would probably have been ruined in the fashionable society to which her aunt would have introduced her, and to which her rather vulgar tastes naturally inclined; now she is safe at home, learning housewifery from her mother, and how to read and think from her stepfather—being wholesomely educated for a useful woman's life. Harry's energies are not withered at the root by the knowledge that he is provided for and therefore need not work; being responsible for the success or failure of his career, he devotes himself to his profession as a young man should, with a young man's proper ambitions; whereby he develops himself healthily, instead of sinking into fat impotence, as those do who have no pursuit but pleasure—sport, and wine, and perpetual danglings at the apron-strings of women—a pursuit to which he would have taken like a duck to water had not beneficent "misfortune" intervened.

Fidelia, it is needless to say, has no regrets for the magnificence of the past, which rather oppressed her than otherwise; while Adam never valued wealth, save as a means to make her happy. Enough, to them, is better than a feast, both being without gross appetites. While they possess each other in health, and in a home of quiet comfort—while he can feel and use his powers in the making of books that are a delight to the literary and thoughtful, and while she can see to read his proofs

and the faces of his admiring friends—they are richer than the millionaires, who rarely taste these refined satisfactions.

Not to speak of the baby. It is the jolliest baby that ever was—so sweet that even Harry and Dora cannot be jealous of it, but quarrel with each other for its favour and attentions. It has Adam's health and strength and fine intelligence, Adam's eyes—but well set under the broad, straight brows—and is generally, according to its nurse, a Dunstanborough woman, "Drewe all over." And yet he is beautiful. Many a qualm of fear had his father suffered before his birth, anticipating a reproduction of the paternal cast of face; but Nature knew better than to commit such a gross injustice. She made this child to be one of his best-deserved compensations.

In the character of a father Adam is truly ridiculous. He loses all sense of dignity as a man, and demeans himself to the level of an under-nurse. He would like to bath and dress his boy in the morning, and dandle and feed and take him out a-walking all day, and put him to bed at night—only Fidelia will not let him; and besides it is necessary that he should write novels instead, in order to support the household. If you meet him rushing homeward like a man distraught, do not imagine that anything terrible has happened. He is merely in a fever of impatience to see that the baby is all right.

But there is something even sweeter to see when he goes home than that handsome little face—Fidelia looking for him—looking for her husband, with those new eyes that he need not hide from any more. He may be ugly and odd—no doubt he is—but if he were a god incarnate they could not shine upon his coming with diviner welcome.

. . . . . .

"So they were married, and lived happy ever after." The dear old formula seems very applicable to this case. But it is never really applicable to any case. They are still not quite happy, just because there is no "ever after" to be happy in, so far as they can see. There is always a something. And the trouble now is that they are growing old too fast.

THE END.

APPLETONS' TOWN AND COUNTRY LIBRARY.

PUBLISHED SEMIMONTHLY.

1. *The Steel Hammer.* By LOUIS ULBACH.
2. *Eve.* A Novel. By S. BARING-GOULD.
3. *For Fifteen Years.* A Sequel to The Steel Hammer. By LOUIS ULBACH.
4. *A Counsel of Perfection.* A Novel. By LUCAS MALET.
5. *The Deemster.* A Romance. By HALL CAINE.
6. *A Virginia Inheritance.* By EDMUND PENDLETON.
7. *Ninette:* An Idyll of Provence. By the author of Véra.
8. "*The Right Honourable.*" By JUSTIN MCCARTHY and MRS. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
9. *The Silence of Dean Maitland.* By MAXWELL GRAY.
10. *Mrs. Lorimer:* A Study in Black and White. By LUCAS MALET.
11. *The Elect Lady.* By GEORGE MACDONALD.
12. *The Mystery of the "Ocean Star."* By W. CLARK RUSSELL.
13. *Aristocracy.* A Novel.
14. *A Recoiling Vengeance.* By FRANK BARRETT. With Illustrations.
15. *The Secret of Fontaine-la-Croix.* By MARGARET FIELD.
16. *The Master of Rathkelly.* By HAWLEY SMART.
17. *Donovan:* A Modern Englishman. By EDNA LYALL.
18. *This Mortal Coil.* By GRANT ALLEN.
19. *A Fair Emigrant.* By ROSA MULHOLLAND.
20. *The Apostate.* By ERNEST DAUDET.
21. *Raleigh Westgate;* or, Epimenides in Maine. By HELEN KENDRICK JOHNSON.
22. *Arius the Libyan;* A Romance of the Primitive Church.
23. *Constance,* and *Calbot's Rival.* By JULIAN HAWTHORNE.
24. *We Two.* By EDNA LYALL.
25. *A Dreamer of Dreams.* By the author of Thoth.
26. *The Ladies' Gallery.* By JUSTIN MCCARTHY and MRS. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
27. *The Reproach of Annesley.* By MAXWELL GRAY.
28. *Near to Happiness.*
29. *In the Wire-Grass.* By LOUIS PENDLETON.
30. *Lace.* A Berlin Romance. By PAUL LINDAU.
31. *American Coin.* A Novel. By the author of Aristocracy.
32. *Won by Waiting.* By EDNA LYALL.
33. *The Story of Helen Davenant.* By VIOLET FANE.
34. *The Light of Her Countenance.* By H. H. BOYESEN.
35. *Mistress Beatrice Cope.* By M. E. LE CLERC.
36. *The Knight-Errant.* By EDNA LYALL.
37. *In the Golden Days.* By EDNA LYALL.
38. *Giraldi;* or, The Curse of Love. By ROSS GEORGE DERING.
39. *A Hardy Norseman.* By EDNA LYALL.
40. *The Romance of Jenny Harlowe,* and *Sketches of Maritime Life.* By W CLARK RUSSELL.
41. *Passion's Slave.* By RICHARD ASHE-KING.
42. *The Awakening of Mary Fenwick.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
43. *Countess Loreley.* Translated from the German of RUDOLF MENGER.
44. *Blind Love.* By WILKIE COLLINS.
45. *The Dean's Daughter.* By SOPHIE F. F. VEITCH.
46. *Countess Irene.* A Romance of Austrian Life. By J. FOGERTY.
47. *Robert Browning's Principal Shorter Poems.*
48. *Frozen Hearts.* By G. WEBB APPLETON.
49. *Djambek the Georgian.* By A. G. VON SUTTNER.
50. *The Craze of Christian Engelhart.* By HENRY FAULKNER DARNELL.
51. *Lal.* By WILLIAM A. HAMMOND, M. D.
52. *Aline.* A Novel. By HENRY GRÉVILLE.
53. *Joost Avelingh.* A Dutch Story. By MAARTEN MAARTENS.
54. *Katy of Catoctin.* By GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND.
55. *Throckmorton.* A Novel. By MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL.
56. *Expatriation.* By the author of Aristocracy.
57. *Geoffrey Hampstead.* By T. S. JARVIS.

58. *Dmitri.* A Romance of Old Russia. By F. W. BAIN, M. A.
59. *Part of the Property.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
60. *Bismarck in Private Life.* By a Fellow-Student.
61. *In Low Relief.* By MORLEY ROBERTS.
62. *The Canadians of Old.* A Historical Romance. By PHILIPPE GASPÉ.
63. *A Squire of Low Degree.* By LILY A. LONG.
64. *A Fluttered Dovecote.* By GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.
65. *The Nugents of Carriconna.* An Irish Story. By TIGHE HOPKINS.
66. *A Sensitive Plant.* By E. and D. GERARD.
67. *Doña Luz.* By JUAN VALERA. Translated by Mrs. MARY J. SERRANO.
68. *Pepita Ximenez.* By JUAN VALERA. Translated by Mrs. MARY J. SERRANO.
69. *The Primes and their Neighbors.* By RICHARD MALCOLM JOHNSTON.
70. *The Iron Game.* By HENRY F. KEENAN.
71. *Stories of Old New Spain.* By THOMAS A. JANVIER.
72. *The Maid of Honor.* By HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD.
73. *In the Heart of the Storm.* By MAXWELL GRAY.
74. *Consequences.* By EGERTON CASTLE.
75. *The Three Miss Kings.* By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
76. *A Matter of Skill.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
77. *Maid Marian, and other Stories.* By MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL.
78. *One Woman's Way.* By EDMUND PENDLETON.
79. *A Merciful Divorce.* By F. W. MAUDE.
80. *Stephen Ellicott's Daughter.* By Mrs. J. H. NEEDELL.
81. *One Reason Why.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
82. *The Tragedy of Ida Noble.* By W. CLARK RUSSELL.
83. *The Johnstown Stage, and other Stories.* By ROBERT H. FLETCHER.
84. *A Widower Indeed.* By RHODA BROUGHTON and ELIZABETH BISLAND.
85. *The Flight of the Shadow.* By GEORGE MACDONALD.
86. *Love or Money.* By KATHARINE LEE.
87. *Not All in Vain.* By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
88. *It Happened Yesterday.* By FREDERICK MARSHALL.
89. *My Guardian.* By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
90. *The Story of Philip Methuen.* By Mrs. J. H. NEEDELL.
91. *Amethyst:* The Story of a Beauty. By CHRISTABEL R. COLERIDGE.
92. *Don Braulio.* By JUAN VALERA. Translated by CLARA BELL.
93. *The Chronicles of Mr. Bill Williams.* By RICHARD MALCOLM JOHNSTON.
94. *A Queen of Curds and Cream.* By DOROTHEA GERARD.
95. "*La Bella*" *and Others.* By EGERTON CASTLE.
96. "*December Roses.*" By Mrs. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
97. *Jean de Kerdren.* By JEANNE SCHULTZ.
98. *Etelka's Vow.* By DOROTHEA GERARD.
99. *Cross Currents.* By MARY A. DICKENS.
100. *His Life's Magnet.* By THEODORA ELMSLIE.
101. *Passing the Love of Women.* By Mrs. J. H. NEEDELL.
102. *In Old St. Stephen's.* By JEANIE DRAKE.
103. *The Berkeleys and their Neighbors.* By MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL.
104. *Mona Maclean, Medical Student.* By GRAHAM TRAVERS.
105. *Mrs. Bligh.* By RHODA BROUGHTON.
106. *A Stumble on the Threshold.* By JAMES PAYN.
107. *Hanging Moss.* By PAUL LINDAU.
108. *A Comedy of Elopement.* By CHRISTIAN REID.
109. *In the Suntime of her Youth.* By BEATRICE WHITBY.
110. *Stories in Black and White.* By THOMAS HARDY and Others.
110½. *An Englishman in Paris.* Notes and Recollections.
111. *Commander Mendoza.* By JUAN VALERA.
112. *Dr. Paull's Theory.* By Mrs. A. M. DIEHL.
113. *Children of Destiny.* By MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL.
114. *A Little Minx.* By ADA CAMBRIDGE.
115. *Capt'n Davy's Honeymoon.* By HALL CAINE.
116. *The Voice of a Flower.* By E. GERARD.
117. *Singularly Deluded.* By SARAH GRAND.
118. *Suspected.* By LOUISA STRATENUS.
119. *Lucia, Hugh, and Another.* By Mrs. J. H. NEEDELL.
120. *The Tutor's Secret.* By VICTOR CHERBULIEZ.

121. *From the Five Rivers.* By Mrs. F. A. Steel.
122. *An Innocent Impostor, and Other Stories.* By Maxwell Gray.
123. *Ideala.* By Sarah Grand.
124. *A Comedy of Masks.* By Ernest Dowson and Arthur Moore.
125. *Relics.* By Frances MacNab.
126. *Dodo: A Detail of the Day.* By E. F. Benson.
127. *A Woman of Forty.* By Esmè Stuart.
128. *Diana Tempest.* By Mary Cholmondeley.
129. *The Recipe for Diamonds.* By C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne.
130. *Christina Chard.* By Mrs. Campbell-Praed.
131. *A Gray Eye or So.* By Frank Frankfort Moore.
132. *Earlscourt.* By Alexander Allardyce.
133. *A Marriage Ceremony.* By Ada Cambridge.
134. *A Ward in Chancery.* By Mrs. Alexander.
135. *Lot 13.* By Dorothea Gerard.
136. *Our Manifold Nature.* By Sarah Grand.
137. *A Costly Freak.* By Maxwell Gray.
138. *A Beginner.* By Rhoda Broughton.
139. *A Yellow Aster.* By Mrs. Mannington Caffyn ("Iota").
140. *The Rubicon.* By E. F. Benson.
141. *The Trespasser.* By Gilbert Parker.
142. *The Rich Miss Riddell.* By Dorothea Gerard.
143. *Mary Fenwick's Daughter.* By Beatrice Whitby.
144. *Red Diamonds.* By Justin McCarthy.
145. *A Daughter of Music.* By G. Colmore.
146. *Outlaw and Lawmaker.* By Mrs. Campbell-Praed.
147. *Dr. Janet of Harley Street.* By Arabella Kenealy.
148. *George Mandeville's Husband.* By C. E. Raimond.
149. *Vashti and Esther.*
150. *Timar's Two Worlds.* By M. Jokai.
151. *A Victim of Good Luck.* By W. E. Norris.
152. *The Trail of the Sword.* By Gilbert Parker.
153. *A Mild Barbarian.* By Edgar Fawcett.
154. *The God in the Car.* By Anthony Hope.
155. *Children of Circumstance.* By Mrs. M. Caffyn ("Iota").
156. *At the Gate of Samaria.* By William J. Locke.
157. *The Justification of Andrew Lebrun.* By Frank Barrett.
158. *Dust and Laurels.* By Mary L. Pendered.
159. *The Good Ship Mohock.* By W. Clark Russell.
160. *Noemi.* By S. Baring-Gould.
161. *The Honour of Savelli.* By S. Levett Yeats.
162. *Kitty's Engagement.* By Florence Warden.
163. *The Mermaid.* By L. Dougall.
164. *An Arranged Marriage.* By Dorothea Gerard.
165. *Eve's Ransom.* By George Gissing.
166. *The Marriage of Esther.* By Guy Boothby.

"The red-brown covers of Appletons' Town and Country Library have come to be an almost infallible sign of a story worth reading. In the series a poor book has not yet been published."—*Toledo Bee.*

"The publishers of the Town and Country Library have been either particularly sagacious or very fortunate in the selection of the novels that have thus far appeared in this excellent series. Not one is lacking in positive merit, and the majority are much above the average fiction of the day. Any person who likes a good story well told can buy any issue in the Town and Country Library with the utmost confidence of finding something well worth while."—*Boston Beacon.*

Each, 12mo, paper cover, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

For sale by all booksellers; or will be sent by mail on receipt of price by the publishers.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 72 Fifth Avenue.

ADA CAMBRIDGE'S NOVELS.

MY GUARDIAN. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"A story which will, from first to last, enlist the sympathies of the reader by its simplicity of style and fresh, genuine feeling. . . . The author is *au fait* at the delineation of character."—*Boston Transcript.*

"The *dénoûment* is all that the most ardent romance-reader could desire."—*Chicago Evening Journal.*

THE THREE MISS KINGS. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"An exceedingly strong novel. It is an Australian story, teeming with a certain calmness of emotional power that finds expression in a continual outflow of living thought and feeling." —*Boston Times.*

"The story is told with great brilliancy, the character and society sketching is very charming, while delightful incidents and happy surprises abound. It is a triple love-story, pure in tone, and of very high literary merit."—*Chicago Herald.*

NOT ALL IN VAIN. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"A worthy companion to the best of the author's former efforts, and in some respects superior to any of them."—*Detroit Free Press.*

"Its surprises are as unexpected as Frank Stockton's, but they are the surprises that are met with so constantly in human experience. . . . A better story has not been published in many moons."—*Philadelphia Inquirer.*

A MARRIAGE CEREMONY. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"'A Marriage Ceremony' is highly original in conception, its action graceful though rapid, and its characters sparkling with that life and sprightliness that have made their author rank as a peer of delineators."—*Baltimore American.*

"This story by Ada Cambridge is one of her best, and to say that is to at once award it high praise."—*Boston Advertiser.*

"It is a pleasure to read this novel."—*London Athenæum.*

A LITTLE MINX. 12mo. Paper, 50 cents; cloth, $1.00.

"A thoroughly charming new novel, which is just the finest bit of work its author has yet accomplished "—*Baltimore American.*

"The character of the versatile, resilient heroine is especially cleverly drawn."—*New York Commercial Advertiser.*

THE ENGLISH PRESS ON ADA CAMBRIDGE'S BOOKS.

"Many of the types of character introduced would not have disgraced George Eliot."—*Vanity Fair.*

"Ada Cambridge's book is rendered attractive by the kindly spirit and fine feeling which it evinces, by the wide and generous sympathies of its author, and no less by her remarkable literary ability."—*The Speaker.*

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 72 Fifth Avenue.

NOVELS BY HALL CAINE.

THE MANXMAN. By HALL CAINE. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

"A story of marvelous dramatic intensity, and in its ethical meaning has a force comparable only to Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Letter.'"—*Boston Beacon.*

"A work of power which is another stone added to the foundation of enduring fame to which Mr. Caine is yearly adding."—*Public Opinion.*

"A wonderfully strong study of character; a powerful analysis of those elements which go to make up the strength and weakness of a man, which are at fierce warfare within the same breast: contending against each other, as it were, the one to raise him to fame and power, the other to drag him down to degradation and shame. Never in the whole range of literature have we seen the struggle between these forces for supremacy over the man more powerfully, more realistically delineated, than Mr. Caine pictures it."—*Boston Home Journal.*

"'The Manxman' is one of the most notable novels of the year, and is unquestionably destined to perpetuate the fame of Hall Caine for many a year to come."—*Philadelphia Telegraph.*

"The author exhibits a mastery of the elemental passions of life that places him high among the foremost of present writers of fiction."—*Philadelphia Inquirer.*

THE DEEMSTER. A Romance of the Isle of Man. By HALL CAINE. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

"Hall Caine has already given us some very strong and fine work, and 'The Deemster' is a story of unusual power. . . . Certain passages and chapters have an intensely dramatic grasp, and hold the fascinated reader with a force rarely excited nowadays in literature."—*The Critic.*

"One of the strongest novels which has appeared for many a day."—*San Francisco Chronicle.*

"Fascinates the mind like the gathering and bursting of a storm."—*Illustrated London News.*

"Deserves to be ranked among the remarkable novels of the day."—*Chicago Times.*

"Remarkably powerful, and is undoubtedly one of the strongest works of fiction of our time. Its conception and execution are both very fine."—*Philadelphia Inquirer.*

CAPT'N DAVY'S HONEYMOON. A Manx Yarn. By HALL CAINE. 12mo. Paper, 50 cts.; cloth, $1.00.

"A new departure by this author. Unlike his previous works, this little tale is almost wholly humorous, with, however, a current of pathos underneath. It is not always that an author can succeed equally well in tragedy and in comedy, but it looks as though Mr. Hall Caine would be one of the exceptions."—*London Literary World.*

"It is pleasant to meet the author of 'The Deemster' in a brightly humorous little story like this. . . . It shows the same observation of Manx character, and much of the same artistic skill."—*Philadelphia Times.*

NOVELS BY MAARTEN MAARTENS.

THE GREATER GLORY. A Story of High Life. By MAARTEN MAARTENS, author of "God's Fool," "Joost Avelingh," etc. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

"Until the Appletons discovered the merits of Maarten Maartens, the foremost of Dutch novelists, it is doubtful if many American readers knew that there were Dutch novelists. His 'God's Fool' and 'Joost Avelingh' made for him an American reputation. To our mind this just published work of his is his best. . . . He is a master of epigram, an artist in description, a prophet in insight."—*Boston Advertiser.*

"It would take several columns to give any adequate idea of the superb way in which the Dutch novelist has developed his theme and wrought out one of the most impressive stories of the period. . . . It belongs to the small class of novels which one can not afford to neglect."—*San Francisco Chronicle.*

"Maarten Maartens stands head and shoulders above the average novelist of the day in intellectual subtlety and imaginative power."—*Boston Beacon.*

GOD'S FOOL. By MAARTEN MAARTENS. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

"Throughout there is an epigrammatic force which would make palatable a less interesting story of human lives or one less deftly told."—*London Saturday Review.*

"Perfectly easy, graceful, humorous. . . . The author's skill in character-drawing is undeniable."—*London Chronicle.*

"A remarkable work."—*New York Times.*

"Maarten Maartens has secured a firm footing in the eddies of current literature. . . . Pathos deepens into tragedy in the thrilling story of 'God's Fool.'"—*Philadelphia Ledger.*

"Its preface alone stamps the author as one of the leading English novelists of to-day."—*Boston Daily Advertiser.*

"The story is wonderfully brilliant. . . . The interest never lags; the style is realistic and intense; and there is a constantly underlying current of subtle humor. . . . It is, in short, a book which no student of modern literature should fail to read."—*Boston Times.*

"A story of remarkable interest and point."—*New York Observer.*

JOOST AVELINGH. By MAARTEN MAARTENS. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

"So unmistakably good as to induce the hope that an acquaintance with the Dutch literature of fiction may soon become more general among us."—*London Morning Post.*

"In scarcely any of the sensational novels of the day will the reader find more nature or more human nature."—*London Standard.*

"A novel of a very high type. At once strongly realistic and powerfully idealistic."—*London Literary World.*

"Full of local color and rich in quaint phraseology and suggestion."—*London Telegraph.*

"Maarten Maartens is a capital story-teller."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

"Our English writers of fiction will have to look to their laurels."—*Birmingham Daily Post.*

ROUND THE RED LAMP. By A. CONAN DOYLE, author of "The White Company," "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," "The Refugees," etc. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

The "Red Lamp," the trade-mark, as it were, of the English country practitioner's office, is the central point of these dramatic stories of professional life. There are no secrets for the surgeon, and, a surgeon himself as well as a novelist, the author has made a most artistic use of the motives and springs of action revealed to him in a field of which he is the master.

"A volume of bright, clever sketches, . . . an array of facts and fancies of medical life, and contains some of the gifted author's best work."—*London Daily News.*

A FLASH OF SUMMER. By Mrs. W. K. CLIFFORD, author of "Love Letters of a Worldly Woman," "Aunt Anne," etc. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

"The story is well written and interesting, the style is limpid and pure as fresh water, and is so artistically done that it is only a second thought that notices it."—*San Francisco Call.*

THE LILAC SUNBONNET. A Love Story. By S. R. CROCKETT, author of "The Stickit Minister," "The Raiders," etc. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

"A love story pure and simple, one of the old-fashioned, wholesome, sunshiny kind, with a pure-minded, sound-hearted hero, and a heroine who is merely a good and beautiful woman; and if any other love story half so sweet has been written this year it has escaped us."—*New York Times.*

MAELCHO. By the Hon. EMILY LAWLESS, author of "Grania," "Hurrish," etc. 12mo. Cloth, $1.50.

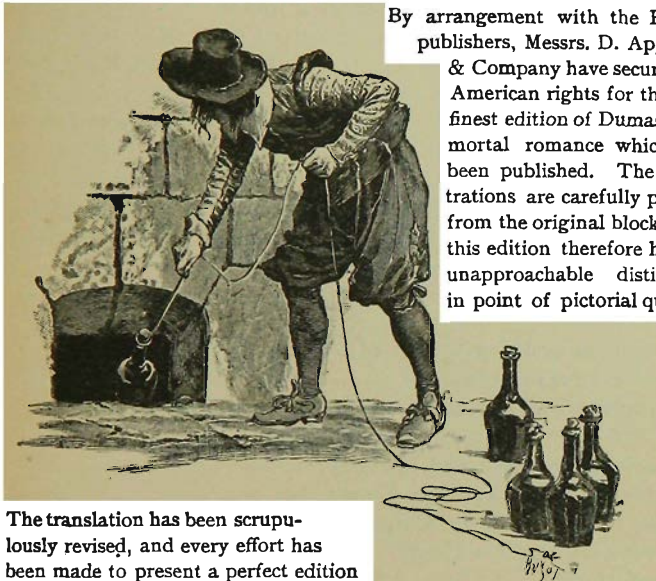
"A paradox of literary genius. It is not a history, and yet has more of the stuff of history in it, more of the true national character and fate, than any historical monograph we know. It is not a novel, and yet fascinates us more than any novel."—*London Spectator.*

THE LAND OF THE SUN. Vistas Mexicanas. By CHRISTIAN REID, author of "The Land of the Sky," "A Comedy of Elopement," etc. Illustrated. 12mo. Cloth, $1.75.

In this picturesque travel romance the author of "The Land of the Sky" takes her characters from New Orleans to fascinating Mexican cities like Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Aguas Calientes, Guadalajara, and of course the City of Mexico. What they see and what they do are described in a vivacious style which renders the book most valuable to those who wish an interesting Mexican travel-book unencumbered with details, while the story as a story sustains the high reputation of this talented author.

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 72 Fifth Avenue.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS. By ALEXANDRE DUMAS. An *édition de luxe* (limited to 750 copies), with 250 Illustrations by Maurice Leloir. In two volumes. Royal 8vo. Buckram, with specially designed cover. $12.00.



By arrangement with the French publishers, Messrs. D. Appleton & Company have secured the American rights for this, the finest edition of Dumas's immortal romance which has been published. The illustrations are carefully printed from the original blocks, and this edition therefore has an unapproachable distinction in point of pictorial quality.

The translation has been scrupulously revised, and every effort has been made to present a perfect edition of Dumas's masterpiece.

"Such a book lends itself to the draughtsman's art, and both requires and rewards decoration. But it must be decoration of the best; and it has waited long. At length, however—I have it before me now—an edition has been prepared which should satisfy both the lovers of black and white and the lovers of picturesque fiction. . . . It is scarcely too much to say that were Alexandre Dumas alive to-day, to see this latest form of his greatest work—first published exactly fifty years ago—he who loved the sumptuous with an almost tropical fervor, and built a grand theater for the production of his own dramas, would weep tears of joy over his offspring."—STANLEY J. WEYMAN, *in The Book Buyer.*

New York: D. APPLETON & CO., 72 Fifth Avenue.

LOUISA MÜHLBACH'S HISTORICAL NOVELS. New edition, 18 vols. Illustrated. 12mo. Cloth, per volume, $1.00. Set, in box, $18.00.

In offering to the public our *new and illustrated 12mo edition* of Louisa Mühlbach's celebrated historical romances we wish to call attention to the continued and increasing popularity of these books for over thirty years. These romances are as well known in England and America as in the author's native country, Germany, and it has been the unanimous verdict that no other romances reproduce so vividly the spirit and social life of the times which are described. In the vividness of style, abundance of dramatic incidents, and the distinctness of the characters portrayed, these books offer exceptional entertainment, while at the same time they familiarize the reader with the events and personages of great historical epochs.

The titles are as follows:

Napoleon and the Queen of Prussia.
The Empress Josephine.
Napoleon and Blucher.
Queen Hortense.
Marie Antoinette and her Son.
Prince Eugene and his Times.
The Daughter of an Empress.
Joseph II and his Court.
Frederick the Great and his Court.
Frederick the Great and his Family.
Berlin and Sans-Souci.
Goethe and Schiller.
The Merchant of Berlin, and Maria Theresa and her Fireman.
Louisa of Prussia and her Times.
Old Fritz and the New Era.
Andreas Hofer.
Mohammed Ali and his House.
Henry VIII and Catherine Parr.
