Salem Chapel

by Margaret Oliphant

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Chronicles of Carlingford

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SALEM CHAPEL

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SALEM CHAPEL.

CHAPTER I., II., III., IV., V., VI., VII., VIII., IX., X., XI., XII., XIII., XIV., XV., XVI., XVII., XVIII., XIX., XX.

CHAPTER I.

TOWARDS the west end of Grove Street, in Carlingford, on the shabby side of the street, stood a red brick building, presenting a pinched gable terminated by a curious little belfry, not intended for any bell, and looking not unlike a handle to lift up the edifice by to the public observation. This was Salem Chapel, the only Dissenting place of worship in Carlingford. It stood in a narrow strip of ground, just as the little houses which flanked it on either side stood in their gardens, except that the enclosure of the chapel was flowerless and sombre, and showed at the farther end a few sparsely-scattered tombstones—unmeaning slabs, such as the English mourner loves to inscribe his sorrow on. On either side of this little tabernacle were the humble houses—little detached boxes, each two storeys high, each fronted by a little flower-plot—clean, respectable, meagre, little habitations, which contributed most

largely to the ranks of the congregation in the Chapel. The big houses opposite, which turned their backs and staircase windows to the street, took little notice of the humble Dissenting community. Twice in the winter, perhaps, the Miss Hemmings, mild evangelical women, on whom the late rector—the Low-Church rector, who reigned before the brief and exceptional incumbency of the Rev. Mr. Proctor—had bestowed much of his confidence, would cross the street, when other profitable occupations failed them, to hear a special sermon on a Sunday evening. But the Miss Hemmings were the only representatives of anything which could, by the utmost stretch, be called Society, who ever patronised the Dissenting interest in the town of Carlingford. Nobody from Grange Lane had ever been seen so much as in Grove Street on a Sunday, far less in the chapel. Greengrocers, dealers in cheese and bacon, milkmen, with some dressmakers of inferior pretensions, and teachers of day-schools of similar humble character, formed the élite of the congregation. It is not to be supposed, however, on this account, that a prevailing aspect of shabbiness was upon this little community; on the contrary, the grim pews of Salem Chapel blushed with bright colours, and contained both dresses and faces on the summer Sundays which the Church itself could scarcely have surpassed. Nor did those unadorned walls form a centre of asceticism and gloomy religiousness in the cheerful little town. Tea-meetings were not uncommon occurrences in Salem—tea-meetings which made the little tabernacle festive, in which cakes and oranges were diffused among the pews, and funny speeches made from the little platform underneath the pulpit, which woke the unconsecrated echoes with hearty outbreaks of laughter. Then the young people had their singing-class, at which they practised hymns, and did not despise a little flirtation; and charitable societies and missionary auxiliaries diversified the congregational routine, and kept up a brisk succession of “Chapel business,” mightily like the Church business which occupied Mr. Wentworth and his Sisters of Mercy at St. Roque’s. To name the two communities, however, in the same breath, would have been accounted little short of

sacrilege in Carlingford. The names which figured highest in the benevolent lists of Salem Chapel, were known to society only as appearing, in gold letters, upon the backs of those mystic tradesmen's books, which were deposited every Monday in little heaps at every house in Grange Lane. The Dissenters, on their part, aspired to no conquests in the unattainable territory of high life, as it existed in Carlingford. They were content to keep their privileges among themselves, and to enjoy their superior preaching and purity with a compassionate complacence. While Mr. Proctor was rector, indeed, Mr. Tozer, the butterman, who was senior deacon, found it difficult to refrain from an audible expression of pity for the "Church folks" who knew no better; but, as a general rule, the congregation of Salem kept by itself, gleaning new adherents by times at an "anniversary" or the coming of a new minister, but knowing and keeping "its own place" in a manner edifying to behold.

Such was the state of affairs when old Mr. Tufton declined in popularity, and impressed upon the minds of his hearers those now-established principles about the unfitness of old men for any important post, and the urgent necessity and duty incumbent upon old clergymen, old generals, old admirals, &c.—every aged functionary, indeed, except old statesmen—to resign in favour of younger men, which have been, within recent years, so much enforced upon the world. To communicate this opinion to the old minister was perhaps less difficult to Mr. Tozer and his brethren than it might have been to men more refined and less practical; but it was an undeniable relief to the managers of the chapel when grim Paralysis came mildly in and gave the intimation in the manner least calculated to wound the sufferer's feelings. Mild but distinct was that undeniable warning. The poor old minister retired, accordingly, with a purse and a presentation, and young Arthur Vincent, fresh from Homerton, in the bloom of hope and intellectualism, a young man of the newest school, was recognised as pastor in his stead.

A greater change could not possibly have happened. When the interesting figure of the young minister went up the homely pulpit-stairs, and appeared, white-browed,

white-handed, in snowy linen and glossy clerical apparel, where old Mr. Tufton, spiritual but homely, had been wont to impend over the desk and exhort his beloved brethren, it was natural that a slight rustle of expectation should run audibly through the audience. Mr. Tozer looked round him proudly to note the sensation, and see if the Miss Hemmings, sole representatives of a cold and unfeeling aristocracy, were there. The fact was, that few of the auditors were more impressed than the Miss Hemmings, who were there, and who talked all the evening after about the young minister. What a sermon it was! not much in it about the beloved brethren; nothing very stimulating, indeed, to the sentiments and affections, except in the youth and good looks of the preacher, which naturally made a more distinct impression upon the female portion of his hearers than on the stronger sex. But then what eloquence! what an amount of thought! what an honest entrance into all the difficulties of the subject! Mr. Tozer remarked afterwards that such preaching was food for men. It was too closely reasoned out, said the excellent butterman, to please women or weak-minded persons: but he did not doubt, for his part, that soon the young men of Carlingford, the hope of the country, would find their way to Salem. Under such prognostications, it was fortunate that the young minister possessed something else besides close reasoning and Homerton eloquence to propitiate the women too.

Mr. Vincent arrived at Carlingford in the beginning of winter, when society in that town was reassembling, or at least reappearing, after the temporary summer seclusion. The young man knew very little of the community which he had assumed the spiritual charge of. He was almost as particular as the Rev. Mr. Wentworth of St. Roque’s about the cut of his coat and the precision of his costume, and decidedly preferred the word clergyman to the word minister, which latter was universally used by his flock; but notwithstanding these trifling predilections, Mr. Vincent, who had been brought up upon the ‘Nonconformist’ and the ‘Eclectic Review,’ was strongly impressed with the idea that the Church Establishment, though outwardly prosperous, was in reality a profoundly rotten institution; that the Nonconforming

portion of the English public was the party of progress; that the eyes of the world were turned upon the Dissenting interest; and that his own youthful eloquence and the Voluntary principle were quite enough to counterbalance all the ecclesiastical advantages on the other side, and make for himself a position of the highest influence in his new sphere. As he walked about Carlingford making acquaintance with the place, it occurred to the young man, with a thrill of not ungenerous ambition, that the time might shortly come when Salem Chapel would be all too insignificant for the Nonconformists of this hitherto torpid place. He pictured to himself how, by-and-by, those jealous doors in Grange Lane would fly open at his touch, and how the dormant minds within would awake under his influence. It was a blissful dream to the young pastor. Even the fact that Mr. Tozer was a butterman, and the other managers of the chapel equally humble in their pretensions, did not disconcert him in that flush of early confidence. All he wanted—all any man worthy of his post wanted—was a spot of standing-ground, and an opportunity of making the Truth—and himself—known. Such, at least, was the teaching of Homerton and the Dissenting organs. Young Vincent, well educated and enlightened according to his fashion, was yet so entirely unacquainted with any world but that contracted one in which he had been brought up, that he believed all this as devoutly as Mr. Wentworth believed in Anglicanism, and would have smiled with calm scorn at any sceptic who ventured to doubt. Thus it will be seen he came to Carlingford with elevated expectations—by no means prepared to circulate among his flock, and say grace at Mrs. Tozer's "teas," and get up soirees to amuse the congregation, as Mr. Tufton had been accustomed to do. These secondary circumstances of his charge had little share in the new minister's thoughts. Somehow the tone of public writing has changed of late days. Scarcely a newspaper writer condescends now to address men who are not free of "society," and learned in all its ways. The 'Times' and the Magazines take it for granted that all their readers dine out at splendid tables, and are used to a solemn attendant behind their chair. Young Vincent was one of those

who accept the flattering implication. It is true, he saw few enough of such celestial scenes in his college-days. But now that life was opening upon him, he doubted nothing of the society that must follow; and with a swell of gratification listened when the advantages of Carlingford were discussed by some chance fellow-travellers on the railway; its pleasant parties—its nice people—Mr. Wodehouse's capital dinners, and the charming breakfasts—such a delightful novelty!—so easy and agreeable!—of the pretty Lady Western, the young dowager. In imagination Mr. Vincent saw himself admitted to all these social pleasures; not that he cared for capital dinners more than became a young man, or had any special tendencies towards tuft-hunting, but because fancy and hope, and ignorance of the real world, made him naturally project himself into the highest sphere within his reach, in the simple conviction that such was his natural place.

With these thoughts, to be asked to Mrs. Tozer's to tea at six o'clock, was the most wonderful cold plunge for the young man. He shrugged his shoulders, smiled to himself over the note of invitation, which, however, was very prettily written by Phœbe, Mrs. Tozer's blooming daughter, on paper as pink as Lady Western's, and consented, as he could not help himself. He went out from his nice lodgings a little after six, still smiling, and persuading himself that this would be quite a pleasant study of manners, and that of course he could not do less than patronise the good homely people in their own way, whatever that might be. Mr. Vincent's rooms were in George Street, at what the Grange Lane people called the other end, in an imposing house with a large door, and iron extinguishers fixed in the railing, which had in their day quenched the links of the last century. To cross the street in his evening coat, and walk into the butter-shop, where the two white-aproned lads behind the counter stared, and a humble member of the congregation turned sharply round, and held out the hand, which had just clutched a piece of bacon, for her minister to shake, was a sufficiently trying introduction to the evening's pleasure; but when the young pastor had been ushered up-stairs, the first aspect of the

company there rather took away his breath, as he emerged from the dark staircase. Tozer himself, who awaited the minister at the door, was fully habited in the overwhelming black suit and white tie, which produced so solemnising an effect every Sunday at chapel; and the other men of the party were, with a few varieties, similarly attired. But the brilliancy of the female portion of the company overpowered Mr. Vincent. Mrs. Tozer herself sat at the end of her hospitable table, with all her best china tea-service set out before her, in a gown and cap which Grange Lane could not have furnished any rivals to. The brilliant hue of the one, and the flowers and feathers of the other, would require a more elaborate description than this chronicle has space for. Nor indeed in the particular of dress did Mrs. Tozer do more than hold her own among the guests who surrounded her. It was scarcely dark, and the twilight softened down the splendours of the company, and saved the dazzled eyes of the young pastor. He felt the grandeur vaguely as he came in with a sense of reproof, seeing that he had evidently been waited for. He said grace devoutly when the tea arrived and the gas was lighted, and with dumb amaze gazed round him. Could these be the veritable womankind of Salem Chapel? Mr. Vincent saw bare shoulders and flower-wreathed heads bending over the laden tea-table. He saw pretty faces and figures not inelegant, remarkable among which was Miss Phœbe's, who had written him that pink note, and who herself was pink all over—dress, shoulders, elbows, cheeks, and all. Pink—not red—a softened youthful flush, which was by no means unbecoming to the plump full figure which had not an angle anywhere. As for the men, the lawful owners of all this feminine display, they huddled all together, indisputable cheesemongers as they were, quite transcended and extinguished by their wives and daughters. The pastor was young and totally inexperienced. In his heart he asserted his own claim to an entirely different sphere; but, suddenly cast into this little crowd, Mr. Vincent's inclination was to join the dark group of husbands and fathers whom he knew, and who made no false pretences. He was shy of venturing upon those fine women, who surely never could

be Mrs. Brown of the Devonshire Dairy, and Mrs. Pigeon, the poulterer's wife; whereas Pigeon and Brown themselves were exactly like what they always were on Sundays, if not perhaps a trifle graver and more depressed in their minds.

"Here's a nice place for you, Mr. Vincent—quite the place for you, where you can hear all the music, and see all the young ladies. For I do suppose ministers, bein' young, are like other young men," said Mrs. Tozer, drawing aside her brilliant skirts to make room for him on the sofa. "I have a son myself as is at college, and feel motherlike to those as go in the same line. Sit you down comfortable, Mr. Vincent. There ain't one here, sir, I'm proud to say, as grudges you the best seat."

"Oh, mamma, how could you think of saying such a thing!" said Phœbe, under her breath; "to be sure, Mr. Vincent never could think there was anybody anywhere that would be so wicked—and he the minister."

"Indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Pigeon, who was close by, "not to affront Mr. Vincent, as is deserving of our best respects, I've seen many and many's the minister I wouldn't have given up my seat to; and I don't misdoubt, sir, you've heard of such as well as we. There was Mr. Bailey at Parson's Green, now. He went and married a poor bit of a governess, as common a looking creature as you could see, that set herself up above the people, Mr. Vincent, and was too grand, sir, if you'll believe me, to visit the deacons' wives. Nobody cares less than me about them vain shows. What's visiting, if you know the vally of your time? Nothing but a laying up of judgment. But I wouldn't be put upon neither by a chit that got her bread out of me and my husband's hard earnins; and so I told my sister, Mrs. Tozer, as lives at Parson's Green."

"Poor thing!" said the gentler Mrs. Tozer, "it's hard lines on a minister's wife to please the congregation. Mr. Vincent here, he'll have to take a lesson. That Mrs. Bailey was pretty-looking, I must allow——"

"Sweetly pretty!" whispered Phœbe, clasping her plump pink hands.

"Pretty-looking! I don't say anything against it," continued her mother; "but it's hard upon a minister when his wife won't take no pains to please his flock. To have people turn up their noses at you ain't pleasant——"

"And them getting their livin' off you all the time," cried Mrs. Pigeon, clinching the milder speech.

"But it seems to me," said poor Vincent, "that a minister can no more be said to get his living off you than any other man. He works hard enough generally for what little he has. And really, Mrs. Tozer, I'd rather not hear all these unfortunate particulars about one of my brethren——"

"He ain't one of the brethren now," broke in the poulterer's wife. "He's been gone out o' Parson's Green this twelvemonths. Them stuck-up ways may do with the Church folks as can't help themselves, but they'll never do with us Dissenters. Not that we ain't as glad as can be to see you, Mr. Vincent, and I hope you'll favour my poor house another night like you're favouring Mrs. Tozer's. Mr. Tufton always said that was the beauty of Carlingford in our connection. Cheerful folks and no display. No display, you know—nothing but a hearty meetin', sorry to part, and happy to meet again. Them's our ways. And the better you know us, the better you'll like us, I'll be bound to say. We don't put it all on the surface, Mr. Vincent," continued Mrs. Pigeon, shaking out her skirts and expanding herself on her chair, "but it's all real and solid; what we say we mean—and we don't say no more than we mean—and them's the kind of folks to trust to wherever you go."

Poor Vincent made answer by an inarticulate murmur, whether of assent or dissent it was impossible to say; and, inwardly appalled, turned his eyes towards his deacons, who, more fortunate than himself, were standing all in a group together discussing chapel matters, and wisely leaving general conversation to the fairer portion of the company. The unlucky minister's secret looks of distress awoke the interest and sympathy of Phœbe, who sat in an interesting manner on a stool at her mother's

side. “Oh, mamma,” said that young lady, too bashful to address himself directly, “I wonder if Mr. Vincent plays or sings? There are some such nice singers here. Perhaps we might have some music, if Mr. Vincent——”

“I don’t perform at all,” said that victim,—“not in any way; but I am an exemplary listener. Let me take you to the piano.”

The plump Phœbe rose after many hesitations, and, with a simper and a blush and pretty air of fright, took the minister’s arm. After all, even when the whole company is beneath a man’s level, it is easier to play the victim under the supplice inflicted by a pretty girl than by two mature matrons. Phœbe understood pretty well about her h’s, and did not use the double negative; and when she rose up rustling from her low seat, the round, pink creature, with dimples all about her, was not an unpleasant object of contemplation. Mr. Vincent listened to her song with decorous interest. Perhaps it was just as well sung as Lucy Wodehouse, in Grange Lane, would have sung it. When Phœbe had concluded, the minister was called to the side of Mrs. Brown of the Devonshire Dairy, who had been fidgeting to secure him from the moment he approached the piano. She was fat and roundabout, good woman, and had the aspect of sitting upon the very edge of her chair. She held out to the distressed pastor a hand covered with a rumpled white glove, which did not fit, and had never been intended to fit, and beckoned to him anxiously. With the calmness of despair Mr. Vincent obeyed the call.

“I have been looking so anxious to catch your eye, Mr. Vincent,” said Mrs. Brown; “do sit you down, now there’s a chance, and let me talk to you a minnit. Bless the girl! there’s Miss Polly Pigeon going to play, and everybody can use their freedom in talking. For my part,” said Mrs. Brown, securing the vacant chair of the performer for her captive, “that’s why I like instrumental music best. When a girl sings, why, to be sure, it’s only civil to listen—ain’t it now, Mr. Vincent? but nobody expects it of you, don’t you see, when she only plays. Now do you sit down. What I wanted to

speak to you was about that poor creetur in Back Grove Street—that's the lane right behind the chapel. She do maunder on so to see the minister. Mr. Tozer he's been to see her, and I sent Brown, but it wasn't a bit of use. It's you, Mr. Vincent, she's awanting of. If you'll call in to-morrow, I'll show you the place myself, as you're a stranger; for if you'll excuse me saying it, I am as curious as can be to hear what she's got to say."

"If she has got anything to say, she might prefer that it was not heard," said Vincent, with an attempt at a smile. "Is she ill—and who is she? I have never heard of her before."

"Well, you see, sir, she doesn't belong rightly to Salem. She's a stranger here, and not a joined member; and she ain't ill either, as I can see—only something on her mind. You ministers," said Mrs. Brown, with a look of awe, "must have a deal of secrets confided to you. Folks may stand out against religion as long as things go on straight with them, but they're sure to want the minister as soon as they've got something on their mind; and a deal better to have it out, and get a little comfort, than to bottle it all up till their latter end, like old Mrs. Thompson, and let it out in their will, to drive them as was expecting different distracted. It's a year or two since that happened. I don't suppose you've heerd tell of it yet. But that's what makes old Mrs. Christian—I dare to say you've seen her at chapel—so uncomfortable in her feelins. She's never got over it, sir, and never will to her dying day."

"Some disappointment about money?" said Mr. Vincent.

"Poor old folks! their daughter did very well for herself—and very well for them too," said Mrs. Brown; "but it don't make no difference in Mrs. Christian's feelins: they're living, like, on Mr. Brown the solicitor's charity, you see, sir, instead of their own fortin, which makes a deal o' difference. It would have been a fine thing for Salem too," added Mrs. Brown, reflectively, "if they had had the old lady's money; for Mrs. Christian was always one that liked to be first, and stanch to her chapel, and

would never have been wanting when the collecting-books went round. But it wasn't to be, Mr. Vincent—that's the short and the long of it; and we never have had nobody in our connection worth speaking of in Carlingford but's been in trade. And a very good thing too, as I tell Brown. For if there's one thing I can't abear in a chapel, it's one set setting up above the rest. But bein' all in the way of business, except just the poor folks, as is all very well in their place, and never interferes with nothing, and don't count, there's nothing but brotherly love here, which is a deal more than most ministers can say for their flocks. I've asked a few friends to tea, Mr. Vincent, on next Thursday, at six. As I haven't got no daughters just out of a boarding-school to write notes for me, will you take us in a friendly way, and just come without another invitation? All our own folks, sir, and a comfortable evening; and prayers, if you'll be so good, at the end. I don't like the new fashion," said Mrs. Brown, with a significant glance towards Mrs. Tozer, "of separatin' like heathens, when all's of one connection. We might never meet again, Mr. Vincent. In the midst of life, you know, sir. You'll not forget Thursday, at six."

"But, my dear Mrs. Brown, I am very sorry: Thursday is one of the days I have specially devoted to study," stammered forth the unhappy pastor. "What with the Wednesday meeting and the Friday committee——"

Mrs. Brown drew herself up as well as the peculiarities of her form permitted, and her roseate countenance assumed a deeper glow. "We've been in the chapel longer than Tozer," said the offended deaconess. "We've never been backward, in takin' trouble, nor spendin' our substance, nor puttin' our hands to every good work; and as for makin' a difference between one member and another, it's what we ain't been accustomed to, Mr. Vincent. I'm a plain woman, and speak my mind. Old Mr. Tufton was very particular to show no preference. He always said, it never answered in a flock to show more friendship to one nor another; and if it had been put to me, I wouldn't have said, I assure you, sir, that it was us as was to be made the first example of. If I haven't a daughter fresh out of a boarding-school, I've been a

member of Salem five-and-twenty year, and had ministers in my house many's the day, and as friendly as if I were a duchess; and for charities and such things, we've never been known to fail, though I say it; and as for trouble——"

"But I spoke of my study," said the poor minister, as she paused, her indignation growing too eloquent for words: "you want me to preach on Sunday, don't you? and I must have some time, you know, to do my work."

"Sir," said Mrs. Brown, severely, "I know it for a fact that Mr. Wentworth of St. Roque's dines out five days in the week, and it don't do his sermons no injury; and when you go out to dinner, it stands to reason it's a different thing from a friendly tea."

"Ah, yes, most likely!" said Mr. Vincent, with a heavy sigh. "I'll come, since you wish it so much; but," added the unlucky young man, with a melancholy attempt at a smile, "you must not be too kind to me. Too much of this kind of thing, you know, might have an effect——" Here he paused, inclined to laugh at his own powers of sarcasm. As chance would have it, as he pointed generally to the scene before them, the little wave of his hand seemed to Mrs. Brown to indicate the group round the piano, foremost in which was Phœbe, plump and pink, and full of dimples. The good mistress of the Devonshire Dairy gave her head a little toss.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Brown, with a sigh, "you don't know, you young men, the half of the tricks of them girls that look so innocent. But I don't deny it's a pleasant party," added the deaconess, looking round on the company in general with some complacency. "But just you come along our way on Thursday, at six, and judge for yourself if mine ain't quite as good; though I have not got no daughters, Mr. Vincent," she concluded, with severe irony, elevating her double chin and nodding her flowery head.

The subdued minister made no reply; only deeper and deeper humiliation seemed in store for him. Was it he, the first prize-man of Homerton, who was supposed to be

already smitten by the pink charms of Phœbe Tozer? The unfortunate young man groaned in spirit, and, seizing a sudden opportunity, plunged into the black group of deacons, and tried to immerse himself in chapel business. But vain was the attempt. He was recaptured and led back in triumph to Mrs. Tozer's sofa. He had to listen to more singing, and accept another invitation to tea. When he got off at last, it was with a sensation of dreadful dwindlement that poor Vincent crossed the street again to his lonely abode. He knocked quite humbly at the big door, and, with a sensation of unclerical rage, wondered to himself whether the policeman who met him knew he had been out to tea. Ah, blessed Mr. Wentworth of St. Roque's! The young Nonconformist sighed as he put on his slippers, and kicked his boots into a corner of his sitting-room. Somehow he had come down in the world all at once, and without expecting it. Such was Salem Chapel and its requirements: and such was Mr. Vincent's first experience of social life in Carlingford.

CHAPTER II.

IT was with a somewhat clouded aspect that the young pastor rose from his solitary breakfast-table next morning to devote himself to the needful work of visiting his flock. The minister's breakfast, though lonely, had not been without alleviations. He had the "Carlingford Gazette" at his elbow, if that was any comfort, and he had two letters which were more interesting; one was from his mother, a minister's widow, humbly enough off, but who had brought up her son in painful gentility, and had done much to give him that taste for good society which was to come to so little fruition in Carlingford. Mr. Vincent smiled sardonically as he read his good mother's questions about his "dear people," and her anxious inquiry whether he had found a "pleasant circle" in Salem. Remembering the dainty little household which it took her so much pains and pinching to maintain, the contrast made present affairs still more and more distasteful to her son. He could fancy her trim little figure in that

traditionary black silk gown which never wore out, and the whitest of caps, gazing aghast at Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Tozer. But, nevertheless, Mrs. Vincent understood all about Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Tozer, and had been very civil to such, and found them very serviceable in her day, though her son, who knew her only in that widowed cottage where she had her own way, could not have realised it. The other letter was from a Homerton chum, a young intellectual and ambitious Nonconformist like himself, whose epistle was full of confidence and hope, triumph in the cause, and its perpetual advance. “We are the priests of the poor,” said the Homerton enthusiast, encouraging his friend to the sacrifices and struggles which he presumed to be already surrounding him. Mr. Vincent bundled up this letter with a sigh. Alas! there were no grand struggles or sacrifices in Carlingford. “The poor” were mostly church-goers, as he had already discovered. It was a tolerably comfortable class of the community, that dreadful “connection” of Browns, Pigeons, and Tozers. Amid their rude luxuries and commonplace plenty, life could have no heroic circumstances. The young man sighed, and did not feel so sure as he once did of the grand generalities in which his friend was still confident. If Dissenters led the van of progress generally, there was certainly an exception to be made in respect to Carlingford. And the previous evening’s entertainment had depressed the young minister’s expectations even of what he himself could do—a sad blow to a young man. He was less convinced that opportunity of utterance was all that was necessary to give him influence in the general community. He was not half so sure of success in opening the closed doors and sealed hearts of Grange Lane. On the whole, matters looked somewhat discouraging that particular morning, which was a morning in October, not otherwise depressing or disagreeable. He took his hat and went down-stairs with a kind of despairing determination to do his duty. There an encounter occurred which did not raise his spirits. The door was open, and his landlady, who was a member of Salem Chapel, stood there in full relief against the daylight outside, taking from the hands of Miss Phœbe Tozer a little basket, the

destination of which she was volubly indicating. Mr. Vincent appearing before Phœbe had half concluded her speech, that young lady grew blushingly embarrassed, and made haste to relinquish her hold of the basket. Her conscious looks filled the unwitting minister with ignorant amaze.

“Oh, to think Mr. Vincent should catch me here! What ever will he think? and what ever will Ma say?” cried Miss Phœbe. “Oh, Mr. Vincent, Ma thought, please, you might perhaps like some jelly, and I said I would run over with it myself, as it’s so near, and the servant might have made a mistake, and Ma hopes you’ll enjoy it, and that you liked the party last night!”

“Mrs. Tozer is very kind,” said the minister, with cloudy looks. “Some what, did you say, Miss Phœbe?”

“La! only some jelly—nothing worth mentioning—only a shape that was over supper last night, and Ma thought you wouldn’t mind,” cried the messenger, half alarmed by the unusual reception of her offering. Mr. Vincent turned very red, and looked at the basket as if he would like nothing better than to pitch it into the street; but prudence for once restrained the young man. He bit his lips, and bowed, and went upon his way, without waiting, as she intended he should, to escort Miss Phœbe back again to her paternal shop. Carrying his head higher than usual, and thrilling with offence and indignation, the young pastor made his way along George Street. It was a very trifling circumstance, certainly; but just when an enthusiastic companion writes to you about the advance of the glorious cause, and your own high vocation as a soldier of the Cross, and the undoubted fact that the hope of England is in you, to have a shape of jelly, left over from last night’s tea-party, sent across the street with complacent kindness, for your refreshment——! It was trying. To old Mrs. Tufton, indeed, who had an invalid daughter, it might have seemed a Christian bounty; but to Arthur Vincent, five-and-twenty, a scholar and a gentleman—ah me! If he had been a Christchurch man, or even a Fellow of Trinity, the chances are he

would have taken it much more graciously; for then he would have had the internal consciousness of his own dignity to support him; whereas the sting of it all was, that poor young Vincent had no special right to his own pretensions, but had come to them he could not tell how; and, in reality, had his mind been on a level with his fortunes, ought to have found the Tozers and Pigeons sufficiently congenial company. He went along George Street with troubled haste, pondering his sorrows—those sorrows which he could confide to nobody. Was he actually to live among these people for years—to have no other society—to circulate among their tea-parties, and grow accustomed to their finery, and perhaps "pay attention" to Phœbe Tozer; or, at least, suffer that young lady's attentions to him? And what would become of him at the end? To drop into a shuffling old gossip, like good old Mr. Tufton, seemed the best thing he could hope for; and who could wonder at the mild stupor of paralysis—disease not tragical, only drivelling—which was the last chapter of all?

The poor young man accordingly marched along George Street deeply disconsolate. When he met the perpetual curate of St. Roque's at the door of Masters's bookshop—where, to be sure, at that hour in the morning, it was natural to encounter Mr. Wentworth—the young Nonconformist gazed at him with a certain wistfulness. They looked at each other, in fact, being much of an age, and not unsimilar in worldly means just at the present moment. There were various points of resemblance between them. Mr. Vincent, too, wore an Anglican coat, and assumed a high clerical aspect—sumptuary laws forbidding such presumption being clearly impracticable in England; and the Dissenter was as fully endowed with natural good looks as the young priest. How was it, then, that so vast a world of difference and separation lay between them? For one compensating moment Mr. Vincent decided that it was because of his more enlightened faith, and felt himself persecuted. But even that pretence did not serve the purpose. He began to divine faintly, and with a certain soreness, that external circumstances do stand for something, if not in the

great realities of a man's career, at least in the comforts of his life. A poor widow's son, educated at Homerton, and an English squire's son, public school and university bred, cannot begin on the same level. To compensate that disadvantage requires something more than a talent for preaching. Perhaps genius would scarcely do it without the aid of time and labour. The conviction fell sadly upon poor Arthur Vincent as he went down the principal street of Carlingford in the October sunshine. He was rapidly becoming disenchanted, and neither the 'Nonconformist' nor the 'Patriot,' nor Exeter Hall itself, could set him up again.

With these feelings the young pastor pursued his way to see the poor woman who, according to Mrs. Brown's account, was so anxious to see the minister. He found this person, whose desire was at present shared by most of the female members of Salem without the intervention of the Devonshire Dairy, in a mean little house in the close lane dignified by the name of Back Grove Street. She was a thin, dark, vivacious-looking woman, with a face from which some forty years of energetic living had withdrawn all the colour and fulness which might once have rendered it agreeable, but which was, nevertheless, a remarkable face, not to be lightly passed over. Extreme thinness of outline and sharpness of line made the contrast between this educated countenance and the faces which had lately surrounded the young minister still more remarkable. It was not a profound or elevated kind of education, perhaps, but it was very different from the thin superficial lacker with which Miss Phœbe was coated. Eager dark eyes, with dark lines under them—thin eloquent lips, the upper jaw projecting slightly, the mouth closing fast and firm—a well-shaped small head, with a light black lace handkerchief fastened under the chin—no complexion or softening of tint—a dark, sallow, colourless face, thrilling with expression, energy, and thought, was that on which the young man suddenly lighted as he went in, somewhat indifferent, it must be confessed, and expecting to find nothing that could interest him. She was seated in a shabby room, only half-carpeted, up two pair of stairs, which looked out upon no more lively view than

the back of Salem Chapel itself, with its few dismal scattered graves—and was working busily at men's clothing of the coarsest kind, blue stuff which had transferred its colour to her thin fingers. Meagre as were her surroundings, however, Mr. Vincent, stumbling listlessly up the narrow bare stair of the poor lodging-house, suddenly came to himself as he stood within this humble apartment. If this was to be his penitent, the story she had to tell might be not unworthy of serious listening. He stammered forth a half apology and explanation of his errand, as he gazed surprised at so unexpected a figure, wondering within himself what intense strain and wear of life could have worn to so thin a tissue the outer garment of this keen and sharp-edged soul.

"Come in," said the stranger, "I am glad to see you. I know you, Mr. Vincent, though I can't suppose you've observed me. Take a seat. I have heard you preach ever since you came—so, knowing in a manner how your thoughts run, I've a kind of acquaintance with you: which, to be sure, isn't the same on your side. I daresay the woman at the Dairy sent you to me?"

"I understood—from Mrs. Brown certainly—that you wanted to see me," said the puzzled pastor.

"Yes, it was quite true. I have resources in myself, to be sure, as much as most people," said his new acquaintance, whom he had been directed to ask for as Mrs. Hilyard, "but still human relations are necessary; and as I don't know anybody here, I thought I'd join the Chapel. Queer set of people, rather, don't you think?" she continued, glancing up from her rapid stitching to catch Vincent's conscious eye; "they thought I was in spiritual distress, I suppose, and sent me the butterman. Lord bless us! if I had been, what could he have done for me, does anybody imagine? and when he didn't succeed, there came the Dairy person, who, I daresay, would have understood what I wanted had I been a cow. Now I can make out what I'm doing when I have you, Mr. Vincent. I know your line a little from your sermons. That was

wonderfully clever on Sunday morning about confirmation. I belong to the Church myself by rights, and was confirmed, of course, at the proper time, like other people, but I am a person of impartial mind. That was a famous downright blow. I liked you there."

"I am glad to have your approbation," said the young minister, rather stiffly; "but excuse me—I was quite in earnest in my argument."

"Yes, yes; that was the beauty of it," said his eager interlocutor, who went on without ever raising her eyes, intent upon the rough work which he could not help observing sometimes made her scarred fingers bleed as it passed rapidly through them. "No argument is ever worth listening to if it isn't used in earnest. I've led a wandering life, and heard an infinity of sermons of late years. When there are any brains in them at all, you know, they are about the only kind of mental stimulant a poor woman in my position can come by, for I've no time for reading lately. Down here, in these regions, where the butterman comes to inquire after your spiritual interests, and is a superior being," added this singular new adherent of Salem, looking full for a single moment in her visitor's eyes, with a slight movement of the muscles of her thin face, and making a significant pause, "the air's a trifle heavy. It isn't pure oxygen we breathe in Back Grove Street, by any means."

"I assure you it surprises me more than I can explain, to find," said Vincent, hesitating for a proper expression, "to find——"

"Such a person as I am in Back Grove Street," interrupted his companion, quickly; "yes—and thereby hangs a tale. But I did not send for you to tell it. I sent for you for no particular reason, but a kind of yearning to talk to somebody. I beg your pardon sincerely—but you know," she said, once more with a direct sudden glance and that half-visible movement in her face which meant mischief, "you are a minister, and are bound to have no inclinations of your own, but to give yourself up to the comfort of the poor."

“Without any irony, that is the aim I propose to myself,” said Vincent; “but I fear you are disposed to take rather a satirical view of such matters. It is fashionable to talk lightly on those subjects; but I find life and its affairs sufficiently serious, I assure you——”

Here she stopped her work suddenly, and looked up at him, her dark sharp eyes lighting up her thin sallow face with an expression which it was beyond his power to fathom. The black eyelashes widened, the dark eyebrows rose, with a full gaze of the profoundest tragic sadness, on the surface of which a certain gleam of amusement seemed to hover. The worn woman looked over the dark world of her own experience, of which she was conscious in every nerve, but of which he knew nothing, and smiled at his youth out of the abysses of her own life, where volcanoes had been, and earthquakes. He perceived it dimly, without understanding how, and faltered and blushed, yet grew angry with all the self-assertion of youth.

“I don’t doubt you know that as well as I do—perhaps better; but notwithstanding, I find my life leaves little room for laughter,” said the young pastor, not without a slight touch of heroics.

“Mr. Vincent,” said Mrs. Hilyard, with a gleam of mirth in her eye, “in inferring that I perhaps know better, you infer also that I am older than you, which is uncivil to a lady. But for my part, I don’t object to laughter. Generally it’s better than crying, which in a great many cases I find the only alternative. I doubt, however, much whether life, from the butterman’s point of view, wears the same aspect. I should be inclined to say not; and I daresay your views will brighten with your company,” added the aggravating woman, again resuming, with eyes fixed upon it, her laborious work.

“I perceive you see already what is likely to be my great trial in Carlingford,” said young Vincent. “I confess that the society of my office-bearers, which I suppose I must always consider myself bound to——”

“That was a very sad sigh,” said the rapid observer beside him; “but don’t confide in me, lest I should be tempted to tell somebody. I can speak my mind without prejudice to anybody; and if you agree with me, it may be a partial relief to your feelings. I shall be glad to see you when you can spare me half an hour. I can’t look at you while I talk, for that would lose me so much time, but at my age it doesn’t matter. Come and see me. It’s your business to do me good—and it’s possible I might even do some good to you.”

“Thank you. I shall certainly come,” said the minister, rising with the feeling that he had received his dismissal for to-day. She rose, too, quickly, and but for a moment, and held out her hand to him.

“Be sure you don’t betray to the dairywoman what I had on my mind, and wanted to tell you, though she is dying to know,” said his singular new acquaintance, without a smile, but with again a momentary movement in her thin cheeks. When she had shaken hands with him, she seated herself again immediately, and without a moment’s pause proceeded with her work, apparently concentrating all her faculties upon it, and neither hearing nor seeing more of her visitor, though he still stood within two steps of her, overshadowing the table. The young man turned and left the room with involuntary quietness, as if he had been dismissed from the presence of a princess. He went straight down-stairs without ever pausing, and hastened through the narrow back-street with still the impulse communicated by that dismissal upon him. When he drew breath, it was with a curious mixture of feelings. Who she was or what she was—how she came there, working at those “slops” till the colour came off upon her hands, and her poor thin fingers bled—she so strangely superior to her surroundings, yet not despising or quarrelling with them, or even complaining of them, so far as he could make out—infinitely perplexed the inexperienced minister. He came away excited and bewildered from the interview, which had turned out so different from his expectations. Whether she had done him good, was extremely doubtful; but she had changed the current of his thoughts, which was in its way an

immediate benefit. Marvelling over such a mysterious apparition, and not so sure as in the morning that nothing out of the most vulgar routine ever could occur in Carlingford, Mr. Vincent turned with meditative steps towards the little house at the extreme end of Grove Street, where his predecessor still lingered. A visit to old Mr. Tufton was a periodical once a-week duty, to be performed with the utmost regularity. Tozer and Pigeon had agreed that it would be the making of the young minister to draw thus from the experience of the old one. Whether Mr. Vincent agreed with them, may be apprehended from the scene which follows.

CHAPTER III.

MR. TUFTON'S house was at the extremity of Grove Street—at the extremity, consequently, in that direction, of Carlingford, lying parallel with the end of Grange Lane, and within distant view of St. Roque's. It was a little old-fashioned house, with a small garden in front and a large garden behind, in which the family cabbages, much less prosperous since the old minister became unable to tend them, flourished. The room into which Mr. Vincent, as an intimate of the house, was shown, was a low parlour with two small windows, overshadowed outside by ivy, and inside by two large geraniums, expanded upon a Jacob's ladder of props, which were the pride of Mrs. Tufton's heart, and made it almost impossible to see anything clearly within, even at the height of day. Some prints, of which one represented Mr. Tufton himself, and the rest other ministers of "the connection," in mahogany frames, hung upon the green walls. The furniture, though it was not unduly abundant, filled up the tiny apartment, so that quite a dislocation and rearrangement of everything was necessary before a chair could be got for the visitor, and he got into it. Though it was rather warm for October out of doors, a fire, large for the size of the room, was burning in the fireplace, on either side of which was an easy-chair and an invalid. The one fronting the light, and consequently fronting the visitor, was

Adelaide Tufton, the old minister's daughter, who had been confined to that chair longer than Phœbe Tozer could remember; and who, during that long seclusion, had knitted, as all Salem Chapel believed, without intermission, nobody having ever yet succeeded in discovering where the mysterious results of her labour went to. She was knitting now, reclining back in the cushioned chair which had been made for her, and was her shell and habitation. A very pale, emaciated, eager-looking woman, not much above thirty, but looking, after half a lifetime spent in that chair, any age that imagination might suggest; a creature altogether separated from the world—separated from life, it would be more proper to say—for nobody more interested in the world and other people's share of it than Adelaide Tufton existed in Carlingford. She had light-blue eyes, rather prominent, which lightened without giving much expression to her perfectly colourless face. Her very hair was pale, and lay in braids of a clayey yellow, too listless and dull to be called brown, upon the thin temples, over which the thin white skin seemed to be strained like an over-tight bandage. Somehow, however, people who were used to seeing her, were not so sorry as they might have been for Adelaide Tufton. No one could exactly say why; but she somehow appeared, in the opinion of Salem Chapel, to indemnify herself for her privations, and was treated, if without much sympathy, at least without that ostentatious pity which is so galling to the helpless. Few people could afford to be sorry for so quick-sighted and all-remembering an observer; and the consequence was, that Adelaide, almost without knowing it, had managed to neutralise her own disabilities, and to be acknowledged as an equal in the general conflict, which she could enter only with her sharp tongue and her quick eye.

It was Mr. Tufton himself who sat opposite—his large expanse of face, with the white hair which had been apostrophised as venerable at so many Salem tea-parties, and which Vincent himself had offered homage to, looming dimly through the green shade of the geraniums, as he sat with his back to the window. He had a green shade over his eyes besides, and his head moved with a slight palsied tremor, which was

now the only remnant of that “visitation” which had saved his feelings, and dismissed more benignly than Tozer and his brother deacons the old pastor from his old pulpit. He sat very contentedly doing nothing, with his large feet in large loose slippers, and his elbows supported on the arms of his chair. By the evidence of Mrs. Tufton’s spectacles, and the newspaper lying on the table, it was apparent that she had been reading the ‘Carlingford Gazette’ to her helpless companions; and that humble journal, which young Vincent had kicked to the other end of his room before coming out, had made the morning pass very pleasantly to the three secluded inmates of Siloam Cottage, which was the name of the old minister’s humble home. Mr. Tufton said “’umble ‘ome,” and so did his wife. They came from storied Islington, both of them, and were of highly respectable connections, not to say that Mrs. Tufton had a little property as well; and, acting in laudable opposition to the general practice of poor ministers’ wives, had brought many dividends and few children to the limited but comfortable fireside. Mr. Vincent could not deny that it was comfortable in its way, and quite satisfied its owners, as he sat down in the shade of the geraniums in front of the fire, between Adelaide Tufton and her father; but, oh heavens! to think of such a home as all that, after Homerton and high Nonconformist hopes, could come to himself! The idea, however, was one which did not occur to the young minister. He sat down compassionately, seeing no analogy whatever between his own position and theirs; scarcely even seeing the superficial contrast, which might have struck anybody, between his active youth and their helplessness and suffering. He was neither hard-hearted nor unsympathetic, but somehow the easy moral of that contrast never occurred to him. Adelaide Tufton’s bloodless countenance conveyed an idea of age to Arthur Vincent; her father was really old. The young man saw no grounds on which to form any comparison. It was natural enough for the old man and ailing woman to be as they were, just as it was natural for him, in the height of his early manhood, to rejoice in his strength and youth.

“So there was a party at Mr. Tozer’s last night—and you were there, Mr. Vincent,” said old Mrs. Tufton, a cheerful active old lady, with pink ribbons in her cap, which asserted their superiority over the doubtful light and the green shade of the geraniums. “Who did you have? The Browns and the Pigeons, and—everybody else, of course. Now tell me, did Mrs. Tozer make tea herself, or did she leave it to Phœbe?”

“As well as I can remember, she did it herself,” said the young pastor.

“Exactly what I told you, mamma,” said Adelaide, from her chair. “Mrs. Tozer doesn’t mean Phœbe to make tea this many a year. I daresay she wants her to marry somebody, the little flirting thing. I suppose she wore her pink, Mr. Vincent—and Mrs. Brown that dreadful red-and-green silk of hers; and didn’t they send you over a shape of jelly this morning? Ha, ha! I told you so, mamma; that was why it never came to me.”

“Pray let me send it to you,” cried Vincent, eagerly.

The offer was not rejected, though coquetted with for a few minutes. Then Mr. Tufton broke in, in solemn bass.

“Adelaide, we shouldn’t talk, my dear, of pinks and green silks. Providence has laid you aside, my love, from temptations; and you remember how often I used to say in early days, No doubt it was a blessing, Jemima, coming when it did, to wean our girl from the world; she might have been as fond of dress as other girls, and brought us to ruin, but for her misfortune. Everything is for the best.”

“Oh, bother!” said Adelaide, sharply—“I don’t complain, and never did; but everybody else finds my misfortune, as they call it, very easy to be borne, Mr. Vincent—even papa, you see. There is a reason for everything, to be sure; but how things that are hard and disagreeable are always to be called for the best, I can’t conceive. However, let us return to Phœbe Tozer’s pink dress. Weren’t you rather stunned with all their grandeur? You did not think we could do as much in Salem,

did you? Now tell me, who has Mrs. Brown taken in hand to do good to now? I am sure she sent you to somebody; and you've been to see somebody this morning," added the quick-witted invalid, "who has turned out different from your expectations. Tell me all about it, please."

"Dear Adelaide does love to hear what's going on. It is almost the only pleasure she has—and we oughtn't to grudge it, ought we?" said Adelaide's mother.

"Stuff!" muttered Adelaide, in a perfectly audible aside. "Now I think of it, I'll tell you who you've been to see. That woman in Back Grove Street—there! What do you think of that for a production of Salem, Mr. Vincent? But she does not really belong to Carlingford. She married somebody who turned out badly, and now she's in hiding that he mayn't find her; though most likely, if all be true, he does not want to find her. That's her history. I never pretend to tell more than I know. Who she was to begin with, or who he is, or whether Hilyard may be her real name, or why she lives there and comes to Salem Chapel, I can't tell; but that's the bones of her story, you know. If I were a clever romancer like some people, I could have made it all perfect for you, but I prefer the truth. Clever and queer, isn't she? So I have guessed by what people say."

"Indeed, you seem to know a great deal more about her than I do," said the astonished pastor.

"I daresay," assented Adelaide, calmly. "I have never seen her, however, though I can form an idea of what she must be like, all the same. I put things together, you see; and it is astonishing the number of scraps of news I get. I shake them well down, and then the broken pieces come together; and I never forget anything, Mr. Vincent," she continued, pausing for a moment to give him a distinct look out of the pale-blue eyes, which for the moment seemed to take a vindictive feline gleam. "She's rather above the Browns and the Tozers, you understand. Somehow or other, she's mixed up with Lady Western, whom they call the Young Dowager, you know.

I have not made that out yet, though I partly guess. My lady goes to see her up two pairs of stairs in Back Grove Street. I hope it does her ladyship good to see how the rest of the world manage to live and get on."

"I am afraid, Adelaide, my dear," said Mr. Tufton, in his bass tones, "that my young brother will not think this very improving conversation. Dear Tozer was speaking to me yesterday about the sermon to the children. I always preached them a sermon to themselves about this time of the year. My plan has been to take the congregation in classes; the young men—ah, and they're specially important, are the young men! Dear Tozer suggested that some popular lectures now would not come amiss. After a long pastorate like mine," said the good man, blandly, unconscious that dear Tozer had already begun to suggest a severance of that tie before gentle sickness did it for him, "a congregation may be supposed to be a little unsettled,—without any offence to you, my dear brother. If I could appear myself and show my respect to your ministry, it would have a good effect, no doubt; but I am laid aside, laid aside, brother Vincent! I can only help you with my prayers."

"But dear, dear Mr. Tufton!" cried his wife, "bless you, the chapel is twice as full as it was six months ago—and natural too, with a nice young man."

"My dear!" said the old minister in reproof. "Yes, quite natural—curiosity about a stranger; but my young brother must not be elated; nor discouraged when they drop off. A young pastor's start in life is attended by many trials. There is always a little excitement at first, and an appearance of seats letting and the ladies very polite to you. Take it easily, my dear brother! Don't expect too much. In a year or two—by-and-by, when things settle down—then you can see how it's going to be."

"But don't you think it possible that things may never settle down, but continue rising up instead?" said Mr. Vincent, making a little venture in the inspiration of the moment.

Mr. Tufton shook his head and raised his large hands slowly, with a deprecating

regretful motion, to hold them over the fire. “Alas! he’s got the fever already,” said the old minister. “My dear young brother, you shall have my experience to refer to always. You’re always welcome to my advice. Dear Tozer said to me just yesterday, ‘You point out the pitfalls to him, Mr. Tufton, and give him your advice, and I’ll take care that he shan’t go wrong outside,’ says dear Tozer. Ah, an invaluable man!”

“But a little disposed to interfere, I think,” said Vincent, with an irrestrainable inclination to show his profound disrelish of all the advice which was about to be given him.

Mr. Tufton raised his heavy forefinger and shook it slowly. “No—no. Be careful, my dear brother. You must keep well with your deacons. You must not take up prejudices against them. Dear Tozer is a man of a thousand—a man of a thousand! Dear Tozer, if you listen to him, will keep you out of trouble. The trouble he takes and the money he spends for Salem Chapel is, mark my words, unknown—and,” added the old pastor, awfully syllabling the long word in his solemn bass, “in-con-ceiv-able.”

“He is a bore and an ass for all that,” said the daring invalid opposite, with perfect equanimity, as if uttering the most patent and apparent of truths. “Don’t you give in to him, Mr. Vincent. A pretty business you will have with them all,” she continued, dropping her knitting-needles and lifting her pale-blue eyes, with their sudden green gleam, to the face of the new-comer with a rapid perception of his character, which, having no sympathy in it, but rather a certain mischievous and pleased satisfaction in his probable discomfiture, gave anything but comfort to the object of her observation. “You are something new for them to pet and badger. I wonder how long they’ll be of killing Mr. Vincent. Papa’s tough; but you remember, mamma, they finished off the other man before us in two years.”

“Oh, hush, Adelaide, hush! you’ll frighten Mr. Vincent,” cried the kind little mother, with uneasy looks: “when he comes to see us and cheer us up—as I am sure is very

kind of him—it is a shame to put all sorts of things in his head, as papa and you do. Never mind Adelaide, Mr. Vincent, dear. Do your duty, and never fear anybody; that's always been my maxim, and I've always found it answer. Not going away, are you? Dear, dear! and we've had no wise talk at all, and never once asked for your poor dear mother—quite well, I hope?—and Miss Susan? You should have them come and see you, and cheer you up. Well, good morning, if you must go; don't be long before you come again."

"And, my dear young brother, don't take up any prejudices," interposed Mr. Tufton, in tremulous bass, as he pressed Vincent's half-reluctant fingers in that large soft flabby ministerial hand. Adelaide added nothing to these valedictions; but when she too had received his leave-taking, and he had emerged from the shadow of the geraniums, the observer paused once more in her knitting. "This one will not hold out two years," said Adelaide, calmly, to herself, no one else paying any attention; and she returned to her work with the zest of a spectator at the commencement of an exciting drama. She did double work all the afternoon under the influence of this refreshing stimulant. It was quite a new interest in her life.

Meanwhile young Vincent left the green gates of Siloam Cottage with no very comfortable feelings—with feelings, indeed, the reverse of comfortable, yet conscious of a certain swell and elevation in his mind at the same moment. It was for him to show the entire community of Carlingford the difference between his reign and the old regime. It was for him to change the face of affairs—to reduce Tozer into his due place of subordination, and to bring in an influx of new life, intelligence, and enlightenment over the prostrate butterman. The very sordidness and contraction of the little world into which he had just received so distinct a view, promoted the revulsion of feeling which now cheered him. The aspiring young man could as soon have consented to lose his individuality altogether as to acknowledge the most distant possibility of accepting Tozer as his guide, philosopher, and friend. He went back again through Grove Street, heated and hastened on his way by those

impatient thoughts. When he came as far as Salem, he could not but pause to look at it with its pinched gable and mean little belfry, innocent of a bell. The day was overclouded, and no clearness of atmosphere relieved the aspect of the shabby chapel, with its black railing, and locked gates, and dank flowerless grass inside. To see anything venerable or sacred in the aspect of such a place, required an amount of illusion and glamour which the young minister could not summon into his eyes. It was not the centre of light in a dark place, the simple tribune from which the people's preacher should proclaim, to the awe and conviction of the multitude, that Gospel once preached to the poor, of which he flattered himself he should be the truest messenger in Carlingford. Such had been the young man's dreams in Homerton—dreams mingled, it is true, with personal ambition, but full notwithstanding of generous enthusiasm. No—nothing of the kind. Only Salem Chapel, with so many pews let, and so many still to be disposed of, and Tozer a guardian angel at the door. Mr. Vincent was so far left to himself as to give vent to an impatient exclamation as he turned away. But still matters were not hopeless. He himself was a very different man from Mr. Tufton. Kindred spirits there must surely be in Carlingford to answer to the call of his. Another day might dawn for the Nonconformists, who were not aware of their own dignity. With this thought he retraced his steps a little, and, with an impulse which he did not explain to himself, threaded his way up a narrow lane and emerged into Back Grove Street, about the spot where he had lately paid his pastoral visit, and made so unexpected an acquaintance. This woman—or should he not say lady?—was a kind of first-fruits of his mission. The young man looked up with a certain wistful interest at the house in which she lived. She was neither young nor fair, it is true, but she interested the youthful Nonconformist, who was not too old for impulses of chivalry, and who could not forget her poor fingers scarred with her rough work. He had no other motive for passing the house but that of sympathy and compassion for the forlorn brave creature who was so unlike her surroundings; and no throbbing pulse or

trembling nerve forewarned Arthur Vincent of the approach of fate.

At that moment, however, fate was approaching in the shape of a handsome carriage, which made quite an exaggeration of echo in this narrow back-street, which rang back every jingle of the harness and dint of the hoofs from every court and opening. It drew up before Mrs. Hilyard's door—at the door of the house, at least, in which Mrs. Hilyard was a humble lodger; and while Vincent slowly approached, a brilliant vision suddenly appeared before him, rustling forth upon the crowded pavement, where the dirty children stood still to gape at her. A woman—a lady—a beautiful dazzling creature, resplendent in the sweetest English roses, the most delicate bewildering bloom. Though it was but for a moment, the bewildered young minister had time to note the dainty foot, the daintier hand, the smiling sunshiny eyes, the air of conscious supremacy, which was half command and half entreaty—an ineffable combination. That vision descended out of the heavenly chariot upon the mean pavement just as Mr. Vincent came up; and at the same moment a ragged boy, struck speechless, like the young minister, by the apparition, planted himself full in her way with open mouth and staring eyes, too much overpowered by sudden admiration to perceive that he stopped the path. Scarcely aware what he was doing, as much beauty-struck as his victim, Vincent, with a certain unconscious fury, seized the boy by the collar, and swung him impatiently off the pavement, with a feeling of positive resentment against the imp, whose rags were actually touching those sacred splendid draperies. The lady made a momentary pause, turned half round, smiled with a gracious inclination of her head, and entered at the open door, leaving the young pastor in an incomprehensible ecstasy, with his hat off, and all his pulses beating loud in his ears, riveted, as the romancers say, to the pavement. When the door shut he came to himself, stared wildly into the face of the next passenger who came along the narrow street, and then, becoming aware that he still stood uncovered, grew violently red, put on his hat, and went off at a great pace. But what was the use of going off? The deed was done. The world on the other

side of these prancing horses was a different world from that on this side. Those other matters, of which he had been thinking so hotly, had suddenly faded into a background and accessories to the one triumphant figure which occupied all the scene. He scarcely asked himself who was that beautiful vision? The fact of her existence was at the moment too overpowering for any secondary inquiries. He had seen her—and lo! the universe was changed. The air tingled softly with the sound of prancing horses and rolling wheels, the air breathed an irresistible soft perfume, which could nevermore die out of it, the air rustled with the silken thrill of those womanly robes. There she had enthroned herself—not in his startled heart, but in the palpitating world, which formed in a moment's time into one great background and framework for that beatific form.

What the poor young man had done to be suddenly assailed and carried off his feet by this wonderful and unexpected apparition, we are unable to say. He seemed to have done nothing to provoke it: approaching quietly as any man might do, pondering grave thoughts of Salem Chapel, and how he was to make his post tenable, to be transfixed all at once and unawares by that fairy lance, was a spite of fortune which nobody could have predicted. But the thing was done. He went home to hide his stricken head, as was natural; tried to read, tried to think of a popular series of lectures, tried to lay plans for his campaign and heroic desperate attempts to resuscitate the shopkeeping Dissenterism of Carlingford into a lofty Nonconformist ideal. But vain were the efforts. Wherever he lifted his eyes, was not She there, all-conquering and glorious? when he did not lift his eyes, was not she everywhere Lady Paramount of the conscious world? Womankind in general, which had never, so to speak, entered his thoughts before, had produced much trouble to poor Arthur Vincent since his arrival in Carlingford. But Phœbe Tozer, pink and blooming—Mrs. Hilyard, sharp and strange—Adelaide Tufton, pale spectator of a life with which she had nothing to do—died off like shadows, and left no sign of their presence. Who was She?

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER the remarkable encounter which had thus happened to the young minister, life went on with him in the dullest routine for some days. Thursday came, and he had to go to Mrs. Brown's tea-party, where, in the drawing-room up-stairs, over the Devonshire Dairy, after tea, and music, and the diversions of the evening, he conducted prayers to the great secret satisfaction of the hostess, who felt that the superior piety of her entertainment entirely made up for any little advantage in point of gentility which Mrs. Tozer, with a grown-up daughter fresh from a boarding-school, might have over her. On Friday evening there was the singing-class at the chapel, which Mr. Vincent was expected to look in upon, and from which he had the privilege of walking home with Miss Tozer. When he arrived with his blooming charge at the private door, the existence of which he had not hitherto been aware of, Tozer himself appeared, to invite the young pastor to enter. This time it was the butterman's unadorned domestic hearth to which Mr. Vincent was introduced. This happy privacy was in a little parlour, which, being on the same floor with the butter-shop, naturally was not without a reminiscence of the near vicinity of all those hams and cheeses—a room nearly blocked up by the large family-table, at which, to the disgust of Phœbe, the apprentices sat at meal-times along with the family. One little boy, distinguished out of doors by a red worsted comforter, was, besides Phœbe, the only member of the family itself now at home; the others being two sons, one in Australia, and the other studying for a minister, as Mrs. Tozer had already informed her pastor, with motherly pride. Mrs. Tozer sat in an easy-chair by the fire darning stockings on this October night; her husband, opposite to her, had been looking over his greasy books, one of which lay open upon a little writing-desk, where a bundle of smaller ones in red leather, with "Tozer, Cheesemonger," stamped on them in gilt letters, lay waiting Phœbe's arrival to be made up. The Benjamin of the house sat half-way down the long table with his slate

working at his lessons. The margin of space round this long table scarcely counted in the aspect of the room. There was space enough for chairs to be set round it, and that was all: the table with its red-and-blue cover and the faces appearing above it, constituted the entire scene. Mr. Vincent stood uneasily at a corner when he was brought into the apartment, and distinctly placed himself at table, as if at a meal, when he sat down.

"Do you now take off your greatcoat, and make yourself comfortable," said Mrs. Tozer; "there's a bit of supper coming presently. This is just what I like, is this. A party is very well in its way, Mr. Vincent, sir; but when a gen'leman comes in familiar, and takes us just as we are, that's what I like. We never can be took wrong of an evening, Tozer and me; there's always a bit of something comfortable for supper; and after the shop's shut in them long evenings, time's free. Phœbe, make haste and take off your things. What a colour you've got, to be sure, with the night air! I declare, Pa, somebody must have been saying something to her, or she'd never look so bright."

"I daresay there's more things than music gets talked of at the singing," said Tozer, thus appealed to. "But she'd do a deal better if she'd try to improve her mind than take notice what the young fellows says."

"Oh, Pa, the idea! and before Mr. Vincent too," cried Phoebe—"to think I should ever dream of listening to anything that anybody might choose to say!"

Vincent, to whom the eyes of the whole family turned, grinned a feeble smile, but, groaning in his mind, was totally unequal to the effort of saying anything. After a moment's pause of half-disappointed expectation, Phœbe disappeared to take off her bonnet; and Mrs. Tozer, bestirring herself, cleared away the desk and books, and went into the kitchen to inquire into the supper. The minister and the deacon were accordingly left alone.

"Three more pews applied for this week—fifteen sittings in all," said Mr. Tozer;

"that's what I call satisfactory, that is. We mustn't let the steam go down—not on no account. You keep well at them of Sundays, Mr. Vincent, and trust to the managers, sir, to keep 'em up to their dooty. Me and Mr. Tufton was consulting the other day. He says as we oughtn't to spare you, and you oughtn't to spare yourself. There hasn't been such a opening not in our connection for fifteen year. We all look to you to go into it, Mr. Vincent. If all goes as I expect, and you keep up as you're doing, I see no reason why we shouldn't be able to put another fifty to the salary next year."

"Oh!" said poor Vincent, with a miserable face. He had been rather pleased to hear about the "opening," but this matter-of-fact encouragement and stimulus threw him back into dismay and disgust.

"Yes," said the deacon, "though I wouldn't advise you, as a young man settin' out in life, to calculate upon it, yet we all think it more than likely; but if you was to ask my advice, I'd say to give it 'em a little more plain—meaning the Church folks. It's expected of a new man. I'd touch 'em up in the State-Church line, Mr. Vincent, if I was you. Give us a coorse upon the anomalies, and that sort of thing—the bishops in their palaces, and the fisherman as was the start of it all; there's a deal to be done in that way. It always tells; and my opinion is as you might secure the most part of the young men and thinkers, and them as can see what's what, if you lay it on pretty strong. Not," added the deacon, remembering in time to add that necessary salve to the conscience—"not as I would have you neglect what's more important; but, after all, what is more important, Mr. Vincent, than freedom of opinion and choosing your own religious teacher? You can't put gospel truth in a man's mind till you've freed him out of them bonds. It stands to reason—as long as he believes just what he's told, and has it all made out for him the very words he's to pray, there may be feelin', sir, but there can't be no spiritual understandin' in that man."

"Well, one can't deny that there have been enlightened men in the Church of England," said the young Nonconformist, with lofty candour. "The inconsistencies

of the human mind are wonderful; and it is coming to be pretty clearly understood in the intellectual world, that a man may show the most penetrating genius, and even the widest liberality, and yet be led a willing slave in the bonds of religious rite and ceremony. One cannot understand it, it is true; but in our clearer atmosphere we are bound to exercise Christian charity. Great as the advantages are on our side of the question, I would not willingly hurt the feelings of a sincere Churchman, who, for anything I know, may be the best of men."

Mr. Tozer paused with a "humph!" of uncertainty; rather dazzled with the fine language, but doubtful of the sentiment. At length light seemed to dawn upon the excellent butterman. "Bless my soul! that's a new view," said Tozer; "that's taking the superior line over them! My impression is as that would tell beautiful. Eh! it's famous, that is! I've heard a many gentlemen attacking the Church, like, from down below, and giving it her about her money and her greatness, and all that; but our clearer atmosphere—there's the point! I always knew as you was a clever young man, Mr. Vincent, and expected a deal from you; but that's a new view, that is!"

"Oh, Pa, dear! don't be always talking about chapel business," said Miss Phœbe, coming in. "I am sure Mr. Vincent is sick to death of Salem. I am sure his heart is in some other place now; and if you bore him always about the chapel, he'll never, never take to Carlingford. Oh, Mr. Vincent, I am sure you know it is quite true!"

"Indeed," said the young minister, with a sudden recollection, "I can vouch for my heart being in Carlingford, and nowhere else;" and as he spoke his colour rose. Phœbe clapped her hands with a little semblance of confusion.

"Oh, la!" cried that young lady, "that is quite as good as a confession that you have lost it, Mr. Vincent. Oh, I am so interested! I wonder who it can be!"

"Hush, child; I daresay we shall know before long," said Mrs. Tozer, who had also rejoined the domestic party; "and don't you colour up or look ashamed, Mr. Vincent. Take my word, it's the very best a young minister can do. To be sure, where there's

a quantity of young ladies in a congregation, it sometimes makes a little dispeace; but there ain't to say many to choose from in Salem."

"La, mamma, how can you think it's a lady in Salem?" cried Phœbe, in a flutter of consciousness.

"Oh, you curious thing!" cried Mrs. Tozer: "she'll never rest, Mr. Vincent, till she's found it all out. She always was, from a child, a dreadful one for finding out a secret. But don't you trouble yourself; it's the very best thing a young minister can do."

Poor Vincent made a hasty effort to exculpate himself from the soft impeachment, but with no effect. Smiles, innuendoes, a succession of questions asked by Phœbe, who retired, whenever she had made her remark, with conscious looks and pink blushes, perpetually renewed this delightful subject. The unlucky young man retired upon Tozer. In desperation he laid himself open to the less troublesome infliction of the butterman's advice. In the mean time the table was spread, and supper appeared in most substantial and savoury shape; the only drawback being, that whenever the door was opened, the odours of bacon and cheese from the shop came in like a musty shadow of the boiled ham and hot sausages within.

"I am very partial to your style, Mr. Vincent," said the deacon; "there's just one thing I'd like to observe, sir, if you'll excuse me. I'd give 'em a coorse; there's nothing takes like a coorse in our connection. Whether it's on a chapter or a book of Scripture, or on a perticklar doctrine, I'd make a pint of giving 'em a coorse if it was me. There was Mr. Bailey, of Parson's Green, as was so popular before he married—he had a historical coorse in the evenings, and a coorse upon the eighth of Romans in the morning; and it was astonishing to see how they took. I walked over many and many's the summer evening myself, he kep' up the interest so. There ain't a cleverer man in our body, nor wasn't a better liked as he was then."

"And now I understand he's gone away—what was the reason?" asked Mr. Vincent.

Tozer shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. "All along of the women: they

didn't like his wife; and my own opinion is, he fell off dreadful. Last time I heard him, I made up my mind I'd never go back again—me that was such an admirer of his; and the managers found the chapel was falling off, and a deputation waited on him; and, to be sure, he saw it his duty to go."

"And, oh, she was so sweetly pretty!" cried Miss Phœbe: "but pray, pray, Mr. Vincent, don't look so pale. If you marry a pretty lady, we'll all be so kind to her! We shan't grudge her our minister; we shall——"

Here Miss Phœbe paused, overcome by her emotions.

"I do declare there never was such a child," said Mrs. Tozer: "it's none of your business, Phœbe. She's a great deal too feelin', Mr. Vincent. But I don't approve, for my part, of a minister marrying a lady as is too grand for her place, whatever Phœbe may say. It's her that should teach suchlike as us humility and simple ways; and a fine lady isn't no way suitable. Not to discourage you, Mr. Vincent, I haven't a doubt, for my part, that you'll make a nice choice."

"I have not the least intention of trying the experiment," said poor Vincent, with a faint smile; then, turning to his deacon, he plunged into the first subject that occurred to him. "Do you know a Mrs. Hilyard in Back Grove Street?" asked the young minister. "I went to see her the other day. Who is she, or where does she belong to, can you tell me?—and which of your great ladies in Carlingford is it," he added, with a little catching of his breath after a momentary pause, "who visits that poor lady? I saw a carriage at her door."

"Meaning the poor woman at the back of the chapel?" said Tozer—"I don't know nothing of her, except that I visited there, sir, as you might do, in the way of dooty. Ah! I fear she's in the gall of bitterness, Mr. Vincent; she didn't take my 'umble advice, sir, not as a Christian ought. But she comes to the chapel regular enough; and you may be the means of putting better thoughts into her mind; and as for our great ladies in Carlingford," continued Mr. Tozer, with the air of an authority,

"never a one of them, I give you my word, would go out of her way a-visiting to one of the chapel folks. They're a deal too bigoted for that, especially them at St. Roque's."

"Oh, Pa, how can you say so," cried Phœbe, "when it's very well known the ladies go everywhere, where the people are very, very poor? but then Mr. Vincent said a poor lady. Was it a nice carriage? The Miss Wodehouses always walk, and so does Mrs. Glen, and all the Strangeways. Oh, I know, it was the young Dowager—that pretty, pretty lady, you know, mamma, that gives the grand parties, and lives in Grange Lane. I saw her carriage going up the lane by the chapel once. Oh, Mr. Vincent, wasn't she very, very pretty, with blue eyes and brown hair?"

"I could not tell you what kind of eyes and hair they were," said Mr. Vincent, trying hard to speak indifferently, and quite succeeding so far as Phœbe Tozer was concerned; for who could venture to associate the minister of Salem, even as a victim, with the bright eyes of Lady Western? "I thought it strange to see her there, whoever she was."

"Oh, how insensible you are!" murmured Phœbe, across the table. Perhaps, considering all things, it was not strange that Phœbe should imagine her own pink bloom to have dimmed the young pastor's appreciation of other beauty.

"But it was Mrs. Hilyard I inquired about, and not this Lady—Lady what, Miss Phœbe?" asked the reverend hypocrite; "I don't profess to be learned in titles, but hers is surely a strange one. I thought dowager was another word for an old woman."

"She's a beautiful young creature," broke in the butterman. "I mayn't approve of such goings-on, but I can't shut my eyes. She deals with me regular, and I can tell you the shop looks like a different place when them eyes of hers are in it. She's out of our line, and she's out of your line, Mr. Vincent," added Tozer, apologetically, coming down from his sudden enthusiasm, "or I mightn't say as much as I do say,

for she's gay, and always a-giving parties, and spending her life in company, as I don't approve of; but to look in her face, you couldn't say a word against her—nor I couldn't. She might lead a man out of his wits, and I wouldn't not to say blame him. If the angels are nicer to look at, it's a wonder to me!" Having reached to this pitch of admiration, the alarmed butterman came to a sudden pause, looked round him somewhat dismayed, wiped his forehead, rubbed his hands, and evidently felt that he had committed himself, and was at the mercy of his audience. Little did the guilty Tozer imagine that never before—not when giving counsel upon chapel business in the height of wisdom, or complimenting the sermon as only a chapel-manager, feeling in his heart that the seats were letting, could—had he spoken so much to the purpose in young Vincent's hearing, or won so much sympathy from the minister. As for the female part of the company, they were at first too much amazed for speech. "Upon my word, Papa!" burst from the lips of the half-laughing, half-angry Phœbe. Mrs. Tozer, who had been cutting bread with a large knife, hewed at her great loaf in silence, and not till that occupation was over divulged her sentiments.

"Some bread, Mr. Vincent?" said at last that injured woman: "that's how it is with all you men. Niver a one, however you may have been brought up, nor whatever pious ways you may have been used to, can stand out against a pretty face. Thank goodness, we know better. Beauty's but skin-deep, Mr. Vincent; and, for my part, I can't see the difference between one pair o' eyes and another. I daresay I see as well out of mine as Lady Western does out o' hers, though Tozer goes on about 'em. It's a mercy for the world, women ain't carried away so; and to hear a man as is the father of a family, and ought to set an example, a-talking like this in his own house! What is the minister to think, Tozer? and Phœbe, a girl as is as likely to take up notions about her looks as most? It's what I didn't expect from you."

"La, mamma! as if there was any likeness between Lady Western and me!" cried Phœbe, lifting a not-unexpectant face across the table. But Mr. Vincent was not equal to the occasion. In that locale, and under these circumstances, a tolerable

breadth of compliment would not have shocked anybody's feelings; but the pastor neglected his opportunities. He sat silent, and made no reply to Phœbe's look. He even at this moment, if truth must be told, devoted himself to the well-filled plate which Mrs. Tozer's hospitality had set before him. He would fain have made a diversion in poor Tozer's favour had anything occurred to him in the thrill of sudden excitement which Tozer's declaration had surprised him into. As it was, tingling with anxiety to hear more of that unknown enchantress, whose presence made sunshine even in the butterman's shop, no indifferent words would find their way to Vincent's lips. So he bestowed his attentions instead upon the comfortable supper to which everybody around him, quite unexcited by this little interlude, was doing full justice, and, not venturing to ask, listened with a palpitating heart.

"You see, Mr. Vincent," resumed Mrs. Tozer, "that title of 'the young Dowager' has been given to Lady Western by them as is her chief friends in Carlingford. Such little things comes to our knowledge as they mightn't come to other folks in our situation, by us serving the best families. There's but two families in Grange Lane as don't deal with Tozer, and one of them's a new-comer as knows no better, and the other a stingy old bachelor, as we wouldn't go across the road to get his custom. A well-kept house must have its butter, and its cheese, and its ham regular; but when there's but a man and a maid, and them nigh as bilious as the master, and picking bits of cheese as one never heard the name of, and as has to be sent to town for, or to the Italian shop, it stands to reason neither me nor Tozer cares for a customer like that."

"Oh, Ma, what does Mr. Vincent care about the customers?" cried Phœbe, in despair.

"He might, then, before all's done," said the deaconess. "We couldn't be as good friends to the chapel, nor as serviceable, nor as well thought on in our connection, if it wasn't for the customers. So you see, sir, Lady Western, she's a young lady not a

deal older than my Phœbe, but by reason of having married an old man, she has a step-son twice as old as herself, and he's married; and so this gay pretty creature here, she's the Dowager Lady Western. I've seen her with young Lady Western, her step-daughter-in-law, and young Lady Western was a deal older, and more serious-looking, and knew twenty times more of life than the Dowager—and you may be sure she don't lose the opportunity to laugh at it neither—and so that's how the name arose."

"Thank you for the explanation; and I suppose, of course, she lives in Grange Lane," said the pastor, still bending with devotion over his plate.

"Dear, dear, you don't eat nothink, Mr. Vincent," cried his benevolent hostess; "that comes of study, as I'm always a-telling Tozer. A deal better, says I, to root the minister out, and get him to move about for the good of his health, than to put him up to sermons and coorses, when we're all as pleased as Punch to start with. She lives in Grange Lane, to be sure, as they most all do as is anything in Carlingford. Fashion's all—but I like a bit of stir and life myself, and couldn't a-bear them close walls. But it would be news in Salem that we was spending our precious time a-talking over a lady like Lady Western; and as for the woman at the back of the chapel, don't you be led away to go to everybody as Mrs. Brown sends you to, Mr. Vincent. She's a good soul, but she's always a-picking up somebody. Tozer's been called up at twelve o'clock, when we were all a-bed, to see somebody as was dying; and there was no dying about it, but only Mrs. Brown's way. My son, being at his eddication for a minister, makes me feel mother-like to a young pastor, Mr. Vincent. I'd be grateful to anybody as would give my boy warning when it comes to be his time."

"I almost wonder," said Vincent, with a little natural impatience, "that you did not struggle on with Mr. Tufton for a little longer, till your son's education was finished."

Mrs. Tozer held up her head with gratified pride. “He’ll be two years before he’s ready, and there’s never no telling what may happen in that time,” said the pleased mother, forgetting how little favourable to her guest was any anticipated contingency. The words were very innocently spoken, but they had their effect upon Vincent. He made haste to extricate himself from the urgent hospitality which surrounded him. He was deafer than ever to Miss Phœbe’s remarks, and listened with a little impatience to Tozer’s wisdom. As soon as he could manage it, he left them, with abundant material for his thoughts. “There’s never no telling what may happen in that time,” rang in his ears as he crossed George Street to his lodging, and the young minister could scarcely check the disgust and impatience which were rising in his mind. In all the pride of his young intellect, to be advised by Tozer—to have warning stories told him of that unfortunate brother in Parson’s Green, whose pretty wife made herself obnoxious to the deacons’ wives—to have the support afforded by the butterman to the chapel thrown in his face with such an undisguised claim upon his gratitude—oh heaven, was this what Homerton was to come to? Perhaps he had been brought here, in all the young flush of his hopes, only to have the life crushed out of him by those remorseless chapel-managers, and room made over his tarnished fame and mortified expectations—over his body, as the young man said to himself in unconscious heroics—for young Tozer’s triumphant entrance. On the whole, it was not to be supposed that to see himself at the mercy of such a limited and jealous coterie—people proud of their liberality to the chapel, and altogether unable to comprehend the feelings of a sensitive and cultivated mind—could be an agreeable prospect to the young man. Their very approbation chafed him; and if he went beyond their level, or exceeded their narrow limit, what mercy was he to expect, what justice, what measure of comprehension? He went home with a bitterness of disgust in his mind far more intense and tragical than appeared to be at all necessary in the circumstances, and which only the fact that this was his first beginning in real life, and that his imagination had never contemplated

the prominent position of the butter-shop and the Devonshire Dairy, in what he fondly called his new sphere, could have justified. Perhaps no new sphere ever came up to the expectations of the neophyte; but to come, if not with too much gospel, yet with an intellectual Christian mission, an evangelist of refined nonconformity, an apostle of thought and religious opinion, and to sink suddenly into “coorses” of sermons and statistics of seat-letting in Salem—into tea-parties of deacons’ wives, and singing-classes—into the complacent society of those good people who were conscious of doing so much for the chapel and supporting the minister—that was a downfall not to be lightly thought of. Salem itself, and the new pulpit, which had a short time ago represented to poor Vincent that tribune from which he was to influence the world, that point of vantage which was all a true man needed for the making of his career, dwindled into a miserable scene of trade before his disenchanted eyes—a preaching shop, where his success was to be measured by the seat-letting, and his soul decanted out into periodical issue under the seal of Tozer & Co. Such, alas! were the indignant thoughts with which, the old Adam rising bitter and strong within him, the young Nonconformist hastened home.

And She was Lady Western—the gayest and brightest and highest luminary in all the society of Carlingford. As well love the moon, who no longer descends to Endymion, as lift presumptuous eyes to that sweeter planet which was as much out of reach of the Dissenting minister. Poor fellow! his room did not receive a very cheerful inmate when he shut the door upon the world and sat down with his thoughts.

CHAPTER V.

IT was about this time, when Mr. Vincent was deeply cast down about his prospects, and saw little comfort before or around him, and when, consequently, an interest apart from himself, and which could detach his thoughts from Salem and its leading

members, was of importance, that his mother's letters began to grow specially interesting. Vincent could not quite explain how it was, but unquestionably those female epistles had expanded all at once; and instead of the limited household atmosphere hitherto breathing in them—an atmosphere confined by the strait cottage walls, shutting in the little picture which the absent son knew so well, and in which usually no figure appeared but those of his pretty sister Susan, and their little servant, and a feminine neighbour or two—instead of those strict household limits, the world, as we have said, had expanded round the widow's pen; the cottage walls or windows seemed to have opened out to disclose the universe beyond: life itself, and words the symbols of life, seemed quickened and running in a fuller current; and the only apparent reason for all this revolution was that one new acquaintance had interrupted Mrs. Vincent's seclusion,—one only visitor, who, from an unexpected call, recorded with some wonderment a month or two before, had gained possession of the house apparently, and was perpetually referred to—by Susan, in her gradually shortening letters, with a certain timidity and reluctance to pronounce his name; by the mother with growing frequency and confidence. Vincent, a little jealous of this new influence, had out of the depths of his own depression written with some impatience to ask who this Mr. Fordham was, and how he had managed to establish himself so confidentially in the cottage, when his mother's letter astounded him with the following piece of news:—

"My dearest Boy,—Mr. Fordham is, or at least will be—or, if I must be cautious, as your poor dear papa always warned me I should—wishes very much, and I hope will succeed in being—your brother, my own Arthur. This is sudden news, but you know, and I have often told you, that a crisis always does seem to arrive suddenly; however much you may have been looking for it, or making up your mind to it, it does come like a blow at the time; and no doubt there is something in human nature to account for it, if I was a philosopher, like your dear papa and you. Yes, my dear boy, that is how it is. Of course, I have known for some time past that he must have

had a motive—no mother could long remain ignorant of that; and I can't say but what, liking Mr. Fordham so much, and seeing him every way so unexceptionable, except, perhaps, in the way of means, which we know nothing about, and which I have always thought a secondary consideration to character, as I always brought up my children to think, I was very much pleased. For you know, my dear boy, life is uncertain with the strongest; and I am becoming an old woman, and you will marry no doubt, and what is to become of Susan unless she does the same? So I confess I was pleased to see Mr. Fordham's inclinations showing themselves. And now, dear Arthur, I've given them my blessing, and they are as happy as ever they can be, and nothing is wanting to Susan's joy but your sympathy. I need not suggest to my dear boy to write a few words to his sister to make her feel that he shares our happiness; for Providence has blessed me in affectionate children, and I can trust the instincts of my Arthur's heart; and oh! my dear son, how thankful I ought to be, and how deeply I ought to feel God's blessings! He has been a father to the fatherless, and the strength of the widow. To think that before old age comes upon me, and while I am still able to enjoy the sight of your prosperity, I should have the happiness of seeing you comfortably settled, and in the way to do your Master's work, and make yourself a good position, and Susan so happily provided for, and instead of losing her, a new son to love—indeed, I am overpowered, and can scarcely hold up my head under my blessings.

"Write immediately, my dearest boy, that we may have the comfort of your concurrence and sympathy, and I am always, with much love,

"My Arthur's loving mother,

"E. S. Vincent.

"P. S.—Mr. Fordham's account of his circumstances seems quite satisfactory. He is not in any profession, but has enough, he says, to live on very comfortably, and is to give me more particulars afterwards; which, indeed, I am ashamed to think he could

imagine necessary, as it looks like want of trust, and as if Susan's happiness was not the first thing with us—but indeed I must learn to be prudent and self-interested for your sakes."

It was with no such joyful feelings as his mother's that Vincent read this letter. Perhaps it was the jealousy with which he had heard of this unknown Mr. Fordham suddenly jumping into the friendship of the cottage, which made him contemplate with a most glum and suspicious aspect the stranger's promotion into the love of Susan, and the motherly regard of Mrs. Vincent. Hang the fellow! who was he? the young minister murmured over his spoiled breakfast: and there appeared to him in a halo of sweet memories, as he had never seen them in reality, the simple graces of his pretty sister, who was as much above the region of the Phœbe Tozers as that ineffable beauty herself who had seized with a glance the vacant throne of poor Arthur Vincent's heart. There was nothing ineffable about Susan—but her brother had seen no man even in Homerton whom he would willingly see master of her affections; and he was equally startled, dissatisfied, and alarmed by this information. Perhaps his mother's unworldliness was excessive. He imagined that he would have exacted more positive information about the fortunes of a stranger who had suddenly appeared without any special business there, who had no profession, and who might disappear lightly as he came, breaking poor Susan's heart. Mr. Vincent forgot entirely the natural process by which, doubtless, his mother's affections had been wooed and won as well as Susan's. To him it was a stranger who had crept into the house, and gained ascendancy there. Half in concern for Susan, half in jealousy for Susan's brother eclipsed, but believing himself to be entirely actuated by the former sentiment, the young minister wrote his mother a hurried, anxious, not too good-tempered note, begging her to think how important a matter this was, and not to come to too rapid a conclusion; and after he had thus relieved his feelings, went out to his day's work in a more than usually uncomfortable frame of mind. Mrs. Vincent congratulated herself upon her son's happy settlement, as well as upon her

daughter's engagement. What if Mr. Fordham should turn out as unsatisfactory as Salem Chapel? His day's work was a round of visits, which were not very particularly to Mr. Vincent's mind. It was the day for his weekly call upon Mr. Tufton and various other members of the congregation not more attractive; and at Siloam Cottage he was reminded of Mrs. Hilyard, whom he had not seen again. Here at least was something to be found different from the ordinary level. He went up to Back Grove Street, not without a vague expectation in his mind, wondering if that singular stranger would look as unlike the rest of his flock to-day as she had done on the former occasion. But when Vincent emerged into the narrow street, what was that unexpected object which threw the young man into such sudden agitation? His step quickened unconsciously into the rapid silent stride of excitement. He was at the shabby door before any of the onlookers had so much as perceived him in the street. For once more the narrow pavement owned a little tattered crowd gazing at the pawing horses, the big footman, the heavenly chariot; and doubtless the celestial visitor must be within.

Mr. Vincent did not pause to think whether he ought to disturb the interview which, no doubt, was going on up-stairs. He left himself no time to consider punctilios, or even to think what was right in the matter. He went up with that swell of excitement somehow winging his feet and making his footsteps light. How sweet that low murmur of conversation within as he reached the door? Another moment, and Mrs. Hilyard herself opened it, looking out with some surprise, her dark thin head, in its black lace kerchief, standing out against the bit of shabby drab-coloured wall visible through the opening of the door. A look of surprise for one moment, then a gleam of something like mirth lighted in the dark eyes, and the thin lines about her mouth moved, though no smile came. "It is you, Mr. Vincent?—come in," she said. "I should not have admitted any other visitor, but you shall come in, as you are my ghostly adviser. Sit down. My dear, this gentleman is my minister and spiritual guide."

And She, sitting there in all her splendour, casting extraordinary lights of beauty round her upon the mean apartment, perfuming the air and making it musical with that rustle of woman's robes which had never been out of poor Vincent's ears since he saw her first;—She lifted her lovely face, smiled, and bowed her beautiful head to the young man, who could have liked to go down on his knees, not to ask anything, but simply to worship. As he dared not do that, he sat down awkwardly upon the chair Mrs. Hilyard pointed to, and said, with embarrassment, that he feared he had chosen a wrong time for his visit, and would return again—but nevertheless did not move from where he was.

"No, indeed; I am very glad to see you. My visitors are not so many, nowadays, that I can afford to turn one from the door because another chooses to come the same day. My dear, you understand Mr. Vincent has had the goodness to take charge of my spiritual affairs," said the mistress of the room, sitting down, in her dark poor dress, beside her beautiful visitor, and laying her thin hands, still marked with traces of the coarse blue colour which rubbed off her work, and of the scars of the needle, upon the table where that work lay. "Thank heaven that's a luxury the poorest of us needs not deny herself. I liked your sermon last Sunday, Mr. Vincent. That about the fashion of treating serious things with levity, was meant for me. Oh, I didn't dislike it, thank you! One is pleased to think one's self of so much consequence. There are more ways of keeping up one's amour propre than your way, my lady. Now, don't you mean to go? You see I cannot possibly unburden my mind to Mr. Vincent while you are here."

"Did you ever hear anything so rude?" said the beauty, turning graciously to the young minister. "You call me a great lady, and all sorts of things, Rachel; but I never could be as rude as you are, and as you always were as long as I remember."

"My dear, the height of good-breeding is to be perfectly ill-bred when one pleases," said Mrs. Hilyard, taking her work upon her knee and putting on her thimble: "but

though you are wonderfully pretty, you never had the makings of a thorough fine lady in you. You can't help trying to please everybody—which, indeed, if there were no women in the world," added that sharp observer, with a sudden glance at Vincent, who saw the thin lines again move about her mouth, "you might easily do without giving yourself much trouble. Mr. Vincent, if this lady won't leave us, might I trouble you to talk? For two strains of thought, carried on at the same moment, now that I'm out of society, are too exhausting for me."

With which speech she gravely pinned her work to her knee, threaded her needle with a long thread of blue cotton, and began her work with the utmost composure, leaving her two visitors in the awkward tête-à-tête position which the presence of a third person, entirely absorbed in her own employment, with eyes and face abstracted, naturally produces. Never in his life had Vincent been so anxious to appear to advantage—never had he been so totally deprived of the use of his faculties. His eager looks, his changing colour, perhaps interceded for him with the beautiful stranger, who was not ignorant of those signs of subjugation which she saw so often.

"I think it was you that were so good as to clear the way for me the last time I was here," she said, with the sweetest grace, raising those lovely eyes, which put even Tozer beside himself, to the unfortunate pastor's face. "I remember fancying you must be a stranger here, as I had not seen you anywhere in society. Those wonderful little wretches never seem to come to any harm. They always appear to me to be scrambling among the horses' feet. Fancy, Rachel, one of those boys who flourish in the back streets, with such rags—oh, such rags!—you could not possibly make them, if you were to try, with scissors—such perfection must come of itself;—had just pushed in before me, and I don't know what I should have done, if Mr. —— (I beg your pardon)—if you had not cleared the way."

"Mr. Vincent," said Mrs. Hilyard breaking in upon Vincent's deprecation. "I am

glad to hear you had somebody to help you in such a delicate distress. We poor women can't afford to be so squeamish. What! are you going away? My dear, be sure you say down-stairs that you brought that poor creature some tea and sugar, and how grateful she was. That explains everything, you know, and does my lady credit at the same time. Good-bye. Well, I'll kiss you if you insist upon it; but what can Mr. Vincent think to see such an operation performed between us? There! my love, you can make the men do what you like, but you know of old you never could conquer me."

"Then you will refuse over and over again—and you don't mind what I say—and you know he's in Lonsdale, and why he's there, and all about him——"

"Hush," said the dark woman, looking all the darker as she stood in that bright creature's shadow. "I know, and always will know, wherever he goes, and that he is after evil wherever he goes; and I refuse, and always will refuse—and my darling pretty Alice," she cried, suddenly going up with rapid vehemence to the beautiful young woman beside her, and kissing once more the delicate rose-cheek to which her own made so great a contrast, "I don't mind in the least what you say."

"Ah, Rachel, I don't understand you," said Lady Western, looking at her wistfully.

"You never did, my dear; but don't forget to mention about the tea and sugar as you go down-stairs," said Mrs. Hilyard, subsiding immediately, not without the usual gleam in her eyes and movement of her mouth, "else it might be supposed you came to have your fortune told, or something like that; and I wish your ladyship bon voyage, and no encounter with ragged boys in your way. Mr. Vincent," she continued, with great gravity, standing in the middle of the room, when Vincent, trembling with excitement, afraid, with the embarrassing timidity of inferior position, to offer his services, yet chafing in his heart to be obliged to stay, reluctantly closed the door, which he had opened for Lady Western's exit, "tell me why a young man of your spirit loses such an opportunity of conducting the greatest

beauty in Carlingford to her carriage? Suppose she should come across another ragged boy, and faint on the stairs?"

"I should have been only too happy; but as I am not so fortunate as to know Lady Western," said the young minister, hesitating, "I feared to presume——"

With an entirely changed aspect his strange companion interrupted him. "Lady Western could not think that any man whom she met in my house presumed in offering her a common civility," said Mrs. Hilyard, with the air of a duchess, and an imperious gleam out of her dark eyes. Then she recollected herself, gave her startled visitor a comical look, and dropped into her chair, before which that coarsest of poor needlewoman's work was lying. "My house! it does look like a place to inspire respect, to be sure," she continued, with a hearty perception of the ludicrous, which Vincent was much too preoccupied to notice. "What fools we all are! but, my dear Mr. Vincent, you are too modest. My Lady Western could not frown upon anybody who honoured her with such a rapt observation. Don't fall in love with her, I beg of you. If she were merely a flirt, I shouldn't mind, but out of her very goodness she's dangerous. She can't bear to give pain to anybody, which of course implies that she gives double and treble pain when the time comes. There! I've warned you; for of course you'll meet again."

"Small chance of that," said Vincent, who had been compelling himself to remain quiet, and restraining his impulse, now that the vision had departed, to rush away out of the impoverished place. "Small chance of that," he repeated, drawing a long breath, as he listened with intent ears to the roll of the carriage which carried Her away; "society in Carlingford has no room for a poor Dissenting minister."

"All the better for him," said Mrs. Hilyard, regarding him with curious looks, and discerning with female acuteness the haze of excitement and incipient passion which surrounded him. "Society's all very well for people who have been brought up in it; but for a young recluse like you, that don't know the world, it's murder. Don't look

affronted. The reason is, you expect too much—twenty times more than anybody ever finds. But you don't attend to my philosophy. Thinking of your sermon, Mr. Vincent? And how is our friend the butterman? I trust life begins to look more cheerful to you under his advice."

"Life?" said the preoccupied minister, who was gazing at the spot where that lovely apparition had been; "I find it change its aspects perpetually. You spoke of Lonsdale just now, did you not? Is it possible that you know that little place? My mother and sister live there."

"I am much interested to know that you have a mother and sister," said the poor needlewoman before him, looking up with calm, fine-lady impertinence in his face. "But you did not hear me speak of Lonsdale; it was her ladyship who mentioned it. As for me, I interest myself in what is going on close by, Mr. Vincent. I am quite absorbed in the chapel; I want to know how you get on, and all about it. I took that you said on Sunday about levity deeply to heart. I entertain a fond hope that you will see me improve under your ministrations, even though I may never come up to the butterman's standard. Some people have too high an ideal. If you are as much of an optimist as your respected deacon, I fear it will be ages before I can manage to make you approve of me."

Vincent's wandering thoughts were recalled a little by this attack. "I hope," he said, rousing himself, "that you don't think me so inexperienced as not to know that you are laughing at me? But indeed I should be glad to believe that the services at the chapel might sometimes perhaps be some comfort to you," added the young pastor, assuming the dignity of his office. He met his penitent's eyes at the moment, and faltered, moon-struck as he was, wondering if she saw through and through him, and knew that he was neither thinking of consolation nor of clerical duties, but only of those lingering echoes which, to any ears but his own, were out of hearing. There was little reason to doubt the acute perceptions of that half-amused, half-malicious

glance.

“Comfort!” she cried; “what a very strange suggestion to make! Why, all the old churches in all the old ages have offered comfort. I thought you new people had something better to give us; enlightenment,” she said, with a gleam of secret mockery, throwing the word like a stone—“religious freedom, private judgment. Depend upon it, that is the rôle expected from you by the butterman. Comfort! one has that in Rome.”

“You never can have that but in conjunction with truth, and truth is not to be found in Rome,” said Vincent, pricking up his ears at so familiar a challenge.

“We’ll not argue, though you do commit yourself by an assertion,” said Mrs. Hilyard; “but oh, you innocent young man, where is the comfort to come from? Comfort will not let your seats and fill your chapel, even granting that you knew how to communicate it. I prefer to be instructed, for my part. You are just at the age, and in the circumstances, to do that.”

“I fear you still speak in jest,” said the minister, with some doubt, yet a little gratification; “but I shall be only too happy to have been the means of throwing any light to you upon the doctrines of our faith.”

For a moment the dark eyes gleamed with something like laughter. But there was nothing ill-natured in the amusement with which his strange new friend contemplated the young pastor in the depressions and confidences of his youth. She answered with a mock gravity which, at that moment, he was by no means clear-sighted enough to see through.

“Yes,” she said, demurely, “be sure you take advantage of your opportunities, and instruct us as long as you have any faith in instruction. Leave consolation to another time: but you don’t attend to me, Mr. Vincent; come another day: come on Monday, when I shall be able to criticise your sermons, and we shall have no Lady Western to put us out. These beauties are confusing, don’t you think? Only, I entreat you,

whatever you do, don't fall in love with her; and now, since I know you wish it, you may go away."

Vincent stammered a faint protest as he accepted his dismissal, but rose promptly, glad to be released. Another thought, however, seemed to strike Mrs. Hilyard as she shook hands with him.

"Do your mother and sister in Lonsdale keep a school?" she said. "Nay, pray don't look affronted. Clergymen's widows and daughters very often do in the Church. I meant no impertinence in this case. They don't? well, that is all I wanted to know. I daresay they are not likely to be in the way of dangerous strangers. Good-bye; and you must come again on Monday, when I shall be alone."

"But—dangerous strangers—may I ask you to explain?" said Vincent, with a little alarm, instinctively recurring to his threatened brother-in-law, and the news which had disturbed his composure that morning before he came out.

"I can't explain; and you would not be any the wiser," said Mrs. Hilyard, peremptorily. "Now, good morning. I am glad they don't keep a school; because, you know," she added, looking full into his eyes, as if defying him to make any meaning out of her words, "it is very tiresome, tedious work, and wears poor ladies out. There!—good-bye; next day you come I shall be very glad to see you, and we'll have no fine ladies to put us out."

Vincent had no resource but to let himself out of the shabby little room which this strange woman inhabited as if it had been a palace. The momentary alarm roused by her last words, and the state of half offence, half interest, into which, notwithstanding his pre-occupation, she had managed to rouse him, died away, however, as he re-entered the poor little street, which was now a road in Fairyland instead of a lane in Carlingford, to his rapt eyes. Golden traces of those celestial wheels surely lingered still upon the way, they still went rolling and echoing over the poor young minister's heart, which he voluntarily threw down before that

heavenly car of Juggernaut. Every other impression faded out of his mind, and the infatuated young man made no effort of resistance, but hugged the enchanted chain. He had seen Her—spoken with Her—henceforward was of her acquaintance. He cast reason to the winds, and probability, and every convention of life. Did anybody suppose that all the world leagued against him could prevent him from seeing her again? He went home with an unspeakable elation, longing, and excitement, and at the same time with a vain floating idea in his mind that, thus inspired, no height of eloquence was impossible to him, and that triumph of every kind was inevitable. He went home, and got his writing-desk, and plunged into his lecture, nothing doubting that he could transfer to his work that glorious tumult of his thoughts; and, with his paper before him, wrote three words, and sat three hours staring into the roseate air, and dreaming dreams as wild as any Arabian tale. Such was the first effort of that chance encounter, in which the personages were not Lady Western and the poor Dissenting minister, but Beauty and Love, perennial hero and heroine of the romance that never ends.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was only two days after this eventful meeting that Vincent, idling and meditative as was natural in such a condition of mind, strayed into Masters’s shop to buy some books. It would have been difficult for him to have explained why he went there, except, perhaps, because it was the last place in the world which his masters at the chapel would have advised him to enter. For there was another bookseller in the town, an evangelical man, patronised by Mr. Bury, the whilom rector, where all the Tract Society’s publications were to be had, not to speak of a general range of literature quite wide enough for the minister of Salem. Masters’s was a branch of the London Master's, and, as might be supposed, was equally amazed and indignant at the intrusion of a Dissenter among its consecrated book-shelves. He was allowed to

turn over all the varieties of the ‘Christian Year’ on a side-table before any of the attendants condescended to notice his presence; and it proved so difficult to find the books he wanted, and so much more difficult to find anybody who would take the trouble of looking for them, that the young Nonconformist, who was sufficiently ready to take offence, began to get hot and impatient, and had all but strode out of the shop, with a new mortification to record to the disadvantage of Carlingford. But just as he began to get very angry, the door swung softly open, and a voice became audible, lingering, talking to somebody before entering. Vincent stopped speaking, and stared in the shopman’s astonished face when these tones came to his ear. He fell back instantly upon the side-table and the ‘Christian Year,’ forgetting his own business, and what he had been saying—forgetting everything except that She was there, and that in another moment they would stand again within the same walls. He bent over the much-multiplied volume with a beating heart, poising in one hand a tiny miniature copy just made to slip within the pocket of an Anglican waistcoat, and in the other the big red-leaved and morocco-bound edition, as if weighing their respective merits—put beside himself, in fact, if the truth must be told, oblivious of his errand, his position—of everything but the fact that She was at the door. She came in with a sweet flutter and rustle of sound, a perfumed air entering with her, as the unsuspected enthusiast thought, and began to lavish smiles, for which he would have given half his life, upon the people of the place, who flew to serve her. She had her tablets in her hand, with a list of what she wanted, and held up a dainty forefinger as she stood reading the items. As one thing after another was mentioned, Masters and his men darted off in search of it. There were fortunately enough to give each of them a separate errand, and the principal ranged his shining wares upon the counter before her, and bathed in her smiles, while all his satellites kept close at hand, listening with all their ears for another commission. Blessed Masters! happy shopmen! that one who looked so blank when Vincent stopped short at the sound of her voice and stared at him, had forgotten all about Vincent. She was there; and if a

little impromptu litany would have pleased her ladyship, it is probable that it could have been got up on the spot after the best models, and that even the Nonconformist would have waived his objections to liturgical worship and led the responses. But Masters's establishment offered practical homage—only the poor Dissenting minister, divided between eagerness and fear, stood silent, flushed with excitement, turning wistful looks upon her, waiting till perhaps she might turn round and see him, and letting fall out of his trembling fingers those unregarded editions of the Anglican lyre.

"And two copies of the 'Christian Year,'" said Lady Western, suddenly. "Oh, thank you so much! but I know they are all on the side-table, and I shall go and look at them. Not the very smallest copy, Mr. Masters, and not that solemn one with the red edges; something pretty, with a little ornament and gilding: they are for two little protegées of mine. Oh, here is exactly what I want! another one like this, please. How very obliging all your people are," said her ladyship, benignly, as the nearest man dashed off headlong to bring what she wanted—"but I think it is universal in Carlingford; and indeed the manners of our country people in general have improved very much of late. Don't you think so? oh, there can't be a question about it!"

"I beg your ladyship's pardon, I am sure; but perhaps, my lady, it is not safe to judge the general question from your ladyship's point of view," said the polite bookseller, with a bow.

"Oh, pray don't say so; I should be wretched if I thought you took more trouble for me than for other people," said the young Dowager, with a sweetness which filled Vincent's heart with jealous pangs. She was close by his side—so close that those sacred robes rustled in his very ear, and her shawl brushed his sleeve. The poor young man took off his hat in a kind of ecstasy. If she did not notice him, what did it matter?—silent adoration, speechless homage, could not affront a queen.

And it was happily very far from affronting Lady Western. She turned round with a

little curiosity, and looked up in his face. “Oh, Mr.—Mr. Vincent,” cried the beautiful creature, brightening in recognition. “How do you do? I suppose you are a resident in Carlingford now, are not you? Pardon me, that I did not see you when I came in. How very, very good it is of you to go and see my—my friend! Did you ever see anything so dreadful as the place where she lives? and isn’t she an extraordinary creature? Thank you, Mr. Masters; that’s exactly what I want. I do believe she might have been Lord Chancellor, or something, if she had not been a woman,” said the enchantress, once more lifting her lovely eyes with an expression of awe to Vincent’s face.

“She seems a very remarkable person,” said Vincent. “To see her where she is, makes one feel how insignificant are the circumstances of life.”

“Really! now, how do you make out that?” said Lady Western; “for, to tell the truth, I think, when I see her, oh, how important they are! and that I’d a great deal rather die than live so. But you clever people take such strange views of things. Now tell me how you make that out?”

“Nay,” said Vincent, lowering his voice with a delicious sense of having a subject to be confidential upon, “you know what conditions of existence all her surroundings imply; yet the most ignorant could not doubt for a moment her perfect superiority to them—a superiority so perfect,” he added, with a sudden insight which puzzled even himself, “that it is not necessary to assert it.”

“Oh, to be sure,” said Lady Western, colouring a little, and with a momentary hauteur, “of course a Russell—— I mean a gentlewoman—must always look the same to a certain extent; but, alas! I am only a very commonplace little woman,” continued the beauty, brightening into those smiles which perhaps might be distributed too liberally, but which intoxicated for the moment every man on whom they fell. “I think those circumstances which you speak of so disrespectfully are everything! I have not a great soul to triumph over them. I should break down, or

they would overcome me—oh, you need not shake your head! I know I am right so far as I myself am concerned."

"Indeed I cannot think so," said the intoxicated young man; "you would make any circumstances—"

"What?"

But the bewildered youth made no direct reply. He only gazed at her, grew very red, and said, suddenly, "I beg your pardon," stepping back in confusion, like the guilty man he was. The lady blushed, too, as her inquiring eyes met that unexpected response. Used as she was to adoration, she felt the silent force of the compliment withheld—it was a thousand times sweeter in its delicate suggestiveness and reserve of incense than any effusion of words. They were both a little confused for the moment, poor Vincent's momentary betrayal of himself having somehow suddenly dissipated the array of circumstances which surrounded and separated two persons so far apart from each other in every conventional aspect. The first to regain her place and composure was of course Lady Western, who made him a pretty playful curtsy, and broke into a low, sweet ring of laughter.

"Now I shall never know whether you meant to be complimentary or contemptuous," cried the young Dowager, "which is hard upon a creature with such a love of approbation as our friend says I have. However, I forgive you, if you meant to be very cutting, for her sake. It is so very kind of you to go to see her, and I am sure she enjoys your visits. Thank you, Mr. Masters, that is all. Have you got the two copies of the 'Christian Year'? Put them into the carriage, please. Mr. Vincent, I am going to have the last of my summer-parties next Thursday—twelve o'clock; will you come?—only a cup of coffee, you know, or tea if you prefer it, and talk au discretion. I shall be happy to see you, and I have some nice friends, and one or two good pictures; so there you have an account of all the attractions my house can boast of. Do come: it will be my last party this season, and I rather want it to be a great

success," said the syren, looking up with her sweet eyes.

Vincent could not tell what answer he made in his rapture; but the next thing he was properly conscious of was the light touch of her hand upon his arm as he led her to her carriage, some sudden courageous impulse having prompted him to secure for himself that momentary blessedness. He walked forth in a dream, conducting that heavenly vision: and there, outside, stood the celestial chariot with those pawing horses, and the children standing round with open mouth to watch the lovely lady's progress. It was he who put her in with such pride and humbleness as perhaps only a generous but inexperienced young man, suddenly surprised into passion, could be capable of—ready to kiss the hem of her garment, or do any other preposterous act of homage—and just as apt to blaze up into violent self-assertion should any man attempt to humble him who had been thus honoured. While he stood watching the carriage out of sight, Masters himself came out to tell the young Nonconformist, whose presence that dignified tradesman had been loftily unconscious of a few minutes before, that they had found the book he wanted; and Vincent, thrilling in every pulse with the unlooked-for blessedness which had befallen him, was not sorry, when he dropped out of the clouds at the bookseller's accost, to re-enter that place where this enchantment still hovered, by way of calming himself down ere he returned to those prose regions which were his own lawful habitation. He saw vaguely the books that were placed on the counter before him—heard vaguely the polite purling of Masters's voice, all-solicitous to make up for the momentary incivility with which he had treated a friend of Lady Western's—and was conscious of taking out his purse and paying something for the volume, which he carried away with him. But the book might have been Sanscrit for anything Mr. Vincent cared—and he would have paid any fabulous price for it with the meekest resignation. His attempt to appear moderately interested, and to conduct this common transaction as if he had all his wits about him, was sufficient occupation just at this moment. His head was turned. There should have been roses blossoming

all along the bare pavement of George Street to account for the sweet gleams of light which warmed the entire atmosphere as he traversed that commonplace way. Not only the interview just passed, but the meeting to come, bewildered him with an intoxicating delight. Here, then, was the society he had dreamed of, opening its perfumed doors to receive him. From Mrs. Tozer's supper-table to the bowery gates of Grange Lane was a jump which, ten days ago, would of itself have made the young minister giddy with satisfaction and pleasure. Now these calm emotions had ceased to move him; for not society, but a sweeter syren, had thrown chains of gold round the unsuspecting Nonconformist. With Her, Back Grove Street was Paradise. Where her habitation was, or what he should see there, was indifferent to Vincent. He was again to meet Herself.

CHAPTER VII.

THE days which intervened between this meeting and Lady Western's party were spent in a way which the managers of Salem would have been far from approving of. Mr. Vincent, indeed, was rapt out of himself, out of his work, out of all the ordinary regions of life and thought. When he sat down to his sermons, his pen hung idly in his hand, and his mind, wilfully cheating itself by that semblance of study, went off into long delicious reveries, indescribable, intangible—a secret sweet intoxication which forbade labour, yet nourished thought. Though he sometimes did not write a word in an hour, so deep was the aspect of studiousness displayed by the young pastor at his writing-desk, and so entire the silence he maintained in his room, shut up in that world of dreams which nobody knew anything of, that his landlady, who was one of his hearers, communicated the fact to Tozer, and expatiated everywhere upon the extreme devotion to study displayed by the new minister. Old Mr. Tufton, who had been in the habit of putting together the disjointed palaver which he called a sermon on the Saturday morning, shook his head over the

information, and doubted that his young brother was resorting more to carnal than to spiritual means of filling his chapel; but the members of Salem generally heard the rumour with pride, and felt a certain distinction accrue to themselves from the possibility that their pastor might ruin his health by over-study. It was a new sensation in Salem; and the news, as it was whispered about, certainly came to the ears of a few of those young men and thinkers, principally poor lawyers' clerks and drapers' assistants, whom Tozer was so anxious to reach, and drew two or three doubtful, genteel hearers to the chapel, where Mr. Vincent's sermon, though no better than usual, and in reality dashed off at the last moment in sheer desperation, when necessity momentarily thrust the dreams away, was listened to with a certain awe and devout attention, solely due to the toil it was reported to have cost. The young minister himself came out of the pulpit remorseful and ashamed, feeling that he had neglected his duty, and thoroughly disgusted with the superficial production, just lighted up with a few fiery sentences of that eloquence which belongs to excitement and passion, which he had just delivered. But Tozer and all the deacons buzzed approbation. They were penetrated with the conviction that he had worked hard at his sermon, and given them his best, and were not to be undeceived by the quality of the work itself, which was a secondary matter. More deeply disgusted and contemptuous than ever was the young pastor at the end of that Sunday—disgusted with himself to have done his work so poorly—contemptuous of those who were pleased with it—his heart swelling with mortified pride to think that what he thought so unworthy of him was more appreciated than his best efforts. For he did not know the report that had gone abroad; he did not know that, while brooding over his own rising passion, and absorbed in dreams with which Salem had nothing to do, the little world around him was complacently giving him credit for a purpose of wearing himself out in its behalf. The sermons so hastily written, thrust into a corner by the overpowering enchantment of those reveries, were not the only sin he had to charge against himself. He could not bring himself to bear the irksome society that

surrounded him, in the state of elevation and excitement he was in. Tozer was unendurable, and Phœbe to be avoided at all costs. He did not even pay his promised visit to Mrs. Hilyard, nor go to Siloam Cottage as usual. In short, he spent the days in a kind of dream, avoiding all his duties, paying no visits, doing no pastoral work, neglecting the very sermon over which his landlady saw him hanging so many silent hours, without knowing that all the vacant atmosphere between him and that blank sheet of paper, in which she saw nothing, was peopled with fairy visitants and unreal scenes to the dreamy eyes of her lodger. Such were the first effects of Circe's cup upon the young minister. He indulged himself consciously, with apologetic self-remonstrances, as Thursday approached. After that day, life was to go on as usual. No—not as usual—with a loftier aim and a higher inspiration; but the season of dreams was to be over when he had real admittance into that Eden garden, where the woman of all women wandered among her flowers. He thought what he was to say to her on that eventful day—how he should charm her into interest in his difficulties, and beautify his office, and the barren spot in which he exercised it, with her sympathy. He imagined himself possessed of her ear, certain of a place by her side, a special guest of her own election. He was not vain, nor deeply persuaded of his own importance; yet all this seemed only natural to his excited imagination. He saw himself by her side in that garden of beatitudes, disclosing to her all that was in his heart; instinctively he recalled all that the poets have said of woman the consoler—woman the inspirer. When he had gained that priceless sympathy, what glorious amends he should make for the few days' indolence to which he now gave way! Thus in his inexperience he went on, preparing for himself, as any one a little wiser could have seen at a glance, one of the bitterest disappointments of early life.

Thursday came, a day of days—such a day as people reckon by, months after; a soft and bright autumnal morning, breathing like spring. As Vincent issued from his own door and took his way along George Street to Grange Lane, he saw the curate of St. Roque's walking before him in the same direction; but Mr. Wentworth himself was

not more orthodoxly clerical in every detail of his costume than was the young Nonconformist, who was going, not to Lady Western's breakfast-party, but into the Bower of Bliss, the fool's paradise of his youth. Mr. Wentworth, it is true, was to see Lucy Wodehouse there, and was a true lover; but he walked without excitement to the green gate which concealed from him no enchanted world of delights, but only a familiar garden, with every turn of which he was perfectly acquainted, and which, even when Lucy was by his side, contained nothing ineffable or ecstatic. It was, to tell the truth, an autumnal garden, bright enough still with scarlet gleams of geranium and verbena, with a lawn of velvet smoothness, and no great diminution as yet in the shade of the acacias and lime-trees, and everything in the most perfect order in the trim shrubberies, through the skilful mazes of which some bright groups were already wandering, when Vincent passed through to the sunny open door. At the open windows within he could see other figures in a pleasant flutter of gay colour and light drapery, as he advanced breathless to take his own place in that unknown world. He heard his own name announced, and went in, with a chill of momentary doubt upon his high expectations, into the airy sunshiny room, with its gay, brilliant, rustling crowd, the ladies all bright and fresh in their pretty morning-dresses, and the din of talk and laughter confusing his unaccustomed ears. For a moment the stranger stood embarrassed, looking round him, eagerly investigating the crowd for that one face, which was not only the sole face of woman in the world so far as he was concerned, but in reality the only face he knew in the gay party, where everybody except himself knew everybody else. Then he saw her, and his doubts were over. When she perceived him, she made a few steps forward to meet him and held out her hand.

"I am so glad to see you—how kind of you to come!" said Lady Western; "and such a beautiful day—just what I wanted for my last fête. Have you seen my friend again since I saw you, Mr. Vincent—quite well, I hope? Now, do have some coffee.—How do you do, Mr. Wentworth? You have been here full five minutes,

and you have never paid your respects to me. Even under the circumstances, you know, one cannot overlook such neglect."

"I am too deeply flattered that your ladyship should have observed my entrance to be able to make any defence," said the curate of St. Roque's, who could speak to her as to any ordinary woman; "but as for circumstances——"

"Oh dear, yes, we all know," cried Lady Western, with her sweet laugh. "Was it you, Mr. Vincent, who were saying that circumstances were everything in life?—oh, no, I beg your pardon, quite the reverse. I remember it struck me as odd and clever. Now, I daresay, you two could quite settle that question. I am such an ignoramus. So kind of you to come!"

Vincent was about to protest his delight in coming, and to deprecate the imputation of kindness, but ere he had spoken three words, he suddenly came to a stop, perceiving that not only Lady Western's attention but her ear was lost, and that already another candidate for her favour had possession of the field. He stepped back into the gay assembly, disturbing one group, the members of which all turned to look at him with well-bred curiosity. He stood quite alone and silent for some time, waiting if, perhaps, he could catch the eye of Lady Western. But she was surrounded, swept away, carried off even from his neighbourhood, while he stood gazing. And here was he left, out of the sunshine of her presence in the midst of Carlingford society, knowing nobody, while every face smiled and every tongue was busy but his own: talk au discretion! such there certainly was—but Vincent had never in his life felt so preposterously alone, so dismally silent, so shut up in himself. If he had come to woo society, doubtless he could have plucked up a spirit, and made a little effort for his object. But he had come to see Her, flattering himself with vain dreams of securing her to himself—of wandering by her side through those garden-paths, of keeping near her whenever she moved—and the dream had intoxicated him more deeply than even he himself was aware of. Now he woke to

his sober wits with a chill of mortification and disappointment not to be expressed. He stood silent, following her with his eyes as she glided about from one corner to the other of the crowded room. He had neither eyes nor ears for anything else. Beautiful as she had always been, she was lovelier than ever to-day, with her fair head uncovered and unadorned, her beautiful hair glancing in the gleams of sunshine, her tiny hands ungloved. Poor Vincent drew near a window, when it dawned upon his troubled perception that he was standing amidst all those chattering, laughing people, a silent statue of disappointment and dismay, and from that little refuge watched her as she made her progress. And, alas! Lady Western assured everybody that they were "so kind" to come—she distributed her smiles, her kind words, everywhere. She beamed upon the old men and the young, the handsome and the stupid, with equal sweetness. After a while, as he stood watching, Vincent began to melt in his heart. She was hostess—she had the party's pleasure to think of, not her own. If he could but help her, bring himself to her notice again in some other way! Vincent made another step out of his window, and looked out eagerly with shy scrutiny. Nobody wanted his help. They stared at him, and whispered questions who he was. When he at length nerved himself to speak to his next neighbour, he met with a courteous response and no more. Society was not cruel, or repulsive, or severely exclusive, but simply did not know him, could not make out who he was, and was busy talking that conversation of a limited sphere full of personal allusions into which no stranger could enter. Instead of the ineffable hour he expected, an embarrassing, unbearable tedium was the lot of the poor Dissenting minister by himself among the beauty, wit, and fashion of Carlingford. He would have stolen away but for the forlorn hope that things might mend—that Lady Western might return, and that the sunshine he had dreamed of would yet fall upon him. But no such happiness came to the unfortunate young minister. After a while, a perfectly undistinguished middle-aged individual charitably engaged Mr. Vincent in conversation; and as they talked, and while the young man's eager

wistful eyes followed into every new combination of the little crowd that one fair figure which had bewitched him, it became apparent that the company was flowing forth into the garden. At last Vincent stopped short in the languid answer he was making to his respectable interlocutor with a sudden start and access of impatience. The brilliant room had suddenly clouded over. She had joined her guests outside. With bitterness, and a sharp pang at his heart, Vincent looked round and wondered to find himself in the house, in the company, from which she had gone. What business had he there? No link of connection existed between him and this little world of unknown people except herself. She had brought him here; she alone knew even so much of him as his name. He had not an inch of ground to stand on in the little alien assembly when she was not there. He broke off his conversation with his unknown sympathiser abruptly, and rushed out, meaning to leave the place. But somehow, fascinated still, in a hundred different moods a minute, when he got outside, he too lingered about the paths, where he continually met with groups and stray couples who stared at him, and wondered again, sometimes not inaudibly, who he was. He met her at last under the shadow of the lime-trees with a train of girls about her, and a following of eager male attendants. When he came forward lonely to make his farewell, with a look in which he meant to unite a certain indignation and reproach with still chivalrous devotion, the unconscious beauty met him with unabated sweetness, held out her hand as before, and smiled the most radiant of smiles.

“Are you going to leave us already?” she said, in a tone which half persuaded the unlucky youth to stay till the last moment, and swallow all his mortifications. “So sorry you must go away so soon! and I wanted to show you my pictures too. Another time, I hope, we may have better fortune. When you come to me again, you must really be at leisure, and have no other engagements. Good-bye! It was so kind of you to come, and I am so sorry you can’t stay!”

In another minute the green door had opened and closed, the fairy vision was gone,

and poor Vincent stood in Grange Lane between the two blank lines of garden-wall, come back to the common daylight after a week's vain wandering in the enchanted grounds, half stupefied, half maddened by the disappointment and downfall. He made a momentary pause at the door, gulped down the big indignant sigh that rose in his throat, and, with a quickened step and a heightened colour, retraced his steps along a road which no longer gleamed with any rosy reflections, but was harder, more real, more matter-of-fact than ever it had looked before. What a fool he had been, to be led into such a false position!—to be cheated of his peace, and seduced from his duty, and intoxicated into such absurdities of hope, all by the gleam of a bright eye, and the sound of a sweet voice! He who had never known the weakness before, to cover himself with ridicule, and compromise his dignity so entirely for the sake of the first beautiful woman who smiled upon him! Poor Vincent! He hurried to his rooms thrilling with projects, schemes, and sudden vindictive ambition. That fair creature should learn that the young Nonconformist was worthy of her notice. Those self-engrossed simperers should yet be startled out of their follies by the new fame rising up amongst them. Who was he, did they ask? One day they should know.

That the young man should despise himself for this outbreak of injured feeling, as soon as he had cooled down, was inevitable; but it took some considerable time to cool down; and in the mean time his resolution rose and swelled into that heroic region which youth always attains so easily. He thought himself disenchanted for ever. That night, in bitter earnest, he burned the midnight oil—that night his pen flew over the paper with outbreaks, sometimes indignant, sometimes pathetic, on subjects as remote as possible from Lady Western's breakfast-party; and with a sudden revulsion he bethought himself of Salem and its oligarchy, which just now prophesied so much good of their new minister. He accepted Salem with all the heat of passion at that moment. His be the task to raise it and its pastor into a common fame!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE events above narrated were all prefatory of the great success accomplished by Mr. Vincent in Carlingford. Indeed, the date of the young minister's fame—fame which, as everybody acquainted with that town must be aware, was widely diffused beyond Carlingford itself, and even reached the metropolis, and gladdened his Alma Mater at Homerton—might almost be fixed by a reference to Lady Western's housekeeping book, if she kept any, and the date of her last summer-party. That event threw the young Nonconformist into just the state of mind which was wanted to quicken all the prejudices of his education, and give individual force to all the hereditary limits of thought in which he had been born. An attempt on the part of the Government to repeal the Toleration Act, or reinstate the Test, could scarcely have produced a more permanent and rapid effect than Lady Western's neglect, and the total ignorance of Mr. Vincent displayed by polite society in Carlingford. No shame to him. It was precisely the same thing in private life which the other would have been in public. Repeal of the Toleration Act, or re-enactment of the Test, are things totally impossible; and when persecution is not to be apprehended or hoped for, where but in the wrongs of a privileged class can the true zest of dissidence be found? Mr. Vincent, who had received his dissenting principles as matters of doctrine, took up the familiar instruments now with a rush of private feeling. He was not conscious of the power of that sentiment of injury and indignation which possessed him. He believed in his heart that he was but returning, after a temporary hallucination, to the true duties of his post; but the fact was, that this wound in the tenderest point—this general slight and indifference—pricked him forward in all that force of personal complaint which gives warmth and piquancy to a public grievance. The young man said nothing of Lady Western even to his dearest friend—tried not to think of her except by way of imagining how she should one day hear of him, and know his name when it possessed a distinction which neither the

perpetual curate of St. Roque's, nor any other figure in that local world, dared hope for. But with fiery zeal he flew to the question of Church and State, and set forth the wrongs which Christianity sustained from endowment, and the heinous evils of rich livings, episcopal palaces, and spiritual lords. It was no mean or ungenerous argument which the young Nonconformist pursued in his fervour of youth and wounded self-regard. It was the natural cry of a man who had entered life at disadvantage, and chafed, without knowing it, at all the phalanx of orders and classes above him, standing close in order to prevent his entrance. With eloquent fervour he expatiated upon the kingdom that was not of this world. If these words were true, what had the Church to do with worldly possessions, rank, dignities, power? Was his Grace of Lambeth more like Paul the tentmaker than his Holiness of Rome? Mr. Vincent went into the whole matter with genuine conviction, and confidence in his own statements. He believed and had been trained in it. In his heart he was persuaded that he himself, oft disgusted and much misunderstood in his elected place at Salem Chapel, ministered the gospel more closely to his Master's appointment than the rector of Carlingford, who was nominated by a college; or the curate of St. Roque's, who had his forty pounds a-year from a tiny ancient endowment, and was spending his own little fortune on his church and district. These men had joined God and mammon—they were in the pay of the State. Mr. Vincent thundered forth the lofty censures of an evangelist whom the State did not recognise, and with whom mammon had little enough to do. He brought forth all the weapons out of the Homerton armoury, new, bright, and dazzling; and he did not know any more than his audience that he never would have wielded them so heartily—perhaps would scarcely have taken them off the wall—but for the sudden sting with which his own inferior place, and the existence of a privileged class doubly shut against his entrance, had quickened his personal consciousness. Such, however, was the stimulus which woke the minister of Salem Chapel into action, and produced that series of lectures on Church and State which, as everybody

knows, shook society in Carlingford to its very foundation.

"Now we've got a young man as is a credit to us," said Tozer; "and now he's warming to his work, as I was a little afraid of at first; for somehow I can't say as I could see to my satisfaction, when he first come, that his heart was in it,—I say, now as we've got a pastor as does us credit, I am not the man to consider a bit of expense. My opinion is as we should take the Music Hall for them lectures. There's folks might go to the Music Hall as would never come to Salem, and we're responsible for our advantages. A clever young man like Mr. Vincent ain't to be named along with Mr. Tufton; we're the teachers of the community, that's what we are. I am for being public-spirited—I always was; and I don't mind standing my share. My opinion is as we should take the Music Hall."

"If we was charging sixpence a-head or so——" said prudent Pigeon, the poulterer.

"That's what I'll never give my consent to—never!" said Tozer. "If we was amusin' the people, we might charge sixpence a-head; but mark my words," continued the butterman, "there ain't twenty men in Carlingford, nor in no other place, as would give sixpence to have their minds enlightened. No, sir, we're conferring of a boon; and let's do it handsomely, I say—let's do it handsomely; and here's my name down for five pound to clear expenses: and if every man in Salem does as well, there ain't no reason for hesitating. I'm a plain man, but I don't make no account of a little bit of money when a principle's at stake."

This statement was conclusive. When it came to the sacrifice of a little bit of money, neither Mrs. Pigeon nor Mrs. Brown could have endured life had their husbands yielded the palm to Tozer. And the Music Hall was accordingly taken; and there, every Wednesday for six weeks, the young Nonconformist mounted his cheval de bataille, and broke his impetuous spear against the Church. Perhaps Carlingford was in want of a sensation at the moment; and the town was virgin soil, and had never yet been invaded by sight or sound of heresy. Anyhow, the fact was, that this fresh

new voice attracted the ear of the public. That personal impetuosity and sense of wrong which gave fire to the discourse, roused the interest of the entire community. Mr. Vincent's lectures became the fashion in Carlingford, where nobody in the higher levels of society had ever heard before of the amazing evils of a Church Establishment. Some of the weaker or more candid minds among the audience were even upset by the young minister's arguments. Two or three young people of both sexes declared themselves converted, and were persecuted to their hearts' desire when they intimated their intention of henceforward joining the congregation of Salem. The two Miss Hemmings were thrown into a state of great distress and perplexity, and wrung their hands, and looked at each other, as each new enormity was brought forth. A very animated interested audience filled the benches in the Music Hall for the three last lectures. It was Mr. Tozer's conviction, whispered in confidence to all the functionaries at Salem, that the rector himself, in a muffler and blue spectacles, listened in a corner to the voice of rebellion; but no proof of this monstrous supposition ever came before the public. Notwithstanding, the excitement was evident. Miss Wodehouse took tremulous notes, her fingers quivering with anger, with the intention of calling upon Mr. Wentworth to answer and deny these assertions. Dr. Marjoribanks, the old Scotchman, who in his heart enjoyed a hit at the Episcopate, cried "Hear, hear," with his sturdy northern r rattling through the hall, and clapped his large brown hands, with a broad grin at his daughter, who was "high," and one of Mr. Wentworth's sisters of mercy. But poor little Rose Lake, the drawing-master's daughter, who was going up for confirmation next time the bishop came to Carlingford, turned very pale under Mr. Vincent's teaching. All the different phases of conviction appeared in her eager little face—first indignation, then doubt, lastly horror and intense determination to flee out from Babylon. Her father laughed, and told her to attend to her needlework, when Rose confided to him her troubles. Her needlework! She who had just heard that the Church was rotten, and tottering on its foundations; that it was choked with filthy lucre and State

support; that Church to which she had been about to give in her personal adhesion. Rose put away her catechism and confirmation good-books, and crossed to the other side of the street that she might not pass Masters's, that emporium of evil. She looked wistfully after the young Nonconformist as he passed her on the streets, wondering what high martyr-thoughts must be in the apostolic mind which entertained so high a contempt for all the honours and distinctions of this world. Meanwhile Mr. Vincent pursued his own way, entirely convinced, as was natural for a young man, that he was "doing a great work" in Carlingford. He was still in that stage of life when people imagine that you have only to state the truth clearly to have it believed, and that to convince a man of what is right is all that is necessary to his immediate reformation. But it was not with any very distinct hopes or wishes of emptying the church in Carlingford, and crowding Salem Chapel, that the young man proceeded. Such expectations, high visions of a day to come when not a sitting could be had in Salem for love or money, did indeed glance into the souls of Tozer and his brother deacons; but the minister did not stand up and deliver his blow at the world—his outcry against things in general—his warm youthful assertion that he too had a right to all the joys and privileges of humanity,—as, by means of sermons, lectures, poems, or what not, youth and poverty, wherever they have a chance, do proclaim their protest against the world.

On the last night of the lectures, just as Vincent had taken his place upon his platform, a rustle, as of some one of importance entering, thrilled the audience. Looking over the sea of heads before him, the breath almost left the young minister's lips when he saw the young Dowager, in all the glory of full-dress, threading her way through the crowd, which opened to let her pass. Mr. Vincent stood watching her progress, unaware that it was time for him to begin, and that his hearers, less absorbed than he, were asking each other what it was which had so suddenly paled his face and checked his utterance. He watched Lady Western and her companion come slowly forward; he saw Tozer, in a delighted bustle, leading

the way to one of the raised seats of the orchestra close to the platform. When they were seated, and not till then, the lecturer, drawing a long gasping breath, turned to his audience. But the crowd was hazy to his eyes. He began, half mechanically, to speak—then made a sudden pause, his mind occupied with other things. On the very skirts of the crowd, far back at the door, stood his friend of Back Grove Street. In that momentary pause, he saw her standing alone, with the air of a person who had risen up unconsciously in sudden surprise and consternation. Her pale dark face looked not less confused and startled than Vincent himself was conscious of looking, and her eyes were turned in the same direction as his had been the previous moment. The crowd of Carlingford hearers died off from the scene for the instant, so far as the young Nonconformist was concerned. He knew but of that fair creature in all her sweet bloom and blush of beauty—the man who accompanied her—Mrs. Hilyard, a thin, dark, eager shadow in the distance—and himself standing, as it were, between them, connecting all together. What could that visionary link be which distinguished and separated these four, so unlike each other, from all the rest of the world? But Mr. Vincent had no leisure to follow out the question, even had his mind been sufficiently clear to do it. He saw the pale woman at the end of the hall suddenly drop into her seat, and draw a thick black veil over her face; and the confused murmur of impatience in the crowd before him roused the young man to his own position. He opened the eyes which had been hazing over with clouds of imagination and excitement. He delivered his lecture. Though he never was himself aware what he had said, it was received with just as much attention and applause as usual. He got through it somehow; and, sitting down at last, with parched lips and a helpless feeling of excitement, watched the audience dispersing, as if they were so many enemies from whom he had escaped. Who was this man with Her? Why did She come to bewilder him in the midst of his work? It did not occur to the poor young fellow that Lady Western came to his lecture simply as to a “distraction.” He thought she had a purpose in it. He pretended not to look as she descended daintily

from her seat in the orchestra, drawing her white cloak with a pretty shiver over her white shoulders. He pretended to start when her voice sounded in his expectant ear.

“Oh, Mr. Vincent, how very clever and wicked of you!” cried Lady Western. “I am so horrified, and charmed. To think of you attacking the poor dear old Church, that we all ought to support through everything! And I am such a stanch churchwoman, and so shocked to hear all this; but you won’t do it any more.”

Saying this, Lady Western leaned her beautiful hand upon Mr. Vincent’s table, and looked in his face with a beseeching insinuating smile. The poor minister did all he could to preserve his virtue. He looked aside at Lady Western’s companion to fortify himself, and escape the enervating influence of that smile.

“I cannot pretend to yield the matter to your ladyship,” said Vincent, “for it had been previously arranged that this was to be the last of my lectures at present. I am sorry it did not please you.”

“But it did please me,” said the young Dowager; “only that it was so very wicked and wrong. Where did you learn such dreadful sentiments? I am so sorry I shan’t hear you again, and so glad you are finished. You never came to see me after my little fête. I am afraid you thought us stupid. Good-night: but you really must come to me, and I shall convert you. I am sure you never can have looked at the Church in the right way: why, what would become of us if we were all Dissenters? What a frightful idea! Thank you for such a charming evening. Good-night.”

And Lady Western held out that “treasured splendour, her hand,” to the bewildered Nonconformist, who only dared touch it, and let it fall, drawing back from the smile with which the syren beguiled him back again into her toils. But Mr. Vincent turned round hastily as he heard a muttered exclamation, “By Jove!” behind him, and fixed the gaze of angry and instinctive repugnance upon the tall figure which brushed past. “Make haste, Alice—do you mean to stay here all night?” said this wrathful individual, fixing his eyes with a defiant stare upon the minister; and he drew the

beauty's arm almost roughly into his own, and hurried her away, evidently remonstrating in the freest and boldest manner upon her civility. "By Jove! the fellow will think you are in love with him," Vincent, with his quickened and suspicious ears, could hear the stranger say, with that delightful indifference to being overheard which characterises some Englishmen of the exalted classes; and the strain of reproof evidently continued as they made their way to the door. Vincent, for his part, when he had watched them out of sight, dropped into his chair, and sat there in the empty hall, looking over the vacant benches with the strangest mixture of feelings. Was it possible that his eager fervour and revolutionary warmth were diminished by these few words and that smile?—that the wrongs of Church and State looked less grievous all at once, and that it was an effort to return to the lofty state of feeling with which he had entered the place two hours ago? As he sat there in his reverie of discomfiture, he could see Tozer, a single black figure, come slowly up the hall, an emissary from the group at the door of "chapel people," who had been enjoying the defeat of the enemy, and were now waiting for the conqueror. "Mr. Vincent," shouted Tozer, "shall we turn off the gas, and leave you to think it all over till the morning, sir? They're all as pleased as Punch and as curious as women down below here, and my Phœbe will have it you're tired. I must say as it is peculiar to see you a-sitting up there all by yourself, and the lights going out, and not another soul in the place," added the butterman, looking round with a sober grin; and in reality the lights diminished every moment as Mr. Vincent rose and stumbled down from his platform into the great empty hall with its skeleton benches. If they had left him there till the morning, it would have been a blessed exchange from that walk home with the party, that invitation to supper, and all the applauses and inquiries that followed. They had the Pigeons to supper that night at the butter-shop, and the whole matter was discussed in all its bearings—the flutter of the "Church folks," the new sittings let during the week, the triumphant conviction of the two deacons that Salem would soon be overflowing.

“Oh, why were ‘deacons’ made so coarse, Or parsons made so fine?”

Mr. Vincent did not bethink himself of that touching ditty. He could not see the serio-comic lights in which the whole business abounded. It was all the saddest earnest to the young pastor, who found so little encouragement or support even in the enthusiasm of his flock.

“And, oh, Mr. Vincent,” said the engaging Phœbe, in a half-whisper aside, “how did you come to be so friendly with Lady Western? How she did listen, to be sure! and smiled at you so sweetly. Ah, I don’t wonder now that you can’t see anything in the Carlingford young ladies; but do tell us, please, how you came to know her so well?”

Insensibly to himself, a gleam of gratification lighted up Mr. Vincent’s face. He was gracious to Phœbe. “I can’t pretend to know her well,” he said, with a little mock humility; whereupon the matrons of the party took up their weapons immediately.

“And all the better, Mr. Vincent—all the better!” cried Mrs. Tozer; “she didn’t come there for no good, you may be sure. Them great ladies, when they’re pretty-looking, as I don’t deny she’s pretty-looking——”

“Oh, mamma, beautiful!” exclaimed Phœbe.

“When they’re pretty-looking, as I say,” continued Mrs. Tozer, “they’re no better nor evil spirits—that’s what I tell you, Phœbe. They’ll go out o’ their way, they will, for to lay hold on a poor silly young man (which was not meaning you, Mr. Vincent, that knows better, being a minister), and when they’ve got him fast, they’ll laugh at him—that’s their sport. A minister of our connection as was well acquainted among them sort of folks would be out o’ nature. My boy shall never make no such acquaintances as long as I’m here.”

“I saw her a-speaking to the minister,” said Mrs. Pigeon, “and the thought crossed my mind as it wasn’t just what I expected of Mr. Vincent. Painted ladies, that come out of a night with low necks and flowers in their hair, to have all Carlingford

a-staring at them, ain't fit company for a good pastor. Them's not the lambs of the flock—not so far as I understand; they're not friends as Salem folks would approve of, Mr. Vincent. I'm always known for a plain speaker, and I don't deceive you. It's a deal better to draw back in time."

"I have not the least reason to believe that Lady Western means to honour me with her friendship," said Vincent, haughtily—"so it is premature to discuss the matter. As I feel rather tired, perhaps you'll excuse me to-night. Come over to my rooms, Mr. Tozer, to-morrow, if you can spare a little time and we will discuss our business there. I hope Mrs. Tozer will pardon me withdrawing so early, but I am not very well—rather tired—out of sorts a little to-night."

So saying, the young pastor extricated himself from the table, shook hands, regardless of all remonstrances, and made his way out with some difficulty from the little room, which was choke-full, and scarcely permitted egress. When he was gone, the three ladies looked at each other in dumb amazement. Phœbe, who felt herself aggrieved, was the first to break silence.

"Ma and Mrs. Pigeon," cried the aggravated girl, "you've been and hurt his feelings. I knew you would. He's gone home angry and disappointed; he thinks none of us understand him; he thinks we're trying to humble him and keep him down, when, to tell the truth——"

Here Phœbe burst into tears.

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Pigeon, "dear, deary me! It's just what I said whenever I knew you had made up your minds to a young minister. He'll come a-dangling after our girls, says I, and a-trifling with their affections. Bless my heart, Phœbe! if it had been my Maria now that's always a-crying about something—but you! Don't take on, dear—fretting's no good—it'll spoil your colour and take away your appetite, and that ain't the way to mend matters: and to think of his lifting his eyes to my Lady Dowager! Upon my word! but there ain't no accounting for young men's

ways no more than for girls—and being a minister don't make a bit of difference, so far as I can see."

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Tozer: "the pastor's gone off in a huff, and Phœbe crying. What's wrong? You've been saying somethin'—you women with your sharp tongues."

"It's Phœbe and Mr. Vincent have had some words. Be quiet, Tozer—don't you see the child's hurt in her feelings?" said his wife.

Mr. and Mrs. Pigeon exchanged looks. "I'll tell you what it is," said the latter lady, solemnly. "It's turned his head. I never approved of the Music Hall myself. It's a deal of money to throw away, and it's not like as if it was mercy to poor souls. And such a crush, and the cheering, and my Lady Western to shake hands with him, has turned the minister's head. Now, just you mark my words. He hasn't been here three month yet, and he's a-getting high already. You men'll have your own adoes with him. Afore a year's over our heads, he'll be a deal too high for Salem. His head's turned—that's what it is."

"Oh, Mrs. Pigeon, how unkind of you!" cried Phœbe, "when he's as good as good—and not a bit proud, nor ever was—and always such a gentleman!—and never neglects the very poorest whenever he's sent for—oh, it's so unkind of you."

"I can't see as his head isn't straight enough on his shoulders," said Tozer himself, with authority. "He's tired, that's what it is—and excited a bit, I shouldn't wonder: a man can't study like he does, and make hisself agreeable at the same time—no, no—by a year's time he'll be settling down, and we'll know where we are; and as for Salem and our connection, they never had a chance, I can tell you, like what they're a-going to have now."

But Mrs. Pigeon shook her head. It was the first cloud that had risen on the firmament of Salem Chapel, so far as Mr. Vincent was concerned.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was a January night on which Vincent emerged abruptly from Tozer's door, the evening of that lecture—a winter night, not very cold, but very dark, the skies looking not blue, but black overhead, and the light of the lamps gleaming dismally on the pavement, which had received a certain squalid power of reflection from the recent rain; for a sharp, sudden shower had fallen while Vincent had been seated at the hospitable table of the butterman, which had chased everybody from the darkling streets. All the shops were closed, a policeman marched along with heavy tread, and the wet pavement glimmered round his solitary figure. Nothing more uncomfortable could be supposed after the warmth and light of a snug interior, however humble; and the minister turned his face hastily in the direction of his lodging. But the next moment he turned back again, and looked wistfully in the other direction. It was not to gaze along the dark length of street to where the garden-walls of Grange Lane, undiscernible in the darkness, added a far-withdrawing perspective of gentility and aristocratic seclusion to the vulgar pretensions of George Street; it was to look at a female figure which came slowly up, dimming out the reflection on the wet stones as it crossed one streak of lamplight after another. Vincent was excited and curious, and had enough in his own mind to make him wistful for sympathy, if it were to be had from any understanding heart. He recognised Mrs. Hilyard instinctively as she came forward, not conscious of him, walking, strange woman as she was, with the air of a person walking by choice at that melancholy hour in that dismal night. She was evidently not going anywhere: her step was firm and distinct, like the step of a person thoroughly self-possessed and afraid of nothing—but it lingered with a certain meditative sound in the steady firm footfall. Vincent felt a kind of conviction that she had come out here to think over some problem of that mysterious life into which he could not penetrate, and he connected this strange walk involuntarily with the appearance of Lady Western and her careless companion. To his roused fancy,

some incomprehensible link existed between himself and the equally incomprehensible woman before him. He turned back almost in spite of himself, and went to meet her. Mrs. Hilyard looked up when she heard his step. She recognised him also on the spot. They approached each other much as if they had arranged a meeting at eleven o'clock of that wet January night in the gleaming, deserted streets.

"It is you, Mr. Vincent!" she said. "I wonder why I happen to meet you, of all persons in the world, to-night. It is very odd. What, I wonder, can have brought us both together at such an hour and in such a place? You never came to see me that Monday—nor any Monday. You went to see my beauty instead, and you were so lucky as to be affronted with the syren at the first glance. Had you been less fortunate, I think I might have partly taken you into my confidence to-night."

"Perhaps I am less fortunate, if that is all that hinders," said Vincent; "but it is strange to see you out here so late in such a dismal night. Let me go with you, and see you safe home."

"Thank you. I am perfectly safe—nobody can possibly be safer than such a woman as I am, in poverty and middle age," said his strange acquaintance. "It is an immunity that women don't often prize, Mr. Vincent, but it is very valuable in its way. If anybody saw you talking to an equivocal female figure at eleven o'clock in George Street, think what the butterman would say; but a single glimpse of my face would explain matters better than a volume. I am going down towards Grange Lane, principally because I am restless to-night, and don't know what to do with myself. I shall tell you what I thought of your lecture if you will walk with me to the end of the street."

"Ah, my lecture?—never mind," said the hapless young minister; "I forget all about that. What is it that brings you here, and me to your side?—what is there in that dark-veiled house yonder that draws your steps and mine to it? It is not accidental, our meeting here."

“You are talking romance and nonsense, quite inconceivable in a man who has just come from the society of deacons,” said Mrs. Hilyard, glancing up at him with that habitual gleam of her eyes. “We have met, my dear Mr. Vincent, because, after refreshing my mind with your lecture, I thought of refreshing my body by a walk this fresh night. One saves candles, you know, when one does one’s exercise at night: whereas walking by day one wastes everything—time, tissue, daylight, invaluable treasures: the only light that hurts nobody’s eyes, and costs nobody money, is the light of day. That illustration of yours about the clouds and the sun was very pretty. I assure you I thought the whole exceedingly effective. I should not wonder if it made a revolution in Carlingford.”

“Why do you speak to me so? I know you did not go to listen to my lecture,” said the young minister, to whom sundry gleams of enlightenment had come since his last interview with the poor needle-woman of Back Grove Street.

“Ah! how can you tell that?” she said, sharply, looking at him in the streak of lamplight. “But to tell the truth,” she continued, “I did actually go to hear you, and to look at other people’s faces, just to see whether the world at large—so far as that exists in Carlingford—was like what it used to be; and if I confess I saw something there more interesting than the lecture, I say no more than the lecturer could agree in, Mr. Vincent. You, too, saw something that made you forget the vexed question of Church and State.”

“Tell me,” said Vincent, with an earnestness he was himself surprised at, “who was that man?”

His companion started as if she had received a blow, turned round upon him with a glance in her dark eyes such as he had never seen there before, and in a sudden momentary passion drew her breath hard, and stopped short on the way. But the spark of intense and passionate emotion was as shortlived as it was vivid. “I do not suppose he is anything to interest you,” she answered the next moment, with a

movement of her thin mouth, letting the hands that she had clasped together drop to her side. “Nay, make yourself quite easy; he is not a lover of my lady’s. He is only a near relation:—and,” she continued, lingering on the words with a force of subdued scorn and rage, which Vincent dimly apprehended, but could not understand, “a very fascinating fine gentleman—a man who can twist a woman round his fingers when he likes, and break all her heartstrings—if she has any—so daintily afterwards, that it would be a pleasure to see him do it. Ah, a wonderful man!”

“You know him then? I saw you knew him,” said the young man, surprised and disturbed, thrusting the first commonplace words he could think of into the silence, which seemed to tingle with the restrained meaning of this brief speech.

“I don’t think we are lucky in choosing our subjects to-night,” said the strange woman. “How about the ladies in Lonsdale, Mr. Vincent? They don’t keep a school? I am glad they don’t keep a school. Teaching, you know, unless when one has a vocation for it, as you had a few weeks ago, is uphill work. I am sorry to see you are not so sure about your work as you were then. Your sister is pretty, I suppose? and does your mother take great care of her and keep her out of harm’s way? Lambs have a silly faculty of running directly in the wolf’s road. Why don’t you take a holiday and go to see them, or have them here to live with you?”

“You know something about them,” said Vincent, alarmed. “What has happened?—tell me. It will be the greatest kindness to say it out at once.”

“Hush,” said Mrs. Hilyard; “now you are absurd. I speak out of my own thoughts, as most persons do, and you, like all young people, make personal applications. How can I possibly know about them? I am not a fanciful woman, but there are some things that wake one’s imagination. In such a dark night as this, with such wet gleams about the streets, when I think of people at a distance, I always think of something uncomfortable happening. Misfortune seems to lie in wait about those black corners. I think of women wandering along dismal solitary roads with babies

in their shameful arms—and of dreadful messengers of evil approaching unconscious houses, and looking in at peaceful windows upon the comfort they are about to destroy; and I think," she continued, crossing the road so rapidly (they were now opposite Lady Western's house) that Vincent, who had not anticipated the movement, had to quicken his pace suddenly to keep up with her, "of evil creatures pondering in the dark vile schemes against the innocent——" Here she broke off all at once, and, looking up in Vincent's face with that gleam of secret mockery in her eyes and movement of her mouth to which he was accustomed, added, suddenly changing her tone, "Or of fine gentlemen, Mr. Vincent, profoundly bored with their own society, promenading in a dreary garden and smoking a disconsolate cigar. Look there!"

The young minister, much startled and rather nervous, mechanically looked, as she bade him, through the little grated loophole in Lady Western's garden-door. He saw the lights shining in the windows, and a red spark moving about before the house, as, with a little shame for his undignified position, he withdrew his eyes from that point of vantage. But Mrs. Hilyard was moved by no such sentiment. She planted herself opposite the door, and, bending her head to the little grating, gazed long and steadfastly. In the deep silence of the night, standing with some uneasiness at her side, and not insensible to the fact that his position, if he were seen by anybody who knew him, would be rather absurd and slightly equivocal, Vincent heard the footsteps of the man inside, the fragrance of whose cigar faintly penetrated the damp air. The stranger was evidently walking up and down before the house in enjoyment of that luxury which the feminine arrangements of the young Dowager's household would not permit indoors; but the steady eagerness with which this strange woman gazed—the way in which she had managed to interweave Mrs. Vincent and pretty Susan at Lonsdale into the conversation—the suggestions of coming danger and evil with which her words had invested the very night, all heightened by the instinctive repugnance and alarm of which the young man had himself been conscious

whenever he met the eye of Lady Western's companion—filled him with discomfort and dread. His mind, which had been lately too much occupied in his own concerns to think much of Susan, reverted now with sudden uneasiness to his mother's cottage, from which Susan's betrothed had lately departed to arrange matters for their speedy marriage. But how Lady Western's "near relation"—this man whom Mrs. Hilyard watched with an intense regard which looked like hatred, but might be dead love—could be connected with Lonsdale, or Susan, or himself, or the poor needlewoman in Back Grove Street, Vincent could not form the remotest idea. He stood growing more and more impatient by that dark closed door, which had once looked a gate of paradise—which, he felt in his heart, half-a-dozen words or a single smile could any day make again a gate of the paradise of fools to his bewildered feet—the steps of the unseen stranger within, and the quick breath of agitation from the watcher by his side, being the only sounds audible in the silence of the night. At last some restless movement he made disturbed Mrs. Hilyard in her watch. She left the door noiselessly and rapidly, and turned to recross the wet road. Vincent accompanied her without saying a word. The two walked along together half the length of Grange Lane without breaking silence, without even looking at each other, till they came to the large placid white lamp at Dr. Marjoribanks's gate, which cleared a little oasis of light out of the heart of the gloom. There she looked up at him with a face full of agitated life and motion—kindled eyes, elevated head, nostril and lips swelling with feelings which were totally undecipherable to Vincent; her whole aspect changed by an indescribable inspiration which awoke remnants of what might have been beauty in that thin, dark, middle-aged face.

"You are surprised at me and my curiosity," she said, "and indeed you have good reason; but it is astonishing, when one is shut up in one's self and knows nobody, how excited one gets over the sudden apparition of a person one has known in the other world. Some people die two or three times in a lifetime, Mr. Vincent. There is a real transmigration of souls, or bodies, or both if you please. This is my third life I

am going through at present. I knew that man, as I was saying, in the other world."

"The world does change strangely," said Vincent, who could not tell what to say; "but you put it very strongly—more strongly than I——"

"More strongly than you can understand; I know that very well," said Mrs. Hilyard; "but you perceive you are speaking to a woman who has died twice. Coming to life is a bitter process, but one gets over it. If you ever should have such a thing to go through with—and survive it," she added, giving him a wistful glance, "I should like to tell you my experiences. However, I hope better things. You are very well looked after at Salem Chapel, Mr. Vincent. I think of you sometimes when I look out of my window and see your tabernacle. It is not so pretty as Mr. Wentworth's at St. Roque's, but you have the advantage of the curate otherwise. So far as I can see, he never occupies himself with anything higher than his prayer-book and his poor people. I doubt much whether he would ever dream of replying to what you told us to-night."

"Probably he holds a Dissenting minister in too much contempt," said Vincent, with an uncomfortable smile on his lips.

"Don't sneer—never sneer—no gentleman does," said his companion. "I like you, though you are only a Dissenting minister. You know me to be very poor, and you have seen me in very odd circumstances to-night; yet you walk home with me—I perceive you are steering towards Back Grove Street, Mr. Vincent—without an illusion which could make me feel myself an equivocal person, and just as if this was the most reasonable thing in the world which I have been doing to-night. Thank you. You are a paladin in some things, though in others only a Dissenting minister. If I were a fairy, the gift I would endow you with would be just that same unconsciousness of your own disadvantages, which courtesy makes you show of mine."

"Indeed," said Vincent, with natural gratification, "it required no discrimination on

my part to recognise at once that I was addressing——”

“Hush! you have never even insinuated that an explanation was necessary, which is the very height and climax of fine manners,” said Mrs. Hilyard; “and I speak who am, or used to be, an authority in such matters. I don’t mean to give you any explanation either. Now, you must turn back and go home. Good-night. One thing I may tell you, however,” she continued, with a little warmth; “don’t mistake me. There is no reason in this world why you might not introduce me to the ladies in Lonsdale, if any accident brought it about that we should meet. I say this to make your mind easy about your penitent; and now, my good young father in the faith, good-night.”

“Let me see you to your door first,” said the wondering young man.

“No—no farther. Good-night,” she said, hastily, shaking hands, and leaving him. The parting was so sudden that it took Vincent a minute to stop short, under way and walking quickly as he was. When she had made one or two rapid steps in advance, Mrs. Hilyard turned back, as if with a sudden impulse.

“Do you know I have an uneasiness about these ladies in Lonsdale?” she said; “I know nothing whatever about them—not so much as their names; but you are their natural protector; and it does not do for women to be as magnanimous and generous in the reception of strangers as you are. There! don’t be alarmed. I told you I knew nothing. They may be as safe, and as middle-aged, and as ugly as I am; instead of a guileless widow and a pretty little girl, they may be hardened old campaigners like myself; but they come into my mind, I cannot tell why. Have them here to live beside you, and they will do you good.”

“My sister is about to be married,” said Vincent, more and more surprised, and looking very sharply into her face in the lamplight, to see whether she really did not know anything more than she said.

A certain expression of relief came over her face.

“Then all is well,” she said, with strange cordiality, and again held out her hand to him. Then they parted, and pursued their several ways through the perfectly silent and dimly-lighted streets. Vincent walked home with the most singular agitation in his mind. Whether to give any weight to such vague but alarming suggestions—whether to act immediately upon the indefinite terror thus insinuated into his thoughts—or to write, and wait till he heard whether any real danger existed—or to cast it from him altogether as a fantastic trick of imagination, he could not tell. Eventful and exciting as the evening had been, he postponed the other matters to this. If any danger threatened Susan, his simple mother could suffer with her, but was ill qualified to protect her: but what danger could threaten Susan? He consoled himself with the thought that these were not the days of abductions or violent love-making. To think of an innocent English girl in her mother’s house as threatened with mysterious danger, such as might have surrounded a heroine of the last century, was impossible. If there are Squire Thornhills nowadays, their operations are of a different character. Walking rapidly home, with now and then a blast of chill rain in his face, and the lamplight gleaming in the wet streets, Vincent found less and less reason for attaching any importance to Mrs. Hilyard’s hints and alarms. It was the sentiment of the night, and her own thoughts, which had suggested such fears to her mind—a mind evidently experienced in paths more crooked than any which Vincent himself, much less simple Susan, had ever known. When he reached home, he found his little fire burning brightly, his room arranged with careful nicety, which was his landlady’s appropriate and sensible manner of showing her appreciation of the night’s lecture, and her devotion to the minister; and, lastly, on the table a letter from that little house in Lonsdale, round which such fanciful fears had gathered. Never was there a letter which breathed more of the peaceful security and tranquillity of home. Mrs. Vincent wrote to her Arthur in mingled rejoicing and admonition, curious and delighted to hear of his lectures, but not more anxious about his fame and success than about his flannels and precautions

against wet feet; while Susan's postscript—a half longer than the letter to which it was appended—furnished her affectionate brother with sundry details, totally incomprehensible to him, of her wedding preparations, and, more shyly, of her perfect girlish happiness. Vincent laughed aloud as he folded up that woman's letter. No mysterious horror, no whispering doubtful gloom, surrounded that house from which the pure, full daylight atmosphere, untouched by any darkness, breathed fresh upon him out of these simple pages. Here, in this humble virtuous world, were no mysteries. It was a deliverance to a heart which had begun to falter. Wherever fate might be lingering in the wild darkness of that January night, it was not on the threshold of his mother's house.

CHAPTER X.

ON the next evening after this there was a tea-meeting in Salem Chapel. In the back premises behind the chapel were all needful accommodations for the provision of that popular refreshment—boilers, tea-urns, unlimited crockery and pewter. In fact, it was one of Mr. Tozer's boasts, that owing to the liberality of the "connection" in Carlingford, Salem was fully equipped in this respect, and did not need to borrow so much as a spoon or teapot, a very important matter under the circumstances. This, however, was the first tea-meeting which had taken place since that one at which Mr. Tufton's purse had been presented to him, and the old pastor had taken leave of his flock. The young pastor, indeed, had set his face against tea-meetings. He was so far behind his age as to doubt their utility, and declared himself totally unqualified to preside over such assemblies; but, in the heat of his recent disappointment, when, stung by other people's neglect, he had taken up Salem and all belonging to it into his bosom, a cruel use had been made of the young minister's compliance. They had wrung a reluctant consent from him in that unguarded moment, and the walls of Carlingford had been for some days blazing with placards of the tea-meeting, at

which the now famous (in Carlingford) lecturer on Church and State was to speak. Not Tozer, with all his eloquence, had been able to persuade the pastor to preside; but at least he was to appear, to take tea at that table elevated on the platform, where Phœbe Tozer, under the matronly care of Mrs. Brown (for it was necessary to divide these honours, and guard against jealousy), dispensed the fragrant lymph, and to address the meeting. There had been thoughts of a grand celebration in the Music Hall to do more honour to the occasion; but as that might have neutralised the advantages of having all the needful utensils within themselves, convenience and economy carried the day, and the scene of these festivities, as of all the previous festivities of Salem, was the large low room underneath the chapel, once intended for a school, but never used, except on Sundays, in that capacity. Thither for two or three days all the "young ladies" of the chapel had streamed to and fro, engaged in decorations. Some manufactured festoons of evergreens, some concocted pink and white roses in paper to embellish the same. The printed texts of the Sunday school were framed, and in some cases obliterated, in Christmas garlands. Christmas, indeed, was past, but there were still holly and red berries and green smooth laurel leaves. The Pigeon girls, Phœbe Tozer, Mrs. Brown's niece from the country, and the other young people in Salem who were of sufficiently advanced position, enjoyed the preparations greatly—entering into them with even greater heartiness than Lucy Wodehouse exhibited in the adornment of St. Roque's, and taking as much pleasure in the task as if they had been picturesque Italians adorning the shrine of their favourite saint. Catterina and Francesca with their flower-garlands are figures worthy of any picture, and so is Lucy Wodehouse under the chancel arch at St. Roque's; but how shall we venture to ask anybody's sympathy for Phœbe and Maria Pigeon as they put up their festoons round the four square walls of the low schoolroom in preparation for the Salem tea-party? Nevertheless it is a fact that the two last mentioned had very much the same intentions and sensations, and amid the coils of fresh ivy and laurel did not look amiss in their cheerful labour—a fact

which, before the work was completed, had become perceptible to various individuals of the Carlingford public. But Mr. Vincent was, on this point, as on several others, unequal to the requirements of his position. When he did glance in for a moment of the afternoon of the eventful day, it was in company with Tozer and the Rev. Mr. Raffles of Shoebury, who was to take the chair. Mr. Raffles was very popular in Carlingford, as everywhere. To secure him for a tea-meeting was to secure its success. He examined into all the preparations, tasted the cake, pricked his fingers with the garlands to the immense delight of the young ladies, and complimented them on their skill with beaming cheerfulness; while the minister of Salem, on the contrary, stalked about by his side pale and preoccupied, with difficulty keeping himself from that contempt of the actual things around to which youth is so often tempted. His mind wandered off to the companion of his last night's walk—to the stranger pacing up and down that damp garden with inscrutable unknown thoughts—to the beautiful creature within those lighted windows, so near and yet so overwhelmingly distant—as if somehow they had abstracted life and got it among themselves. Mr. Vincent had little patience for what he considered the mean details of existence nearer at hand. As soon as he could possibly manage it, he escaped, regarding with a certain hopeless disgust the appearance he had to make in the evening, and without finding a single civil thing to say to the fair decorators. "My young brother looks sadly low and out of spirits," said jolly Mr. Raffles. "What do you mean by being so unkind to the minister, Miss Phœbe, eh?" Poor Phœbe blushed pinker than ever, while the rest laughed. It was pleasant to be supposed "unkind" to the minister; and Phœbe resolved to do what she could to cheer him when she sat by his elbow at the platform table making tea for the visitors of the evening.

The evening came, and there was not a ticket to be had anywhere in Carlingford: the schoolroom, with its blazing gas, its festoons, and its mottoes, its tables groaning with dark-complexioned plumcake and heavy buns, was crowded quite beyond its

accommodation; and the edifying sight might be seen of Tozer and his brother deacons, and indeed all who were sufficiently interested in the success of Salem to sacrifice themselves on its behalf, making an erratic but not unsubstantial tea in corners, to make room for the crowd. And in the highest good-humour was the crowd which surrounded all the narrow tables. The urns were well filled, the cake abundant, the company in its best attire. The ladies had bonnets, it is true, but these bonnets were worthy the occasion. At the table on the platform sat Mr. Raffles, in the chair, beaming upon the assembled party, with cheerful little Mrs. Tufton and Mrs. Brown at one side of him, and Phœbe looking very pink and pretty, shaded from the too enthusiastic admiration of the crowd below by the tea-urn at which she officiated. Next to her, the minister cast abstracted looks upon the assembly. He was, oh, so interesting in his silence and pallor!—he spoke little; and when any one addressed him, he had to come back as if from a distance to hear. If anybody could imagine that Mr. Raffles contrasted dangerously with Mr. Vincent in that reserve and quietness, it would be a mistake unworthy a philosophic observer. On the contrary, the Salem people were all doubly proud of their pastor. It was not to be expected that such a man as he should unbend as the reverend chairman did. They preferred that he should continue on his stilts. It would have been a personal humiliation to the real partisans of the chapel, had he really woke up and come down from that elevation. The more commonplace the ordinary “connection” was, the more proud they felt of their student and scholar. So Mr. Vincent leaned his head upon his hands and gazed unmolested over the lively company, taking in all the particulars of the scene, the busy groups engaged in mere tea-making and tea-consuming—the flutter of enjoyment among humble girls and womankind who knew no pleasure more exciting—the whispers which pointed out himself to strangers among the party—the triumphant face of Tozer at the end of the room, jammed against the wall, drinking tea out of an empty sugar-basin. If the scene woke any movement of human sympathy in the bosom of the young Nonconformist, he

was half ashamed of himself for it. What had the high mission of an evangelist—the lofty ambition of a man trained to enlighten his country—the warm assurance of talent which felt itself entitled to the highest sphere,—what had these great things to do in a Salem Chapel tea-meeting? So the lofty spirit held apart, gazing down from a mental elevation much higher than the platform; and all the people who had heard his lectures pointed him out to each other, and congratulated themselves on that studious and separated aspect which was so unlike other men. In fact, the fine superiority of Mr. Vincent was at the present moment the very thing that was wanted to rivet their chains. Even Mrs. Pigeon looked on with silent admiration. He was "high"—never before had Salem known a minister who did not condescend to be gracious at a tea-meeting—and the leader of the opposition honoured him in her heart.

And even when at last the social meal was over, when the urns were cleared away, and with a rustle and flutter the assembly composed itself to the intellectual regale about to follow, Mr. Vincent did not change his position. Mr. Raffles made quite one of his best speeches; he kept his audience in a perpetual flutter of laughter and applause; he set forth all the excellencies of the new minister with such detail and fulness as only the vainest could have swallowed. But the pleased congregation still applauded. He praised Mr. Tufton, the venerable father of the community, he praised the admirable deacons; he praised the arrangements. In short, Mr. Raffles applauded everybody, and everybody applauded Mr. Raffles. After the chairman had concluded his speech, the hero of the evening gathered himself up dreamily, and rose from Phœbe Tozer's side. He told them he had been gazing at them this hour past, studying the scene before him; how strangely they appeared to him, standing on this little bright gaslighted perch amid the dark sea of life that surged round them; that now he and they were face to face with each other, it was not their social pleasure he was thinking of, but that dark unknown existence that throbbed and echoed around: he bade them remember the dark night which enclosed that town of Carlingford,

without betraying the secret of its existence even to the nearest village; of those dark streets and houses which hid so many lives and hearts and tragic histories; he enlarged upon Mrs. Hilyard's idea of the sentiment of "such a night," till timid people threw glances behind them, and some sensitive mothers paused to wonder whether the minister could have heard that Tommy had fallen into the fire, or Mary scalded herself, and took this way to break the news. The speech was the strangest that ever was listened to at a tea-party. It was the wayward capricious pouring forth of a fanciful young mind under an unquiet influence, having no connection whatever with the "object," the place, or the listeners. The consequence was, that it was listened to with breathless interest—that the faces grew pale and the eyes bright, and shivers of restrained emotion ran through the astonished audience. Mr. Vincent perceived the effect of his eloquence, as a nursery story-teller perceives the rising sob of her little hearers. When he saw it, he awoke, as the same nursery minstrel does sometimes, to feel how unreal was the sentiment in his own breast which had produced this genuine feeling in others, and with a sudden amusement proceeded to deepen his colours and make bolder strokes of effect. His success was perfect; before he concluded, he had in imagination dismissed the harmless Salem people out of their very innocent recreation to the dark streets which thrilled round them—to the world of unknown life, of which each man for himself had some knowledge—to the tragedies that might be going on side by side with them, for aught they knew. His hearers drew a long breath when it was over. They were startled, frightened, enchanted. If they had been witnessing a melodrama, they scarcely could have been more excited. He had put the most dreadful suggestions in their mind of all sorts of possible trouble; he sat down with the consciousness of having done his duty by Salem for this night at least.

But when Tozer got up after him to tell about the prosperity of the congregation, the anticlimax was felt even by the people of Salem. Some said, "No, no," audibly, some laughed, not a few rose up and went away. Vincent himself, feeling the room

very hot, and not disliking the little commotion of interest which arose on his departure, withdrew himself from the platform, and made his way to the little vestry, where a breath of air was to be had; for, January night as it was, the crowd and the tea had established a very high temperature in the under-regions of Salem. He opened the window in the vestry, which looked out upon the damp ground behind the chapel and the few gravestones, and threw himself down on the little sofa with a sensation of mingled self-reproach and amusement. Somehow, even when one disapproves of one's self for doing it, one has a certain enjoyment in bewildering the world. Mr. Vincent was rather pleased with his success, although it was only a variety of "humbug." He entertained with Christian satisfaction the thought that he had succeeded in introducing a certain visionary uneasiness into the lively atmosphere of the tea-meeting—and he was delighted with his own cleverness in spite of himself.

While he lay back on his sofa, and pondered this gratifying thought, he heard a subdued sound of voices outside—voices and steps that fell with but little sound upon the damp grass. A languid momentary wonder touched the mind of the minister: who could have chosen so doleful a retirement? It was about the last place in the world for a lover's interview, which was the first thing that suggested itself to the young man; the next moment he started bolt upright, and listened with undisguised curiosity. That voice so different from the careless voices of Salem, the delicate refined intonations which had startled him in the shabby little room in Back Grove Street, awoke an interest in his mind which no youthful accents in Carlingford could have excited. He sat upright on the instant, and edged towards the open window. The gas burned low in the little vestry, which nobody had been expected to enter, and the illumination from all the schoolroom windows, and sounds of cheering and commotion there, had doubtless made the absolute darkness and silence behind seem perfectly safe to the two invisible people now meeting under the cloud of night. Mr. Vincent was not startled into eavesdropping unawares,

nor did he engage in any sophistical argument to justify himself for listening. On the contrary, he listened honestly, with the full intention of hearing all he could—suddenly changed from the languid sentimentalist, painful and self-conscious, which the influences of the evening had made him, into a spectator very wide awake and anxious, straining his ear to catch some knowledge of a history, in which a crowd of presentiments warned him that he himself should yet be concerned.

“If you must speak, speak here,” said that voice which Vincent had recognised: “it is scarcely the atmosphere for a man of your fine taste, to be sure; but considering the subject of the conference, it will do. What do you want with me?”

“By Jove, it looks dangerous!—what do you mean to suggest by this sweet rendezvous—murder?” said the man, whoever he was, who had accompanied Mrs. Hilyard to the damp yard of Salem Chapel, with its scattered graves.

“My nerves are strong,” she answered. “It is a pity you should take the trouble to be melodramatic. Do you think I am vain enough to imagine that you could subject yourself to all the unpleasant accessories of being hanged on my account? Fancy a rough hempen rope, and the dirty fingers that would adjust it. Pah! you would not risk it for me.”

Her companion swore a muttered oath. “By Jove! I believe you’d be content to be murdered, to make such an end of me,” he answered, in the baffled tone of rage which a man naturally sinks into when engaged in unequal conflict of recrimination with a woman.

“This is too conjugal,” said Mrs. Hilyard; “it reminds me of former experiences: come to the point, I beg of you. You did not come here and seek me out that we might have an amusing conversation—what do you want with me?”

“Don’t tempt me too far with your confounded impertinence,” exclaimed the man, “or there is no telling what may happen. I want to know where that child is; you

know I do. I mean to reclaim my rights so far as she is concerned. If she had been a ward in Chancery, a man might have submitted. But I am a reformed individual—my life is of the most exemplary description—no court in Christendom would keep her from my custody now. I want the girl for her own good—she shall marry brilliantly, which she never could do with you. I know she's grown up as lovely as I expected——"

"How do you know?" interrupted Mrs. Hilyard, with a certain hoarseness in her voice.

"Ah! I have touched you at last. Remembering what her mother was," he went on, in a mocking tone, "though I am grieved to see how much you have gone off in late years—and having a humble consciousness of her father's personal advantages, and, in short, of her relatives in general, I know she's a little beauty—and, by Jove, she shall be a duchess yet."

There was a pause—something like a hard sob thrilled in the air, rather a vibration than a sound; and Vincent, making a desperate gesture of rage towards the school-room, from which a burst of applause at that moment sounded, approached closer to the window. Then the woman's voice burst forth passionate, but subdued.

"You have seen her! you!—you that blasted her life before she was born, and confused her sweet mind for ever—how did you dare to look at my child? And I," cried the passionate voice, forgetting even caution—"I, that would give my life drop by drop to restore what never can be restored to that victim of your sin and my weakness—I do not see her. I refuse myself that comfort. I leave it to others to do all that love and pity can do for my baby. You speak of murder—man! if I had a knife, I could find it in my heart to put an end to your horrid career; and, look you, I will—Coward! I will! I will kill you before you shall lay your vile hands on my child."

"She-wolf!" cried the man, grinding his teeth, "do you know how much it would be

to my advantage if you never left this lonely spot you have brought me to? By Jove, I have the greatest mind——”

Another momentary silence. Vincent, wound up to a high state of excitement, sprang noiselessly to his feet, and was rushing to the window to proclaim his presence, when Mrs. Hilyard’s voice, perfectly calm, and in its usual tone, brought him back to himself.

“Second thoughts are best. It would compromise you horribly, and put a stop to many pleasures—not to speak of those dreadful dirty fingers arranging that rough rope round your neck, which, pardon me, I can’t help thinking of when you associate your own name with such a vulgar suggestion as murder. I should not mind these little details, but you! However, I excited myself unreasonably, you have not seen her. That skilful inference of yours was only a lie. She was not at Lonsdale, you know.”

“How the devil do you know I was at Lonsdale?” said her companion.

“I keep myself informed of the movements of so interesting a person. She was not there.”

“No,” replied the man, “she was not there; but I need not suggest to your clear wits that there are other Lonsdales in England. What if Miss Mildmay were in her father’s lawful guardianship now?”

Here the air palpitated with a cry, the cry as of a wild creature in sudden blind anguish. It was echoed by a laugh of mockery and exultation. “Should you like me to tell you which of the Lonsdales you honoured with your patronage?” continued the mocking voice: “that in Derbyshire, or that in Devonshire, or that in Cumberland? I am afflicted to have defeated your skilful scheme so easily. Now that you see I am a match for you, perhaps you will perceive that it is better to yield peaceably, and unite with me in securing the girl’s good. She needs only to be seen to——”

“Who do you imagine you are addressing, Colonel Mildmay?” said Mrs. Hilyard, haughtily; “there has been enough of this: you are mistaken if you think you can deceive me for more than a moment: my child is not in your hands, and never will be, please God. But mark what I say,” she continued, drawing a fierce, hard breath, “if you should ever succeed in tracing her—if you should ever be able to snatch her from me—then confess your sins, and say your last prayers, for as sure as I live you shall die in a week.”

“She-devil! murderess!” cried her companion, not without a certain shade of alarm in his voice; “if your power were equal to your will——”

“In that case my power should be equal to my will,” said the steady, delicate woman’s voice, as clear in very fine articulation as if it were some peaceful arrangement of daily life for which she declared herself capable: “you should not escape if you surrounded yourself with a king’s guards. I swear to you, if you do what you say, that I will kill you somehow, by whatever means I can attain—and I have never yet broken my word.”

An unsteady defiant laugh was the only reply. The man was evidently more impressed with the sincerity, and power to execute her intentions, of the woman than she with his. Apparently they stood regarding each other for another momentary interval in silence. Again Mrs. Hilyard was the first to speak.

“I presume our conference is over now,” she said, calmly; “how you could think of seeking it is more than I can understand. I suppose poor pretty Alice, who thinks every woman can be persuaded, induced you to attempt this. Don’t let me keep you any longer in a place so repugnant to your taste. I am going to the tea-meeting at Salem Chapel to hear my young friend the minister speak: perhaps this unprofitable discussion has lost me that advantage. You heard him the other night, and were pleased, I trust. Good-night. I suppose, before leaving you, I should thank you for having spared my life.”

Vincent heard the curse upon her and her stinging tongue, which burst in a growl of rage from the lips of the other, but he did not see the satirical curtsy with which this strange woman swept past, nor the scarcely controllable impulse which made the man lift his stick and clench it in his hand as she turned away from him those keen eyes, out of which even the gloom of night could not quench the light. But even Mrs. Hilyard herself never knew how near, how very near, she was at that moment to the unseen world. Had her step been less habitually firm and rapid,—had she lingered on her way—the temptation might have been too strong for the man, maddened by many memories. He made one stride after her, clenching his stick. It was perfectly dark in that narrow passage which led out to the front of the chapel. She might have been stunned in a moment, and left there to die, without any man being the wiser. It was not virtue, nor hatred of bloodshed, nor repugnance to harm her, which restrained Colonel Mildmay's hand: it was half the rapidity of her movements, and half the instinct of a gentleman, which vice itself could not entirely obliterate. Perhaps he was glad when he saw her disappear from before him down the lighted steps into the Salem schoolroom. He stood in the darkness and watched her out of sight, himself unseen by any one, and then departed on his way, a splendid figure, all unlike the population of Grove Street. Some of the Salem people, dispersing at the moment, saw him sauntering down the street grand and leisurely, and recognised the gentleman who had been seen in the Music Hall with Lady Western. They thought he must have come privately once more to listen to their minister's eloquence. Probably Lady Western herself, the leader of fashion in Carlingford, would appear next Sunday to do Mr. Vincent honour. The sight of this very fine gentleman picking his leisurely way along the dark pavement of Grove Street, leaning confidingly upon that stick over which his tall person swayed with fashionable languor, gave a climax to the evening in the excited imaginations of Mr. Vincent's admirers. Nobody but the minister and one utterly unnoted individual in the crowd knew what had brought the Colonel and his stick to such a place. Nobody

but the Colonel himself, and the watchful heavens above, knew how little had prevented him from leaving a silent, awful witness of that secret interview upon the chapel steps.

When Mr. Vincent returned to the platform, which he did hurriedly, Mr. Pigeon was addressing the meeting. In the flutter of inquiries whether he was better, and gentle hopes from Phœbe that his studies had not been too much for him, nobody appeared to mark the eagerness of his eyes, and the curiosity in his face. He sat down in his old place, and pretended to listen to Mr. Pigeon. Anxiously from under the shadow of his hands he inspected the crowd before him, who had recovered their spirits. In a corner close to the door he at last found the face he was in search of. Mrs. Hilyard sat at the end of a table, leaning her face on her hand. She had her eyes fixed upon the speaker, and there passed now and then across the corners of her close-shut mouth that momentary movement which was her symbol for a smile. She was not pretending to listen, but giving her entire attention to the honest poulterer. Now and then she turned her eyes from Pigeon, and perused the room and the company with rapid glances of amusement and keen observation. Perhaps her eyes gleamed keener, and her dark cheek owned a slight flush—that was all. Out of her mysterious life—out of that interview, so full of violence and passion—the strange woman came, without a moment's interval, to amuse herself by looking at and listening to all those homely innocent people. Could it be that she was taking notes of Pigeon's speech? Suddenly, all at once, she had taken a pencil out of her pocket and began to write, glancing up now and then towards the speaker. Mr. Vincent's head swam with the wonder he was contemplating—was she flesh and blood after all, or some wonderful skeleton living a galvanic life? But when he asked himself the question, her cry of sudden anguish, her wild, wicked promise to kill the man who stole her daughter, came over his mind, and arrested his thoughts. He, dallying as he was on the verge of life, full of fantastic hopes and disappointment, could only pretend to listen to Pigeon; but the good poulterer turned gratified eyes towards Mrs. Hilyard.

He recognised her real attention and interest; was it the height of voluntary sham and deception?—or was she really taking notes?

The mystery was solved after the meeting was over. There was some music, in the first place—anthems in which all the strength of Salem united, Tozer taking a heavy bass, while Phœbe exerted herself so in the soprano that Mr. Vincent's attention was forcibly called off his own meditations, in terror lest something should break in the throat so hardly strained. Then there were some oranges, another speech, a hymn, and a benediction; and then Mr. Raffles sprang joyfully up, and leaned over the platform to shake hands with his friends. This last process was trying. Mr. Vincent, who could no longer take refuge in silence, descended into the retiring throng. He was complimented on his speech, and even by some superior people, who had a mind to be fashionable, upon the delightful evening they had enjoyed. When they were all gone, there were still the Tozers, the Browns, the Pigeons, Mrs. Tufton, and Mr. Raffles. He was turning back to them disconsolate, when he was suddenly confronted by Mrs. Hilyard out of her corner with the fly-leaf of the hymn-book the unscrupulous woman had been writing in, torn out in her hand.

"Stop a minute!" she cried; "I want to speak to you. I want your help, if you will give it me. Don't be surprised at what I ask. Is your mother a good woman—was it she that trained you to act to the forlorn as you did to me last night? I have been too hasty—I take away your breath;—never mind, there is no time to choose one's words. The butterman is looking at us, Mr. Vincent. The ladies are alarmed; they think I want spiritual consolation at this unsuitable moment. Make haste—answer my question. Would she do an act of Christian charity to a woman in distress?"

"My mother is—yes, I know she would, what do you want of her?—my mother is the best and tenderest of women," cried Vincent, in utter amazement.

"I want to send a child to her—a persecuted, helpless child, whom it is the object of my life to keep out of evil hands," said Mrs. Hilyard, her dark thin face growing

darker and more pallid, her eyes softening with tears. “She will be safe at Lonsdale now, and I cannot go in my own person at present to take her anywhere. Here is a message for the telegraph,” she added, holding up the paper which Vincent had supposed to be notes of Mr. Pigeon’s speech; “take it for me—send it off to-night—you will? and write to your mother; she shall suffer no loss, and I will thank her on my knees. It is life or death.”

“I know—I am aware!” cried Vincent, not knowing what he said. “There is no time to be lost.”

She put the paper into his hand, and clasped it tight between both of hers, not knowing in the excitement which she was so well trained to repress, that he had betrayed any special knowledge of her distress. It seemed natural, in that strain of desperation, that everybody should understand her. “Come to-morrow and tell me,” she said, hurriedly, and then hastened away, leaving him with the paper folded close into his hand as her hard grasp had left it. He turned away from the group which awaited his coming with some curiosity and impatience, and read the message by the light of one of the garlanded and festive lamps. “Rachel Russell to Miss Smith, Lonsdale, Devonshire. Immediately on receiving this, take the child to Lonsdale, near Peterborough—to Mrs. Vincent’s; leave the train at some station near town, and drive to a corresponding station on the Great Northern; don’t enter London. Blue veil—care—not to be left for an instant. I trust all to you.” Mr. Vincent put the message in his pocketbook, took it out again—tried it in his purse, his waistcoat pocket, everywhere he could think of—finally, closed his hand over it as at first, and in a high state of excitement went up to the chattering group at the little platform, the only thought in his mind being how to get rid of them, that he might hasten upon his mission before the telegraph office was closed for the night.

And, as was to be expected, Mr. Vincent found it no easy matter to get rid of the Tozers and Pigeons, who were all overflowing about the tea-party, its provisions, its

speeches, and its success. He stood with that bit of paper clenched in his hand, and endured the jokes of his reverend brother, the remarks of Mrs. Tufton, the blushes of Phœbe. He stood for half an hour at least perforce in unwilling and constrained civility—at last he became desperate;—with a wild promise to return presently, he rushed out into the night. The station was about half a mile out of Carlingford, at the new end, a long way past Dr. Rider's. When Vincent reached it, the telegraph clerk was putting on his hat to go away, and did not relish the momentary detention; when the message was received and despatched, the young minister drew breath—he went out of the office, wiping his hot forehead, to the railway platform, where the last train for town was just starting. As Vincent stood recovering himself and regaining his breath, the sudden flash of a match struck in one of the carriages attracted his attention. He looked, and saw by the light of the lamp inside a man stooping to light his cigar. The action brought the face, bending down close to the window, clearly out against the dark-blue background of the empty carriage; hair light, fine, and thin, in long but scanty locks—a high-featured eagle-face, too sharp for beauty now, but bearing all the traces of superior good looks departed—a light beard, so light that it did not count for its due in the aspect of that remarkable countenance—a figure full of ease and haughty grace: all these particulars Vincent noted with a keen rapid inspection. In another moment the long leash of carriages had plunged into the darkness. With a strange flush of triumph he watched them disappear, and turned away with a smile on his lips. The message of warning was already tingling along the sensitive wires, and must outspeed the slow human traveller. This face, which so stamped itself upon his memory, which he fancied he could see pictured on the air as he returned along the dark road, was the face of the man who had been Lady Western's companion at the lecture. That it was the same face which had confronted Mrs. Hilyard in the dark graveyard behind Salem Chapel he never doubted. With a thrill of active hatred and fierce enmity which it was difficult to account for, and still more difficult for a man of his profession to excuse, the young man looked forward

to the unknown future with a certainty of meeting that face again.

We drop a charitable veil over the conclusion of the night. Mr. Raffles and Mr. Vincent supped at Pigeon's, along with the Browns and Tozers; and Phœbe's testimony is on record that it was a feast of reason and a flow of soul.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next morning Vincent awoke with a sense of personal occupation and business, which perhaps is only possible to a man engaged with the actual occurrences of individual life. Professional duties and the general necessities of existing, do not give that thrill of sensible importance and use which a man feels who is busy with affairs which concern his own or other people's very heart and being. The young Nonconformist was no longer the sentimentalist who had made the gaping assembly at Salem Chapel uneasy over their tea-drinking. That dark and secret ocean of life which he had apostrophised, opened up to him immediately thereafter one of its most mysterious scenes. This had shaken Vincent rudely out of his own youthful vagaries. Perhaps the most true of philosophers, contemplating, however profoundly, the secrets of nature or thought, would come to a sudden standstill over a visible abyss of human guilt, wretchedness, heroic self-restraint, and courage, yawning apparent in the meditative way. What, then, were the poor dialectics of Church and State controversy, or the fluctuations of an uncertain young mind feeling itself superior to its work, to such a spectacle of passionate life, full of evil and of noble qualities—of guilt and suffering more intense than anything philosophy dreams of? The thin veil which youthful ignorance, believing in the supremacy of thought and superior charm of intellectual concerns, lays over the world, shrivelled up under the fiery lurid light of that passionate scene. Two people clearly, who had once loved each other, hating each other to the death, struggling desperately over a lesser thread of life proceeding from them both—the mother, driven to the lowest

extremities of existence, standing up like a wild creature to defend her offspring—what could philosophy say to such phenomena? A wild circle of passion sprang into conscious being under the young man's half-frightened eyes—wild figures that filled the world, leaving small space for the calm suggestions of thought, and even to truth itself so little vantage-ground. Love, Hatred, Anger, Jealousy, Revenge—how many more? Vincent, who was no longer the lofty reasoning Vincent of Homerton, found life look different under the light of those torch-bearers. But he had no leisure on this particular morning to survey the subject. He had to carry his report and explanation to the strange woman who had so seized upon and involved him in her concerns.

Mrs. Hilyard was seated in her room, just as he had seen her before, working with flying needle and nervous fingers at her coarsest needlework. She said, "Come in," and did not rise when he entered. She gave him an eager, inquiring look, more importunate and commanding than any words, but never stopped working, moving her thin fingers as if there was some spell in the continuance of her labour. She was impatient of his silence before he had closed the door—desperate when he said the usual greeting. She opened her pale lips and spoke, but Vincent heard nothing. She was beyond speech.

"The message went off last night, and I wrote to my mother," said Vincent; "don't fear. She will do what you wish, and everything will be well."

It was some time before Mrs. Hilyard quite conquered her agitation; when she succeeded, she spoke so entirely in her usual tone that Vincent started, being inexperienced in such changes. He contemplated her with tragic eyes in her living martyrdom; she, on the contrary, more conscious of her own powers, her own strength of resistance and activity of life, than of any sacrifice, had nothing about her the least tragical, and spoke according to nature. Instead of any passionate burst of self-revelation, this is what she said—

“Thank you. I am very much obliged to you. How everything is to be well, does not appear to me; but I will take your word for it. I hope I may take your word for your mother also, Mr. Vincent. You have a right to know how this is. Do you claim it, and must I tell you now?”

Here for the first time Vincent recollected in what an unjustifiable way he had obtained his information. Strangely enough, it had never struck him before. He had felt himself somehow identified with the woman in the strange interview he had overheard. The man was a personal enemy. His interest in the matter was so honest and simple amid all the complication of his youthful superficial insincerities, that this equivocal action was one of the very few which Vincent had actually never questioned even to himself. He was confounded now when he saw how the matter stood. His face became suddenly crimson;—shame took possession of his soul.

“Good heavens, I have done the most dishonourable action!” cried Vincent, betrayed into sudden exclamation by the horror of the discovery. Then he paused, turning an alarmed look upon his new friend. She took it very calmly. She glanced up at him with a comic glance in her eyes, and a twitch at the corners of her mouth. Notwithstanding last night—notwithstanding the anxiety which she dared not move in her own person to alleviate—she was still capable of being amused. Her eyes said, “What now?” with no very alarming apprehensions. The situation was a frightful one for poor Vincent.

“You will be quite justified in turning me out of your house,” he said, clearing his throat, and in great confusion; “but if you will believe it, I never till this moment saw how atrocious—— Mrs. Hilyard, I was in the vestry; the window was open; I heard your conversation last night.”

For a moment Vincent had all the punishment he expected, and greater. Her eyes blazed upon him out of that pale dark face with a certain contempt and lofty indifference. There was a pause. Mr. Vincent crushed his best hat in his hands, and

sat speechless doing penance. He was dismayed with the discovery of his own meanness. Nobody could deliver such a cutting sentence as he was pronouncing on himself.

“All the world might have listened, so far as I am concerned,” she said, after a while, quietly enough. “I am sorry you did it; but the discovery is worse for yourself than for me.” Then, after another pause, “I don’t mean to quarrel. I am glad for my own sake, though sorry for yours. Now you know better than I can tell you. There were some pleasant flowers of speech to be gathered in that dark garden,” she continued, with another odd upward gleam of her eyes. “We must have startled your clerical ideas rather. At the moment, however, Mr. Vincent, people like Colonel Mildmay and myself mean what we say.”

“If I had gained my knowledge in a legitimate way,” said the shame-stricken minister, not venturing to look her in the face, “I should have said that I hoped it was only for the moment.”

Mrs. Hilyard laid down her work, and looked across at him with undisguised amusement. “I am sorry there is nobody here to perceive this beautiful situation,” she said. “Who would not have their ghostly father commit himself, if he repented after this fashion? Thank you, Mr. Vincent, for what you don’t say. And now we shall drop the subject, don’t you think? Were the deacons all charmed with the tea-meeting last night?”

“You want me to go now,” said Vincent, rising, with disconcerted looks.

“Not because I am angry. I am not angry,” she said, rising and holding out her hand to him. “It was a pity, but it was an inadvertence, and no dishonourable action. Yes, go. I am best to be avoided till I hear how this journey has been managed, and what your mother says. It was a sudden thought, that sending them to Lonsdale. I know that, even if he has not already found the right one, he will search all the others now. And your Lonsdale has been examined and exhausted; all is safe there. Yes, go. I am

glad you know; but don't say anything to Alice, if you see her, as she is sure to seek you out. You know who I mean by Alice? Lady Western—yes. Good-bye. I trust you, notwithstanding the vestry window; but close it after this on January nights."

She had sunk into her seat again, and was absorbed in her needlework, before Vincent left the room. He looked back upon her before he shut the door, but she had no look to spare from that all-engrossing work; her thin fingers were more scarred than ever, and stained with the coarse blue stuff. All his life after the young man never saw that colour without thinking of the stains on those poor hands.

He went about his work assiduously all that day, visiting sick people, poor people, men and women, "which were sinners." That dark ocean of life with which he had frightened the Salem people last night, Mr. Vincent made deeper investigations into this day than he had made before during all the time he had been in Carlingford. He kept clear of the smug comfort of the leading people of "the connection." Absolute want, suffering, and sorrow, were comparatively new to him; and being as yet a stranger to philanthropic schemes, and not at all scientific in the distribution of his sympathies, the minister of Salem conducted himself in a way which would have called forth the profoundest contempt and pity of the curate of St. Roque's. He believed everybody's story, and emptied his purse with the wildest liberality; for, indeed, visitation of the poor had not been a branch of study at Homerton. Tired and all but penniless, he did not turn his steps homeward till the wintry afternoon was sinking into night, and the lamps began to be lighted about the cheerful streets. As he came into George Street he saw Lady Western's carriage waiting at the door of Masters's. Alice! that was the name they called her. He looked at the celestial chariot wistfully. He had nothing to do with it or its beautiful mistress—never, as anything but a stranger, worshipping afar off, could the Dissenting minister of Carlingford approach that lovely vision—never think of her but as of a planet, ineffably distant—never——

“My lady’s compliments,” said a tall voice on a level with Vincent’s eyebrows: “will you please to step over and speak to her ladyship?” The startled Nonconformist raised his eyes. The big footman, whose happy privilege it was to wait upon that lady of his dreams, stood respectful by his side, and from the carriage opposite the fairest face in the world was beaming, the prettiest of hands waving to him. Vincent believed afterwards that he crossed the entire breadth of George Street in a single stride.

“I am so glad to see you, Mr. Vincent,” said Lady Western, giving him her hand; “I did so want to see you after the other night. Oh, how could you be so clever and wicked—so wicked to your friends! Indeed, I shall never be pleased till you recant, and confess how wrong you were. I must tell you why I went that night. I could not tell what on earth to do with my brother, and I took him to amuse him; or else, you know, I never could have gone to hear the poor dear old Church attacked. And how violent you were too! Indeed I must not say how clever I thought it, or I should feel I was an enemy to the Church. Now I want you to dine with me, and I shall have somebody to come who will be a match for you. I am very fond of clever society, though there is so little of it in Carlingford. Tell me, will you come to-morrow? I am disengaged. Oh, pray, do! and Mr. Wentworth shall come too, and you shall fight.”

Lady Western clapped her pretty hands together with the greatest animation. As for Vincent, all the superior thoughts in which he would probably have indulged—the contrast he would have drawn between the desperate brother and this butterfly creature, fluttering on the edge of mysteries so dark and evil, had she been anybody else—deserted him totally in the present crisis. She was not anybody else—she was herself. The words that fell from those sweetest lips were of a half-divine simplicity to the bewildered young man. He would have gone off straightway to the end of the world if she had chosen to command him. All unwarned by his previous failure, paradise opened again to his delighted eyes.

"And I want to consult you about our friend," said Lady Western; "it will be so kind of you to come. I am so pleased you have no engagement. I am sure you thought us very stupid last time; and I am stupid, I confess," added the beauty, turning those sweet eyes, which were more eloquent than genius, upon the slave who was reconquered by a glance; "but I like clever people dearly. Good-bye till to-morrow. I shall quite reckon upon to-morrow. Oh, there is Mr. Wentworth! John, call Mr. Wentworth to speak to me. Good morning—remember, half-past six—now, you must not forget."

Spite of the fact that Mr. Wentworth took his place immediately by the side of the carriage, Vincent passed on, a changed man. Forget! He smiled to himself at the possibility, and as he walked on to his lodging, a wonderful maze of expectation fell upon the young man's mind. Why, he asked, was he brought into this strange connection with Her relations and their story? what could be, he said to himself with a little awe, the purpose of that Providence which shapes men's ends, in interweaving his life with Hers by these links of common interest? The skies throbbed with wonder and miracle as soon as they were lighted up by her smile. Who could predict what might be coming, through all the impossibilities of fact and circumstance? He would not dissipate that delicious haze by any definite expectations like those which brought him to sudden grief on a former occasion. He was content to believe it was not for nothing that all these strange circles of fate were weaving round his charmed feet.

In this elevated frame of mind, scarcely aware of the prosaic ground he trod, Vincent reached home. The little maid at the door said something about a lady, to which he paid no attention, being occupied with his own thoughts. With an unconscious illumination on his face he mounted the stair lightly, three steps at a time, to his own rooms. The lamp was lighted in his little sitting-room, and some one rose nervously from the table as he went in at the door. What was this sudden terror which fell upon the young man in the renewed glory of his youthful hopes? It was his mother, pale

and faint, with sleepless tearful eyes, who, with the cry of an aching heart, worn out by fatigue and suspense, came forward, holding out anxious hands to him, and dropped in an utter abandon of weariness and distress into his astonished arms.

CHAPTER XII.

"WHAT has happened? For heaven's sake tell me, mother," cried Vincent, as she sank back, wiping her eyes, and altogether overpowered, half with the trouble which he did not know, half with the joy of seeing him again—"say it out at once, and don't keep me in this dreadful suspense. Susan? She is not married? What is wrong?"

"Oh, my dear boy!" said Mrs. Vincent, recovering herself, but still trembling in her agitation—"oh, my affectionate boy, always thinking of us in his good heart! No, dear. It's—it's nothing particular happened. Let me compose myself a little, Arthur, and take breath."

"But, Susan?" cried the excited young man.

"Susan, poor dear!—she is very well; and—and very happy up to this moment, my darling boy," said Mrs. Vincent, "though whether she ought to be happy under the circumstances—or whether it's only a cruel trick—or whether I haven't been foolish and precipitate—but, my dear, what could I do but come to you, Arthur? I could not have kept it from her if I had stayed an hour longer at home. And to put such a dreadful suspicion into her head, when it might be all a falsehood, would have only been killing her; and, my dear boy, now I see your face again, I'm not so frightened—and surely it can be cleared up, and all will be well."

Vincent, whose anxiety conquered his impatience, even while exciting it, kneeled down by his mother's side and took her hands, which still trembled, into his own. "Mother, think that I am very anxious; that I don't know what you are referring to; and that the sudden sight of you has filled me with all sort of terrors—for I know

you would not lightly take such a journey all by yourself," said the young man, growing still more anxious as he thought of it—"and try to collect your thoughts and tell me what is wrong."

His mother drew one of her hands out of his, laid it on his head, and fondly smoothed back his hair. "My dear good son! you were always so sensible—I wish you had never left us," she said, with a little groan; "and indeed it was a great thought to undertake such a journey; and since I came here, Arthur, I have felt so flurried and strange, that I have not, as you see, even taken off my bonnet; but I think now you've come, dear, if you would ring the bell and order up the tea? When I see you, and see you looking so well, Arthur, it seems as if things could never be so bad, you know. My dear," she said at last, with a little quiver in her voice, stopping and looking at him with a kind of nervous alarm, "it was about Mr. Fordham, you may be sure."

"Tea directly," said Vincent to the little maid, who appeared just at this crisis, and who was in her turn alarmed by the brief and peremptory order.

"What about Mr. Fordham?" he said, helping his mother to take off the cloak and warm wraps in which she had been sitting, in her nervous tremor and agitation, while she waited his return.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," cried poor Mrs. Vincent, wringing her hands, "if he should not turn out as he ought, how can I ever forgive myself? I had a kind of warning in my mind the first time he came to the house, and I have always dreamt such uncomfortable dreams of him, Arthur. Oh! if you only could have seen him, my dear boy! But he was such a gentleman, and had such ways. I am sure he must have mixed in the very highest society—and he seemed so to appreciate Susan—not only to be in love with her, you know, my dear, as any young man might, but to really appreciate my sweet girl. Oh, Arthur, Arthur, if he should turn out badly, it will kill me, for my Susan will break her heart."

“Mother, you drive me frantic. What has he done?” cried poor Vincent.

“He has done nothing, my dear, that I know of. It is not him, Arthur, for he has been gone for a month, arranging his affairs, you know, before the wedding, and writes Susan regularly and beautiful letters. It is a dreadful scrawl I got last night. I have it in my pocket-book. It came by the last post when Susan was out, thank heaven. I’ll show it you presently, my dear, as soon as I can find it, but I have so many papers in my pocket-book. She saw directly when she came in that something had happened, and oh, Arthur, it was so hard to keep it from her. I don’t know when I have kept anything from her before. I can’t tell how we got through the night. But this morning I made up the most artful story I could—here is the dreadful letter, my dear, at last—about being determined to see you, and making sure that you were taking care of yourself; for she knew as well as I did how negligent you always are about wet feet. Are you sure your feet are dry now, Arthur? Yes, my dear boy, it makes me very uncomfortable. You don’t wonder to see your poor mother here, now, after that?”

The letter which Vincent got meanwhile, and anxiously read, was as follows—the handwriting very mean, with a little tremor in it, which seemed to infer that the writer was an old man:—

“Madam,—Though I am but a poor man, I can’t abear to see wrong going on, and do nothink to stop it. Madam, I beg of you to excuse me, as am unknown to you, and as can’t sign my honest name to it like a man. This is the only way as I can give you a word of warning. Don’t let the young lady marry him as she’s agoing to, not if her heart should break first. Don’t have nothink to do with Mr. Fordham. That’s not his right name, and he has got a wife living—and this I say is true, as sure as I have to answer at the judgment;—and I say to you as a friend, Stop it, stop it! Don’t let it go on a step, if you vally the young lady’s charackter and her life. I don’t add no more, because that’s all I dare say, being only a servant; but I hope it’s enough to save the

poor young lady out of his clutches, as is a man that goeth about seeking whom he may devour.—From a well-wisher, though

A Stranger."

Mrs. Vincent's mind was easier when this epistle was out of her hands. She stood up before the mirror to take off her bonnet, and put her cap tidy; she glided across the room to take up the shawl and cloak which her son had flung upon the little sofa anyhow, and to fold them and lay them together on a chair. Then the trim little figure approached the table, on which stood a dimly burning lamp, which smoked as lamps will when they have it all their own way. Mrs. Vincent turned down the light a little, and then proceeded to remove the globe and chimney by way of seeing what was wrong—bringing her own anxious patient face, still retaining many traces of the sweet comeliness which had almost reached the length of beauty in her daughter, into the full illumination of the smoky blaze. Notwithstanding the smoke, the presence of that little woman made the strangest difference in the room. She took note of various evidences of litter and untidiness with her mind's eye as she examined the lamp. She had drawn a long breath of relief when she put the letter into Arthur's hand. The sense of lightened responsibility seemed almost to relieve her anxiety as well. She held the chimney of the lamp in her hand, when an exclamation from her son called her back to the consideration of that grievous question. She turned to him with a sudden deepening of all the lines in her face.

"Oh, Arthur dear! don't you think it may be an enemy? don't you think it looks like some cruel trick? You don't believe it's true?"

"Mother, have you an enemy in the world?" cried Vincent, with an almost bitter affectionateness. "Is there anybody living that would take pleasure in wounding you?"

"No, dear; but Mr. Fordham might have one," said the widow. "He is not like you or your dear father, Arthur. He looks as if he might have been in the army, and had

seen a great deal of life. That is what has been a great consolation to me. A man like that, you know, dear, is sure to have enemies; so very different from our quiet way of life," said Mrs. Vincent, holding up the chimney of the lamp, and standing a little higher than her natural five feet, with a simple consciousness of that grandeur of experience: "some one that wished him ill might have got some one else to write the letter. Hush, Arthur, here is the maid with the tea."

The maid with the tea pushed in, bearing her tray into a scene which looked very strange to her awakened curiosity. The minister stood before the fire with the letter in his hand, narrowly examining it, seal, post-mark, handwriting, even paper. He did not look like the same man who had come up-stairs three steps at a time, in the glow and exhilaration of hope, scarcely half an hour ago. His teeth were set, and his face pale. On the table the smoky lamp blazed into the dim air, unregulated by the chimney, which Mrs. Vincent was nervously rubbing with her handkerchief before she put it on. The little maid, with her round eyes, set down the tray upon the table with an answering thrill of excitement and curiosity. There was "somethink to do" with the minister and his unexpected visitor. Vincent himself took no notice of the girl; but his mother, with feminine instinct, proceeded to disarm this possible observer. Mrs. Vincent knew well, by long experience, that when the landlady happens to be one of the flock, it is as well that the pastor should keep the little shocks and crises of his existence studiously to himself.

"Does it always smoke?" said the gentle Jesuit, addressing the little maid.

The effect of so sudden and discomposing a question, at a moment when the person addressed was staring with all her soul at the minister, open-mouthed and open-eyed, may be better imagined than described. The girl gave a start and stifled exclamation, and made all the cups rattle on the tray as she set it down. Did what smoke?—the chimney, or the minister, or the landlady's husband down-stairs?

"Does it always smoke?" repeated Mrs. Vincent, calmly, putting on the chimney. "I

don’t think it would if you were very exact in putting this on. Look here: always at this height, don’t you see? and now it burns perfectly well.”

“Yes, ma’am; I’ll tell missis, ma’am,” said the girl, backing out, with some alarm. Mrs. Vincent sat down at the table with all the satisfaction of success and conscious virtue. Her son, for his part, flung himself into the easy-chair which she had given up, and stared at her with an impatience and wonder which he could not restrain.

“To think you should talk about the lamp at such a time, or notice it at all, indeed, if it smoked like fifty chimneys!” he exclaimed, with a tone of annoyance; “why, mother, this is life or death.”

“Yes, yes, my dear!” said the mother, a little mortified in her turn: “but it does not do to let strangers see when you are in trouble. Oh, Arthur, my own boy, you must not get into any difficulty here. I know what gossip is in a congregation; you never would bear half of what your poor dear papa did,” said the widow, with tears in her eyes, laying her soft old fingers upon the young man’s impatient hand. “You have more of my quick temper, Arthur; and whatever you do, dear, you must not expose yourself to be talked of. You are all we have in the world. You must be your sister’s protector; for oh, if this should be true, what a poor protector her mother has been! And, dear boy, tell me, what are we to do?”

“Had he any friends?” asked Vincent, half sullenly; for he did feel an instinctive desire to blame somebody, and nobody seemed so blamable as the mother, who had admitted a doubtful person into her house. “Did he know anybody—in Lonsdale, or anywhere? Did he never speak of his friends?”

“He had been living abroad,” said Mrs. Vincent, slowly. “He talked of gentlemen sometimes, at Baden, and Homburg, and such places. I am afraid you would think it very silly, and—and perhaps wrong, Arthur; but he seemed to know so much of the world—so different from our quiet way of life—that being so nice and good and refined himself with it all—I am afraid it was rather an attraction to Susan. It was so

different to what she was used with, my dear. We used to think a man who had seen so much, and known so many temptations, and kept his nice simple tastes through it all—oh, dear, dear! If it is true, I was never so deceived in all my life."

"But you have not told me," said Arthur, morosely, "if he had any friends?"

"Nobody in Lonsdale," said Mrs. Vincent. "He came to see some young relative at school in the neighbourhood——"

At this point Mrs. Vincent broke off with a half scream, interrupted by a violent start and exclamation from her son, who jumped off his seat, and began to pace up and down the room in an agitation which she could not comprehend. This start entirely overpowered his mother. Her overwrought nerves and feelings relieved themselves in tears. She got up, trembling, approached the young man, put her hand, which shook, through his arm, and implored him, crying softly all the time, to tell her what he feared, what he thought, what was the matter? Poor Vincent's momentary ill-humour deserted him: he began to realise all the complications of the position; but he could not resist the sight of his mother's tears. He led her back gently to the easy-chair, poured out for her a cup of the neglected tea, and restrained himself for her sake. It was while she took this much-needed refreshment that he unfolded to her the story of the helpless strangers whom, only the night before, he had committed to her care.

"The mother you shall see for yourself to-morrow. I can't tell what she is, except a lady, though in the strangest circumstances," said Vincent. "She has some reason—I cannot tell what—for keeping her child out of the father's hands. She appealed to me to let her send it to you, because he had been at Lonsdale already, and I could not refuse. His name is Colonel Mildmay; he has been at Lonsdale; did you hear of such a man?"

Mrs. Vincent shook her head—her face grew more and more troubled.

"I don't know about reasons for keeping a child from its father," she said, still

shaking her head. “My dear, dear boy, I hope no designing woman has got a hold upon you. Why did you start so, Arthur? what had Mr. Fordham to do with the child? Susan would open my letters, of course, and I daresay she will make them very comfortable; but, Arthur dear, though I don’t blame you, it was very imprudent. Is Colonel Mildmay the lady’s husband? or—or what? Dear boy, you should have thought of Susan—Susan, a young girl, must not be mixed up with anybody of doubtful character. It was all your good heart, I know, but it was very imprudent, to be sure.”

Vincent laughed, in a kind of agony of mingled distress, anxiety, and strange momentary amusement. His mother and he were both blaming each other for the same fault. Both of them had equally yielded to kind feelings, and the natural impulse of generous hearts, without any consideration of prudence. But his mistake could not be attended by any consequences a hundredth part so serious as hers.

“In the mean time, we must do something,” he said. “If he has no friends, he has at least an address, I suppose. Susan”—and a flush of indignation and affectionate anger crossed the young man’s face—“Susan, no doubt, writes to the rascal. Susan! my sister! Good heaven!”

“Arthur!” said Mrs. Vincent. “Your dear papa always disapproved of such exclamations: he said they were just a kind of oath, though people did not think so. And you ought not to call him a rascal without proof—indeed, it is very sinful to come to such hasty judgments. Yes, I have got the address written down—it is in my pocket-book. But what shall you do? Will you write to himself, Arthur? or what? To be sure, it would be best to go to him and settle it at once.”

“Oh, mother, have a little prudence now,” cried the afflicted minister; “if he were base enough to propose marriage to Susan (confound him! that’s not an oath—my father himself would have said as much) under such circumstances, don’t you think he has the courage to tell a lie as well? I shall go up to town, and to his address

to-morrow, and see what is to be found there. You must rest in the mean time. Writing is out of the question; what is to be done, I must do—and without a moment's loss of time."

The mother took his hand again, and put her handkerchief to her eyes—"God bless my dear boy," she said, with a mother's tearful admiration—"Oh, what a thing for me, Arthur, that you are grown up and a man, and able to do what is right in such a dreadful difficulty as this! You put me in mind more and more of your dear father when you settle so clearly what is to be done. He was always ready to act when I used to be in a flutter, which was best. And, oh, how good has the Father of the fatherless been to me in giving me such a son!"

"Ah, mother," said the young minister, "you gave premature thanks before, when you thought the Father of the fatherless had brought poor Susan a happy lot. Do you say the same now?"

"Always the same, Arthur dear," cried his mother, with tears—"always the same. If it is even so, is it me, do you think, or is it Him that knows best?"

After this the agitation and distress of the first meeting gradually subsided. That mother, with all her generous imprudence and innocence of heart, was, her son well knew, the tenderest, the most indulgent, the most sympathetic of all his friends. Though the little—the very little insight he had obtained into life and the world had made him think himself wiser than she was in some respects, nothing had ever come between them to disturb the boy's half-adoring, half-protecting love. He bethought himself of providing for her comfort, as she sat looking at him in the easy-chair, with her eyes smiling on him through their tears, patiently sipping the tea, which was a cold and doubtful infusion, nothing like the fragrant lymph of home. He poked the fire till it blazed, and drew her chair towards it, and hunted up a footstool which he had himself kicked out of the way, under the sofa, a month before. When he looked at the dear tender fresh old face opposite to him, in that close white cap

which even now, after the long fatiguing journey, looked fresher and purer than other people's caps and faces look at their best, a thaw came upon the young man's heart. Nature awoke and yearned in him. A momentary glimpse crossed his vision of a humble happiness long within his reach, which never till now, when it was about to become impossible for ever, had seemed real or practicable, or even desirable before.

"Mother, dear," said Vincent, with a tremulous smile, "you shall come here, Susan and you, to me; and we shall all be together again—and comfort each other," he added, with a deeper gravity still, thinking of his own lot.

His mother did not answer in many words. She said, "My own boy!" softly, following him with her eyes. It was hard, even with Susan's dreadful danger before her, to help being tearfully happy in seeing him again—in being his guest—in realising the full strength of his manhood and independence. She gave herself up to that feeling of maternal pride and consolation as she once more dried the tears which would come, notwithstanding all her efforts. Then he sat down beside her, and resigned himself to that confidential talk which can rarely be but between members of the same family. He had unburdened his mind unconsciously in his letters about Tozer and the deacons; and it cannot be told what a refreshment it was to be able to utter roundly in words his sentiments on all those subjects. The power of saying it out with no greater hindrance than her mild remonstrances, mingled, as they were, with questions which enabled him to complete his sketches, and smiles of amusement at his descriptive powers, put him actually in better humour with Salem. He felt remorseful and charitable after he had said his worst.

"And are you sure, dear," said Mrs. Vincent, at last resuming the subject nearest her heart, "that you can go away to-morrow without neglecting any duty? You must not neglect a duty, Arthur—not even for Susan's sake. Whatever happens to us, you must keep right."

"I have no duty to detain me," said Vincent, hastily. Then a sudden glow came over the young man, a flush of happiness which stole upon him like a thief, and brightened his own personal firmament with a secret unacknowledgable delight; "but I must return early," he added, with a momentary hesitation—"for if you won't think it unkind to leave you, mother, I am engaged to dinner. I should scarcely like to miss it," he concluded, after another pause, tying knots in his handkerchief, and taking care not to look at her as he spoke.

"To dinner, Arthur? I thought your people only gave teas," said Mrs. Vincent, with a smile.

"The Salem people do; but this—is not one of the Salem people," said the minister, still hesitating. "In fact, it would be ungracious of me not to go, and cowardly, too—for that curate, I believe, is to meet me—and Lady Western would naturally think——"

"Lady Western!" said Mrs. Vincent, with irrestrainable pleasure; "is that one of the great people in Carlingford?" The good woman wiped her eyes again with the very tenderest and purest demonstration of that adoration of rank which is said to be an English instinct. "I don't mean to be foolish, dear," she said, apologetically; "I know these distinctions of society are not worth your caring about; but to see my Arthur appreciated as he should be, is——" She could not find words to say what it was—she wound up with a little sob. What with trouble and anxiety, and pride and delight, and bodily fatigue added to all, tears came easiest that night.

Vincent did not say whether or not these distinctions of society were worth caring about. He sat abstractedly, untying the knots in his handkerchief, with a faint smile on his face. Then, while that pleasurable glow remained, he escorted his mother to his own sleeping-room, which he had given up to her, and saw that her fire burned brightly, and that all was comfortable. When he returned to poke his solitary fire, it was some time before he took out the letter which had disturbed his peace. The

smile died away first by imperceptible degrees from his face. He gradually erected himself out of the meditative lounge into which he had fallen; then, with a little start, as if throwing dreams away, he took out and examined the letter. The more he looked at it, the graver and deeper became the anxiety in his face. It had every appearance of being genuine in its bad writing and doubtful spelling. And Vincent started again with an unexplainable thrill of alarm when he thought how utterly unprotected his mother's sudden journey had left that little house in Lonsdale. Susan had no warning, no safeguard. He started up in momentary fright, but as suddenly sat down again with a certain indignation at his own thoughts. Nobody could carry her off, or do any act of violence; and as for taking advantage of her solitude, Susan, a straightforward, simple-minded English girl, was safe in her own pure sense of right.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEXT morning Mr. Vincent got up early, with an indescribable commotion in all his thoughts. He was to institute inquiries which might be life or death to his sister, but yet could not keep his mind to the contemplation of that grave necessity. A flicker of private hope and expectation kept gleaming with uncertain light over the dark weight of anxiety in his heart. He could not help, in the very deepest of his thoughts about Susan, breaking off now and then into a momentary digression, which suddenly carried him into Lady Western's drawing-room, and startled his heart with a thrill of conscious delight, secret and exquisite, which he could neither banish nor deny. In and out, and round about that grievous doubt which had suddenly disturbed the quiet history of his family, this capricious fairy played, touching all his anxious thoughts with thrills of sweetness. It seemed an action involuntary to himself, and over which he had no power; but it gave the young man an equally involuntary and causeless cheer and comfort. It did not seem possible that

any dreadful discovery could be made that day, in face of the fact that he was to meet Her that night.

When he met his mother at breakfast, the recollection of Mrs. Hilyard and the charge she had committed to him, came to his mind again. No doubt Susan would take the wanderers in—no doubt they were as safe in the cottage as it was possible to be in a humble inviolable English home, surrounded by all the strength of neighbours and friends, and the protection of a spotless life which everybody knew; but yet—— That was not what his strange acquaintance had expected or bargained for. He felt as if he had broken faith with her when he realised his mother's absence from her own house. Yet somehow he felt a certain hesitation in broaching the subject, and unconsciously prepared himself for doubts and reluctance. The certainty of this gave a forced character to the assumed easiness with which he spoke.

"You will go to see Mrs. Hilyard," he said; "I owe it to her to explain that you were absent before her child went there. They will be safe enough at home, no doubt, with Susan; but still, you know, it would have been different had you been there."

"Yes, Arthur," said Mrs. Vincent, with an indescribable dryness in her voice.

"You will find her a very interesting woman," said her son, instinctively contending against that unexpressed doubt—"the strangest contrast to her surroundings. The very sound of her voice carries one a thousand miles from Salem. Had I seen her in a palace, I doubt whether I should have been equally impressed by her. You will be interested in spite of yourself."

"It is, as you say, very strange, Arthur," said Mrs. Vincent—the dryness in her voice increasing to the extent of a short cough; "when does your train start?"

"Not till eleven," said Vincent, looking at his watch; but you must please me, and go to see her, mother."

"That reminds me, dear," said Mrs. Vincent, hurriedly, "that now I am here, little as it suits my feelings, you must take me to see some of your people, Arthur. Mrs.

Tufton, and perhaps the Tozers, you know. They might not like to hear that your mother had been in Carlingford, and had not gone to see them. It will be hard work visiting strangers while I am in this dreadful anxiety, but I must not be the means of bringing you into any trouble with your flock."

"Oh, never mind my flock," said Vincent, with some impatience; "put on your bonnet, and come and see her, mother."

"Arthur, you are going by the first train," said his mother.

"There is abundant time, and it is not too early for her," persisted the minister.

But it was not so easy to conquer that meek little woman. "I feel very much fatigued to-day," she said, turning her eyes, mild but invincible, with the most distinct contradiction of her words to her son's face; "if it had not been my anxiety to have all I could of you, Arthur, I should not have got up to-day. A journey is a very serious matter, dear, for an old woman. One does not feel it so much at first," continued this plausible defendant, still with her mild eyes on her son's face, secure in the perfect reasonableness of her plea, yet not unwilling that he should perceive it was a pretence; "it is the next day one feels it. I shall lie down on the sofa, and rest when you are gone."

And, looking into his mother's soft eyes, the young Nonconformist retreated, and made no more attempts to shake her. Not the invulnerability of the fortress alone discouraged him—though that was mildly obdurate, and proof to argument—but a certain uneasiness in the thought of that meeting, an inclination to postpone it, and stave off the thought of all that might follow, surprised himself in his own mind. Why he should be afraid of the encounter, or how any complication could arise out of it, he could not by any means imagine, but such was the instinctive sentiment in his heart.

Accordingly he went up to London by the train, leaving Mrs. Hilyard unwarned, and his mother reposing on the sofa, from which, it is sad to say, she rose a few minutes

after he was gone, to refresh herself by tidying his bookcase and looking over all his linen and stockings, in which last she found a very wholesome subject of contemplation, which relieved the pressure of her thoughts much more effectually than could have been done by the rest which she originally proposed. Arthur, for his part, went up to London with a certain nervous thrill of anxiety rising in his breast as he approached the scene and the moment of his inquiries; though it was still only by intervals that he realised the momentous nature of those inquiries, on the result of which poor Susan's harmless girlish life, all unconscious of the danger that threatened it, hung in the balance. Poor Susan! just then going on with a bride's preparations for the approaching climax of her youthful existence. Was she, indeed, really a bride, with nothing but truth and sweet honour in the contract that bound her, or was she the sport of a villanous pastime that would break her heart, and might have shipwrecked her fair fame and innocent existence? Her brother set his teeth hard as he asked himself that question. Minister as he was, it might have been a dangerous chance for Fordham, had he come at that moment without ample proofs of guiltlessness in the Nonconformist's way.

When he got to town, he whirled, as fast as it was possible to go, to the address where Susan's guileless letters were sent almost daily. It was in a street off Piccadilly, full of lodging-houses, and all manner of hangers-on and ministrants to the world of fashion. He found the house directly, and was somewhat comforted to find it really an actual house, and not a myth or Doubtful Castle, or a post-office window. He knocked with the real knocker, and heard the bell peal through the comparative silence in the street, and insensibly cheered up, and began to look forward to the appearance of a real Mr. Fordham, with unquestionable private history and troops of friends. A quiet house, scrupulously clean, entirely respectable, yet distinct in all its features of lodging-house; a groom in the area below, talking to an invisible somebody, also a man, who seemed to be cleaning somebody else's boots; up-stairs, at the first-floor balcony, a smart little tiger making a fashion of

watering plants, and actually doing his best to sprinkle the conversational groom below; altogether a superabundance of male attendants, quite incompatible with the integrity of the small dwelling-place as a private house. Another man, who evidently belonged to the place, opened the door, interrupting Vincent suddenly in his observations—an elderly man, half servant, half master, in reality the proprietor of the place, ready either to wait or be waited on as occasion might require. Turning with a little start from his inspection of the attendant circumstances, Vincent asked, did Mr. Fordham live there?

The man made a momentary but visible pause; whatever it might betoken, it was not ignorance. He did not answer with the alacrity of frank knowledge or simple non-information. He paused, then said, "Mr. Fordham, sir?" looking intently at Vincent, and taking in every particular of his appearance, dress, and professional looks, with one rapid glance.

"Mr. Fordham," repeated Vincent, "does he live here?"

Once more the man perused him, swiftly and cautiously. "No, sir, he does not live here," was the second response.

"I was told this was his address," said Vincent. "I perceive you are not ignorant of him; where does he live? I know his letters come here."

"There are a many gentlemen in the house in the course of the season," answered the man, still on the alert to find out Vincent's meaning by his looks—"sometimes letters keep on coming months after they are gone. When we knows their home address, sir, we sends them; when we don't, we keeps them by us till we see if any owner turns up. Gen'leman of the name of Fordham?—do you happen to know, sir, what part o' the country he comes from? There's the Lincolnshire Fordhams, as you know, sir, and the Northumberland Fordhams; but there's no gen'leman of that name lives here."

"I am sure you know perfectly whom I mean," said Vincent, in his heat and

impatience. “I don’t mean Mr. Fordham any harm—I only want to see him, or to get some information about him, if he is not to be seen. Tell me where he does live, or tell me which of his friends is in town, that I may ask them. I tell you I don’t mean Mr. Fordham any harm.”

“No, sir?—nor I don’t know as anybody means any harm,” said the man, once more examining Vincent’s appearance. “What was it as you were wishing to know? Though I ain’t acquainted with the gen’leman myself, the missis or some of the people may be. We have a many coming and going, and I might confuse a name.—What was it as you were wishful to know?”

“I wish to see Mr. Fordham,” said Vincent, impatiently.

“I have told you, sir, he don’t live here,” said the guardian of the house.

“Then, look here; you don’t deceive me, remember. I can see you know all about him,” said Vincent; “and, as I tell you, I mean him no harm; answer me one or two simple questions, and I will either thank or reward you as you like best. In the first place, Is this Mr. Fordham a married man? and, Has he ever gone by another name?”

As he asked these questions the man grinned in his face. “Lord bless you, sir, we don’t ask no such questions here. A gen’leman comes and has his rooms, and pays, and goes away, and gives such name as he pleases. I don’t ask a certificate of baptism, not if all’s right in the pay department. We don’t take ladies in, being troublesome; but if a man was to have a dozen wives, what could we know about it? Sorry to disoblige a clergyman, sir; but as I don’t know nothing about Mr. Fordham, perhaps you’ll excuse me, as it’s the busiest time of the day.”

“Well, then, my good man,” said Vincent, taking out his purse, “tell me what friend he has that I can apply to; you will do me the greatest service, and I——”

“Sorry to disoblige a clergyman, as I say,” said the man, angrily; “but, begging your pardon, I can’t stand jabbering here. I never was a spy on a gen’leman, and never will be. If you want to know, you’ll have to find out. Time’s money to me.”

With which the landlord of No. 10 Nameless Street, Piccadilly, shut the door abruptly in Vincent's face. A postman was audibly approaching at the moment. Could that have anything to do with the sudden breaking off of the conference? The minister, exasperated, yet, becoming more anxious, stood for a moment in doubt, facing the blank closed door. Then, desperate, turned round suddenly, and faced the advancing Mercury. He had no letters for No. 10; he was hastening past, altogether regardless of Vincent's look of inquiry. When he was addressed, however, the postman responded with immediate directness. "Fordham, sir—yes—a gentleman of that name lives at No. 10—leastways he has his letters there—No. 10—where you have just been, sir."

"But they say he doesn't live there," said Vincent.

"Can't tell, sir—has his letters there," said the public servant, decidedly.

More than ever perplexed, Vincent followed the postman to pursue his inquiries. "What sort of a house is it?" he asked.

"Highly respectable house, sir," answered the terse and decisive functionary, performing an astounding rap next door.

In an agony of impatience and uncertainty, the young man lingered opposite the house, conscious of a helplessness and impotence which made him furious with himself. That he ought to be able to get to the bottom of it was clear; but that he was as far as possible from knowing how to do that same, or where to pursue his inquiries, was indisputable. One thing was certain, that Mr. Fordham did not choose to be visible at this address to which his letters were sent, and that it was hopeless to attempt to extract any information on the subject by such frank inquiries as the minister had already made. He took a half-hour's walk, and thought it over with no great enlightenment on the subject. Then, coming back, applied once more at the highly respectable uncommunicative door. He had entertained hopes that another and more manageable adherent of the house might possibly appear this time—a

maid, or impressionable servitor of some description, and had a little piece of gold ready for the propitiatory tip in his hand. His hopes were, however, put to flight by the appearance of the same face, increased in respectability and composure by the fact that the owner had thrown off the jacket in which he had formerly been invested, and now appeared in a solemn black coat, the essence of respectable and dignified servitude. He fixed his eyes severely upon Vincent as soon as he opened the door. He was evidently disgusted by this return to the charge.

"Look here," said Vincent, somewhat startled and annoyed to find himself confronted by the same face which had formerly defied him; "could you get a note conveyed from me to Mr. Fordham?—the postman says he has his letters here."

"If he gets his letters here they come by the post," said the man, insolently. "There's a post-office round the corner, but I don't keep one here. If one reaches him, another will. It ain't nothing to me."

"But it is a great deal to me," said Vincent, with involuntary earnestness. "You have preserved his secret faithfully, whatever it may be; but it surely can't be any harm to convey a note to Mr. Fordham. Most likely, when he hears my name," said the young man, with a little consciousness that what he said was more than he believed, "he will see me; and I have to leave town this evening. You will do me a great service if you will save me the delay of the post, and get it delivered at once. And you may do Mr. Fordham a service too."

The man looked with less certainty in Vincent's face.—"Seems to me some people don't know what 'No' means, when it's said," he replied, with a certain relenting in his voice. "There's things as a gen'leman ought to know, sure enough—something happened in the family or so; but you see, he don't live here; and since you stand it out so, I don't mind saying that he's a gen'leman as can't be seen in town to-day, seeing he's in the country, as I'm informed, on urgent private affairs. It's uncommon kind of a clergyman, and a stranger, to take such an interest in my house," continued

the fellow, grinning spitefully; “but what I say first I say last—he don’t live here.”

“And he is not in town?” asked Vincent eagerly, without noticing the insolence of the speech. The man gradually closed the door upon himself till he had shut it, and stood outside, facing his persistent visitor.

“In town or out of town,” he said, folding his arms upon his chest, and surveying Vincent with all the insolence of a lackey who knows he has to deal with a man debarred by public opinion from the gratifying privilege of knocking him down, “there ain’t no more information to be got here.”

Such was the conclusion of Vincent’s attempted investigation. He went away at once, scarcely pausing to hear this speech out, to take the only means that presented themselves now; and going into the first stationer’s shop in his way, wrote a note entreating Mr. Fordham to meet him, and giving a friend’s address in London, as well as his own in Carlingford, that he might be communicated with instantly. When he had written and posted this note, Vincent proceeded to investigate the Directory and all the red and blue books he could lay his hands upon, for the name of Fordham. It was not a plentiful name, but still it occurred sufficiently often to perplex and confuse him utterly. When he had looked over the list of Fordhams in London, sufficiently long to give himself an intense headache, and to feel his under-taking entirely hopeless, he came to a standstill. What was to be done? He had no clue, nor the hope of any, to guide him through this labyrinth; but he had no longer any trust in the honour of the man whom his mother had so rashly received, and to whom Susan had given her heart. By way of the only precaution which occurred to him, he wrote a short note to Susan, begging her not to send any more letters to Mr. Fordham until her mother’s return; and desiring her not to be alarmed by this prohibition, but to be very careful of herself, and wait for an explanation when Mrs. Vincent should return. He thought he himself would accompany his mother home. The note was written, as Vincent thought, in the most guarded terms;

but in reality was such an abrupt, alarming performance, as was sure to drive a sensitive girl into the wildest fright and uncertainty. Having eased his conscience by this, he went back to the railway, and returned to Carlingford. Night had fallen before he reached home. Under any other circumstances, he would have encountered his mother after such an ineffectual enterprise, conscious as he was of carrying back nothing but heightened suspicion, with very uncomfortable feelings, and would have been in his own person too profoundly concerned about this dreadful danger which menaced his only sister, to be able to rest or occupy himself about other things. But the fact was, that whenever he relapsed into the solitary carriage in which he travelled to Carlingford, and when utterly quiet and alone, wrapped in the haze of din and smoke and speed which abstracts railway travellers from all the world,—gave himself up to thought, the rosy hue of his own hopes came stealing over him unawares. Now and then he woke up, as men wake up from a doze, and made a passing snatch at his fears. But again and again they eluded his grasp, and the indefinite brightness which had no foundation in reason, swallowed up everything which interfered with its power. The effect of this was to make the young man preternaturally solemn when he entered the room where his mother awaited him. He felt the reality of the fear so much less than he ought to do, that it was necessary to put on twice the appearance. Had he really been as deeply anxious and alarmed as he should have been, he would naturally have tried to ease and lighten the burden of the discovery to his mother; feeling it so hazily as he did, no such precautions occurred to him. She rose up when he came in, with a face which gradually paled out of all its colour as he approached. When he was near enough to hold out his hand to her, Mrs. Vincent was nearly fainting. “Arthur,” she cried, in a scarcely audible voice, “God have pity upon us; it is true: I can see it in your face.”

“Mother, compose yourself. I have no evidence that it is true. I have discovered nothing,” cried Vincent, in alarm.

The widow dropped heavily into her chair, and sobbed aloud. “I can read it in your

face," she said. "Oh! my dear boy, have you seen that—that villain? Does he confess it? Oh, my Susan, my Susan! I will never forgive myself; I have killed my child."

From this passion it was difficult to recover her, and Vincent had to represent so strongly the fact that he had ascertained nothing certain, and that, for anything he could tell, Fordham might still prove himself innocent, that he almost persuaded his own mind in persuading hers.

"His letters might be taken in at a place where he did not live, for convenience sake," said Vincent. "The man might think me a dun, or something disagreeable. Fordham himself, for anything we can tell, may be very angry about it. Cheer up, mother; things are no worse than they were last night. I give you my word I have made no discovery, and perhaps to-morrow may bring us a letter clearing it all up."

"Ah! Arthur, you are so young and hopeful. It is different with me, who have seen so many terrors come true," said the mother, who notwithstanding was comforted. As for Vincent, he felt neither the danger nor the suspense. His whole soul was engrossed with the fact that it was time to dress; and it was with a little conscious sophistry that he himself made the best of it, and excused himself for his indifference.

"I can't bear to leave you, mother, in such suspense and distress," he said, looking at his watch; "but—I have to be at Lady Western's at half-past six."

Mrs. Vincent looked up with an expression of stupified surprise and pain for a moment, then brightened all at once. "My dear, I have laid out all your things," she said, with animation. "Do you think I would let you miss it, Arthur? Never mind talking to me. I shall hear all about it when you come home to-night. Now go, dear, or you will be late. I will come and talk to you when you are dressing, if you don't mind your mother? Well, perhaps not. I will stay here, and you can call me when you are ready, and I will bring you a cup of tea. I am sure you are tired, what with the fatigue and what with the anxiety. But you must try to put it off your mind, and

enjoy yourself to-night."

"Yes, mother," said Vincent, hastening away; the tears were in her gentle eyes when she gave him that unnecessary advice. She pressed his hands fast in hers when he left her at last, repeating it, afraid in her own heart that this trouble had spoilt all the brightness of the opening hopes which she perceived with so much pride and joy. When he was gone, she sat down by the solitary fire, and cried over her Susan in an utter forlornness and helplessness, which only a woman, so gentle, timid, and unable to struggle for herself, could feel. Her son, in the mean time, walked down Grange Lane, first with a momentary shame at his own want of feeling, but soon, with an entire forgetfulness both of the shame and the subject of it, absorbed in thoughts of his reception there. With a palpitating heart he entered the dark garden, now noiseless and chill in winterly decay, and gazed at the lighted windows which had looked like distant planets to him the last time he saw them. He lingered looking at them, now that the moment approached so near. A remembrance of his former disappointment went to his heart with a momentary pang as he hesitated on the edge of his present happiness. Another moment and he had thrown himself again, with a degree of suppressed excitement wonderful to think of, upon the chances of his fate.

Not alarming chances, so far as could be predicated from the scene. A small room, the smaller half of that room which he had seen full of the pretty crowd of the summer-party, the folding-doors closed, and a curtain drawn across them; a fire burning brightly; groups of candles softly lighting the room in clusters upon the wall, and throwing a colourless soft illumination upon the pictures of which Lady Western was so proud. She herself, dropped amid billows of dark blue silk and clouds of black lace in a low easy-chair by the side of the fire, smiled at Vincent, and held out her hand to him without rising, with a sweet cordiality and friendliness which rapt the young man into paradise. Though Lucy Wodehouse was scarcely less pretty than the young Dowager, Mr. Vincent saw her as if he saw her not, and still less did he realise the presence of Miss Wodehouse, who was the shadow to all this

brightness. He took the chair which Lady Western pointed to him by her side. He did not want anybody to speak; or anything to happen. The welcome was not given as to a stranger, but made him at once an intimate and familiar friend of the house. At once all his dreams were realised. The sweet atmosphere was tinged with the perfumy breath which always surrounded Her; the room, which was so fanciful and yet so home-like, seemed a reflection of her to his bewildered eyes; and the murmur of soft sound, as these two lovely creatures spoke to each other, made the most delicious climax to the scene; although the moment before he had been afraid lest the sound of a voice should break the spell. But the spell was not to be broken that night. Mr. Wentworth came in a few minutes after him, and was received with equal sweetness; but still the young Nonconformist was not jealous. It was he whose arm Lady Western appropriated, almost without looking at him as she did so, when they went to dinner. She had put aside the forms which were intended to keep the outer world at arm's length. It was as her own closest personal friends that the little party gathered around the little table, just large enough for them, which was placed before the fire in the great dining-room. Lady Western was not a brilliant talker, but Mr. Vincent thought her smallest observation more precious than any utterance of genius. He listened to her with a fervour which few people showed when listening to him, notwithstanding his natural eloquence; but as to what he himself said in reply, he was entirely oblivious, and spoke like a man in a dream. When she clapped her pretty hands, and adjured the Churchman and the Nonconformist to fight out their quarrel, it was well for Vincent that Mr. Wentworth declined the controversy. The lecturer on Church and State was hors de combat; he was in charity with all men. The curate of St. Roque's, who—blind and infatuated man!—thought Lucy Wodehouse the flower of Grange Lane, did not come in his way. He might pity him, but it was a sympathetic pity. Mr. Vincent took no notice when Miss Wodehouse launched tiny arrows of argument at him. She was the only member of the party who seemed to recollect his heresies in respect to Church and State—which, indeed, he

had forgotten himself, and the state of mind which led to them. No such world existed now as that cold and lofty world which the young man of genius had seen glooming down upon his life, and shutting jealous barriers against his progress. The barriers were opened, the coldness gone—and he himself raised high on the sunshiny heights, where love and beauty had their perennial abode. He had gained nothing—changed in nothing—from his former condition: not even the golden gates of society had opened to the dissenting minister; but glorious enfranchisement had come to the young man's heart. It was not Lady Western who had asked him to dinner—a distinction of which his mother was proud. It was the woman of all women who had brought him to her side, whose sweet eyes were sunning him over, whose voice thrilled to his heart. By her side he forgot all social distinctions, and all the stings contained in them. No prince could have reached more completely the ideal elevation and summit of youthful existence. Ambition and its successes were vulgar in comparison. It was a poetic triumph amid the prose tumults and downfalls of life.

When the two young men were left over their wine, a somewhat grim shadow fell upon the evening. The curate of St. Roque's and the minister of Salem found it wonderfully hard to get up a conversation. They discussed the advantages of retiring with the ladies as they sat glum and reserved opposite each other—not by any means unlike, and, by consequence, natural enemies. Mr. Wentworth thought it an admirable plan, much more sensible than the absurd custom which kept men listening to a parcel of old fogies, who retained the habits of the last generation; and he proposed that they should join the ladies—a proposal to which Vincent gladly acceded. When they returned to the drawing-room, Lucy Wodehouse was at the piano; her sister sat at table with a pattern-book before her, doing some impossible pattern in knitting; and Lady Western again sat languid and lovely by the fire, with her beautiful hands in her lap, relieved from the dark background of the billowy blue dress by the delicate cambric and lace of her handkerchief. She was not doing

anything, or looking as if she could do anything. She was leaning back in the low chair, with the rich folds of her dress sweeping the carpet, and her beautiful ungloved hands lying lightly across each other. She did not move when the gentlemen entered. She turned her eyes to them, and smiled those sweet welcoming smiles, which Vincent knew well enough were for both alike, yet which made his heart thrill and beat. Wentworth (insensible prig!) went to Lucy's side, and began to talk to her over her music, now and then appealing to Miss Wodehouse. Vincent, whom no man hindered, and for whose happiness all the fates had conspired, invited by those smiling eyes, approached Lady Western with the surprised delight of a man miraculously blessed. He could not understand why he was permitted to be so happy. He drew a chair between her and the table, and, shutting out the other group by turning his back upon them, had her all to himself. She never changed her position, nor disturbed her sweet indolence, by the least movement. The fire blazed no longer. The candles, softly burning against the wall, threw no very brilliant light upon this scene. To Vincent's consciousness, bewildered as he was by the supreme delight of his position, they were but two in a new world, and neither thing nor person disturbed the unimaginable bliss. But Miss Wodehouse, when she raised her eyes from her knitting, only saw the young Dowager leaning back in her chair, smiling the natural smiles of her sweet temper and kind heart upon the young stranger whom she had chosen to make a protégé of. Miss Wodehouse silently concluded that perhaps it might be dangerous for the young man, who knew no better, and that Lady Western always looked well in a blue dress. Such was the outside world's interpretation of that triumphant hour of Vincent's life.

How it went on he never could tell. Soft questions, spoken in that voice which made everything eloquent, gently drew from him the particulars of his life; and sweet laughter, more musical than that song of Lucy's to which the curate (dull clod!) gave all his attention, rang silvery peals over the name of Tozer and the economics of Salem. Perhaps Lady Western enjoyed the conversation almost half as much as her

worshipper did. She was amused, most delicate and difficult of all successes. She was pleased with the reverential devotion which had a freshness and tender humility conjoined with sensitive pride which was novel to her, and more flattering than ordinary adoration. When he saw it amused her, the young man exerted himself to set forth his miseries with their ludicrous element fully developed. They were no longer miseries, they were happinesses which brought him those smiles. He said twice enough to turn him out of Salem, and make him shunned by all the connection. He forgot everything in life but the lovely creature beside him, and the means by which he could arouse her interest, and keep her ear a little longer. Such was the position of affairs, when Miss Wodehouse came to the plain part of her pattern, where she could go on without counting; and seeing Lady Western so much amused, became interested and set herself to listen too. By this time Vincent had come to more private concerns.

"I have been inquiring to-day after some one whom my mother knows, and whom I am anxious to hear about," said Vincent. "I cannot discover anything about him. It is a wild question to ask if you know him, but it is just possible; there are such curious encounters in life."

"What is his name?" said Lady Western, with a smile as radiant as a sunbeam.

"His name is Fordham—Herbert Fordham: I do not know where he comes from, nor whether he is of any profession; nor, indeed, anything but his name. I have been in town to-day——"

Here Vincent came to a sudden stop. He had withdrawn his eyes from that smile of hers for the moment. When he raised them again, the beautiful picture was changed as if by magic. Her eyes were fixed upon him dilated and almost wild. Her face was deadly pale. Her hands, which had been lying lightly crossed, grasped each other in a grasp of sudden anguish and self-control. He stopped short with a pang too bitter and strange for utterance. At that touch all his fancies dispersed into the air. He

came to himself strangely, with a sense of chill and desolation. In one instant, from the height of momentary bliss down to the miserable flat of conscious unimportance. Such a downfall was too much for man to endure without showing it. He stopped short at the aspect of her face.

“You have been in town to-day?” she repeated, pointedly, with white and trembling lips.

“And could hear nothing of him,” said Vincent, with a little bitterness. “He was not to be heard of at his address.”

“Where was that?” asked Lady Western again, with the same intent and anxious gaze.

Vincent, who was sinking down, down in hopeless circles of jealousy, miserable fierce rage and disappointment, answered, “10 Nameless Street, Piccadilly,” without an unnecessary word.

Lady Western uttered a little cry of excitement and wonder. She knew nothing of the black abyss into which her companion had fallen any more than she knew the splendid heights to which her favour had raised him; but the sound of her own voice recalled her to herself. She turned away from Vincent and pulled the bell which was within her reach—pulled it once and again with a nervous twitch, and entangled her bracelet in the bell-pull, so that she had to bend over to unfasten it. Vincent sat gloomily by and looked on, without offering any assistance. He knew it was to hide her troubled face and gain a moment to compose herself; but he was scarcely prepared for her total avoidance of the subject when she next spoke.

“They are always so late of giving us tea,” she said, rising from her chair, and going up to Miss Wodehouse: “I can see you have finished your pattern; let me see how it looks. That is pretty; but I think it is too elaborate. How many things has Mary done for this bazaar, Mr. Wentworth?—and do tell us when is it to be?”

What did Vincent care for the answer? He sat disenchanted in that same place which

had been his bower of bliss all the evening, watching her as she moved about the room; her beautiful figure went and came with a certain restlessness, surely not usual to her, from one corner to another. She brought Miss Wodehouse something to look at from the work-table, and fetched some music for Lucy from a window. She had the tea placed in a remote corner, and made it there; and insisted on bringing it to the Miss Wodehouses with her own hands. She was disturbed; her sweet composure was gone. Vincent sat and watched her under the shade of his hands, with feelings as miserable as ever moved man. It was not sorrow for having disturbed her;—feelings much more personal, mortification and disappointment, and, above all, jealousy, raged in his heart. Warmer and stronger than ever was his interest in Mr. Fordham now.

After a miserable interval, he rose to take his leave. When he came up to her, Lady Western's kind heart once more awoke in his behalf. She drew him aside after a momentary struggle with herself.

"I know that gentleman," she said, quickly, with a momentary flush of colour, and shortening of breath; "at least I knew him once; and the address you mention is my brother's address. If you will tell me what you want to know, I will ask for you. My brother and he used not to be friends, but I suppose——. What did you want to know?"

"Only," said Vincent, with involuntary bitterness, "if he was a man of honour, and could be trusted; nothing else."

The young Dowager paused and sighed; her beautiful eyes softened with tears. "Oh, yes—yes; with life—to death!" she said, with a low accompaniment of sighing, and a wistful melancholy smile upon her lovely face.

Vincent hastened out of the house. He ventured to say nothing to himself as he went up Grange Lane in the starless night, with all the silence and swiftness of passion. He dared not trust himself to think. His very heart, the physical organ itself, seemed

throbbing and bursting with conscious pain. Had she loved this mysterious stranger whose undecipherable shadow hung over the minister's path? To Vincent's fancy, nothing else could account for her agitation; and was he so true, and to be trusted? Poor gentle Susan, whom such a fate and doom was approaching as might have softened her brother's heart, had but little place in his thoughts. He was not glad of that favourable verdict. He was overpowered with jealous rage and passion. Alas for his dreams! Once more, what downfall and over-throw had come of it! once more he had come down to his own position, and the second awakening was harder than the first. When he got home, and found his mother, affectionately proud, waiting to hear all about the great lady he had been visiting, it is impossible to express in words the intolerable impatience and disgust with himself and his fate which overpowered the young man. He had a bad headache, Mrs. Vincent said, she was sure, and he did not contradict her. It was an unspeakable relief to him when she went to her own room, and delivered him from the tender scrutiny of her eyes—those eyes full of nothing but love, which, in the irritation of his spirit, drove him desperate. He did not tell her about the unexpected discovery he had made. The very name of Fordham would have choked him that night.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next morning brought no letters except from Susan. Fordham, if so true as Lady Western called him, was not, Vincent thought with bitterness, acting as an honourable man should in this emergency. But perhaps he might come to Carlingford in the course of the day, to see Susan's brother. The aspect of the young minister was changed when he made his appearance at the breakfast table. Mrs. Vincent made the most alarmed inquiries about his health, but—stopped abruptly in making them by his short and ungracious answer—came to a dead pause; and with a pang of fright and mortification, acknowledged to herself that her son was no longer

her boy, whose entire heart she knew, but a man with a life and concerns of his own, possibly not patent to his mother. That breakfast was not a cheerful meal. There had been a long silence, broken only by those anxious attentions to each other's personal comfort, with which people endeavour to smooth down the embarrassment of an intercourse apparently confidential, into which some sudden unexplainable shadow has fallen. At last Vincent got up from the table, with a little outbreak of impatience.

"I can't eat this morning; don't ask me. Mother, get your bonnet on," said the young man; "we must go to see Mrs. Hilyard to-day."

"Yes, Arthur," said Mrs. Vincent, meekly; she had determined not to see Mrs. Hilyard, of whom her gentle respectability was suspicious; but, startled by her son's looks, and by the evident arrival of that period, instinctively perceived by most women, at which a man snatches the reins out of his adviser's hand, and has his way, the alarmed and anxious mother let her arms fall, and gave in without a struggle.

"The fact is, I heard of Mr. Fordham last night," said Vincent, walking about the room, lifting up and setting down again abstractedly the things on the table. "Lady Western knows him, it appears; perhaps Mrs. Hilyard does too."

"Lady Western knows him? Oh, Arthur, tell me—what did she say?" cried his mother, clasping her hands.

"She said he could be trusted—with life—to death," said Vincent, very low, with an inaudible groan in his heart. He was prepared for the joy and the tears, and the thanksgiving with which his words were received; but he could not have believed, how sharply his mother's exclamation, "God bless my Susan! now I am happy about her, Arthur. I could be content to die," would go to his heart. Susan, yes;—it was right to be happy about her; and as for himself, who cared? He shut up his heart in that bitterness; but it filled him with an irritation and restlessness which he could not subdue.

"We must go to Mrs. Hilyard; probably she can tell us more," he said, abruptly; "and there is her child to speak of. I blame myself," he added, with impatience, "for not telling her before. Let us go now directly—never mind ringing the bell; all that can be done when we are out. Dinner? oh, for heaven's sake, let them manage that! Where is your bonnet, mother? the air will do me good after a bad night."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Vincent, moved by this last argument. It must be his headache, no doubt, she tried to persuade herself. Stimulated by the sound of his footstep in the next room, she lost very little time over her toilette. Perhaps the chill January air, sharp with frost, air full of natural exhilaration and refreshment, did bring a certain relief to the young Nonconformist's aching temples and exasperated temper. It was with difficulty his mother kept time with his long strides, as he hurried her along the street, not leaving her time to look at Salem, which was naturally the most interesting point in Carlingford to the minister's mother. Before she had half prepared herself for this interview, he had hurried her up the narrow bare staircase which led to Mrs. Hilyard's lodgings. On the landing, with the door half open, stood Lady Western's big footman, fully occupying the narrow standing-ground, and shedding a radiance of plush over the whole shabby house. The result upon Mrs. Vincent was an immediate increase of comfort, for surely the woman must be respectable to whom people sent messages by so grand a functionary. The sight of the man struck Vincent like another pang. She had sent to take counsel, no doubt, on the evidently unlooked-for information which had startled her so last night.

"Come in," said the inhabitant of the room. She was folding a note for which the footman waited. Things were just as usual in that shabby place. The coarse stuff at which she had been working lay on the table beside her. Seeing a woman with Vincent, she got up quickly, and turned her keen eyes upon the new-comer. The timid doubtful mother, the young man, somewhat arbitrary and self-willed, who had brought his companion there against her will, the very look, half fright, half

suspicion, which Mrs. Vincent threw round the room, explained matters to this quick observer. She was mistress of the position at once.

“Take this to Lady Western, John,” said Mrs. Hilyard. “She may come when she pleases—I shall be at home all day; but tell her to send a maid next time, for you are much too magnificent for Back Grove Street. This is Mrs. Vincent, I know. Your son has brought you to see me, and I hope you have not come to say that I was too rash in asking a Christian kindness from this young man’s mother. If he had not behaved like a paladin, I should not have ventured upon it; but when a young man conducts himself so, I think his mother is a good woman. You have taken in my child?”

She had taken Mrs. Vincent by both hands, and placed her in a chair, and sat down beside her. The widow had not a word to say. What with the praise of her son, which was music to her ears—what with the confusion of her own position, she was painfully embarrassed and at a loss, and anxiously full of explanations. “Susan has, I have no doubt; but I am sorry I left home on Wednesday morning, and we did not know then they were expected; but we have a spare room, and Susan, I don’t doubt——”

“The fact is, my mother had left home before they could have reached Lonsdale,” interposed Vincent; “but my sister would take care of them equally well. They are all safe. A note came this morning announcing their arrival. My mother,” said the young man, hastily, “returns almost immediately. It will make no difference to the strangers.”

“I am sure Susan will make them comfortable, and the beds would be well aired,” said Mrs. Vincent; “but I had sudden occasion to leave home, and did not even know of it till the night before. My dear,” she said, with hesitation, “did you think Mrs. Hilyard would know? I brought Susan’s note to show you,” she added, laying down that simple performance in which Susan announced the receipt of Arthur’s letter,

and the subsequent arrival of “a governess-lady, and the most beautiful girl that ever was seen.” The latter part of Susan’s hurried note, in which she declared this beautiful girl to be “very odd—a sort of grown-up baby,” was carefully abstracted by the prudent mother.

The strange woman before them took up the note in both her hands and drank it in, with an almost trembling eagerness. She seemed to read over the words to herself again and again with moving lips. Then she drew a long breath of relief.

“Miss Smith is the model of a governess-lady,” she said, turning with a composure wonderfully unlike that eagerness of anxiety to Mrs. Vincent again—“she never writes but on her day, whatever may happen; and yesterday did not happen to be her day. Thank you; it is Christian charity. You must not be any loser meantime, and we must arrange these matters before you go away. This is not a very imposing habitation,” she said, glancing round with a movement of her thin mouth, and comic gleam in her eye—“but that makes no difference, so far as they are concerned. Mr. Vincent knows more about me than he has any right to know,” continued the strange woman, turning her head towards him for the moment with an amused glance—“a man takes one on trust sometimes, but a woman must always explain herself to a woman: perhaps, Mr. Vincent, you will leave us together while I explain my circumstances to your mother?”

“Oh, I am sure it—it is not necessary,” said Mrs. Vincent, half alarmed; “but, Arthur, you were to ask——”

“What were you to ask?” said Mrs. Hilyard, laying her hand with an involuntary movement upon a tiny note lying open on the table, to which Vincent’s eyes had already wandered.

“The fact is,” he said, following her hand with his eyes, “that my mother came up to inquire about some one called Fordham, in whom she is interested. Lady Western knows him,” said Vincent, abruptly, looking in Mrs. Hilyard’s face.

"Lady Western knows him. You perceive that she has written to ask me about him this morning. Yes," said Mrs. Hilyard, looking at the young man, not without a shade of compassion. "You are quite right in your conclusions; poor Alice and he were in love with each other before she married Sir Joseph. He has not been heard of for a long time. What do you want to know, and how is it he has showed himself now?"

"It is for Susan's sake," cried Mrs. Vincent, interposing; "oh, Mrs. Hilyard, you will feel for me better than any one—my only daughter! I got an anonymous letter the night before I left. I am so flurried, I almost forget what night it was—Tuesday night—which arrived when my dear child was out. I never kept anything from her in all her life, and to conceal it was dreadful—and how we got through that night——"

"Mother, the details are surely not necessary now," said her impatient son. "We want to know what are this man's antecedents and his character—that is all," he added, with irrestrainable bitterness.

Mrs. Hilyard took up her work, and pinned the long coarse seam to her knee. "Mrs. Vincent will tell me herself," she said, looking straight at him with her amused look. Of all her strange peculiarities, the faculty of amusement was the strangest. Intense restrained passion, anxiety of the most desperate kind, a wild will which would pause at nothing, all blended with and left room for this unfailing perception of any ludicrous possibility. Vincent got up hastily, and, going to the window, looked out upon the dismal prospect of Salem, throwing its shabby shadow upon those dreary graves. Instinctively he looked for the spot where that conversation must have been held which he had overheard from the vestry window; it came most strongly to his mind at that moment. As his mother went through her story, how Mr. Fordham had come accidentally to the house—how gradually they had admitted him to their friendship—how, at last, Susan and he had become engaged to each other—her son stood at the window, following in his mind all the events of that evening, which

looked so long ago, yet was only two or three evenings back. He recalled to himself his rush to the telegraph office; and again, with a sharp stir of opposition and enmity, recalled, clear as a picture, the railway-carriage just starting, the flash of light inside, the face so clearly evident against the vacant cushions. What had he to do with that face, with its eagle outline and scanty long locks? Somehow, in the meshes of fate he felt himself so involved that it was impossible to forget this man. He came and took his seat again with his mind full of that recollection. The story had come to a pause, and Mrs. Hilyard sat silent, taking in with her keen eyes every particular of the gentle widow's character, evidently, as Vincent could see, following her conduct back to those springs of gentle but imprudent generosity and confidence in what people said to her, from which her present difficulties sprang.

"And you admitted him first?" said Mrs. Hilyard, interrogatively, "because——?" She paused. Mrs. Vincent became embarrassed and nervous.

"It was very foolish, very foolish," said the widow, wringing her hands; "but he came to make inquiries, you know. I answered him civilly the first time, and he came again and again. It looked so natural. He had come down to see a young relation at school in the neighbourhood."

Mrs. Hilyard uttered a sudden exclamation—very slight, low, scarcely audible; but it attracted Vincent's attention. He could see that her thin lips were closed, her figure slightly erected, a sudden keen gleam of interest in her face. "Did he find his relation?" she asked, in a voice so ringing and distinct that the young minister started, and sat upright, bracing himself for something about to happen. It did not flash upon him yet what that meaning might be; but his pulses leapt with a prescient thrill of some tempest or earthquake about to fall.

"No; he never could find her—it did not turn out to be our Lonsdale, I think—what is the matter?" cried Mrs. Vincent; "you both know something I don't know—what has happened? Arthur, have I said anything dreadful?—oh, what does it mean?"

“Describe him if you can,” said Mrs. Hilyard, in a tone which, sharp and calm, tingled through the room with a passionate clearness which nothing but extreme excitement could give. She had taken Mrs. Vincent’s hand, and held it tightly with a certain compassionate compulsion, forcing her to speak. As for Vincent, the horrible suspicion which stole upon him unmanned him utterly. He had sprung to his feet, and stood with his eyes fixed on his mother’s face with an indescribable horror and suspense. It was not her he saw. With hot eyes that blazed in their sockets, he was fixing the gaze of desperation upon a picture in his mind, which he felt but too certain would correspond with the faltering words which fell from her lips. Mrs. Vincent, for her part, would have thrown herself wildly upon him, and lost her head altogether in a frightened attempt to find out what this sudden commotion meant, had she not been fixed and supported by that strong yet gentle grasp upon her hand. “Describe him—take time,” said her strange companion again—not looking at her, but waiting in an indescribable calm of passion for the words which she could frame in her mind before they were said.

“Tall,” said the widow’s faltering alarmed voice, falling with a strange uncertainty through the intense stillness, in single words, with gasps between; “not—a very young man—aquiline—with a sort of eagle-look—light hair—long and thin, and as fine as silk—very light in his beard, so that it scarcely showed. Oh, God help us! what is it? what is it?—You both know whom I mean.”

Neither of them spoke; but the eyes of the two met in a single look, from which both withdrew, as if the communication were a crime. With a shudder Vincent approached his mother; and, speechless though he was, took hold of her, and drew her to him abruptly. Was it murder he read in those eyes, with their desperate concentration of will and power? The sight of them, and recollection of their dreadful splendour, drove even Susan out of his mind. Susan, poor gentle soul!—what if she broke her tender heart, in which no devils lurked? “Mother, come—come,” he said, hoarsely, raising her up in his arm, and releasing the hand

which the extraordinary woman beside her still clasped fast. The movement roused Mrs. Hilyard as well as Mrs. Vincent. She rose up promptly from the side of the visitor who had brought her such news.

“I need not suggest to you that this must be acted on at once,” she said to Vincent, who, in his agitation, saw how the hand, with which she leant on the table, clenched hard till it grew white with the pressure. “The man we have to deal with spares nothing.” She stopped, and then, with an effort, went up to the half-fainting mother, who hung upon Vincent’s arm, and took her hands and pressed them close. “We have both thrust our children into the lion’s mouth,” she cried, with a momentary softening. “Go, poor woman, and save your child if you can, and so will I—we are companions in misfortune. And you are a priest, why cannot you curse him?” she exclaimed, with a bitter cry. The next moment she had taken down a travelling-bag from a shelf, and, kneeling down by a trunk, began to transfer some things to it. Vincent left his mother, and went up to her with a sudden impulse, “I am a priest, let me bless you,” said the young man, touching with a compassionate hand the dark head bending before him. Then he took his mother away. He could not speak as he supported her down-stairs; she, clinging to him with double weakness, could scarcely support herself at all in her agitation and wonder when they got into the street. She kept looking in his face with a pitiful appeal that went to his heart.

“Tell me, Arthur, tell me!” She sobbed it out unawares, and over and over before he knew what she was saying. And what could he tell her? “We must go to Susan—poor Susan!” was all the young man could say.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. VINCENT came to a dead stop as they passed the doors of Salem, which were ajar, taking resolution in the desperateness of her uncertainty—for the feelings in the widow’s mind were not confined to one burning impulse of terror for Susan,

but complicated by a wonderful amount of flying anxieties about other matters as well. She knew, by many teachings of experience, what would be said by all the connection, when it was known that the minister's mother had been in Carlingford without going to see anybody—not even Mrs. Tufton, the late minister's wife, or Mrs. Tozer, who was so close at hand. Though her heart was racked, Mrs. Vincent knew her duty. She stopped short in her fright and distress with the mild obduracy of which she was capable. Before rushing away out of Carlingford to protect her daughter, the mother, notwithstanding her anxiety, could not forget the injury which she might possibly do by this means to the credit of her son.

"Arthur, the chapel is open—I should like to go in and rest," she said, with a little gasp; "and oh, my dear boy, take a little pity upon me! To see the state you are in, and not to know anything, is dreadful. You must have a vestry, where one could sit down a little—let us go in."

"A vestry—yes; it will be a fit place," cried Vincent, scarcely knowing what he was saying, and indeed worn out with the violence of his own emotions. This little persistent pause of the widow, who was not absorbed by any one passionate feeling, but took all the common cares of life with her into her severest trouble, awoke the young man to himself. He, too, recollected that this enemy who had stolen into his house was not to be reached by one wild rush, and that everything could not be suffered to plunge after Susan's happiness into an indiscriminate gulf of ruin. All his own duties pricked at his heart with bitter reminders in that moment when he stood by the door of Salem, where two poor women were busy inside, with pails and brushes, preparing for Sunday. The minister, too, had to prepare for Sunday. He could not dart forth, breathing fire and flame at a moment's notice, upon the serpent who had entered his Eden. Even at this dreadful moment, in all the fever of such a discovery, the touch of his mother's hand upon his arm brought him back to his lot. He pushed open the mean door, and led her into the scene of his weekly labours with a certain sickening disgust in his heart which would have appalled his companion.

She was a dutiful woman, subdued by long experience of that inevitable necessity against which all resistance fails; and he a passionate young man, naturally a rebel against every such bond. They could not understand each other; but the mother's troubled face, all conscious of Tufton and Tozer, and what the connection would say, brought all the weight of his own particular burden back upon Vincent's mind. He pushed in past the pails with a certain impatience which grieved Mrs. Vincent. She followed him with a pained and disapproving look, nodding, with a faint little smile, to the women, who no doubt were members of the flock, and might spread an evil report of the pastor, who took no notice of them. As she followed him to the vestry, she could not help thinking, with a certain strange mixture of pain, vexation, and tender pride, how different his dear father would have been. "But Arthur, dear boy, has my quick temper," sighed the troubled woman. After all, it was her fault rather than her son's.

"This is a very nice room," said Mrs. Vincent, sitting down with an air of relief; "but I think it would be better to close the window, as there is no fire. You were always very susceptible to cold, Arthur, from a child. And now, my dear boy, we are undisturbed, and out of those dreadful glaring streets where everybody knows you. I have not troubled you, Arthur, for I saw you were very much troubled; but, oh! don't keep me anxious now."

"Keep you anxious! You ask me to make you anxious beyond anything you can think of," said the young man, closing the window with a hasty and fierce impatience, which she could not understand. "Good heavens, mother! why did you let that man into your innocent house?"

"Who is he, Arthur?" asked Mrs. Vincent, with a blanched face.

"He is——" Vincent stopped with his hand upon the window where he had overheard that conversation, a certain awe coming over him. Even Susan went out of his mind when he thought of the dreadful calmness with which his strange

acquaintance had promised to kill her companion of that night. Had she started already on this mission of vengeance? A cold thrill came over him where he stood. “I can’t tell who he is,” he exclaimed, abruptly, throwing himself down upon the little sofa; “but it was to be in safety from him that Mrs. Hilyard sent her daughter to Lonsdale. It was he whom she vowed to kill if he found the child. Ah!—he is,” cried the young man, springing to his feet again with a sudden pang and smothered exclamation as the truth dawned upon him, “Lady Western’s brother. What other worse thing he is I cannot tell. Ruin, misery, and horror at the least—death to Susan—not much less to me.”

“To you? Oh, Arthur, have pity upon me, my heart is breaking,” said Mrs. Vincent. “Oh, my boy, my boy, whom I would die to save from any trouble! don’t tell me I have destroyed you. That cannot be, Arthur—that cannot be!”

The poor minister did not say anything—his heart was bitter within him. He paced up and down the vestry with dreadful thoughts. What was She to him if she had a hundred brothers? Nothing in the world could raise the young Nonconformist to that sweet height which she made beautiful; and far beyond that difference came the cruel recollection of those smiles and tears—pathetic, involuntary confessions. If there was another man in the world whom she could trust “with life—to death!” what did it matter though a thousand frightful combinations involved poor Vincent with her kindred? He tried to remind himself of all this, but did not succeed. In the mean time, the fact glared upon him that it was her brother who had aimed this deadly blow at the honour and peace of his own humble house; and his heart grew sad with the thought that, however indifferent she might be to him, however unattainable, here was a distinct obstacle which must cut off all that bewildering tantalising intercourse which at present was still possible, notwithstanding every other hindrance. He thought of this, and not of Susan, as the floor of the little vestry thrilled under his feet. He was bitter, aggrieved, indignant. His troubled mother, who sat by there, half afraid to cry, watching him with frightened, anxious,

uncomprehending eyes, had done him a sharp and personal injury. She could not fancy how it was, nor what she could have done. She followed him with mild tearful glances, waiting with a woman's compelled patience till he should come to himself, and revolving thoughts of Salem, and supply for the pulpit there, with an anxious pertinacity. But in her way Mrs. Vincent was a wise woman. She did not speak—she let him wear himself out first in that sudden apprehension of the misfortune personal to himself, which was at the moment so much more poignant and bitter than any other dread. When he had subsided a little—and first of all he threw up the window, leaning out, to his mother's great vexation, with a total disregard of the draught, and receiving the chill of the January breeze upon his heated brow—she ventured to say, gently, "Arthur, what are we to do?"

"To go to Lonsdale," said Vincent. "When we came in here, I thought we could rush off directly; but these women outside there, and this place, remind me that I am not a free man, who can go at once and do his duty. I am in fetters to Salem, mother. Heaven knows when I may be able to get away. Sunday must be provided for first. No natural immediate action is possible to me."

"Hush, Arthur dear—oh, hush! Your duty to your flock is above your duty even to your sister," said the widow, with a tremulous voice, timid of saying anything to him whose mood she could not comprehend. "You must find out when the first train starts, and I will go. I have been very foolish," faltered the poor mother, "as you say, Arthur; but if my poor child is to bear such a dreadful blow, I am the only one to take care of her. Susan"—here she made a pause, her lip trembled, and she had all but broken into tears—"will not upbraid me, dear. You must not neglect your duty, whatever happens; and now let us go and inquire about the train, Arthur, and you can come on Monday, after your work is over; and, oh! my dear boy, we must not repine, but accept the arrangements of Providence. It was what your dear father always said to his dying day."

Her face all trembling and pale, her eyes full of tears which were not shed, her tender humility, which never attempted a defence, and those motherly, tremulous, wistful advices which it now for the first time dawned upon Mrs. Vincent her son was not certain to take, moved the young Nonconformist out of his personal vexation and misery.

"This will not do," he said. "I must go with you; and we must go directly. Susan may be less patient, less believing, less ready to take our word for it, than you imagine, mother. Come; if there is anybody to be got to do this preaching, the thing will be easy. Tozer will help me, perhaps. We will waste no more time here."

"I am quite rested, Arthur dear," said Mrs. Vincent; "and it will be right for me to call at Mrs. Tozer's too. I wish I could have gone to Mrs. Tufton's, and perhaps some others of your people. But you must tell them, dear, that I was very hurried—and—and not very well; and that it was family business that brought me here."

"I do not see they have any business with the matter," said the rebellious minister.

"My dear, it will of course be known that I was in Carlingford; and I know how things are spoken of in a flock," said Mrs. Vincent, rising; "but you must tell them all I wanted to come, and could not—which, indeed, will be quite true. A minister's family ought to be very careful, Arthur," added the much-experienced woman. "I know how little a thing makes mischief in a congregation. Perhaps, on the whole, I ought not to call at Mrs. Tozer's, as there is no time to go elsewhere. But still I should like to do it. One good friend is often everything to a young pastor. And, my dear, you should just say a word in passing to the women outside."

"By way of improving the occasion?" said Vincent, with a little scorn. "Mother, don't torture yourself about me. I shall get on very well; and we have plenty on our hands just now without thinking of Salem. Come, come; with this horrible cloud overhanging Susan, how can you spare a thought for such trifles as these?"

"Oh, Arthur, my dear boy, must not we keep you right?" said his mother; "are not you our only hope? If this dreadful news you tell me is true, my child will break her heart, and I will be the cause of it; and Susan has no protector or guardian, Arthur dear, that can take care of her, but you."

Wiping her eyes, and walking with a feeble step, Mrs. Vincent followed her son out of Salem; but she looked up with gentle interest to his pulpit as she passed, and said it was a cold day to the cleaners, with anxious carefulness. She was not carried away from her palpable standing-ground by any wild tempest of anxiety. Susan, whose heart would be broken by this blow, was her mother's special object in life; but the thought of that coming sorrow which was to crush the girl's heart, made Mrs. Vincent only the more anxiously concerned to conciliate and please everybody whose influence could be of any importance to her son.

So they came out into the street together, and went on to Tozer's shop. She, tremulous, watchful, noting everything; now lost in thought as to how the dreadful truth was to be broken to Susan; now in anxious plans for impressing upon Arthur the necessity of considering his people—he, stinging with personal wounds and bitterness, much more deeply alarmed than his mother, and burning with consciousness of all the complications which she was totally ignorant of. Fury against the villain himself, bitter vexation that he was Lady Western's brother, anger at his mother for admitting, at Susan for giving him her heart, at Mrs. Hilyard for he could not tell what, because she had added a climax to all, burned in Vincent's mind as he went on to George Street with his mother leaning on his arm, who asked him after every wayfarer who passed them, Who was that? It was not wonderful that the young man gradually grew into a fever of excitement and restless misery. Everything conspired to exasperate him,—even the fact that Sunday came so near, and could not be escaped. The whirl of his brain came to a climax when Lady Western's carriage drove past, and through the mist of his wretchedness he saw the smile and the beautiful hand waved to him in sweet recognition. Oh heaven! to bring

tears to those eyes, or a pang to that heart!—to have her turn from him shuddering, or pass him with cold looks, because her brother was a villain, and he the avenger of that crime! His mother, almost running to keep up with his unconsciously quickened pace, cast pitiful looks at him, inquiring what it was. The poor young fellow could not have told even if he would. It was a combination of miseries, sharply stimulated to the intolerable point by the mission on which he had now to enter Tozer's shop.

"We heard you was come, ma'am," said Tozer, graciously, "and in course was looking for a call. I hope you are going to stay awhile and help us take care of the pastor. He don't take that care of himself as his friends would wish," said the butterman. "Mr. Vincent, sir, I've a deal to say to you when you're at leisure. Old Mr. Tufton, he has a deal to say to you. We are as anxious as ever we can be, us as are old stagers, to keep the minister straight, ma'am. He's but a young man, and he's come into a deal of popularity, and any one more thought on in our connection, I don't know as I would wish to see; but it wouldn't do to let him have his head turned. Them lectures on Church and State couldn't but be remarked, being delivered, as you may say, in the world, all on us making a sacrifice to do our duty by our fellow-creaturs, seein' what we had in our power. But man is but mortal; and us Salem folks don't like to see no signs of that weakness in a pastor; it's our duty to see as his head's not turned."

"Indeed, I trust there is very little fear of that," said Mrs. Vincent, roused, and set on the defensive. "My dear boy has been used to be appreciated, and to have people round him who could understand him. As for having his head turned, that might happen to a man who did not know what intelligent approbation was; but after doing so well as he did at college, and having his dear father's approval, I must say I don't see any cause to apprehend that, Mr. Tozer. I am not surprised at all, for my part,—I always knew what my Arthur could do." "No more of this," said Vincent, impatiently. "Look here, I have come on a special business. Can any one be got, do you think, to preach on Sunday? I must go home with my mother to-day."

“To-day!” Tozer opened his eyes, with a blank stare, as he slowly took off his apron. “You was intimated to begin that course on the Miracles, Mr. Vincent, if you’ll excuse me, on Sunday. Salem folks is a little sharp, I don’t deny. It would be a great disappointment, and I can’t say I think as it would be took well if you was to go away.”

“I can’t help that,” said the unfortunate minister, to whom opposition at this moment was doubly intolerable. “The Salem people, I presume, will hear reason. My mother has come upon——”

“Family business,” interrupted Mrs. Vincent, with the deepest trembling anxiety. “Arthur dear, let me explain it, for you are too susceptible. My son is all the comfort we have in the world, Mr. Tozer,” said the anxious widow. “I ought not to have told him how much his sister wanted him, but I was rash, and did so; and now I ought to bear the penalty. I have made him anxious about Susan; but, Arthur dear, never mind; you must let me go by myself, and on Monday you can come. Your dear father always said his flock was his first duty, and if Sunday is a special day, as Mr. Tozer says——”

“Oh, Pa, is it Mrs. Vincent? and you keep her in the shop, when we are all as anxious as ever we can be to see her,” said Phœbe, who suddenly came upon the scene. “Oh, please to come up-stairs to the drawing-room. Oh, I am so glad to see you! and it was so unkind of Mr. Vincent not to let us know you were coming. Mamma wanted to ask you to come here, for she thought it would be more comfortable than a bachelor’s rooms; and we did think the minister would have told us,” said Phœbe, with reproachful looks; “but now that you have come back again, after such a long time, please, Mr. Vincent, let your mother come up-stairs. They say you don’t think us good enough to be trusted now; but oh, I don’t think you could ever be like that!” continued Phœbe, pausing by the door as she ushered Mrs. Vincent into the drawing-room, and giving the minister an appealing remonstrative

glance before she dropped her eyelids in virginal humility. Poor Vincent paused too, disgusted and angry, but with a certain confusion. To fling out of the house, dash off to his rooms, make his hasty preparations for the journey, was the impulse which possessed him; but his mother was looking back with wistful curiosity, wondering what the two could mean by pausing behind her at the door.

"I am exactly as I was the last time I saw you, which was on Tuesday," he said, with some indignation. "I will follow you, please. My mother has no time to spare, as she leaves to-day—can Mrs. Tozer see her? She has been agitated and worn out, and we have not really a moment to spare."

"Appearingly not—not for your own friends, Mr. Vincent," said Mrs. Tozer, who now presented herself. "I hope I see you well, ma'am, and proud to see you in my house, though I will say the minister don't show himself not so kind as was to be wished. Phœbe, don't put on none o' your pleading looks—for shame of yourself, Miss! If Mr. Vincent has them in Carlingford as he likes better than any in his own flock, it ain't no concern of ours. It's a thing well known as the Salem folks are all in trade, and don't drive their carriages, nor give themselves up to this world and vanity. I never saw no good come, for my part, of folks sacrificing theirselves and their good money as Tozer and the rest set their hearts on, with that Music Hall and them advertisings and things—not as I was meaning to upbraid you, Mr. Vincent, particular not before your mother, as is a stranger—but we was a deal comfortabler before them lectures and things, and taking off your attention from your own flock."

Before this speech was finished, the whole party had assembled in the drawing-room, where a newly-lighted fire, hastily set light to on the spur of the moment by Phœbe, was sputtering drearily. Mrs. Vincent had been placed in an arm-chair at one side, and Mrs. Tozer, spreading out her black silk apron and arranging her cap, set herself doggedly on the other, with a little toss of her head and careful averting of her eyes from the accused pastor. Tozer, without his apron, had

drawn a chair to the table, and was drumming on it with the blunt round ends of his fingers; while Phœbe, in a slightly pathetic attitude, ready for general conciliation, hovered near the minister, who grew red all over, and clenched his hand with an emphasis most intelligible to his frightened mother. The dreadful pause was broken by Phœbe, who rushed to the rescue.

"Oh, Ma, how can you!" cried that young lady—"you were all worrying and teasing Mr. Vincent, you know you were; and if he does know that beautiful lady," said Phœbe, with her head pathetically on one side, and another glance at him, still more appealing and tenderly reproachful—"and—and likes to go to see her—it's—it's the naturalest thing that ever was. Oh, I knew he never could think anything of anybody else in Carlingford after Lady Western! and I am sure, whatever other people may say, I—I—never can think Mr. Vincent was to blame."

Phœbe's words were interrupted by her feelings—she sank back into a seat when she had concluded, and put a handkerchief to her eyes. As for Tozer, he still drummed on the table. A certain human sympathy was in the mind of the butterman, but he deferred to the readier utterance of his indignant wife.

"I never said it was any concern of ours," said Mrs. Tozer. "It ain't our way to court nobody as doesn't seek our company; but a minister as we've all done a deal to make comfortable, and took an interest in equal to a son, and has been made such a fuss about as I never see in our connection—it's disappointing, I will say, to see him a-going off after worldly folks that don't care no more about religion than I do about playing the piano. Not as Phœbe doesn't play the piano better than most—but such things ain't in my thoughts. I do say it's disappointing, and gives folks a turn. If she's pretty-lookin'—as she may be, for what I can tell—it ain't none of the pastor's business. Them designing ladies is the ruin of a young man; and when he deserts his flock, as are making sacrifices, and goes off after strangers, I don't say if it's right or wrong, but I say it's disappointin', and what wasn't looked for at Mr. Vincent's

hands."

Vincent had listened up to this point with moderate self-restraint—partially, perhaps, subdued by the alarmed expression of his mother's face, who had fixed her anxious eyes upon him, and vainly tried to convey telegraphic warnings; but the name of Lady Western stung him. "What is all this about?" he asked, with assumed coldness. "Nobody supposes, surely, that I am to render an account of my private friends to the managers of the chapel. It is a mistake, if it has entered any imagination. I shall do nothing of the kind. There is enough of this. When I neglect my duties, I presume I shall hear of it more seriously. In the mean time, I have real business in hand."

"But, Arthur dear, I daresay some one has misunderstood you," said his mother; "it always turns out so. I came the day before yesterday, Mrs. Tozer. I left home very suddenly in great anxiety, and I was very much fatigued by the journey, and I must go back to-day. I have been very selfish, taking my son away from his usual occupations. Never mind me, Arthur dear; if you have any business, leave me to rest a little with Mrs. Tozer. I can take such a liberty here, because I know she is such a friend of yours. Don't keep Mr. Tozer away from his business on my account. I know what it is when time is valuable. I will just stay a little with Mrs. Tozer, and you can let me know when it is time for the train. Yes, I came up very hurriedly," said the gentle diplomatist, veiling her anxiety as she watched the gloomy countenances round her. "We had heard some bad news; I had to ask my son to go to town yesterday for me, and—and I must go home to-day without much comfort. I feel a good deal shaken, but I dare not stay away any longer from my dear child at home."

"Dear, dear; I hope it's nothing serious as has happened?" said Mrs. Tozer, slightly mollified.

"It is some bad news about the gentleman Susan was going to marry," said Mrs. Vincent, with a rapid calculation of the necessities of the position; "and she does not

know yet. Arthur, my dear boy, it would be a comfort to my mind to know about the train."

"Oh, and you will be so fatigued!" said Phœbe. "I do so hope it's nothing bad. I am so interested about Miss Vincent. Oh, Pa, do go down-stairs and look at the railway bill. Won't you lie down on the sofa a little and rest? Fancy, mamma, taking two journeys in three days!—it would kill you; and, oh, I do so hope it is nothing very bad. I have so longed to see you and Mr. Vincent's sister. He told me all about her one evening. Is the gentleman ill? But do lie down and rest after all your fatigue. Mamma, don't you think it would do Mrs. Vincent good?"

"We'll have a bit of dinner presently," said Mrs. Tozer. "Phœbe, go and fetch the wine. There is one thing in trouble, that it makes folks find out their real friends. It wouldn't be to Lady Western the minister would think of taking his mother. I ain't saying anything, Tozer—nor Mr. Vincent needn't think I am saying anything. If I speak my mind a bit, I don't bear malice. Phœbe's a deal too feelin', Mrs. Vincent—she's overcome, that's what she is; and if I must speak the truth, it's disappointing to see our pastor, as we've all made sacrifices for, following after the ungodly. I am a mother myself," continued Mrs. Tozer, changing her seat, as her husband, followed by the indignant Vincent, went down-stairs, "and I know a mother's feelin's: but after what I heard from Mrs. Pigeon, and how it's going through all the connection in Carlingford——"

Mrs. Vincent roused herself to listen. Her son's cause was safe in her hands.

Meantime Vincent went angry and impetuous down-stairs. "I will not submit to any inquisition," cried the young man. "I have done nothing I am ashamed of. If I dine with a friend, I will suffer no questioning on the subject. What do you mean? What right has any man in any connection to interfere with my actions? Why, you would not venture to attack your servant so! Am I the servant of this congregation? Am I their slave? Must I account to them for every accident of my life? Nobody in the

world has a right to make such a demand upon me."

"If a minister ain't a servant, we pays him his salary at the least, and expects him to please us," said Tozer, sulkily. "If it weren't for that, I don't give a sixpence for the Dissenting connection. Them as likes to please themselves would be far better in a State Church, where it wouldn't disappoint nobody; not meaning to be hard on you as has given great satisfaction, them's my views; but if the Chapel folks is a little particular, it's no more nor a pastor's duty to bear with them, and return a soft answer. I don't say as I'm dead again' you, like the women," added the butterman, softening; "they're jealous, that's what they are; but I couldn't find it in my heart, not for my own part, to be hard on a man as was led away after a beautiful creature like that. But there can't no good come of it, Mr. Vincent; take my advice, sir, as have seen a deal of the world—there can't no good come of it. A man as goes dining with Lady Western, and thinking as she means to make a friend of him, ain't the man for Salem. We're different sort of folks, and we can't go on together. Old Mr. Tufton will tell you just the same, as has gone through it all—and that's why I said both him and me had a deal to say to you, as are a young man, and should take good advice."

It was well for Vincent that the worthy butterman was lengthy in his address. The sharp impression of resentment and indignation which possessed him calmed down under this outpouring of words. He bethought himself of his dignity, his character. A squabble of self-defence, in which the sweet name of the lady of his dreams must be involved—an angry encounter of words about her, down here in this mean world to which the very thought of her was alien, wound up her young worshipper into supernatural self-restraint. He edged past the table in the back-parlour to the window, and stood there looking out with a suppressed fever in his veins, biting his lip, and bearing his lecture. On the whole, the best way, perhaps, would have been to leave Carlingford at once, as another man would have done, and leave the Sunday to take care of itself. But though he groaned under his bonds, the young Nonconformist

was instinctively confined by them, and had the habits of a man trained in necessary subjection to circumstances. He turned round abruptly when the butterman at last came to a pause.

"I will write to one of my friends in Homerton," he said, "if you will make an apology for me in the chapel. I daresay I could get Beecher to come down, who is a very clever fellow; and as for the beginning of that course of sermons——"

He stopped short with a certain suppressed disgust. Good heavens! what mockery it seemed. Amid these agonies of life, a man overwhelmed with deadly fear, hatred, and grief might indeed pause to snatch a burning lesson, or appropriate with trembling hands a consolatory promise; but with the whole solemn future of his sister's life hanging on a touch, with all the happiness and peace of his own involved in a feverish uncertainty, with dark unsuspected depths of injury and wretchedness opening at his feet—to think of courses of sermons and elaborate preachments, ineffectual words, and pretences of teaching! For the first time in the commotion of his soul, in the resentments and forebodings to which he gave no utterance, in the bitter conviction of uncertainty in everything which consumed his heart, a doubt of his own ability to teach came to Vincent's mind. He stopped short with an intolerable pang of impatience and self-disgust.

"And what of that, Mr. Vincent?" said Tozer. "I can't say as I think it'll be well took to see a stranger in the pulpit after them intimations. I made it my business to send the notices out last night; and after saying everywhere as you were to begin a coorse, as I always advised, if you had took my advice, it ain't a way to stop talk to put them off now. Old Mr. Tufton, you know, he was a different man; it was experience as was his line; and I don't mean to say nothing against experience," said the worthy deacon. "There ain't much true godliness, take my word, where there's a shrinking from disclosin' the state of your soul; but for keeping up a congregation there's nothing I know on like a coorse—and a clever young man as has studied his

subjects, and knows the manners of them old times, and can give a bit of a description as takes the interest, that's what I'd set my heart on for Salem. There's but three whole pews in the chapel as isn't engaged," said the butterman, with a softening glance at the pastor; "and the Miss Hemmings sent over this morning to say as they meant to come regular the time you was on the Miracles; and but for this cackle of the women, as you'll soon get over, there ain't a thing as I can see to stop us filling up to the most influential chapel in the connection; I mean in our parts."

The subdued swell of expectation with which the ambitious butterman concluded, somehow made Vincent more tolerant even in his undiminished excitement. He gave a subdued groan over all this that was expected of him, but not without a little answering thrill in his own troubled and impatient heart.

"A week can't make much difference, if I am ever to do any good," said the young man. "I must go now; but if you explain the matter for me, you will smooth the way. I will bring my mother and sister here," he went on, giving himself over for a moment to a little gleam of comfort, "and everything will go on better. I am worried and anxious now, and don't know what I am about. Give me some paper, and I will write to Beecher. You will like him. He is a good fellow, and preaches much better than I do," added poor Vincent with a sigh, sitting wearily down by the big table. He was subdued to his condition at that moment, and Tozer appreciated the momentary humbleness.

"I am not the man to desert my minister when he's in trouble," said the brave butterman. "Look you here, Mr. Vincent; don't fret yourself about it. I'll take it in hand; and I'd like to see the man in Salem as would say to the contrary again' me and the pastor both. Make your mind easy; I'll manage 'em. As for the women," said Tozer, scratching his head, "I don't pretend not to be equal to that; but my missis is as reasonable as most; and Phœbe, she'll stand up for you, whatever you do. If you'll take my advice, and be a bit prudent, and don't go after no more vanities,

things ain't so far wrong but a week or two will make them right."

With this consolatory assurance Vincent began to write his letter. Before he had concluded it, the maid came to lay the cloth for dinner, thrusting him into a corner, where he accomplished his writing painfully on his knee with his ink on the window-sill, a position in which Phœbe found him when she ventured down-stairs. It was she who took his letter from him, and ran with it to the shop to despatch it at once; and Phœbe came back to tell him that Mrs. Vincent was resting, and that it was so pleasant to see him back again after such a time. "I never expected you would have any patience for us when I saw you knew Lady Western so well. Oh, she is so sweetly pretty! and if I were a gentleman, I know I should fall deep in love with her," said Phœbe, with a sidelong glance, and not without hopes of calling forth a disclaimer from the minister; but the poor minister, jammed up in the corner, whence it was now necessary to extricate his chair preparatory to sitting down to a family dinner with the Tozers, was, as usual, unequal to the occasion, and had nothing to say. Phœbe's chair was by the minister's side during that substantial meal; and the large fire which burned behind Mrs. Tozer at the head of the table, and the steaming viands on the hospitable board, and the prevailing atmosphere of cheese and bacon which entered when the door was opened, made even Mrs. Vincent pale and flush a little in the heroic patience and friendliness with which she bent all her powers to secure the support of these adherents to her son. "I could have wished, Arthur, they were a little more refined," she said, faintly, when the dinner was over, and they were at last on their way to the train; "but I am sure they are very genuine, my dear; and one good friend is often everything to a pastor; and I am so glad we went at such a time." So glad! The young Nonconformist heaved a tempestuous sigh, and turned away not without a reflection upon the superficial emotions of women who at such a time could be glad. But Mrs. Vincent, for her part, with a fatigue and sickness of heart which she concealed from herself as much as she could, let down her veil, and cried quietly behind it. Perhaps her share of the

day’s exhaustion had not been the mildest or least hard.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE journey was troublesome and tedious, involving a change from one railway to another, and a troubled glimpse into the most noisy streets of London by the way. Vincent had left his mother, as he thought, safe in the cab which carried them to the second railway station, and was disposing of the little luggage they had with them, that he might not require to leave her again, when he heard an anxious voice calling him, and found her close behind him, afloat in the bustle and confusion of the crowd, dreadfully agitated and helpless, calling upon her Arthur with impatient accents of distress. His annoyance to find her there increased her confusion and trembling. “Arthur,” she gasped out, “I saw him—I saw him—not a minute ago—in a cab—with some ladies; oh, my dear, run after him. That was the way he went. Arthur, Arthur, why don’t you go? Never mind me—I can take care of myself.”

“Who was it—how did he go?—why didn’t you stop him, mother?” cried the young man, rushing back to the spot she had left. Nothing was to be seen there but the usual attendant group of railway porters, and the alarmed cabman who had been keeping his eye on Mrs. Vincent. The poor widow gasped as she gazed and saw no traces of the enemy who had eluded them.

“Oh, Arthur, my dear boy, I thought, in such a case, it ought to be a man to speak to him,” faltered Mrs. Vincent. “He went that way—that way, look!—in a cab, with somebody in a blue veil.”

Vincent rushed away in the direction she indicated, at a pace which he was totally unused to, and of course quite unable to keep up beyond the first heat; but few things could be more hopeless than to dash into the whirl of vehicles in the crowded current of the New Road, with any vain hope of identifying one which had ten minutes’ start, and no more distinctive mark of identity than the spectrum of a blue

veil. He rushed back again, angry with himself for losing breath in so vain an attempt, just in time to place his mother in a carriage and jump in beside her before the train started. Mrs. Vincent's anxiety, her questions which he could not hear, her doubts whether it might not have been best to have missed the train and followed Mr. Fordham, aggravated the much-tried patience of her son beyond endurance. They set off upon their sad journey with a degree of injured feeling on both sides, such as often gives a miserable complication to a mutual anxiety. But the mother, wounded and timid, feeling more than ever the difference between the boy who was all her own and the man who had thoughts and impulses of which she knew nothing, was naturally the first to recover and to make wistful overtures of peace.

"Well, Arthur," she said, after a while, leaning forward to him, her mild voice making a gentle murmur through the din of the journey, "though it was very foolish of me not to speak to him when I saw him, still, dear, he is gone and out of the way; that is a great comfort—we will never, never let him come near Susan again. That is just what I was afraid of; I have been saying to myself all day, 'What if he should go to Lonsdale too, and deny it all?' but Providence, you see, dear, has ordered it for us, and now he shall never come near my poor child again."

"Do you think he has been to Lonsdale?" asked Vincent.

"My poor Susan!" said his simple mother, "she will be happier than ever when we come to her with this dreadful news. Yes; I suppose he must have been seeing her, Arthur—and I am glad it has happened while I was away, and before we knew; and now he is gone," said the widow, looking out of the carriage with a sigh of relief, as if she could still see the road by which he had disappeared—"now he is gone, there will be no need for any dreadful strife or arguments. God always arranges things for us so much better than we can arrange them for ourselves. Fancy if he had come to-morrow to tear her dear heart to pieces!—Oh, Arthur, I am very thankful! There will be nothing to do now but to think best how to break it to her. He had ladies with

him; it is dreadful to think of such villany. Oh, Arthur, do you imagine it could be his wife?—and somebody in a blue veil."

"A blue veil!"—Mrs. Hilyard's message suddenly occurred to Vincent's mind, with its special mention of that article of disguise. "If this man is the man we suppose, he has accomplished one of his wishes," said the minister, slowly; "and she will kill him as sure as he lives."

"Who will kill him?—I hope nothing has occurred about your friend's child to agitate my Susan," said his mother. "It was all the kindness of your heart, my dear boy; but it was very imprudent of you to let Susan's name be connected with anybody of doubtful character. Oh, Arthur, dear, we have both been very imprudent!—you have so much of my quick temper. It was a punishment to me to see how impatient you were to-day; but Susan takes after your dear father. Oh, my own boy, pray; pray for her, that her heart may not be broken by this dreadful news."

And Mrs. Vincent leant back in her corner, and once more put down her veil. Pray!—who was he to pray for? Susan, forlorn and innocent, disappointed in her first love, but unharmed by any worldly soil or evil passion?—or the other sufferers involved in more deadly sort, himself palpitating with feverish impulses, broken loose from all his peaceful youthful moorings, burning with discontents and aspirations, not spiritual, but of the world? Vincent prayed none as he asked himself that bitter question. He drew back in his seat opposite his mother, and pondered in his heart the wonderful difference between the objects of compassion to whom the world gives ready tears, and those of whom the world knows and suspects nothing. Susan! he could see her mother weeping over her in her white and tender innocence. What if, perhaps, she broke her young heart? the shock would only send the girl with more clinging devotion to the feet of the great Father; but as for himself, all astray from duty and sober life, devoured with a consuming fancy, loathing the way

and the work to which he had been trained to believe that Father had called him—who thought of weeping?—or for Her, whom his alarmed imagination could not but follow, going forth remorseless and silent to fulfil her promise, and kill the man who had wronged her? Oh, the cheat of tears!—falling sweet over the young sufferers whom sorrow blessed—drying up from the horrible complex pathways where other souls, in undisclosed anguish, went farther and farther from God!

With such thoughts the mother and son hurried on upon their darkling journey. It was the middle of the night when they arrived in Lonsdale—a night starless, but piercing with cold. They were the only passengers who got out at the little station, where two or three lamps glared wildly on the night, and two pale porters made a faint bustle to forward the long convoy of carriages upon its way. One of these men looked anxiously at the widow, as if with the sudden impulse of asking a question, or communicating some news, but was called off by his superior before he could speak. Vincent unconsciously observed the look, and was surprised and even alarmed by it, without knowing why. It returned to his mind, as he gave his mother his arm to walk the remaining distance home. Why did the man put on that face of curiosity and wonder? But, to be sure, to see the mild widow arrive in this unexpected way in the middle of the icy January night, must have been surprising enough to any one who knew her, and her gentle decorous life. He tried to think no more of it, as they set out upon the windy road, where a few sparely-scattered lamps blinked wildly, and made the surrounding darkness all the darker. The station was half a mile from the town, and Mrs. Vincent’s cottage was on the other side of Lonsdale, across the river, which stole sighing and gleaming through the heart of the little place. Somehow the sudden black shine of that water as they caught it, crossing the bridge, brought a shiver and flash of wild imagination to the mind of the Nonconformist. He thought of suicides, murders, ghastly concealment, and misery; and again the face of the porter returned upon him. What if something had happened while the watchful mother had been out of the way? The wind came sighing round

the corners with an ineffectual gasp, as if it too had some warning, some message to deliver. Instinctively he drew his mother's arm closer, and hurried her on. Suggestions of horrible unthought-of evil seemed lurking everywhere in the noiseless blackness of the night.

Mrs. Vincent shivered too, but it was with cold and natural agitation. In her heart she was putting tender words together, framing tender phrases—consulting with herself how she was to look, and how to speak. Already she could see the half-awakened girl, starting up all glowing and sweet from her safe rest, unforeboding of evil; and the widow composed her face under the shadow of her veil, and sent back with an effort the unshed tears from her eyes, that Susan might not see any traces in her face, till she had "prepared her" a little, for that dreadful, inevitable blow.

The cottage was all dark, as was natural—doubly dark to-night, for there was no light in the skies, and the wind had extinguished the lamp which stood nearest, and on ordinary occasions threw a doubtful flicker on the little house. "Susan will soon hear us, she is such a light sleeper," said Mrs. Vincent. "Ring the bell, Arthur. I don't like using the knocker, to disturb the neighbours. Everybody would think it so surprising to hear a noise in the middle of the night from our house. There—wait a moment. That was a very loud ring; Susan must be sleeping very soundly if that does not wake her up."

There was a little pause; not a sound, except the tinkling of the bell, which they could hear inside as the peal gradually subsided, was in the air; breathless silence, darkness, cold, an inhuman preternatural chill and watchfulness, no welcome sound of awakening sleepers, only their own dark shadows in the darkness, listening like all the hushed surrounding world at that closed door.

"Poor dear! Oh, Arthur, it is dreadful to come and break her sleep," sighed Mrs. Vincent, whose strain of suspense and expectation heightened the effect of the cold: "when will she sleep as sound again? Give another ring, dear. How terribly dark and

quiet it is! Ring again, again, Arthur!—dear, dear me, to think of Susan in such a sound sleep!—and generally she starts at any noise. It is to give her strength to bear what is coming, poor child, poor child!"

The bell seemed to echo out into the silent road, it pealed so clearly and loudly through the shut-up house, but not another sound disturbed the air without or within. Mrs. Vincent began to grow restless and alarmed. She went out into the road, and gazed up at the closed windows; her very teeth chattered with anxiety and cold.

"It is very odd she does not wake," said the widow; "she must be rousing now, surely. Arthur, don't look as if we had bad news. Try to command your countenance, dear. Hush! don't you hear them stirring? Now, Arthur, Arthur, oh remember not to look so dreadful as you did in Carlingford! I am sure I hear her coming down-stairs. Hark! what is it? Ring again, Arthur—again!"

The words broke confused and half-articulate from her lips; a vague dread took possession of her, as of her son. For his part, he rang the bell wildly without pausing, and applied the knocker to the echoing door with a sound which seemed to reverberate back and back through the darkness. It was not the sleep of youth Vincent thought of, as, without a word to say, he thundered his summons on the cottage door. He was not himself aware what he was afraid of; but in his mind he saw the porter's alarmed and curious look, and felt the ominous silence thrilling with loud clangour of his own vain appeals through the deserted house.

At length a sound—the mother and son both rushed speechless towards the side-window, from which it came. The window creaked slowly open, and a head, which was not Susan's, looked cautiously out. "Who is there?" cried a strange voice; it's some mistake. This is Mrs. Vincent's, this is, and nobody's at home. If you don't go away I'll spring the rattle, and call Thieves, thieves—Fire! What do you mean coming rousing folks like this in the dead of night?"

"Oh, Williams, are you there? Thank God!—then all is well," said Mrs. Vincent,

clasping her hands. “It is I—you need not be afraid—I and my son: don’t disturb Miss Susan, since she has not heard us—but come down, and let us in;—don’t disturb my daughter. It is I—don’t you know my voice?”

“Good Lord!” cried the speaker at the window; then in a different tone, “I’m coming, ma’am—I’m coming.” Instinctively, without knowing why, Vincent drew his mother’s arm within his own, and held her fast. Instinctively the widow clung to him, and kept herself erect by his aid. They did not say a word—no advices now about composing his countenance. Mrs. Vincent’s face was ghastly, had there been any light to see it. She went sheer forward when the door was open, as though neither her eyes nor person were susceptible of any other motion. An inexpressible air of desolation upon the cottage parlour, where everything looked far too trim and orderly for recent domestic occupation, brought to a climax all the fanciful suggestions which had been tormenting Vincent. He called out his sister’s name in an involuntary outburst of dread and excitement, “Susan! Susan!” The words pealed into the midnight echoes—but there was no Susan to answer to the call.

“It is God that keeps her asleep to keep her happy,” said his mother, with her white lips. She dropt from his arm upon the sofa in a dreadful pause of determination, facing them with wide-open eyes—daring them to undeceive her—resolute not to hear the terrible truth, which already in her heart she knew. “Susan is asleep, asleep!” she cried, in a terrible idiocy of despair, always facing the frightened woman before her with those eyes which knew better, but would not be undeceived. The shivering midnight, the mother’s dreadful looks, the sudden waking to all this fright and wonder, were too much for the terrified guardian of the house. She fell on her knees at the widow’s feet.

“Oh, Lord! Miss Susan’s gone! I’d have kep her if I had been here. I’d have said her mamma would never send no gentleman but Mr. Arthur to fetch her away. But she’s gone. Good Lord! it’s killed my missis—I knew it would kill my missis. Oh, good

Lord! good Lord! Run for a doctor, Mr. Arthur; if the missis is gone, what shall we do?"

Vincent threw the frightened creature off with a savage carelessness of which he was quite unconscious, and raised his mother in his arms. She had fallen back in a dreary momentary fit which was not fainting—her eyes fluttering under their half-closed lids, her lips moving with sounds that did not come. The shock had struck her as such shocks strike the mortal frame when it grows old. When sound burst at last from the moving lips, it was in a babble that mocked all her efforts to speak. But she was not unconscious of the sudden misery. Her eyes wandered about, taking in everything around her, and at last fixed upon a letter lying half-open on Susan's work-table, almost the only token of disorder or agitation in the trim little room. The first sign of revival she showed was pointing at it with a doubtful but impatient gesture. Before she could make them understand what she meant, that "quick temper" of which Mrs. Vincent accused herself blazed up in the widow's eyes. She raised herself erect out of her son's arms, and seized the paper. It was Vincent's letter to his sister, written from London after he had failed in his inquiries about Mr. Fordham. In the light of this dreadful midnight the young man himself perceived how alarming and peremptory were its brief injunctions. "Don't write to Mr. Fordham again till my mother's return; probably I shall bring her home: we have something to say to you on this subject, and in the mean time be sure you do as I tell you." Mrs. Vincent gradually recovered herself as she read this; she said it over under her breath, getting back the use of her speech. There was not much explanation in it, yet it seemed to take the place, in the mother's confused faculties, of an apology for Susan. "She was frightened," said Mrs. Vincent, slowly, with strange twitches about her lips—"she was frightened." That was all her mind could take in at once. Afterwards, minute by minute, she raised herself up, and came to self-command and composure. Only as she recovered did the truth reveal itself clearly even to Vincent, who, after the first shock, had been occupied entirely by his

mother. The young man's head throbbed and tingled as if with blows. As she sat up and gazed at him with her own recovered looks, through the dim ice-cold atmosphere, lighted faintly with one candle, they both woke up to the reality of their position. The shock of the discovery was over—Susan was gone; but where, and with whom? There was still something to hope, if everything to fear.

"She is gone to her aunt Alice," said Mrs. Vincent, once more looking full in the eyes of the woman who had been left in charge of the house, and who stood shivering with cold and agitation, winding and unwinding round her a thin shawl in which she had wrapped up her arms. "She has gone to her aunt Alice—she was frightened, and thought something had happened. To-morrow we can go and bring her home."

"Oh, good Lord! No; she ain't there," cried the frightened witness, half inaudible with her chattering teeth.

"Or to Mrs. Hastings at the farm. Susan knows what friends I can trust her to. Arthur, dear, let us go to bed. It's uncomfortable, but you won't mind for one night," said the widow, with a gasp, rising up and sitting down again. She dared not trust herself to hear any explanation, yet all the time fixed with devouring eyes upon the face of the woman whom she would not suffer to speak.

"Mother, for Heaven's sake let us understand it; let her speak—let us know. Where has Susan gone? Speak out; never mind interruptions. Where is my sister?" cried Vincent, grasping the terrified woman by the arm.

"Oh Lord! If the missis wouldn't look at me like that! I ain't to blame!" cried Williams, piteously. "It was the day afore yesterday as the ladies came. I come up to help Mary with the beds. There was the old lady as had on a brown bonnet and the young miss in the blue veil——"

Vincent uttered a sudden exclamation, and looked at his mother; but she would not meet his eyes—would not acknowledge any recognition of that fatal piece of gauze.

She gave a little gasp, sitting bolt upright, holding fast by the back of a chair, but kept her eyes steadily and sternly upon the woman's face.

"We tidied the best room for the lady, and Miss Susan's little closet; and Mary had out the best sheets, for she says——"

"Mary—where's Mary?" cried Mrs. Vincent, suddenly.

"I know no more nor a babe," cried Williams, wringing her hands. "She's along with Miss Susan—wherever that may be—and the one in the blue veil."

"Go on, go on!" cried Vincent.

But his mother did not echo his cry. Her strained hand fell upon her lap with a certain relaxation and relief; her gaze grew less rigid; incomprehensible moisture came to her eyes. "Oh, Arthur, there's comfort in it!" said Mrs. Vincent, looking like herself again. "She's taken Mary, God bless her! she's known what she was doing. Now I'm more easy; Williams, you can sit down and tell us the rest."

"Go on!" cried Vincent, fiercely. "Good heavens! what good can a blundering country girl do here?—go on."

The women thought otherwise; they exchanged looks of sympathy and thankfulness; they excited the impatient young man beside them, who thought he knew the world, into the wildest exasperation by that pause of theirs. His mother even loosed her bonnet off her aching head, and ventured to lean back under the influence of that visionary consolation; while Vincent, aggravated to the intolerable pitch, sprang up, and, once more seizing Williams by the arm, shook her unawares in the violence of his anxiety. "Answer me!" cried the young man; "you tell us everything but the most important of all. Besides this girl—and Mary—who was with my sister when she went away?"

"Oh Lord! you shake the breath out of me, Mr. Arthur—you do," cried the woman. "Who? why, who should it be, to be sure, but him as had the best right after yourself to take Miss Susan to her mamma? You've crossed her on the road, poor dear," said

the adherent of the house, wringing her hands; “but she was going to her ma—that’s where she was going. Mr. Arthur’s letter gave her a turn; and then, to be sure, when Mr. Fordham came, the very first thing he thought upon was to take her to her mamma.”

Vincent groaned aloud. In his first impulse of fury he seized his hat and rushed to the door to pursue them anyhow, by any means. Then, remembering how vain was the attempt, came back again, dashed down the hat he had put on, and seized upon the railway book in his pocket, to see when he could start upon that desperate mission. Minister as he was, a muttered curse ground through his teeth—villain! coward! destroyer!—curse him! His passion was broken in the strangest way by the composed sounds of his mother’s voice.

“It was very natural,” she said, with dry tones, taking time to form the words as if they choked her; “and of course, as you say, Williams, Mr. Fordham had the best right. He will take her to his mother’s—or—or leave her in my son’s rooms in Carlingford; and as she has Mary with her—Arthur,” continued his mother, fixing a warning emphatic look upon him as he raised his astonished eyes to her face, “you know that is quite right: after you—Mr. Fordham is—the only person—that could have taken care of her in her journey. There, I am satisfied. Perhaps, Williams, you had better go to bed. My son and I have something to talk of, now I feel myself.”

“I’ll go light the fire, and get you a cup of tea—oh Lord! what Miss Susan would say if she knew you were here, and had got such a fright!” cried the old servant; “but now you’re composed, there’s nothing as’ll do you good like a cup of tea.”

“Thank you—yes; make it strong, and Mr. Arthur will have some too,” said the widow; “and take care the kettle is boiling; and then, Williams, you must not mind us, but go to bed.”

Vincent threw down his book, and stared at her with something of that impatience and half-contempt which had before moved him. “If the world were breaking up, I

suppose women could still drink tea!" he said, bitterly.

"Oh, Arthur, my dear boy," cried his mother, "don't you see we must put the best face on it now? Everybody must not know that Susan has been carried away by a—— O God, forgive me! don't let me curse him, Arthur. Let us get away from Lonsdale, dear, before we say anything. Words will do no good. Oh, my dear boy, till we know better, Mr. Fordham is Susan's betrothed husband, and he has gone to take care of her to Carlingford. Hush—don't say any more. I am going to compose myself, Arthur, for my child's sake," cried the mother, with a smile of anguish, looking into her son's face. How did she drive those tears back out of her patient eyes? how did she endure to talk to the old servant about what was to be done to-morrow—and how the sick lady was next door—till the excited and shivering attendant could be despatched up-stairs and got out of the way? Woman's weaker nature, that could mingle the common with the great; or woman's strength, that could endure all things—which was it? The young man, sitting by in a sullen, intolerable suspense, waiting till it was practicable to rush away through the creeping gloom of night after the fugitives, could no more understand these phenomena of love and woe, than he could translate the distant mysteries of the spheres.

CHAPTER XVII.

EARLY morning, but black as midnight; bitter cold, if bitterer cold could be, than that to which they entered when they first came to the deserted house; the little parlour, oh, so woefully trim and tidy, with the fire laid ready for lighting, which even the mother, anxious about her son, had not had the heart to light; the candle on the table between them lighting dimly this speechless interval; some shawls laid ready to take with them when they went back again to the earliest train; Mrs. Vincent sitting by with her bonnet on, and its veil drooping half over her pale face,

sometimes rousing up to cast hidden looks of anxiety at her son, sometimes painfully saying something with a vain effort at smiling—what o'clock was it? when did he think they could reach town?—little ineffectual attempts at the common intercourse, which seemed somehow to deepen the dreadful silence, the shivering cold, the utter desolation of the scene. Such a night!—its minutes were hours as they stole by noiseless in murderous length and tedium—and the climax of its misery was in the little start with which Mrs. Vincent now and then woke up out of her own thoughts to make that pitiful effort to talk to her son.

They were sitting thus, waiting, not even venturing to look at each other, when a sudden sound startled them. Nothing more than a footstep outside approaching softly. A footstep—surely two steps. They could hear them far off in this wonderful stillness, making steady progress near—nearer. Mrs. Vincent rose up, stretching her little figure into a preternatural hysteric semblance of height. Who was it? Two people—surely women—and what women could be abroad at such an hour? One lighter, one heavier, irregular as female steps are, coming this way—this way! Her heart fluttered in the widow's ears with a sound that all but obliterated those steps which still kept advancing. Hark, sudden silence! a pause—then, oh merciful heaven, could it be true? a tinkle at the bell—a summons at the closed door.

Mrs. Vincent had flown forth with open arms—with eyes blinded. The poor soul thought nothing less than that it was her child returned. They carried her back speechless, in a disappointment too cruel and bitter to have expression. Two women—one sober, sleepy, nervous, and full of trouble, unknown to either mother or son—the other with a certain dreadful inspiration in her dark face, and eyes that gleamed out of it as if they had concentrated into them all the blackness of the night.

"You are going back, and so am I," Mrs. Hilyard said. "I came to say a word to you before I go away. If I have been anyhow the cause, forgive me. God knows, of all things in the world the last I dreamt of was to injure this good woman or invade her

innocent house. Do you know where they have gone?—did she leave any letters?—Tell me. She shall be precious to me as my own, if I find them out."

Mrs. Vincent freed herself from her son's arms, and got up with her blanched face. "My daughter—followed me—to Carlingford," she said, in broken words, with a determination which sat almost awful on her weakness. "We have had the great misfortune—to cross each other—on the way. I am going—after her—directly. I am not afraid—of my Susan. She is all safe in my son's house."

The others exchanged alarmed looks, as they might have done had a child suddenly assumed the aspect of a leader. She, who could scarcely steady her trembling limbs to stand upright, faced their looks with a dumb denial of her own anguish. "It is—very unfortunate—but I am not anxious," she said, slowly, with a ghastly smile. Human nature could do no more. She sank down again on her seat, but still faced them—absolute in her self-restraint, rejecting pity. Not even tears should fall upon Susan's sweet name—not while her mother lived to defend it in life and death.

The Carlingford needlewoman stood opposite her, gazing with eyes that went beyond that figure, and yet dwelt upon it, at so wonderful a spectacle. Many a terrible secret of life unknown to the minister's gentle mother throbbed in her heart; but she stood in a pause of wonder before that weaker woman. The sight of her stayed the passionate current for a moment, and brought the desperate woman to a pause. Then she turned to the young man, who stood speechless by his mother's side—

"You are a priest, and yet you do not curse," she said. "Is God as careless of a curse as of a blessing? She thinks He will save the Innocents yet. She does not know that He stands by like a man, and sees them murdered, and shines and rains all the same. God! No—He never interferes. Good-bye," she added, suddenly, holding out to him the thin hand upon which, even in that dreadful moment, his eye still caught the traces of her work, the scars of the needle, and stains of the coarse colour. "If you

ever see me again, I shall be a famous woman, Mr. Vincent. You will have a little of the trail of my glory, and be able to furnish details of my latter days. This good Miss Smith here will tell you of the life it was before; but if I should make a distinguished end after all, come to see me then—never mind where. I speak madly, to be sure, but you don't understand me. There—not a word. You preach very well, but I am beyond preaching now—Good-bye."

"No," said Vincent, clutching her hand—"never, if you go with that horrible intention in your eyes; I will say no farewell to such an errand as this."

The eyes in their blank brightness paused at him for a moment before they passed to the vacant air on which they were always fixed—paused with a certain glance of troubled amusement, the lightning of former days. "You flatter me," she said, steadily, with the old habitual movement of her mouth. "It is years since anybody has taken the trouble to read any intention in my eyes. But don't you understand yet that a woman's intention is the last thing she is likely to perform in this world? We do have meanings now and then, we poor creatures, but they seldom come to much. Good-bye, good-bye!"

"You cannot look at me," said Vincent, with a conscious incoherence, reason or argument being out of the question. "What is it you see behind there? Where are you looking with those dreadful eyes?"

She brought her eyes back as he spoke, with an evident effort, to fix them upon his face. "I once remarked upon your high-breeding," said the strange woman. "A prince could not have shown finer manners than you did in Carlingford, Mr. Vincent. Don't disappoint me now. If I see ghosts behind you, what then? Most people that have lived long enough, come to see ghosts before they die. But this is not exactly the time for conversation, however interesting it may be. If you and I ever see each other again, things will have happened before then; you too, perhaps, may have found the ghosts out. I appoint you to come to see me after you have come

to life again, in the next world. Good-night. I don't forget that you gave me your blessing when we parted last."

She was turning away when Mrs. Vincent rose, steadying herself by the chair, and put a timid hand upon the stranger's arm. "I don't know who you are," said the widow; "it is all a strange jumble; but I am an older woman than you, and a—a minister's wife. You have something on your mind. My son is frightened you will do something—I cannot tell what. You are much cleverer than I am; but I am, as I say, an older woman, and a—a minister's wife. I am not—afraid of anything. Yes! I know God does not always save the Innocents, as you say—but He knows why, though we don't. Will you go with me? If you have gone astray when you were young," said the mild woman, raising up her little figure with an ineffable simplicity, "I will never ask any questions, and it will not matter—for everybody I care for knows me. The dreadful things you think of will not happen if we go together. I was a minister's wife thirty years. I know human nature and God's goodness. Come with me."

"Mother, mother! what are you saying?" cried Vincent, who had all the time been making vain attempts to interrupt this extraordinary speech. Mrs. Hilyard put him away with a quick gesture. She took hold of the widow's hand with that firm, supporting, compelling pressure under which, the day before, Mrs. Vincent had yielded up all her secrets. She turned her eyes out of vacancy to the little pale woman who offered her this protection. A sudden mist surprised those gleaming eyes—a sudden thrill ran through the thin, slight, iron figure, upon which fatigue and excitement seemed to make no impression. The rock was stricken at last.

"No—no," she sighed, with a voice that trembled. "No—no! the lamb and the lion do not go together yet in this poor world. No—no—no. I wonder what tears have to do in my eyes; ah, God in the skies! if you ever do miracles, do one for this woman, and save her child! Praying and crying are strange fancies for me—I must go away,

but first," she said, still holding Mrs. Vincent fast—"a woman is but a woman after all—if it is more honourable to be a wicked man's wife than to have gone astray, as you call it, then there is no one in the world who can breathe suspicion upon me. Ask this other good woman here, who knows all about me, but fears me, like you. Fears me! What do you suppose there can be to fear, Mr. Vincent, you who are a scholar, and know better than these soft women," said Mrs. Hilyard, suddenly dropping the widow's hand, and turning round upon the young minister, with an instant throwing off of all emotion, which had the strangest horrifying effect upon the little agitated company, "in a woman who was born to the name of Rachel Russell, the model English wife? Will the world ever believe harm, do you imagine, of such a name? I will take refuge in my ancestress. But we go different ways, and have different ends to accomplish," she continued, with a sudden returning gleam of the subdued horror—"Good-night—good-night!"

"Oh, stop her, Arthur—stop her!—Susan will be at Carlingford when we get there; Susan will go nowhere else but to her mother," cried Mrs. Vincent, as the door closed on the nocturnal visitors—"I am as sure—as sure——! Oh, my dear, do you think I can have any doubt of my own child? As for Susan going astray—or being carried off—or falling into wickedness—Arthur!" said his mother, putting back her veil from her pale face, "now I have got over this dreadful night, I know better—nobody must breathe such a thing to me. Tell her so, dear—tell her so!—call her back—they will be at Carlingford when we get there!"

Vincent drew his mother's arm through his own, and led her out into the darkness, which was morning and no longer night. "A few hours longer and we shall see," he said, with a hard-drawn breath. Into that darkness Mrs. Hilyard and her companion had disappeared. There was another line of railway within a little distance of Lonsdale, but Vincent was at pains not to see his fellow-travellers as he placed his mother once more in a carriage, and once more caught the eye of the man whose curious look had startled him. When the grey morning began to dawn, it revealed

two ashen faces, equally speechless and absorbed with thoughts which neither dared communicate to the other. They did not even look at each other, as the merciful noise and motion wrapped them in that little separate sphere of being. One possibility and no more kept a certain coherence in both their thoughts, otherwise lost in wild chaos—horrible suspense—an uncertainty worse than death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was the very height of day when the travellers arrived in Carlingford. It would be vain to attempt to describe their transit through London in the bustling sunshine of the winter morning after the vigil of that night, and in the frightful suspense and excitement of their minds. Vincent remembered, for years after, certain cheerful street-corners, round which they turned on their way from one station to another, with shudders of recollection, and an intense consciousness of all the life circulating about them, even to the attitudes of the boys that swept the crossings, and their contrast with each other. His mother made dismal attempts now and then to say something; that he was looking pale; that after all he could yet preach, and begin his course on the Miracles; that it would be such a comfort to rest when they got home; but at last became inaudible, though he knew by her bending across to him, and the motion of those parched lips with which she still tried to smile, that the widow still continued to make those pathetic little speeches without knowing that she had become speechless in the rising tide of her agony. But at last they reached Carlingford, where everything was at its brightest, all the occupations of life afloat in the streets, and sunshine, lavish though ineffectual, brightening the whole aspect of the town. When they emerged from the railway, Mrs. Vincent took her son’s arm, and for the last time made some remark with a ghastly smile—but no sound came from her lips. They walked up the sunshiny street together with such silent speed as would have been frightful to look at had anybody known what was in their hearts.

Mrs. Pigeon, who was coming along the other side, crossed over on purpose to accost the minister and be introduced to his mother, but was driven frantic by the total blank unconsciousness with which the two swept past her; “taking no more notice than if he had never set eyes on me in his born days!” as she described it afterwards. The door of the house where Vincent lived was opened to them briskly by the little maid in holiday attire; everything wore the most sickening, oppressive brightness within in fresh Saturday cleanliness. Vincent half carried his mother up the steps, and held fast in his own to support her the hand which he had drawn tightly through his arm. “Is there any one here? Has anybody come for me since I left?” he asked, with the sound of his own words ringing shrilly into his ears. “Please, sir, Mr. Tozer’s been,” said the girl, alertly, with smiling confidence. She could not comprehend the groan with which the young man startled all the clear and sunshiny atmosphere, nor the sudden rustle of the little figure beside him, which moved somehow, swaying with the words as if they were a wind. “Mother, you are going to faint!” cried Vincent—and the little maid flew in terror to call her mistress, and bring a glass of water. But when she came back, the mother and son were no longer in the bright hall with its newly cleaned wainscot and whitened floor. When she followed them up-stairs with the water, it was the minister who had dropped into the easy-chair with his face hidden on the table, and his mother was standing beside him. Mrs. Vincent looked up when the girl came in and said, “Thank you—that will do,” looking in her face, and not at what she carried. She was of a dreadful paleness, and looked with eyes that were terrible to that wondering observer upon the little attendant. “Perhaps there have been some letters or messages,” said Mrs. Vincent. “We—we expected somebody to come; think! a young lady came here?—and when she found we were gone——”

“Only Miss Phœbe!” said the girl, in amazement—“to say as her Ma——”

“Only Miss Phœbe!” repeated the widow, as if she did not comprehend the words. Then she turned to her son, and smoothed down the ruffled locks on his head; then

held out her hand again to arrest the girl as she was going away. “Has your mistress got anything in the house,” she asked—“any soup or cold meat, or anything? Would you bring it up, please, directly?—soup would perhaps be best—or a nice chop. Ask what she has got, and bring it up on a tray. You need not lay the cloth—only a tray with a napkin. Yes, I see you know what I mean.”

“Mother!” cried Vincent, raising his head in utter fright as the maid left the room. He thought in the shock his mother’s gentle wits had gone.

“You have eaten nothing, dear, since we left,” she said, with a heartbreaking smile. “I am not going crazy, Arthur. O no, no, my dear boy! I will not go crazy; but you must eat something, and not be killed too. Susan is not here,” said Mrs. Vincent, with a ghastly, wistful look round the room; “but we are not going to distrust her at the very first moment, far less her Maker, Arthur. Oh, my dear, I must not speak, or something will happen to me; and nothing must happen to you or me till we have found your sister. You must eat when it comes, and then you must go away. Perhaps,” said Mrs. Vincent, sitting down and looking her son direct in the eyes, as if to read any suggestion that could arise there, “she has lost her way:—perhaps she missed one of these dreadful trains—perhaps she got on the wrong railway, Arthur. Oh, my dear boy, you must take something to eat, and then you must go and bring Susan home. She has nobody to take care of her but you.”

Vincent returned his mother’s look with a wild inquiring gaze, but with his lips he said “Yes,” not daring to put in words the terrible thoughts in his heart. The two said nothing to each other of the horror that possessed them both, or of the dreadful haze of uncertainty in which that Susan whom her brother was to go and bring home as if from an innocent visit, was now enveloped. Their eyes spoke differently as they looked into each other, and silently withdrew again, each from each, not daring to communicate further. Just then a slight noise came below, to the door. Mrs. Vincent stood up directly in an agony of listening, trembling all over. To be sure it was

nothing. When nothing came of it, the poor mother sank back again with a piteous patience, which it was heartbreaking to look at; and Vincent returned from the window which he had thrown open in time to see Phœbe Tozer disappear from the door. They avoided each other's eyes now; one or two heavy sobs broke forth from Mrs. Vincent's breast, and her son walked with a dreadful funereal step from one end of the room to the other. Not even the consolation of consulting together what was to be done, or what might have happened, was left them. They dared not put their position into words—dared not so much as inquire in their thoughts where Susan was, or what had befallen her. She was to be brought home; but whence or from what abyss neither ventured to say.

Upon their misery the little maid entered again with her tray, and the hastily prepared refreshment which Mrs. Vincent had ordered for her son. The girl's eyes were round and staring with wonder and curiosity; but she was aware, with female instinct, that the minister's mother, awful little figure, with lynx eyes, which nothing escaped, was watching her, and her observations were nervous accordingly. "Please, sir, it's a chop," said the girl—"please, sir, missus sent to know was the other gentleman a-coming?—and please, if he is, there ain't nowhere as missus knows of, as he can sleep—with the lady, and you, and all; and the other lodgers as well"—said the handmaiden with a sigh, as she set down her tray and made a desperate endeavour to turn her back upon Mrs. Vincent, and to read some interpretation of all this in the unguarded countenance of the minister; "and please, am I to bring up the Wooster sauce, and would the lady like some tea or anythink? And missus would be particklar obliged if you would say. Miss Phœbe's been to ask the gentleman to tea, but where he's to sleep, missus says——"

"Yes, yes, to be sure," said Vincent, impatiently; "he can have my room, tell your mistress—that will do—we don't want anything more."

"Mr. Vincent is going to leave town again this afternoon," said his mother. "Tell

your mistress that I shall be glad to have a little conversation with her after my son goes away—and you had better bring the sauce—but it would have saved you trouble and been more sensible, if you had put it on the tray in the first place. Oh, Arthur," cried his mother again, when she had seen the little maid fairly out—"do be a little prudent, my dear! When a minister lodges with one of his flock, he must think of appearances—and if it were only for my dear child's sake, Arthur! Susan must not be spoken of through our anxiety; oh, my child!—Where can she be?—Where can she be?"

"Mother dear, you must keep up, or everything is lost!" cried Vincent, for the first time moved to the depths of his heart by that outcry of despair. He came to her and held her trembling hands, and laid his face upon them without any kiss or caress, that close clinging touch of itself expressing best the fellowship of their wretchedness. But Mrs. Vincent put her son away from her, when the door again bounced open. "My dear boy, here is the sauce, and you must eat your chop," she said, getting up and drawing forward a chair for him; her hands, which trembled so, grew steady as she put everything in order, cut the bread, and set his plate before him. "Oh, eat something, Arthur dear—you must, or you cannot go through it," said the widow, with her piteous smile. Then she sat down at the table by him in her defensive armour. The watchful eyes of "the flock" were all around spying upon the dreadful calamity which had overwhelmed them; at any moment the college companion whom Vincent had sent for might come in upon them in all the gaiety of his holiday. What they said had to be said with this consciousness—and the mother, in the depth of her suspense and terror, sat like a queen inspected on all sides, and with possible traitors round her, but resolute and self-commanding in her extremity, determined at least to be true to herself.

"Arthur, can you think where to go?" she said, after a little interval, almost under her breath.

“To London first,” said Vincent—“to inquire after—him, curse him! don’t say anything, mother—I am only a man after all. Then, according to the information I get.—God help us!—if I don’t get back before another Sunday——”

Mrs. Vincent gave a convulsive start, which shook the table against which she was leaning, and fell to shivering as if in a fit of ague. “Oh, Arthur, Arthur, what are you saying? Another Sunday!” she exclaimed, with a cry of despair. To live another day seemed impossible in that horror. But self-restraint was natural to the woman who had been, as she said, a minister’s wife for thirty years. She clasped her hands tight, and took up her burden again. “I will see Mr. Beecher when he comes, dear, and—and speak to him,” she said, with a sigh, “and I will see the Tozers and—and your people, Arthur; and if it should be God’s will to keep us so long in suspense, if—if—I can keep alive, dear, I may be of some use. Oh, Arthur, Arthur, the Lord have pity upon us! if my darling comes back, will she come here or will she go home? Don’t you think she will come here? If I go back to Lonsdale, I will not be able to rest for thinking she is at Carlingford; and if I stay—oh, Arthur, where do you think Susan will go to? She might be afraid to see you, and think you would be angry, but she never could distrust her poor mother, who was the first to put her in danger; and to think of my dear child going either there or here, and not finding me, Arthur! My dear, you are not eating anything. You can never go through it all without some support. For my sake, try to eat a little, my own boy; and oh, Arthur, what must I do?”

“These Tozers and people will worry you to death if you stay here,” said the minister, with an impatient sigh, as he thought of his own difficulties; “but I must not lose time by going back with you to Lonsdale, and you must not travel by yourself, and this is more in the way, whatever happens. Send word to Lonsdale that you are to have a message by telegraph immediately—without a moment’s loss of time—if she comes back.”

"You might say when, Arthur, not if," said his mother, with a little flash of tender resentment—then she gave way for the moment, and leaned her head against his arm and held him fast with that pressure and close clasp which spoke more than any words. When she raised her pale face again, it was to entreat him once more to eat. "Try to take something, if it were only a mouthful, for Susan's sake," pleaded the widow. Her son made a dismal attempt as she told him. Happy are the houses that have not seen such dreadful pretences of meals where tears were the only possible food! When she saw him fairly engaged in this desperate effort to take "some support," the poor mother went away and wrote a crafty female letter, which she brought to him to read. He would have smiled at it had the occasion been less tragic. It was addressed to the minister of "the connection" at Lonsdale, and set forth how she was detained at Carlingford by some family affairs—how Susan was visiting friends and travelling, and her mother was not sure where to address her—and how it would be the greatest favour if he would see Williams at the cottage, and have a message despatched to Mrs. Vincent the moment her daughter returned. "Do you not think it would be better to confide in him a little, and tell him what anxiety we are in?" said Vincent, when he read this letter. His mother took it out of his hands with a little cry. "Oh, Arthur, though you are her brother, you are only a man, and don't understand," cried Mrs. Vincent. "Nobody must have anything to say about my child. If she comes to-night, she will come here," continued the poor mother, pausing instinctively once more to listen; "she might have been detained somewhere; she may come at any moment—at any moment, Arthur dear! Though these telegraphs frighten me, and look as if they must bring bad news, I will send you word directly when my darling girl comes; but oh, my dear, though it is dreadful to send you away, and to think of your travelling to-morrow and breaking the Sunday, and very likely your people hearing it—oh, Arthur, God knows better, and will not blame you: and if you will not take anything more to eat, you should not lose time, my dearest boy! Don't look at me, Arthur—don't say good-bye. Perhaps

you may meet her before you leave—perhaps you may not need to go away. Oh, Arthur dear, don't lose any more time!"

"It is scarcely time for the train yet," said the minister, getting up slowly; "the world does not care, though our hearts are breaking; it keeps its own time. Mother, good-bye. God knows what may have happened before I see you again."

"Oh, Arthur, say nothing—say nothing! What can happen but my child to come home?" cried his mother, as he clasped her hands and drew her closer to him. She leaned against her son's breast, which heaved convulsively, for one moment, and no more. She did not look at him as he went slowly out of the room, leaving her to the unspeakable silence and solitude in which every kind of terror started up and crept about. But before Vincent had left the house his mother's anxiety and hope were once more excited to passion. Some one knocked and entered; there was a sound of voices and steps on the stair audibly approaching this room in which she sat with her fears. But it was not Susan; it was a young man of Arthur's own age, with his travelling-bag in his hand, and his sermons in his pocket. He had no suspicion that the sight of him brought the chill of despair to her heart as he went up to shake hands with his friend's mother. "Vincent would not come back to introduce me," said Mr. Beecher, "but he said I should find you here. I have known him many years, and it is a great pleasure to make your acquaintance. Sometimes he used to show me your letters years ago. Is Miss Vincent with you? It is pleasant to get out of town for a little, even though one has to preach; and they will all be interested in 'Omerton to hear how Vincent is getting on. Made quite a commotion in the world, they say, with these lectures of his. I always knew he would make an 'it if he had fair-play."

"I am very glad to see you," said Mrs. Vincent. "I have just come up from Lonsdale, and everything is in a confusion. When people grow old," said the poor widow, busying herself in collecting the broken pieces of bread which Arthur had crumbled

down by way of pretending to eat, “they feel fatigue and being put out of their way more than they ought. What can I get for you? will you have a glass of wine, and dinner as soon as it can be ready? My son had to go away.”

“Preaching somewhere?” asked the lively Mr. Beecher.

“N-no; he has some—private business to attend to,” said Mrs. Vincent, with a silent groan in her heart.

“Ah!—going to be married, I suppose?” said the man from ’Omerton; “that’s the natural consequence after a man gets a charge. Miss Vincent is not with you, I think you said? I’ll take a glass of wine, thank you; and I hear one of the flock has sent over to ask me to tea—Mr. Tozer, a leading man, I believe, among our people here,” added Mr. Beecher, with a little complacence. “It’s very pleasant when a congregation is hospitable and friendly. When a pastor’s popular, you see, it always reacts upon his brethren. May I ask if you are going to Mr. Tozer’s to tea to-night?”

“Oh, no,” faltered poor Mrs. Vincent, whom prudence kept from adding, “heaven forbid!” “They—did not know I was here,” she continued, faintly, turning away to ring the bell. Mr. Beecher, who flattered himself on his penetration, nodded slightly when her back was turned. “Jealous that they’ve asked me,” said the preacher, with a lively thrill of human satisfaction. How was he to know the blank of misery, the wretched feverish activity of thought, that possessed that mild little woman, as she gave her orders about the removal of the tray, and the dinner which already was being prepared for the stranger? But the lively young man from ’Omerton perceived that there was something wrong. Vincent’s black looks when he met him at the door, and the exceeding promptitude of that invitation to tea, were two and two which he could put together. He concluded directly that the pastor, though he had made “an ’it,” was not found to suit the connection in Carlingford; and that possibly another candidate for Salem might be required ere long. “I would not injure Vincent for the world,” he said to himself, “but if he does not ’it it, I might.” The thought was not

unpleasant. Accordingly, while Vincent's mother kept her place there in the anguish of her heart, thinking that perhaps, even in this dreadful extremity, she might be able to do something for Arthur with his people, and conciliate the authorities, her guest was thinking, if Vincent were to leave Carlingford, what a pleasant distance from town it was, and how very encouraging of the Tozers to ask him to tea. It might come to something more than preaching for a friend; and if Vincent did not "'it it," and a change were desirable, nobody could tell what might happen. All this smiling fabric the stranger built upon the discomposed looks of the Vincents and Phœbe's invitation to tea.

To sit by him and keep up a little attempt at conversation—to superintend his dinner, and tell him what she knew of Salem and her son's lectures, and his success generally, as became the minister's mother—was scarcely so hard as to be left afterwards, when he went out to Tozer's, all alone once more with the silence, with the sounds outside, with the steps that seem to come to the door, and the carriages that paused in the street, all sending dreadful thrills of hope through poor Mrs. Vincent's worn-out heart. Happily, her faculties were engaged by those frequent and oft-repeated tremors. In the fever of her anxiety, always startled with an expectation that at last this was Susan, she did not enter into the darker question where Susan might really be, and what had befallen the unhappy girl. Half an hour after Mr. Beecher left her, Phœbe Tozer came in, affectionate and anxious, driving the wretched mother almost wild by the sound of her step and the apparition of her young womanhood, to beg and pray that Mrs. Vincent would join them at their "friendly tea." "And so this is Mr. Vincent's room," said Phœbe, with a bashful air; "it feels so strange to be here! and you must be so dull when he is gone. Oh, do come, and let us try to amuse you a little; though I am sure none of us could ever be such good company as the minister—oh, not half, nor quarter!" cried Phœbe. Even in the midst of her misery, the mother was woman enough to think that Phœbe showed too much interest in the minister. She declined the invitation with gentle

distinctness. She did not return the enthusiastic kiss which was bestowed upon her. “I am very tired, thank you,” said Mrs. Vincent. “On Monday, if all is well, I will call to see your mamma. I hope you will not catch cold coming out in this thin dress. I am sure it was very kind of you; but I am very tired to-night. On—Monday.” Alas, Monday! could this horror last so long, and she not die? or would all be well by that time, and Susan in her longing arms? The light went out of her eyes, and the breath from her heart, as that dreadful question stared her in the face. She scarcely saw Phœbe’s withdrawal; she lay back in her chair in a kind of dreadful trance, till those stumbling steps and passing carriages began again, and roused her back into agonised life and bootless hope.

CHAPTER XIX.

VINCENT had shaken hands with his friend at the door, and hurried past, saying something about losing the train, in order to escape conversation; but, with the vivid perceptions of excitement, he heard the delivery of Phœbe’s message, and saw the complacence with which the Homerton man regarded the invitation which had anticipated his arrival. The young Nonconformist had enough to think of as he took his way once more to the railway, and tea at Mrs. Tozer’s was anything but attractive to his own fancy; yet in the midst of his wretchedness he could not overcome the personal sense of annoyance which this trifling incident produced. It came like a prick of irritating pain, to aggravate the dull horror which throbbed through him. He despised himself for being able to think of it at all, but at the same time it came back to him, darting unawares again and again into his thoughts. Little as he cared for the entertainments and attention of his flock, he was conscious of a certain exasperation in discovering their eagerness to entertain another. He was disgusted with Phœbe for bringing the message, and disgusted with Beecher for looking pleased to receive it. “Probably he thinks he will supersede me,” Vincent

thought, in sudden gusts of disdain now and then, with a sardonic smile on his lip, waking up afterwards with a thrill of deeper self-disgust, to think that anything so insignificant had power to move him. When he plunged off from Carlingford at last, in the early falling darkness of the winter afternoon, and looked back upon the few lights struggling red through the evening mists, it was with a sense of belonging to the place where he had left an interloper who might take his post over his head, which, perhaps, no other possible stimulant could have given him. He thought with a certain pang of Salem, and that pulpit which was his own, but in which another man should stand to-morrow, with a quickened thrill of something that was almost jealousy; he wondered what might be the sentiments of the connection about his deputy—perhaps Brown and Pigeon would prefer that florid voice to his own—perhaps Phœbe might find the substitute more practicable than the incumbent. Nothing before had ever made Salem so interesting to the young pastor as Beecher's complacence over that invitation to tea.

But he had much more serious matters to consider in his rapid journey. Vincent was but a man, though he was Susan's brother. He did not share those desperate hopes which afforded a kind of forlorn comfort and agony of expectation to his mother's heart. No thought that Susan would come home either to Carlingford or Lonsdale was in his mind. In what way soever the accursed villain, whom his face blanched with deadly rage to think of, had managed to get her in his power, Susan's sweet life was lost, her brother knew. He gave her up with unspeakable anguish and pity; but he did give her up, and hoped for no deliverance. Shame had taken possession of that image which fancy kept presenting in double tenderness and brightness to him as his heart burned in the darkness. He might find her indeed; he might snatch her out of these polluting arms, and bring home the sullied lily to her mother, but never henceforward could hope or honour blossom about his sister's name. He made up his mind to this in grim misery, with his teeth clenched, and a desperation of rage and horror in his heart. But in proportion to his conviction that Susan would not

return, was his eagerness to find her, and snatch her away. To think of her in horror and despair was easier than to think of her deluded and happy, as might be—as most probably was the case. This latter possibility made Vincent frantic. He could scarcely endure the slowness of the motion which was the highest pitch of speed that skill and steam had yet made possible. No express train could travel so fast as the thoughts which went before him, dismal pioneers penetrating the most dread abysses. To think of Susan happy in her horrible downfall and ruin was more than flesh or blood could bear.

When Vincent reached town, he took his way without a moment's hesitation to the street in Piccadilly where he had once sought Mr. Fordham. He approached the place now with no precautions; he had his cab driven up to the door, and boldly entered as soon as it was opened. The house was dark and silent but for the light in the narrow hall; nobody there at that dead hour, while it was still too early for dinner. And it was not the vigilant owner of the place, but a drowsy helper in a striped jacket who presented himself at the door, and replied to Vincent's inquiry for Colonel Mildmay, that the Colonel was not at home—never was at home at that hour—but was not unwilling to inquire, if the gentleman would wait. Vincent put up the collar of his coat about his ears, and stood back with eager attention, intently alive to everything. Evidently the ruler of the house was absent as well as the Colonel. The man lounged to the staircase and shouted down, leaning upon the bannisters. No aside or concealment was possible in this perfectly easy method of communication. With an anxiety strongly at variance with the colloquy thus going on, and an intensification of all his faculties which only the height of excitement could give, Vincent stood back and listened. He heard every step that passed outside; the pawing of the horse in the cab that waited for him, the chance voices of the passengers, all chimed in, without interrupting the conversation between the man who admitted him and his fellow-servant down-stairs.

"Jim, is the Colonel at home?—he ain't, to be sure, but we wants to know particklar.

Here," in a slightly lowered voice, "his mother's been took bad, and the parson's sent for him. When is he agoing to be in to dinner? Ask Cookie; she'll be sure to know."

"The Colonel ain't coming in to dinner, stoopid," answered the unseen interlocutor; "he ain't been here all day. Out o' town. Couldn't you say so, instead of jabbering? Out o' town. It's allays safe to say, and this time it's true."

"What's he adoing of, in case the gen'leman should want to know?" said the fellow at the head of the stair.

"After mischief," was the brief and emphatic answer. "You come along down to your work, and let the Colonel alone."

"Any mischief in particklar?" continued the man, tossing a dirty napkin in his hand, and standing in careless contempt, with his back to the minister. "It's a pleasant way the Colonel's got, that is: any more particklars, Jim?—the gen'leman 'll stand something if you'll let him know."

"Hold your noise, stoopid—it ain't no concern o' yours—my master's my master, and I ain't agoing to tell his secrets," said the voice below. Vincent had made a step forward, divided between his impulse to kick the impertinent fellow who had admitted him down-stairs, and the equally strong impulse which prompted him to offer any bribe to the witness who knew his master's secrets; but he was suddenly arrested in both by a step on the street outside, and the grating of a latch-key in the door. A long light step, firm and steady, with a certain sentiment of rapid silent progress in it. Vincent could not tell what strange fascination it was that made him turn round to watch this new-comer. The stranger's approach thrilled him vaguely, he could not tell how. Then the door opened, and a man appeared like the footstep—a very tall slight figure, stooping forward a little; a pale oval face, too long to be handsome, adorned with a long brown beard; thoughtful eyes, with a distant gleam in them, now and then flashing into sudden penetrating glances—a

loose dress too light for the season, which somehow carried out all the peculiarities of the long light step, the thin sinewy form, the thoughtful softness and keenness of the eye. Even in the height of his own suspense and excitement, Vincent paused to ask himself who this could be. He came in with one sudden glance at the stranger in the hall, passed him, and calling to the man, who became on the moment respectful and attentive, asked if there were any letters. "What name, sir?—beg your pardon—my place ain't up-stairs," said the fellow. What was the name? Vincent rushed forward when he heard it, and seized the new-comer by the shoulder with the fierceness of a tiger. "Fordham!" cried the young man, with boiling rage and hatred. Next moment he had let go his grasp, and was gazing bewildered upon the calm stranger, who looked at him with merely a thoughtful inquiry in his eyes. "Fordham—at your service—do you want anything with me?" he asked, meeting with undiminished calm the young man's excited looks. This composure put a sudden curb on Vincent's passion.

"My name is Vincent," he said, restraining himself with an effort; "do you know now what I want with you? No? Am I to believe your looks or your name? If you are the man," cried the young Nonconformist, with a groan out of his distracted heart, "whom Lady Western could trust with life, to death—or if you are a fiend incarnate, making misery and ruin, you shall not escape me till I know the truth. Where is Susan? Here is where her innocent letters came—they were addressed to your name. Where is she now? Answer me! For you, as well as the rest of us, it is life or death."

"You are raving," said the stranger, keeping his awakened eyes fixed upon Vincent; "but this is easily settled. I returned from the East only yesterday. I don't know you. What was that you said about Lady—Lady—what lady? Come in: and my name?—my name has been unheard in this country, so far as I know, for ten years. Lady——?—come in and explain what you mean."

The two stood together confronting each other in the little parlour of the house,

where the striped jacket quickly and humbly lighted the gas. Vincent's face, haggard with misery and want of rest, looked wild in that sudden light. The stranger stood opposite him, leaning forward with a strange eagerness and inquiry. He did not care for Vincent's anxiety, who was a stranger to him; he cared only to hear again that name—Lady——? He had heard it already, or he would have been less curious; he wanted to understand this wonderful message wafted to him out of his old life. What did it matter to Herbert Fordham, used to the danger of the deserts and mountains, whether it was a maniac who brought this chance seed of a new existence to his wondering heart?

"A man called Fordham has gone into my mother's house," said Vincent, fixing his eyes upon those keen but visionary orbs which were fixed on him—"and won the love of my sister. She wrote to him here—to this house; yesterday he carried her away, to her shame and destruction. Answer me," cried the young man, making another fierce step forward, growing hoarse with passion, and clenching his hands in involuntary rage—"was it you?"

"There are other men called Fordham in existence besides me," cried the stranger, with a little irritation; then seizing his loose coat by its pockets, he shook out, with a sudden impatient motion, a cloud of letters from these receptacles. "Because you seem in great excitement and distress, and yet are not, as far as I can judge," said Mr. Fordham, with another glance at Vincent, "mad, I will take pains to satisfy you. Look at my letters; their dates and post-marks will convince you that what you say is simply impossible, for that I was not here."

Vincent clutched and took them up with a certain blind eagerness, not knowing what he did. He did not look at them to satisfy himself that what Fordham said was true. A wild, half-conscious idea that there must be something in them about Susan possessed him; he saw neither dates nor post-mark, though he held them up to the light, as if they were proofs of something. "No," he said at last, "it was not you—it

was that fiend Mildmay, Rachel Russell's husband. Where is he? he has taken your name, and made you responsible for his devilish deeds. Help me, if you are a Christian! My sister is in his hands, curse him! Help me, for the sake of your name, to find them out. I am a stranger, and they will give me no information; but they will tell you. For God's sake, ask and let me go after them. If ever you were beholden to the help of Christian men, help me! for it is life and death!"

"Mildmay! Rachel Russell's husband? under my name?" said Mr. Fordham, slowly. "I have been beholden to Christian men, and that for very life. You make a strong appeal: who are you that are so desperate? and what was that you said?"

"I am Susan Vincent's brother," said the young Nonconformist; "that is enough. This devil has taken your name; help me, for heaven's sake, to find him out!"

"Mildmay?—devil? yes, he is a devil! you are right enough: I owe him no love," said Fordham; then he paused and turned away, as if in momentary perplexity. "To help that villain to his reward would be a man's duty; but," said the stranger, with a heavy sigh, upon which his words came involuntarily, spoken to himself, breathing out of his heart—"he is her brother, devil though he is!"

"Yes!" cried Vincent, with passion, "he is her brother." When he had said the words, the young man groaned aloud. Partly he forgot that this man, who looked upon him with so much curiosity, was the man who had brought tears and trembling to Her; partly he remembered it, and forgot his jealousy for the moment in a bitter sense of fellow-feeling. In his heart he could see her, waving her hand to him out of her passing carriage, with that smile for which he would have risked his life. Oh, hideous fate! it was her brother whom he was bound to pursue to the end of the world. He buried his face in his hands, in a momentary madness of anguish and passion. Susan floated away like a mist from that burning personal horizon. The love and the despair were too much for Vincent. The hope that had always been impossible was frantic now. When he recovered himself, the stranger whom he had

thus unawares taken into his confidence was regarding him haughtily from the other side of the table, with a fiery light in his thoughtful eyes. Suspicion, jealousy, resentment, had begun to sparkle in those orbs, which in repose looked so far away and lay so calm. Mr. Fordham measured the haggard and worn-out young man with a look of rising dislike and animosity. He was at least ten years older than the young Nonconformist, who stood there in his wretchedness and exhaustion entirely at disadvantage, looking, in his half-clerical dress, which he had not changed for four-and-twenty hours, as different as can be conceived from the scrupulously dressed gentleman in his easy morning habiliments, which would not have been out of place in the rudest scene, yet spoke of personal nicety and high-breeding in every easy fold. Vincent himself felt the contrast with an instant flush of answering jealousy and passion. For a moment the two glanced at each other, conscious rivals, though not a word of explanation had been spoken. It was Mr. Fordham who spoke first, and in a somewhat hasty and imperious tone.

"You spoke of a lady—Lady Western, I think. As it was you yourself who sought this interview, I may be pardoned if I stumble on a painful subject," he said, with some bitterness. "I presume you know that lady by your tone—was it she who sent you to me? No? Then I confess your appeal to a total stranger seems to me singular, to say the least of it. Where is your proof that Colonel Mildmay has used my name?"

"Proof is unnecessary," said Vincent, firing with kindred resentment; "I have told you the fact, but I do not press my appeal, though it was made to your honour. Pardon me for intruding on you so long. I have now no time to lose."

He turned away, stung in his hasty youthfulness by the appearance of contempt. He would condescend to ask no farther. When he was once more outside the parlour, he held up the half-sovereign, which he had kept ready in his hand, to the slovenly fellow in the striped jacket. "Twice as much if you will tell where Colonel Mildmay is gone," he said, hurriedly. The man winked and nodded and pointed outside, but

before Vincent could leave the room a hasty summons came from the parlour which he had just left. Then Mr. Fordham appeared at the door.

“If you will wait I will make what inquiries I can,” said the stranger, with distant courtesy and seriousness. “Excuse me—I was taken by surprise: but if you have suffered injury under my name, it is my business to vindicate myself. Come in. If you will take my advice, you will rest and refresh yourself before you pursue a man with all his wits about him. Wait for me here and I will bring you what information I can. You don’t suppose I mean to play you false?” he added, with prompt irritation, seeing that Vincent hesitated and did not at once return to the room. It was no relenting of heart that moved him to make this offer. It was with no softening of feeling that the young Nonconformist went back again and accepted it. They met like enemies, each on his honour. Mr. Fordham hastened out to acquit himself of that obligation. Vincent threw himself into a chair, and waited for the result.

It was the first moment of rest and quiet he had known since the morning of the previous day, when he and his mother, alarmed but comparatively calm, had gone to see Mrs. Hilyard, who was now, like himself, wandering, with superior knowledge and more desperate passion, on the same track. To sit in this house in the suspicious silence, hearing the distant thrill of voices which might guide or foil him in his search; to think who it was whom he had engaged to help him in his terrible mission; to go over again in distracted gleams and snatches the brief little circle of time which had brought all this about, the group of figures into which his life had been absorbed,—rapt the young man into a maze of excited musing, which his exhausted frame at once dulled and intensified. They seemed to stand round him, with their faces so new, yet so familiar—that needle-woman with her emphatic mouth—Mildmay—Lady Western—last of all, this man, who was not Susan’s lover—not Susan’s destroyer—but a man to be trusted “with life—to death!” Vincent put up his hands to put away from him that wonderful circle of strangers who shut out everything else in the world—even his own life—from his eyes. What

were they to him? he asked, with an unspeakable bitterness in his heart. Heaven help him! they were the real creatures for whom life and the world were made—he and his poor Susan the shadows to be absorbed into, and under them; and then, with a wild, bitter, hopeless rivalry, the mind of the poor Dissenting minister came round once more to the immediate contact in which he stood—to Fordham, in whose name his sister's life had been shipwrecked, and by whom, as he divined with cruel foresight, his own hopeless love and dreams were to be made an end of. Well! what better could they come to? but it was hard to think of him, with his patrician looks, his negligent grace, his conscious superiority, and to submit to accept assistance from him even in his sorest need. These thoughts were in his mind when Mr. Fordham hastily re-entered the room. A thrill of excitement now was in the long, lightly-falling step, which already Vincent, with the keen ear of rivalry almost as quick as that of love, could recognise as it approached. The stranger was disturbed out of his composure. He shut the door and came up to the young man, who rose to meet him, with a certain excited repugnance and attraction much like Vincent's own feelings.

"You are quite right," he said, hastily; "I find letters have been coming here for some months, addressed as if to me, which Mildmay has had. The man of the house is absent, or I should never have heard of it. I don't know what injury he may have done you; but this is an insult I don't forgive. Stop! I have every reason to believe that he has gone," said Fordham, growing darkly red, "to a house of mine, to confirm this slander upon me. To prove that I am innocent of all share of it—I don't mean to you—you believe me, I presume?" he said, with a haughty sudden pause, looking straight in Vincent's face—"I will go——" Here Mr. Fordham stopped again, and once more looked at Vincent with that indescribable mixture of curiosity, dislike, resentment, and interest, which the eyes of the young Nonconformist repaid him fully,—"with you—if you choose. At all events, I will go to-night—to Fordham, where the scoundrel is. I cannot permit it to be believed for an hour that it

is I who have done this villany. The lady you mentioned, I presume, knows?"—he added, sharply—"knows what has happened, and whom you suspect? This must be set right at once. If you choose, we can go together."

"Where is the place?" asked Vincent, without any answer to this proposition.

Fordham looked at him with a certain haughty offence: he had made the offer as though it were a very disagreeable expedient, but resented instantly the tacit neglect of it shown by his companion.

"In Northumberland—seven miles from the railway," he said, with a kind of gratification. "Once more, I say, you can go with me if you will, which may serve us both. I don't pretend to be disinterested. My object is to have my reputation clear of this, at all events. Your object, I presume, is to get to your journey's end as early as may be. Choose for yourself. Fordham is between Durham and Morpeth—seven miles from Lamington station. You will find difficulty in getting there by yourself, and still greater difficulty in getting admission; and I repeat, if you choose it, you can go with me—or I will accompany you, if that pleases you better. Either way, there is little time to consider. The train goes at eight or nine o'clock—I forget which. I have not dined. What shall you do?"

"Thank you," said Vincent. It was perhaps a greater effort to him to overcome his involuntary repugnance than it was to the stranger beside him, who had all the superior ease of superior rank and age. The Nonconformist turned away his eyes from his new companion, and made a pretence of consulting his watch. "I will take advantage of your offer," he said, coldly, withdrawing a step with instinctive reserve. On these diplomatic terms their engagement was made. Vincent declined to share the dinner which the other offered him, as one duellist might offer hospitality to another. He drove away in his hansom, with a restrained gravity of excitement, intent upon the hour's rest and the meal which were essential to make him anything like a match for this unexpected travelling companion. Every morsel he attempted to

swallow when in Carlingford under his mother's anxious eyes, choked the excited young man, but now he ate with a certain stern appetite, and even snatched an hour's sleep and changed his dress, under this novel stimulant. Poor Susan, for whom her mother sat hopelessly watching with many a thrill of agony at home! Poor lost one, far away in the depths of the strange country in the night and darkness! Whether despair and horror enveloped her, or delirious false happiness and delusion, again she stood secondary even in her brother's thoughts. He tried to imagine it was she who occupied his mind, and wrote a hurried note to his mother to that purport; but with guilt and self-disgust, knew in his own mind how often another shadow stood between him and his lost sister—a shadow bitterly veiled from him, turning its sweetness and its smiles upon the man who was about to help him, against whom he gnashed his teeth in the anguish of his heart.

CHAPTER XX.

THEY were but these two in the railway-carriage; no other passenger broke the silent conflict of their companionship. They sat in opposite corners, as far apart as their space would permit, but on opposite sides of the carriage as well, so that one could not move without betraying his every movement to the other's keen observation. Each of them kept possession of a window, out of which he gazed into the visible blackness of the winter night. Two or three times in the course of the long darksome chilly journey, a laconic remark was made by one or the other with a deadly steadiness, and gravity, and facing of each other, as they spoke; but no further intercourse took place between them. When they first met, Fordham had made an attempt to draw his fellow-traveller into some repetition of that first passionate speech which had secured his own attention to Vincent; but the young Nonconformist perceived the attempt, and resented it with sullen offence and gloom. He took the stranger's indifference to his trouble, and undisguised and simple

purpose of acquitting himself, as somehow an affront, though he could not have explained how it was so; and this notwithstanding his own consciousness of realising this silent conflict and rivalry with Fordham, even more deeply in his own person than he did the special misery which had befallen his house. Through the sullen silent midnight the train dashed on, the faint light flickering in the unsteady carriage, the two speechless figures, with eyes averted, watching each other through all the ice-cold hours. It was morning when they got out, cramped and frozen, at the little station, round which miles and miles of darkness, a black unfathomable ocean, seemed to lie—and which shone there with its little red sparkle of light among its wild waste of moors like the one touch of human life in a desert. They had a dreary hour to wait in the little wooden room by the stifling fire, divided between the smothering atmosphere within and the thrilling cold without, before a conveyance could be procured for them, in which they set out shivering over the seven darkling miles between them and Fordham. Vincent stood apart in elaborate indifference and carelessness, when the squire was recognised and done homage to; and Fordham's eye, even while lighted up by the astonished delight of the welcome given him by the driver of the vehicle who first found him out, turned instinctively to the Mordecai in the corner who took no heed. No conversation between them diversified the black road along which they drove. Mr. Fordham took refuge in the driver, whom he asked all those questions about the people of the neighbourhood which are so interesting to the inhabitants of a district and so wearisome to strangers. Vincent, who sat in the dog-cart with his face turned the other way, suffered himself to be carried through the darkness by the powerful horse, which made his own seat a somewhat perilous one, with nothing so decided in his thoughts as a dumb sense of opposition and resistance. The general misery of his mind and body—the sense that all the firmament around him was black as this sky—the restless wretchedness that oppressed his heart—all concentrated into conscious rebellion and enmity. He seemed to himself at war, not only with Mr. Fordham who was helping him, but

with God and life.

Morning was breaking when they reached the house. The previous day, as it dawned chilly over the world, had revealed his mother's ashy face to Vincent as they came up from Lonsdale with sickening thrills of hope that Susan might still be found unharmed. Here was another horror of a new day rising, the third since Susan disappeared into that darkness which was now lifting in shuddering mists from the bleak country round. Was she here in her shame, the lost creature? As he began to ask himself that question, what cruel spirit was it that drew aside a veil of years, and showed to the unhappy brother that prettiest dancing figure, all smiles and sunshine, sweet honour and hope? Poor lost child! what sweet eyes, lost in an unfathomable light of joy and confidence—what truthful looks, which feared no evil! Just as they came in sight of that hidden house, where perhaps the hidden, stolen creature lay in the darkness, the brightest picture flashed back upon Vincent's eyes with an indescribably subtle anguish of contrast; how he had come up to her once—the frank, fair Saxon girl—in the midst of a group of gypsies—how he found she had done a service to one of them, and the whole tribe did homage—how he had asked, "Were you not afraid, Susan?" and how the girl had looked up at him with undoubting eyes, and answered, "Afraid, Arthur?—yes, of wild beasts if I saw them, not of men and women." Oh Heaven!—and here he was going to find her in shame and ruin, hidden away in this secret place! He sprang to the ground before the vehicle had stopped, jarring his frozen limbs. He could not bear to be second now, and follow to the dread discovery which should be his alone. He rushed through the shrubbery without asking any question, and began to knock violently at the door. What did it matter to him though its master was there, looking on with folded arms and unsympathetic face? Natural love rushed back upon the young man's heart. He settled with himself, as he stood waiting, how he would wrap her in his coat, and hurry her away without letting any cold eye fall upon the lost creature. Oh, hard and cruel fate! oh, wonderful heart-breaking indifference of Heaven! The Innocents are

murdered, and God looks on like a man, and does not interfere. Such were the broken thoughts of misery—half-thought, half-recollection—that ran through Vincent's mind as he knocked at the echoing door.

"Eugh! you may knock, and better knock, and I'se undertake none comes at the ca'," said the driver, not without a little complacence. "I tell the Squire, as there han't been man nor woman here for ages; but he don't believe me. She's deaf as a post, is the housekeeper; and her daughter, she's more to do nor hear when folks is wanting in—and this hour in the morning! But canny, canny, man! he'll have the door staved in if we all stand by and the Squire don't interfere."

Vincent paid no attention to the remonstrance—which, indeed, he only remembered afterwards, and did not hear at the moment. The house was closely shut in with trees, which made the gloom of morning darker here than in the open road, and increased the aspect of secrecy which had impressed the young man's excited imagination. While he went on knocking, Fordham alighted and went round to another entrance, where he too began to knock, calling at the same time to the unseen keepers of the place. After a while some answering sounds became audible—first the feeble yelping of an asthmatic dog, then a commotion up-stairs, and at last a window was thrown up, and a female head enveloped in a shawl looked out. "Eh, whae are ye? vagabond villains,—and this a gentleman's house," cried a cracked voice. "I'll let the Squire know—I'll rouse the man-servants. Tramps! what are you wanting here?" The driver of the dog-cart took up the response well pleased. He announced the arrival of the Squire, to the profound agitation of the house, which showed itself in a variety of scuffling sounds and the wildest exclamations of wonder. Vincent leaned his throbbing head against the door, and waited in a dull fever of impatience and excitement, as these noises gradually came nearer. When the door itself was reached and hasty hands began to unfasten its bolts, Susan's brother pressed alone upon the threshold, forgetful and indifferent that the master of the house stood behind, watching him with close and keen observation. He forgot whose

house it was, and all about his companion. What were such circumstances to him, as he approached the conclusion of his search, and thought every moment to hear poor Susan's cry of shame and terror? He made one hasty stride into the hall when the door was open, and looked round him with burning eyes. The wonder with which the women inside looked at him, their outcry of disappointment and anger when they found him a stranger, coming first as he did, and throwing the Squire entirely into the shade, had no effect upon the young man, who was by this time half frantic. He went up to the elder woman and grasped her by the arm. "Where is she? show me the way!" he said, hoarsely, unable to utter an unnecessary word. He held the terrified woman fast, and thrust her before him, he could not tell where, into the unknown house, all dark and miserable in the wretchedness of the dawn. "Show me the way!" he cried, with his broken hoarse voice. A confused and inarticulate scene ensued, which Vincent remembered afterwards only like a dream; the woman's scream—the interference of Fordham, upon whom his fellow-traveller turned with sudden fury—the explanation to which he listened without understanding it, and which at first roused him to wild rage as a pretence and falsehood. But even Vincent at last, struggling into soberer consciousness as the day broadened ever chiller and more grey over the little group of strange faces round him, came to understand and make out that both Fordham and he had been deceived. Nobody had been there—letters addressed both to Fordham himself, and to Colonel Mildmay, had been for some days received; but these, it appeared, were only a snare laid to withdraw the pursuers from the right scent. Not to be convinced, in the sullen stupor of his excitement, Vincent followed Fordham into all the gloomy corners of the neglected house—seeing everything without knowing what he saw. But one thing was plain beyond the possibility of doubt, that Susan was not there.

"I am to blame for this fruitless journey," said Fordham, with a touch of sympathy more than he had yet exhibited; "perhaps personal feeling had too much share in it; now I trust you will have some breakfast before you set out again. So far as my

assistance can be of any use to you——"

"I thank you," said Vincent, coldly; "it is a business in which a stranger can have no interest. You have done all you cared to do," continued the young man, hastily gathering up the overcoat which he had thrown down on entering; "you have vindicated yourself—I will trouble you no further. If I encounter any one interested in Mr. Fordham," he concluded, with difficulty and bitterness, but with a natural generosity which, even in his despair, he could not belie, "I will do him justice." He made an abrupt end, and turned away, not another word being possible to him. Fordham, not without a sentiment of sympathy, followed him to the door, urging refreshment, rest, even his own society, upon his companion of the night. Vincent's face, more and more haggard—his exhausted excited air—the poignant wretchedness of his youth, on which the older man looked, not without reminiscences, awoke the sympathy and compassion of the looker-on, even in the midst of less kindly emotions. But Fordham's sympathy was intolerable to poor Vincent. He took his seat with a sullen weariness once more by the talkative driver, who gave him an unheeded history of all the Fordhams. As they drove along the bleak moorland road, an early church-bell tingled into the silence, and struck, with horrible iron echoes, upon the heart of the minister of Salem. Sunday morning! Life all disordered, incoherent, desperate—all its usages set at nought and duties left behind. Nothing could have added the final touch of conscious derangement and desperation like the sound of that bell; all his existence and its surroundings floated about him in feverish clouds, as it came to his mind that this wild morning, hysterical with fatigue and excitement, was the Sunday—the day of his special labours—the central point of all his former life. Chaos gloomed around the poor minister, who, in his misery, was human enough to remember Beecher's smile and Phœbe Tozer's invitation, and to realise how all the "Chapel folks" would compare notes, and contrast their own pastor, to whom they had become accustomed, with the new voice from Homerton, which, half in pride and half in disgust, Vincent

acknowledged to be more in their way. He fancied he could see them all collecting into their mean pews, prepared to inaugurate the “coorse” for which Tozer had struggled, and the offence upon their faces when the minister’s absence was known, and the sharp stimulus which that offence would give to their appreciation of the new preacher—all this, while he was driving over the bleak Northumberland wilds, with the cutting wind from the hills in his face, and the church-bell in his distracted ear, breaking the Sunday! Not a bright spot, so far as he could perceive, was anywhere around him, in earth, or sky, or sea.

Sunday night!—once more the church-bells, the church-going groups, the floating world, which he had many a time upbraided from the pulpit seeking its pleasure. But it was in London now, where he stood in utter exhaustion, but incapable of rest, not knowing where to turn. Then the thought occurred to him that something might be learned at the railway stations of a party which few people could see without remarking it. He waited till the bustle of arrival was over, and then began to question the porters. One after another shook his head, and had nothing to say. But the men were interested, and gathered in a little knot round him, trying what they could recollect, with the ready humanity of their class. “I’d speak to the detective police, sir, if I was you,” suggested one; “it’s them as finds out all that happens nowadays.” Then a little gleam of light penetrated the darkness. One man began to recall a light-haired gentleman with a mustache, and two ladies, who “went off sudden in a cab, with no luggage.” “An uncommon swell he did look,” said the porter, instinctively touching his cap to Vincent, on the strength of the connection; “and, my eyes! she was a beauty, that one in the blue veil. It was—let me see—Wednesday night; no—not Wednesday—that day as the up-train was an hour late—Friday afternoon, to be sure. It was me as called the cab, and I won’t deny as the gen’leman was a gen’leman. Went to the London Bridge station, sir; Dover line; no luggage; I took particular notice at the time, though it went out o’ my head first minute as you asked me.—Cab, sir? Yes. Here you are—here’s the last on the

stand.—London Bridge Station, Dover line."

Vincent took no time to inquire further. In the impatience of his utter weariness and wretchedness, he seized on this slight clue, and went off at once to follow it out. London Bridge station!—what a world swarmed in those streets through which the anxious minister took his way, far too deeply absorbed in himself to think of the flood of souls that poured past him. The station was in wild bustle and commotion; a train just on the eve of starting, and late passengers dashing towards it with nervous speed. Vincent followed the tide instinctively, and stood aside to watch the long line of carriages set in motion. He was not thinking of what he saw; his whole mind was set upon the inquiry, which, as soon as that object of universal interest was gone, he could set on foot among the officials who were clanging the doors, and uttering all the final shrieks of departure. Now the tedious line glides into gradual motion. Good Heaven! what was that? the flash of a match, a sudden gleam upon vacant cushions, the profile of a face, high-featured, with the thin light locks and shadowy mustache he knew so well, standing out for a moment in aquiline distinctness against the moving space. Vincent rushed forward with a hoarse shout, which scared the crowd around him. He threw himself upon the moving train with a desperate attempt to seize and stop it; but only to be himself seized by the frantic attendants, who caught him with a dozen hands. The travellers in the later carriages were startled by the commotion. Some of them rose and looked out with surprised looks; he saw them all as they glided past, though the passage was instantaneous. Saw them all! Yes; who was that, last of all, at the narrow window of a second-class carriage, who looked out with no surprise, but with a horrible composure in her white face, and recognised him with a look which chilled him to stone. He stood passive in the hands of the men, who had been struggling to hold him, after he encountered those eyes; he shuddered with a sudden horror, which made the crowd gather closer, believing him a maniac. Now it was gone into the black night, into the chill space, carrying a hundred innocent souls and light hearts, and among them deadly crime and

vengeance—the doomed man and his executioner. His very heart shuddered in his breast as he made a faltering effort to explain himself, and get free from the crowd which thought him mad. That sight quenched the curses on his own lips, paled the fire in his heart. To see her dogging his steps, with her dreadful relentless promise in her eyes, overwhelmed Vincent, who a moment before had thrilled with all the rage of a man upon whom this villain had brought the direst shame and calamity. He could have dashed him under those wheels, plunged him into any mad destruction, in the first passionate whirl of his thoughts on seeing him again; but to see Her behind following after—pale with her horrible composure, a conscious Death tracking his very steps—drove Vincent back with a sudden paralysing touch. He stood chilled and horror-stricken in the crowd, which watched and wondered at him: he drew himself feebly out of their detaining circle, and went and sat down on the nearest seat he could find, like a man who had been stunned by some unexpected blow. He was not impatient when he heard how long he must wait before he could follow them. It was a relief to wait, to recover his breath, to realise his own position once more. That dreadful sight, diabolical and out of nature, had driven the very life-blood out of his heart.

As he sat, flung upon his bench in utter exhaustion and feebleness, stunned and stupified, leaning his aching head in his hands, and with many curious glances thrown at him by the bystanders, some of whom were not sure that he ought to be suffered to go at large, Vincent became sensible that some one was plucking at his sleeve, and sobbing his name. It was some time before he became aware that those weeping accents were addressed to him; some time longer before he began to think he had heard the voice before, and was so far moved as to look up. When he did raise his head it was with a violent start that he saw a little rustic figure, energetically, but with tears, appealing to him, whom his bewildered faculties slowly made out to be Mary, his mother’s maid, whom Susan had taken with her when she left Lonsdale. As soon as he recognised her he sprang up, restored to himself with

the first gleam of real hope which had yet visited him. “My sister is here!” he cried, almost with joy. Mary made no answer but by a despairing outbreak of tears.

“Oh no, Mr. Arthur; no—oh no, no! never no more!” cried poor Mary, when she found her voice. “It’s all been deceitfulness and lyin’ and falsehood, and it ain’t none o’ her doing—oh no, no, Mr. Arthur, no!—but now she’s got nobody to stand by her, for he took and brought me up this very day; oh, don’t lose no time!—he took and brought me up, pretending it was to show me the way, and he sent me right off, Mr. Arthur, and she don’t know no more nor a baby, and he’ll take her off over the seas this very night—he will; for I had it of his own man. She’s written letters to her Ma, Mr. Arthur, but I don’t think as they were ever took to the post; and he makes believe they’re a-going to be married, and he’ll have her off to France to-night. Oh, Mr. Arthur, Mr. Arthur, don’t lose no time. They’re at a ’otel. Look you here—here’s the name as I wrote down on a bit o’ paper to make sure; and oh, Mr. Arthur, mind what I say, and don’t lose no time!”

“But Susan—Susan—what of her?” cried her brother, unconsciously clutching at the girl’s arm.

Mary burst into another flood of tears. She hid her face, and cried with storms of suppressed sobs. The young man rose up pale and stern from his seat, without asking another question. He took the crumpled paper out of her hand, put some money into it, and in few words directed her to go to his mother at Carlingford. What though the sight of her would break his mother’s heart—what did it matter? Hearts were made to be broken, trodden on, killed—so be it! Pale and fierce, with eyes burning red in his throbbing head, he too went on, a second Murder, after the first which had preceded him in the shape of the Carlingford needlewoman. The criminal who escaped two such avengers must bear a charmed life.

END OF VOL. I.

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Typographical errors corrected by the etext transcriber: the charmming breakfasts=> the charming breakfasts {pg 11} stupified=> stupefied {pg 103} downfal=> downfall {pg 103} their ain't no=> there ain't no {pg 118} the litte parlour=> the little parlour {pg 260} a man get's a charge=> a man gets a charge {pg 279}

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COLLECTION OF BRITISH AUTHORS TAUCHNITZ EDITION. VOL. 1092. SALEM CHAPEL BY MRS. OLIPHANT. IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II.

Chronicles of Carlingford

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SALEM CHAPEL

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SALEM CHAPEL.

CHAPTER I., II., III., IV., V., VI., VII., VIII., IX., X., XI., XII., XIII., XIV., XV., XVI., XVII., XVIII., XIX., XX., XXI., XXII., XXIII.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. VINCENT rose from the uneasy bed, where she had not slept, upon that dreadful Sunday morning, with feelings which it would be vain to attempt any description of. Snatches of momentary sleep more dreadful than wakefulness had fallen upon her during the awful night—moments of unconsciousness which plunged her into a deeper horror still, and from which she started thinking she heard Susan call. Had Susan called, had Susan come, in any dreadful plight of misery, her mother thought she could have borne it; but she could not, yet did, bear this, with the mingled passion and patience of a woman; one moment rising up against the intolerable, the next sitting down dumb and steadfast before that terrible necessity which could not be resisted. She got up in the dim wintry morning with all that restless anguish in her heart, and took out her best black silk dress, and a clean cap to go under her bonnet. She offered a sacrifice and burnt-offering as she dressed herself in her snow-white cuffs, and composed her trim little figure into its Sunday neatness; for the minister’s mother must go to chapel this dreadful day. No whisper

of the torture she was enduring must breathe among the flock—nothing could excuse her from attending Salem, seeing her son's people, and hearing Mr. Beecher preach, and holding up Arthur's standard at this dangerous crisis of the battle. She felt she was pale when she came into the sitting-room, but comforted herself with thinking that nobody in Salem knew that by nature she had a little tender winter bloom upon her face, and was not usually so downcast and heavy-eyed. Instinctively, she rearranged the breakfast-table as she waited for the young minister from Homerton, who was not an early riser. Mr. Beecher thought it rather cheerful than otherwise when he came in somewhat late and hurried, and found her waiting by the white covered table, with the fire bright and the tea made. He was in high spirits, as was natural. He thought Vincent was in very comfortable quarters, and had uncommonly pleasant rooms.

"Don't you think so? And one has just as great a chance of being uncomfortable as not in one's first charge," said the young preacher; "but we were all delighted to hear that Vincent had made an 'it. Liberal-minded people, I should say, if I may judge by Mr. Tozer, who was uncommonly friendly last night. These sort of people are the strength of our connection—not great people, you know, but the flower of the middle classes. I am surprised you did not bring Miss Vincent with you for a little cheerful society at this time of the year."

"My daughter may perhaps come yet, before—before I leave," said Mrs. Vincent, drawing herself up, with a little hauteur, as Mr. Beecher thought, though in reality it was only a physical expression of that sob of agony to which she dared not give vent in audible sound.

"Oh, I thought it might be more cheerful for her in the winter," said the preacher, a little affronted that his interest in Vincent's pretty sister should be received so coldly. He was interrupted by the arrival of the post, for Carlingford was a profane country town, and had its letters on Sunday morning. The widow set herself

desperately down in an arm-chair to read Arthur's letter. It made her heart beat loud with throbs so violent that a blindness came over her eyes, and her very life failed for an instant. It was very short, very assured and certain—he was going to Northumberland, where the fugitives had gone—he was going to bring Susan back. Mr. Beecher over his egg watched her reading this, and saw that she grew ashy, deathly pale. It was not possible for him to keep silent, or to refrain from wondering what it was.

"Dear me, I am afraid you are ill—can I get you anything?" he said, rising from the table.

Mrs. Vincent folded up her letter. "Thank you; my tea will refresh me," she said, coming back to her seat. "I did not sleep very much last night, and my head aches: when people come to my time of life," said the little woman, with a faint heroical smile, "they seldom sleep well the first few nights in a new place. I hope you rested comfortably, Mr. Beecher. Mr. Vincent, Arthur's dear papa, used to say that he never preached well if he did not sleep well; and I have heard other ministers say it was a very true rule."

"If that is all, I hope you will be pleased to-day," said the preacher, with a little complaisance. "I always sleep well; nothing puts me much out in that respect. Perhaps it is about time to start now? I like to have a few minutes in the vestry before going into the pulpit. You know the way perhaps? or we can call at Mr. Tozer's and get one of them to guide us."

"I think I know the way," said Mrs. Vincent, faintly. It was a slight comfort, in the midst of her martyrdom, to leave the room and have a moment to herself. She sank down by her bedside in an inarticulate agony of prayer, which doubtless God deciphered, though it never came to words, and rose up again to put on her bonnet, her neat shawl, her best pair of gloves. The smile that might have come on the face of a martyr at the stake dawned upon the little woman's lips as she caught sight of

her own pale face in the glass, when she was tying her bonnet-strings. She was not thrusting her hand into the scorching flames, she was only pulling out the bows of black ribbon, and giving the last touch to that perfection of gentle neatness in which Arthur's mother, for his sake, must present herself to his people. She took Mr. Beecher's arm afterwards, and walked with him, through the wintry sunshine and streams of churchgoers, to Salem. Perhaps she was just a little sententious in her talk to the young preacher, who would have stared had anybody told him what active and feverish wretchedness was in her heart. She quoted Arthur's dear father more than usual; she felt a little irritated in spite of herself by the complaisance of the young man from 'Omerton. Notwithstanding the dreadful pressure of her trouble, she felt that his excitement in the prospect of preaching to Arthur's people was quite ill-timed. What did it matter to him whether the Salem flock liked him or not? Were they not Arthur's people, pre-engaged to their own pastor? The gentle widow did what she could to bring Mr. Beecher down as they walked through Grove Street. She remarked, gently, that where a minister was very popular, a stranger had but little chance of appreciation. "You must not be mortified if you see the congregation look disappointed when you come into the pulpit," said Mrs. Vincent; "for my son, if he had not been called away so suddenly, was to commence a course of lectures to-day, and I believe a good deal of expectation was raised about them." The new preacher was perhaps a shade less buoyant when he resigned his friend's mother to Tozer at the door of the chapel, to be conducted to her pew. Salem was already about half filled; and the entering flock looked at Mrs. Vincent, as she stood with the deacon in the porch, asking, with the courtesy of a royal personage, humble yet affable, after his wife and daughter. Tozer was a little overawed by the politeness of the minister's mother. He concluded that she was "quite the lady" in his private heart.

"If you tell me where the minister's seat is, I need not trouble you to go in," said Mrs. Vincent. "Mrs. Tufton's uncommon punctual, and it's close upon her time," said Tozer; "being a single man, we've not set apart a seat for the minister—not till

he's got some one as can sit in it; it's the old minister's seat, as is the only one we've set aside; for we've been a-letting of the pews uncommon this past month, and it don't answer to waste nothing in a chapel as is as expensive to keep up as Salem. It's our pride to give our minister a good salary, as you know, ma'am, and we've all got to pay up according, so there ain't no pew set apart for Mr. Vincent—not till he's got a wife."

"Then I am to sit in Mr. Tufton's pew?" said the minister's mother, not without a little sharpness.

"There ain't no more of them never at Salem, but Mrs. Tufton," said Tozer. "Mr. Tufton has had a shock, and the only one of a family they've at home is a great invalid, and never was within the chapel door in my time. Mr. Tufton he do come now and again. He would have been here to-day, I make bold to say, but for the minister being called away. I hope you've 'eard from Mr. Vincent, ma'am, and as he'll soon be back. It ain't a good thing for a congregation when the pastor takes to going off sudden. Here she is a-coming. Mrs. Tufton, ma'am, this is Mrs. Vincent, the minister's mother; she's been waiting for you to go into your pew."

"I hope I shall not be in your way," said Mrs. Vincent, with her dignified air. "I have always been accustomed to see a seat for the minister, but as I am a stranger, I hope for once I shall not be in your way."

"Don't say a word!" cried Mrs. Tufton. "I am as glad as possible to see Mr. Vincent's mother. He is a precious young man. It's not a right principle, you know, but it's hard not to envy people that are so happy in their families; nothing would make my Tom take to the ministry, though his papa and I had set our hearts upon it; and he's in Australia, poor dear fellow! and my poor girl is such an invalid. I hope your daughter is pretty well? Come this way. I hope I shall see a great deal of you. Mr. Tufton takes such an interest in his young brother; all that he wants is a little good advice—that is what the minister always tells me. All that Mr. Vincent wants,

he says, is a little good advice."

The latter part of this was communicated in a whisper, as the two ladies seated themselves in the minister's pew. After a momentary pause of private devotion, Mrs. Tufton again took up the strain where she had left it off.

"I assure you, we take the greatest interest in him at the cottage. He doesn't come to see us so often as Mr. Tufton would wish, but I daresay he has other things to do. The minister often says to me that he is a precious young man, is Mr. Vincent, and that a little good advice and attention to those that know better is all he wants to make him a shining light; and I am sure he will want no good advice Mr. Tufton can give him. So you may keep your mind easy—you may keep your mind quite easy. In any difficulty that could occur, I am sure the minister would act as if he were his own son."

"You are very kind; but I hope no difficulty will occur," said Mrs. Vincent, with a little quiver in her lip.

"I hope not, indeed; but there are so many people to please in a flock," said the late minister's wife, with a sigh. "We always got on very well, for Mr. Tufton is not one to take a deal of notice of any unpleasantness; but you know as well as I do that it takes a deal of attention to keep all matters straight. If you'll excuse me, it's a great pity Mr. Vincent has gone away to-day. Nothing would have made my husband leave his post just as he was intimated to begin a course of lectures. It's very excusable in Mr. Vincent, because he hasn't that experience that's necessary. I always say he's very excusable, being such a young man; and we have no doubt he'll get on very well if he does but take advice."

"My son was very unwilling to go; but it was quite necessary. His sister," said Mrs. Vincent, clasping her hands tight under her shawl to balance the pang in her heart, "was with some friends—whom we heard something unpleasant about—and he went to bring her home. I expect them—to-morrow."

The poor mother shut her lips close when she had said the words, to keep in the cry or sob that seemed bursting from them. Yes, God help her, she expected them; perhaps to-morrow—perhaps that same dreadful night; but even in the height of her anguish there occurred to Mrs. Vincent a forlorn prayer that they might not come back that Sunday. Rather another agonising night than that all the "Chapel folks" should be aware that their pastor was rushing wildly along distant railways on the day of rest. The fact that he was doing so added a pang to her own trouble. Total disarrangement, chaos, all the old habitudes of life gone to wreck, and only desperation and misery left, was the sensation produced by that interruption of all religious use and wont. It came upon her with an acute sting, to think that her poor young minister was travelling that Sunday; just as in Arthur's own experience at that same moment, the utter incoherence, chaos, and wretchedness into which his life had suddenly fallen, breathed upon him in the sound of the church-bells.

"Dear me, I am very sorry!" said Mrs. Tufton; "some fever or something, I suppose—something that's catching? Dear, dear me, I am so sorry! but there are some people that never take infection; a little camphor is such a nice thing to carry about—it can't do any harm, you know. Mrs. Tozer tells me he is a very nice young man, Mr. Vincent's friend from 'Omerton. I don't like to say such a thing of a girl, but I do believe your son could have that Phoebe any day for asking, Mrs. Vincent. I can't bear forward girls, for my part—that is her just going into the pew, with the pink bonnet; oh, you know her!—to be sure, Mrs. Pigeon remarked you were sure to go there; though I should have hoped we would have seen you as soon as any one in Carlingford."

"Indeed, I have been much disappointed not to call. I—I hope I shall—tomorrow," said the widow, to whom tomorrow loomed dark like another world, and who could not help repeating over and over the dreaded name.

"That is Maria Pigeon all in white—to be only tradespeople they do dress more than

I approve of," said Mrs. Tufton. "My Adelaide, I am sure, never went like that. Many people think Maria a deal nicer-looking than Phœbe Tozer, but her mother is so particular—more than particular—what I call troublesome, you know. You can't turn round without giving her offence. Dear me, how my tongue is going! the minister would say I was just at my old imprudent tricks—but you, that were a minister's wife, can understand. She is such a difficult woman to deal with. I am sure Mr. Tufton is always telling them to wait, and that Mr. Vincent is a young man yet, and experience is all he wants. I wish he had a good wife to keep him straight; but I don't know that that would be advisable either, because of Phœbe and the rest. Dear, dear, it is a difficult thing to know what to do!—but Mr. Tufton always says, If he had a little more experience—— Bless me, the young man is in the pulpit!" said Mrs. Tufton, coming to a sudden standstill, growing very red, and picking up her hymn-book. Very seldom had the good woman such a chance of talk. She ran herself so out of breath that she could not join in that first hymn.

But Mrs. Vincent, who had a sensation that the pew, and indeed the whole chapel, trembled with the trembling that was in her own frame, but who felt at the same time that everybody was looking at her, and that Arthur's credit was involved, stood up steadfastly, holding her book firm in both her hands, and with an effort almost too much for her, the heroism of a martyr, added her soft voice, touched with age, yet still melodious and true, to the song of praise. The words choked her as she uttered them, yet with a kind of desperate courage she kept on. Praise!—it happened to be a very effusive hymn that day, an utterance of unmitigated thanksgiving; fortunately she had not sufficient command of her mind or wits to see clearly what she was singing, or to enter into the wonderful bitter difference between the thanks she was uttering and the position in which she stood. Could she give God thanks for Susan's ruin, or rejoice in the light He had given, when it revealed only misery? She was not called upon to answer that hard question. She stood up mechanically with her white face set in pale steadfastness, and was only aware that she was singing, keeping the

tune, and making herself noways remarked among the crowd of strange people, many of whom turned curious eyes towards her. She stood with both her feet set firm on the floor, both her hands holding fast to the book, and over the ache of frightful suspense in her heart came the soft voice of her singing, which for once in her life meant nothing except a forlorn determination to keep up and hold herself erect and vigilant, sentinel over Arthur's fortunes and his people's thoughts.

Mr. Beecher's sermon was undeniably clever; the Salem folks pricked up their ears at the sound of it, recalling as it did that period of delightful excitation when they were hearing candidates, and felt themselves the dispensers of patronage. That was over now, and they were wedded to one; but the bond of union between themselves and their pastor was far from being indissoluble, and they contemplated this new aspirant to their favour with feelings stimulated and piquant, as a not inconsolable husband, likely to become a widower, might contemplate the general female public, out of which candidates for the problematically vacant place might arise. Mrs. Pigeon, who was the leader of the opposition, and whose daughter Mr. Vincent had not distinguished, whose house he had not specially frequented, and whom, most of all, he had passed in the street without recognition, made a note of this man from 'Omerton. If the painful necessity of dismissing the present pastor should occur—as such things did occur, deplorable though they were—it might be worth while sending for Mr. Beecher. She made a note of him privately in her mind, as she sat listening with ostentatious attention, nodding her head now and then by way of assent to his statements. Mrs. Vincent remarked her as she watched the congregation from the minister's pew, with her jealous mother's eyes. The Tozers were not so devoted in their listening. Mrs. Tozer's brilliant cherry-coloured bonnet visibly drooped once or twice with a blessed irregularity of motion; all these signs Mrs. Vincent perceived as she sat in preternatural acute consciousness of everything round her, by Mrs. Tufton's side. She was even aware that the sermon was clever; she remembered expressions in it long after, which somehow got burned in, without

any will of hers, upon her breaking heart. The subdued anguish that was in her collected fuel for its own silent consuming fire, even in the congregation of Salem, where, very upright, very watchful, afraid to relax her strained nerves even by leaning back or forward, she lived through the long service as if through a year of suffering.

The congregation dispersed in a buzz of talk and curiosity. Everybody wanted to know where the minister had gone, and what had taken him away. “I can’t say as I think he’s using of us well,” said somebody, whom Mrs. Vincent could hear as she made her way to the door. “Business of his own! a minister ain’t got no right to have business of his own, leastways on Sundays. Preaching’s his business. I don’t hold with that notion. He’s in our employ, and we pays him well——”

Here a whisper from some charitable bystander directed the speaker’s eyes to Mrs. Vincent, who was close behind.

“Well! it ain’t nothing to me who hears me,” said this rebellious member, not without a certain vulgar pleasure in his power of insult. “We pays him well, as I say; I have to stick to my business well or ill, and I don’t see no reason why the minister should be different. If he don’t mind us as pays him, why, another will.”

“Oh, I’ve been waiting to catch your eye,” said Mrs. Pigeon, darting forward at this crisis to Mrs. Tufton; “wasn’t that a sweet sermon? that’s refreshing, that is! I haven’t listened to anything as has roused me up like that—no, not since dear Mr. Tufton came first to Carlingford; as for what we’ve been hearing of late, I don’t say it’s not clever, but, oh, it’s cold! and for them as like good gospel preaching and rousing up, I must confess as Mr. Vincent——”

“Hush! Mrs. Pigeon—Mrs. Vincent,” said Mrs. Tufton, hurriedly; “you two ladies should have been introduced at the first. Mr. Pigeon is one of our deacons and leading men, Mrs. Vincent, and I don’t doubt you’ve often and often heard your son talking of him. We are always discussing Mr. Vincent, because he is our own pastor

now, you know; and a precious young man he is—and all that he wants is a little experience, as Mr. Tufton always says."

"Oh, I am sorry!— I beg your pardon, I'm sure," cried Mrs. Pigeon; "but I am one as always speaks my mind, and don't go back of my word. Folks as sees a deal of the minister," continued the poulterer's wife, not without a glance at that cherry-coloured bonnet which had nodded during the sermon, and to which poor Mrs. Vincent felt a certain gratitude, "may know different; but me as don't have much chance, except in chapel, I will say as I think he wants speaking to: most folks do—specially young folks, when they're making a start in the world. He's too high, he is, for us plain Salem folks; what we want is a man as preaches gospel sermons—real rousing-up discourses—and sits down pleasant to his tea, and makes hisself friendly. I never was one as thought a minister couldn't do wrong. I always said as they were just like other men, liking grand dinners and grand folks, and the vanities of this world; not meaning no offence, Mrs. Vincent, neither to you nor the minister—but I must say as I think, he's a deal too high."

"My son has had very good training," said the widow, not without dignity. "His dear father had many good friends who have taken an interest in him. He has always been accustomed to good society, and I must say, at the same time," added Mrs. Vincent, "that I never knew Arthur to fail in courtesy to the poorer brethren. If he has done so, I am sure it has been unintentionally. It is quite against my principles and his dear father's to show any respect to persons. If he has shown any neglect of Mrs. Pigeon's family," continued the mild diplomatist, "it must have been because he thought them less, and not more in need of him than the rest of the flock."

Mrs. Pigeon listened with open mouth, but total discomfiture: whether this was a compliment or a reprimand was totally beyond her power to make out. She cried, "Oh, I'm sure!" in a tone which was half defensive and half deprecating. Mrs. Pigeon, however, intended nothing less than to terminate the conversation at this

interesting point, and it was with utter dismay that she perceived Mrs. Vincent sweep past before she had recovered herself—sweep past—though that black silk gown was of very moderate dimensions, and the trim little figure was noways majestic. The minister's mother made a curtsy to the astonished wife of the poulterer; she said "good morning" with a gracious bow, and went upon her way before Mrs. Pigeon had recovered her breath. Perfect victory attended the gentle widow in this little passage of arms. Her assailant fell back, repeating in a subdued tone, "Well, I'm sure!" Mrs. Pigeon, like Tozer, granted that the minister's mother was "quite the lady," henceforward, in her heart.

And Mrs. Vincent passed on victorious; yes, victorious, and conscious of her victory, though giddy with secret anguish, and feeling as if every obstacle that hindered her return was a conscious cruelty. They could not have arrived this morning—it was impossible; yet she burned to get back to see whether impossibility might not be accomplished for once, and Susan be there awaiting her. The first to detain her was Mrs. Tufton, who hurried, with added respect, after her, triumphing secretly in Mrs. Pigeon's defeat.

"I am so glad you gave her her answer," said Mrs. Tufton; "bless me! how pleased Adelaide will be when I tell her! I always said it would be well for a minister's wife to have a spirit. Won't you come and take a bit of dinner with us, as Mr. Vincent is not at home? Oh, I daresay somebody will ask Mr. Beecher. It does not do to pay too much attention to the young men that come to preach—though I think he was clever. You won't come?—a headache?—poor dear! You're worrying about your daughter, I am sure; but I wouldn't, if I were you. Young girls in health don't take infection. She'll come back all right, you'll see. Well—good-bye. Don't come in the evening if you have a headache. I shouldn't, if I were you. Good-bye—and to-morrow, if all is well, we'll look for you. Siloam Cottage—just a little way past Salem—you can't miss the way."

"Yes, thank you—to-morrow," said Mrs. Vincent. If only anybody could have known what dreadful work it was keeping up that smile, holding upright as she did! Then she went on a little way in peace, half-crazed with the misery that consumed her, yet unnaturally vigilant and on the alert, always holding up Arthur's standard at that critical hour when he had no representative but herself in his field of battle. But the poor mother was not long allowed this interval of peace. After a few minutes, the Tozers, who were going the same way, came up to her, and surrounded her like a bodyguard.

"I liked that sermon, ma'am," said Tozer; "there was a deal that was practical in that sermon. If ever we should be in the way of hearing candidates again—and shortsighted creatures like us never knows what's a-going to happen—I'd put down that young man's name for an 'earing. There ain't a word to be said again' the minister's sermons in the matter of talent. They're full of mind, ma'am—they're philosophical, that's what they are; and the pews we've let in Salem since he come, proves it, let folks say what they will. But if there is a want, it's in the application. He don't press it home upon their consciences, not as some on us expected; and Mr. Tufton being all in that line, as you may say, makes it show the more. If I was going to make a change again—not as I mean nothing of the kind, nor as the Salem folks has ever took it into their heads— I'd like to have a little o' both ways, that's what I'd like."

"When you get a minister of independent-mind, Mr. Tozer, if he gives you the best he has, he ought to be allowed to choose his own way," said Mrs. Vincent. "My dear husband always said so, and he had great experience. Mr. Vincent's son, I know, will never want friends."

"I am sure as long as the minister keeps to his duty, he'll always find friends in Tozer and me," said the deacon's wife, striking in; "and though there may be folks in a finer way, there ain't no such good friends a pastor can have as in his own flock.

As for hearing candidates and that, Tozer ought to know as none on us would hear of such a thing. I don't see no reason why Mr. Vincent shouldn't settle down in Carlingford and make himself comfortable. We're all his friends as long as he's at his post."

"Oh, ma, I am sure he is at his post," cried Phoebe; "he has gone away because he could not help it. I am quite sure," continued the modest maiden, casting down her eyes, "that he would never have left but for a good reason! Oh, I am confident he is fond of Carlingford now. He would not go away if he had not some duty— I am certain he would not!"

"If Phoebe is better informed than the rest of us, it ain't nobody's business as I can see," said the father, with a short laugh. "I always like the young folks to manage them matters among themselves; but I take my own view, miss, for all that."

"Oh, Pa, how can you talk so," cried Phœbe, in virgin confusion, "to make Mrs. Vincent think——"

"Indeed, nothing will make me think otherwise than I know," said Mrs. Vincent, with a voice which extinguished Phœbe. "I understand my son. He does not bestow his confidence very easily; and I am sure he is quite able to manage all the matters he may have in hand," added the widow, not without significance. Not all her anxiety for Arthur, not all her personal wretchedness, could unwoman the minister's mother so much as to make her forgive or overlook Phœbe's presumption. She could not have let this pretendant to her son's affections off without transfixing her with a passing arrow. Human endurance has its limits. Mrs. Vincent could bear anything for Arthur except this pretence of a special interest in him.

"Oh, I am sure I never meant——!" faltered Phœbe; but she could get no further, and even her mother did not come to the rescue.

"Them things had much best not be talked of," said Mrs. Tozer, sharply. "Mr. Beecher is coming in to have a bit of dinner. You mightn't have things comfortable

where you are, the minister being away, and you used to your own house. Won't you come in with us and eat a bit of dinner? I never can swallow a morsel when I'm by myself. It's lonesome for you in them rooms, and us so near. There ain't no ceremony nor nonsense, but we'll be pleased if you'll come."

"Thank you very much," said Mrs. Vincent, who could not forget that the cherry-coloured bonnet had nodded during Mr. Beecher's sermon, "but I slept badly last night. At my time of life a new bed often makes one sleepless, and I have a bad headache. I think I will go and lie down. Many thanks. It is very kind of you to ask me. I hope I shall see you," said the widow, with a slight shiver, repeating her formula, "to-morrow."

"You can't take us amiss," said Mrs. Tozer; "there's always enough for an extra one, if it isn't grand or any ceremony; or if you'll come to tea and go to church with us at night? Phœbe can run over and see how you find yourself. Good mornin'. I'm sorry you'll not come in."

"Oh, I wish you would let me go with you and nurse you," said Phœbe, not without a glance in the other direction at the approaching form of the young man from 'Omerton, "I am so frightened you don't like me!—but I'll come over before tea, and sit with you if your headache is not better. If I could only make you fancy I was Miss Vincent!" said Phœbe, with pink pleading looks.

Mrs. Vincent turned away more smartly under the effect of that stimulant. She crossed George Street, towards her son's rooms, a solitary little figure, in the flood of winter sunshine—not dismal to look at, save for its black dress, trim, alert, upright still. And the heart within, which ached with positive throbs of pain, had roused up under that last provocation, and was stinging with indignation and anger, pure womanly, and not to be deadened by any anguish. Phoebe's impertinence, as she called it to herself, took her out of her own far heavier trouble. To think of that pink creature having designs upon her boy, and taking upon herself little airs of

conquest! To encounter Phoebe's wiles overwhelmed Arthur with shame and annoyance; but they exasperated his mother. She went home with a steadier ring in her little light footstep. But the fumes of that temporary excitement had faded when the door opened upon her—the blank door, with the little maid open-mouthed behind, who did not look her in the face, and who had nothing to communicate: the sitting-room up-stairs lay blank in utter solitude—all the books put away according to Sunday custom, and the cover of Arthur's letter lying on the table startling his mother into wild hopes that some other communication had come for her. She sank down upon a chair, and covered her pale face with her hands—torture intolerable, unendurable; but oh, how certainly to be endured and put up with! This poor mother, who had met with many a heavy sorrow in her day, though never any so hideous as this, was no excitable, passionate creature, but a wholesome, daylight woman, in whom no strain of superlative emotions had choked up the natural channels of relief. She wept a few bitter, heavy tears under cover of her clasped hands—tears which took away the dreadful pressure upon her brain, and made it easier to bear for the moment. Then she went away in her patience, and took off her bonnet, and prepared herself for the calm of the dreadful day of which so small a portion had yet passed. She pretended to dine, that no outlet might be left to gossip on that score. She took a good book and lay down upon the sofa in the awful silence—the moments creeping, stealing over her in a tedious procession which she could almost see—the silence throbbing all around as if with the beats of her own heart; how was it that the walls of the house stood steady with those throbs palpitating within their dull enclosure? But there was this comfort at least, that nobody fathomed Mrs. Vincent in that speechless martyrdom of hers—nobody guessed the horror in her heart—nobody imagined that there was anything of tragic meaning under that composed aspect. She went to church again in the evening to escape Phoebe's "nursing," and sat there choking with the anticipation that meantime her son was bringing Susan home. She walked home with Beecher, devoured by feverish hopes and fears, found still no one

there, with an unutterable pang, yet relief, and sat with the young man from ’Omerton for a horrible hour or two, till the strain had all but killed her. But nobody came; nobody came all through the hideous night. Holding with half-frantic hands to the thread of life, which could ill bear this total want of all its usual sustenance, but which must not be sacrificed for her children’s sake—keeping alive, she could not tell how, without food, without rest, without even prayer—nothing but a fever of dumb entreaty coming to her mind when she sought some forlorn comfort from the mere fact of going on her knees— Mrs. Vincent lived through the night and the morning. Another horrible, sunshiny, cheerful day; but no sound in earth or heaven to say they were coming—no arrival, no letter—nothing but hopeless, sickening, intolerable suspense—suspense all the more intolerable because it had to be borne.

CHAPTER II.

TO-MORROW! to-morrow was Monday morning, a new day, a new work-week—cheerful, healthful, and exhilarating—bright with that frosty sunshine, which carried comparative comfort to many a poor house in Carlingford. The widow’s face was sharper, paler, of a wonderful ashy colour. Nature could not go on under such a struggle without showing signs of it. Beecher, who was not to go until a late train, took leave of her as soon as he could, not without a little fright, and betook himself to Tozer’s, where he said she overawed him with her grand manners, and where he was led to admit that Vincent had always been a little “high.” If she could have abandoned herself to her dreadful vigil, perhaps Mrs. Vincent might have found it easier, perhaps harder—she herself thought the former; but she dared not give up to it. She had to set her face like a flint—she was Arthur’s representative, and had still to show a steadfast front of battle for him, and if not discomfit, still confront his enemies. She had to call at Siloam Cottage, at Mrs. Tozer’s, to do what else might be necessary for the propitiation of the flock. She never dreamed of

saying to herself that she could not do it; there was no question of that; the flag had to be kept flying for Arthur. No friend of his must be jeopardised, no whisper allowed to rise which his mother could prevent: she had been a minister's wife for thirty years; well had she learned in that time, like Mrs. Tufton, that a deal of attention was needed to keep all things straight.

Accordingly, in the height of her excitement and anxiety, believing that any moment the poor fugitive might be brought home, the widow, in her unflinching martyrdom, once more put on her bonnet, and drew out her black ribbon into bows of matchless neatness. Though she wrung her poor hands in speechless anguish as she went out of the room, it was with composed, though colourless lips, that she spoke to the little maid in the hall. "Mr. Vincent may come home any time to-day," said the widow; "you must have some lunch ready, and tea; perhaps his sister may be with him—or—or she may come alone. Any one who comes is to be taken up-stairs. I will not be long gone; and I am going to Mrs. Tufton's, if anybody should want me——"

At this moment a knock came to the door—a hurried single knock, always alarming, and sounding like an evil omen. Mrs. Vincent's voice failed her at that sound—most likely her face went into convulsive twitches, for the maid stood staring at her, too much startled to open the door, until a wild gesture from the speechless woman, who was herself unable to move, her breath almost forsaking her, and coming in sobs, recalled the girl to her senses. The door was opened, and Mrs. Vincent stood with burning eyes gazing out. Ah, not Susan! never Susan!—a little, stout, rustic figure, all weary and dishevelled, looking ashamed, frightened, almost disreputable in utter forlornness and unhappiness. Mrs. Vincent gave a great sob to get breath, and dropped upon the chair, and held out her hand to Mary. She had forgotten Mary—forgotten her momentary comfort in the fact that Susan's flight was not alone. Now was it life or death the girl was bringing? She drew the frightened creature near, close, and shrieked, as she thought, her question in her ear. "What?

what?" said Mrs. Vincent in her own mind; but no sound came to Mary's ears.

"O missis dear, missis dear!" sobbed the girl. "I've been and told Mr. Arthur exact where she is—he's gone to fetch her home. O missis, don't take on! they'll soon be here. Miss Susan's living, she ain't dead. O missis, missis, she ain't dead—it might be worse nor it is."

At these words Mrs. Vincent roused herself up once more. "My daughter has been ill," she said in gasps, turning a dreadful look upon the servant of the house. Then she rose, took hold of Mary's arm, and went up-stairs with her, holding her fast. She shut the door with her own hands when they got back to the lonely parlour full of daylight and silence. "Miss Susan has been ill?" she said once more with parched lips, looking again, with that full blank gaze which seemed to deny and defy any other answer, in Mary's frightened face.

"O missis, don't take on!" sobbed the terrified girl.

"No, oh no, no, that is impossible. I can't take on, Mary, if I would—oh no, not now," said the poor widow, with what seemed a momentary wandering of her strained senses. "Tell me all— I am ready to hear it all."

And then Mary began the pitiful story, the same they had heard in Lonsdale—the sudden arrival of the girl and her governess, and innocent Susan's puzzled interest in them; Mr. Fordham's appearance afterwards, his sudden snatch at the stranger, his ready use of Arthur's letter, which Susan was disturbed about, to persuade her that she must instantly go to her mother and set all right; the journey bringing them late at night to an unknown place, which, with the boom of the unexpected sea in their ears, the defenceless deceived creatures found out not to be Carlingford. Mary knew nothing of the scene which had been enacted up-stairs, when the villanous scheme was made known to the unhappy victim. She could tell nothing but by guesses of what had passed and followed, and Mary, of course, by a natural certainty, guessed the worst. But next day Susan had written to her mother, either because she was still

deceived or still innocent; and the next day again Mary was sent away under a pretence of being sent to church, and the false Fordham himself had conducted her to town and left her there. Such was Mary's tale. Last night she had met Mr. Arthur and given him the address. Now, no doubt, they were on their way,—if only missis would not take on! "No," said the widow once more, with speechless lips. Take on! oh no, never more. Surely all these light afflictions that could bring tears were over now—nothing but horror and agony remained. The poor mother sat for a little in a dreadful silence, aching all over her anguished frame. Nothing was to be said or done; the pause of utter misery, in which thought itself had no place, but one horrible sensation of suffering was all that remained of life, passed over her; then a faint agonised smile fluttered upon her white lips. She drew on her glove again slowly and with pain. "I must go out, Mary," said Arthur's mother. "I must do my duty if the world were all breaking up, as I—I think it is; and you must stay here and tell my poor darling her mother will come back to her directly. And don't talk to the other servant, Mary. You shall be like my own child if you will stand by us now."

"O missis dear, not a word—not if it was to save my life!" said poor Mary, through her tears.

And in her bravery and desperation the widow went out to her other forlorn hope. She went away out of the doors which enclosed at least the knowledge of this event, through the everyday streets, where, if there were other tragedies, nobody knew of them any more than of hers. She had her veil over her face, on which that shadow had settled, and no one could have suspected her of carrying a broken heart through those sunshiny ways. She could not think or anticipate or even fear anything further. Susan might die under that load of shame and anguish, but her mother apprehended, was sensible of, nothing more. The worst had come, except for Arthur, who might be helped out of his troubles. So, stunned and hopeless, she set out to visit Arthur's people, with a courage more desperate than that of battle. That was the duty which must be done if the world went to pieces—to talk to Adelaide Tufton and hear her

sharp criticism and bitter gossip—to listen to the old minister dawdling forth his slow sentiments—to visit the Tozers and soothe their feelings, and hear what they had to say. An auto-da-fé in the old Spanish fashion would have been easier, to be sure; but this was how the minister's mother, in the depths of unknown anguish and calamity, was expected to exert herself, the only way she could serve her son.

The parlour in Siloam Cottage was as green and obscure, as warm and close, as of old. The big geranium had grown, and covered the little window still more completely, and the fire burned with virulence, conscious of the frost. The minister's invalid daughter, with the colourless face and sharp eyes, was still knitting, leaning back upon her pillows. Poor Mrs. Vincent, when she sat down, as near the door as possible, feeling as if she could not get breath, became immediately aware that to confront those eyes was a more dangerous process than any which she had yet been subjected to in Carlingford. They penetrated through her, keen with the restless life and curiosity, which made up to that disabled woman for the privations of her existence. In the dim green parlour the minister's mother saw nothing but Adelaide Tufton's eyes. If they had been beautiful eyes the effect would have been less surprising; but they were not beautiful; they were pale blue, and had something of the shrill shining of a rainy sky in the glistening white, which counted for far more than the faint watery colour. Mrs. Vincent gave way before them as she had never yet done. She cast down her own eyes, and drew back her chair, and even faltered in her speech, when she was obliged to face their observation. The danger was all the greater for being unexpected. As for Mrs. Tufton, that good woman was in a flutter of interest and sympathy. She wanted to know whether Susan had gone through all the orthodox number of fevers and youthful ailments, and was in her element talking of the merits of camphor as a preventive, and of all the means that might be used to avoid infection.

"When my children were young, and their papa always being noted for so active a man among his people, I don't know what I should have done if I had been easily

frightened," said Mrs. Tufton. "Don't worry—keep her quiet, and give her——"

"Mrs. Vincent never said she was afraid of infection," said Adelaide. "Is it typhus fever? My mother jumps at everything, and never stops to inquire. I daresay it's something quite different. Love affairs? Oh no; of course we don't want you to tell us. I don't think Phœbe Tozer will die of her failure. This young man from Homerton will console her. Has your son recovered his little affair with the young Dowager, Mrs. Vincent? He dined there, you know. I daresay his head was turned; but there is one safeguard with those fine ladies. If a man has his wits about him, he can always know that they mean nothing all the time."

"Indeed, I don't know what you mean. My son knows Lady Western, I believe; I remember one time he dined there. My Arthur," said the mother, with a faint smile, "is not one to have his head turned. He has been used to be thought a great deal of at home."

"Ah, he's a precious young man!" said Mr. Tufton, see-sawing the air with his large grey hand. "I am much interested in my dear young brother. He thinks too much, perhaps—too much—of pleasing the carnal mind; and my people, that have been used to practical preaching so long, find the difference. But when he has deeper experiences——"

"Stuff!" said the invalid, turning her head half aside; "you know the chapel has filled since he came. Even when they are asses like your Salem people, you know they like a man with brains. I don't see that it matters much what Mr. Vincent goes wrong in; he was sure to go wrong somehow. I gave him six months, but he has got through the six months, and they have not killed him off yet. What does he mean, thrusting himself into other people's messes? As far as I can make out, it's quite a little tragedy. There was that Mrs. Hilyard, you know—the woman in Back Grove Street. Ah, you know her!" said Adelaide, keenly, seeing the little shiver with which the visitor received the name.

“I have heard my son speak of her,” said the widow, faintly.

“She was some connection of the Bedford family,” said Adelaide, going on, with her curious eyes fixed on Mrs. Vincent’s face, who quailed before her, “and she married a half brother of Lady Western’s—a desperate rascal he was. They had one baby, and then she left him—one baby, a girl, that has grown up an idiot; and here this lady lives—a poor needle-woman—to keep the girl safe, somehow, out of her father’s hand. Why he should want to have her I can’t exactly tell. I suspect, because she’s pretty, to make a decoy of her, and sell her somehow, either to be married, or worse——”

“Adelaide!” cried Mrs. Tufton; “oh, my dear, do mind what you’re saying; Mrs. Vincent does not know you. What can she think if you talk like that?”

“Mrs. Vincent sees well enough I am not a girl to be frightened for words,” said the sick woman. “Now, what I want to know is, what has your son to do with it? He’s gone off after them, now, for some reason or other; of course I don’t expect you to tell me. Perhaps Lady Western has sent him?—never mind, I will find out; but I know it has something to do with Mrs. Hilyard, for they both went off from Carlingford the same day. I have no share in life for myself,” said Adelaide, with another keen look at the stranger; “and so, instead of comforting myself that it’s all for the best, as papa says, I interfere with my fellow-creatures. Oh, pray, don’t be sorry for me! I get on as well as most people. Nobody in this place ever succeeds in concealing anything from me.”

“Indeed it is a pity when people have anything to conceal,” said poor Mrs. Vincent, thinking, with a sensation of deadly sickness at her heart, of the awful secret which was in Mary’s keeping, and faltering, in spite of all her self-command. She rose up hurriedly, when she met once more the glance of those sharp eyes: she could not bear that investigation; all her dreadful suspense and excitement seemed to ooze out unawares, and betray themselves; her only safety seemed in flight.

"This is a very short visit," said Mr. Tufton. "My dear anxious sister, we can only pray you may be comforted. All things work together for good; you don't need to be told that. It's sure to be for the best, whatever happens: take that consolation to your heart—it's sure to be for the best."

"If her daughter dies and her son is dismissed, I wonder will that be for the best?" said Adelaide Tufton, as soon as the widow had left the room. Mrs. Vincent's ears, made acute by suffering, caught enough of this valedictory address to realise, if that were possible, an additional pang. Kind Mrs. Tufton did not hear it, not being in any such state of feverish susceptibility. She, on the contrary, kissed the mother, whom she pitied with all her heart, and entreated her not to worry. "A young healthy girl does not fall ill for nothing. You'll see things will turn out all right," said the kind soul; and Mrs. Vincent went upon her forlorn way.

At Mrs. Tozer's the minister's mother found a little committee assembled. Mrs. Brown was there from the Devonshire Dairy, and Mrs. Pigeon, whose gratification in being able to hail Mrs. Vincent as an acquaintance, to the confusion of the dairywoman and amazement of Mrs. Tozer, almost restored the minister to that lady's favour. They were in the drawing-room, where, in honour of the expected visitors, a fire had been lighted; and as Mrs. Vincent ascended the dark staircase, she obtained a passing glimpse of Mr. Beecher seated at the table in the parlour studying "The Railway Guide," which Phœbe expounded to him, until they were both sent for up-stairs. Altogether the conjunction did not look promising for Arthur's interests. She went in thrilling with a touch of exasperation and defiance. Now was the time to make a final stand for Arthur. This covert rebellion could be deprecated no longer.

"I expect my son home to-day," said the brave mother, gulping down all the pangs of her expectation. "I think, now that I see for myself how much he is thought of in Carlingford, I ought to make an apology to the Salem people. It was I that induced him to go away, not thinking that one Sunday would be such a great matter; but

indeed it was very gratifying to me to see how disappointed everybody was. I hope Mr. Beecher will pardon me, for I am sure he preached us a very nice sermon, and we were all grateful for it; but, naturally on my dear boy's account, to see how disappointed everybody was, was a great gratification to me."

"Oh! I did not mind," said Mr. Beecher, with a little laugh of embarrassment; but the young man was much taken aback, and stared with astonished looks before he answered, at this totally unexpected address. Having thus floored one of her adversaries, and seeing the female foe more voluble and ready, quite prepared to answer her, Mrs. Vincent blandly proceeded.

"And this, you know, Mrs. Tozer, was all the more gratifying to me, because I was not quite sure that Arthur had done wisely in choosing Carlingford. His dear father had so many friends in our denomination, and people are so kind as to speak of my boy as such a rising young man. Before I knew Carlingford," said the widow, looking round her with an air of gentle superiority, "I used to regret my son had not accepted the invitation from Liverpool. Many people said to me that his talents would have had so much more room there; but I am reconciled now," she added, turning her mild eyes upon Mrs. Pigeon, who showed symptoms of resistance. "I may say I am quite satisfied now. He would have been better off, and had more opportunity of making himself a position in Liverpool, but what is that in comparison with the attachment of a flock?"

"Well, indeed, that's just the thing, ma'am," said Mrs. Brown, who imagined herself addressed; "we are fond of him. I always said he was an uncommon nice young man; and if he was but to settle down——"

"That will come in time," said the minister's mother, graciously; "and I am glad, for my part, that he has been away, for it shows me how his dear people feel towards him; and though he would have been, of course, better off in Liverpool, I would never consider that in comparison. They still want to have him, you know, and keep

writing me letters, and him too, I don't doubt; but after what I have seen, I could never advise him to break the link that has been formed here. The connection between pastor and people is a sacred tie; it should never be broken," said Mrs. Vincent, with mild grandeur, "for anything so poor as a money object; but my dear boy is far above any such consideration as that."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Pigeon, drawing a long breath of involuntary awe and admiration; "and I don't doubt as the pastor would have been a deal better off in Liverpool," she added, after a pause, quite overpowered by that master-stroke.

"It's a deal bigger a place," suggested Mrs. Tozer; "and grander folks, I don't have a doubt," she too added, after an interval. This new idea took away their breath.

"But, ah! what is that to affection," said Arthur's artful mother, "when a minister has the love of his flock! My dear Mrs. Pigeon, though a mother is naturally anxious for her son, nothing on earth would induce me to advise him to break such a tie as that!"

"And indeed, ma'am, it's as a Christian mother should act," gasped the poulterer's subdued wife. Mrs. Brown made a little movement of admiring assent, much impressed with the fine sentiments of the minister's mother. Phœbe put her handkerchief to her eyes, and Mr. Beecher found it was time for his train. "Tell Vincent I am very glad to have been of use to him. We were all delighted in 'Omerton to hear of him making such an 'it," said Mr. Beecher, friendly but discomfited. He made his leave-taking all round, before Mrs. Vincent, at the height of victory, rose and went her way. Then she, too, shook hands, and blandly parted with the astonished women. They remained behind, and laid their heads together, much subdued, over this totally new light. She departed, gently victorious. This little demonstration had done her good. When she got out into the street, however, she fell down again into those depths of despair out of which she had risen so bravely for Arthur's sake. She began to plan how she and Susan could go away—not to Lonsdale—never again to Lonsdale—but to some unknown place, and hide their

shame-stricken heads. She was so weary and sick in her heart, it was almost a comfort to think of creeping into some corner, taking her poor darling into her arms, healing those dreadful wounds of hers, hiding her from the sight of men. This was what they must do as soon as her dearest child came back—go to Scotland, perhaps, or into the primitive south country, where nobody knew them, or—— but softly, who was this?

A new claim upon the overworked anxious soul. At the door of her son's house stood a carriage—an open carriage—luxurious and handsome, with two fine horses impatiently pawing the air, and a very fine footman at the door, talking to the little maid. Within the carriage, the same beautiful young woman whom Mrs. Vincent remembered to have seen waving a lovely hand to Arthur. No doubt it was Lady Western. The beauty did not bewilder Mrs. Vincent as she had bewildered Mrs. Vincent's son; but, with a thrill of mingled pride, admiration, and disapproval, she hastened forward at sight of her. Could she be asking for Arthur?—and could Arthur have ventured to love that lovely creature in her radiance of wealth and rank? With a mother's involuntary self-delusion Mrs. Vincent looked at the beautiful vision as at Arthur's possible bride, and was proud and displeased at the same moment; proud, that anything so lovely and splendid was to fall to her son's lot—disapproving, that Arthur's chosen should offer a mark of favour even to Arthur, so much more decided than accorded with the widow's old-fashioned notion of what became a woman. Mrs. Vincent did not think of the other figure by Lady Western's side—a man of great height, very slight, and rapid in his movements, with a long brown beard, and thoughtful eyes—eyes which lightened up and became as keen as they were dreamy, whenever occasion arose. Why should the widow look at him? She had nothing to do with him. This once in their life they were to come into momentary contact—never more.

"Mr. Vincent ain't at home—but oh, look year!—here's his mother as can tell you better nor me," cried the half-frightened maid at the door.

"His mother?" said the beautiful creature in the carriage; she had alighted in a moment, and was by Mrs. Vincent's side—"Oh, I am so glad to see Mr. Vincent's mother! I am Lady Western—he has told you of me?" she said, taking the widow's hand; "take us in, please, and let us talk to you—we will not tease you—we have something important to say."

"Important to us—not to Mrs. Vincent," said the gentleman who followed her, a remarkable figure, in his loose light-coloured morning dress; and his eyes fell with a remorseful pity upon the widow, standing, drawn-back, and self-restrained, upon the ground of her conscious misery, not knowing whether to hope that they brought her news, or to steel herself into a commonplace aspect of civility. This man had a heart; he looked from the brilliant creature before him, all flushed and radiant with her own happiness, to the little woman by her side, in her pitiful widow's dress, in her visible paleness and desperation of self-control. It was he who had brought Lady Western here to put his own innocence beyond doubt, but the cruelty of that selfish impulse struck him now as he saw them stand together. "Important to us—not to Mrs. Vincent," he said again, taking off his hat to her with devout respect.

"Ah, yes! to us," said Lady Western, looking up to him with a momentary gleam of love and happiness. Then the pretty tender-hearted creature changed her look, and composed her countenance into sympathy. "I am so sorry for you, dear Mrs. Vincent!" she said, with the saddest voice. At this the widow on her part started, and was recalled to herself.

"I am a stranger in Carlingford," said the mild little woman, drawing up her tiny figure. "I do not know what has procured me this pleasure—but all my son's friends are welcome to me. I will show you the way up-stairs," she continued, going up before them with the air of dignity which, after the hard battles and encounters and bitter wounds of this day, became the heroic little figure. She sent Mary, who started up in dismay at her entrance, into another room, and gave Lady Western a chair, but

herself continued standing, always the conservator of Arthur's honour. If Arthur loved her, who was this man? why did such glances pass between them? Mrs. Vincent stood erect before Lady Western, and did not yield even to the winning looks for which poor Arthur would have given his life.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Vincent, I am so sorry for you!" said Lady Western again; "I know it all, and it makes my heart bleed to think of it. I will be your friend and your daughter's friend as long as I live, if you will let me. Oh, don't shut your heart against me! Mr. Vincent trusts me, and so must you; and I am heartbroken to think all that you must have gone through——"

"Stop!" said Mrs. Vincent, with a gasp. "I—I cannot tell—what you mean," she articulated, with difficulty, holding by the table to support herself, but looking with unflinching eyes in her new persecutor's face.

"Oh, don't shut your heart against me!" cried the young dowager, with genuine tears in her lovely eyes. "This gentleman was with Mr. Vincent yesterday—he came up here this morning. He is—Mr. Fordham." She broke off abruptly with a terrified cry. But Mrs. Vincent had not died or fainted standing rigid there before her, as the soft creature thought. Her eyes had only taken that blank lustreless gaze, because the force of emotion beneath was too much for them, and inexpressible. Even in that extremity, it was in the widow's heart, wrung to desperation, to keep her standing-ground of assumed ignorance, and not to know what this sudden offer of sympathy could mean.

"I do not know—the gentleman," she said, slowly, trying to make the shadow of a curtsy to him. "I am sorry to seem uncivil; but I am tired and anxious. What—what did you want of me?" she asked, in a little outburst of uncontrollable petulance, which comforted Lady Western. It was a very natural question. Surely, in this forlorn room, where she had passed so many wretched hours, her privacy might have been sacred; and she was jealous and angry at the sight of Fordham for

Arthur's sake. It was another touch in the universal misery. She looked at Lady Western's beauty with an angry heart. For these two, who ventured to come to her in their happiness, affronting her anguish, was Arthur's heart to be broken too?

"We wanted—our own ends," said Fordham, coming forward. "I was so cruel as to think of myself, and that you would prove it was another who had assumed my name. Forgive me—it was I who brought Lady Western here; and if either of us can serve you, or your daughter—or your son—" added Fordham, turning red, and looking round at his beautiful companion——

Mrs. Vincent could bear it no longer. She made a hasty gesture of impatience, and pointed to the door. "I am not well enough, nor happy enough, to be civil," cried Arthur's mother; "we want nothing—nothing." Her voice failed her in this unlooked-for exasperation. A few bitter tears came welling up hot to her eyes. It was very different from the stupor of agony—it was a blaze of short-lived passion, which almost relieved, by its sense of resentment and indignation, a heart worn out with other emotions. Fordham himself, filled with compunction, led Lady Western to the door; but it was not in the kind, foolish heart of the young beauty to leave this poor woman in peace. She came back and seized Mrs. Vincent's trembling hands in her own; she begged to be allowed to stay to comfort her; she would have kissed the widow, who drew back, and, half fainting with fatigue and excitement, still kept her erect position by the table. Finally, she went away in tears, no other means of showing her sympathy being practicable. Mrs. Vincent dropped down on her knees beside the table as soon as she was alone, and leaned her aching, throbbing head upon it. Oh, dreadful lingering day, which was not yet half gone! Unconsciously groans of suffering, low but repeated, came out of her heart. The sound brought Mary, with whom no concealment was possible, and who gave what attendance and what sympathy she might to her mistress's grievous trouble. Perhaps the work of this dreadful day was less hard than the vigil to which the mother had now to nerve her heart.

CHAPTER III.

WAS it possible that she had slept? A moment ago and it was daylight—a red sunset afternoon: now the pale half-light, struggling with the black darkness, filled the apartment. She was lying on the sofa where Mary had laid her, and by her side, upon a chair within her reach, was some tea untasted, which Mary must have brought after she had fallen into that momentary slumber. The fire burned brightly, with occasional little outbreaks of flame. Such a silence seemed in the house—silence that crept and shuddered—and to think she should have slept!

The night had found covert in all the corners, so dark they were; but one pale line of light came from the window, and the room had a little ruddy centre in the fire. Mrs. Vincent, in the poignant anguish of her awakening, grew superstitious; some other breath—some other presence—seemed in the room besides her own. She called "Mary," but there was no answer. In her excited condition anything was possible—the bounds of the living world and the possible seemed gone for ever. She might see anything—hear anything—in the calm of her desperation. She got up, and hastily lighted the candle which stood on the table. As she looked over the little light a great cry escaped her. What was it? rising darkly, rising slowly, out of the shadows in which it had been crouching, a huddled indistinct figure. Oh God! not Susan! not her child! As it rose slowly facing her, the widow cried aloud once more, and put her hand over her eyes to shut out the dreadful vision. Ghastly white, with fixed dilated eyes—with a figure dilated and grandiose—like a statue stricken into marble, raised to grandeur—could it be Susan who stood there, without a word, without a movement, only with a blank dark gaze at the horrified woman, who dared not meet those dreadful eyes? When life rallied in Mrs. Vincent's horror-stricken heart, she went to the ghastly creature, and put warm arms round it, and called it Susan! Susan! Had it any consciousness at all, this dreadful ghost? had it come from another world? The mother kissed it with lips that woke no answer—held it motionless in

her trembling arms. She cried again aloud—a great outcry—no longer fearing anything. What were appearances now? If it was Susan, it was Susan dead whom she held, all unyielding and terrible in her warm human arms.

Mary heard and came with exclamations of terror and sympathy. They got her between them to the fire, and chafed her chill hands and feet. Nobody knew how she had got in, where she had come from; no one was with her—no one had admitted her. She sat a marble woman in the chair where they had placed her, unresistant, only gazing, gazing—turning her awful eyes after her mother. At last she drew some long gasping breaths, and, with a shudder which shook her entire frame, seemed to come to herself. “I am Susan Vincent,” said the awful ghost. No tears, nor cries, nor wild pressure of her mother’s arms, nor entreaties poured into her cold ear, could extract any other words. Mrs. Vincent lost her self-possession: she rushed out of the room for remedies—rung the bell—called for Arthur in a voice of despair—could nobody help her, even in this horrible crisis? When she had roused the house she recollected herself, and shut the door upon the wondering strangers, and returned once more to her hopeless task. “Oh, Mary! what are we to do? Oh, Susan, my child, my darling! speak to your poor mother,” cried the widow; but the marble figure in the chair, which was Susan, made no reply. It began to shiver with dreadful trembling fits—to be convulsed with long gasping sobs. “I am—Susan—Susan Vincent”—it said at intervals, with a pitiful iteration. The sight of her daughter in this frightful condition, coming after all her fatigue and strain of excitement, unnerved Mrs. Vincent completely. She had locked the door in her sudden dismay. She was kneeling, clasping Susan’s knees—wasting vain adjurations upon her—driven beyond hope, beyond sense, beyond capacity. Little rustic Mary had all the weight of the emergency thrown upon her shoulders. It was she who called to the curious landlady outside to send for the doctor, and who managed to get Susan put into her mother’s bed. When they had succeeded in laying her down there, a long interval, that seemed like years, passed before Dr. Rider came. The bed was opposite

the window, through which the pale rays of the twilight were still trembling. The candle on the other side showed Mrs. Vincent walking about the room wringing her hands, now and then coming to the bedside to look at the unconscious form there, rent by those gasping sobs, uttering those dreadful words. Mary stood crying at the foot of the bed. As for the widow, her eyes were tearless—her heart in an intolerable fever of suffering. She could not bear it. She said aloud she could not bear it—she could not bear it! Then she returned again to call vainly upon her child, her child! Her strength had given way—she had spent all her reserves, and had nothing to resist this unexpected climax of misery.

It was quite dark when Dr. Rider came. Mary held the candle for him as he felt Susan's pulse, and examined her wide-open eyes. The doctor knew nothing about her any more than if he had not been a doctor. He said it must have been some dreadful mental shock, with inquiring looks at Mrs. Vincent, who began to recover herself. He put back the heavy locks of golden brown hair, which had been loosened down from Susan's head, and said he was afraid there was pressure on the brain. What could he say?—he knew nothing more about it. He left some simple directions, said he would send some medicine, and took Mrs. Vincent into a corner to ask what it was. "Some severe mental shock?" asked Dr. Rider; but, before she could reply, a cab drove rapidly up to the door, and sounds of a sudden arrival were audible in the house. "Oh, doctor, thank God, my son is come—now I can bear it," said the widow. Dr. Rider, who was of a compassionate nature, waited with pitying eyes till the minister should come up, and went to take another look at the patient, relieved to think he could speak to her brother, instead of racking her mother's heart. Mrs. Vincent grew calm in the sudden consolation of thinking Arthur at hand. She sat down by the bedside, with her eyes fixed on the door, yearning for her son, the only living creature from whom she could have entire sympathy. Was it necessary that they should speak so loudly as they came up-stairs?—could he be bringing a stranger with him to Susan's sickroom? Her heart began to beat louder with mingled

expectation and displeasure. It was not like Arthur—and there was no sound of his voice in the noise that swept up the stair. She rose up instinctively as the footsteps approached—heavy steps, not like her son's. Then the door was thrown open. It was not Arthur who stood upon the dim threshold. It was a stranger in a rough travelling-coat, excited, resolute, full of his own errand. He made a stride into the room to the bedside, thrusting Mrs. Vincent aside, not wittingly, but because she was in his way. Mary stood at the other side with the doctor, holding up the one pale candle, which threw a flickering light upon the marble white figure on the bed, and the utter consternation and surprise in Dr. Rider's face. Mrs. Vincent, too much alarmed and astonished to offer any resistance, followed the man who had thus entered into her sanctuary of anguish. He knew what he was doing, though nobody else did. He went straight forward to the bed. But the sight of the unconscious figure there appalled the confident stranger. "It is she, sure enough," he said; "are you a doctor, sir? is the lady taken ill? I've come after her every step of the way. She's in my custody now. I'll not give any trouble that I can help, but I must stay here."

Mrs. Vincent, who scarcely could endure to hear, and did not understand, rushed forward while he was speaking, and seized him by the arm—"Leave the room!" she cried with sudden passion—"He has made some impudent mistake, doctor. God help me!—will you let my child be insulted? Leave the room, sir—leave the room, I say! This is my daughter, Miss Vincent, lying here. Mary, ring the bell—he must be turned out of the room. Doctor, doctor! you are a man; you will never let my child be insulted because her brother is away."

"What does it mean?" cried Dr. Rider—"go outside and I will come and speak to you. Miss Vincent is in a most dangerous state—perhaps dying. If you know her——"

"Know her, doctor! you are speaking of my child," cried Mrs. Vincent, who faced the intruder with blazing eyes. The man held his ground, not impertinently, but with

steadiness.

“I know her fast enough,” he said; “I’ve tracked her every step of the way; not to hurt the lady’s feelings, I can’t help what I’m doing, sir. It’s murder;—I can’t let her out of my sight.”

Mrs. Vincent clasped her hands together with a grasp of desperation. “What is murder?” she said, in a voice that echoed through the room. The doctor, with an exclamation of horror, repeated the same question. Murder! it seemed to ring through the shuddering house.

“It’s hard upon a lady, not to say her mother,” said the man, compassionately; “but I have to do my duty. A gentleman’s been shot where she’s come from. She’s the first as suspicion falls on. It often turns out as the one that’s first suspected isn’t the criminal. Don’t fret, ma’am,” he added, with a glance of pity, “perhaps it’s only as a witness she’ll be wanted—but I must stay here. I daren’t let her out of my sight.”

There was a dreadful pause. Mrs. Vincent looked up at the two men before her with a heartrending appeal in her eyes. Would anybody tell her what it meant?—would nobody interfere for Susan? She moaned aloud inarticulate in her voiceless misery. “And Arthur is not here!” was the outcry which at last burst from her heart. She was beyond feeling what this was—her senses were confused with extremity of suffering. She only felt that another blow had been dealt at her, and that Arthur was not here to help to bear it. Then the stranger, who had put himself so horribly in possession of Susan’s sickroom, once more began to speak. The widow could not tell what he said—the voice rang in her ears like a noise of unmeaning sound, but it stirred her to a flush of female passion, as violent as it was shortlived. She sprang forward and took hold of his arm with her white little trembling hand: “Not here—not here!” cried the mother in her passion. With her feeble force excited into something irresistible, she put the astonished stranger out of the room before he knew what she was doing. If an infant had done it the man could not have been more

utterly astonished. Outside, the people of the house were standing in an excited group. She thrust the dreadful messenger of justice out with those hands that shook with tremors of anguish and weakness. She shut the door upon him with all her feeble strength, locked it, put a chair against it; then she stumbled and fell as she stretched out for another—fell down upon her knees, poor soul! and remained so, forgetting, as it seemed, how she came there, and gradually, by instinct, putting together the hands which trembled like leaves in the wind—"Lord, Lord!" cried the mother, hovering on the wild verge between passion and insensibility. She called Him by name only as utter anguish alone knows how; she had nothing to tell Him; she could only call upon Him by His name.

Dr. Rider took the half-insensible form up in his arms and carried her to the bedside, where Susan still lay motionless with her eyes wide open, in an awful abstraction and unconsciousness. He put Mrs. Vincent tenderly into the chair, and held the hands that shook with that palsied irrestrainable tremor. "No one can bring her to life but you," said the doctor, turning the face of the miserable mother towards her child. "She has kept her senses till she reached you; when she was here she no longer wanted them; she has left her life in your hands." He held those hands fast as he spoke; pressed them gently, but firmly; repeated his words over again. "In your hands," said the doctor once more, struck to his heart with horror and pity. Susan's bare beautiful arm lay on the coverlid, white, round, and full, like marble. The doctor, who had never seen the fair Saxon girl who was Mrs. Vincent's daughter a week ago, thought in his heart that this full developed form and face, rapt to grandeur by the extremity of woe, gave no contradiction to the accusation he had just heard with so much horror. That week had obliterated Susan's soft girlish innocence and the simplicity of her eighteen years. She was a grand form as she lay there upon that bed—might have loved to desperation—fallen—killed. Unconsciously he uttered aloud the thought in his heart—"Perhaps it would be better she should die!"

Then the mother rose. Once more her painful senses came back to the woman who was still the minister's mother, and, even in this hideous dream of misery, had not forgotten the habits of her life. "When my son comes he will settle it all," said Mrs. Vincent. "I expect him—any time—he may come any minute. Some one has made—a mistake. I don't know what that man said; but he has made—a mistake, doctor. My son, Mr. Vincent, will see to all that. It has nothing to do with us. Tell me what we are to do for my child. Cut off her hair? Oh, yes, yes, anything! I don't mind it, though it is a sacrifice. She has had—a—a great fright, doctor. She could not tell me particulars. When her brother comes home, we will hear all—" said the widow, looking with a jealous gaze in his eyes to see if he believed her. The scene altogether overcame Dr. Rider. He turned away and went to the other side of the room, and took a glass of water from the table before he could answer her or meet that appeal. Then he soothed her as he best could with directions about Susan. He went away immediately to come back in an hour, if perhaps there might be any change—so he said; but, in reality, he wanted to escape, to hear this dreadful story, to think what was best. Friendless, with nobody near to protect them, and the officer of justice waiting at the door, what were these women to do? perhaps death waited closer than the visible messenger of fate. Would it be well to stay that more merciful executioner on his way?

The doctor found the officer outside the door, waiting, not without pity, at his post. He heard what was this man's version of the strange tragedy—strange, and yet not unfamiliar to human ears. The young woman had been betrayed and ruined. In wild vengeance and misery she had seized one of her seducer's pistols and shot him through the head—such was the story. And now she had fled from the scene of the murder, tracked step by step by the avenger. The whole house was in a tumult, as may be supposed. The indignant landlady, who was a member of Salem, could scarcely be prevented going into the jealously-closed room and turning out the unhappy criminal. Another lodger, a nervous woman, had already collected her

goods to fly from the place. Outside, some mysterious instinct had collected a few people about the door of the hitherto irreproachable house, which imagination magnified into a crowd. Already Tozer had set out from his shop, red with anger, to inquire into this incipient excitement, which nobody could explain. And still Arthur had not appeared to stand by the miserable women in this horrible climax of fate.

When the doctor went back to the room where Susan was, he found Mrs. Vincent in a state of agitated activity. Mary and she were flitting about the room, moving lights before Susan's eyes, making what noises they could with the furniture, keeping a fantastic commotion about the bed. "She stirred, doctor, and we were trying to rouse her," said the widow, who had put everything but Susan's bodily extremity from her eyes at the moment. The doctor, who was desperate, and whose heart was moved, resorted to desperate measures. He gathered them about the bed, set Mrs. Vincent to support the insensible form, and raising that white marble arm which had developed into such glorious proportion, touched the swollen blue vein with his lancet. The touch acted like magic. In another moment she had struggled up out of her mother's grasp, and thrown out the arm, from which the blood flowed, up above her head: the crimson stream caught her wild eye as she raised her arm in the air. A convulsive shudder shook her frame. She threw herself over on her face with a cry of horror, far more than a match, in her strength of youth and passion, for the agitated arms that held her. "Mother, mother, mother! it is his blood! it is his life!" cried that despairing voice. The confused bed, the convulsed frame, the flowing blood, all pitifully lighted up by Mary's candle, made up of themselves a scene like murder; and Dr. Rider vainly tried to forget the dreadful words which forced upon his mind their untimely testimony. He shuddered at the touch of that white woman's hand as he bound up the wounded arm. He withdrew his eyes from the pallid grandeur of the stricken face. In spite of himself, horror mingled with his pity. A heavier stain was upon her than those crimson traces on her pearly skin. Other words followed in an incoherent stream. Fever of the heart and brain, burning up into consuming frenzy,

had seized upon this lost creature, who was no longer a girl or innocent. Ere long they had to send for nurses, to restrain her delirium. She, raving with a wild madness which betrayed in every wandering exclamation the horror upon her soul, lay desperate in the room which had enclosed for so many lingering hours her mother's anguish of suspense and fear. In an adjoining room, the man who had followed her to this refuge still waited, watchful yet pitiful, intent that his prisoner should not escape him. While outside a few gazers lingered, looking up at the lights in the windows, with a strange perception that something unusual had happened, though nobody knew what it was. Such was the scene upon which Arthur Vincent, not unwarned, yet incredulous, came suddenly with eyes of horror and wild indignation as he reached his own door.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Vincent was set down, in the darkness and silence of the Sunday night, in the Dover railway station, it was some minutes before he could collect himself, and understand where he was. He had fallen into a feverish sleep during the journey, little as he could have supposed himself capable of sleeping at such a moment; but he was young, and unused to the ceaseless fatigue and excitement and total want of rest which had obliterated for him the natural distinction between night and day. While his fellow-passengers trooped away with all the bustle and excitement of travellers, who had then only completed the first stage of their journey, to the pier and the night-boat which waited to carry them across the Channel, he, whom various porters and attendants stimulated with adjurations to make haste, and warnings that he would be late, stumbled out into the dark, collecting his faculties, and trying to think what he must do first. He was giddy and feverish with that insufficient snatch of sleep which had lost him the time in which he might have been laying his plans. But when he got outside the station into the unknown place, into the gloom of night,

and heard the “moanings of the homeless sea” sounding sullen against the unseen shore, recollection and energy came back to him. That very sound, booming through the darkness, inspired Susan’s brother. He thought of her forlorn, desolate, succourless, a weary wanderer seeking rest and finding none, shrouded up in darkness and danger, lost in the mysterious gloom—such was the sentiment of the night. The minister went on rapidly to the town, with its restless lights, through which everybody seemed to be passing towards the unseen sea. Should he follow with the stream, or should he stop at the hotel of which Mary had told him? He quickened his steps as he reached the open door of the inn, and plunged in to make rapid inquiries. Nobody knew either Colonel Mildmay or Mr. Fordham, but the party which he described had been there, and had left only an hour before—not for the boat, the attendants thought: but the boat was ringing its bells through the night; and if by chance they had gone there, no time was to be lost. He rushed from the inn as fast as his wearied limbs could carry him to the pier, where the lookers-on stood aside out of his way, recognising his excitement. He went through among all the passengers with the rough captain and his lantern, having briefly explained to that functionary what he wanted. But they were not there. When he had satisfied himself, he left the boat, and stood with suspicious reluctance, unwilling to lose sight of it, on the pier, and watched the coloured lamp on the mast of the steamer gradually gliding through the darkness out of the sheltering harbour, till it began to plunge and heave on the unseen sea. Then he took his troubled way back to the inn. It was very late, and all the population seemed to disappear out of the streets, with the little attendant crowd which had been waiting upon the last event of the day, the departure of this night-boat. The inn itself looked half asleep, and was half closed when he returned. No further arrivals, no incidents in the shape of trains or boats, were to be looked for till the morning. It was the first time that Arthur had encountered this compulsory pause of night. He struggled against it for some time, questioning the waiters, and gleaning some particulars which did but increase his anxiety, but the waiters

themselves were sleepy, and all the world around had closed itself up in utter quietness and rest.

Vincent went out again, but he could get admittance nowhere, save at the office of the police, where he went in desperation to ask the services of some one skilful in such inquiries. He found this not without difficulty, but nothing was to be done that night. He had to go back to the hotel to consent to the necessary rest for which, notwithstanding the fever of his mind, his worn-out frame craved. Weariness, indeed, had gradually overpowered and absorbed him—stronger than anxiety, more urgent even than his love for his sister, was this present and over-powering exhaustion which began to occupy all his thoughts. Though he struggled with it he could not but feel in his heart, with a certain guilt, how this overwhelming desire to throw himself down somewhere and rest possessed him to the exclusion of more worthy impulses. After he had ordered some refreshment, of which, indeed, he stood as much in need, the young man threw himself upon a sofa, and there fell into a deep sleep of utter weariness. He could do no more. He slept as youth must sleep, were it on the edge of a precipice, were it at the deathbed of its dearest friend. The very waiter who brought in the food he had ordered, took pity upon the worn-out slumberer. The man heaped up the fire, and covered Vincent with his railway wrapper before he withdrew; and it was not till morning that the young minister awoke out of that profound slumber—awoke chilled and aching, and confused, in the dark, with the untouched meal still on the table, the candle flaming in its socket, and he himself totally unaware how long he had been asleep.

In the interval that elapsed before the first sounds of awakening life in the house, he had time to collect himself, and when he went down-stairs to the coffee-room, still in the dark of the winter morning, had regained more command of himself and his powers than at any previous moment since this misery came upon him.

But it was still so early that the fire was scarcely alight, and he had to wait for the

cup of coffee he ordered. Vincent went to the window, as was natural—a large window looking into the dark street, faintly lighted with lamps, which somehow burned less bright in the chill of the morning than they did at night. Looking out vaguely, yet with the vigilance of anxiety, without being able to discriminate anything except here and there a dark figure passing in the darkness, the young man waited with his face close to the uncurtained panes. There was nothing in that blank undecipherable street to interest him, and yet he gazed out mechanically in the anxious pre-occupation of his mind. When the attendant came into the room with his coffee, his attention was temporarily distracted. He got up to go to the table where breakfast was being arranged for him; but, as he rose, his eye was caught by the gleam of a passing face, ghastly white in the darkness, looking in. Before he could draw breath, the apparition was gone. Without saying a word to the astonished waiter, who began to think him mad, Vincent dashed out after this vanished vision. Two female figures were visible a little further on in the gloomy street. He pursued them with breathless, noiseless speed, and grasped at the arm of a terrified woman who, gasping with sudden fright, turned upon him a face he had never seen before. Nobody else was to be seen in any direction. The minister made an inarticulate apology, and turned back to search for some opening or passage through which that face could have disappeared. It was no fancy of his that painted that pale countenance upon the darkness—the same face that he had seen in the railway carriage following Colonel Mildmay—the same, but with a new look of horror and desperation in its eyes. The young man investigated, as he thought, every doorway, every corner which could have given shelter to such a fugitive. He returned, excited and agitated, to the inn, to ask if there was any passage through the line of houses which he might have overlooked, but could hear of none. It was on his lips to ask if they had heard of any crime or accident during the night—any—murder; but prudence restrained the incautious utterance. He went out with the wildest agitation in his mind; something had happened. Mrs. Hilyard's face, gleaming in unconscious

at the window, betrayed to him much more clearly than any confession, that some new and awful event had been added to that woman's strange experiences of life; and in the darkness he had been aware of some shadowy figure beside her, accompanying her ghostly way. Perhaps her child—perhaps—could it be Susan? The young man went out, not knowing where he went, into the darkness of the winter morning; he hastened to the pier, to the railway, startling the half-awakened people about, but nowhere could either see or hear of her. Could it be a delusion? but the wildest imagination in the world could not have inspired with such a new horror of expression the eyes that gleamed out of that ghastly pale face.

The grey daylight had just got final mastery of the dark, when Vincent met the man whom he had employed the night before to help him in his inquiries. This agent, more skilful than the minister, had found out the cab-driver who conveyed the party from the hotel on the previous evening. Colonel Mildmay seemed to have made the precipitate retreat of a man suddenly startled and frightened out of his plans. The cabman gave a detailed account of the strange conduct of his fare. "We was a-going to the pier to the Ostend steamer, sir," said the driver, "when I was pulled up sharp, and got my directions to turn about sudden and go to the railway. There was a lady as I see keeping her eye on us, a-standing by the pier gates with her bag in her hand; but it was dark, and she couldn't have seen who was in the cab. The same occurred, sir, as we came up to the railway. I don't say as I see the lady there—but sure enough I was pulled up second time, and ordered out along the Folkestone road, a matter o' three mile or so. Then I was turned back again; and the end of all was that I took them to the Swan in Walmer Street, as is a place where there's well-aired beds and chops, and that style o' thing. That ain't the style of thing as is done in the Lord Warden. To take a fare, and partic'lar along with ladies, from the one of them places to the other, looks queer—that's what it does; it looks very queer, sir. It made me take a deal of notice. Gen'leman tall, light-haired, hook nose, awful swell to look at. Ladies, one on 'em pretty tall, one little; pretty creatures, but dreadful skeared as

far as I could see. The little one had a blue veil. That's them, sir; thought as I was right."

"And you can take me to the place?" said Vincent.

"Jump into my cab, and I'll have you there, sir, in five minutes," said the man.

The minister sprang into the cab alone. He no longer wanted the aid of a stranger; the darkling streets seemed to glide past him, and not he past them, as he dashed on at last to find his sister, this time there could be no mistake. After they had threaded several obscure streets, the driver came to a sudden pause, got off his box, and touched his hat with an alarmed look. "I can't drive up to the very 'ouse, sir—there's a crowd around the door; they do say as something has happened. I hope it ain't to any of your friends?" said the cabman. Vincent flung the door open as he was speaking, and rushed out. A horrified and excited crowd was besieging the door of the shabby public-house to which he had been brought. Seeing his hasty arrival, and the passionate anxiety in his eyes, the crowd gave way before him, recognising his right of entry; the very policeman at the door yielded to him in the force of his passion. "What is it?" he cried, aware of putting away some women and babies from the door with mechanical kindness, but unconscious that he had stumbled up the steps like a man in a dream, and was demanding an answer to his question with an almost wild vehemence. The question was answered by a dozen eager voices. It was murder—murder! He could make out nothing but the word in the confusion of many speakers and of his own mind. Nobody opposed his entrance or asked what business he had there. He sprang up the stairs in two or three steps, pressed forward to a half-open door, within which he saw some people assembled, and, unawares thrusting aside a man who stopped him, went into that chamber of death. Several people were around the bed—one, a surgeon, occupied with the prostrate figure there. Vincent, over the heads of the spectators, gazed with burning eyes at this horrible spectacle. Susan herself, whom he did not expect to find there,

nor could associate in any way with such a scene, faded out of his mind as he gazed with haggard face and horror-stricken soul at the shattered head, bound up in bloody-bandages, scarce recognisable except by sharp eyes of love or hate, which rested on that mean pillow. He asked no questions for the moment. To him alone the business needed no explanation. He was not even surprised—he stood gazing in a momentary trance of horror at the lamentable sight. It was a wretched room, shabby and meagre, such a place as only terror could have driven Mildmay to. Villain as he was, his punishment had begun before that pistol-shot brought it to a climax—even in his success he had been conscious that she would keep her word.

The policeman at the door touched Vincent on the sleeve, just as he turned from the dreadful spectacle before him. “Nobody is allowed in here but for a good reason,” said this man, gazing suspiciously at the stranger; “unless you knows something about it, or have come to identify the poor gentleman, or are of some use somehow, I can’t let you stay here.”

“I do not wish to stay here,” said Vincent, turning away with a shudder. “I want to see the ladies who were with him. Yes, I know who he is—but I am not a friend of his; I have nothing to do with the matter. Where are the ladies who were with him? Miss Vincent,” said the minister with a pang, “and—and Miss Mildmay. I have come to take them away.”

“The ladies as were with him? Oh, it’s them as you’re awanting; perhaps you’ll stop a minute and talk to the inspector,” said the policeman. “The ladies as were with him? Maybe you can tell the inspector something as will help justice? You didn’t know the reason as brought out two young women a-travelling with a gen’leman, did you? They’ll want all the friends they can collect afore all’s done. You come this way with me.”

It was a relief to get out of sight of that which horrified yet fascinated his eyes. Vincent followed the man into another room without observing the evident

suspicion with which he was regarded. “Where are they?” he asked again. “I have a cab below. This is not a place for women. I have come to take them away. Where are the people of the house? What do you mean by keeping your hand on me? I want Miss Vincent. Do you hear me? I have nothing to do with Colonel Mildmay. He has plenty of friends to avenge him. I want my sister. Where is she? Call the people of the house.”

Vincent threw off the policeman’s hand from his arm, and, looking for a bell, rang violently. He was too much horror-stricken, and too secure of finding Susan, weeping and helpless in some corner, to show any of the passionate eagerness with which he had started on his search. Little doubt she was there, poor lost soul. He shrank from meeting with her, now that the meeting was so near; and his thoughts went after that other desperate wretched woman, flying—who could tell where?—in despair and darkness. The house was in utter disorder, as was natural; none of its humble occupants being capable, at the present exciting moment, of attending to their usual duties. Vincent rang the bell again, till it pealed and echoed through the place. Then he bethought himself, with a natural shudder, of the death-chamber close by. He turned to the man by his side, with an instinctive involuntary curiosity. “Is any one suspected?” said the minister, feeling his face grow pale with a dreadful consciousness of the secret which he shared. But before he could hear the answer, his second summons had brought up the terrified mistress of the house, attended half way up the stair by a throng of curious women. He went hurriedly to meet her at the door.

“Where are the ladies?” said the minister. “I have just heard that my sister was brought here last night. Tell her I am here. Take me to her. Don’t be alarmed. You know what I mean? The two ladies—young ladies who came here with Colonel Mildmay last night—where are they? Good heavens! do you not understand what I mean?”

"The young ladies, sir?" faltered the landlady, gasping and looking at the man who still kept by Vincent's side. "Oh, Lord bless us! The young ladies——"

"Make haste and let them know I am here," said Vincent, gradually growing more and more anxious. "I will undertake to produce them if they are wanted as witnesses. Where are they?—where is my sister? I tell you she is my sister. I have come for her. Tell Miss Vincent. Surely I am speaking plain English," said the young man, with a flush of sudden dread. "The elder one, Miss Vincent—you understand me? Let her know that I am here."

"His sister! Oh, Lord bless us; and he don't know no more than the unborn," cried the woman of the house. "Oh, Lord! p'liceman, can't you tell the poor gentleman? His sister! oh, that's worse than ever, that is. Some poor young thing as has been beguiled and led astray. Lord bless us! don't look at me o' that way. I ain't to blame. Oh, gracious me, that I should have to tell the gentleman, and you standing there! Oh, sir, it's her as has done it. She's gone away from here afore break of day. I don't blame her; oh, I don't blame her; don't look o' that dreadful way at me. He's drove her to it with bad usage. She'll have to suffer for it; but I don't blame her. I don't blame her if it was my last word in life."

Vincent felt his tongue cleave to his mouth. He was stunned; he did not know what he said—what he was hearing. "Blame her? whom? for what?" he said, with a mechanical effort. He seemed to himself to be suddenly engulfed in some horrible cloud, but he did not know what it meant.

"Oh, Lord! don't look o' that dreadful way at me; she's gone off from here as soon as she done it," cried the woman. "She had that much sense left, poor soul. He's drove her mad; he's drove her to it. My man says it can't be brought in no worse than manslaughter——"

"You don't understand me," Vincent broke in; "you are talking of the criminal. Who are you talking of?—but it does not matter. I want Miss Vincent. Do you hear

me?—the young lady whom he brought here last night. Where is my sister? Gone away before daybreak! You mean the criminal, but I want my sister. Susan! take me to where she is. She had nothing to do with it. I will give you anything—pay you anything, only take me to where she is."

He moved towards the door as he spoke, half believing that, if he could but hold out and refuse to credit this horror, Susan might still be found. "Lord bless us! the poor young gentleman's gone out of his senses," cried the landlady. "Let him go through all the house if that's what he wants. There ain't nothing to conceal in my house. I'll take you to the room as they were in—she and the other one. This way, sir. They hadn't nothing with them but two little bags, so there wasn't much to leave; but such as it is, being her night-things, is there. She wasn't thinking of bags, nor any of her little comforts, when she went away. Here, sir; walk in here."

The woman took him to a room up-stairs, where Vincent followed her mechanically. The room had evidently been occupied a very short time before. Upon a chair, open, with the contents only half thrust in, was a travelling-bag, which the minister recognised at once—a piece of family property dreadful to see in such a place. Susan had been putting her things away with the orderly instinct of her mother's daughter when this sudden shock of terror came upon her. "Do you mean to tell me that it is she who has gone away," said Vincent, with a look of incredulous wonder and appeal—"she—Susan Vincent, my sister? Take time to think. It was not she—somebody else. Tell me where she is—"

"Oh, sir, don't say anything as may come against her," cried the landlady. "It's nobody but her, poor soul, poor soul. If it was possible to think as it could be another, I would—but there was nobody else to do it. As soon as we heard the shot and the groan the master got up. He met her on the stair, sir, if you'll believe me, like a woman as was walking in her sleep. He was that struck he daren't say a word to her. He let her pass by him and go out at the door—and when he went into the

gentleman's room and found him there a-dying, she was gone clean off, and couldn't be heard of. Folks say as my husband should have stopped her, but it wasn't none of his business. Oh, sir, don't say nothing as'll put them on her track! There's one man gone off after her already—oh, it's dreadful!—if you'll be advised by me, you'll slip out the back way, and don't come across that policeman again. If she did kill him," cried the weeping landlady, "it was to save herself, poor dear. I'll let you out the back way, if you'll be guided by me."

The horror of this accusation had come home to Vincent's mind at last. He saw, as if by a sudden flash of dreadful enlightenment, not guilt indeed, or its awful punishment, but open shame—the disgrace of publicity—the horrible suspicions which were of themselves more than enough to kill the unhappy girl. He made a great effort to speak, but could not for the moment. He thrust in the white soft garments which were hanging out of it, into that familiar bag, which somehow gave him a pang more acute than all the terrible news he was hearing. He had travelled with it himself on innocent boyish journeys, had seen it in his mother's innocent hands—and now to find it in this shuddering atmosphere of crime and mystery! He too shuddered as he roused himself to speak. "Hush—hush," said Vincent, "you mistake, my sister has nothing to do with it; I—I can prove that—easily," said the minister, getting the words out with difficulty. "Tell me how it all happened—when they came here, what passed; for instance——" He paused, and his eye caught another evidence of the reality of his horrible position. It was the blue veil which he had followed and described, and looked for through all these weary hours. He took it up in his hand, crushing it together with an almost ungovernable impulse of rage, from where it had been thrown down on the shabby carpet. "For instance," said Susan's brother, restraining himself, "where is the girl who wore this? You said Miss Vincent went away alone—where was the other? was she left behind—is she here?"

The policeman had followed them up into the room in natural curiosity and

suspicion. The landlady's husband had sworn that Susan left the house by herself. Then, where was the girl? The fugitive had been tracked to the railway, the policeman said; but she was alone. Nobody had thought before of her helpless companion. The inspector arrived while they were going over the house trying if it were possible to find any traces of this forlorn creature. Vincent was much too profoundly concerned himself to keep silence about the mysterious movements of the woman whom he had seen on his way to Dover—whom he had seen that very morning in the darkness—whom he knew to be the bitterest enemy of the murdered man. It was only when he described her—when he tried to collect all the information he had ever had about her for the guidance of justice—that he saw how little he knew of her in reality. His very description was tinged with a touch of fancy; and in this frightful emergency he perceived, for the first time, how much his imagination had supplied of the interest he felt in this woman. When he had done all it was possible to do to set the pursuer on her track, and gathered all he could of the supposed proofs against Susan, he left the place where he could do nothing further. He had to describe himself fully—to prove his identity by a reference to the Dissenting minister of the place, and explain whence he had come and whither he was going, before the officers in charge of the house, although conscious that they had no grounds for detaining him, would let him go. But he was permitted to leave at last. While he waited for the next train to Carlingford, he questioned the cabman, who could give but a very faint and indistinct description of the lady whom he had seen at the pier-gates, whose appearance had stopped Colonel Mildmay in the prosecution of his journey. She was standing under a lamp, the man said: the gentleman might see her, but he didn't think as she could see him; but dim as the vision was, this was another little link in the chain of evidence. If it did but vindicate Susan—save her, not from the penalty, but from the very shadow and suspicion of such a horror! It was this which filled the minister's mind with every sort of frightful apprehension. To have Susan's name exposed to such a horrible publicity—to have

such a scene, such a crime anyhow connected with his sister—the idea shook Vincent's mind utterly, and almost disabled him from thought at all. And where was she, poor horror-stricken fugitive? He scarcely dared hope that she had gone to her mother. Sudden death, madness, any misery, seemed possible to have overtaken the unhappy girl thus suddenly reft out of the peacefulness of her youth into circumstances so horrible. When he entered Carlingford, late at night, it was with insupportable pangs of suspense and alarm that he looked into the faces he met on the lighted streets. Were they looking at him already with a consciousness that some frightful shadow enveloped him? Tozer's shop was already shut—earlier than usual, surely—and two or three people stood talking at the open door, clearly visible against the gaslight, which still burned bright within. Farther up, opposite his own house, two or three passengers had stopped to look up at the lighted windows. When Vincent thrust aside a lad who happened to be in his way, asking, with uncontrollable irritation, what he wanted there, the door opened suddenly at the sound of his voice. All was excited and confused within—common life, with its quiet summonses and answers, was over there. Wild confusion, agitation, reproach, surrounded the unfortunate minister. His landlady came forward to meet him, to bewail her own misfortune, and upbraid him with the wrong he had done her. "I took in the pastor for a lodger, because he was sure to be steady and respectable, and this is what he has brought to me!" cried the hysterical woman. "What is the meaning of all this?" cried Vincent, looking round him with restrained fury, but he did not wait for an answer. He went up to his rooms to know the worst. As he rushed breathless up-stairs, loud outcries of delirium reached him. In his horror and anguish he could not recognise the voice—was it his mother who had given way under the terrible burden? He dashed open the door of the sitting-room in which he had spent so many quiet hours—neither mother nor sister were there; instead of them a rough-featured man, in a blue travelling-coat, and Tozer, flushed and argumentative, standing by the table. Vincent had not time to ask what the controversy was that was

going on between the two. The butterman grasped his hand with an almost violent pressure, and took the stranger's arm. "Beg your pardon for being in your room, Mr. Vincent, but me and this gentleman has a little business. I'll be back presently and explain," said the good deacon, with a compassionate look at the young man, whose weary eyes sought with instinctive suspicion that unknown face. "I'm your friend, Mr. Vincent— I always was; I'm not one as will desert a friend in trouble," said Tozer, with another shake of his hand, lowering his voice. Then he disappeared with his strange companion. The minister was alone with those cries, with this agitation. He threw himself down in momentary despair. The worst, it appeared, had happened—the horror had travelled before him. He gave up everything in the anguish of that moment. There seemed to be no use for any further struggle. To this sensitive, spotless, inexperienced household, suspicion was worse than death.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Vincent came to himself, and began to see clearly the true horrors of his position, his mind, driven to its last stronghold, rallied convulsively to meet the worst. It was Susan who was raving close by; but her brother, in the sickening despair of his heart, had not the courage to go into that agitated sick-room. He sat waiting for Tozer's return with a sense of helplessness, a sense of irritation, against which he had no strength to contend. In that bitter moment he gave up everything, and felt himself no longer capable of striving against his fate. He felt in his heart that all Carlingford must already be discussing the calamity that had come upon him, and that his innocent honourable name was already sullied by the breath of the crowd; and, with a strange mixture of intolerance and eagerness, he waited the return of the man who had first, as it appeared, thrust himself into the secret—a man whom the minister must not affront, must not defy, on peril of all he had in the world. These few silent moments were more terrible to Vincent than any that had gone before

them. Was it any good holding out, attempting to keep a brave face to the world, struggling against this crushing blow?—or would it not be easiest to give in, to drop the useless arms, to fly from the inevitable downfall? Some corner of the earth there surely remained where he could hide his head and find a shelter for the two poor women who were greater sufferers than he. It was with such feelings that he awaited the return of Tozer—feelings aggravated by the consciousness that somehow the butterman was engaged in his service at this very moment, and by a shadowy and unexpressed suspicion in his mind as to the character of the stranger whom Tozer had taken away. The excellent deacon returned at last with looks of conscious importance. He was very sorry and anxious, but he could not help looking confidential, and standing a little higher upon the ground of this mystery, which nobody shared but himself. Once more he shook hands with Vincent, sympathetically, and with a grasp full of meaning.

"The thing for us to do is to keep it quiet—to keep it quiet, sir," said Tozer, lowering his voice as he spoke. "Nothing must be said about it—no more nor can be helped, Mr. Vincent. As far as it has gone, there's nobody as has heard but me. If it could be kept private from the Salem folks," continued the butterman, taking a seat at the table, and looking cautiously round him, as if to make sure that no one was within hearing, "it would be for the best. Them women do make such a talk about everything. Not to tell a falsehood, sir, as I wouldn't, not to save my own, if so be as my own could be in such a position—we'll say as your sister's took bad, sir, that's what we'll say. And no lie neither—hear to her, poor soul!— But, Mr. Vincent," said Tozer, drawing closer, and confiding his doubt in a whisper, "what she says is best not to be listened to, if you'll take my advice. It ain't to be built upon what a poor creature says in a fever, but them sort of words and screechings don't come out of nothing but a troubled mind. She was aggravated awful—so the man tells me."

"Who was the man?" asked Vincent, hurriedly.

"The man? oh!—which man was you meaning, sir?" asked Tozer, with a little fright, recurring to his more generous intention of keeping this intruder altogether from the knowledge of the minister; "nobody in particular, Mr. Vincent—nobody as is worth mentioning. One as was sent to inquire—that's all. I've cleared him away out of the road," said the butterman, not without some natural complacency: "there ain't no matter about him. Don't ask me no more, Mr. Vincent, for it's losing time as is precious. If there's anything as can be done, it's best to do it directly. I'd speak to John Brown as is the cleverest attorney in Carlingford, sir, if I was you. She's young, and, as I was saying, she was aggravated awful. She might be got off."

"Hush!" said Vincent, who had to put a desperate curb upon himself, lest the restrained rage with which he heard this implication of guilt should burst out; "you think there is something in this horrible business—that my sister has something to do with it. It is all a frightful delusion—an infernal——"

"Mr. Vincent, sir, you mustn't swear. I'm as sorry for you as a man can be; but you're a minister, and you mustn't give way," said Tozer. "If there ain't nothing in it, so much the better; but I'm told as the evidence is clean again' her. Well, I won't say no more; it's no pleasure to me to think of a young creature, and a minister's daughter, with a mother like what she's got, going any ways astray—far the contrary, Mr. Vincent: your own father, if he was living, couldn't be more sorry than me. But my advice is, keep quiet, and don't let anything get out no more nor can be helped. I don't mean to say as it can be altogether kep' quiet—that ain't in the nature of things; nor I don't mean to make you suppose as all is likely to go smooth, and no fault found. There's pretty sure to be some unpleasantness, one way or another; and the only thing as I can see is just to put up with it, and stand your ground, and do your duty all the same. And I for one will stand by you, sir," said Tozer, rising to his feet with a little glow of conscious generosity and valour, and shaking the hand of the poor young minister with cordial kindness—"I'll stand by you, sir, for one, whatever happens; and we'll tide it out, Mr. Vincent, that's what we'll do, sir, if you

can but hold on."

"Thank you," said poor Vincent, moved to the heart—"thank you. I dare not think how it is all to end, but thank you all the same; I shall not forget what you say."

"And tell your mother," continued Tozer, swelling to a little triumph in his own magnanimity—"tell your mother as I said so; tell her as I'll stand by you through thick and thin; and we'll pull through, we'll pull through!" said the butterman, slowly disappearing, with a face radiant with conscious bounty and patronage, through the open door.

Vincent had followed him with an instinct of civility and gratitude. Just as Tozer withdrew, a fresh burst of outcry came from the sick-room, ringing through the excited house. The deacon turned round half-way down the stair, held up his hands, listened, and made a movement of wondering pity towards the closed door which hid Susan, but did not keep in her cries. The wretched minister drew back from that compassionate gesture as if some one had struck him a blow. He went back and threw himself down on the sofa, and covered his face with his hands. The pity and the patronage were the last drop of humiliation in his bitter cup. Hot tears came to his eyes; it seemed to him more than flesh and blood could bear.

Some time elapsed, however, before Vincent had the courage to meet his mother. When those dreadful outcries sank into exhaustion, and all for the moment was quiet in the sick-room, he sent to tell her he had arrived, and went to the dreadful door which she kept closed so jealously. He was afraid to meet her eye when she came to him, and noiselessly drew him within. Judging by himself, he had not ventured to think what his mother's horror and despair would be. But Mrs. Vincent put her arms round her son with an exclamation of thanksgiving. "Oh, Arthur! thank God, you are come. Now I shall be able to bear it," cried his mother. She cried a little upon his breast, and then wiped her eyes and looked up at him with quivering lips. "Oh, Arthur, what my poor darling must have come through!" said Mrs. Vincent, with a

wistful appeal to him in her tender eyes. She said nothing of the darker horror. It lay upon her soul a frightful, inarticulate shadow; but in the mean time she could only think of Susan and her fever—that fever which afforded a kind of comfort to the mother—a proof that her child had not lost her innocence lightly, but that the shock had been to Susan a horrible convulsion, shaking earth and heaven. The mother and son went together to the bedside to look at the unhappy cause of all their sorrows—she clinging with her tender hand to his arm, wistful now, and afraid in the depths of her heart lest Arthur, who was only a man, might be hard upon Susan in her terrible abasement. It was more than a year since Vincent had seen his sister. Was it Susan? The grandeur of the stricken form, the features sublimed and elevated, the majestic proportions into which this awful crisis of fate had developed the fair-haired girl of Lonsdale, struck her brother with unspeakable awe and pity. Pity and awe: but yet another feeling mingled in the wonder with which he gazed upon her. A thrill of terror came over him. That frightful, tropical blaze of passion, anguish, and woe which had produced this sudden development, had it developed no unknown qualities in Susan's heart? As she lay there in the majesty of unconsciousness, she resembled more a woman who could avenge herself, than a soft girl, the sudden victim of a bad man. Vincent turned away from the bed with an involuntary shudder. He would not, could not, look at her again: he left his mother to her unceasing vigil, and himself went to his own room, to try if rest were possible. Rest was not easy in such a terrible complication of affairs; but weariness is omnipotent with youth. He did sleep by snatches, in utter fatigue and exhaustion—slept long enough to secure for himself the unspeakable torture of waking to the renewed horror of a new day.

CHAPTER VI.

NEXT morning the minister rose to the changed life and world which now

surrounded his way, if not with much less excitement, at least with a more familiar knowledge of all the troubles which encompassed him. As he sat over the pretended breakfast, for which he had no appetite, and not even heart enough to make a show of eating, hearing close by the voice of his sister's delirium, sometimes in faint murmurs, sometimes rising into wild outcries of passion, and pondered all the circumstances of this frightful calamity, it is not wonderful that his heart fainted within him. He had found out quickly enough that it was an officer of justice whom Tozer had succeeded, by what means he could not tell, in removing from his house. His landlady knew all the facts sufficiently well to be by times reproachful and by times sympathetic. The other lodgers in the house, some of whom had already left for fear of pollution, were equally aware of all the circumstances of the case; and it was impossible to hope that a tale so exciting, known to so many, could be long of spreading. The minister seemed to himself to look ruin in the face, as he sat in profound dejection, leaning his head in his hands. He had committed his sister's interests into the hands of the best attorney he could hear of in Dover, that watch and search might be made on the spot for any further information; and now the only thing possible to be done was to secure some still more skilful agent in London to superintend the case, and set all the machinery of detection in motion to discover Mrs. Hilyard. Vincent had nothing in the world but the income which he drew from the liberality of Salem; an income which could ill stand the drain of these oft-repeated journeys, not to speak of the expenses of Susan's defence. All that the minister had would not be enough to retain a fit defender for her, if she had to undergo the frightful ordeal of a trial. The very thought of it drove her unhappy brother desperate. Would it not be better if she died and escaped that crowning misery, which must kill her anyhow, if she survived to bear it? But these ponderings were as unprofitable as they were painful. When he had seen his mother, who whispered to him accounts of Susan's illness, which his mind was too much preoccupied to understand, he went away immediately to the railway, and hastened

to town. While he stood waiting in the lawyer's office, he took up listlessly, without knowing what he was doing, the newspaper of the day. There he found the whole terrible tale made into a romance of real life, in which his sister's name, indeed, was withheld, but no other particular spared. As he stood wiping the heavy dew from his forehead, half frantic with rage and despair, the quick eye of his misery caught a couple of clerks in another corner of the office, talking over another newspaper, full of lively interest and excitement. It was Susan's story that interested them; the compiler had heightened with romantic details those hideous bare facts which had changed all his life, and made the entire world a chaos to Vincent; and all over the country by this time, newspaper readers were waking up into excitement about this new tale of love, revenge, and crime. The poor minister put down the paper as if it had stung him, and drew back, tingling in every nerve, from the table, where he could almost hear the discussion which was going on about Miss ——; where she could have escaped to, and whether she would be found. It restored him to his senses and self-command when he found himself face to face with the cool lawyer, who waited for his tragic story as a matter of business, and who had nothing to do with the heartbreaks or the disgrace which it involved. He was detained there for some time, giving as full an account as he could of all the circumstances, and describing as well as he could his reasons for suspecting Mrs. Hilyard, and her mysterious appearance at the scene of the murder. Vincent perceived, with a sensation of comfort at his heart, that his story interested the acute attorney, accustomed to the tricks and expedients of crime, who perceived at once the circumstances of suspicion, and understood at once how to go about it, and ferret the secret out. The minister himself grew steadier as he entered into his narrative. No shivers of wonder or pain convulsed the calm lawyer as he listened. Under his touch, Susan's dreadful position became one not unprecedented, to be dealt with like any other condition of actual life; and when Vincent, after furnishing all the information he could, and satisfying himself that no time was to be lost in the prosecution of the search for the

real criminal, left the office to return to Carlingford, it was with a mind somewhat calmed out of its first horror. He went back again by the train, deeply depressed and anxious, but not so susceptible to every glance and word as he had been an hour or two before. He tried, indeed, to take a certain gloomy satisfaction from the idea that now everything was known. Fear of discovery could no longer appal the stricken household; and to meet the horror in the face was less dreadful than to feel themselves skulking under a secret shadow which might at any moment be found out. He set his face sternly, and looked everybody full in the eyes who looked at him, as he once more alighted at the familiar station. He accepted the fact that people were talking of him, pitying him, contemplating him with wonder and fright, as somehow involved in an atmosphere of tragedy and crime. With this feeling he went slowly along George Street on his homeward way, with no susceptibility left in him, so far as he was aware, except as concerned this sudden calamity which had swallowed up his life.

When suddenly the sound of a carriage stopping came dully upon his ears; he would not have noted or heard it but for the sound that followed of some one calling his own name, and the soft rush of footsteps on the pavement; even then he did not turn round to see who called him. It was accordingly with a thrill of strange emotion—a strange, sudden, guilty suffusion of delight over all his tingling frame and aching heart, even in the midst of his suffering, that he felt the light touch of Lady Western's hand first laid on his arm, then softly stealing within it in the sudden sympathy which possessed her as she looked up into his colourless face. It was pity and natural kindness which prompted the young Dowager to this unwonted familiar touch. She was sorry for him to the bottom of her heart—she would fain have made him amends somehow for the terrible evil which had come upon him. With the natural impulse of a woman to caress or soothe, or cheat a man anyhow out of that look of suffering which it is intolerable to her to see on his face, Lady Western acted instinctively, without thinking what she did. She did her beautiful hand into his arm,

clung to him, looked up with her lovely appealing face and eyes full of tears to the pale face of the minister, which that touch moved beyond all expression. If he did not stop and take her into his arms, and lean his great anguish upon her in a sweetness of relief unspeakable and measureless, it was only because ordinary rule and custom are stronger than even passion. He was as much deceived as if he had done it, the poor young deluded soul. Out of the thunder and storm, all at once, without prelude or warning, he thought it was the light of love that broke upon him all radiant and glorious. With that he could brave all, overcome all; for that he could be content to fathom any depths of wretchedness. So he thought, as he looked down from those sudden heights of unhoped-for tremulous blessedness into that lovely face, and saw it trembling with divine compassion and tenderness. So he thought the ice breaking, the depths stirring in his own soul. Hope, deliverance, happiness, a delight more exquisite still, that consolation of love which makes anguish itself sweet, breathed over the poor young Nonconformist as that hand slid within his arm. His very brain grew dizzy with the sweetness of relief, the sudden ease that possessed his soul.

“Oh, Mr. Vincent, my heart is breaking; what shall we do—what shall we do?” cried Lady Western. “If it is true, I shall never dare speak to you again, and I feel for you to the bottom of my heart. Oh, Mr. Vincent, you don’t think she did it? I am sure she did not do it—your sister! It was bad enough before,” cried the lovely creature, crying without restraint, but still holding his arm and gazing up into his face, “but now my heart is broken. Oh, will you tell me what I must do? I will not go to him, for he has been a bad man; and I dare not go to your dear mother as I should like to go; and I feel for you, oh, to the very bottom of my heart!”

“Then I can bear it,” said Vincent. Though he did not speak another word, the sound of his voice, the expression of his face, betrayed him. He put his hand involuntarily upon the little hand that rested on his arm. It was all so sudden that his self-command forsook him. A smile trembled upon his face as he looked down at

her with all his heart in his eyes. “Then I can bear it,” said the poor young minister, overwhelmed and penetrated by that exquisite consolation. Lady Western gave a little start of alarm as she read the unmistakable meaning in his face. She withdrew her hand hastily with a flush of radiant colour and downcast look of fright and shame. What had she done? Her confusion, her agitation, her sudden withdrawal, did but increase the spell. To Vincent’s charmed soul it seemed that she had betrayed herself, and that womanly reserve alone drew her back. He attended her to her carriage with a tender devotion which could not express itself in words. When he had put her in, he lingered, gazing at the face, now so troubled and downcast, with a delicious feeling that he had a right to gaze at her. “You have made me strong to bear all things,” he said, in the low tone of passion and secret joy. In the depth of his delusion he saw no other meaning than sudden timidity and womanly reticence in her confused and alarmed looks. When the carriage drove off he stood looking after it with eyes full of dreamy light. Darkness surrounded him on every side, darkness more hideous than a nightmare. The poor young soul believed for that delicious moment that superlative and ineffable, like his misery, was to be his joy.

Harder thoughts regained the mastery when he got within his own house again. It was no longer the orderly, calm, well-regulated house which had taken in the minister of Salem by way of adding yet a finer touch to its own profound respectability. Susan’s unhappy presence pervaded the place. Boxes of other lodgers going away encumbered the hall, where the landlady hovered weeping, and admitted the pastor sullenly with an audible sob.

Though he had imagined himself invested in armour of light against all these petty assaults, Vincent was not strong enough, even in the fictitious strength given him by Lady Western’s kindness, to bear the reality of his position. The very face of his landlady brought before him the whole array of faces at Salem, which he must shortly encounter, all directed towards him in judicial severity—an awful tribunal. When he reached the shelter of his room up-stairs, the ‘Carlingford Gazette’ lay

upon his table, folded out so as to show that mysterious story of Miss ——, which some one in the house had certainly identified. The poor minister took it in his hands with an impulse to tear it in pieces—to trample it under foot—to give some outlet, now he was by himself, to the rage and indignation with which he saw his own calamity turned into a romance for the amusement of the public. He checked himself with a bitter smile at his own folly; unconsciously he bethought himself of Tozer's back-parlour, of Mr. Tufton's sitting-room, of all the places about where he had seen his people gleaning information and amusement from the 'Carlingford Gazette.' How the little paper, generally so harmless, would amuse and excite its readers to-day! What surmises there would be, and how soon the fatal knowledge would ooze out and be talked over on all sides! It was no matter of feeling to him—it was ruin in every way to the poor young minister, whose credit and living depended solely upon the caprice of his "flock." The sight of the newspaper had so stunned him, that it was some time before he perceived a letter lying under it on the table. When he saw that the post-mark was Dover, he snatched up this letter eagerly and tore it open. It was from the lawyer whom he had consulted there. For the first moment he did not comprehend the information it conveyed. Good news!—what news could be good under his dreadful circumstances? The young man's mind was stupified, and could not take it in. It was the copy of a doctor's certificate—the opinion of a famous surgeon who had been summoned from London—to the effect that Colonel Mildmay's wound was not necessarily fatal, and that if fever did not come on he might recover. The minister read it over again and again before he could comprehend it, and when he did comprehend it, the fact seemed rather an aggravation than a comfort to his misery. He was not dead—this destroyer. Perhaps at this moment, when his unhappy victim lay struggling between life and death, he, with the horrible good fortune of wickedness, was coming back from the edge of the grave. At the first shock it did not seem good news to Vincent. Not dead!—"the cursed villain," he said through his clenched teeth. The earth was not rid of that

pitiless wretch. It looked like another grand injustice in the world, where all the landmarks were overturned, and only evil seemed to prosper. He did not connect it anyhow with possible relief or deliverance to Susan; on the contrary, it raised in his own mind all the resentment and rage which had been quenched by Mildmay's supposed death. He could scarcely compose himself after that unexpected information. If all went well, it would naturally change the character of the case—perhaps, under the circumstances, there might be no prosecution, said the lawyer's letter. Vincent was young—excited out of all self-command or prudential considerations. In his soul he resented even this hope, which might still save his sister, and grudged what he felt to be the diabolical good-luck of her destroyer. Not dead!—not going to die!—not punished anyhow. About, after all the misery he had occasioned, to recover, and go on prosperously again, and spread wretchedness and ruin upon others. "He shall render me an account," cried the minister fiercely to himself. "He shall answer for it to me!" He felt it intolerable, that this guilty soul should escape its punishment.

Thoughts more reasonable, however, came to him after a time. He began to see the importance of the intelligence to Susan—and even to himself. At least she could not be accused of shedding blood—at least she might be hidden somewhere in her shame, poor lost soul, and kept from the cruel eyes of the world. When he began to feel the influence of this gleam of comfort, he ventured to go to the sick-room to tell his mother, whom he had not yet seen; but Mrs. Vincent was deaf and insensible to everything but her child, whose need and danger were too urgent to permit more distant spectres, however terrible, to be visible in her sick-chamber. Mary, already worn out with fatigue, had gone to bed with a headache, with the liveliest conviction in her mind that she had taken the fever too. The widow, who had lived for the past week as though she had no physical frame at all, sat sleepless, with hot eyes and pallid face, by her daughter's bed. She could still smile—smiles more heart-breaking than any outcry of anguish—and leaned her poor head upon her son, as he came near

to her, with a tender pressure of her arms and strain of absolute dependence which went to his heart. She could not speak, or say, as she had said so often, that her boy must take care of his sister—that Susan had no one else to stand by her. Leaning upon him in an unspeakable appeal of love and weakness, smiling on him with her wistful quivering lips, was all the poor mother could do now.

All; for in that room no one could speak. One voice filled its silence. The restless movement of the head on that pillow turning from side to side in search of the rest which was nowhere to be found, stilled every other motion. Not even fever could flush the marble whiteness of her face. Awfully alone, in her mother's anxious presence, with her brother by her bedside, Susan went on unconscious through the wild distracted world of her own thoughts—through what had been her own thoughts before horror and anguish cast them all astray. Vincent stood aside in breathless attention like the rest, before he had been many minutes in the room. We say to each other how strange it is that no heart can ever fully communicate itself to another; but when that revelation does take place, awful is the spectacle. All unawares, in her dread distraction, Susan opened up her heart.

"What does it matter what they will say?" said Susan; "I will never see them again. Unless—yes, put down her veil; she is pretty, very pretty; but what has Herbert to do with her? He said it was me he wanted; and why did he bring me away if he did not love me? Love me! and deceived me, and told me lies. Oh God, oh God! is it not Carlingford? Where is it? I am taking God's name in vain. I was not thinking of Him—, I was thinking——. His name is Fordham, Herbert Fordham,—do you hear? What do you mean by Mildmay? I know no Mildmay. Stop and let me think. Herbert—Herbert! Oh, where are you—where are you? Do you think it never could be him, but only a lie? Well! if he did not love me, I could bear it; but why, why did he cheat me, and bring me away? The door is locked; they will not let me get out. Herbert! was there never, never any Herbert in the world? Oh, come back, even if you are only a dream! Locked! If they would only kill me! What do they mean to do

with me? Oh God, oh God! but I must marry him if he says so. I must, must marry him, though he has told me lies. I must, whatever he does. Even if I could get through the window and escape; for they will call me wicked. Oh, mamma, mamma! and Arthur a minister, and to bring disgrace on him! But I am not disgraced. Oh no, no; never, never!— I will die first— I will kill him first. Open the door; oh, open the door! Let me go!"

She struggled up in one of her wilder paroxysms. She had thrown herself half out of bed, rising up wildly, and tossing her arms into the air, before her startled brother could rush forward to control her. But as the voice of the unhappy girl rose into frenzy, some unseen attendants stole in and took her out of his unskilful hands. The sight was too painful for unaccustomed eyes—for eyes of love, which could scarcely bear, even for her own sake, to see such means of restraint employed upon Susan. Mrs. Vincent stood by, uttering unconscious cries, imploring the two strong women who held her daughter, oh, not to hurt her, not to grasp her so tightly; while Susan herself beat the air in vain, and entreated, with passionate outcries, to be set free—to be let go. When she was again subdued, and sank into the quiet of exhaustion, Vincent withdrew from this saddest scene of all, utterly depressed and broken-spirited. The wretch lived who had wrought this dread wreck and ruin. What did it matter? Within that room it gave no relief, eased no heart, to say that he was not dead. Forms more terrific still than those of law and public vengeance—madness and death—stood on either side of Susan's bed; till they had fought out the desperate quarrel, what matter to those most immediately concerned whether a greater or a lesser penalty lowered over her head? The minister went back to his own retirement with an aching heart, utterly dejected and depressed. He threw himself into a chair to think it all over, as he said to himself; but as he sat there, hopeless and solitary, his mind strayed from Susan. Could any one blame him? Who does not know what it is to have one secret spot of personal consolation to fly to in the midst of trouble? Vincent betook himself there in the utter darkness of everything around. Once more

he seemed to feel that sudden touch which took away half his burden. No words could have spoken to his heart like that fairy hand upon his arm. He brooded over it, not thinking, only living over again the moment which had made so great a difference in the world. He forgot Fordham; he forgot everything; he took neither reason nor likelihood with him in his self-delusion. A sudden rosy mist suffused once more the cruel earth upon which he was standing; whatever came, he had something of his own to fall back upon, an ineffable secret sweetness, which stanched every wound before it was made. The young minister, out of the very depths of calamity, escaped into this garden of delights; he put aside the intolerable misery of the house; he thrust away from him all the lesser troubles which bristled thick in front of him in the very name of Salem. He fled to that one spot of joy which he thought remained to him in the middle of the waste, doubly sweet and precious. It gave him strength to hold out through his trouble, without being overwhelmed. He escaped to that delicious resting-place almost against his will, not able to resist the charm of the indescribable solace he found there. He alone, of all concerned, had that footbreadth of personal happiness to take refuge in amid the bitter storm. He did not know it was all delusion, self-deception, a woeful miserable blunder. He hugged it to his heart in secret, and took a comfort not to be spoken from the thought. Vanity of vanities; but nothing else in the world could have stolen with such fairy balms of consolation and strength to the heart of the poor minister. It was not long till he was called to face his fate again, and all the heavy front of battle set in array against him; but it was with a feeling of sweet guilt that he started up in the winter twilight, and left his room to see Tozer, who waited for him below. That room henceforward was inhabited by the fairy vision. When he went back to it, Love, the consolatrix, met him again, stealing that visionary hand within his arm. Blank darkness dwelt all around; here, falsest, fairest mirage of imagination, palpitated one delicious gleam of light.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMEHOW the heavy week stole round without any other fluctuations but those terrible ones of Susan's fever. Dreadful consolation and terrible doubt breathed forth in those heartrending revelations which her poor unconscious soul was continually pouring forth. The unhappy girl showed her heart all naked and undisguised to the watchers round her—a heart bewildered, alarmed, desperate, but not overwhelmed with guilty passion. Through the dreadful haze which enveloped her mind, flashes of indignation, bursts of hope, shone tragical and fierce; but she was not a disgraced creature who lay there, arguing pitifully with herself what she must do; not disgraced—but in an agony of self-preservation could she have snatched up the ready pistol—could it be true? When Vincent went into that room, it was always to withdraw with a shuddering dread. Had she escaped one horror to fall into another yet more horrible? That evidence of which, with Mrs. Hilyard's face before his eyes, he had been half contemptuous at first, returned upon him with ever-growing probability. Driven to bay, driven mad, reason and self-control scared by the horrible emergency, had the desperate creature resorted to the first wild expedient within her reach to save herself at last? With this hideous likelihood growing in his mind, Vincent had to face the Sunday, which came upon him like a new calamity. He would fain have withdrawn, and, regardless of anything else which might happen, have sent once more for Beecher. To confront the people of Salem, to look down upon those familiar rows of faces, all of them bearing a consciousness of the story in the newspapers, acquainted with all that his landlady could tell, and guessing but too distinctly the terrible misfortune which had befallen his family, seemed more than flesh and blood could bear. He was sitting alone, pondering all this, with a letter which he had commenced to write to Beecher before him, when Tozer, who was now his constant visitor, came in. There could be no doubt of the butterman's honest and genuine sympathy, but, unfortunately, there was just as little

doubt that Tozer took a pleasure in managing the minister's affairs at this crisis, and piloting him through the troubled waters. Tozer did all but neglect his business to meet the emergency; he carried matters with rather a high hand in the meetings of the managing committee; he took absolute control, or wished to do so, of Vincent's proceedings. "We'll tide it over, we'll tide it over," he said, rubbing his hands. To go in, in this state of mind, secure in his own resources and in the skill with which he could guide the wavering and half-informed mind of Salem, fluctuating as it did between horror and sympathy, doubtful whether to take up the minister's cause with zeal, or to cast him off and disown him, and to find the minister himself giving in, deserting his post at the most critical moment, and making useless all that his patron was doing for him, was too much for the deacon's patience. He sat down in indignant surprise opposite Vincent, and struck his stick against the floor involuntarily, by way of emphasis to his words.

"Mr. Vincent, sir, this ain't the thing to do— I tell you it ain't the thing to do. Salem has a right to expect different," cried Tozer, in the warmth of his disappointment; "a congregation as has never said a word, and office-bearers as have stuck by you and stood up for you whatever folks liked to say! I'm a man as will never desert my pastor in trouble; but I'd like to know what you call this, Mr. Vincent, but a deserting of me? What's the good of fighting for the minister, if he gives in and sends for another man, and won't face nothing for himself? It's next Sunday as is all the battle. Get that over, and things will come straight. When they see you in the pulpit in your old way, and all things as they was, bless you, they'll get used to it, and won't mind the papers no more nor—nor I do. I tell you, sir, it's next Sunday as is the battle. I don't undertake to answer for the consequences, not if you gives in, and has Mr. Beecher down for next Sunday. It ain't the thing to do, Mr. Vincent; Salem folks won't put up with that. Your good mother, poor thing, wouldn't say no different. If you mean to stay and keep things straight in Carlingford, you'll go into that pulpit, and look as if nothing had happened. It's next Sunday as is the battle."

“Look as if nothing had happened!—and why should I wish to stay in Carlingford, or—or anywhere?” cried Vincent, in a momentary outbreak of dejection. But he threw down his pen, and closed his blotting-book over the half-written letter. He was too wretched to have much resolution one way or another. To argue the matter was worse than to suffer any consequences, however hard they might be.

“I don’t deny it’s natural as you should feel strange,” admitted Tozer. “I do myself, as am only your friend, Mr. Vincent, when folks are a-talking in the shop, and going over one thing and another—asking if it’s true as she belongs to you, and how a minister’s daughter ever come to know the likes of him——”

“For heaven’s sake, no more, no more!—you will drive me mad!” cried Vincent, springing to his feet. Tozer, thus suddenly interrupted, stared a little, and then changed the subject, though without quite finding out how it was that he had startled his sensitive companion into such sudden impatience. “When I was only telling him the common talk!” as he said to his wife in the privacy of their own parlour. In the mean time he had other subjects equally interesting.

“If you’ll take my advice, you’ll begin your coorse all the same,” said Tozer; “it would have a good effect, that would. When folks are in a state of excitement, and a-looking for something, to come down upon them as before, and accordin’ to intimation, would have a wonderful effect, Mr. Vincent. You take my word, sir, it would be very telling—would that. Don’t lose no time, but begin your coorse as was intimated. It’s a providence, is the intimation. I wouldn’t say nothing about what’s happened—not plain out; but if you could bring in a kind of an inference like, nothing as had anything to do with the story in the papers, but just as might be understood——”

The butterman sat quite calmly and at his ease, but really anxious and interested, making his sober suggestions. The unfortunate minister, unable otherwise to subdue his impatience and wretchedness, fell to walking up and down the room, as was

natural. When he could bear it no longer, he came back to the table at which Tozer sat in all the pomp of advice and management. He took his unfinished letter and tore it in little pieces, then stopped the calm flow of the deacon's counsel by a sudden outburst.

"I will preach," cried the young man, scattering the bits of paper out of his hand unawares. "Is not that enough? don't tell me what I am to do—the evil is sufficient without that. I tell you I will preach. I would rather cut off my right hand, if that would do as well. I am speaking like a child or a fool: who cares for my right hand, I wonder, or my life, or my senses? No more of this. I will preach—don't speak of it again. It will not matter a hundred years hence," muttered the minister, with that sudden adoption of the philosophy of recklessness which misery sometimes plays with. He threw himself into his chair again, and covered his face with his hands. He was thinking of Salem, and all those rows of gazing eyes. He could see them all in their pews, imagination, with a cruel freak like a mocking spirit, depicting all the finery of Mrs. Pigeon and Mrs. Brown upon that vivid canvass. The minister groaned at the thought of them; but to put it down on paper, and record the pang of exasperation and intolerable wretchedness which was thus connected with the fine winter bonnets of the poulterer's wife and the dairy-woman would make a picture rather grotesque than terrible to unconcerned eyes. It was dreadful earnest to poor Vincent, thinking how he should stand before them on that inexorable Sunday, and preach "as if nothing had happened;" reading all the while, in case his own mind would let him forget them, the vulgarest horrors of all that had happened in all that crowd of eyes.

"And you'll find a great consolation, take my word, sir, in the thought that you're a-doing of your duty," said Tozer, shaking his head solemnly, as he rose to go away; "that's a wonderful consolation, Mr. Vincent, to all of us; and especially to a minister that knows he's a-serving his Master and saving souls."

Saving souls! Heaven help him! the words rang in his ears like mocking echoes long after the butterman had settled into his arm-chair, and confided to his wife and Phœbe that the pastor was a-coming to himself and taking to his duties, and that we'll tide it over yet. "Saving souls!" the words came back and back to Vincent's bewildered mind. They formed a measure and cadence in their constant repetition, haunting him like some spiritual suggestion, as he looked over, with senses confused and dizzy, his little stock of sermons, to make preparation for the duty which he could not escape. At last he tossed them all away in a heap, seized his pen, and poured forth his heart. Saving souls! what did it mean? He was not writing a sermon. Out of the depths of his troubled heart poured all the chaos of thought and wonder, which leapt into fiery life under that quickening touch of personal misery and unrest. He forgot the bounds of orthodox speculation—all bounds save those of the drear mortal curtain of death, on the other side of which that great question is solved. He set forth the dark secrets of life with exaggerated touches of his own passion and anguish. He painted out of his own aching fancy a soul innocent, yet stained with the heaviest of mortal crimes: he turned his wild light aside and poured it upon another, foul to the core, yet unassailable by man. Saving souls!—which was the criminal? which was the innocent? A wild confusion of sin and sorrow, of dreadful human complications, misconceptions, of all incomprehensible, intolerable thoughts, surged round and round him as he wrote. Were the words folly that haunted him with such echoes? Could he, and such as he, unwitting of half the mysteries of life, do anything to that prodigious work? Could words help it—vain syllables of exhortation or appeal? God knows. The end of it all was a confused recognition of the One half-known, half-identified, who, if any hope were to be had, held that hope in His hands. The preacher, who had but dim acquaintance with His name, paused, in the half idiocy of his awakened genius, to wonder, like a child, if perhaps his simple mother knew a little more of that far-off wondrous figure—recognised it wildly by the confused lights as the only hope in earth or heaven—and so rose up,

trembling with excitement and exhaustion, to find that he had spent the entire night in this sudden inspiration, and that the wintry dawn, cold and piercing to the heart, was stealing over the opposite roofs, and another day had begun.

This was the sermon which startled half the population of Carlingford on that wonderful Sunday. Salem, had never been so full before. Every individual of the Chapel folks was there who could by any means come out, and many other curious inhabitants, full of natural wonder, to see how a man looked, and what he would preach about, concerning whom, and whose family, such mysterious rumours were afloat. The wondering congregation thrilled like one soul under that touch of passion. Faces grew pale, long sobs of emotion burst here and there from the half-terrified excited audience, who seemed to see around them, instead of the every-day familiar world, a throng of those souls whom the preacher disrobed of everything but passion and consciousness and immortality. Just before the conclusion, when he came to a sudden pause all at once, and made a movement forward as if to lay hold of something he saw, the effect was almost greater than the deacons could approve of in chapel. One woman screamed aloud, another fainted, some people started to their feet—all waited with suspended breath for the next words, electrified by the real life which palpitated there before them, where life so seldom appears, in the decorous pulpit. When he went on again the people were almost too much excited to perceive the plain meaning of his words, if any plain meaning had ever been in that passionate outcry of a wounded and bewildered soul. When the services were over, many of them watched the precipitate rush which the young preacher made through the crowd into his vestry. He could not wait the dispersion of the flock, as was the usual custom. It was with a buzz of excitement that the congregation did disperse slowly, in groups, asking each other had such a sermon ever been preached before in Carlingford. Some shook their heads, audibly expressing their alarm lest Mr. Vincent should go too far, and unsettle his mind; some pitied and commented on his looks—women these. He sent them all away in a

flutter of excitement, which obliterated all other objects of talk for the moment, even the story in the papers, and left himself in a gloomy splendour of eloquence and uncertainty, the only object of possible comment until the fumes of his wild oration should have died away.

"I said we'd tide it over," said Tozer, in a triumphant whisper, to his wife. "That's what he can do when he's well kep' up to it, and put on his mettle. The man as says he ever heard anything as was finer, or had more mind in it," added the worthy butterman to his fellow-deacons, "has had more opportunities nor me; and though I say it, I've heard the best preachers in our connection. That's philosophical, that is—there ain't a man in the Church as I ever heard of as could match that, and not a many as comes out o' 'Omerton. We're not a-going to quarrel with a pastor as can preach a sermon like that, not because he's had a misfortune in his family. Come into the vestry, Pigeon, and say a kind word—as you're sorry, and we'll stand by him. He wants to be kep' up, that's what he wants. Mind like that always does. It ain't equal to doing for itself, like most. Come along with me, and say what's kind, and cheer him up, as has exerted hisself and done his best."

"It was rousing up," said Pigeon, with a little reluctance; "even the missis didn't go again' that; but where he's weak is in the application. I don't mind just shaking hands——"

"If we was all to go, he might take it kind," suggested Brown, the dairyman, who had little to say, and not much confidence in his own opinion; and pride and kindness combined won the day. The deacons who were in attendance went in, in a body, to shake hands with the pastor, and express their sympathy, and congratulate him on his sermon, the latter particular being an established point of deacon's duty in every well-regulated and harmonious community. They went in rather pleased with themselves, and full of the gratification they were about to confer. But the open door of the vestry revealed an empty room, with the preacher's black gown lying

tossed upon the floor, as if it had been thrown down recklessly in his sudden exit. The little procession came to a halt, and stared in each other's faces. Their futile good intentions flashed into exasperation. They had come to bestow their favour upon him, to make him happy, and behold he had fled in contemptuous haste, without waiting for their approval; even Tozer felt the shock of the failure. So far as the oligarchs of Salem were concerned, the sermon might never have been preached, and the pastor sank deeper than ever into the bad opinion of Mr. Pigeon and Mr. Brown.

In the mean time Vincent had rushed from his pulpit, thrown on his coat, and rushed out again into the cold mid-day, tingling in every limb with the desperate effort of self-restraint, which alone had enabled him to preserve the gravity of the pulpit and conclude the services with due steadiness and propriety. When he made that sudden pause, it was not for nought. Effective though it was, it was no trick of oratory which caught the breath at his lips, and transfixed him for the moment. There, among the crowded pews of Salem, deep in the further end of the chapel, half lost in the throng of listeners, suddenly, all at once, had flashed upon him a face—a face, unchanged from its old expression, intent as if no deluge had descended, no earthquake fallen; listening, as of old, with gleaming keen eyes and close-shut emphatic mouth. The whole building reeled in Vincent's eyes, as he caught sight of that thin head, dark and silent, gleaming out in all its expressive refinement and intelligence from the common faces round. How he kept still and went on was to himself a kind of miracle. Had she moved or left the place, he could not have restrained himself. But she did not move. He watched her, even while he prayed, with a profanity of which he was conscious to the heart. He watched her with her frightful composure finding the hymn, standing up with the rest to sing. When she disappeared, he rushed from the pulpit—rushed out—pursued her. She was not to be seen anywhere when he got outside, and the first stream of the throng of dispersing worshippers, which fortunately, however, included none of the leading people of

Salem, beheld with amazed eyes the minister who darted through them, and took his hurried way to Back Grove Street. Could she have gone there? He debated the question vainly with himself as he hastened on the familiar road. The door was open as of old, the children playing upon the crowded pavement. He flew up the staircase, which creaked under his hasty foot, and knocked again at the well-known door, instinctively pausing before it, though he had meant to burst in and satisfy himself. Such a violence was unnecessary—as if the world had stood still, Mrs. Hilyard opened the door and stood before him, with her little kerchief on her head, her fingers still marked with blue. “Mr. Vincent,” said this incomprehensible woman, admitting him without a moment’s hesitation, pointing him to a chair as of old, and regarding him with the old steady look of half-amused observation, “you have never come to see me on a Sunday before. It is the best day for conversation for people who have work to do. Sit down, take breath; I have leisure, and there is time now for everything we can have to say.”

CHAPTER VIII.

VINCENT put out his hand to seize upon the strange woman who confronted him with a calmness much more confounding than any agitation. But her quick eye divined his purpose. She made the slightest movement aside, extended her own, and had shaken hands with him in his utter surprise before he knew what he was doing. The touch bewildered his faculties, but did not move him from the impulse, which was too real to yield to anything. He took the door from her hand, closed it, placed himself against it. “You are my prisoner,” said Vincent. He could not say any more, but gazed at her with blank eyes of determination. He was no longer accessible to reason, pity, any sentiment but one. He had secured her. He forgot even to be amazed at her composure. She was his prisoner—that one fact was all he cared to know.

"I have been your prisoner the entire morning," said Mrs. Hilyard, with an attempt at her old manner, which scarcely could have deceived the minister had he preserved his wits sufficiently to notice it, but at the same time betraying a little surprise, recognising instinctively that here she had come face to face with those blind forces of nature upon which no arguments can tell. "You were in much less doubt about your power of saving souls the last time I heard you, Mr. Vincent. Sit down, please. It is not long since we met, but many things have happened. It is kind of you to give me so early an opportunity of talking them over. I am sorry to see you look excited—but after such exertions, it is natural, I suppose——"

"You are my prisoner," repeated Vincent, without taking any notice of what she said. He was no match for her in any passage of arms. Her words fell upon his ears without any meaning. Only a dull determination possessed him. He locked the door, while she, somewhat startled in her turn, stood looking on; then he went to the window, threw it open, and called to some one below—any one—he did not care who. "Fetch a policeman—quick—lose no time!" cried Vincent. Then he closed the window, turned round, and confronted her again. At last a little agitation was visible in this invulnerable woman. For an instant her head moved with a spasmodic thrill, and her countenance changed. She gave a rapid glance round as if to see whether any outlet was left. Vincent's eye followed hers.

"You cannot escape—you shall not escape," he said, slowly; "don't think it—nothing you can do or say will help you now."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Hilyard, with a startled, panting breath. "You have come to the inexorable," she said, after a moment; "most men do, one time or another. You decline meeting us on our ground, and take to your own. Very well," she continued, seating herself by the table where she had already laid down one of the Salem hymn-books; "till this arrival happens, we may have a little conversation, Mr. Vincent. I was about to tell you something which ought to be good news. Though

you don't appreciate my regard for you, I will tell it you all the same. What noise is that? Oh, the boys, I suppose, rushing off for your policeman. I hope you know what you are going to say to that functionary when he comes. In the mean time, wait a little—you must hear my news."

The only answer Vincent made was to look out again from the window, under which a little group of gazers had already collected. His companion heard the sounds below with a thrill of alarm more real than she had ever felt before. She sat rigidly, with her hand upon the hymn-book, preserving her composure by a wonderful effort, intensely alive and awake to everything, and calculating her chances with a certain desperation. This one thing alone of all that had happened, the Back Grove Street needlewoman, confident in her own powers and influence, had not foreseen.

"Listen!" she cried, with an excitement and haste which she could not quite conceal. "That man is not dead, you know. Come here—shut the window! Young man, do you hear what I say to you? Am I likely to indulge in vain talk now? Come here—here! and understand what I have to say."

"It does not matter," said Vincent, closing the window. "What you say can make no difference. There is but one thing possible now."

"Yes, you are a man!" cried the desperate woman, clasping her hands tight, and struggling with herself to keep down all appearance of her anxiety. "You are deaf, blind! You have turned your back upon reason. That is what it always comes to. Hush! come here—closer; they make so much noise in the street. I believe," she said, with a dreadful smile, "you are afraid of me. You think I will stab you, or something. Don't entertain such vulgar imaginations, Mr. Vincent. I have told you before, you have fine manners, though you are only a Dissenting minister. I have something to tell you—something you will be glad to know——"

Here she made another pause for breath—merely for breath—not for any answer, for there was no answer in her companion's face. He was listening for the footsteps in

the street—the steps of his returning messengers. And so was she, as she drew in that long breath, expanding her forlorn bosom with air, which the quick throbs of her heart so soon exhausted. She looked in his eyes with an eager fire in her own, steadily, without once shifting her gaze. The two had changed places. It was he, in his inexorableness, close shut up against any appeal or argument, that was the superior now.

"When you hear what I have to say, you will not be so calm," she went on, with another involuntary heave of her breast. "Listen! your sister is safe. Yes, you may start, but what I say is true. Don't go to the window yet. Stop, hear me! I tell you your sister is safe. Yes, it may be the people you have sent for. Never mind, this is more important. You have locked the door, and nobody can come in. I tell you again and again, your sister is safe. That man is not dead—you know he is not dead. And yesterday—hush! never mind!—yesterday," she said, rising up as Vincent moved, and detaining him with her hand upon his arm, which she clutched with desperate fingers, "he made a declaration that it was not she; a declaration before the magistrates," continued Mrs. Hilyard, gasping as her strength failed her, and following him, holding his arm as he moved to the window, "that it was not she—not she! do you understand me—not she! He swore to it. He said it was another, and not that girl. Do you hear me?" she cried, raising her voice, and shaking his arm wildly in the despair of the moment, but repeating her words with the clearness of desperation—"He said on his oath it was not she."

She had followed him to the window, not pleading for herself by a single word, but with her desperate hand upon his arm, her face pinched and pale to the lips, and a horrible anxiety gleaming in the eyes which she never removed from his face. The two stood together there for a moment in that silent encounter; he looking down at the group of people below, she watching his face with her eyes, clutching his arm with her hand, appealing to him with a speechless suspense and terror, which no words can describe. Her fate hung upon the merest thread, and she knew it. She had

no more power to move him in her own person than any one of the ragged children who stood gazing up at the window. There he stood, silent, blank, immovable; and she, suffering no expression of her dreadful suspense to escape her, stood clutching his arm, seeing, as she had never seen before, a pale vision of prisons, scaffolds, judgments, obscuring earth and heaven. She was brave, and had dared them all wittingly in the crisis of her fate, but the reality caught the labouring breath from her lips, and turned her heart sick. This morning she had woke with a great burden taken off her mind, and, daring as she was, had faced the only man who had any clue to her secret, confident in his generous nature and her own power over him. But this confidence had failed her utterly, and in the very ease and relief of her mind—a relief more blessed and grateful than she could have acknowledged to any mortal—lo! here arose before her close and real the spectre which she had defied. It approached step by step, while she gazed with wild eyes and panting breath upon the inexorable man who had it in his power to deliver her over to law and justice. She dared not say a word of entreaty to him; she could only watch his eyes, those eyes which never lighted upon her, with speechless dread and anxiety. Many evils she had borne in her life—many she had confronted and overcome—obstinate will and unscrupulous resolution had carried her one way or other through all former dangers. Here for the first time she stood helpless, watching with an indescribable agony the face of the young man at whom she had so often smiled. Some sudden unforeseen touch might still set her free. Her breath came quick in short gasps—her breast heaved—her fate was absolutely beyond her own control, in Vincent's hands.

Just then there came into the narrow street a sound of carriage-wheels. Instinctively Vincent started. The blank of his determination was broken by this distant noise. Somehow it came naturally into the silence of this room and woke up the echoes of the past in his mind; the past—that past in which Lady Western's carriage was the celestial chariot, and she the divinest lady of life. Like a gleam of light there suddenly dawned around him a remembrance of the times he had seen her here—the

times he had seen her anywhere; the last time—the sweet hand she had laid upon his arm. Vincent's heart awoke under that touch. With a start he looked down upon the hand which was at this moment on his arm,—not the hand of love,—fingers with the blood pressed down to the very tips, holding with desperation that arm which had the power of life and death. A hurried exclamation came from his lips; he looked at the woman by him, and read vaguely in her face all the passion and agony there. Vaguely it occurred to him that to save or to sacrifice her was in his hands, and that he had but a moment now to decide. The carriage-wheels came nearer, nearer, ringing delicious promises in his ears—nearer too came the servants of that justice he had invoked; and what plea was it, what strange propitiation, which his companion had put forth to him to stay his avenging hand? Only a moment now; he shook her hand off his arm, and in his turn took hold of hers; he held her fast while she faced him in an agony of restrained suspense and terror. How her worn bosom panted with that quick coming breath! Her life was in his hands.

"What was that you said?" asked Vincent, with the haste and brevity of passion, suddenly perceiving how much had to be done in this moment of fate.

The long-restrained words burst from his companion's lips almost before he had done speaking. "I said your sister was safe!" she cried; "I said he had declared her innocent on his oath. It was not she—he has sworn it, all a man could do. To sacrifice another," she went on breathlessly with a strong momentary shudder, pausing to listen, "will do nothing for her—nothing! You hear what I say. It was not she; he has sworn upon his solemn oath. Do as you will. She is safe—safe!—as safe as—as— God help me—as safe as my child,—and it was for her sake——"

She stopped—words would serve her no further—and just then there came a summons to the locked door. Vincent dropped her arm, and she recoiled from him with an involuntary movement; unawares she clasped her thin hands and gave one wild look into his face. Not even now could she tell what he was going to do, this

dreadful arbiter of fate. The key, as he turned it in the door, rang in her ears like thunder; and his hand trembled as he set open the entrance of the needlewoman's mean apartment. On the threshold stood no vulgar messenger of fate, but a bright vision, sad, yet sweeter than anything else in earth or almost in heaven to Vincent. He fell back without saying anything before the startled look of that beautiful face. He let in, not law and justice, but love and pity, to this miserable room.

"Oh, Rachel! where have you been? have you seen him? have you heard of him? where have you been?" cried the visitor, going up to the pallid woman, whose eyes were still fixed on Vincent. Mrs. Hilyard could not speak. She dropped upon her knees by the table, shivering and crouching like a stricken creature. She leaned her head upon the hymn-book which lay there so strangely at variance with everything else around it. Pale with fright and horror, Lady Western appealed to Vincent. "She is ill, she is fainting—oh, Mr. Vincent, what have you been saying to her? She was not to blame," cried the new-comer, in her ignorance. Vincent attempted no reply, offered no help. In his heart he could have snatched away those beautiful hands which embraced and comforted his "prisoner," thus rescued out of his grasp. It was hard to see her touch that guilty conscious woman whom his own heart refused to pity. He stood by looking on, watching her still; the instinct of vengeance had been awakened within him. He was reluctant to let her go.

"You have been saying something to her," said Lady Western, with tears in her eyes; "and how could she be to blame? Rachel! Oh, I wonder, I wonder if she loved him after all?" cried the beautiful creature, in the bewilderment of her innocence and ignorance. She stood bending over the kneeling figure, troubled, perplexed almost more than her strange sister-in-law had ever yet perplexed her. She could not account for this extraordinary access of agitation. It was nohow explainable, except upon that supposition which opened at once the warmest sympathies of the gentle young woman's heart.

“Rachel, dear!” she cried, kissing softly the thin hands worn with toil that covered Mrs. Hilyard’s face—“he is still living, there is hope; perhaps he will get better; and he is showing a better mind too,” she added, after a little tremulous pause. “I came to see if you had come home to tell you; he has sworn that it was not—oh, Mr. Vincent, I sent you word immediately when I got the message—he says it was not your sister; she had nothing to do with it, he says. Now I can look you in the face again. The first thing he was able to do when he came to himself was to clear her; and now she will get better—and your dear mother?”—said Lady Western, looking wistfully into the young man’s face. In that moment, while her attention was directed otherwise, Mrs. Hilyard rose up and took her seat again; took her seat because she was not able to stand, and scarcely able, by all the power of her will, to compose the nerves which, for the first time in her life, had utterly got the better of her. She wiped off the heavy moisture from her face with a furtive hand before the young Dowager turned her eyes again that way. She grasped fast hold of the only thing on the table, the Salem hymn-book, and with a vast effort regained some degree of self-command. For that precious moment she was free from observation, for nothing in the world could have prevented Vincent from returning with his own fascinated eyes the look which Lady Western turned upon him. While the two looked at each other, she was safe; she collected her scattered forces in that invaluable instant. She was herself again when Lady Western looked round, somewhat nervous and embarrassed, from the gaze of passion with which her look of deprecation and sympathy had been met. If a slight shiver now and then thrilled over Mrs. Hilyard’s figure, it was as like to be cold as emotion. Otherwise, she sat with her arm resting on the table and her hand clenched upon the hymn-book, her thin lips clinging spasmodically to each other, and her face pallid, but to an uncritical observer scarcely changed from the grey and vigilant composure of her usual appearance. So many storms had passed over that countenance, that the momentary agony of horror and fright from which she had scarcely yet emerged did

not tell as it would have done on a face less worn. Her voice was sharp and strained when she spoke, and she watched Vincent's eye with a keenness of which he was vividly conscious; but Lady Western, who did not go deep into looks and meanings, found nothing very unusual in what she said.

"I think Mr. Vincent was doubtful of my information," she said. "I heard it last night from Langridge, the groom, who once belonged to my family, you know, Alice; and—and lets me know if anything more than usual happens," she said, abruptly stopping to draw breath. "I travelled all night to get here to-day. Mr. Vincent was doubtful of me. Now this matter is cleared up, I daresay he will understand me when I say that I never could have allowed things to go further. I am only a needle-woman, and live in Back Grove Street," continued Mrs. Hilyard, recovering gradually as she spoke; "but I have certain things still in my power. Mr. Vincent will understand what I mean," she went on, fixing her eyes upon him, and unable to repress an occasional gasp which interrupted her words, "when I say that I should not have suffered it to go further. I should not have shrunk from any sacrifice. My dear, I have been a little shaken and agitated, as you perceive. Mr. Vincent wants to keep his eye upon me. Take me with you, Alice," said the bold woman, once more looking Vincent full in the face; "take charge of me, keep me prisoner until all this is cleared up. I am about tired of living a disguised princess. Send up your people for my possessions here, and take me with you. You will find me safe, Mr. Vincent, when you happen to want me, with Lady Western in Grange Lane."

"Oh, Rachel, I am so glad!" cried Lady Western; "I cannot for my life imagine what you mean by keeping you my prisoner, and all that; but Mr. Vincent may be very sure you will be safe with me;—since he has so much interest in your movements," continued the young Dowager, turning her perplexed eyes from one to the other. She had not the remotest idea what it all meant. She was perhaps a little surprised to perceive that, after all, Vincent's interest was less with herself than with this strange woman, whose calmness and agitation were equally confusing and unintelligible.

"We shall, of course, always be happy to see Mr. Vincent in Grange Lane," she concluded, with a somewhat stately courtesy. He did not look at her; he was looking at the other, whose eyes were fixed upon his face. Between these eyes Lady Western, much amazed, could perceive a secret communication passing. What could it mean? The consciousness of this mystery between them which she did not know, annoyed her, notwithstanding her sweet temper. She withdrew her hand instinctively from Mrs. Hilyard's, which she had taken in momentary enthusiasm, and watched their looks of intelligence with half-offended eyes.

"Yes," said the needlewoman, speaking with her eyes fixed upon Vincent, though she did not address him, and making a desperate effort after her usual manner; "I do not think Back Grove Street will do any longer. One may as well take advantage of the accident which has brought our family affairs before the world to come alive again. It is a thing one must do sooner or later. So, if your carriage is close, Alice, I will go home with you. I shall miss Salem," said the audacious woman, "though you are so much less sure about doing good than you used to be, Mr. Vincent. If my soul happens to be saved, however," she continued, with a strange softening of her fixed and gleaming eyes—"if that is of much importance, or has any merit in it—you will have had some share in the achievement. You will?" She said the words with a keen sharpness of interrogation, much unlike their more obvious meaning. "You will," she repeated again, more softly—"you will!" Her thin hands came together for a moment in a clasp of mute supplication; her eyes, always hitherto looking down upon him from heights of dark knowledge and experience, looked up in his face with an anguish of entreaty which startled Vincent. Just at that moment the sounds in the street grew louder, and a voice of authority was audible ordering some one to clear the way. Mrs. Hilyard did not speak, but she put out her hand and touched Lady Western's shawl, lifting its long fringes, and twisting them round those fingers on which the marks of her long labour were still visible. She withdrew as she did this her eyes from his face. Her fate was absolutely in his hands.

“Ladies,” said Vincent, hoarsely, after vainly trying to clear his agitated voice, “it is better you should leave this place at once. I will see you to your carriage. If I do wrong, the consequences will fall hardest on me. Don’t say anything; either way, talking will do little good. You are her shield and defence,” he said, looking at Lady Western, with an excitement which he could not quite keep under. “When she touches you, she becomes sacred. You will keep her safe—safe? you will not let her go?”

“Yes; I will keep her safe,” said the beauty, opening her lovely astonished eyes. “Is she in danger? Oh, Mr. Vincent, your trouble has been too much for you! remember your sister is safe now.”

“Is she?” said the minister; he was bitter in his heart, even though that hand was once more laid on his arm, “Safe!—with a broken heart and a ruined life; but what does that matter? It is all we are good for; though we may go mad and die.”

“Oh, not you! not you!” said Lady Western, gazing at him with the tenderest pity in her sweet eyes. “You must not say so; I should be so unhappy.” Her beautiful hand pressed his arm with the lightest momentary pressure. She could not help herself; to see suffering and not to do what was in her to soothe it was not possible to her soft heart. Whatever harm that temporary opiate might do, nothing in the world could have prevented her gentle kindness from administering it. She went down the humble stairs leaning on his arm, with Mrs. Hilyard following close. The young man put aside the little crowd he himself had collected, and put them in the carriage. He saw them drive away with a kind of despairing exaltation and excitement, and turned to the difficulties which remained to him—to explain himself and send the tardy ministers of justice away. He explained, as he best could, that he had been mistaken, and once more emptied his scanty purse, where there was now little enough left. When he had got rid of the disappointed group about the door, he went home slowly in the reaction of his violence and haste. Susan was safe; was she safe? delivered

from this dreadful accusation—allowed to drop back at least with her broken heart into the deep silences of privacy and uninvadable domestic life. Well, it was a mercy, a great mercy, though he could not realise it. He went home slowly, tingling with the strain of these strange hours; was it Sunday still? was it only an hour ago that Salem had thrilled to the discourse in which his passion and despair had found vent? Vincent neither comprehended himself nor the hours, full of strange fate, which were gliding over him. He went home exhausted, as if with a great conflict; conscious of some relief in his heart, but half unwilling to confess to it, or to realise the means by which it had dawned upon him.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Vincent entered the house, the sensation of quiet in it struck him with a vague consolation which he could scarcely explain. Perhaps only because it was Sunday, but there was no reproachful landlady, no distracting sound from above—all quiet, Sunday leisure, Sunday decorum, as of old. When he went up hurriedly to his sitting-room, he found two letters lying on his table—one a telegraphic despatch from Dover, the other a dainty little note, which he opened as a man opens the first written communication he receives from the woman of all women. He knew what was in it; but he read it as eagerly as if he expected to find something new in the mild little epistle, with its gentle attempt at congratulation. The news was true. Either remorse had seized upon Mildmay in the prospect of death, or the lingering traditions of honour in his heart had asserted themselves on Susan’s behalf. He had declared her entirely innocent; he had even gone farther, he had sworn that it was only as the companion of his daughter that Susan had accompanied them, and as such that he had treated her. The deposition taken by the magistrates was sent to Vincent in an abridged form, but what it conveyed was clear beyond dispute. So far as the words of this apparently dying man could be received,

Susan was spotless—without blood on her hand, or speck upon her good fame. The lesser and the greater guilt were both cleared from that young head which had not been strong enough to wait for this vindication. Though he said, Thank God, from the bottom of his heart, an unspeakable bitterness filled Vincent's soul as he read. Here was a deliverance, full, lavish, unlooked for; but who could tell that the poor girl, crazed with misery, would ever be any the better for it? who could tell whether this vindication might be of any further use than to lighten the cloud upon Susan's grave?

With this thought in his mind he went to the sick-room, where everything seemed quiet, not quite sure that his mother, absorbed as she was in Susan's present danger, could be able to realise the wonderful deliverance which had come to them. But matters were changed there as elsewhere. Between the door and the bed on which Susan lay, a large folding-screen had been set up, and in the darkened space between this and the door sat Mrs. Vincent, with Dr. Rider and his wife on each side, evidently persuading and arguing with her on some point which she was reluctant to yield to them. They were talking in whispers under their breath, and a certain air of stillness, of calm and repose, which Vincent could scarcely comprehend, was in the hushed room.

"I assure you, on my word," said Dr. Rider, lifting his eyes as Vincent opened the door, and beckoning him softly to come in, "that this change is more than I dared hope for. The chances are she will wake up out of danger. Nothing can be done for her but to keep her perfectly quiet; and my wife will watch, if you will rest;—for our patient's sake!" said the anxious doctor, still motioning Vincent forward, and appealing to him with his eyes.

"Mr. Vincent has something to tell you," said the quick little woman, impetuous even in her whisper, who was Dr. Rider's wife. "He must not come and talk here. He might wake her. Take him away. Edward, take them both away. Mrs. Vincent, you

must go and hear what he has to say."

"Oh, Arthur! my dear boy," cried his mother, looking up to him with moist eyes. "It is I who have something to tell. My child is perhaps to get well, Arthur. Oh! my own boy, after all, she is going to get better. We shall have Susan again. Hush! doctor, please let me go back again; something stirred— I think something stirred; and perhaps she might want something, and the nurse would not observe. Tired?—no, no; I am not tired. I have always watched them when they were ill, all their lives. They never had any nurse in sickness but their mother. Arthur, you know I am not tired. Oh! doctor, perhaps you would order something while he is here, for my son; he has been agitated and anxious, and he is not so strong—not nearly so strong as I am; but, my dear," said the widow, looking up in her son's face with a wistful eagerness, "when Susan gets better, all will be—well."

She said the last words with a trembling, prolonged sigh. Poor mother, in that very moment she had recalled almost for the first time how far from well everything would be. Her face darkened over piteously as she spoke. She rose up, stung into new energy by this dreadful thought, which had been hitherto mercifully obscured by Susan's danger. "Let me go back—don't say anything. Nobody can watch my child but me," said the heartbroken woman; and once more she looked in her son's face. She wanted to read there what had happened—to ascertain from him, without any one else being the wiser, all the dreadful particulars which now, in the first relief of Susan's recovery, had burst into sudden shape upon her sight. "Doctor, we will not detain you; her brother and I will watch my child," said Mrs. Vincent. The light forsook her eyes as she rose in that new and darker depth of anxiety; her little figure tottered trying to stand as she held out her hand to her son. "You and me—only you and me, Arthur—we must never leave her; though everybody is so kind——" said the minister's mother, turning with her smile of martyrdom, though her eyes were blind and she could not see them, to Dr. Rider and his wife.

Vincent took his mother's hands and put her tenderly back in her chair. "I have good news, too," he said; "all will be well, mother dear. This man who has wrought us so much trouble is not dead. I told you, but you did not understand it; and he declares that Susan——"

"Arthur!" cried Mrs. Vincent, with a sharp outcry of alarm and remonstrance. "Oh, God forgive me! I shall wake my child. Arthur! The doctor is very good," added the widow, looking round upon them always with the instinct of conciliating Arthur's friends; "and so is Mrs. Rider; but every family has its private affairs," she concluded, with a wistful, deprecating smile, all the time making signs to Arthur to stop him in his indiscreet revelations. "My dear, you will tell me presently when we are alone."

"Ah, mother," said Vincent, with a suppressed groan, "there is nothing private now in our family affairs. Hush! listen— Susan is cleared; he swears she had nothing to do with it; he swears that she was his daughter's companion only. Mother! Good heavens! doctor, what has happened? She looks as if she were dying. Mother! What have I done? I have killed her with my good news."

"Hush, hush—she has fainted—all will come right; let us get her away," cried Dr. Rider under his breath. Between them the two young men carried her out of the room, which Mrs. Rider closed after them with a certain triumph. The widow was not in so deep a faint but the fresher air outside and the motion revived her. It was more a sudden failing of her faculties in the height of emotion than actual insensibility. She made a feeble effort to resist and return into Susan's room. "You will wake her," said Dr. Rider in her ear; and the poor mother sank back in their arms, fixing her wistful misty eyes, in which everything swam, upon her son. Her lips moved as she looked at him, though he could not hear her say a word; but the expression in her face, half awakened only from the incomprehension of her swoon, was not to be mistaken or resisted. Vincent bent down over her, and repeated what

he had said as he carried her to another room. “Susan is safe—Susan is innocent. It is all over; mother, you understand me?” he said, repeating it again and again. Mrs. Vincent leaned back upon his shoulder with a yielding of all her fatigued frame and worn-out mind. She understood him, not with her understanding as yet, but with her heart, which melted into unspeakable relief and comfort without knowing why. She closed her eyes in that wonderful consciousness of some great mercy that had happened to her; the first time she had closed them voluntarily for many nights and days. When they laid her down on the bed which had been hurriedly prepared for her, her eyes were still closed, and tears stealing softly out under the lids. She could not break out into expressions of thankfulness—the joy went to her heart.

Dr. Rider thought it judicious to leave her so, and retired from the bedside with Vincent, not without some anxious curiosity in his own mind to hear all “the rights” of the matter. Perhaps the hum of their voices, quietly though they spoke, aroused her from her trance of silent gratitude. When she called Arthur faintly, and when they both hurried to her, Mrs. Vincent was sitting up in her bed wiping off the tears from her cheeks. “Arthur dear,” said the widow, “I am quite sure Dr. Rider will understand that what he has heard is in the strictest confidence; for to be sure,” she continued, with a faint smile breaking over her wan face, “nobody could have any doubt about my Susan. It only had to be set right—and I knew when my son came home he would set it right,” said Mrs. Vincent, looking full in Dr. Rider’s face. “It has all happened because I had not my wits about me as I ought to have had, and was not used to act for myself; but when my son came back— Arthur, my own boy, it was all my fault, but I knew you would set it right—and as for my Susan, nobody could have any doubt; and you will both forgive your poor mother. I don’t mind saying this before the doctor,” she repeated again once more, looking in his face; “because he has seen us in all our trouble, and I am sure we may trust Dr. Rider; but, my dear, you know our private affairs are not to be talked of before strangers—especially,” said the widow, with a long trembling sigh of relief and

comfort, “when God has been so good to us, and all is to be well.”

The two young men looked at each other in silence with a certain awe. All the dreadful interval which had passed between this Sunday afternoon and the day of Susan’s return, had been a blank to Mrs. Vincent so far as the outer world was concerned. Her daughter’s illness and danger had rapt her altogether out of ordinary life. She took up her burden only where it had dropped off from her in the consuming anxiety for Susan’s life and reason, in which all other fears had been lost. Just at the point where she had forgotten it, where she had still faced the world with the despairing assumption that all would be right when Arthur returned, she bethought herself now of that frightful shadow which had never been revealed in its full horror to her eyes. Now that Arthur’s assurance relieved her heart of that, the widow took up her old position instinctively. She knew nothing of the comments in the newspapers, the vulgar publicity to which poor Susan’s story had come. She wanted to impress upon Dr. Rider’s mind, by way of making up for her son’s imprudence, that he was specially trusted, and that she did not mind speaking before him because he had seen all their trouble. Such was the poor mother’s idea as she sat upon the bed where they had carried her, wiping the tears of joy from her wan and worn face. She forgot all the weary days that had come and gone. She took up the story just at the point where she, after all her martyrdom and strenuous upholding of Arthur’s cause, had suddenly sunk into Susan’s sick-room and left it. Now she reappeared with Arthur’s banner once more in her hands—always strong in that assumption that nobody could doubt as to Susan, and that Arthur had but to come home to set all right. Dr. Rider held up his warning finger when he saw Vincent about to speak. This delusion was salvation to the widow.

“But I must go back to Susan, doctor,” said Mrs. Vincent. “If she should wake and find a stranger there!—though Mrs. Rider is so kind. But I am much stronger than I look—watching never does me any harm; and now that my mind is easy— People don’t require much sleep at my time of life. And, Arthur, when my dear child sees

me, she will know that all is well—all is well," repeated the widow, with trembling lips. "I must go to Susan, doctor; think if she should wake!"

"But she must not wake," said Dr. Rider; "and if you stay quietly here she will not wake, for my wife will keep everything still. You will have a great deal to do for her when she is awake and conscious. Now you must rest."

"I shall have a great deal to do for her? Dr. Rider means she will want nursing, Arthur," said Mrs. Vincent, "after such an illness; but she might miss me even in her sleep, or she might——"

"Mother, you must rest, for Susan's sake; if you make yourself ill, who will be able to take care of her?" said Vincent, who felt her hand tremble in his, and saw with how much difficulty she sustained the nervous shivering of her frame. She looked up into his face with those anxious eyes which strove to read his without being able to comprehend all the meanings there. Then the widow turned with a feminine artifice to Dr. Rider.

"Doctor, if you will bring me word that my child is still asleep—if you will tell me exactly what you think, and that she is going on well," said Mrs. Vincent; "you are always so kind. Oh, Arthur, my dear boy," cried the widow, taking his hand and caressing it between her own, "now that he is gone, tell me. Is it quite true?—is all well again? but you must never bring in Susan's name. Nobody must have it in their power to say a word about your sister, Arthur dear. And, oh, I hope you have been prudent and not said anything among your people. Hush! he will be coming back; is it quite true, Arthur? Tell me that my dear child has come safe out of it all, and nothing has happened. Tell me! Oh, speak to me, Arthur dear!"

"It is quite true," said Vincent, meeting his mothers eyes with a strange blending of pity and thankfulness. He did not say enough to satisfy her. She drew him closer, looking wistfully into his face. The winter afternoon was darkening, the room was cold, the atmosphere dreary. The widow held her son close, and fixed upon him her

anxious inquiring eyes. “It is quite true, Arthur! There is nothing behind that you are hiding from me?” she said, with her lips almost touching his cheek, and her wistful eyes searching his meaning. “Oh, my dear boy, don’t hide anything from me. I am able to bear it, Arthur. Whatever it is, I ought to know.”

“What I have told you is the simple truth, mother,” said Vincent, not without a pang. “He has made a declaration before the magistrates——”

Mrs. Vincent started so much that the bed on which she sat shook. “Before the magistrates!” she said, with a faint cry. Then after a pause—“But, thank God, it is not here, Arthur, nor at Lonsdale, nor anywhere where we are known. And he said that—that—he had never harmed my child? Oh, Arthur, Arthur—your sister!—that she should ever be spoken of so! And he was not killed? I do not understand it, my dear. I cannot see all the rights of it; but it is a great comfort to have you to myself for a moment, and to feel as if perhaps things might come right again. Hush! I think the doctor must be coming. Speak very low. My dear boy, you don’t mean it, but you are imprudent; and, oh, Arthur, with a troublesome flock like yours you must not commit yourself! You must not let your sister’s name be talked of among the people. Hush, hush, I hear the doctor at the door.”

And the widow put her son away from her, and leant her head upon her hands instead of on his shoulder. She would not even let the doctor suppose that she had seized that moment to inquire further, or that she was anything but sure and confident that all was going well.

“She is in the most beautiful sleep,” said the enthusiastic doctor, “and Nettie is by her. Now, Mrs. Vincent, here is something you must take; and when you wake up again I will take you to your daughter, and I have very little doubt you will find her on the fair way for recovery—recovery in every sense,” added Dr. Rider, incautiously; “twice saved—and I hope you will have no more of such uneasiness as you have suffered on her behalf.”

“Indeed, I have had very little uneasiness with my children,” said Mrs. Vincent, drawing up her little figure on the bed. “Susan never had a severe illness before. When she came here first she was suffering from a—a bad fright, doctor. I told you so at the time; and I was so weak and so alarmed, Arthur dear, that I fear Dr. Rider has misunderstood me. When one is not much used to illness,” said the mother, with her pathetic jesuitry, “one thinks there never was anything so bad as one’s own case, and I was foolish and upset. Yes, I will take it, doctor. Now that I am easy in my mind, I will take anything you please; and you will let me know if she wakes, or if she stirs. Whatever happens, you will let me know that moment? Arthur, you will see that they let me know.”

The doctor promised, anxiously putting the draught into her hands: he would have promised any impossible thing at the moment, so eager was he to get her persuaded to rest.

“I have not talked so much for— I wonder how long it is?” said the widow, with a faint smile. “Oh, Arthur dear, I feel as if somehow a millstone had been on my heart, and God had taken it off. Doctor, it is—it is—all your doing, under Providence,” said the little woman, looking full in his face. Perhaps she believed it—at least she meant him to believe so. She swallowed the draught he gave her with that smile upon her face, and laid down her throbbing head in the quietness and darkness. “Go with the doctor, Arthur dear,” she said, denying the yearning in her heart to question her son farther, lest Dr. Rider might perhaps suppose all was not so well as she said; “and, oh be sure to tell me the very moment that Susan wakes?” She watched them gliding noiselessly out of the room, two dark figures, in the darkness. She lay down alone, throbbing all over with thrills of pain, which were half pleasure. She began to be conscious again of her own body and life; and the wistful curiosity that possessed her was not strong enough to neutralise the positive unmistakable joy. Susan was recovering. Susan was innocent. What trouble could there be heavy enough to take away the comfort out of words like these!

“Now she will sleep. Mr. Vincent, I congratulate you on having such pure blood in your veins; not robust, you know, but far better—such sweet, perfect health as one rarely meets with nowadays,” said the doctor, under his breath, with professional enthusiasm; “all the better for your sister that she came of such a stock. My wife, now, is another example—not robust, as I say—natures delicately organised, but in such exquisite adjustment, and with such elasticity! Mrs. Vincent will go to sleep like a baby, and wake able for—anything that God may please to send her,” said Dr. Rider with reverence. “They will both sleep till to-morrow if all goes well. Hush!—Well, I may be absurd, for neither of them could hear us here; but still it is best to err on the safe side.”

“But Susan—you are not deceiving us—Susan is——” said Vincent, with sudden alarm.

“She is asleep,” said Dr. Rider; “and, if I can, I will remain till she wakes; it is life or death.”

They parted thus—the doctor to the little room below-stairs, where Vincent’s dinner awaited him, and the young minister himself to his own room, where he went into the darkness with a kind of bewildered uncertainty and incomprehension of the events about him. To think that this day, with all its strange encounters and unexpected incidents, was Sunday, as he suddenly remembered it to be—that this morning he had preached, and this evening had to preach again, completed in Vincent’s mind the utter chaos and disturbance of ordinary life. It struck him dumb to remember that by-and-by he must again ascend the pulpit, and go through all his duties. Was he an impostor, doing all this mechanically? He debated the question dully in his own mind, as he sat too much bewildered to do anything else in the dark in his bed-chamber, pondering with a certain confused gravity and consolation over all that had happened. But faculties, which are confused by sudden comfort and relief, are very different from faculties obscured and confounded by suffering. He

sat vaguely in the dark, wondering over his strange position. This morning, even in the height of his despair, he had at least some idea what he was going to do in that pulpit of Salem. It was a sacrifice—a martyrdom to accomplish—a wild outcry and complaint to pour forth to the world. This evening he sat wasting the precious moments in the soft darkness, without knowing a word of what he was to say—without being able to realise the fact, that by-and-by he should have to go out through the sharp air echoing with church-bells—to see once more all those watchful faces turned upon him, and to communicate such instruction as was in him to his flock. A sense of exhaustion and satisfaction was in Vincent's heart. He sat listless in a vague comfort and weariness, his head throbbing with the fumes of his past excitement, yet not aching. It was only now that he realised the rolling off from his head of this dark cloud of horror and shame. Susan was recovering—Susan was innocent. He became aware of the facts much in the same way as his mother became aware of them ere she dropped to sleep in the blessed darkness of the adjoining room. Confused as he was, with his brain still full of the pulsations of the past, he was so far conscious of what had happened. He sat in his reverie, regardless of the time, and everything else that he ought to have attended to. The little maid came and knocked at his door to say his dinner had been waiting for an hour, and he answered, "Yes; he was coming," but sat still in the darkness. Then the landlady herself, compunctious, beginning to feel the thrills of returning comfort which had entered her house, came tapping softly to say it was near six, and wouldn't Mr. Vincent take something before it was time for chapel? Mr. Vincent said "Yes" again, but did not move; and it was only when he heard the church-bells tingling into the night air that he got up at last, and, stealing first to the door of Susan's room, where he ascertained that she still slept, and then to his mother's, where he could hear her soft regular breathing in the darkness, he went away in an indescribably exalted condition of mind to Salem and his duty. There is a kind of weakness incident to excitement of mind and neglect of body, which is akin to the ecstatic state in which

men dream dreams and see visions. Vincent was in that condition to-night. He was not careful what anybody would say or think; he no longer pictured to himself the up-turned faces in Salem, all conscious of the tragedy which was connected with his name. The sense of deliverance in his heart emancipated him, and gave a contrary impulse to his thoughts. In the weakness of an excited and exhausted frame, a certain gleam of the ineffable and miraculous came over the young man. He was again in the world where God stoops down to change with one touch of His finger the whole current of man's life—the world of childhood, of genius, of faith; that other world, dark sphere of necessity and fate, where nothing could stay the development into dread immortality of the obstinate human intelligence, and where dreary echoes of speculation still questioned whether any change were possible in heart and spirit, or if saving souls were a mere figure of speech, floated away far off over his head, a dark fiction of despair. In this state of mind he went back to the pulpit where, in the morning, he had thrilled his audience with all those wild complications of thought which end in nothing. Salem was again crowded—not a corner of the chapel remained unfilled; and again, many of the more zealous members were driven out of their seats by the influx of the crowd. Vincent, who had no sermon to preach, and nothing except the fulness that was in his heart to say, took up again his subject of the morning. He told his audience with the unpremeditated skill of a natural orator, that while Reason considered all the desperate chances, and concluded that wonderful work impossible, God, with the lifting of His countenance, with the touch of His power, made the darkness light before Him, and changed the very earth and heavens around the wondering soul. Lifted out of the region of reasonableness himself, he explained to his astonished audience how Reason halts in her conclusions, how miracle and wonder are of all occurrences the most natural, and how, between God and man, there are no boundaries of possibility. It was a strange sermon, without any text or divisions, irregular in its form, sometimes broken in its utterance; but the man who spoke was in a "rapture"—a state of fasting

and ecstasy. He saw indistinctly that there were glistening eyes in the crowd, and felt what was somewhat an unusual consciousness—that his heart had made communications to other hearts in his audience almost without his knowing it; but he did not observe that nobody came to the vestry to congratulate him, that Tozer looked disturbed, and that the deacons averted their benign countenances. When he had done his work, he went home without waiting to talk to anybody—without, indeed, thinking any more of Salem—through the crowd, in the darkness, passing group after group in earnest discussion of the minister. He went back still in that exalted condition of mind, unaware that he passed Mrs. Tozer and Phœbe, who were much disposed to join him—and was in his own house sooner than most of his congregation. All within was quiet, lost in the most grateful and profound stillness. Sleep seemed to brood over the delivered house. Vincent spoke to the doctor, who still waited, and whose hopes were rising higher and higher, and then ate something, and said his prayers, and went to rest like a child. The family, so worn out with labour, and trial, and sorrow, slept profoundly under the quiet stars. Those hard heavens, from which an indifferent God saw the Innocents murdered and made no sign, had melted into the sweet natural firmament, above which the great Father watches unwearied. The sudden change was more than mere deliverance to the young Nonconformist. He slept and took rest in the sweet surprise and thankfulness of his soul. His life and heart, still young and incapable of despair, had got back out of hard anguishes and miseries which no one could soften, to the sweet miraculous world in which circumstances are always changing, and God interferes for ever.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Vincent awoke next morning, his mother was standing by his bedside. Her eyes were dewy and moist, a faint tinge of colour was on her sweet old cheek, and her steps tottered a little as she came up to his bed, and stooped to kiss him. “Oh,

Arthur, my dear boy, she knows me!" said Mrs. Vincent, putting up her hand to her eyes. "I must not be away from her a moment, but I could not resist coming to tell you. She knows me, dear. Make haste and dress, and come and see your sister, Arthur; and I will give orders about your breakfast as I go back. My dear, I know you have been anxious," said the widow, putting back his hair fondly with the soft little hand which still trembled; "though men have not the way of showing it, I know you have been very anxious. You looked quite pale and thin as you slept. But I must speak to the landlady now and see about your food. Come to Susan's room as soon as you are dressed, and I will order your breakfast, my dear boy," said his mother, going softly out again, with her tender little figure all beautified and trembling with joy. Mrs. Vincent met the landlady near the door, and stopped to speak to her. "My daughter is a great deal better," said the minister's mother. "I have been so anxious, I have never been able to thank you as I ought to have done for your kindness and attention. We have been as quiet as if we had been at home. We will all remember your attention, though I have never been able to thank you before; and I am sure it is very gratifying to my son to think it is one of his own flock who has taken so much pains for us. Mr. Vincent has been very anxious about his sister," continued the widow; "I fear he has not been taking his food, nor keeping his regular time for meals. You would oblige me very much if you would try to have something nice for his breakfast. We were all much shaken yesterday, being so anxious;—some new-laid eggs perhaps—though I know they are scarce in a town at this time of the year—or anything you can think of that will tempt him to eat. I would not say so much," said Mrs. Vincent, smiling upon the astonished landlady, and leaning to support her own weakness on the rail of the passage upon which the staircase opened, "but that I know your kind interest in your minister. I am sure you will take all the pains you can to get him to attend to his precious health. Thank you. I am very much obliged."

With this the little woman passed on, feeling indeed too weak to stand longer; and

leaving the landlady, who had intended to mingle some statement of her own grievances with her congratulations, with the plea quietly taken out of her hands, and the entire matter disposed of. Mrs. Vincent was moving back again to the sick-room, when the door opened down-stairs, and some one asked for Mr. Vincent, and came up hurriedly. The minister's mother recognised Tozer's voice, and made a pause. She was glad of the opportunity to make sure that all was well in the flock. She leant over the railing to shake hands with the butterman, moved to a little effusion of thankfulness by the recollection of the state of anxiety she was in when she saw him last.

"My son is not up yet," she said. "We were very anxious yesterday. It was the crisis of the fever, and everything depended upon it. I daresay you would see how anxious Mr. Vincent was; but, thank heaven, now all is going on well."

"You see, ma'am," said Tozer, "it must have all been on the nerves, and to be sure there ain't nothing more likely to be serviceable than good news. It's in the paper this morning. As soon as I see it, I said to my missis, 'This is why the minister was so pecooliar yesterday.' I divined it in a moment, ma'am; though it wasn't to say prudent, Mrs. Vincent, and not as you would have advised no more nor myself, to fly off like that out of chapel, without as much as shaking hands with one o' the deacons. But I make allowances, I do; and when I see it in the paper, I said to my missis, 'It's all along o' this Mr. Vincent was so queer.' I don't doubt as it'll be quite looked over, and thought no more of, when it's known what's the news."

"What news?" said Mrs. Vincent, faintly, holding fast by the railing. "You mean the news of my dear child's recovery," she added, after a breathless pause. "Have they put it in the papers? I am sure it is very good, but I never heard of such a thing before. She has been very ill to be sure—but most people are very ill once in their lives," said the widow, gasping a little for breath, and fixing her eyes upon the paper which Tozer held in his hand.

“Poor soul!” said the deacon, compassionately, “it ain’t no wonder, considering all things. Phœbe would have come the very first day to say, Could she be of any use? but her mother wasn’t agreeable. Women has their own ways of managing; but they’ll both come to-day, now all’s cleared up, if you’ll excuse me. And now, ma’am, I’ll go on to the minister, and see if there’s anything as he’d like me to do, for Pigeon and the rest was put out, there’s no denying of it; but if things is set straight directly, what with this news, and what with them sermons yesterday, I don’t think as it’ll do no harm. I said to him, as this Sunday was half the battle,” said the worthy butterman, reflectively; “and he did his best— I wouldn’t say as he didn’t do his best; and I’m not the man as will forsake my pastor when he’s in trouble. Good-morning, ma’am; and my best respects to miss, and I hope as she’ll soon be well again. There ain’t no man as could rejoice more nor me at this news.”

Tozer went on to Vincent’s room, at the door of which the minister had appeared summoning him with some impatience and anxiety. “News? what news?” said Mrs. Vincent, faintly to herself, as she held by the rail and felt the light forsaking her eyes in a new mist of sudden dread. She caught the look of the landlady at that moment, a look of half-pity, curiosity, and knowledge, which startled her back to her defences. With sudden firmness she gathered herself together, and went on to the sick-room, leaving behind her, as she closed the door, the whole troubled world, which seemed to know better about her most intimate affairs than she did; and those newspapers, which somehow mentioned Susan’s name, that sweet maiden name which it was desecration to see so much as named in print. Rather the widow carried that uneasy world in with her to the sick-room which she had left a few minutes before in all the effusion of unhoped-for joy. Everything still was not well though Susan was getting better. She sat down by the bedside where Susan lay languid and pale, showing the change in her by little more than quietness and a faint recognition of her mother, and in her troubled heart began to look the new state of affairs in the face, and to make up her mind that more of the causes of Susan’s illness than she had supposed known,

must have become public. And then Arthur and his flock, that flock which he evidently had somehow affronted on the previous day. Mrs. Vincent pondered with all the natural distrust of a woman over Arthur's imprudence. She almost chafed at her necessary confinement by her daughter's bedside; if she herself, who had been a minister's wife for thirty years, and knew the ways of a congregation, and how it must be managed, could only get into the field to bring her son out of the difficult passages which she had no faith in his own power to steer through! So the poor mother experienced how, when absorbing grief is removed, a host of complicated anxieties hasten in to fill up its place. She was no longer bowed down under an overwhelming dread, but she was consumed by restless desires to be doing—cravings to know all—fears for what might at the moment be happening out of her range and influence. What might Arthur, always incautious, be confiding to Tozer even now?—perhaps telling him those "private affairs" which the widow would have defended against exposure with her very life—perhaps chafing at Salem and rejecting that yoke which, being a minister, he must bear. It was all Mrs. Vincent could do to keep herself still on her chair, and to maintain that quietness which was necessary for Susan. If only she could have been there to soften his impatience and make the best of his unnecessary confidences! Many a time before this, the widow had been compelled to submit to that female tribulation—to be shut up apart, and leave the great events outside to be transacted by those incautious masculine hands, in which, at the bottom of her heart, a woman seldom has perfect confidence when her own supervising influence is withdrawn. Mrs. Vincent felt instinctively that Arthur would commit himself as she sat resigned but troubled by Susan's bed.

Tozer went directly to the door of Vincent's room, where the minister, only half-dressed, but much alarmed to see the colloquy which was going on between his mother and the butterman, was waiting for him. The deacon squeezed the young man's hand with a hearty pressure. His aspect was so fatherly and confidential, that

it brought back to the mind of the young Nonconformist a certain rueful half-comic recollection of the suppers in the back parlour, and all the old troubles of the pastor of Salem, which heavier shadows had driven out of his mind. Tozer held up triumphantly the paper in his hand.

"You've seen it, sir?" said the butterman; "first thing I did this morning was to look up whether there wasn't nothing about it in the latest intelligence; for the 'Gazette' has been very particular, knowing, at Carlingford, folks would be interested—and here it is sure enough, Mr. Vincent; and we nigh gave three cheers, me and the lads in the shop."

To this Vincent listened with a darkening brow and an impatience which he did not attempt to conceal. He took the paper with again that quick sense of the intolerable which prompted him to tear the innocent broadsheet in pieces and tread it under foot. The 'Gazette' contained, with a heading in large characters, the following paragraph:—

"THE DOVER TRAGEDY.

"Our reader will be glad to hear that the unfortunate young lady whose name has been so unhappily mixed up in this mysterious affair, is likely to be fully exonerated from the charge rashly brought against her. In the deposition of the wounded man, which was taken late on Saturday night, by Mr. Everett, the stipendiary magistrate of Dover, he distinctly declares that Miss —— was not the party who fired the pistol, nor in any way connected with it—that she had accompanied his daughter merely as companion on a hasty journey, and that, in short, instead of the romantic connection supposed to subsist between the parties, with all the passions of love and revenge naturally involved, the ties between them were of the simplest and most temporary character. We are grieved to add, that the fright and horror of her awful position had overpowered Miss —— some time before this deposition was made, and brought on a brain-fever, which, of course, made the unfortunate young lady, who is understood

to possess great personal attractions, quite unable to explain the suspicious circumstances surrounding her. We have now only to congratulate her respectable family and friends on her exoneration from a very shocking charge, and hope her innocence will soon be confirmed by full legal acquittal. Our readers will find Colonel Mildmay's deposition on another page. It will be perceived that he obstinately refuses to indicate who was the real perpetrator of the deed. Suspicion has been directed to his groom, who accompanied him, in whom, however, the wounded man seems to repose perfect confidence. He is still in a precarious state, but little doubt is entertained of his ultimate recovery."

"There, Mr. Vincent, that's gratifying, that is," said Tozer, as Vincent laid down the paper; "and I come over directly I see it, to let you know. And I come to say besides," continued the butterman with some diffidence, "as I think if you and me was to go off to Mr. Brown the solicitor, and give him his orders as he was to put in bail for Miss —— or anything else as might be necessary—not meaning to use no disagreeable words, as there ain't no occasion now," said the good deacon; "but only to make it plain, as you and me is responsible for her, if so be as she was ever to be called for again. It would be the thing to do, that would, sir, if you take my advice. It ain't altogether my own notion, but was put into my head by one as knows. The gentleman as come here from Dover inquiring into the business was the one as suggested it to me. He turned out uncommon obliging, and wasn't to say no trouble in the house; and when word came as the Colonel wasn't dead, he went away as civil as could be. I'll go with you cheerful to Mr. Brown, if you'll take my advice, afore Mrs. Vincent gets moving about again, or the young lady knows what's a-going on; that's what I'd do, sir, if it was me."

Vincent grasped the exultant butterman's hand in an overflow of gratitude and compunction. "I shall never forget your kindness," he said, with a little tremor in his voice. "You have been a true friend. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I will go at once, and accept this other great kindness from you. I shall never forget what I

owe to you as long as I live."

"I never was the man to forsake my pastor in trouble—not to say a young man like you as is a credit to the connection, and the best preacher I may say as I ever heard in Salem," said Tozer, with effusion, returning the grasp; "but we ain't a-going a step till you've had your breakfast. Your good mother, Mrs. Vincent, as is a real lady, sir, and would never advise you different from what I would myself, being for your own interests, would have little opinion of me if I took you out on a Monday mornin' after your labours without so much as a bit o' breakfast to sustain you. I'll sit by you while you're a-eating of your bacon. There's a deal to consider of concerning Salem as I couldn't well bring before you as long as you were in such trouble. Them were uncommon sermons, sir, yesterday, I don't know as I ever heard anything as was just to be compared with the mornin' discourse, and most of the flock was of my opinion; but what is the good of standing up for the pastor—I ask you candid, Mr. Vincent—when he'll not take no pains to keep things square? I'm speaking plain, for you can't mistake me as it's anything but your own interests I am a-thinking of. We was all marching in, deacons and committee and all, to say as we was grateful to you for your instructions, and wishing you well out of your trouble—and I was in great hopes as matters might have been made up—when behold, what we finds was the vestry empty and the pastor gone! Now, I ain't a-finding fault. Them news would explain anything; but I don't deny as Pigeon and the rest was put out; and if you'll be guided by one as wishes you well, Mr. Vincent, when you've done our business as is most important of all, you'll go and make some visits, sir, and make yourself agreeable, if you'll excuse me. It ain't with no selfish thoughts as I speak," said Tozer, energetically. "It's not like asking of you to come a-visiting to me, nor setting myself forward as the minister's great friend—though we was remarking as the pastor was unknown in our house this fortnight and more—but it's for peace and union, Mr. Vincent, and the good of the flock, sir, and to keep—as your good mother well knows ain't easy in a congregation—all things

straight."

When this little peroration was delivered, Vincent was seated at table, making what he could of the breakfast, in which both his mother and Tozer had interested themselves. It was with a little effort that the young man accepted this advice as the character and intentions of his adviser deserved. He swallowed what was unpalatable in the counsel, and received the suggestion "in as sweet a frame of mind as I could wish to see," as Tozer afterwards described.

"I will go and make myself agreeable," said the minister, with a smile. "Thank heaven! it is not so impossible to-day as it might have been yesterday; I left the chapel so hurriedly, because——"

"I understand, sir," said Tozer, benevolently interposing as Vincent paused, finding explanation impossible. "Pigeon and the rest was put out, as I say, more nor I could see was reasonable—not as Pigeon is a man that knows his own mind. It's the women as want the most managing. Now, Mr. Vincent, I'm ready, sir, if you are, and we won't lose no time."

Before going out, however, Vincent went to his sister's room. She was lying in an utter quietness which went to his heart;—silent, no longer uttering the wild fancies of a disordered brain, recovering, as the doctor thought; but stretched upon her white couch, marble white, without any inclination apparently to lift the heavy lids of her eyes, or to notice anything that passed before her—a very sad sight to see. By her sat her mother, in a very different condition, anxious, looking into Arthur's eyes, whispering counsels in his ears. "Oh, my dear boy, be very careful," said Mrs. Vincent; "your dear papa always said that a minister's flock was his first duty; and now that Susan is getting better, O Arthur! you must not let people talk about your sister;—and have patience, O have patience, dear!" This was said in wistful whispers, with looks which only half confided in Arthur's prudence; and the widow sank into her chair when he left her, folding her hands in a little agony of

self-restraint and compulsory quietness. She felt equal for it herself, if she had been at liberty to go out upon the flock once more in Arthur's cause; but who could tell how he might commit himself, he who was a young man, and took his own way, and did not know, as Tozer said, how to keep all things straight? When Mrs. Vincent thought of her son in personal conflict with Mrs. Pigeon, she lost faith in Arthur. She herself might have conquered that difficult adversary, but what weapons had he to bring forth against the deacon's wife, he who was only a minister and a man?

CHAPTER XI.

"AND now that's settled, as far as we can settle it now," said Tozer, as they left the magistrate's office, where John Brown, the famous Carlingford solicitor, had accompanied them, "you'll go and see some of the chapel folks, Mr. Vincent? It'll be took kind of you to lose no time, especially if you'd say a word just as it's all over, and let them know the news is true."

"I will go with you first," said Vincent, who contemplated the butterman's shop at that moment through a little halo of gratitude and kindness. He went into the back parlour with the gratified deacon, where Mrs. Tozer sat reading over again the same 'Gazette' in which poor Susan's history was summed up and ended. It seemed like a year to Vincent since he had dined with his mother at this big table, amid the distant odours of all the bacon and cheese. Mrs. Tozer put down the paper, and took off her spectacles as her visitor came in. "It's Mr. Vincent, Phœbe," she said, with a little exclamation. "Dear, dear, I never thought as the pastor would be such a strange sight in my house—not as I was meaning nothing unkind, Tozer, so there's no occasion to look at me. I'm as glad as ever I can be to see the minister; and what a blessing as it's all settled, and the poor dear getting well, too. Phœbe, you needn't be a-hiding behind me, child, as if the pastor was thinking of how you was dressed. She has on her morning wrapper, Mr. Vincent, as she was helping her mother in, and we didn't

expect no visitors. Don't be standing there, as if it was any matter to the minister how you was dressed."

"Oh, ma, as if I ever thought of such a thing!" said Phœbe, extending a pink uncovered arm out of the loose sleeve of her morning dress to Vincent, and averting her face; "but to see Mr. Vincent is so like old times—and everything has seemed so different—and it is so pleasant to feel as if it were all coming back again. Oh ma! to imagine that I ever supposed Mr. Vincent could notice my dress, or think of poor me!" added Phœbe, in a postscript under her breath. The minister heard the latter words quite as well as the first. After he had shaken the pink, plump hand, he sat down on the opposite side of the table, and saw Phoebe, relieved against the light of the window, wiping a tender tear from her eye. All at once out of the darker and heavier trials which had abstracted him from common life, the young Nonconformist plunged back into the characteristic troubles of his position. As usual, he made no response to Phœbe, found nothing civil to say, but turned with desperation to Mrs. Tozer, who was luckily about to speak.

"Don't pay no attention to her, Mr. Vincent; she's a deal too feelin'. She oughtn't to be minded, and then she'll learn better," said Mrs. Tozer. "I am sure it wasn't no wish of ours as you should ever stop away. If we had been your own relations we couldn't have been more took up; and where should a minister seek for sympathy if it isn't in his own flock? There ain't nobody so safe to put your trust in, Mr. Vincent, as Salem folks. There's a many fine friends a young man may have when he's in a prosperous way, but it ain't to be supposed they would stand by him in trouble; and it's then as you find the good of your real friends," continued Mrs. Tozer, looking with some significance at her husband. Tozer, for his own part, rubbed his hands and stationed himself with his back to the fire, as is the custom of Englishmen of all degrees. The husband and wife contemplated Vincent with complacence. With the kindest feelings in the world, they could not altogether restrain a little triumph. It was impossible now that the minister could mistake who were his true friends.

But just then, strangely enough, a vision of a tender smile, a glance up in his face, the touch of a soft hand, came to Vincent's mind. His fine friends! he had but one, and she had stood by him in his trouble. From Tozer's complacence the minister's mind went off with a bound of relief to that sweet, fruitless sympathy which was dearer than help. From her soft perfumy presence to Mrs. Tozer's parlour, with that pervading consciousness in it of the shop hard by and its store of provisions, what a wonderful difference! It was not so easy to be grateful as he had at first thought.

"Mr. Tozer has been my real friend indeed, and a most honest and thorough one," said Vincent. "But I don't think I have any other in Salem so sure and steady," added the minister, after a little pause, half gratefully, half in bitterness. This sentiment was not, however, resented by the assembled family. Phœbe leaned over her mother's chair, and whispered, "Oh, ma, dear! didn't I always say he was full of feeling?" somewhat to the discomfiture of the person commented on; while Tozer himself beamed upon the minister from before the blazing fire.

"I said as we'd pull you through," said Tozer, "and I said as I'd stand by you; and both I'll do, sir, you take my word, if you'll but stick to your duty; and as for standing bail in a hundred pound or two," continued the butterman, magnanimously, "for a poor young creature as couldn't be nothing but innocent, I don't mind that, nor a deal more than that, to keep all things straight. It's nothing but my duty. When a man is a responsible man, and well-known in a place, it's his business to make use of his credit, Mr. Vincent, sir, and his character, for the good of his friends."

"It may be your duty, but you know there ain't a many as would have done it," said his straight-forward wife, "as Mr. Vincent sees himself, and no need for nobody a-telling of him. There ain't a many as would have stood up for the pastor, right and wrong, and finished off with the likes of this, and the minister don't need us to say so. Dear, dear, Mr. Vincent, you ain't a-going away already, and us hasn't so much as seen you for I can't tell how long? I made sure you'd stop and take a bit of dinner

at least, not making no ceremony," said Mrs. Tozer, "for there's always enough for a friend, and you can't take us wrong."

Vincent had risen hurriedly to his feet, under the strong stimulant of the butterman's self-applause. Conscious as he was of all that Tozer had really done, the minister found it hard to listen and echo, with due humility and gratitude, the perfect satisfaction of the pair over their own generosity. He had no thanks to say when thus forestalled. "Oh, ma, how can you make so much of it?" cried Phœbe. "The minister will think us so selfish; and, oh, please Mr. Vincent, when you go home, will you speak to your mother, and ask her to let me come and help with her nursing? I should do whatever she told me, and try to be a comfort to her—oh, I should indeed!" said Phœbe, clasping those pink hands. "Nobody could be more devoted than I should be." She cast down her eyes, and stood the image of maidenly devotedness between Vincent and the window. She struck him dumb, as she always did. He never was equal to the emergency where Phœbe was concerned. He took up his hat in his hands, and tried to explain lamely how he must go away—how he had visits to make—duties to do—and would have stuck fast, and lost Mrs. Tozer's favour finally and for ever, had not the butterman interposed.

"It's me as is to blame," said the worthy deacon. "If it hadn't have been as the pastor wouldn't pass the door without coming in, I'd not have had him here to-day; and if you women would think, you'd see. We're stanch—and Mr. Vincent ain't no call to trouble himself about us; but Pigeon and them, you see, as went off in a huff yesterday—that's what the minister has got to do. You shan't be kep' no longer, sir, in my house. Duty afore pleasure, that's my maxim. Good mornin', and I hope as you won't meet with no unpleasantness; but if you should, Mr. Vincent, don't be disheartened, sir—we'll pull you through."

With this encouraging sentiment, Vincent was released from Mrs. Tozer's parlour. He drew a long breath when he got out to the fresh air in the street, and faced the

idea of the Pigeons and other recusants whom he was now bound to visit. While he thought of them, all so many varieties of Mrs. Tozer's parlour, without the kindness which met him there, the heart of the young Nonconformist failed him. Nothing but gratitude to Tozer could have sent him forth at all on this mission of conciliation; but now on the threshold of it, smarting from even Tozer's well-intentioned patronage, a yearning for a little personal comfort seized upon Vincent's mind. It was his duty to go away towards Grove Street, where the poulterer's residence was; but his longing eyes strayed towards Grange Lane, where consolation dwelt. And, besides, was it not his duty to watch over the real criminal, for whose mysterious wickedness poor Susan had suffered? It was not difficult to foresee how that argument would conclude. He wavered for a few minutes opposite Masters's shop, gave a furtive glance back towards the butterman's, and then, starting forward with sudden resolution, took his hasty way to Lady Western's door; only for a moment; only to see that all was safe, and his prisoner still in custody. Vincent sighed over the thought with an involuntary quickening of his heart. To be detained in such custody, the young man thought, would be sweeter than heaven; and the wild hope which came and went like a meteor about his path, sprang up with sudden intensity, and took the breath from his lips, and the colour from his cheek, as he entered at that green garden door.

Lady Western was by herself in the drawing-room—that room divided in half by the closed doors which Vincent remembered so well. She rose up out of the low chair in which she reposed, like some lovely swan amid billows of dark silken drapery, and held out her beautiful hand to him—both her beautiful hands—with an effusion of kindness and sympathy. The poor young Nonconformist took them into his own, and forgot the very existence of Salem. The sweetness of the moment took all the sting out of his fate. He looked at her without saying anything, with his heart in his eyes. Consolation! It was all he had come for. He could have gone away thereafter and met all the Pigeons in existence; but more happiness still was in store for him—she

pointed to a chair on the other side of her work-table. There was nobody else near to break the charm. The silken rustle of her dress, and that faint perfume which she always had about her, pervaded the rosy atmosphere. Out of purgatory, out of bitter life beset with trouble, the young man had leaped for one moment into paradise; and who could wonder that he resigned himself to the spell?

"I am so glad you have come," said Lady Western. "I am sure you must have hated me, and everything that recalled my name; but it was impossible for any one to be more grieved than I was, Mr. Vincent. Now, will you tell me about Rachel? She sits by herself in her own room. When I go in she gives me a look of fright which I cannot understand. Fright! Can you imagine Rachel frightened, Mr. Vincent—and of me!"

"Ah, yes. I would not venture to come into the presence of the angels if I had guilt on my hands," said Vincent, not very well knowing what he said.

"Mr. Vincent! what can you mean? You alarm me very much," said the young Dowager; "but perhaps it is about her little girl. I don't think she knows where her daughter is. Indeed," said Lady Western, with a cloud on her beautiful face, "you must not think I ever approved of my brother's conduct; but when he was so anxious to have his child, I think she might have given in to him a little—don't you think so? The child might have done him good perhaps. She is very lovely, I hear. Did you see her? Oh, Mr. Vincent, tell me about it. I cannot understand how you are connected with it at all. She trusted in you so much, and now she is afraid of you. Tell me how it is. Hush! she is ringing her bell. She has seen you come into the house."

"But I don't want to see Mrs.—Mrs. Mildmay," said Vincent, rising up. "I don't know why I came at all, if it were not to see the sun shining. It is dark down below where I am," said the young man, with an involuntary outburst of the passion which at that moment suddenly appeared to him in all its unreasonableness. "Forgive me. It was only a longing I had to see the light."

Lady Western looked up with her sweet eyes in the minister's face. She was not ignorant of the condition of mind he was in, but she was sorry for him to the bottom of her heart. To cheer him a little could not harm any one. "Come back soon," she said, again holding out her hand with a smile. "I am so sorry for your troubles; and if we can do anything to comfort you, come back soon again, Mr. Vincent." When the poor Nonconformist came to himself after these words, he was standing outside the garden door, out of paradise, his heart throbbing, and his pulse beating in a kind of sweet delirium. In that very moment of delight he recognised, with a thrill of exaltation and anguish, the madness of his dream. No matter. What if his heart broke after? Now, at least, he could take the consolation. But if it was hard to face Mrs. Pigeon before, it may well be supposed that it was not easy now, with all this world of passionate fancies throbbing in his brain, to turn away from his elevation, and encounter Salem and its irritated deacons. Vincent went slowly up Grange Lane, trying to make up his mind to his inevitable duty. When he was nearly opposite the house of Dr. Marjoribanks, he paused to look back. The garden door was again open, and somebody else was going into the enchanted house. Somebody else;—a tall slight figure, in a loose light-coloured dress, which he recognised instinctively with an agony of jealous rage. A minute before he had allowed to himself, in an exquisite despair, that to hope was madness; but the sight of his rival awoke other thoughts in the mind of the minister. With quick eyes he identified the companion of his midnight journey—he in whose name all Susan's wretchedness had been wrought—he whom Lady Western could trust "with life—to death." Vincent went back at the sight of him, and found the door now close shut, through which his steps had passed. Close shut—enclosing the other—shutting him out in the cold external gloom. He forgot all he had to do for himself and his friends—he forgot his duty, his family, everything in the world but hopeless love and passionate jealousy, as he turned again to Lady Western's door.

CHAPTER XII.

THUS while Mrs. Vincent sat in Susan's sick-room, with her mind full of troubled thoughts, painfully following her son into an imaginary and unequal conflict with the wife of the rebellious deacon; and while the Salem congregation in general occupied itself with conjectures how this internal division could be healed, and what the pastor would do, the pastor himself was doing the very last thing he ought to have done in the circumstances—lingering down Grange Lane in the broad daylight with intent to pass Lady Western's door—that door from which he had himself emerged a very few minutes before. Why did he turn back and loiter again along that unprofitable way? He did not venture to ask himself the question; he only did it in an utterly unreasonable access of jealousy and rage. If he had been Lady Western's accepted lover instead of the hopeless worshipper afar off of that bright unattainable creature, he could still have had no possible right to forbid the entrance of Mr. Fordham at that garden gate. He went back with a mad, unreasoning impulse, only excusable in consideration of the excited state of mind into which so many past events had concurred to throw him. But the door opened again as he passed it. Instinctively Vincent stood still, without knowing why. It was not Mr. Fordham who came out. It was a stealthy figure, which made a tremulous pause at sight of him, and, uttering a cry of dismay, fixed eyes which still gleamed, but had lost all their steadiness, upon his face. Vincent felt that he would not have recognised her anywhere but at this door. Her thin lips, which had once closed so firmly, and expressed with such distinctness the flying shades of amusement and ridicule, hung apart loosely, with a perpetual quiver of hidden emotion. Her face, always dark and colourless, yet bearing such an unmistakable tone of vigour and strength, was haggard and ghastly; her once assured and steady step furtive and trembling. She gave him an appalled look, and uttered a little cry. She shivered as she looked at him, making desperate vain efforts to recover her composure and conceal the

agitation into which his sudden appearance had thrown her. But nature at last had triumphed over this woman who had defied her so long. She had not strength left to accomplish the cheat. “You!” she cried, with a shrill tone of terror and confusion in her voice, “I did not look for you!” It was all her quivering lips would say.

The sight of her had roused Vincent. “You were going to escape,” he said. “Do you forget your word? Must I tell her everything, or must I place you in surer custody? You have broken your word.”

“My word! I did not give you my word,” she cried, eagerly. “No. I—I never said—: and,” after a pause, “if I had said it, how do you imagine I was going to escape? Escape! from what? That is the worst—one cannot escape,” said the miserable woman, speaking as if by an uncontrollable impulse, “never more; especially if one keeps quiet in one place and has nothing to do,” she continued after a pause, recovering herself by strange gleams now and then for a moment; “that is why I came out, to escape, as you say, for half an hour, Mr. Vincent. Besides, I don’t have news enough—not nearly enough. How do you think I can keep still when nobody sends me any news? How long is it since I saw you last? And I have heard nothing since then—not a syllable! and you expect me to sit still, because I have given my word? Besides,” after another breathless pause, and another gleam of self-recovery, “the laws of honour don’t extend to women. We are weak, and we are allowed to lie.”

“You are speaking wildly,” said Vincent, with some compassion and some horror, putting his hand on her arm to guide her back to the house. Mrs. Hilyard gave a slight convulsive start, drew away from his touch, and gazed upon him with an agony of fright and terror in her eyes.

“We agreed that I was to stay with Alice,” she said. “You forget I am staying with Alice: she—she keeps me safe, you know. Ah! people change so; I am sometimes—half afraid—of Alice, Mr. Vincent. My child is like her—my

child—she did not know me!" cried the wretched woman, with a sob that came out of the depths of her heart; "after all that happened, she did not know me! To be sure, that was quite natural," she went on again, once more recovering her balance for an instant, "she could not know me! and I am not beautiful, like Lady Western, to please a child's eye. Beauty is good—very good. I was once pretty myself; any man would have forgiven me as you did when Alice came with her lovely face; but I daresay your mother would not have minded had it been she. Ah, that reminds me," said Mrs. Hilyard, gradually acquiring a little more steadiness, "that was why I came out: to go to your mother—to ask if perhaps she had heard anything—from my child."

"This is madness," said Vincent; "you know my mother could not possibly hear about your child; you want to escape— I can see it in your eyes."

"If you will tell me what kind of things people can escape from, I will answer you," said his strange companion, still becoming more composed. "Hush! I said what was true. The governess, you know, had your address. Is it very long since yesterday when I got that news from Dover? Never mind. I daresay I am asking wild questions that cannot have any answer. Do you remember being here with me once before? Do you remember looking through the grating and seeing——? Ah, there is Mr. Fordham now with Alice! Poor young man!" said Mrs. Hilyard, turning once more to look at him, still vigilant and anxious, but with a softened glance. "Poor minister! I told you not to fall in love with her lovely face. I told you she was kind, too kind—she does not mean any harm. I warned you. Who could have thought then that we should have so much to do with each other?" she resumed, shrinking from him, and trying to conceal how she shrank with another convulsive shiver; "but you were going to visit your people or something. I must not keep you, Mr. Vincent; you must go away."

"Not till you have returned to the house; and given me your word of honour," said

Vincent, “not to escape, or to attempt to escape; or else I must tell her everything, or give you up into stronger hands. I will not leave you here.”

“My word! but women are not bound by their honour; our honour means—not our word,” cried Mrs. Hilyard, wildly; “my parole, he means; soldiers, and heroes, and men of honour give their parole; you don’t exact it from women. Words are not kept to us, Mr. Vincent; do you expect us to keep them? Yes, yes; I know I am talking wildly. Is it strange, do you think? But what if I give you my word, and nobody sends me any further news—nothing about my child? Women are only wild animals when their children are taken from them. I will forget it, and go away for news—news! That is what I want. Escape!” she repeated, with a miserable cry; “who can escape? I do not understand what it means.”

“But you must not leave this house,” said Vincent, firmly. “You understand what I mean. You must not leave Lady Western. Go with her where she pleases; but unless you promise on your honour to remain here, and with her, I shall be obliged——”

“Hush!” she said, trembling—“hush! My honour!—and you still trust in it? I will promise,” she continued, turning and looking anxiously round into the dull winter daylight, as if calculating what chance she had of rushing away and eluding him. Then her eyes returned to the face of the young man, who stood firm and watchful beside her—agitated, yet so much stronger, calmer, even more resolute than she; then shrinking back, and keeping her eyes, with a kind of fascinated gaze, upon his face, she repeated the words slowly, “I promise—upon my honour. I will not go away—escape, as you call it. If I should go mad, that will not matter. Yes, ring the bell for me. You are the stronger now. I will obey you and go back. You have taken a woman’s parole, Mr. Vincent,” she went on, with a strange spasmodic shadow of that old movement of her mouth; “it will be curious to note if she can keep it. Good-bye—good-bye.” She spoke with a trembling desperation of calmness, mastering herself with all her power. She did not remove her eyes from his face till

the door had been opened. “I promise, on my honour,” she repeated, with again a gleam of terror, as Vincent stood watching. Then the door closed, shutting in that tragic, wretched figure. She was gone back to her prison, with her misery, from which she could not escape. In that same garden, Vincent, with the sharp eyes of love and despair, even while watching her, had caught afar off a vision of two figures together, walking slowly, one leaning on the other, with the lingering steps of happiness. The sight went to his heart with a dull pang of certainty, which crushed down in a moment the useless effervescence of his former mood. His prisoner and he parted, going in and out, one scarcely less miserable at that moment than the other. In full sight of them both lingered for the same moment these two in the tenderest blessedness of life. Vincent turned sharp round, and went away the whole length of the long road past St. Roque’s, past the farthest village suburb of Carlingford, stifling his heart that it should say nothing. He had forgotten all about those duties which brought him there. Salem had vanished from his horizon. He saw nothing in heaven or earth but that miserable woman going back to her prison, interwoven with the vision of these two in their garden of paradise. The sight possessed him heart and spirit; he could not even feel that he felt it, his heart lying stifled in his bosom. It was, and there was no more to say.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. VINCENT made many pilgrimages out of the sick-room that day; her mind was disturbed and restless; she could not keep still by Susan’s side. She went and strayed through her son’s rooms, looked at his books, gave a furtive glance at his linen; then went back and sat down for a little, until a renewed access of anxiety sent her wandering forth once more. Then she heard him come in, and went out to see him. But he was gloomy and uncommunicative, evidently indisposed to satisfy her in any way, absorbed in his own thoughts. Mrs. Vincent came and sat by him while

he dined, thinking, in her simplicity, that it would be a pleasure to Arthur. But Arthur, with the unsocial habits of a man accustomed to live alone, had already set up a book before him while he ate, leaving his mother to wonder by herself behind what was the world of unknown thought that rapt her son, and into which her wistful wonder could not penetrate. But the widow was wise in her generation: she would not worry him with questions which it was very apparent beforehand that he did not mean to answer. She admitted to herself with a pang of mingled pain, curiosity, and resignation, that Arthur was no longer a boy having no secrets from his mother. Once more the little woman looked at the unreasonable male creature shut up within itself, and decided, with a feminine mixture of pity and awe, that it must be allowed to take its own time and way of disclosing itself, and that to torture it into premature utterance would be foolish, not to say impracticable. She left him, accordingly, to himself, and went away again, returning, however, ere long, in her vague restlessness, as she had been doing all day. The early winter evening had closed in, and the lamp was lighted—the same lamp which had smoked and annoyed Mrs. Vincent's nice perceptions the first evening she was in Carlingford. Vincent had thrown himself on a sofa with a book, not to read, but as a disguise under which he could indulge his own thoughts, when his mother came quietly back into the room. Mrs. Vincent thought it looked dark and less cheerful than it ought. She poked the fire softly not to disturb Arthur, and made it blaze. Then she turned to the lamp, which flared huskily upon the table. "It smokes more than ever," said Mrs. Vincent, half apologetically, in case Arthur should observe her proceedings as she took off the globe. He, as was natural, put down his book and gazed at her with a certain impatient wonder, half contemptuous of that strange female development which amid all troubles could carry through, from one crisis of life to another, that miraculous trifling, and concern itself about the smoking of a lamp. As she screwed it up and down and adjusted the wick, with the smoky light flaring upon her anxious face, and magnifying the shadow of her little figure against the wall behind, her son

looked on with a feeling very similar to that which had moved Mrs. Vincent when she watched him eating his dinner with his book set up before him. These were points upon which the mother and son could not understand each other. But the sight disturbed his thoughts and touched his temper; he got up from the sofa and threw down his unread book.

"You women are incomprehensible," said the young man, with an irritation he could not subdue—"what does it matter about the lamp? but if the world were going to pieces you must still be intent upon such trifles—leave that to the people of the house."

"But, my dear, the people of the house don't understand it," said Mrs. Vincent. "Oh Arthur, it is often the trifles that are the most important. I have had Mrs. Tozer calling upon me to-day, and Mrs. Tufton. I don't wonder, dear, if you find them a little tiresome; but that is what every pastor has to expect. I daresay you have been worried to-day paying so many visits. Hush, there is some one coming up-stairs. It is Mr. Tozer, Arthur. I can hear his voice."

Upon which the minister, conscious of not being prepared for Tozer's questions, gave vent to an impatient ejaculation. "Never a moment's respite! And now I shall have to give an account of myself," said the unfortunate Nonconformist. Mrs. Vincent, who had just then finished her operations with the lamp, looked up reproachfully over the light at her son.

"Oh Arthur, consider how kind he has been! Your dear father would never have used such an expression—but you have my quick temper," said the widow, with a little sigh. She shook hands very cordially with the good butterman when he made his appearance. "I was just going to make tea for my son," said Mrs. Vincent. "I have scarcely been able to sit with him at all since Susan took ill. Arthur, ring the bell—it is so kind of you to come; you will take a cup of tea with us while my son and you talk matters over—that is, if you don't object to my presence?" said the

minister's mother with a smile. "Your dear papa always liked me to be with him, Arthur; and until he has a wife, Mr. Tozer, I daresay his mother will not be much in the way when it is so kind a friend as you he has to talk over his business with. Bring tea directly, please. I fear you have forgotten what I said to you about the lamp, which burns quite nicely when you take a little pains. Arthur, will you open the window to clear the atmosphere of that smoke? and perhaps Mr. Tozer will take a seat nearer the fire."

"I am obliged to you, ma'am," said the butterman, who had a cloud on his face. "Not no nearer, thank you all the same. If I hadn't thought you'd have done tea, I shouldn't have come troubling Mr. Vincent, not so soon;" and Tozer turned a doubtful glance towards the minister, who stood longer at the window than he need have done. The widow's experienced eye saw that some irritation had risen between her son and his friend and patron. Tozer was suspicious, and ready to take offence—Arthur, alas! in an excited and restless mood, only too ready to give it. His mother could read in his shoulders, as he stood at the window with his back to her, that impulse to throw off the yoke and resent the inquisition to which he was subject, which, all conscious as he was of not having carried out Tozer's injunctions, seized upon the unfortunate Nonconformist. With a little tremulous rush, Mrs. Vincent put herself in the breach.

"I am sure so warm a friend as Mr. Tozer can never trouble any of my family at any time," said the widow, with a little effusion. "I know too well how rare a thing real kindness is—and I am very glad you have come just now while I can be here," she added, with a sensation of thankfulness perhaps not so complimentary to Tozer as it looked on the surface. "Arthur, dear, I think that will do now. You may put up the window and come back to your chair. You don't smell the lamp, Mr. Tozer? and here is the little maid with the tea."

Mrs. Vincent moved about the tray almost in a bustle when the girl had placed it on

the table. She re-arranged all the cups and moved everything on the table, while her son took up a gloomy position behind her on the hearthrug, and Tozer preserved an aspect of ominous civility on the other side of the table. She was glad that the little maid had to return two or three times with various forgotten adjuncts, though even then Mrs. Vincent's instincts of good management prompted her to point out to the handmaiden the disadvantages of her thoughtlessness. "If you had but taken time to think what would be wanted, you would have saved yourself a great deal of trouble," said the minister's mother, with a tremble of expectation thrilling her frame, looking wistfully round to see whether anything more was wanted, or if, perhaps, another minute might be gained before the storm broke. She gave Arthur a look of entreaty as she called him forward to take his place at table. She knew that real kindness was not very often to be met with in this cross-grained world; and if people are conscious of having been kind, it is only natural they should expect gratitude! Such was the sentiment in her eyes as she turned round and fixed them upon her son. "Tea is ready, Arthur," said the widow, in a tone of secret supplication. And Arthur understood his mother, and was less and less inclined to conciliate as he came forward out of the darkness, where he might look sulky if he pleased, and sat down full in the light of the lamp, which smoked no longer. They were not a comfortable party. Mrs. Vincent felt it so necessary that she should talk and keep them separated, that she lost her usual self-command, and subjects failed her in her utmost need.

"Let me give you another cup of tea," she said, as the butterman paused in the supernumerary meal which that excellent man was making; "I am so glad you happened to come this evening when I am taking a little leisure. I hope the congregation will not think me indifferent, Mr. Tozer. I am sure you and Mrs. Tozer will kindly explain to them how much I have been occupied. When Susan is well, I hope to make acquaintance with all my son's people. Arthur, my dear boy, you are over-tired, you don't eat anything—and you made a very poor dinner. I wish you would advise him to take a little rest, Mr. Tozer. He minds his mother in most

things, but not in this. It is vain for me to say anything to him about giving up work; but perhaps a little advice from you would have more effect. I spoke to Dr. Rider on the subject, and he says a little rest is all my son requires; but rest is exactly what he will never take. It was just the same with his dear father—and you are not strong enough, Arthur, to bear so much."

"I daresay as you're right, ma'am," said Tozer; "if he was to take a little more exercise and walking about—most of us Salem folks wouldn't mind a little less on Sundays, to have more of the minister at other times. I hope as there wasn't no unpleasantness, Mr. Vincent, between you and Pigeon when you see him to-day?"

"I did not see him;—I mean I am sorry I was not able to call on Pigeon to-day," said Vincent, hastily; "I was unexpectedly detained," he added, growing rather red, and looking Tozer in the face. "Indeed, I am not sure that I ought to call on Pigeon," continued the minister, after a pause; "I have done nothing to offend him. If he chooses to take an affront which was never intended, I can't help it. Why should I go and court every man who is sulky or ill-tempered in the congregation? Look here, Tozer—you are a sensible man—you have been very kind, as my mother says. I set out to-day intending to go and see this man for your sake; but you know very well this is not what I came to Carlingford for. If I had known the sort of thing that was required of me!" cried Vincent, rising up and resuming his place on the hearthrug—"to go with my hat in my hand, and beg this one and the other to forgive me, and receive me into favour:—why, what have I ever done to Pigeon? if he has anything to find fault with, he had much better come to me, and have it out."

"Mr. Vincent, sir," said Tozer solemnly, pushing away his empty teacup, and leaning forward over the table on his folded arms, "them ain't the sentiments for a pastor in our connection. That's a style of thing as may do among fine folks, or in the church where there's no freedom; but them as chooses their own pastor, and pays their own pastor, and don't spare no pains to make him comfortable, has a right

to expect different. Them ain't the sentiments, sir, for Salem folks. I don't say if they're wrong or right— I don't make myself a judge of no man; but I've seen a deal of our connection and human nature in general, and this I know, that a minister as has to please his flock, has got to please his flock whatever happens, and neither me nor no other man can make it different; and that Mrs. Vincent, as has seen life, can tell you as well as I can. Pigeon ain't neither here nor there. It's the flock as has to be considered—and it ain't preaching alone as will do that; and that your good mother, sir, as knows the world, will tell you as well as me."

"But Arthur is well aware of it," said the alarmed mother, interposing hastily, conscious that to be thus appealed to was the greatest danger which could threaten her. "His dear father always told him so; yet, after all, Mr. Vincent used to say," added the anxious diplomatist, "that nothing was to be depended on in the end but the pulpit. I have heard him talking of it with the leading people in the connection, Mr. Tozer. They all used to say that, though visiting was very good, and a pastor's duty, it was the pulpit, after all, that was to be most trusted to; and I have always seen in my experience—I don't know if the same has occurred to you—that both gifts are very rarely to be met with. Of course, we should all strive after perfection," continued the minister's mother, with a tremulous smile—"but it is so seldom met with that any one has both gifts! Arthur, my dear boy, I wish you would eat something; and Mr. Tozer, let me give you another cup of tea."

"No more for me, ma'am, thankye," said Tozer, laying his hand over his cup. "I don't deny as there's truth in what you say. I don't deny as a family here and there in a flock may be aggravating like them Pigeons, I'm not the man to be hard on a minister, if that ain't his turn. A pastor may have a weakness, and not feel himself as equal to one part of his work as to another; but to go for to say as visiting and keeping the flock pleased, ain't his duty—it's that, ma'am, as goes to my heart."

Tozer's pathos touched a lighter chord in the bosom of the minister. He came back

to his seat with a passing sense of amusement. “If Pigeon has anything to find fault with, let him come and have it out,” said Vincent, bringing, as his mother instantly perceived, a less clouded countenance into the light of the lamp. “You, who are a much better judge than Pigeon, were not displeased on Sunday,” added the minister, not without a certain complacency. Looking back upon the performances of that day, the young Nonconformist himself was not displeased. He knew now—though he was unconscious at the time—that he had made a great appearance in the pulpit of Salem, and that once more the eyes of Carlingford, unused to oratory, and still more unused to great and passionate emotion, were turned upon him.

“Well, sir, if it come to be a question of that,” said the mollified deacon; “but no—it ain’t that—I can’t, whatever my feelings is, be forgetful of my dooty!” cried Tozer, in sudden excitement. “It ain’t that, Mr. Vincent; it’s for your good I’m a-speaking up and letting you know my mind. It ain’t the pulpit, sir. I’ll not say as I ever had a word to say against your sermons: but when the minister goes out of my house, a-saying as he’s going to visit the flock, and when he’s to be seen the next moment, Mrs. Vincent, not going to the flock, but a-spending his precious time in Grange Lane with them as don’t know nothing, and don’t care nothing for Salem, nor understand the ways of folks like us——”

Here Tozer was interrupted suddenly by the minister, who once more rose from his chair with an angry exclamation. What he might have said in the hasty impulse of the moment nobody could tell; but Mrs. Vincent, hastily stumbling up on her part from her chair, burst in with a tremulous voice—

“Arthur, my dear boy! did you hear Susan call me?—hark! I fancied I heard her voice. Oh, Arthur dear, go and see, I am too weak to run myself. Say I am coming directly—hark! do you think it is Susan? Oh, Arthur, go and see!”

Startled by her earnestness, though declaring he heard nothing, the young man hastened away. Mrs. Vincent seized her opportunity without loss of time.

"Mr. Tozer," said the widow, "I am just going to my sick child. Arthur and you will be able to talk of your business more freely when I am gone, and I hope you will be guided to give him good advice; what I am afraid of is, that he will throw it all up," continued Mrs. Vincent, leaning her hand upon the table, and bending forward confidential and solemn to the startled butterman, "as so many talented young men in our connection do nowadays. Young men are so difficult to deal with; they will not put up with things that we know must be put up with," said the minister's mother, shaking her head with a sigh. "That is how we are losing all our young preachers;—an accomplished young man has so many ways of getting on now. Oh, Mr. Tozer, I rely upon you to give my son good advice—if he is aggravated, it is my terror that he will throw it all up! Good-night. You have been our kind friend, and I have such trust in you!" Saying which the widow shook hands with him earnestly and went away, leaving the worthy deacon much shaken, and with a weight of responsibility upon him. Vincent met her at the door, assuring her that Susan had not called; but with a heroism which nobody suspected—trembling with anxiety, yet conscious of having struck a master-stroke—his mother glided away to the stillness of the sick-room, where she sat questioning her own wisdom all the evening after, and wondering whether, after all, at such a crisis, she had done right to come away.

When the minister and the deacon were left alone together, instead of returning with zest to their interrupted discussion, neither of them said anything for some minutes. Once more Vincent took up his position on the hearthrug, and Tozer gazed ruefully at the empty cup which he still covered with his hand, full of troubled thoughts. The responsibility was almost too much for Tozer. He could scarcely realise to himself what terrors lay involved in that threatened danger, or what might happen if the minister threw it all up! He held his breath at the awful thought. The widow's Parthian arrow had gone straight to the butterman's heart.

"I hope, sir, as you won't think there's anything but an anxious feelin' in the flock to do you justice as our pastor," said Tozer, with a certain solemnity, "or that we ain't

sensible of our blessin's. I've said both to yourself and others, as you was a young man of great promise, and as good a preacher as I ever see in our connection, Mr. Vincent, and I'll stand by what I've said; but you ain't above taking a friend's advice—not speaking with no authority," added the good butterman, in a conciliatory tone; "it's all along of the women, sir—it's them as is at the bottom of all the mischief in a flock. It ain't Pigeon, bless you, as is to blame. And even my missis, though she's not to say unreasonable as women go—none of them can abide to hear of you a-going after Lady Western—that's it, Mr. Vincent. She's a lovely creature," cried Tozer, with enthusiasm; "there ain't one in Carlingford to compare with her, as I can see, and I wouldn't be the one to blame a young man as was carried away. But there couldn't no good come of it, and Salem folks is touchy and jealous," continued the worthy deacon; "that was all as I meant to say."

Thus the conference ended amicably after a little more talk, in which Pigeon and the other malcontents were made a sacrifice of and given up by the anxious butterman, upon whom Mrs. Vincent's parting words had made so deep an impression. Tozer went home thereafter to overawe his angry wife, whom Vincent's visit to Lady Western had utterly exasperated, with the dread responsibility now laid upon them. "What if he was to throw it all up!" said Tozer. That alarming possibility struck silence and dismay to the very heart of the household. Perhaps it was the dawn of a new era of affairs in Salem. The deacon's very sleep was disturbed by recollections of the promising young men who, now he came to think of it, had been lost to the connection, as Mrs. Vincent suggested, and had thrown it all up. The fate of the chapel, and all the new sittings let under the ministry of the young Nonconformist, seemed to hang on Tozer's hands. He thought of the weekly crowd, and his heart stirred. Not many deacons in the connection could boast of being crowded out of their own pews Sunday after Sunday by the influx of unexpected hearers. The enlightenment of Carlingford, as well as the filling of the chapel, was at stake. Clearly, in the history of Salem, a new era had begun.

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT week passed on without much incident. To Vincent and his mother, in whose history days had, for some time past, been counting like years, it might have seemed a very grateful pause, but for the thunderous atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty which clouded over them on every side. Susan's recovery did not progress; and Dr. Rider began to look as serious over her utter languor and apathy, which nothing seemed able to disturb, as he had done at her delirium. The Salem people stood aloof, as Mrs. Vincent perceived, with keen feminine observation. She could not persuade herself, as she had tried to persuade Mrs. Tozer, that the landlady answered inquiries at the door by way of leaving the sick-room quiet. The fact was, that except Lady Western's fine footman, the sight of whom at the minister's door was far from desirable, nobody came to make inquiries except Mrs. Tufton and Phœbe Tozer, the latter of whom found no encouragement in her visits. Politic on all other points, the widow could not deny herself, when circumstances put it in her power to extinguish Phœbe. Mrs. Vincent would not have harmed a fly, but it gave her a certain pleasure to wound the rash female bosom which had, as she supposed, formed plans of securing her son. As for Tozer himself, his visits had almost ceased. He was scarcely to be seen even in the shop, into which sometimes the minister himself gazed disconsolately when he strayed out in the twilight to walk his cares away. The good butterman was otherwise employed. He was wrestling with Pigeon in many a close encounter, holding little committees in the back parlour. On his single arm and strength he felt it now to depend whether or not the pastor could tide it over, and be pulled through.

As for Vincent himself, he had retired from the conflict. He paid no visits; with a certain half-conscious falling back upon the one thing he could do best, he devoted himself to his sermons. At least he shut himself up to write morning after morning, and remained all day dull and undisturbed, brooding over his work. The

congregation somehow got to hear of his abstraction. And to the offended mind of Salem there was something imposing in the idea of the minister, misunderstood and unappreciated, thus retiring from the field, and devoting himself to "study." Even Mrs. Pigeon owned to herself a certain respect for the foe who did not humble himself, but withdrew with dignity into the intrenchments of his own position. It was fine; but it was not the thing for Salem. Mrs. Brown had a tea-party on the Thursday, to which the pastor was not even invited, but where there were great and manifold discussions about him, and where the Tozers found themselves an angry minority, suspected on all sides. "A pastor as makes himself agreeable here and there, but don't take no thought for the good of the flock in general, ain't a man to get on in our connection," said Mrs. Pigeon, with a toss of her head at Phœbe, who blushed over all her pink arms and shoulders with mingled gratification and discomposure. Mrs. Tozer herself received this insinuation without any violent disclaimer. "For my part, I can't say as the minister hasn't made himself very agreeable as far as we are concerned," said that judicious woman. "It's well known as friends can't come amiss to Tozer and me. Dinner or supper, we never can be took wrong, not being fine folks but comfortable," said the butterman's wife, directing her eyes visibly to Mrs. Pigeon, who was not understood to be liberal in her house-keeping. Poor Phœbe was not so discriminating. When she retired into a corner with her companions, Phœbe's injured feelings disclosed themselves. "I am sure he never said anything to me that he might not have said to any one," she confessed to Maria Pigeon; "it is very hard to have people look so at me when perhaps he means nothing at all," said Phœbe, half dejected, half important. Mrs. Pigeon heard the unguarded confession, and made use of it promptly, not careful for her consistency.

"I said when you had all set your hearts on a young man, that it was a foolish thing to do," said poor Vincent's skilful opponent; "I said he'd be sure to come a-dangling about our houses, and a-trifling with the affections of our girls. It'll be well if it doesn't come too true; not as I want to pretend to be wiser nor other folks—but I

said so, as you'll remember, Mrs. Brown, the very first day Mr. Vincent preached in Salem. I said, 'He's not bad-looking, and he's young and has genteel ways, and the girls don't know no better. You mark my words, if he don't make some mischief in Carlingford afore all's done,'—and I only hope as it won't come too true."

"Them as is used to giddy girls gets timid, as is natural," said Mrs. Tozer; "it's different where there is only one, and she a quiet one. I can't say as I ever thought a young man was more taking for being a minister; but there can't be no doubt as it must be harder upon you, ma'am, as has four daughters, than me as has only one—and she a quiet one," added the deacon's wife, with a glance of maternal pride at Phœbe, who was just then enfolding the spare form of Maria Pigeon in an artless embrace, and who looked in her pink wreath and white muslin dress, "quite the lady," at least in her mother's eyes.

"The quiet ones is the deep ones," said Tozer, interfering, as a wise man ought, in the female duel, as it began to get intense. "Phœbe's my girl, and I don't deny being fond of her, as is natural; but she ain't so innocent as not to know how things is working, and what meaning is in some folks' minds. But that's neither here nor there, and it's time as we was going away."

"Not before we've had prayers," said Mrs. Brown. "I was surprised the first time I see Mr. Vincent in your house, Mr. Tozer, as we all parted like heathens without a blessing, specially being all chapel folks, and of one way of thinking. Our ways is different in this house; and though we're in a comfortless kind of condition, and no better than if we hadn't no minister, still as there's you and Mr. Pigeon here——"

The tea-party thus concluded with a still more distinct sense of the pastor's shortcomings. There was nobody to "give prayers" but Pigeon and Tozer. For all social purposes, the flock in Salem might as well have had no minister. The next little committee held in the back parlour at the butter-shop was still more unsatisfactory. While it was in progress, Mr. Vincent himself appeared, and had to

be taken solemnly up-stairs to the drawing-room, where there was no fire, and where the hum of the voices below was very audible, as Mrs. Tozer and Phœbe, getting blue with cold, sat vainly trying to occupy the attention of the pastor.

"Pa has some business people with him in the parlour," explained Phœbe, who was very tender and sympathetic, as might be expected; but it did not require a very brilliant intelligence to divine that the business under discussion was the minister, even if Mrs. Tozer's solemnity, and the anxious care with which he was conveyed past the closed door of the parlour, had not already filled the mind of the pastor with suspicion.

"Go down and let your pa know as Mr. Vincent's here," said Mrs. Tozer, after this uncomfortable séance had lasted half an hour; "and he's not to keep them men no longer than he can help; and presently we'll have a bit of supper—that's what I enjoy, that is, Mr. Vincent; no ceremony like there must be at a party, but just to take us as we are; and we can't be took amiss, Tozer and me. There's always a bit of something comfortable for supper; and no friend as could be made so welcome as the minister," added the good woman, growing more and more civil as she came to her wits' end; for had not Pigeon and Brown been asked to share that something comfortable? For the first time it was a relief to the butterman's household when the pastor declined the impromptu invitation, and went resolutely away. His ears, sharpened by suspicion, recognised the familiar voices in the parlour, where the door was ajar when he went out again. Vincent could not have imagined that to feel himself unwelcome at Tozer's would have had any effect whatever upon his preoccupied mind, or that to pass almost within hearing of one of the discussions which must inevitably be going on about him among the managers of Salem, could quicken his pulse or disturb his composure. But it was so notwithstanding. He had come out at the entreaty of his mother, half unwillingly, anticipating, with the liveliest realisation of all its attendant circumstances, an evening spent at that big table in the back parlour, and something comfortable to supper. He came back again

tingling with curiosity, indignation, and suppressed defiance. The something comfortable had not this time been prepared for him. He was being discussed, not entertained, in the parlour; and Mrs. Tozer and Phœbe, in the chill fine drawing-room up-stairs, where the gas was blazing in a vain attempt to make up for the want of the fire—shivering with cold and civility—had been as much disconcerted by his appearance as if they too were plotting against him. Mr. Vincent returned to his sermon not without some additional fire. He had spent a great deal of time over his sermon that week; it was rather learned and very elaborate, and a little—dull. The poor minister felt very conscious of the fact, but could not help it. He was tempted to put it in the fire, and begin again, when he returned that Friday evening, smarting with those little stinging arrows of slight and injury; but it was too late: and this was the beginning of the "coorse" which Tozer had laid so much store by. Vincent concluded the elaborate production by a few sharp sentences, which he was perfectly well aware did not redeem it, and explained to his mother, with a little ill-temper, as she thought, that he had changed his mind about visiting the Tozers that night. Mrs. Vincent did Arthur injustice as she returned to Susan's room, where again matters looked very sadly; and so the troubled week came to a close.

CHAPTER XV.

SUNDAY! It came again, the inevitable morning. There are pathetic stories current in the world about most of the other professions that claim the ear of the public; how lawyers prepare great speeches, which are to open for them the gates of the future, in the midst of the killing anxieties of life and poverty—how mimes and players of all descriptions keep the world in laughter while their hearts are breaking. But few people think of the sufferings of the priest, whom, let trouble or anxiety come as they please, necessity will have in the inexorable pulpit Sunday after Sunday. So Vincent thought as he put on his Geneva gown in his little vestry, with the raw

February air coming in at the open window, and his sermon, which was dull, lying on the table beside him. It was dull—he knew it in his heart; but after all the strain of passion he had been held at, what was to preserve him any more than another from the unavoidable lassitude and blank that followed? Still it was not agreeable to know that Salem was crowded to the door, and that this sermon, upon which the minister looked ruefully, was laboured and feeble, without any divine spark to enlighten it, or power to touch the hearts of other men. The consciousness that it was dull would, the preacher knew, make it duller still—its heaviness would affect himself as well as his audience. Still that was not to be helped now, there it lay, ready for utterance; and here in his Geneva gown, with the sound in his ears of all the stream of entering worshippers who were then arranging themselves in the pews of Salem, stood the minister prepared to speak. There was, as Vincent divined, a great crowd—so great a crowd that various groups stood during the whole service, which, by dint of being more laboured and feeble than usual, was longer too. With a certain dulness of feeling, half despairing, the minister accomplished the preliminary devotions, and was just opening his Bible to begin the work of the day when his startled eye caught a most unlooked-for accession to the flock. Immediately before him, in the same pew with Mrs. Tozer and Phœbe, what was that beautiful vision that struck him dumb for the moment? Tozer himself had brought her in during the prayers, through the groups that occupied the passage, to his own seat, where she sat expanding her rustling plumage, and looking round with all her natural sweetness, and a kind of delightful unconscious patronage and curiosity, upon the crowd of unknown people who were nobody in Carlingford. The sight of her struck the young Nonconformist dumb. He took some moments to recover himself, ere, with a pang in his heart, he began his dull sermon. It mattered nothing to Lady Western what kind of a sermon he preached. She was not clever, and probably would never know the difference; but it went to the young man’s heart, an additional pang of humiliation, to think that it was not his best he had to set before that unexpected hearer. What had

brought the beauty here? Vincent's dazzled eyes did not make out for some time the dark spare figure beside her, all sunned over with the rays of her splendour. Mrs. Tozer and Phœbe on one side, proud yet half affronted, contemplating with awe and keen observation the various particulars of Lady Western's dress, were not more unlike her, reposing in her soft beauty within the hard wooden enclosure of the pew, beaming upon everybody in sweet ease and composure—than was the agitated restless face, with gleaming uncertain eyes that flashed everywhere, which appeared at her other side when Vincent came to be able to see. He preached his sermon with a certain self-disgust growing more and more intense every time he ventured to glance at that strange line of faces. The only attentive hearer in Tozer's pew was Lady Western, who looked up at the young minister steadily with her sweet eyes, and listened with all the gracious propriety that belonged to her. The Tozers, for their part, drawn up in their end of the seat, gave a very divided attention, being chiefly occupied with Lady Western; and as for Mrs. Hilyard, the sight of her restlessness and nervous agitation would have been pitiful had anybody there been sufficiently interested to observe it. Mr. Vincent's sermon certainly did not secure that wandering mind. All her composure had deserted this strange woman. Now and then she almost rose up by way apparently of relieving the restless fever that possessed her; her nervous hands wandered among the books of the Tozer pew with an incessant motion. Her eyes gleamed in all directions with a wistful anxiety and suspicion. All this went on while Vincent preached his sermon; he had no eyes for the other people in the place. Now and then the young man became rhetorical, and threw in here and there a wild flourish to break the deadness of his discourse, with no success as he saw. He read tedium in all the lines of faces before him as he came to a close with a dull despair—in all the faces except that sweet face never disturbed out of its lovely calm of attention, which would have listened to the Dissenting minister quite as calmly had he preached like Paul. With a sensation that this was one of the critical moments of his fate, and that he had failed in it, Vincent dropped

into his seat in exhaustion and self-disgust, while his hearers got up to sing their hymn. It was at this moment that Tozer walked up through the aisle, steadily, yet with his heart beating louder than usual, and ascended the pulpit-stairs to give forth that intimation which had been agreed upon in the back parlour on Friday. The minister was disturbed in his uncomfortable repose by the entrance of the deacon into the pulpit, where the worthy butterman seated himself by Vincent's side. The unconscious congregation sang its hymn, while the Nonconformist, rousing up, looked with surprised eyes upon his unexpected companion; yet there were bosoms in the flock which owned a thrill of emotion as Tozer's substantial person partially disappeared from view behind the crimson cushion. Phœbe left off singing, and subsided into tears and her seat. Mrs. Pigeon lifted up her voice and expanded her person; meanwhile Tozer whispered ominously, with a certain agitation, in his pastor's ear—

"It's three words of an intimation as I'd like to give—nothing of no importance; a meeting of the flock as some of us would like to call, if it's quite agreeable—nothing as you need mind, Mr. Vincent. We wouldn't go for to occupy your time, sir, attending of it. There wasn't no opportunity to tell you before. I'll give it out, if it's agreeable," said Tozer, with hesitation—"or if you'd rather——"

"Give it to me," said the minister quickly. He took the paper out of the butterman's hand, who drew back uncomfortable and embarrassed, wishing himself anywhere in the world but in the pulpit, from which that revolutionary document menaced the startled pastor with summary deposition. It was a sufficiently simple notice of a meeting to be held on the following Monday evening, in the schoolroom, which was the scene of all the tea and other meetings of Salem. This, however, was no tea-meeting. Vincent drew his breath hard, and changed colour, as he bent down under the shadow of the pulpit-cushion and the big Bible, and read this dangerous document. Meanwhile the flock sang their hymn, to which Tozer, much discomposed, added a few broken notes of tremulous bass as he sat by the minister's

side. When Mr. Vincent again raised his head, and sat erect with the notice in his hand, the troubled deacon made vain attempts to catch his eye, and ask what was to be done. The Nonconformist made no reply to these telegraphic communications. When the sinking was ended he rose, still with the paper in his hand, and faced the congregation, where he no longer saw one face with a vague background of innumerable other faces, but had suddenly woke up to behold his battle-ground and field of warfare, in which everything dear to him was suddenly assailed. Unawares the assembled people, who had received no special sensation from the sermon, woke up also at the sight of Vincent's face. He read the notice to them with a voice that tingled through the place; then he paused. "This meeting is one of which I have not been informed," said Vincent. "It is one which I am not asked to attend. I invite you to it, all who are here present; and I invite you thereafter," continued the minister, with an unconscious elevation of his head, "to meet me on the following evening to hear what I have to say to you. Probably the business will be much the same on both occasions, but it will be approached from different sides of the question. I invite you to meet on Monday, according to this notice; and I invite you on Tuesday, at the same place and hour, to meet me."

Vincent did not hear the audible hum and buzz of surprise and excitement which ran through his startled flock. He did not pay much attention to what Tozer said to him when all was over. He lingered in his vestry, taking off his gown, until he could hear Lady Western's carriage drive off after an interval of lingering. The young Dowager had gone out slowly, thinking to see him, and comfort him with a compliment about his sermon, concerning the quality of which she was not critical. She was sorry in her kind heart to perceive his troubled looks, and to discover that somehow, she could not quite understand how, something annoying and unexpected had occurred to him. And then this uneasy companion, to whom he had bound her, and whose strange agitation and wonderful change of aspect Lady Western could in no way account for— But the carriage rolled away at last, not without reluctance, while the

minister still remained in his vestry. Then he hurried home, speaking to no one. Mrs. Vincent did not understand her son all day, nor even next morning, when he might have been supposed to have time to calm down. He was very silent, but no longer dreamy or languid, or lost in the vague discontent and dejection with which she was familiar. On the contrary, the minister had woke up out of that abstraction. He was wonderfully alert, open-eyed, full of occupation. When he sat down to his writing-table it was not to muse, with his pen in his languid fingers, now and then putting down a sentence, but to write straight forward with evident fire and emphasis. He was very tender to herself, but he did not tell her anything. Some new cloud had doubtless appeared on the firmament where there was little need for any further clouds. The widow rose on the Monday morning with a presentiment of calamity on her mind—rose from the bed in Susan's room which she occupied for two or three hours in the night, sometimes snatching a momentary sleep, which Susan's smallest movement interrupted. Her heart was rent in two between her children. She went from Susan's bedside, where her daughter lay in dumb apathy, not to be roused by anything that could be said or done, to minister wistfully at Arthur's breakfast, which, with her heart in her throat, the widow made a pitiful pretence of sharing. She could not ask him questions. She was silent, too, in her great love and sorrow. Seeing some new trouble approaching—wistfully gazing into the blank skies before her, to discover, if that were possible, without annoying Arthur, or compromising him, what it was; but rather than compromise or annoy him, contenting herself not to know—the greatest stretch of endurance to which as yet she had constrained her spirit.

Arthur did not go out all that Monday. Even in the house a certain excitement was visible to Mrs. Vincent's keen observation. The landlady herself made her appearance in tears to clear away the remains of the minister's dinner. "I hope, sir, as you don't think what's past and gone has made no difference on me," said that tearful woman in Mrs. Vincent's hearing; "it ain't me as would ever give my support

to such doings." When the widow asked, "What doings?" Arthur only smiled and made some half articulate remark about gossip, which his mother of course treated at its true value. As the dark wintry afternoon closed in, Mrs. Vincent's anxiety increased under the influence of the landlady's Sunday dress, in which she was visible progressing about the passages, and warning her husband to mind he wasn't late. At last Mrs. Tufton called, and the minister's mother came to a true understanding of the state of affairs. Mrs. Tufton was unsettled and nervous, filled with a not unexhilarating excitement, and all the heat of partisanship. "Don't you take on," said the good little woman; "Mr. Tufton is going to the meeting to tell them his sentiments about his young brother. My dear, they will never go against what Mr. Tufton says: and if I should mount upon the platform and make a speech myself, there shan't be anything done that could vex you; for we always said he was a precious young man, and a credit to the connection; and it would be a disgrace to us all to let the Pigeons, or such people, have it all their own way." Mrs. Vincent managed to ascertain all the particulars from the old minister's wife. When she was gone, the widow sat down a little with a very desolate heart to think it all over. Arthur, with a new light in his eye, and determination in his face, was writing in the sitting-room; but Arthur's mother could not sit still as he did, and imagine the scene in the Salem schoolroom, and how everybody discussed and sat upon her boy, and decided all the momentous future of his young life in this private inquisition. She went back, however, beside him, and poured out a cup of tea for him, and managed to swallow one for herself, talking about Susan and indifferent household matters, while the evening wore on and the hour of the meeting approached. A little before that hour Mrs. Vincent left Arthur, with an injunction not to come into the sick-room that evening until she sent for him, as she thought Susan would sleep. As she left the room the landlady went downstairs, gorgeous in her best bonnet and shawl, with all the personal satisfaction which a member of a flock naturally feels when called to a bed of justice to decide the future destiny of its head. The minister's fate was in the

hands of his people; and it was with a pleasurable sensation that, from every house throughout Grove Street and the adjacent regions, the good people were going forth to decide it. As for the minister's mother, she went softly back to Susan's room, where the nurse, who was Mrs. Vincent's assistant, had taken her place. "She looks just the same," said the poor mother. "Just the same," echoed the attendant. "I don't think myself as there'll be no change until——" Mrs. Vincent turned away silently in her anguish, which she dared not indulge. She wrapped herself in a black shawl, and took out the thick veil of crape which she had worn in her first mourning. Nobody could recognise her under that screen. But it was with a pang that she tied that sign of woe over her pale face. The touch of the crape made her shiver. Perhaps she was but forestalling the mourning which, in her age and weakness, she might have to renew again. With such thoughts she went softly through the wintry lighted streets towards Salem. As she approached the door, groups of people going the same way brushed past her through Grove Street. Lively people, talking with animation, pleased with this new excitement, declaring, sometimes so loudly that she could hear them as they passed, what side they were on, and that they, for their part, were going to vote for the minister to give him another trial. The little figure in those black robes, with anxious looks shrouded under the crape veil, went on among the rest to the Salem schoolroom. She took her seat close to the door, and saw Tozer and Pigeon, and the rest of the deacons, getting upon the platform, where on occasions more festive the chairman and the leading people had tea. The widow looked through her veil at the butterman and the poulterer with one keen pang of resentment, of which she repented instantly. She did not despise them as another might have done. They were the constituted authorities of the place, and her son's fate, his reputation, his young life, all that he had or could hope for in the world, was in their hands. The decision of the highest authorities in the land was not so important to Arthur as that of the poulterer and the butterman. There they stood, ready to open their session, their inquisition, their solemn tribunal. The widow drew

her veil close, and clasped her hands together to sustain herself. It was Pigeon who was about to speak.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. PIGEON was a heavy orator; he was a tall man, badly put together, with a hollow crease across his waistcoat, which looked very much as if he might be folded in two, and so laid away out of mischief. His arms moved foolishly about in the agonies of oratory, as if they did not belong to him; but he did not look absurd through Mrs. Vincent's crape veil, as she sat gazing at the platform on which he stood, and taking in with eager ears every syllable that came from his lips. Mr. Pigeon said it was Mr. Vincent as they had come there to discuss that night. The managers had made up their minds as it was a dooty to lay things before the flock. Mr. Vincent was but a young man, and most in that congregation was ready to make allowances; and as for misfortunes as might have happened to him, he wasn't a-going to lay that to the pastor's charge, nor take no mean advantages. He was for judging a man on his merits, he was. If they was to take Mr. Vincent on his merits without no prejudice, they would find as he hadn't carried out the expectations as was formed of him. Not as there was anything to be said against his preaching; his preaching was well enough, though it wasn't to call rousing up, which was what most folks wanted. There wasn't no desire on the part of the managers to object to his preaching: he had ought to have preached well, that was the truth, for every one as had been connected with Salem in Mr. Tufton's time knew as there was a deal of difference between the new pastor and the old pastor, as far as the work of a congregation went. As for Pigeon's own feelings, he would have held his peace cheerful, if his dooty had permitted him, or if he had seen as it was for the good of the connection. But things was come to that pass in Salem as a man hadn't ought to mind his own feelings, but had to do his dooty, if he was to be took to the stake for

it. And them were his circumstances, as many a one as he had spoken to in private could say, if they was to speak up.

To all this Mrs. Vincent listened with the profoundest attention behind her veil. The schoolroom was very full of people—almost as full as on the last memorable tea-party, but the square lines of the gas-burners, coming down with two flaring lights each from the low roof, were veiled with no festoons this time, and threw an unmitigated glare upon the people, all in their dark winter-dresses, without any attempt at special embellishment. Mrs. Pigeon was in the foreground, on a side-bench near the platform, very visible to the minister's mother, nodding her head and giving triumphant glances around now and then to point her husband's confused sentences. Mrs. Pigeon had her daughters spread out on one side of her, all in their best bonnets, and at the corner of the same seat sat little Mrs. Tufton, who shook her charitable head when the poulterer's wife nodded hers, and put her handkerchief to her eyes now and then, as she gazed up at the platform, not without a certain womanly misgiving as to how her husband was going to conduct himself. The Tozers had taken up their position opposite. Mrs. Tozer and her daughter had all the appearance of being in great spirits, especially Phœbe, who seemed scarcely able to contain her amusement as Mr. Pigeon went on. All this Mrs. Vincent saw as clearly as in a picture through the dark folds of her veil. She sat back as far as she could into the shade, and pressed her hands close together, and was noways amused, but listened with as profound an ache of anxiety in her heart as if Pigeon had been the Lord Chancellor. As for the audience in general, it showed some signs of weariness as the poulterer stumbled on through his confused speech; and not a restless gesture, not a suppressed yawn in the place, but was apparent to the minister's mother. The heart in her troubled bosom beat steadier as she gazed; certainly no violent sentiment actuated the good people of Salem as they sat staring with calm eyes at the speaker. Mrs. Vincent knew how a congregation looked when it was thoroughly excited and up in arms against its head. She drew a long breath of relief, and

suffered the tight clasp of her hands to relax a little. There was surely no popular passion there.

And then Mr. Tufton got up, swaying heavily with his large uncertain old figure over the table. The old minister sawed the air with his white fat hand after he had said “My beloved brethren” twice over; and little Mrs. Tufton, sitting below in her impatience and anxiety lest he should not acquit himself well, dropt her handkerchief and disappeared after it, while Mrs. Vincent erected herself under the shadow of her veil. Mr. Tufton did his young brother no good. He was so sympathetic over the misfortunes that had befallen Vincent’s family, that bitter tears came to the widow’s eyes, and her hands once more tightened in a silent strain of self-support. While the old minister impressed upon his audience the duty of bearing with his dear young brother, and being indulgent to the faults of his youth, it was all the poor mother could do to keep silent, to stifle down the indignant sob in her heart, and keep steady in her seat. Perhaps it was some breath of anguish escaping from her unawares that drew towards her the restless gleaming eyes of another strange spectator there. That restless ghost of a woman!—all shrunken, gleaming, ghastly—her eyes looking all about in an obliquity of furtive glances, fearing yet daring everything. When she found Mrs. Vincent out, she fixed her suspicious desperate gaze upon the crape veil which hid the widow’s face. The deacons of Salem were to Mrs. Hilyard but so many wretched masquers playing a rude game among the dreadful wastes of life, of which these poor fools were ignorant. Sometimes she watched them with a reflection of her old amusement—oftener, pursued by her own tyrannical fancy and the wild restlessness which had brought her here, forgot altogether where she was. But Mrs. Vincent’s sigh, which breathed unutterable things—the steady fixed composure of that little figure while the old minister maundered on with his condolences, his regrets, his self-glorification over the interest he had taken in his dear young brother, and the advice he had given him—could not miss the universal scrutiny of this strange woman’s eyes. She

divined, with a sudden awakening of the keen intelligence which was half crazed by this time, yet vivid as ever, the state of mind in which the widow was. With a half-audible cry the Back Grove Street needlewoman gazed at the minister's mother; in poignant trouble, anxiety, indignant distress—clasping her tender hands together yet again to control the impatience, the resentment, the aching mortification and injury with which she heard all this maudlin pity overflowing the name of her boy—yet, ah! what a world apart from the guilty and desperate spirit which sat there gazing like Dives at Lazarus. Mrs. Hilyard slid out of her seat with a rapid stealthy movement, and placed herself unseen by the widow's side. The miserable woman put forth her furtive hand and took hold of the black gown—the old black silk gown, so well worn and long preserved. Mrs. Vincent started a little, looked at her, gave her a slight half-spasmodic nod of recognition, and returned to her own absorbing interest. The interruption made her raise her head a little higher under the veil, that not even this stranger might imagine Arthur's mother to be affected by what was going on. For everything else, Mrs. Hilyard had disappeared out of the widow's memory. She was thinking only of her son.

As for the other minister's wife, poor Mrs. Tufton's handkerchief dropped a great many times during her husband's speech. Oh, if these blundering men, who mismanage matters so, could but be made to hold their peace! Tears of vexation and distress came into the eyes of the good little woman. Mr. Tufton meant to do exactly what was right; she knew he did; but to sit still and hear him making such a muddle of it all! Such penalties have to be borne by dutiful wives. She had to smile feebly, when he concluded, to somebody who turned round to congratulate her upon the minister's beautiful speech. The beautiful speech had done poor Vincent a great deal more harm than Pigeon's oration. Salem folks, being appealed to on this side, found out that they had, after all, made great allowances for their minister, and that he had not on his part shown a due sense of their indulgence. Somebody else immediately after went on in the same strain: a little commotion began to rise in the quiet

meeting. “Mr. Tufton’s ’it it,” said a malcontent near Mrs. Vincent; “we’ve been a deal too generous, that’s what we’ve been; and he’s turned on us.” “He was always too high for my fancy,” said another. “It ain’t the thing for a pastor to be high-minded; and them lectures and things was never nothing but vanity; and so I always said.” Mrs. Vincent smiled a wan smile to herself under her veil. She refused to let the long breath escape from her breast in the form of a sigh. She sat fast, upright, holding her hands clasped. Things were going against Arthur. Unseen among all his foes, with an answer, and more than an answer, to everything they said, burning in dumb restrained eloquence in her breast, his mother held up his banner. One at least was there who knew Arthur, and lifted up a dumb protest on his behalf to earth and heaven. She felt with an uneasy half-consciousness that some haunting shadow was by her side, and was even vaguely aware of the hold upon her dress, but had no leisure in her mind for anything but the progress of this contest, and the gradual overthrow, accomplishing before her eyes, of Arthur’s cause.

It was at this moment that Tozer rose up to make that famous speech which has immortalised him in the connection, and for which the Homerton students, in their enthusiasm, voted a piece of plate to the worthy butterman. The face of the Salem firmament was cloudy when Tozer rose; suggestions of discontent were surging among the audience. Heads of families were stretching over the benches to confide to each other how long it was since they had seen the minister; how he never had visited as he ought; and how desirable “a change” might prove. Spiteful glances of triumph sought poor Phœbe and her mother upon their bench, where the two began to fail in their courage, and laughed no longer. A crisis was approaching. Mrs. Tufton picked up her handkerchief, and sat erect, with a frightened face; she, too, knew the symptoms of the coming storm.

Such were the circumstances under which Tozer rose in the pastor’s defence.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Tozer,—“and Mr. Chairman, as I ought to have said

first, if this meeting had been constituted like most other meetings have been in Salem; but, my friends, we haven't met not in what I would call an honest and straight-forward way, and consequently we ain't in order, not as a free assembly should be, as has met to know its own mind, and not to be dictated to by nobody. There are them as are ready to dictate in every body of men. I don't name no names; I don't make no suggestions; what I'm a-stating of is a general truth as is well known to every one as has studied philosophy. I don't come here pretending as I'm a learned man, nor one as knows better nor my neighbours. I'm a plain man, as likes everything fair and aboveboard, and is content when I'm well off. What I've got to say to you, ladies and gentlemen, ain't no grumbling nor reflecting upon them as is absent and can't defend themselves. I've got two things to say—first, as I think you haven't been called together not in an open way; and, second, that I think us Salem folks, as ought to know better, is a-quarrelling with our bread-and-butter, and don't know when we're well off!

"Yes, ladies and gentlemen! them's my sentiments! we don't know when we're well off! and if we don't mind, we'll find out how matters really is when we've been and disgusted the pastor, and drove him to throw it all up. Such a thing ain't uncommon; many and many's the one in our connection as has come out for the ministry, meaning nothing but to stick to it, and has been drove by them as is to be found in every flock—them as is always ready to dictate—to throw it all up. My friends, the pastor as is the subject of this meeting"—here Tozer sank his voice and looked round with a certain solemnity—"Mr. Vincent, ladies and gentlemen, as has doubled the seat-holders in Salem in six months' work, and, I make bold to say, brought one-half of you as is here to be regular at chapel, and take an interest in the connection— Mr. Vincent, I say, as you're all collected here to knock down in the dark, if so be as you are willing to be dictated to—the same, ladies and gentlemen, as we're a-discussing of to-night—told us all, it ain't so very long ago, in the crowdedest meeting as I ever see, in the biggest public hall in Carlingford—as we

weren't keeping up to the standard of the old Nonconformists, nor showing, as we ought, what a voluntary church could do. It ain't pleasant to hear of, for us as thinks a deal of ourselves; but that is what the pastor said, and there was not a man as could contradict it. Now, I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, what is the reason? It's all along of this as we're doing to-night. We've got a precious young man, as Mr. Tufton tells you, and a clever young man, as nobody tries for to deny; and there ain't a single blessed reason on this earth why he shouldn't go on as he's been a-doing, till, Salem bein' crowded out to the doors (as it's been two Sundays back), we'd have had to build a new chapel, and took a place in our connection as we've never yet took in Carlingford!"

Mr. Tozer paused to wipe his heated forehead, and ease his excited bosom with a long breath; his audience paused with him, taking breath with the orator in a slight universal rustle, which is the most genuine applause. The worthy butterman resumed in a lowered and emphatic tone.

"But it ain't to be," said Tozer, looking round him with a tragic frown, and shaking his head slowly. "Them as is always a-finding fault, and always a-setting up to dictate, has set their faces again' all that. It's the way of some folks in our connection, ladies and gentlemen; a minister ain't to be allowed to go on building up a chapel, and making hisself useful in the world. He ain't to be left alone to do his dooty as his best friends approve. He's to be took down out of his pulpit, and took to pieces behind his back, and made a talk and a scandal of to the whole connection! It's not his preaching as he's judged by, nor his dooty to the sick and dyin', nor any of them things as he was called to be pastor for; but it's if he's seen going to one house more nor another, or if he calls often enough on this one or t'other, and goes to all the tea-drinkings. My opinion is," said Tozer, suddenly breaking off into jocularity, "as a young man as may-be isn't a marrying man, and anyhow can't marry more nor one, ain't in the safest place at Salem tea-drinkings; but that's neither here nor there. If the ladies haven't no pity, us men can't do nothing in that

matter; but what I say is this," continued the butterman, once more becoming solemn; "to go for to judge the pastor of a flock, not by the dooty he does to his flock, but by the times he calls at one house or another, and the way he makes hisself agreeable at one place or another, ain't a thing to be done by them as prides themselves on being Christians and Dissenters. It's not like Christians—and if it's like Dissenters the more's the pity. It's mean, that's what it is," cried Tozer, with fine scorn; "it's like a parcel of old women, if the ladies won't mind me saying so. It's beneath us as has liberty of conscience to fight for, and has to set an example before the Church folks as don't know no better. But it's what is done in our connection," added the good deacon with pathos, shaking his forefinger mournfully at the crowd. "When there's a young man as is clever and talented, and fills a chapel, and gives the connection a chance of standing up in the world as it ought, here's some one as jumps up and says, 'The pastor don't come to see me,' says he—'the pastor don't do his duty—he ain't the man for Salem.' And them as is always in every flock ready to do a mischief, takes it up; and there's talk of a change, and meetings is called, and—here we are! Yes, ladies and gentlemen, here we are! We've called a meeting, all in the dark, and give him no chance of defending himself; and them as is at the head of this movement is calling upon us to dismiss Mr. Vincent. But let me tell you," continued Tozer, lowering his voice with a dramatic intuition, and shaking his forefinger still more emphatically in the face of the startled audience, "that this ain't no question of dismissing Mr. Vincent; it's a matter of disgusting Mr. Vincent, that's what it is—it's a matter of turning another promising young man away from the connection, and driving him to throw it all up. You mark what I say. It's what we're doing most places, us Dissenters; them as is talented and promising and can get a better living working for the world than working for the chapel, and won't give in to be worried about calling here and calling there—we're a-driving of them out of the connection, that's what we're doing! I could reckon up as many as six or seven as has been drove off already, and

I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, what's the good of subscribing and keeping up of colleges and so forth, if that's how you're a-going to serve every clever young man as trusts hisself to be your pastor? I'm a man as don't feel no shame to say that the minister, being took up with his family affairs and his studies, has been for weeks as he hasn't crossed my door; but am I that poor-spirited as I would drive away a young man as is one of the best preachers in the connection, because he don't come, not every day, to see me? No, my friends! them as would ever suspect such a thing of me don't know who they're a-dealing with; and I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, as this is a question as must come home to every one of your bosoms. Them as is so set upon their own way that they can't hear reason—or them as is led away by folks as like to dictate—may give their voice again' the minister, if so be as they think fit; but as for me, and them as stands by me, I ain't a-going to give in to no such tyranny! It shall never be said in our connection as a clever young man was drove away from Carlingford, and I had part in it. There's the credit o' the denomination to keep up among the Church folks—and there's the chapel to fill, as never had half the sittings let before—and there's Mr. Vincent, as is the cleverest young man I ever see in our pulpit, to be kep' in the connection; and there ain't no man living as shall dictate to me or them as stands by me! Them as is content to lose the best preaching within a hundred miles, because the minister don't call on two or three families in Salem, not as often as they would like to see him," said Tozer, with trenchant sarcasm, "can put down their names again' Mr. Vincent; but for me, and them as stands by me, we ain't a-going to give in to no such dictation: we ain't a-going to set up ourselves against the spread of the Gospel, and the credit o' the connection, and toleration and freedom of conscience, as we're bound to fight for! If the pastor don't make hisself agreeable, I can put up with that— I can; but I ain't a-going to see a clever young man drove away from Salem, and the sittings vacant, and the chapel falling to ruin, and the Church folks a-laughing and a-jeering at us, not for all the deacons in the connection, nor any man in Carlingford. And this I say for myself and

for all as stands by me!”

The last sentence was lost in thunders of applause. The “Salem folks” stamped with their feet, knocked the floor with their umbrellas, clapped their hands in a furore of enthusiasm and sympathy. Their pride was appealed to; nobody could bear the imputation of being numbered among the two or three to whom the minister had not paid sufficient attention. All the adherents of the Pigeon party deserted that luck-less family sitting prominent upon their bench, with old Mrs. Tufton at the corner joining as heartily as her over-shoes would permit in the general commotion. There they sat, a pale line of faces, separated, by their looks of dismay and irresponsive silence, from the applauding crowd, cruelly identified as “them as is always ready to dictate.” The occasion was indeed a grand one, had the leader of the opposition been equal to it; but Mrs. Pigeon only sat and stared at the new turn of affairs with a hysterical smile of spite and disappointment fixed on her face. Before the cheers died away, a young man—one of the Young Men’s Christian Association connected with Salem—jumped up on a bench in the midst of the assembly, and clinched the speech of Tozer. He told the admiring meeting that he had been brought up in the connection, but had strayed away into carelessness and neglect—and when he went anywhere at all on Sundays, went to church like one of the common multitude, till Mr. Vincent’s lectures on Church and State opened his eyes, and brought him to better knowledge. Then came another, and another. Mrs. Vincent, sitting on the back seat with her veil over her face, did not hear what they said. The heroic little soul had broken down, and was lost in silent tears, and utterances in her heart of thanksgiving, deeper than words. No comic aspect of the scene appeared to her; she was not moved by its vulgarity or oddity. It was deliverance and safety to the minister’s mother. Her son’s honour and his living were alike safe, and his people had stood by Arthur. She sat for some time longer, lost in that haze of comfort and relief, afraid to move lest perhaps something untoward might still occur to change this happy state of affairs—keen to detect any evil symptom, if such should occur,

but unable to follow with any exactness the course of those addresses which still continued to be made in her hearing. She was not quite sure, indeed, whether anybody had spoken after Tozer, when, with a step much less firm than on her entrance, she went forth, wiping the tears that blinded her from under her veil, into the darkness and quiet of the street outside. But she knew that “resolutions” of support and sympathy had been carried by acclamation, and that somebody was deputed from the flock to assure the minister of its approval, and to offer him the new lease of popularity thus won for him in Salem. Mrs. Vincent waited to hear no more. She got up softly and went forth on noiseless, weary feet, which faltered, now that her anxiety was over, with fatigue and agitation. Thankful to the bottom of her heart, yet at the same time doubly worn out with that deliverance, confused with the lights, the noises, and the excitement of the scene, and beginning already to take up her other burden, and to wonder by times, waking up with sharp touches of renewed anguish, how she might find Susan, and whether “any change” had appeared in her other child. It was thus that the great Salem congregational meeting, so renowned in the connection, ended for the minister’s mother. She left them still making speeches when she emerged into Grove Street. The political effect of Tozer’s address, or the influence which his new doctrine might have on the denomination, did not occur to Mrs. Vincent. She was thinking only of Arthur. Not even the darker human misery by her side had power to break through her preoccupation. How the gentle little woman had shaken off that anxious hand which grasped her old black dress, she never knew herself, nor could any one tell; somehow she had done it: alone, as she entered, she went away again—secret, but not clandestine, under that veil of her widowhood. She put it up from her face when she got into the street, and wiped her tears off with a trembling, joyful hand. She could not see her way clearly for those tears of joy. When they were dried, and the crape shadow put back from her face, Mrs. Vincent looked up Grove Street, where her road lay in the darkness, broken by those flickering lamps. It was a windy night, and Dr. Rider’s drag went up past her

rapidly, carrying the doctor home from some late visit, and recalling her thoughts to her own patient whom she had left so long. She quickened her tremulous steps as Dr. Rider disappeared in the darkness; but almost before she had got beyond the last echoes of the Salem meeting, that shadow of darker woe and misery than any the poor mother wist of, was again by Mrs. Vincent's side.

CHAPTER XVII.

"YOU are not able to walk so fast," said Mrs. Hilyard, coming up to the widow as she crossed over to the darker side of Grove Street, just where the house of the Miss Hemmings turned its lighted staircase-window to the street; "and it will not harm you to let me speak to you. Once you offered me your hand, and would have gone with me. It is a long long time ago—ages since—but I remember it. I do not come after you for nothing. Let me speak. You said you were a—a minister's wife, and knew human nature," she continued, with a certain pause of reverence, and at the same time a gleam of amusement, varying for a moment the blank and breathless voice in which she had spoken. "I want your advice."

Mrs. Vincent, who had paused with an uncomfortable sensation of being pursued, recovered herself a little during this address. The minister's mother had no heart to linger and talk to any one at that moment, after all the excitement of the evening, with her fatigued frame and occupied mind; but still she was the minister's mother, as ready and prepared as Arthur himself ought to have been, to hear anything that any of the flock might have to say to her, and to give all the benefit of her experience to anybody connected with Salem, who might be in trouble. "I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Vincent; "my daughter is ill—that is why I was making so much haste; but I am sure, if I can be of any use to any member of— I mean to any of my son's friends"—she concluded rather abruptly. She did not remember much about this woman, who was strangely unlike the other people in Salem. When was that

time in which they had met before? The widow's mind had been so swept by the whirlwind of events and emotions, that she remembered only dimly how and where it was she had formerly seen her strange companion.

"Your daughter is ill?" said Mrs. Hilyard; "that is how trouble happens to you. You are a good woman; you don't interfere in God's business; and this is how your trouble comes. You can nurse her and be about her bed; and when she wakes up, it is to see you and be grateful to you. But my child," she said, touching the widow's arm suddenly with her hand, and suppressing painfully a shrill tone of anguish in her voice which would break through, "does not know me. She opens her blue eyes—they are not even my eyes—they are Alice's eyes, who has no right to my child—and looks at me as if I were a stranger; and for all this time, since I parted with her, I have not heard—I do not know where she is. Hush, hush, hush!" she went on, speaking to herself, "to think that this is me, and that I should break down so at last. A woman has not soul enough to subdue her nerves for ever. But this is not what I wanted to say to you. I gave Miss Smith your son's address——"

Having said this, she paused, and looked anxiously at the widow, who looked at her also in the windy gleams of lamplight with more and more perplexity. "Who is Miss Smith?" asked poor Mrs. Vincent. "Who are—you? Indeed, I am very sorry to seem rude; but my mind has been so much occupied. Arthur, of course, would know if he were here, but Susan's illness has taken up all my thoughts; and—I beg your pardon—she may want me even now," she continued, quickening her steps. Even the courtesy due to one of the flock had a limit; and the minister's mother knew it was necessary not to yield too completely to all the demands that her son's people might make upon her. Was this even one of her son's people? Such persons were unusual in the connection. Mrs. Vincent, all fatigued, excited, and anxious as she was, felt at her wits' end.

"Yes, your son would know if he were here; he has taken my parole and trusted me,"

said the strange woman; “but a woman’s parole should not be taken. I try to keep it; but unless they come, or I have news—— Who am I? I am a woman that was once young and had friends. They married me to a man, who was not a man, but a fine organisation capable of pleasures and cruelties. Don’t speak. You are very good; you are a minister’s wife. You don’t know what it is, when one is young and happy, to find out all at once that life means only so much torture and misery, and so many lies, either done by you or borne by you—what does it matter which? My baby came into the world with a haze on her sweet soul because of that discovery. If it had been but her body!” said Mrs. Vincent’s strange companion, with bitterness. “A dwarfed creature, or deformed, or—— But she was beautiful—she is beautiful, as pretty as Alice; and if she lives, she will be rich. Hush, hush! you don’t know what my fears were,” continued Mrs. Hilyard, with a strange humility, once more putting her hand on the widow’s arm. “If he could have got possession of her, how could I tell what he might have done?—killed her—but that would have been dangerous; poisoned what little mind she had left—made her like her mother. I stole her away. Long ago, when I thought she might have been safe with you, I meant to have told you. I stole her out of his power. For a little while she was with me, and he traced us—then I sent the child away. I have not seen her but in glimpses, lest he should find her. It has cost me all I had, and I have lived and worked with my hands,” said the needlewoman of Back Grove Street, lifting her thin fingers to the light and looking at them, pathetic vouchers to the truth of her story. “When he drove me desperate,” she went on, labouring in vain to conceal the panting, long-drawn breath which impeded her utterance, “you know? I don’t talk of that. The child put her arms round that old woman after her mother had saved her. She had not a word, not a word for me, who had done—— But it was all for her sake. This is what I have had to suffer. She looked in my face and waved me away from her and said, ‘Susan, Susan!’ Susan meant your daughter—a new friend, a creature whom she had not seen a week before—and no word, no look, no recognition for me!”

"Oh, I am very sorry, very sorry!" said Mrs. Vincent, in her turn taking the poor thin hand with an instinct of consolation. Susan's name, thus introduced, went to the mother's heart. She could have wept over the other mother thus complaining, moaning out her troubles in her compassionate ear.

"I left them in a safe place. I came home to fall into your son's hands. He might have been sure, had it come to that, that no one should have suffered for me" said Mrs. Hilyard, with again a tone of bitterness. "What was my life worth, could any man suppose? And since then I have not heard a word—not a word—whether the child is still where I left her, or whether some of his people have found her—or whether she is ill—or whether— I know nothing, nothing! Have a little pity upon me, you innocent woman! I never asked pity, never sought sympathy before; but a woman can never tell what she may be brought to. I am brought down to the lowest depths. I cannot stand upright any longer," she cried, with a wailing sigh. "I want somebody—somebody at least to give me a little comfort. Comfort! I remember," she said, with one of those sudden changes of tone which bewildered Mrs. Vincent, "your son once spoke to me of getting comfort from those innocent young sermons of his. He knows a little better now; he does not sail over the surface now as he used to do in triumph. Life has gone hard with him, as with me and all of us. Tell him, if I get no news I will break my parole. I cannot help myself—a woman's honour is not her word. I told him so. Say to your son——"

"My son? what have you to do with my son?" said Mrs. Vincent, with a sudden pang. The poor mother was but a woman too. She did not understand what this connection was. A worn creature, not much younger than herself, what possible tie could bind her to Arthur? The widow, like other women, could believe in any "infatuation" of men; but could not understand any other bond subsisting between these two. The thought went to her heart. Young men had been known before now to be mysteriously attracted by women old, unbeautiful, unlike themselves. Could this be Arthur's fate? Perhaps it was a danger more dismal than that which he had just

escaped in Salem. Mrs. Vincent grew sick at heart. She repeated, with an asperity of which her soft voice might have been thought incapable, “What have you to do with my son?”

Mrs. Hilyard made no answer—perhaps she did not hear the question. Her eyes, always restlessly turning from one object to another, had found out, in the lighted street to which they had now come, a belated postman delivering his last letters. She followed him with devouring looks; he went to Vincent’s door as they approached, delivered something, and passed on into the darkness with a careless whistle. While Mrs. Vincent watched her companion with doubtful and suspicious looks through the veil which, once more among the lights of Grange Street, the minister’s mother had drawn over her face, the unconscious object of her suspicion grasped her arm, and turned to her with beseeching eyes. “It may be news of my child?” she said, with a supplication beyond words. She drew the widow on with the desperation of her anxiety. The little maid had still the letter in her hand when she opened the door. It was not even for Mr. Vincent. It was for the mistress of the house, who had not yet returned from the meeting at Salem. Mrs. Vincent paused upon the threshold, compassionate but determined. She looked at the unhappy woman who stood upon the steps in the light of the lamp, gazing eagerly in at the door, and resolved that she should penetrate no farther; but even in the height of her determination the widow’s heart smote her when she looked at that face, so haggard and worn with passion and anxiety, with its furtive gleaming eyes, and all the dark lines of endurance which were so apparent now, when the tide of emotion had grown too strong to be concealed. “Have you—no—friends in Carlingford?” said the widow, with hesitation and involuntary pity. She could not ask her to enter where, perhaps, her presence might be baleful to Arthur; but the little woman’s tender heart ached, even in the midst of her severity, for the suffering in that face.

“Nowhere!” said Mrs. Hilyard; then, with a gleam out of her eyes which took the place of a smile, “Do not be sorry for me; I want no friends—nobody could share

my burden with me. I am going back—home—to Alice. Tell Mr. Vincent; I think something must happen to-night," she added, with a slight shiver; "it grows intolerable, beyond bearing. Perhaps by the telegraph—or perhaps—— And Miss Smith has this address. I told you my story," she went on, drawing closer, and taking the widow's hand, "that you might have pity on me, and understand—no, not understand; how could she?—but if you were like me, do you think you could sit still in one place, with so much upon your heart? You never could be like me—but if you had lost your child——"

"I did," said Mrs. Vincent, drawing a painful breath at the recollection, and drawn unwittingly by the sight of the terrible anxiety before her into a reciprocation of confidence—"my child who had been in my arms all her life— God gave her back again; and now, while I am speaking, He may be taking her away," said the mother, with a sudden return of all her anxiety. "I cannot do you any good, and Susan may want me: good-night—good-night."

"It was not God who gave her back to you," said Mrs. Hilyard, grasping the widow's hand closer—"it was I—remember it was I. When you think hardly of me, recollect—I did it. She might have been—but I freed her—remember; and if you hear anything, if it were but a whisper, of my child, think of it, and have pity on me. You will?—you understand what I say?"

The widow drew away her hand with a pang of fear. She retreated hurriedly, yet with what dignity she could, calling the little maid to shut the door.

When that strange face, all gleaming, haggard, and anxious, was shut out into the night, Mrs. Vincent went up-stairs very hastily, scarcely able to give her alarmed withdrawal the aspect of an orderly retreat. Was this woman mad to whom she had been speaking so calmly? In her agitation she forgot all the precautions with which she had intended to soften to her son the fact of her attendance at that meeting of which he had not even informed her. Pursued by the recollection of that face, she

hastened to Arthur, still in her bonnet and veil. He was seated at the table writing as when she left him; but all the minister's self-control could not conceal a certain expectancy and excitement in the eyes which he raised with a flash of eager curiosity to see who it was that thus invaded his solitude. "Mother! where have you been?" he asked, with irritation, when he perceived her. His impatience and anxiety, and the great effort he had made to subdue both, betrayed him into a momentary outburst of annoyance and vexation. "Where have you been?" he repeated, throwing down his pen. "Surely not to this meeting, to compromise me, as if I had not trouble enough already!" This rude accost put her immediate subject out of Mrs. Vincent's mind: she went up to her son with deprecating looks, and put her hand fondly on his head. The tears came into her eyes, not because his words offended or grieved her, but for joy of the good news she had to tell; for the minister's mother was experienced in the ways of man, and knew how many things a woman does for love which she gets no thanks for doing. Her boy's anger did not make her angry, but it drove other matters, less important, out of her head.

"Oh, Arthur, no one saw me," she said; "I had my veil down all the time. How could I help going when I knew of it? I did not tell you—I did not mean you to know; but it was impossible to stay away," cried the widow, perceiving her son's impatience while she explained herself, and growing confused in consequence, "when I heard what was going on. Oh, Arthur dear, don't look so disturbed; they know better than you imagine—they appreciate you, though they have not the way of showing it. I have seen things happen so differently, that I know the value of such friends as you have in the flock. Oh, my dear boy, don't look so strange! It has been a great triumph, Arthur. There is a deputation coming to offer you their support and sympathy. All this dreadful business has not harmed you. Thank God for that! I think I shall be able to bear anything now."

The minister got up hastily from his chair, and took refuge on the hearthrug. He changed colour; grew red and grew pale; and by way of escaping from the

complication of feelings that moved him, once more broke out into impatient exclamations. “Why did you go? Why did not you tell me you were going?” he said. “Why did you leave Susan, who wanted you? Mother, you will never understand that a man’s affairs must not be meddled with!” cried the Nonconformist, with an instinctive effort to conceal the agitation into which this unexpected news threw him. Then he began to pace about the room, exclaiming against the impatience of women, who can never wait for a result. The young man was too proud to acknowledge the state of feverish suspense in which he had been, or the wonderful tumult suddenly produced in his mind. He seized upon this ready safety-valve of irritation, which was half real and half fictitious. It gave him time to collect his troubled thoughts.

“Arthur dear, hush! no one saw me at the meeting. I had my veil down, and spoke to nobody,” said the widow: “and oh! don’t you think it was only natural that your mother should be there? No one in the world is so much interested in what concerns you. I spoke to no one—except,” said Mrs. Vincent, with a little effort, “that strange woman, Arthur, whom you have had so much to do with. Who is she? Oh, my dear boy, I hope you have not formed any connections that you will repent? She said something about a promise, and having given her word. I don’t know why you should have her word, or what she has to do with you. She came here to the door with me to-night.”

“Mrs. Hilyard!” cried the minister, suddenly roused. “Mrs.——; no matter what her name is. Where is she? Do you mean that she came here? They keep no watch over her. To-night of all nights in the world! If you had but stayed at home, I should not have known of her wanderings at least,” he said, with vexation. “Now I shall have to go and look after her—she must be sent back again—she must not be allowed to escape.”

“Is she mad?” said Mrs. Vincent, alarmed, yet relieved. “Don’t go away, Arthur; she

is not here. She said I was to tell you that she had gone back—to Alice. Who is Alice?—who is this woman? What have you to do with her? Oh! my dear boy, you are a minister, and the world is so ready to make remarks. She said you had her word. Oh, Arthur, I hope it does not mean anything you will live to repent?" cried the anxious mother, fixing her jealous eyes on her son's face. "She is not like you. I cannot tell what you can have to do with such a woman—you who might——" Mrs. Vincent's fright and anxiety exhausted both her language and her breath.

"It does not matter much after all," said the Nonconformist, who had been busy with his own thoughts, and had only half heard his mother's adjurations. "Like me?—what has that to do with the matter? But I daresay she will go back, as she said; and now that he is out of danger, and has not accused her, things must take their chance. Mad? It would not be wonderful if she were mad. I can sympathise with people when they are driven out of their wits. Who is this next? Another messenger from the meeting, or perhaps your deputation? I think I shall go mad after a while if I get no rest."

But as the minister stood in ill-concealed excitement by the fire, not without expectation that it might be somebody with an official report from Salem, Mr. Vincent's landlady, still in her bonnet and shawl, just returned from the meeting, came in to tell the widow of the approach of the doctor. "He's a-coming directly, ma'am; he's gone in for a minute to Smith's, next door, where they've got the hooping-cough. And oh, Mr. Vincent, sir," cried the woman, who had made this a pretence to express her sentiments on the more important subject, "if there hasn't a-been a sweet meeting! I'd have giv' a half-year's rent, ma'am, the pastor had been there. All as unanimous and as friendly!—all but them Pigeons, as are the poison of the place; and sweet Miss Phœbe Tozer a-crying of her pretty eyes out; but there ain't no occasion for crying now," said the triumphant landlady, who had a real stake in the matter. At this touch the minister regained his composure. He went back to his seat at the table, and took up the pen he had thrown down. A bishop could not

have looked more grandly indifferent than did the Nonconformist as he turned his back upon his anxious partisan. “Tell the doctor to let me know how Susan is, mother, for I am busy to-night,” said the young man. “I cannot leave my work just now even for Dr. Rider.” He began again to write in the excitement of his mind, and produced a sentence which was not one of the least successful of his sentences, while the two women with a certain awe stood silent behind his chair.

“I will not disturb you any longer, my dear boy. Good-night,” said Mrs. Vincent. She went away, followed by the discomfited landlady, who was overwhelmed, and did not know what to make of it. The widow could not but improve such an opportunity. “The minister must not be disturbed in his studies,” she said, with importance and in a whisper as she closed the door. “When he is engaged with a subject, it does not answer to go in upon him and disturb his attention. Neither meetings nor anything else, however important, should interrupt a pastor when he is engaged in composition,” said the little woman, grandly. But while the mistress of the house departed to her own quarter much overawed, the minister’s mother went to the sick-room with no such composure as she assumed. Something she did not understand was in Arthur’s mind. The Salem meeting did not appear to her so conclusive as it had done an hour ago. He was young and high-spirited and proud, and had not that dutiful subjection to the opinions of the flock which became a minister of Salem. What if that visionary horror with which she had frightened Tozer might turn out a real danger? Though she had made such skilful use of it, the possibility she had herself invented had not really alarmed her; but the thought thrilled through her now with a fear which had some remorse in it. She had invoked the ghost, not much believing in any such supernatural climax; but if the apparition really made itself visible, the widow recognised at once her entire want of any power to lay it. She took off her shawl and bonnet with little comfort in her mind on that subject to support her under the returning pangs of anxiety about Susan, which overwhelmed her again as she opened the door of the sick-room. The two troubles

united in her heart and aggravated each other, as with a sick throb of expectation she went in to Susan's bedside. Perhaps there might be "a change"—for better or for worse, something might have happened. The doctor might find something more conclusive to-night in that languid pallid face. The noiseless room struck her with a chill of misery as she went to her usual place, carrying the active life of pain and a troubled heart into that melancholy atmosphere from which life seemed to have fled. With a faltering voice she spoke to Susan, who showed no signs of hearing her except by a feeble half-lifting of her heavy eyelids and restless motion of her frame. No change! Never any change! or, at least, as the nurse imagined, until—— The widow's heart heaved with a silent sob of anguish—anguish sharp and acute as it is when our misery breaks suddenly upon us out of a veil of other thoughts, and we feel it intolerable. This sudden pang convulsed Mrs. Vincent's much-tried heart as she wiped the bitter tears out of her eyes and looked at her child, thus gliding, in a hopeless apathy and unconsciousness, out of the arms that strained themselves in vain to hold her. After so much as she had borne in her troubled life, God knows it was hard. She did not rebel, but her heart lifted up a bitter cry to the Father in heaven.

It was just then, while her anxious ear caught the step of the doctor on the stair, that Mrs. Vincent was aware also of a carriage driving rapidly up to the door. Preoccupied as she was, the sound startled her. A passing wonder who it could be, and the vague expectation which influences the mind at the great crises of life, when one feels that anything may happen, moved her dimly as she rose to receive the doctor. Dr. Rider came in with his noiseless step and anxious face; they shook hands with each other mechanically, she gazing at him to see what his opinion was before it could be formed—he looking with solicitous serious eyes on the sick-bed. The light was dim, and Dr. Rider held it up to see his patient. There she lay, moving now and then with the restlessness of weakness, the pale large eyelids half closed, the pale lips dropping apart,—a solemn speechless creature, abstracted already out of

this world and all its influences. The light that streamed over her for the moment made no difference to Susan. There was nothing here powerful enough to rouse the soul which horror and passion had driven into one terrible corner of memory, obliterating all the rest of her life. Dr. Rider looked at her with eyes in which the impatience of powerless strength overcame even his professional reserve. He wrung the widow's hand, which she laid on his arm in a trembling appeal to him to tell her the worst. "The worst is that she is dying before our eyes, and that she might be saved," he said, leading the poor mother to the other end of the room. "All her heart and soul are concentrated upon that time when she was away from you; unless we can rouse her by something that will recall that time, she will never know you more. Think! is there nothing that would wake her up even to remember the misery she endured? Where is your servant who was with her?—but she has seen her lately, and nothing has come of that. If you have the courage and strength," said the doctor, once more grasping Mrs. Vincent's hand tight, "to talk of that man under the name she knew him by—to talk of him so as perhaps she might hear; to discuss the matter; anything that will recall her mind. Hush! what is that noise down-stairs?"

Even while listening to the doctor's dreadful suggestion, Mrs. Vincent had been aware of the opening of the door down-stairs, and of a sound of voices. She was trembling so that she could scarcely stand, principally, no doubt, on account of this strange demand which he made upon her strength, but with a nervous expectation besides which she could not explain even to herself. But when, out of that confused commotion below, there rose faint but audible the sound of a voice calling "Susan! Susan!" the two anxious people started apart, and turned a wondering momentary gaze upon each other, involuntarily asking what was that? what did it mean? Then the doctor rushed to the door, where the widow followed him as well as her trembling limbs would permit. She saw him dash down-stairs, and herself stood grasping the railing, waiting for what was about to happen, with her heart so beating and fluttering in her breast that she could scarcely breathe for it. She could make

nothing of the rapid interrogation that went on downstairs. She heard the voice of the doctor in hasty questions, and the slow, agitated, somewhat confused utterance of a strange voice, which appeared to answer him; and once or twice through these sounds came the strange cry, “Susan! Susan!” which went to the widow’s heart. Who could this be that called upon Susan with so pathetic a repetition? It seemed a very long interval to Mrs. Vincent before the doctor reappeared, and yet so short was the time, that the door by which the new-comers, whoever they were, had entered, was still open, admitting some strange familiar sounds from the street into the bewildering maze of wonder and expectation. Mrs. Vincent held fast by the rails to support herself, when she saw the doctor returning up the stair, leading by the hand a girl whom he grasped fast, and carried along with him by a kind of gentle but strong compulsion. It was she who was calling Susan, gazing round her with large dilated blue eyes, looking everywhere for something she had not yet found. A beautiful girl—more beautiful than anything mortal to the widow’s surprised and wondering eyes. Who was she? The face was very young, sadly simple, framed by long curling locks of fair hair, and the broad circle of a large flapping Leghorn hat and blue veil. A bewildered half-recognition came to Mrs. Vincent’s mind as this blue veil waved in her face in the wind from the open door; but excitement and anxiety had deprived her of speech: she could ask no questions. “Here is the physician,” said Dr. Rider, with a kindred excitement in his voice. He went into the room before her, leading the girl, behind whom there followed slowly a confused and disturbed woman, whose face Mrs. Vincent felt she had seen before. The mother, half jealous in her wonder, pressed in after the doctor to guard her Susan even from experiments of healing. “Doctor, doctor, who is it?” she said. But Dr. Rider held up his hand imperatively to silence her. The room was imperfectly lighted with candles burning dimly, and a faint glow of firelight. “Susan!” cried the eager child’s voice, with a weary echo of longing and disappointment. “Susan!—take me to Susan; she is not here.” Then Dr. Rider led her round to the bedside, closely followed by the widow,

and, lifting a candle, threw its light fully upon the stranger. “Is it Susan?” said the girl. “Will she not speak to me?—is she dead? Susan, oh Susan, Susan!” It was an outcry of childish impatience and despair, rising louder than any voice had risen in that room for many a day. Then she burst forth into tears and sobs. “Susan!—she will not speak to me, she will not look at me!” cried the stranger, drawing her arm out of the doctor’s hold, and clasping her hands together. There was a slight movement in the bed; not the restless tossing with which her nurse was familiar, but a trembling shiver came over that dying frame. The sound had reached to the dull ears of the patient. She lifted her heavy eyelids, and looked round with half-awakened eyes. “Call her again, again!” said the doctor, in an intense whisper, which seemed to thrill through the room. The girl, who was engaged with a much more engrossing interest of her own, took no notice of the doctor. She knew nothing about Susan’s danger—she was bent on gaining succour for herself. “Susan! tell her to look at me—at me! Susan! I care for nobody but you!” said the lovely helpless creature, with strange half-articulate cries, pressing closer to the bed. “You are to take care of me.” Mrs. Vincent pressed forward with pangs of anxiety, of terror, of hope, and of a mother’s tender jealousy through all, as these strange entreaties filled the room. She too cried aloud, as she perceived the awakening in that pallid face, the faint movement as if to raise herself up, which indicated a conscious effort on the part of Susan. The clouds were breaking on that obscured and hopeless firmament. The light, which trembled in the doctor’s hand, caught a gleam of understanding and life in Susan’s eyes, as her mother flew to raise her up, obeying the suggestion of that unhoped-for movement. “Susan! you said you would take care of me!” cried the young stranger, throwing herself upon the bedside and grasping at the weak arm which once had protected her. The touch of her hands awoke the slumbering soul. Slowly the light grew in Susan’s eyes. She who had not moved for days except in the restless tossings of languor, lifted those white feeble arms to put them round the appealing child. Then Susan struggled up, faint, yet inspired, unconscious of her

mother's help that enabled her to do so, and confronted the strange people in her room, whom she had seen for weeks past, but did not know, with living eyes. "Nobody shall touch her—we will protect each other," said the voice that had grown strange even to her mother's ears. Mrs. Vincent could hardly be restrained from breaking in with a thousand caresses and outcries of joy and thankfulness. But Dr. Rider quieted the poor mother with a touch of his hand. "Let them alone," he said, with that authority which no one in a sick-room can resist. Mrs. Vincent kept back with unspeakable pangs in her heart, and watched the waking up of that paralysed life which, alike in its loss and its recovery, had been swept apart from her into another world. Without any help from her mother, without even recognising her mother or distinguishing her from the strangers round, Susan's soul awoke. She raised herself more and more among those pillows where a little while ago she lay so passively—she opened her eyes fully and looked round upon the man by her bedside, and the other indistinct figures in the room, with a look of resistance and conscious strength. "We will protect each other," said Susan, slowly, "nobody shall harm her—we will keep each other safe." Then, after another interval, other instincts awoke in the reviving soul. She cast a wistful look from one to another, always drawing her faint white arm round the girl who clung to her and found security in her clasp. "Hush, hush! there are women here," she said in a whisper, and with a tone of strange confusion, light breaking through the darkness. Then there followed a long pause. Dr. Rider stood by the bedside holding up his candle, attracting the wandering wistful glances of his patient, who ceased to look at him with defiance as her eyes again and again returned to the face, of which, often as it had bent over her, she had no knowledge. All over the unknown room wandered those strange looks, interrogating everything with a wistfulness beyond words. What was this strange unfamiliar world into which, after her trance of suffering, Susan had awakened? She did not know where she was, nor who the people were who surrounded her. But the recollection of deadly peril was not more distinct upon her confused mind than was

the sentiment of safety, of love, and watchfulness which somehow abode in this strange dim room, in the little undecipherable circle of faces which surrounded her bed. “Hush!” said Susan again, holding the stranger close. “Here are women—women! nobody will harm us;” then, with a sudden flush over all her face and cry of joy as the doctor suddenly threw the light full upon Mrs. Vincent, who was bending over her, her mind struggled into possession of itself,—“Here is my mother! she has come to take us home!”

Mrs. Vincent remembered nothing more; she did not faint, for her child wanted her—she sat all the night through on the bed, with Susan leaning against her shoulder, clinging to her, holding her fast—starting again and again to make sure that all was safe, and that it was, indeed, her mother’s arms that held her. Her soul was recalled out of that trance of death. They laid the beautiful child upon the sofa in her young guardian’s sight, to keep up that happy influence; and when the night was about half spent, the widow, throbbing all over her wearied frame with exhaustion, pain, and joy, perceived that her Susan had fallen deep and sweet asleep, clasping close, as if never again to lose hold of them, her mother’s tender hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE after-events of the evening naturally lessened, in the minister’s family at least, the all-absorbing interest of the meeting at Salem. Even Mr. Vincent’s landlady, in her wondering narrative of the scene in the sick-room—which, all Mrs. Vincent’s usual decorums being thrust aside by that unexpected occurrence, she had witnessed—forgot the other public event which was of equally great importance. The house was in a state of agitation as great as on Susan’s return; and when the exulting doctor, whose experiment had been so rarely successful, turned all supernumerary persons out of the sick-room, it fell to Vincent’s part to take charge of the perplexed governess, Miss Smith, who stood outside, anxious to offer

explanations, a fatigued and harassed, but perfectly virtuous and exemplary woman. Vincent, who had not realised his sister's extreme peril, and who was rather disconcerted by this fresh invasion of his house, opened the door of his sitting-room for her with more annoyance than hospitality. His own affairs were urgent in his mind. He could not keep his thoughts from dwelling upon Salem and what had occurred there, though no one else thought of it. Had he known the danger in which his sister lay, his heart might have rejected every secondary matter. But the minister did not know that Susan had been sinking into the last apathy when this sudden arrival saved her. He gave Miss Smith the easy-chair by the fire, and listened with an appearance of attention, but with little real understanding, to her lengthy and perplexed story. She was all in a flutter, the good governess said: everything was so mysterious and out of the way, she did not know what to think. Little Alice's mamma, Miss Russell that was, Mrs. Mildmay she meant, had brought the child back to her after that dreadful business at Dover. What was the rights of that business, could Mr. Vincent tell her? Colonel Mildmay was getting better, she knew, and it was not a murder; and she was heartbroken when she heard the trouble poor dear Miss Vincent had got into about it. Well, Alice's mamma brought back the child, and they started with her at once to France. They went up beyond Lyons to the hills, an out-of-the-way little place, but Mrs. Mildmay was always so nervous. "And then she left us, Mr. Vincent," said the afflicted governess, as the minister, in grievous impatience, kept pacing up and down the room thus occupied and taken possession of—"left us without a soul to speak to or a church within reach; and if there is one thing I have more horror of than another for its effect upon the youthful mind, it is Popery, which is so seductive to the imagination. Alice did not take to her mamma, Mr. Vincent. It was natural enough, but it was hard upon Mrs. Mildmay: she never had a good way with children; and from the moment we started till now, it has been impossible to get your sister out of the child's mind. She took a fancy to her the moment she saw her. Girls of that age, if you will not think it strange of me

to say so, very often fall in love with a girl older than themselves—quite fall in love, though it is a strange thing to say. Alice would not rest—she gave me no peace. I wrote to say so, but I think Mrs. Mildmay could not have got my letter. The child would have run away by herself if I had not brought her. Besides," said Miss Smith, apologetically, "the doctors have assured me that, if she ever became much interested in any one, or attached to anybody in particular, she was not to be crossed. It was the best chance for her mind, the doctors said. What could I do? What do you think I could do, Mr. Vincent? I brought her home, for I could not help myself—otherwise she would have run away. She has a very strong will, though she looks so gentle. I hope you will help me to explain the circumstances to Mrs. Mildmay, and how it was I came back without her authority. Don't you think they ought to call in the friends on both sides and come to some arrangement, Mr. Vincent?" said the excellent woman, anxiously. "I know she trusts you very much, and it was she herself who gave me your address."

To this speech Vincent listened with an impatience and restlessness which he found it impossible to conceal. He paced about the darker end of his room, on the other side of that table, where the lamp shone vacantly upon his open desk and scattered papers, answering now and then with a mono-syllable of reluctant courtesy, irritated and disturbed beyond expression by the perfectly serious and proper figure seated by the fire. Somebody might come from that assembly which had met to discuss him, and he could not be alone to receive them. In the annoyance of the moment the minister almost chafed at his sister and her concerns. His life was invaded by these women, with their mysteries and agonies. He listened to the steps outside, thinking every moment to hear the steady tramp of the deputation from Salem, or at least Tozer, whom it would have been balm to his mind, in the height of the good man's triumph, to cut short and annihilate. But how do that, or anything else, with this woman seated by his fire explaining her unintelligible affairs? Such was Vincent's state of mind while his mother, in an agony of joy, was hearing from Susan's lips,

for the first time, broken explanations of those few days of her life which outbalanced in terrible importance all its preceding years. The minister did not know that his sister's very existence, as well as her reason, hung upon that unhoped-for opening of her mouth and her heart.

Matters were not much mended when Dr. Rider came in, beaming and radiant, full of congratulations. Susan was saved. It was the most curious psychological puzzle, the doctor said; all her life had got concentrated into the few days between her departure from Lonsdale and her arrival at Carlingford. Neither her old existence, nor the objects that surrounded her at the moment, had any significance for Susan; only something that belonged to that wonderful interval in which she had been driven desperate, could win back consciousness to her mind. It was the most singular case he had ever met with; but he knew this was the only way of treating it, and so it had proved. He recognised the girl with the blue veil the moment he saw her—he knew it could be no other. Who was she? where had she sprung from at that critical moment? where had she been? what was to be done with her? Dr. Rider poured forth his questions like a stream. He was full of professional triumph, not to say natural satisfaction. He could not understand how his patient's brother, at that wonderful crisis, could have a mind preoccupied or engaged with other things. The doctor turned with lively sympathy and curiosity from the anxious Nonconformist to Miss Smith, who was but too willing to begin all her explanations over again. Dr. Rider, accustomed to hear many personal narratives, collected this story a great deal more clearly than Vincent, who was so much more interested in it, had, with all his opportunities, been able to do. How long the poor minister might have suffered under this conversation, it is impossible to tell. But Mrs. Vincent, in all the agitation of her daughter's deliverance, could not forget the griefs of others. She sent a little message to her son, begging that he would send word of this arrival to "the poor lady." "To let her know—but she must not come here to-night," was the widow's message, who was just then having the room darkened, and everything arranged for

the night, if perhaps her child might sleep. This message delivered the minister; it recalled Miss Smith to her duty. She it was who must go and explain everything to her patroness. Dr. Rider, whose much-excited wonder was still further stimulated by hearing that the child's mother was at Lady Western's, that she was Mrs. Mildmay, and that the Nonconformist was in her confidence, cheerfully undertook to carry the governess in his drag to Grange Lane, not without hopes of further information; and it was now getting late. Miss Smith made Vincent a tremulous curtsy, and held out her hand to him to say good-night. "The doctor will perhaps explain to Mrs. Mildmay why I have left little Alice," said the troubled woman. "I never left her before since she was intrusted to me—never but when her papa stole her away; and you are a minister, Mr. Vincent, and oh, I hope I am doing quite right, and as Alice's mamma will approve! But if she disapproves I must come back and——"

"They must not be disturbed to-night," said Dr. Rider, promptly; "I will see Mrs. Mildmay." He was not reluctant to see Mrs. Mildmay. The doctor, though he was not a gossip, was not inaccessible to the pleasure of knowing more than anybody else of the complications of this strange business, which still afforded matter of talk to Carlingford. He hurried her away while still the good governess was all in a flutter, and for the first time the minister was left alone. It was with a troubled mind that the young man resumed his seat at his desk. He began to get utterly weary of this business, and all about it. If he could only have swept away in a whirlwind, with his mother and sister, where the name of Mildmay had never been heard of, and where he could for ever get rid of that haunting woman with her gleaming eyes, who had pursued even his gentle mother to the door! but this new complication seemed to involve him deeper than ever in those strange bonds. It was with a certain disgust that the minister thought it all over as he sat leaning his head on his hands. His way was dark before him, yet it must speedily be decided. Everything was at a crisis in his excited mind and troubled life—even that strange lovely child's face, which had roused Susan from her apathy, had its share in the excitement of her brother's

thoughts; for it was but another version, with differences, of the face of that other Alice, who all unwittingly had procured for Vincent the sweetest and the hardest hours he had spent in Carlingford. Were they all to pass like a dream—her smiles, her sweet looks, her kind words, even that magical touch upon his arm, which had once charmed him out of all his troubles? A groan came out of the young man's heart, not loud, but deep, as that thought moved him. The very despair of this love-dream had been more exquisite than any pleasure of his life. Was it all to pass away and be no longer? Life and thought, the actual and the visionary, had both come to a climax, and seemed to stand still, waiting the decision which must be come to that night.

From these musings the entrance of Tozer roused the minister. The excellent butterman came in all flushed and glowing from his success. To him, the meeting, which already the Nonconformist had half lost sight of under the superstructure of subsequent events, had newly concluded, and was the one occurrence of the time. The cheers which had hailed him master of the field were still ringing in Tozer's ears. "I don't deny as I am intoxicated-like," said the excellent deacon; "them cheers was enough to carry any man off his legs, sir, if you'll believe me. We've scattered the enemy, that's what we've been and done, Mr. Vincent. There ain't one of them as will dare show face in Salem. We was unanimous, sir—unanimous, that's what we was! I never see such a triumph in our connection. Hurrah! If it warn't Miss as is ill, I could give it you all over again, cheers and all."

"I am glad you were pleased," said Vincent, with an effort; "but I will not ask you for such a report of the proceedings."

"Pleased! I'll tell you one thing as I was sorry for, sir," said Tozer, somewhat subdued in his exultation by the pastor's calmness—"I did it for the best; but seeing as things have turned out so well, I am as sorry as I can be—and that is, that you wasn't there. It was from expecting some unpleasantness as I asked you not to come;

but things turning out as they did, it would have done your heart good to see ’em, Mr. Vincent. Salem folks has a deal of sense when you put things before them effective. And then you’d only have had to say three words to them on the spur of the moment, and all was settled and done with, and everything put straight; which would have let them settle down steady, sir, at once, and not kept no excitement, as it were, hanging about.”

“Yes,” said the minister, who was moving about his papers, and did not look up. The butterman began to be alarmed; he grew more and more enthusiastic the less response he met with.

“It’s a meeting as will tell in the connection,” said Tozer, with unconscious foresight; “a candid mind in a congregation ain’t so general as you and me would like to see, Mr. Vincent, and it takes a bit of a trial like this, sir, and opposition, to bring out the real attachment as is between a pastor and a flock.”

“Yes,” said Vincent again. The deacon did not know what to make of the minister. Had he been piqued and angry, Tozer thought he might have known how to manage him, but this coldness was an alarming and mysterious symptom which he was unequal to. In his embarrassment and anxiety the good butterman stumbled upon the very subject from which, had he known the true state of affairs, he would have kept aloof.

“And the meeting as was to be to-morrow night?” said Tozer; “there ain’t no need for explanation now—a word or two out of the pulpit is all as is wanted, just to say as it’s all over, and you’re grateful for their attachment, and so forth; you know a deal better, sir, how to do it nor me. And about the meeting as was called for to-morrow night?—me and the misses were thinking, though it’s sudden, as it might be turned into a tea-meeting, if you was agreeable, just to make things pleasant; or if that ain’t according to your fancy, as I’m aware you’re not one as likes tea-meetings, we might send round, Mr. Vincent to all the seat-holders to say as it’s given up; I’d

do one or the other, if you'd be advised by me."

"Thank you—but I can't do either one or the other," said the Nonconformist. "I would not have asked the people to meet me if I had not had something to say to them—and this night's business, you understand," said Vincent, with a little pride, "has made no difference in me."

"No, sir, no—to be sure not," said the perplexed butterman, much bewildered; "but two meetings on two nights consecutive is running the flock hard, it is. I'd give up to-morrow, Mr. Vincent, if I was you."

To this insinuating address the minister made no answer—he only shook his head. Poor Tozer, out of his exultation, fell again into the depths. The blow was so unlooked-for that it overwhelmed him.

"You'll not go and make no reflections, sir?" said the troubled deacon; "bygones is bygones. You'll not bring it up against them, as they didn't show that sympathy they might have done? You'll not make no reference to nobody in particular, Mr. Vincent? When a flock is conscious as they've done their duty and stood by their pastor, it ain't a safe thing, sir, not to turn upon them, and rake up things as is past. If you'll take my advice, sir, as wishes you well, and hasn't no motive but your good, I'd not hold that meeting, Mr. Vincent; or, if you're bent upon it, say the word, and we'll set to work and give 'em a tea-meeting, and make all things comfortable. But if you was prudent, sir, and would go by my advice, one or the other of them two is what I would do."

"Thank you, Tozer, all the same," said Vincent, who, notwithstanding his preoccupation, saw the good butterman's anxiety, and appreciated it. "I know very well that all that is pleasant to-night is owing to you. Don't suppose I don't understand how you've fought for me; but now the business is mine, and I can take no more advice. Think no more of it; you have done all that you could do."

"I have done my humble endeavour, sir, as is my dooty, to keep things straight,"

said the deacon, doubtfully; “and if you’d tell me what was in your mind, Mr. Vincent——?”

But the young Nonconformist gathered up his papers, closed his desk, and held out his hand to the kind-hearted butterman. “My sister has come back almost from the grave to-night,” said Vincent; “and we are all, for anything I can see, at the turning-point of our lives. You have done all you can do, and I thank you heartily; but now the business is in my hands.”

This was all the satisfaction Tozer got from the minister. He went home much discouraged, not knowing what to make of it, but did not confide his fears even to his wife, hoping that reflection would change the pastor’s mind, and resolved to make another effort to-morrow. And so the night fell over the troubled house. In the sick-room a joyful agitation had taken the place of the dark and hopeless calm. Susan, roused to life, lay leaning against her mother, looking at the child asleep on the sofa by her, unconscious of the long and terrible interval between the danger which that child had shared, and the delicious security to which her mind had all at once awakened. To Susan’s consciousness, it appeared as if her mother had suddenly risen out of the mists, and delivered the two helpless creatures who had suffered together. She could not press close enough to this guardian of her life. She held her arms round her, and laid her cheek against the widow’s with the dependence of a child upon her mother’s bosom. Mrs. Vincent sat upon the bed supporting her, herself supported in her weariness by love and joy, two divine attendants who go but seldom together. The two talked in whispers,—Susan because of her feebleness, the mother in the instinct of caressing tenderness. The poor girl told her story in broken syllables—broken by the widow’s kisses and murmurs of sympathy, of wonder and love. Healing breathed upon the stricken mind and feeble frame as the two clung together in the silent night, always with an unspoken reference to the beautiful forlorn creature on the sofa—that visible symbol of all the terrors and troubles past. “I told her my mother would come to save us,” said poor

Susan. When she dropt to sleep at last, the mother leant her aching frame upon some pillows, afraid to move, and slept too, supreme protector, in her tender weakness, of these two young lives. As she woke from time to time to see her child sleeping by her side, thoughts of her son's deliverance stole across Mrs. Vincent's mind to sweeten her repose. The watch-light burned dimly in the room, and threw a gigantic shadow of her little figure, half erect on the side of the bed, still in her black gown and the close white cap, which could not be less than dainty in its neatness, even in that vigil, upon the further wall. The widow slept only in snatches, waking often and keeping awake, as people do when they grow old; her thoughts, ever alive and active, varying between her projects for the future, to save Susan from all painful knowledge of her own story, and the thankful recollection of Arthur's rescue from his troubles. From echoes of Tozer's speech, and of the cheers of the flock, her imagination wandered off into calculations of how she could find another place of habitation as pleasant, perhaps, as Lonsdale, and even to the details of her removal from thence, what portions of her furniture she would sell, and which take with her. "For now that Arthur has got out of his troubles, we must not stay to get him into fresh difficulties with his flock," she said to herself, with a momentary ache in her thankful heart; and so dropped asleep for another half-hour, to wake again presently, and enter anew into the whole question. Such was the way in which Mrs. Vincent passed that agitated but joyful night.

In the adjoining room Arthur sat up late over his papers. He was not writing, or doing any work; for hours together he sat leaning his head on his hands, gazing intently at the lamp, which his mother had adjusted, until his eyes were dazzled, and the gloom of the room around became spotted with discs of shade. Was he to permit the natural gratification into which Tozer's success had reluctantly moved him, to alter his resolve? Was he to drop into his old harness and try again? or was he to carry out his purpose in the face of all entreaties and inducements? The natural inclination to adopt the easiest course—and the equally natural, impetuous, youthful

impulse to take the leap to which he had made up his mind, and dash forth in the face of his difficulties—gave him abundant occupation for his thoughts as they contended against each other. He sat arguing the question within himself long after his fire had sunk into ashes. When the penetrating cold of the night drove him at last to bed, the question was still dubious. Even in his sleep the uneasy perplexity pursued him;—a matter momentous enough, though nobody but Tozer—who was as restless as the minister, and disturbed his wife by groans and murmurs, of which, when indignantly woke up to render an account, he could give no explanation—knew or suspected anything. Whether to take up his anchors altogether and launch out upon that sea of life, of which, much as he had discussed it in his sermons, the young Nonconformist knew next to nothing? The widow would not have mused so quietly with her wakeful eyes in the dim room next to him, had she known what discussions were going on in Arthur's mind. As for the congregation of Salem, they slept soundly, with an exhilarating sensation of generosity and goodness,—all except the Pigeons, who were plotting schism, and had already in their eye a vacant Temperance Hall, where a new preaching station might be organised under the auspices of somebody who would rival Vincent. The triumphant majority, however, laughed at the poulterer, and anticipated, with a pleasurable expectation, the meeting of next night, and the relief and delight of the pastor, who would find he had no explanations to make, but only his thanks to render to his generous flock. The good people concluded that they would all stop to shake hands with him after the business was over. "For it's as good as receiving of him again, and giving him the right hand of fellowship," said Mrs. Brown at the Dairy, who was entirely won over to the minister's side. Only Tozer, groaning in his midnight visions, and disturbing the virtuous repose of his wedded partner, suspected the new cloud that hung over Salem. For before morning the minister's mind was finally made up.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next day dawned amid the agitations natural to such a crisis of affairs. Almost before it was daylight, before Susan had woke, or the young stranger stirred upon her sofa, Miss Smith, troubled and exemplary, had returned to see after her charge. Miss Smith was in a state of much anxiety and discomfort till she had explained to Mrs. Vincent all the strange circumstances in which she found herself; and the widow, who had ventured to rise from Susan's side, and had been noiselessly busy putting the room in order, that her child might see nothing that was not cheerful and orderly when she woke, was not without curiosity to hear, and gladly took this opportunity, before even Arthur was stirring, to understand, if she could, the story which was so connected with that of her children. She ventured to go into the next room with Miss Smith, where she could hear every movement in the sick-chamber. The widow found it hard to understand all the tale. That Mrs. Hilyard was Mildmay's wife, and that it was their child who had sought protection of all the world from Susan Vincent, whom the crimes of her father and mother had driven to the very verge of the grave, was so hard and difficult to comprehend, that all the governess's anxious details of how little Alice first came into her hands, of her mother's motives for concealing her from Colonel Mildmay, even of the ill-fated flight to Lonsdale, which, instead of keeping her safe, had carried the child into her father's very presence—and all the subsequent events which Miss Smith had already confided to the minister, fell but dully upon the ears of Susan's mother. "Her daughter—and his daughter—and she comes to take refuge with my child," said the widow, with a swelling heart. Mrs. Vincent did not know what secret it was that lay heavy on the soul of the desperate woman who had followed her last night from Grove Street, but somehow, with a female instinct, felt, though she did not understand, that Mrs. Hilyard or Mrs. Mildmay, whatever her name might be, was as guilty in respect to Susan as was her guilty husband—the man who had stolen like a

serpent into the Lonsdale cottage and won the poor girl's simple heart. Full of curiosity as she was, the widow's thoughts wandered off from Miss Smith's narrative; her heart swelled within her with an innocent triumph; the good had overcome the evil. This child, over whom its father and mother had fought with so deadly a struggle, had flown for protection to Susan, whom that father and mother had done their utmost to ruin and destroy. They had not succeeded, thank God! Through the desert and the lions the widow's Una had come victorious, stretching her tender virgin shield over this poor child of passion and sorrow. While Miss Smith maundered through the entire history, starting from the time when Miss Russell married Colonel Mildmay, the widow's mind was entirely occupied with this wonderful victory of innocence over wickedness. She forgot the passionate despair of the mother whose child did not recognise her. She began immediately to contrive, with unguarded generosity, how Susan and she, when they left Carlingford, should carry the stranger along with them, and nurse her clouded mind into full development. Mrs. Vincent's trials had not yet taught her any practical lessons of worldly wisdom. Her heart was still as open as when, unthinking of evil, she admitted the false Mr. Fordham into her cottage, and made a beginning of all the misery which seemed now, to her sanguine heart, to be passing away. She went back to Susan's room full of this plan—full of tender thoughts towards the girl who had chosen Susan for her protector, and of pride and joy still more tender in her own child, who had overcome evil. It was, perhaps, the sweetest solace which could have been offered, after all her troubles, to the minister's mother. It was at once a vindication of the hard "dealings" of Providence, and of that strength of innocence and purity, in which the little woman believed with all her heart.

The minister himself was much less agreeably moved when he found the governess in possession of his sitting-room. Anything more utterly vexatious could hardly have occurred to Vincent than to find this troubled good woman, herself much embarrassed and disturbed by her own position, seated at his breakfast-table on this

eventful morning. Miss Smith was as primly uncomfortable as it was natural for an elderly single woman, still conscious of the fact that she was unmarried, to be, in an absolute tête-à-tête with a young man. She, poor lady, was as near blushing as her grey and composed non-complexion would permit. She moved uneasily in her seat, and made tremulous explanations, as Vincent, who was too young and inexperienced to be absolutely uncourteous, took his place opposite to her. “I am sure I feel quite an intruder,” said poor Miss Smith; “but your mother, Mr. Vincent, and little Alice—and indeed I did not know I was to be left here alone. It must seem so odd to you to find a lady—dear, dear me! I feel I am quite in the way,” said the embarrassed governess; “but Mrs. Mildmay will be here presently. I know she will be here directly. I am sure she would have come with me had she known. But she sat up half the night hearing what I had to tell her, and dropped asleep just in the morning. She is wonderfully changed, Mr. Vincent—very, very much changed. She is so nervous—a thing I never could have looked for. I suppose, after all, married ladies, however much they may object to their husbands, can’t help feeling a little when anything happens,” continued Miss Smith, primly; “and there is something so dreadful in such an accident. How do you think it can have happened? Could it be his groom, or who could it be? but I understand he is getting better now?”

“Yes, I believe so,” said Vincent.

“I am so glad,” said Miss Smith, “not that if it had been the will of Providence.—I would make the tea for you, Mr. Vincent, if you would not think it odd, and I am sure Mrs. Mildmay will be here directly. They were in a great commotion at Grange Lane. Just now, you know, there is an excitement. Though she is not a young girl, to be sure it is always natural. But for that I am sure they would all have come this morning; but perhaps Mr. Fordham——”

“Not any tea, thank you. If you have breakfasted, I will have the things removed. I have only one sitting-room, you perceive,” said the minister, rather bitterly. He

could not be positively uncivil—his heart was too young and fresh to be rude to any woman; but he rang the bell with a little unnecessary sharpness when Miss Smith protested that she had breakfasted long before. Her words excited him with a touch beyond telling. He could not, would not ask what was the cause of the commotion in Grange Lane; but he walked to the window to collect himself while the little maid cleared the table, and, throwing it open, looked out with the heart beating loud in his breast. Were these the bells of St. Roque's chiming into the ruddy sunny air with a confused jangle of joy? It was a saint's day, no doubt—a festival which the perpetual curate took delight in proclaiming his observance of; or—if it might happen to be anything else, what was that to the minister of Salem, who had so many other things on his mind? As he looked out a cab drove rapidly up to the door—a cab from which he saw emerge Mrs. Hilyard and another figure, which he recognised with a start of resentment. What possible right had this man to intrude upon him in this moment of fate? The minister left the window hastily, and stationed himself with a gloomy countenance on the hearthrug. He might be impatient of the women; but Fordham, inexcusable as his intrusion was, had to be met face to face. With a flash of sudden recollection, he recalled all his previous intercourse with the stranger whose name was so bitterly inter-woven with the history of the last six months. What had he ever done to wake so sharp a pang of dislike and injury in Vincent's mind? It was not for Susan's sake that her brother's heart closed and his countenance clouded against the man whose name had wrought her so much sorrow. Vincent had arrived at such a climax of personal existence that Susan had but a dim and secondary place in his thoughts. He was absorbed in his own troubles and plans and miseries. On the eve of striking out for himself into that bitter and unknown life in which his inexperienced imagination rejected the thought of any solace yet remaining, what malicious influence brought this man here?

They came in together into the room, "Mrs. Mildmay and Mr. Fordham"—not Mrs. Hilyard: that was over; and, preoccupied as the minister was, he could not but

perceive the sudden change which had come over the Back Grove Street needlewoman. Perhaps her despair had lasted as long as was possible for such an impatient spirit. She came in with the firm, steady step which he had observed long ago, before she had begun to tremble at his eye. Another new stage had commenced in her strange life. She went up to him without any hesitation, clear and decisive as of old.

"I am going away," she said, holding out her hand to him, "and so I presume are you, Mr. Vincent. I have come to explain everything and see your mother. Let me see your mother. Mr. Fordham has come with me to explain to you. They think in Grange Lane that it is only a man who can speak to a man," she went on, with the old movement of her thin lips; "and that now I have come to life again, I must not manage my own affairs. I am going back to society and the world, Mr. Vincent. I do not know where you are going, but here is somebody come to answer for me. Do they accept bail in a court of honour? or will you still hold a woman to her parole? for it must be settled now."

"Why must it be settled now?" said Vincent. He had dropped her hand and turned away from her with a certain repugnance. She had lost her power over him. At that moment the idea of being cruel, tyrannical to somebody—using his power harshly, balancing the pain in his own heart by inflicting pain on another—was not unagreeable to the minister's excited mind. He could have steeled himself just then to bring down upon her all the horrible penalties of the law. "Why must it be settled?" he repeated; "why must you leave Carlingford? I will not permit it." He spoke to her, but he looked at Fordham. The stranger was wrapped in a large overcoat which concealed all his dress. What was his dress, or his aspect, or the restrained brightness in his eyes to the minister of Salem? But Vincent watched him narrowly with a jealous inspection. In Fordham's whole appearance there was the air of a man to whom something was about to happen, which aggravated to the fever-point the dislike and opposition in Vincent's heart.

"I will be answerable for Mrs. Mildmay," said Fordham, with an evident response on his side to that opposition and dislike. Then he paused, evidently perceiving the necessity of conciliation. "Mr. Vincent," he continued, with some earnestness, "we all understand and regret deeply the inconvenience— I mean the suffering—that is to say, the injury and misery which these late occurrences must have caused you. I know how well—that is, how generously, how nobly—you have behaved——"

Here Mr. Fordham came to a pause in some confusion. To express calm acknowledgments to a man for his conduct in a matter which has been to him one of unmitigated disaster and calamity, requires an amount of composure which few people possess when at the height of personal happiness. The minister drew back, and, with a slight bow, and a restraint which was very natural and not unbecoming in his circumstances, looked on at the confusion of the speaker without any attempt to relieve it. He had offered seats to his visitors, but he himself stood on the hearthrug, dark and silent, giving no assistance in the explanation. He had not invited the explanation—it must be managed now as the others might, without any help from him.

"I have seen Colonel Mildmay," continued Mr. Fordham, after a confused pause. "If it can be any atonement to you to know how much he regrets all that has happened, so far as your family is concerned—how fully he exonerates Miss Vincent, who was all along deceived, and who would not have remained a moment with him had she not been forcibly detained. Mildmay declares she met with nothing but respect at his hands," continued the embarrassed advocate, lowering his voice; "he says——"

"Enough has been said on the subject," said Vincent, restraining himself with a violent effort.

"Yes—I beg your pardon, it is quite true—enough has been said," cried Fordham, with an appearance of relief. Here, at least, was one part of his difficult mediation over. "Mildmay will not," he resumed, after a pause, "tell me or any one else who it

was that gave him his wound—that is a secret, he says, between him and his God—and another. Whoever that other may be," continued Fordham, with a quick look towards Mrs. Mildmay, "he is conscious of having wronged—him—and will take no steps against—him. This culprit, it appears, must be permitted to escape—you think so?—worse evils might be involved if we were to demand—his—punishment. Mr. Vincent, I beg you to take this into consideration. It could be no advantage to you; the innocent shall not suffer—but—the criminal—must be permitted to escape."

"I do not see the necessity," said Vincent between his teeth.

"No, no," said Mrs. Mildmay, suddenly. "Escape! who believes in escape? Mr. Vincent knows better. Hush, you are a happy man just now—you are not qualified to judge; but we know better. Escape!—he means from prisons, and such like," she continued, turning to Vincent with a half-disdainful wave of her hand towards her companion. "But you know, and so do I, that there is no escape—not in this world. I know nothing about the next," said the strange woman, curbing once more the flush of excitement which had overpowered her as she spoke—"nothing; neither do you, though you are a priest. But there is enough of retribution here. The criminal—Mr. Vincent—you know—will not escape."

She spoke these last words panting, with pauses between, for breath. She was afraid of him again; his blankness, his passive opposition, drove her out of her composure. She put her hands together under her shawl with a certain dumb entreaty, and fixed upon him her eager eyes. They were a strange group altogether. Miss Smith, who had still lingered at the door, notwithstanding Mrs. Mildmay's imperative gesture of dismissal—out of hearing, but not out of sight—suffered some little sound to escape her at this critical moment; and when her patroness turned round upon her with those dreadful eyes, fled with precipitation, taking refuge in Mrs. Vincent's room. The table, still covered with its white cloth, stood between that dismayed spectator

before she disappeared finally, and the little company who were engaged in this silent conflict. Beside it sat Mrs. Mildmay, with a renewed panic of fear rising in her face. Fordham, considerably disturbed, and not knowing what to say, stood near her buttoning and unbuttoning his overcoat with impatient fingers, anxious to help her, but still more anxious to be gone. The minister stood facing them all, with compressed lips, and eyes which looked at nobody. He was wrapt in a silent dumb resistance to all entreaties and arguments, watching Fordham's gestures, Fordham's looks, with a jealous but secret suspicion. His heart was cruel in its bitterness. He for whom Providence had no joys in store, to whom the light was fading which made life sweet, was for this moment superior to the happy man who stood embarrassed and impatient before him; and generous as his real nature was, it was not in him, in this moment of darkness, to let the opportunity go.

"The innocent have suffered already," said Vincent, "all but madness, all but death. Why should the criminal escape?—go back into society, the society of good people, perhaps strike some one else more effectually? Why should I betray justice, and let the criminal escape? My sister's honour and safety are mine, and shall be guarded, whoever suffers. I will not permit her to go."

"But I offer to be answerable for her appearance," said Fordham, hastily. "I undertake to produce her if need be. You know me. I am a—a relation of the family. I am a man sufficiently known to satisfy any magistrate. You have no legal right to detain her. What would you have more? Is not my guarantee enough for you?"

"No," said Vincent, slowly. The two men stood defiant opposite to each other, contending for this woman, whom neither of them looked at, for whom neither of them cared. She, in the mean time, sat still in an agony of suspense and concealed anguish, with her eyes fixed on Vincent's face. She knew very well it was not of her that either of the two was thinking; yet it was her fate, perhaps her very life, which hung trembling in the balance. A smothered sighing sob came from her breast. She

was silenced for the first time in her life. She had escaped her crime; but all its material consequences, shame and punishment, still hung over her head. After God himself had freed her from the guilt of blood—after the injured man himself had forgiven her—when all was clear for her escape into another life—was this an indignant angel, with flaming sword and averted face, that barred the way of the fugitive? Beyond him, virtue and goodness, and all the fruits of repentance, shone before the eyes which had up to this time seen but little attraction in them—all so sweet, so easy, so certain, if but she were free. Her worn heart sighed to get forth into that way of peace. She could have fallen on her knees before the stern judge who kept her back, and held over her head the cloud of her own ill-doings, but dared not, in her paroxysm of fear and half-despair. A groaning, sighing sob, interrupted and broken, came from her exhausted breast. Just as she had recovered herself—as she had escaped—as remorse and misery had driven her to yearn after a better life, to be cast down again into this abyss of guilt and punishment! She trembled violently as she clasped her poor hands under her shawl. Composure and self-restraint were impossible in this terrible suspense.

Her cry went to Fordham's heart; and, besides, he was in desperate haste, and could afford to sink his pride, and make an appeal for once. He made a step forward, and put out his hand with an entreating gesture. "Do you hear her?" he cried, suddenly. "You have had much to bear yourself; have pity on her. Let her off—leave her to God. She has been ill, and will die if you have no mercy. You who are a minister——"

In his energy his overcoat fell back for a moment; underneath he was in full dress, which showed strangely in that grey spring morning. Vincent turned round upon him with a smile. The young man's face was utterly pale, white to the lips. The bells were jangling joy in his ears. He was not master of himself. "We detain you, Mr. Fordham; you have other affairs in hand," he said. "I am a minister only—a Dissenting minister—unworthy to have such an intercessor pleading with me; but

you, at least," cried poor Vincent, with an attempt at sarcasm, "do not want my pity; there is nothing between us that requires explanation. I will arrange with Mrs. Mildmay alone." He turned away and went to the window when he had spoken. There he stood, with his back to them, listening to the bells of St. Roque's, as they came and went in irregular breaks upon the wind. His heart was bursting with wild throbs of bitterness and despair; it was all he could do to keep the tumult down, and contain himself in that flush of passion. He turned away from them, and stood gazing out at that tedious window into the blank world. What did it matter? Let her escape if she would—let things go as they might; nothing was of any further importance—certainly on earth—perhaps even in heaven.

"I will go away—I can do you no good—I should only lose my temper; and time presses," said Mr. Fordham, with a flush of resentment on his face, as he turned to the anxious woman behind him. What could he do? He could not quarrel with this angry man in his own house on such a day. He could not keep happier matters waiting. He would not risk the losing of his temper and his time at this moment of all others. He went away with a sensation of defeat, which for half an hour materially mitigated his happiness. But he was happy, and the happy are indulgent judges both of their own conduct and of others. As for the minister, he was roused again when he saw his rival jump into the cab at the door, and drive off alone down the street, which was lively with the early stir of day. The sun had just broken through the morning clouds, and it was into a ruddy perspective of light that the stranger disappeared as he went off towards Grange Lane. Strange contrast of fate! While Fordham hastened down into the sunshine to all the joy that awaited him there, Tozer, a homely, matter-of-fact figure in the ruddy light, was crossing the street towards the minister's door. Vincent went away from the window again, with pangs of an impatience and intolerance of his own lot which no strength of mind could subdue. All the gleams of impossible joy which had lighted his path in Carlingford had now gone out, and left him in darkness; and here came back, in

undisturbed possession, all the meaner circumstances of his individual destiny. Salem alone remained to him out of the wreck of his dreams; except when he turned back and discovered her—the one tragic thread in the petty history—this woman whose future life for good or for evil he held in his avenging hands.

Mrs. Mildmay was still seated by the table. She had regained command of herself. She looked up to him with gleaming eyes when he approached her. “Mr. Vincent, I keep my parole— I am waiting your pleasure,” she said, never removing her eyes from his face. It was at this moment that Mrs. Vincent, who had from the window of Susan’s chamber seen the cab arrive and go away with some curiosity, came into the room. The widow wanted to know who her son’s visitors were, and what had brought them. She came in with a little eagerness, but was brought to a sudden standstill by the appearance of Mrs. Mildmay. Why was this woman here? what had she to do with the minister? Mrs. Vincent put on her little air of simple dignity. She said, “I beg your pardon; I did not know my son was engaged,” with a curtsy of disapproving politeness to the unwelcome visitor. With a troubled look at Arthur, who looked excited and gloomy enough to justify any uncomfortable imaginations about him, his mother turned away somewhat reluctantly. She did not feel that it was quite right to leave him exposed to the wiles of this “designing woman;” but the widow’s own dignity was partly at stake. All along she had disapproved of this strange friendship, and she could not countenance it now.

“Your mother is going away,” said Mrs. Mildmay, with a restrained outcry of despair: “is no one to be permitted to mediate between us? You are a man and cruel; you are in trouble, and you think you will avenge yourself. No, no—I don’t mean what I say. Your son is a—a true knight, Mrs. Vincent; I told you so before. He will never be hard upon a woman: if I had not known that, why should I have trusted him? I came back, as he knows, of my own will. Don’t go away; I am willing you should know—the whole,” said the excited woman, with a sudden pause, turning upon Vincent, her face blanching into deadly whiteness—“the whole—I consent; let

her be the judge. Women are more cruel than men; but I saved her daughter—I am willing that she should hear it all."

She sat down again on the seat from which she had risen. A certain comfort and relief stole over her face. She was appealing to the general heart of humanity against this one man who knew her secret. It might be hard to hear the story of her own sin—but it was harder to be under the stifling sway of one who knew it, and who had it in his power to denounce her. She ceased to tremble as she looked at the widow's troubled face. It was a new tribunal before which she stood; perhaps here her provocations might be acknowledged—her soul acquitted of the burden from which it could never escape. As the slow moments passed on, and the minister did not speak, she grew impatient of the silence. "Tell her," she said, faintly—it was a new hope which thus awoke in her heart.

But while Mrs. Mildmay sat waiting, and while the widow drew near, not without some judicial state in the poise of her little figure, to hear the explanation which she felt she was entitled to, Tozer's honest troubled face looked in at the door. It put a climax upon the confusion of the morning. The good butterman looked on in some surprise at this strange assemblage, recognising dimly the haze of an excitement of which he knew nothing. He was acquainted, to some extent, with the needlewoman of Back Grove Street. He had gone to call on her once at the solicitation of the anxious Brown, who had charge of her district but did not feel himself competent to deal with the spiritual necessities of such a penitent; and Tozer remembered well that her state of mind had not been satisfactory—"not what was to be looked for in a person as had the means of grace close at hand, and attended regular at Salem." He thought she must have come at this unlucky moment to get assistance of some kind from the minister—"as if he had not troubles enough of his own," Tozer said to himself; but the deacon was not disposed to let his pastor be victimised in any such fashion. This, at least, was a matter in which he felt fully entitled to interfere.

"Good mornin', ma'am," said the worthy butterman; "good mornin', Mr. Vincent—it's cold, but it's seasonable for the time of year. What I wanted was a word or two with the pastor, ma'am, if he's disengaged. It ain't what I approve," continued Tozer, fixing his eyes with some sternness upon the visitor, "to take up a minister's time in the morning when he has the work of a flock on his hands. My business, being such as can't wait, is different; but them as are in want of assistance, one way or another, which is a thing as belongs to the deacons, have no excuse, not as I can see, for disturbing the pastor. It ain't a thing as I would put up with," continued Tozer, with increasing severity; the charities of the flock ain't in Mr. Vincent's hands; it's a swindling of his time to come in upon him of a morning if there ain't a good reason; and, as far as I am concerned, it would be enough to shut my heart up again' giving help—that's how it would work on me."

Mrs. Mildmay was entirely inattentive to the first few words of this address, but the pointed application given by the speaker's eyes called her attention presently. She gazed at him, as he proceeded, with a gradual lightening of her worn and anxious face. While Mrs. Vincent did all she could, with anxious looks and little deprecatory gestures, to stop the butterman, the countenance of her visitor cleared by one of those strange sudden changes which the minister had noted so often. Her lips relaxed, her eyes gleamed with a sudden flash of amusement. Then she glanced around, seeing with quick observation not only the absurdity of Tozer's mistake, but the infallible effect it had in changing the aspect of affairs. The minister had turned away, not without a grim, impatient smile at the corner of his mouth. The minister's mother, shocked in all her gentle politeness, was eagerly watching her opportunity to break in and set the perplexed deacon right. The culprit, who had been on her trial a moment before, drew a long breath of utter relief. Now she had escaped—the crisis was over. Her quick spirit rose with a sense of triumph—a sensation of amusement. She entered eagerly into it, leaning forward with eyes that shone and gleamed upon her accuser, and a mock solemnity of attention which only her desperate strain of

mind and faculties could have enabled her to assume so quickly. When the butterman came to a pause, Mrs. Vincent rushed in breathlessly to the rescue.

"Mr. Tozer—Mr. Tozer! this lady is—a—a friend of ours," cried the minister's mother, with looks that were much more eloquent of her distress and horror than any words. She had no time to say more, when the aggrieved individual herself broke in—

"Mr. Tozer knows I have been one of the flock since ever Mr. Vincent came," said the strange woman. "I have gone to all the meetings, and listened faithfully to the pastor every time he has preached; and would you judge me unworthy of relief because I once came to see him in a morning? That is hard laws; but the minister will speak for me. The minister knows me," she went on, turning to Vincent, "and he and his mother have been very charitable to a poor woman, Mr. Tozer. You will not exclude me from the Salem charities for this one offence? Remember that I am a member of the flock."

"Not a church-member as I know," said the sturdy deacon—"not meaning no offence, if I've made a mistake—one sitting, as far as I remember; but a—lady—as is a friend of Mrs. Vincent's——"

Here Tozer paused, abashed but suspicious, not disposed to make any further apology. That moment was enough to drive this lighter interlude from the vigilant soul which, in all its moods, watched what was going on with a quick apprehension of the opportunities of the moment. All her perceptions, quickened as they were by anxiety and fear, were bent on discovering an outlet for her escape, and she saw her chance now. She got up wearily, leaning on the table, as indeed she needed to lean, and looked into Mrs. Vincent's face: "May I see my child?" she said, in a voice that went to the heart of the widow. The minister's mother could not resist this appeal. She saw the trembling in her limbs, the anxiety in her eye. "Arthur, I will see to Mrs. Mildmay. Mr. Tozer has something to say to you, and we must not occupy your

time," said the tender little woman, in whose gentle presence there was protection and shelter even for the passionate spirit beside her. Thus the two went away together. If there had ever been any revengeful intention in Vincent's mind, it had disappeared by this time. He too breathed deep with relief. The criminal had escaped, at least out of his hands. He was no longer compelled to take upon himself the office of an avenger.

CHAPTER XX.

"I HOPE, sir, as I haven't said anything to give offence?—it was far from my meaning," said Tozer; "not as the—person—is a church-member, being only a seat-holder for one sittin', as is down in the books. I wouldn't have come over, not so early, Mr. Vincent, if it wasn't as I was wishful to try if you'd listen to reason about the meetin' as is appointed to be to-night. It ain't no interest of mine, not so far as money goes, nor nothing of that kind. It's you as I'm a-thinking of. I don't mind standing the expense out of my own pocket, if so be as you'd give in to make it a tea-meetin'. I don't know as you'd need to do nothing but take the chair and make yourself agreeable. Me and Brown and the women would manage the rest. It would be a pleasant surprise, that's what it would be," said the good butterman; "and Phœbe and some more would go down directly to make ready: and I don't doubt as there's cakes and buns enough in Carlingford, Mr. Vincent, sir, if you'd but bend your mind to it and consent."

"I am going out," said Vincent; "I have—something to do; don't detain me, Tozer. I must have this morning to myself."

"I'll walk with you, sir, if I ain't in the way," said the deacon, accompanying the young man's restless steps down-stairs. "They tell me Miss is a deal better, and all things is going on well. I wouldn't be meddlesome, Mr. Vincent, not of my own will; but when matters is settling, sir, if you'd but hear reason! There can't nothing

but harm come of more explanations. I never had no confidence in explanations, for my part; but pleasant looks and the urns a-smoking, and a bit of green on the wall, as Phœbe and the rest could put up in no time! and just a speech as was agreeable to wind up with—a bit of an anecdote, or poetry about friends as is better friends after they've spoke their minds and had it out—that's the thing as would settle Salem, Mr. Vincent. I don't speak, not to bother you, sir, but for your good. There ain't no difficulty in it; it's easier a deal than being serious and opening up all things over again; and as for them as would like to dictate——"

"I am not thinking of Salem," said the minister; "I have many other things to distract me; for heaven's sake, if you have any pity, leave me alone to-day."

"But you'll give in to make it a tea-meetin'?" said the anxious butterman, pausing at his own door.

Tozer did not make out the minister's reply. It is difficult to distinguish between a nod and a shake of the head, under some circumstances—and Vincent did not pause to give an articulate answer, but left his champion to his own devices. It seemed to Vincent to be a long time since Fordham left his house—and he was possessed with a fever of impatience to see for himself what was being transacted down yonder in the sunshine, where the spire of St. Roque's appeared in the distance through the ruddy morning haze. The bells had ceased, and all was quiet enough in Grange Lane. Quite quiet—a few ordinary passengers in the tranquil road, nursemaids and children—and the calm green doors closing in the concealed houses, as if no passion or agitation could penetrate them. The door of Lady Western's garden was ajar. The minister crossed over and looked in with a wistful, despairing hope of seeing something that would contradict his conclusion. The house was basking in the spring sunshine—the door open, some of the windows open, eager servants hovering about, an air of expectation over all. With eyes full of memories, the minister looked in at the half-open door, which one time and another had been to him the gate of paradise.

Within, where the red geraniums and verbenas had once brightened all the borders, were pale crocuses and flowers of early spring—the limes were beginning to bud, the daisies to grow among the grass. The winter was over in that sheltered and sunny place; Nature herself stood sweet within the protecting walls, and gathered all the tenderest sweets of spring to greet the bride in the new beginning of her life. It was but a glance, but the spectator, in the bitterness of his heart, did not lose a single tint or line; and just then the joy-bells burst out once more from St. Roque's. Poor Vincent drew back from the door as the sudden sound stung him to the heart. Nothing had any pity for him—all the world, and every voice and breath therein, sided with the others in their joy. He went on blindly, without thinking where he was going, with a kind of dull, stubborn determination in his heart, not to turn back in his wretchedness even from the sight of the happy procession which he knew must be advancing to meet him. A pang more or less, what did it matter? And for the last time he would look on Her who was nothing in the world to him now—who never could have been anything—yet who had somehow shed such streams of light upon the poor minister's humble path, as no reality in all his life had ever shed before. He paused on the edge of the road as he saw the carriage coming. It was one of those moments when a man's entire life becomes apparent to him in long perspective of past and future, he himself and all the world standing still between. The bells rang on his heart, with echoes from the wheels and the horses' feet coming up in superb pride and triumph. Heaven and earth were glad for her in her joy. He, in his great trouble, stood dark in the sunshine and looked on.

It was only a moment, and no more. He would have seen nothing but the white mist of the veil which surrounded her, had not she in her loveliness and kindness perceived him, and bent forward in the carriage with a little motion of her hand calling the attention of her unseen bridegroom to that figure on the way. At sight of that movement, the unhappy young man started with an intolerable pang, and went on heedless where he was going. He could not control the momentary passion. She

had never harmed him—never meant to dazzle him with her beauty, or trifle with his love, or break his heart. It was kind as the sunshine, this sweet bridal face leaning out with that momentary glance of recognition. She would have given him her kind hand, her sweet smile as of old, had they met more closely—no remorseful consciousness was in her eyes; but neither the bells, nor the flowers, nor the sunshine, went with such a pang to poor Vincent's heart as did that look of kindness. It was all unreal then—no foundation at all in it? not enough to call a passing colour to her cheek, or to dim her sweet eyes on her bridal day? He went down the long road in the insensibility of passion—seeing nothing, caring for nothing—stung to the heart. No look of triumph, no female dart of conscious cruelty, could have given the poor minister so bitter a wound. All her treasured looks and smiles—the touch of her hand—her words, of which he had scarcely forgotten one—did they mean nothing after all? nothing but kindness? He had laid his heart at her feet; if she had trodden on it he could have forgiven her; but she only went on smiling, and never saw the treasure in her way. And this was the end. The unfortunate young man could not give way to any outbreak of the passion that consumed him; he could but go on hotly—on past St. Roque's, where flowers still lay in the porch, and the open doors invited strangers, to the silent country, where the fields lay callow under the touch of spring. Spring! everlasting mockery of human trouble! Here were the hedgerows stirring, the secret grain beginning to throb conscious in the old furrows; but life itself standing still—coming to a sudden end in this heart which filled the young man's entire frame with pulsations of anguish. All his existence had flowed towards this day, and took its termination here. His love—heaven help him! he had but one heart, and had thrown it away; his work—that too was to come to nothing, and be ended; all his traditions, all his hopes, were they to be buried in one grave? and what was to become after of the posthumous and nameless life?

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN the minister fully came to himself, it was after a long rapid walk of many miles through the silent fields and hazy country. There the clouds cleared off from him in the quietness. When he began to see clearly he turned back towards Carlingford. Nothing now stood between him and the crisis which henceforward must determine his personal affairs. He turned in the long country road, which he had been pursuing eagerly without knowing what he was doing, and gazed back towards the distant roofs. His heart ached and throbbed with the pangs that were past. He had a consciousness that it stirred within his breast, still smarting and thrilling with that violent access of agony—but the climax was over. The strong pulsations fell into dull beats of indefinite pain. Now for the other world—the neutral-coloured life. Vincent did not very well know which road he had taken, for he had not been thinking of where he was going; but it roused him a little to perceive that his homeward way brought him through Grove Street, and past Siloam Cottage, where Mr. Tufton lived.

Mrs. Tufton was at the window, behind the great geranium, when the minister came in sight. When she saw him she tapped upon the pane and beckoned him to go in. He obeyed the summons, almost without impatience, in the languor of his mind. He went in to find them all by the fire, just as they had been when he came first to Carlingford. The old minister, in his arm-chair, holding out his flabby white hand to his dear young brother; the invalid daughter still knitting, with cold blue eyes, always vigilant and alert, investigating everything. It was a mild day, and Mrs. Tufton herself had shifted her seat to the window, where she had been reading aloud as usual the ‘Carlingford Gazette.’ The motionless warm air of the little parlour, the prints of the brethren on the walls, the attitudes of the living inhabitants, were all unchanged from the time when the young minister of Salem paid his first visit, and chafed at Mr. Tufton’s advice, and heard with a secret shiver the prophecy of Adelaide, that “they would kill him in six months.” He took the same chair, again making a little commotion among the furniture, which the size of the room made it

difficult to displace. It was with a bewildering sensation that he sat down in that unchangeable house. Had time really gone on through all these passions and pains, of which he was conscious in his heart? or had it stood still, and were they only dreams? Adelaide Tufton, immovable in her padded chair, with pale blue eyes that searched through everything, had surely never once altered her position, but had knitted away the days with a mystic thread like one of the Fates. Even the geranium did not seem to have gained or shed a single leaf.

"I have just been reading in the 'Gazette' the report of last night's meeting," said good Mrs. Tufton. "Oh, Mr. Vincent, I was so glad—your dear mother herself, if she had been there, could not have been happier than I was. I hope she has seen the 'Gazette' this morning. You young men always like the 'Times;' but they never put in anything that is interesting to me in the 'Times.' Perhaps, if she has not seen it, you will put the paper in your pocket. Indeed, it made me as happy as if you had been my own son. I always say that is very much how Mr. Tufton and I feel for you."

"Yes, it went off very well," said the old minister. "My dear young brother, it all depends on whether you have friends that know how to deal with a flock; nothing can teach you that but experience. I am sorry I dare not go out again to-night—it cost me my night's rest last night, as Mrs. Tufton will tell you; but that is nothing in consideration of duty. Never think of ease to yourself, my dear young friend, when you can serve a brother; it has always been my rule through life——"

"Mr. Vincent understands all that," said Adelaide; "that will do, papa—we know. Tell me about Lady Western's marriage, Mr. Vincent. I daresay you were invited, as she was such a friend of yours. It must have made an awkwardness between you when she turned out to be Colonel Mildmay's sister; but, to be sure, those things don't matter among people in high life. It was delightful that she should marry her old love after all, don't you think? Poor Sir Joseph would have left a different will if

he had known. Parted for ten years and coming together again! it is like a story in a book——”

“I do not know the circumstances,” said poor Vincent. He turned to Mr. Tufton with a vain hope of escaping. “I shall have to bid you good-bye shortly,” said the minister; “though it was very good of the Salem people not to dismiss me, I prefer——”

“You mean to go away?” said Adelaide; “that will be a wonderful piece of news in the connection; but I don’t think you will go away: there will be a deputation, and they will give you a piece of plate, and you will remain—you will not be able to resist. Papa never was a preacher to speak of,” continued the dauntless invalid, “but they gave him a purse and a testimonial when he retired; and you are soft-hearted, and they will get the better of you——”

“Adelaide!” said Mrs. Tufton, “Mr. Vincent will think you out of your senses: indeed, Mr. Vincent, she does not mind what she says; and she has had so much ill-health, poor child, that both her papa and I have given in to her too much; but as for my husband’s preaching, it is well known he could have had many other charges if his duty had not called him to stay at Salem; invitations used to come——”

“Oh, stuff!” said the irreverent Adelaide—“as if Mr. Vincent did not know. But I will tell you about Lady Western—that is the romance of the day. Mr. Fordham was very poor, you know, when they first saw each other—only a poor barrister—and the friends interfered. Friends always interfere,” said the sick woman, fixing her pale eyes on Vincent’s face as she went on with her knitting; “and they married her to old Sir Joseph Western; and so, after a while, she became the young dowager. She must have been very pretty then—she is beautiful now; but I would not have married a widow, had I been Mr. Fordham, after I came into my fortune. His elder brother died, you know. I would not have married her, however lovely she had been. Mr. Vincent, would you?”

"Adelaide!" cried Mrs. Tufton, again in dismay. The poor minister thrust back his chair from the table, and came roughly against the stand of the great geranium, which had to be adjusted, and covered his retreat. He glanced at his conscious tormentor with the contemptuous rage and aggravation which men sometimes feel towards a weak creature who insults them with impunity. But she did not show any pleasurable consciousness of her triumph; she kept knitting on, looking at him with her pale blue eyes. There was something in that loveless eagerness of curiosity which appalled Vincent. He got up hastily to his feet, and said he had something to do and must go away.

"Good-bye, my dear brother," said Mr. Tufton slowly, shaking the young minister's hand; "you will be judicious to-night? The flock have stood by you, and been indulgent to your inexperience. They see you never meant to hurt any of their feelings. It is what I always trained my dear people to be—considerate to the young preachers. Take my advice, my beloved young brother, and dear Tozer's advice. We do all we can for you here, and dear Tozer is a tower of strength. And you have our prayers; we are but a little assembly—I and my dear partner in life and our afflicted child—but two or three, you know—and we never forget you at the throne of grace."

With this parting blessing Vincent hastened away. Poor little Mrs. Tufton had added some little effusion of motherly kindness which he did not listen to. He came away with a strange impression on his mind of that knitting woman, pale and curious, in her padded chair. Adelaide Tufton was not old—not a great many years older than himself. To him, with the life beating so strong in his veins, the sight of that life in death was strange, almost awful. The despair, the anguish, the vivid uncertainty and reality of his own existence, appeared to him in wonderful relief against that motionless background. If he came back here ten years hence, he might still find as now the old man by the fire, the pale woman knitting in her chair, as they had been for these six months which had brought to the young minister a greater crowd of events than all his previous years. When he thought of that helpless woman, with her

lively thoughts and curious eyes, always busy and speculating about the life from which she was utterly shut out, a strange sensation of thankfulness stole over the young man; though he was miserable he was alive. Between him and the lovely figure on which his heart had dwelt too long, rose up now this other figure which was not lovely. He grew stronger as he went home along the streets in the changed light of the afternoon. Siloam Cottage interposed between him and that ineffable moment at the bridal doors; presently Salem too would interpose, and all the difficulties and troubles of his career. He had taken up life again, after that pause when the sun and the moon stood still and the battle raged. Now it was all over, and the world's course had begun anew.

Mrs. Vincent was looking out for him when he reached his own door. He could see her disappear from the window above, where she had been standing watching. She came to meet him as he went up to the sitting-room. There was nobody now in that room, where the widow had been making everything smile for her son. The table was spread; the fire bright; the lamp ready to be lighted on the table. Mrs. Vincent had been alarmed by Arthur's long absence, but she did not say so. She only made haste to tell him that Susan was so much better, and that the doctor was in such high spirits about her. "After we come back from the meeting you are to go in and sit with your sister for an hour, my dear boy," said his mother. "Till that was over, we knew your mind would be occupied, and Susan would like to see you. Oh, Arthur! it will make you happy only to look at her. She remembers everything now; she has asked me even all about the flock, and cried with joy to hear how things had gone off last night—not for joy only," said the truthful widow, "with indignation, too, that you ever should have been doubted—for Susan thinks there is nobody like her brother; but, my dear, we ought to be very thankful that things have happened so well. Everybody must learn to put up with a little injustice in this world, particularly the pastor of a flock. If you will go and get ready for dinner, Arthur," said Mrs. Vincent, "I will light the lamp. I have taken it into my own hands, dear; it is better to

put it right at first than to be always arranging it after it has been put wrong. Dinner is quite ready, and make haste, my dear boy. I have got a little fish for you, and you know it will spoil if you keep it waiting; and I have so much to tell you before we go out to the meeting to-night."

Vincent made no answer to the wistful inquiring look which his mother turned to his face as she mentioned this meeting. He went away with an impatient exclamation about that lamp, which seemed to him to occupy half her thoughts. Mrs. Vincent was full of many cares and much news which she had to give her son; she was also deeply anxious and curious to know what he was going to do that night; but still she spared a little time for the lamp, to set the screw right, and light to a delicate evenness the well-trimmed wick. When she had placed it on the table, it gave her a certain satisfaction to see how clearly it burned, and how bright it made the table. "If I only knew what Arthur was going to do," she said to herself, with a little sigh, as she rang the bell for the dinner, and warned the little maid to be very careful with the fish; "for if it is not put very nicely on the table Mr. Vincent will not have any of it," said the minister's mother, with that feminine mingling of small cares and great which was so incomprehensible to her son. When he came back and seated himself listlessly at the table, he never thought of observing the light, or taking note of the brightness of the room. To think of this business of dinner at all, interjected into such a day, was almost too much for Arthur; and he was half disgusted with himself when he found that, after all, he could eat, and that not only for his mother's sake. Mrs. Vincent talked only of Susan while the little maid was going and coming into the room; but when they were alone she drew her chair a little nearer and entered upon other things.

"Arthur, I had a great deal of conversation with Mrs. Mildmay; she told me—everything," said the widow, growing pale. "Oh, my dear! when God leaves us alone to our own devices, what dreadful things a sinful creature may do! I said you would do nothing to harm her now when Susan was safe. Hush, dear! we must never

breathe a word of it to Susan, or any one. Susan is changed, Arthur; sometimes I am glad of it, sometimes I could cry. She is not an innocent girl now. She is a woman—oh, Arthur! a great deal stronger than her mother; she would clear herself somehow if she knew; she would not bear that suspicion. She is more like your dear papa," said the mother, wiping her eyes, "than I ever thought to see one of my children. I can see his high-minded ways in her, Arthur—and steadier than you and me; for you have my quick temper, dear. Wait just another moment, Arthur. This poor child dotes upon Susan; and her mother asked me," said poor Mrs. Vincent, pausing, and looking her son in the face, "if—I would keep her with me."

"Keep her with you! Let us be rid of them," cried the minister; "they have brought us nothing but misery ever since we heard their names."

"Yes, Arthur dear; but the poor child never did any one any harm. They have made her a ward in Chancery now. It should have been done long ago but for the wickedness and the disputes; and, my dear boy," said Mrs. Vincent, anxiously, "I will have to leave Lonsdale, you know, my poor child could not go back there; and we will not stay with you in Carlingford to get you into trouble with your flock," continued the widow, gazing wistfully in his face to see if she could gather anything of his purpose from his looks; "and with my little income, you know, it would be hard work without coming on you; but all the difficulty is cleared away if we take this child. I was thinking I might take Susan abroad," said the widow, with a little sigh; "it is the best thing, I have always heard, after such trouble; and it would be an occupation for her when she got better. My dear boy, don't be hasty; your dear father always took a little time to think upon a thing before he would speak; but you have always had my temper, Arthur. I won't say any more; we will speak of it, dear, in your sister's room, when we come home from the meeting to-night."

"I think you had better not go to the meeting to-night; there will be nothing said to please you, mother," said the minister, rising from the table, and taking his favourite

position on the hearthrug. His mother turned round frightened, but afraid to show her fright, determined still to look as if she believed everything was going well.

“No fine speeches, Arthur? My dear boy, I always like to hear you speak. I know you will say what you ought,” said the widow, smiling, with a patient determination in her face. Then there was a pause. “Perhaps you will give me a little sketch of what you are going to say,” she went on, with a tender artifice, concealing her anxiety. “Your dear papa often did, Arthur, when anything was going on among the flock.”

But Arthur made no reply. His clouded face filled his mother with a host of indefinite fears. But she saw, as she had seen so often, that womanish entreaties were not practicable, and that he must be left to himself. “He will tell me as we go to Salem,” she said in her heart, to quiet its anxious throbbing. “Perhaps you would like to have the room to yourself a little, dear,” she said aloud. “I will go to Susan till it is time to leave; and I know my Arthur will ask the counsel of God,” she added softly, just touching his hand with a tender momentary clasp. It was all the minister could do to resist the look of anxious inquiry with which this little caress was accompanied; and then she left him to prepare for his meeting. Whether he asked advice or not of his Father in heaven, the widow asked it for him with tears in her anxious eyes. She had done all that she could do. When the minister was left to himself, he opened his desk and took out the manuscript with which he had been busy last night. It was the speech he had intended to deliver, and he had been pleased with it. He sat down now and read it over to himself, by the white-covered table, on which his mother’s lamp burned bright. Sheet by sheet, as he read it over, the impatient young man tossed into the fire, with hasty exclamations of disgust. He was excited; his mind was in fiery action; his heart moved to the depths. No turgid Homerton eloquence would do now. What he said must be not from the lips, but from the heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. VINCENT was ready in very good time for the meeting; she brought her son a cup of coffee with her own hand when she was dressed in her bonnet and shawl. She had put on her best bonnet—her newest black silk dress. Perhaps she knew that device of Tozer's, of which the minister yet was not aware; but Arthur for once was too peremptory and decided for his mother. She who knew how to yield when resistance was impossible, had to give in to him at last. It was better to stay at home, anxious as her heart was, than to exasperate her boy, who had so many other things to trouble him. With much heroism the widow took off her bonnet again and returned to Susan's room. There could be little doubt now what the minister was going to do. While she seated herself once more by her daughter's bedside, in a patience which was all but unbearable, her son went alone to his last meeting with his flock. He walked rapidly through Grove Street, going through the stream of Salem people, who were moving in twos and threes in the same direction. A little excitement had sprung up in Carlingford on the occasion. The public in general had begun to find out, as the public generally does, that here was a man who was apt to make disclosures not only of his opinions but of himself wherever he appeared, and that a chance was hereby afforded to the common eye of seeing that curious phenomenon, a human spirit in action—a human heart as it throbbed and changed—a sight more interesting than any other dramatic performance under heaven. There was an unusual throng that night in Grove Street, and the audience was not less amazed than the minister when they found what awaited them in the Salem schoolroom. There Phœbe Tozer and her sister-spirits had been busy all day. Again there were evergreen wreaths on the walls, and the stiff iron gaslights were bristling with holly. Phœbe's genius had even gone further than on the last great occasion, for there were pink and white roses among the green leaves, and one of the texts which hung on the wall had been temporarily elevated over the platform,

framed in wreaths and supported by extempore fastenings, the doubtful security of which filled Phœbe's artless soul with many a pang of terror. It was the tender injunction, "Love one another," which had been elevated to this post of honour, and this was the first thing which met Vincent's eye as he entered the room. Underneath, the platform table was already filled with the elite of the flock. The ladies were all in their best bonnets in that favoured circle, and Tozer stood glorious in his Sunday attire—but in his own mind privately a little anxious as to the effect of all this upon the sensitive mind of the minister—by the side of the empty chair which had been left for the president of the assembly. When Vincent was seen to enter, it was Tozer who gave the signal for a burst of cheering, which the pleased assembly, newly aware of the treat thus provided for it, performed heartily with all its boots and umbrellas. Through this applause the minister made his way to the platform with abstracted looks. The cheer made no difference upon the stubborn displeasure and annoyance of his face. Nothing that could possibly have been done to aggravate his impatient spirit and make his resolve unalterable, could have been more entirely successful than poor Tozer's expedient for the conciliation of the flock. Angry, displeased, humbled in his own estimation, the unfortunate pastor made his way through the people, who were all smiles and conscious favour. A curt general bow and cold courtesy was all he had even for his friends on the platform, who beamed upon him as he advanced. He was not mollified by the universal applause; he was not to be moved to complaisance by any such argument. He would not take the chair, though Tozer, with anxious officiousness, put it ready for him, and Phœbe looked up with looks of entreaty from behind the urn. In the sight of all the people he refused the honour, and sat down on a little supernumerary seat behind, where he was not visible to the increasing crowd. This refusal sent a thrill through all the anxious deacons on the platform. They gathered round him to make remonstrances, to which the minister paid no regard. It was a dreadful moment. Nobody knew what to do in the emergency. The throng streamed in till there was no longer an inch of

standing-ground, nor a single seat vacant, except that one empty chair which perplexed the assembly. The urns began to smoke less hotly; the crowd gave murmurous indications of impatience as the deacons cogitated— What was to be done?—the tea at least must not be permitted to get cold. At last Mr. Brown stood up and proposed feebly, that as Mr. Vincent did not wish to preside, Mr. Tozer should be chairman on this joyful occasion. The Salem folks, who thought it a pity to neglect the good things before them, assented with some perplexity, and then the business of the evening began.

It was very lively business for the first half-hour. Poor Mrs. Tufton, who was seated immediately in front of the minister, disturbed by his impatient movements, took fright for the young man; and could not but wonder in herself how people managed to eat cake and drink tea in such an impromptu fashion, who doubtless had partaken of that meal before leaving home, as she justly reflected. The old minister's wife stood by the young minister with a natural esprit the corps, and was more anxious than she could account for. A certain cloud subdued the hilarity of the table altogether; everybody was aware of the dark visage of the minister, indignant and annoyed, behind. A certain hush was upon the talk, and Tozer himself had grown pale in the chair, where the good butterman by no means enjoyed his dignity. Tozer was not so eloquent as usual when he got up to speak. He told the refreshed and exhilarated flock that he had made bold to give them a little treat, out of his own head, seeing that everything had gone off satisfactory last night; and they would agree with him as the minister had no call to take no further trouble in the way of explanations. A storm of applause was the response of the Salem folks to this suggestion; they were in the highest good-humour both with themselves and the minister—ready to vote him a silver tea-service on the spot, if anybody had been prompt enough to suggest it. But a certain awe stole over even that delighted assembly when Mr. Vincent came forward to the front of the table and confronted them all, turning his back upon his loyal supporters. They did not know what to

make of the dark aspect and clouded face of the pastor, relieved as it was against the alarmed and anxious countenances behind him. A panic seized upon Salem: something which they had not anticipated—something very different from the programme—was in the minister's eye.

The Pigeons were in a back seat—very far back, where Mrs. Vincent had been the previous evening—spies to see what was going on, plotting the Temperance Hall and an opposition preacher in their treacherous hearts; but even Mrs. Pigeon bent forward with excitement in the general flutter. When the minister said "My friends," you could have heard a pin drop in the crowded meeting; and when, a minute after, a leaf of holly detached itself and fluttered down from one of the gaslights, the whole row of people among whom it fell thrilled as if they had received a blow. Hush! perhaps it is not going to be so bad after all. He is talking of the text there over the platform, in its evergreen frame, which Phœbe trembles to think may come down any moment with a crash upon her father's anxious head. "Love one another!" Is Mr. Vincent telling them that he is not sure what that means, though he is a minister—that he is not very sure what anything means—that life is a great wonder, and that he only faintly guesses how God, being pitiful, had the heart to make man and leave him on this sad earth? Is that what he says as he stands pale before the silent assembly, which scarcely dares draw breath, and is ashamed of its own lightness of heart and vulgar satisfaction with things in general? That is what the minister says. "The way is full of such pitfalls—the clouds so heavy overhead—the heavens, so calm and indifferent, out of reach—cannot we take hands and help each other through this troubled journey?" says the orator, with a low voice and solemn eyes. When he pauses thus and looks them all in the face, the heart of Salem fails. The very gaslights seem to darken in the air, in the silence, and there is not one of the managers who does not hear the beating of his own heart. Then suddenly the speaker raises his voice, raises his hand, storms over their heads in a burst of indignation not loud but grand. He says "No."—"No!" exclaims the minister—"not

in the world, not in the church, nowhere on earth can we be unanimous except by moments. We throw our brother down, and then extend a hand to him in charity—but we have lost the art of standing side by side. Love! it means that you secure a certain woman to yourself to make your hearth bright, and to be yours for ever; it means that you have children who are yours, to perpetuate your name and your tastes and feelings. It does not mean that you stand by your brother for him and not for you!”

Then there followed another pause. The Salem people drew a long breath and looked in each other’s faces. They were guilty, self-convicted; but they could not tell what was to come of it, nor guess what the speaker meant. The anxious faces behind, gazing at him and his audience, were blank and horror-stricken, like so many conspirators whose leader was betraying their cause. They could not tell what accusation he might be going to make against them, to be confirmed by their consciences; but nobody except Tozer had the least conception what he was about to say.

The minister resumed his interrupted speech. Nobody had ventured to cheer him; but during this last pause, seeing that he himself waited, and by way of cheering up their own troubled hearts, a few feeble and timid plaudits rose from the further end of the room. Mr. Vincent hurriedly resumed to stop this, with characteristic impatience. “Wait before you applaud me,” said the Nonconformist. “I have said nothing that calls for applause. I have something more to tell you—more novel than what I have been saying. I am going to leave Carlingford. It was you who elected me, it is you who have censured me, it was you last night who consented to look over my faults and give me a new trial. I am one of those who have boasted in my day that I received my title to ordination from no bishop, from no temporal provision, from no traditionary church, but from the hands of the people. Perhaps I am less sure than I was at first, when you were all disposed to praise me, that the voice of the people is the voice of God; but, however that may be, what I received from you I can but

render up to you. I resign into your hands your pulpit, which you have erected with your money, and hold as your property. I cannot hold it as your vassal. If there is any truth in the old phrase which calls a church a cure of souls, it is certain that no cure of souls can be delegated to a preacher by the souls themselves who are to be his care. I find my old theories inadequate to the position in which I find myself, and all I can do is to give up the post where they have left me in the lurch. I am either your servant, responsible to you, or God's servant, responsible to Him—which is it? I cannot tell; but no man can serve two masters, as you know. Many of you have been kind to me—chief among all," said Vincent, turning once round to look in Tozer's anxious face, "my friend here, who has spared no pains either to make me such a pastor as you wished, or to content me with that place when he had secured it. I cannot be content. It is no longer possible. So there remains nothing but to say good-bye—good-bye!—farewell! I will see you again to say it more formally. I only wish you to understand now that this is the decision I have come to, and that I consider myself no longer the minister of Salem from this night."

Vincent drew back instantly when he had said these words, but not before half the people on the platform had got up on their feet, and many had risen in the body of the room. The women stretched out their hands to him with gestures of remonstrance and entreaty. "He don't mean it; he's not going for to leave us; he's in a little pet, that's all," cried Mrs. Brown, loud out. Phœbe Tozer, forgetting all about the text and the evergreens, had buried her face in her handkerchief and was weeping, not without demonstration of the fact. Tozer himself grasped at the minister's shoulder, and called out to the astonished assembly that "they weren't to take no notice. Mr. Vincent would hear reason. They weren't a-going to let him go, not like this." The minister had almost to struggle through the group of remonstrant deacons. "You don't mean it, Mr. Vincent?" said Mrs. Tozer; "only say as it's a bit o' temper, and you don't mean it!" Phœbe, on her part, raised a tear-wet cheek to listen to the pastor's reply; but the pastor only shook his head, and made no answer to the eager

appeals which assailed him. When he had extricated himself from their hands and outcries, he hastened down the tumultuous and narrow passage between the benches, where he would not hear anything that was addressed to him, but passed through with a brief nod to his anxious friends. Just as Vincent reached the door, he perceived, with eyes which excitement had made clearer than usual, that his enemy, Pigeon, had just got to his feet, who shouted out that the pastor had spoken up handsome, and that there wasn't one in Salem, whatever was their inclination, as did not respect him that day. Though he paid no visible attention to the words, perhaps the submission of his adversary gave a certain satisfaction to the minister's soul; but he took no notice of this nor anything else, as he hurried out into the silent street, where the lamps were lighted, and the stars shining unobserved overhead. Not less dark than the night were the prospects which lay before him. He did not know what he was to do—could not see a day before him of his new career; but, nevertheless, took his way out of Salem with a sense of freedom, and a thrill of new power and vigour in his heart.

Behind he left a most tumultuous and disorderly meeting. After the first outburst of dismay and sudden popular desire to retain the impossible possession which had thus slid out of their hands—after Tozer's distressed entreaty that they would all wait and see if Mr. Vincent didn't hear reason—after Pigeon's reluctant withdrawal of enmity and burst of admiration, the meeting broke up into knots, and became not one meeting, but a succession of groups, all buzzing in different tones over the great event. Resolutions, however, were proposed and carried all the same. Another deputation was appointed to wait on Mr. Vincent. A proposal was made to raise his "salary," and a subscription instituted on the spot to present him with a testimonial. When all these things were concluded, nothing remained but to dismiss the assembly, which dispersed not without hopes of a satisfactory conclusion. The deacons remained for a final consultation, perplexed with alarms and doubts. The repentant Pigeon, restored to them by this emergency, was the most hopeful of all.

Circumstances which had changed his mind must surely influence the pastor. An additional fifty pounds of "salary"—a piece of plate—a congregational ovation—was it to be supposed that any Dissenting minister bred at Homerton could withstand such conciliatory overtures as these?

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUT the deputation and the increased salary and the silver salver were all ineffectual. Arthur would not hear reason, as his mother knew. It was with bitter restrained tears of disappointment and vexation that she heard from him, when he returned to that conference in Susan's room, the events of the evening. It came hard upon the widow, who had invited her son to his sister's bedside that they might for the first time talk together as of old over all their plans. But though her heart ached over the opportunity thus thrown away, and though she asked herself with terror, "What was Arthur to do now?" his mother knew he was not to be persuaded. She smiled on Tozer next morning, ready to cry with vexation and anxiety as she was. "When my son has made up his mind, it will be vain for any one to try to move him," said the widow, proud of him in spite of all, though her heart cried out against his imprudence and foolishness; and so it proved. The minister made his acknowledgments so heartily to the good butterman, that Tozer's disclaimer of any special merit, and declaration that he had but tried to "do his dooty," was made with great faltering and unsteadiness; but the Nonconformist himself never wavered in his resolve. Half of Carlingford sat in tears to hear Mr. Vincent's last sermon. Such a discourse had never been heard in Salem. Scarcely one of the deacons could find a place in the crowded chapel to which all the world rushed; and Tozer himself listened to the last address of his minister from one of the doors of the gallery, where his face formed the apex and culminating point of the crowd to Mr. Vincent's eyes. When Tozer brushed his red handkerchief across his face, as he was moved to do

two or three times in the course of the sermon, the gleam seemed to the minister, who was himself somewhat excited, to redden over the entire throng. It was thus that Mr. Vincent ended his connection with Salem Chapel. It was a heavy blow to the congregation for the time—so heavy that the spirit of the butterman yielded; he was not seen in his familiar seat for three full Sundays after; but the place was mismanaged in Pigeon's hands, and regard for the connection brought Tozer to the rescue. They had Mr. Beecher down from Homerton, who made a very good impression. The subsequent events are so well known in Carlingford, that it is hardly necessary to mention the marriage of the new minister, which took place about six months afterwards. Old Mr. Tufton blessed the union of his dear young brother with the blushing Phœbe, who made a most suitable minister's wife in Salem after the first disagreeables were over; and Mr. Beecher proved a great deal more tractable than any man of genius. If he was not quite equal to Mr. Vincent in the pulpit, he was much more complaisant at all the tea-parties; and, after a year's experience, was fully acknowledged, both by himself and others, to have made an 'it.

Vincent meanwhile plunged into that world of life which the young man did not know; not that matters looked badly for him when he left Carlingford—on the contrary, the connection in general thrilled to hear of his conduct and his speech. The enthusiasm in Homerton was too great to be kept within bounds. Such a demonstration of the rightful claims of the preacher had not been made before in the memory of man; and the enlightened Nonconforming community did honour to the martyr. Three vacant congregations at least wooed him to their pulpits; his fame spread over the country: but he did not accept any of these invitations; and after a while the eminent Dissenting families who invited him to dinner, found so many other independencies cropping out in the young man, that the light of their countenances dimmed upon him. It began to be popularly reported, that a man so apt to hold opinions of his own, and so convinced of the dignity of his office, had best have been in the Church where people knew no better. Such, perhaps, might have

been the conclusion to which he came himself; but education and prejudice and Homerton stood invincible in the way. A Church of the Future—an ideal corporation, grand and primitive, not yet realised, but surely real, to be come at one day—shone before his eyes, as it shines before so many; but, in the mean time, the Nonconformist went into literature, as was natural, and was, it is believed in Carlingford, the founder of the 'Philosophical Review,' that new organ of public opinion. He had his battle to fight, and fought it out in silence, saying little to any one. Sundry old arrows were in his heart, still quivering by times as he fought with the devil and the world in his desert; but he thought himself almost prosperous, and perfectly composed and eased of all fanciful and sentimental sorrows, when he went, two or three years after these events, to Folkestone, to meet his mother and sister, who had been living abroad, away from him, with their charge, and to bring them to the little house he had prepared for them in London, and where he said to himself he was prepared, along with them—a contented but neutral-coloured household—to live out his life.

But when Mr. Vincent met his mother at Folkestone, not even the haze of the spring evening, nor the agitation of the meeting, which brought back again so forcibly all the events which accompanied the parting, could soften to him the wonderful thrill of surprise, almost a shock, with which he looked upon two of the party. The widow, in her close white cap and black bonnet, was unchanged as when she fell, worn out, into his arms on her first visit to Carlingford. She gave a little cry of joy as she saw her son. She trembled so with emotion and happiness, that he had to steady her on his arm and restrain his own feelings till another time. The other two walked by their side to the hotel where they were to rest all night. He had kissed Susan in the faint evening light, but her brother did not know that grand figure, large and calm and noble like a Roman woman, at whom the other passengers paused to look as they went on; and his first glance at the younger face by her side sent the blood back to his heart with a sudden pang and thrill which filled him with amazement at himself.

He heard the two talking to each other, as they went up the crowded pier in the twilight, like a man walking in a dream. What his mother said, leaning on his arm, scarcely caught his attention. He answered to her in monosyllables, and listened to the voices—the low, sweet laughter, the sound of the familiar names. Nothing in Susan's girlish looks had prophesied that majestic figure, that air of quiet command and power. And a wilder wonder still attracted the young man's heart as he listened to the beautiful young voice which kept calling on Susan, Susan, like some sweet echo of a song. These two, had they been into another world, an enchanted country? When they came into the lighted room, and he saw them divest themselves of their wrappings, and beheld them before him, visible tangible creatures and no dreams, Vincent was struck dumb. He seemed to himself to have been suddenly carried out of the meaner struggles of his own life into the air of a court, the society of princes. When Susan came up to him and laid her two beautiful hands on his shoulders, and looked with her blue eyes into his face, it was all he could do to preserve his composure, and conceal the almost awe which possessed him. The wide sleeve had fallen back from her round beautiful arm. It was the same arm that used to lie stretched out uncovered upon her sick-bed like a glorious piece of marble. Her brother could scarcely rejoice in the change, it struck him with so much wonder, and was so different from his thoughts. Poor Susan! he had said in his heart for many a day. He could not say poor Susan now.

"Arthur does not know me," she said, with a low, liquid voice, fuller than the common tones of women. "He forgets how long it is ago since we went away. He thinks you cannot have anything so big belonging to you, my little mother. But it is me, Arthur. Susan all the same."

"Susan perhaps, since you say so—but not all the same," said Arthur, with his astonished eyes.

"And I daresay you don't know Alice either," said his sister. "I was little and Alice

was foolish when we went away. At least I was little in Lonsdale, where nobody minded me. Somehow most people mind me now, because I am so big, I suppose; and Alice, instead of being foolish, is a little wise woman. Come here, Alice, and let my brother see you. You have heard of him every day for three years. At last here is Arthur; but what am I to do if he has forgotten me?"

"I have forgotten neither of you," said the young man. He was glad to escape from Susan's eyes, which somehow looked as if they were a bit of the sky, a deep serene of blue; and the little Alice imagined he did not look at her at all, and was a little mortified in her tender heart. Things began to grow familiar to him after a while. However wonderful they were, they were real creatures, who did not vanish away, but were close by him all the evening, moving about—this with lovely fairy lightness, that with majestic maiden grace—talking in a kind of dual, harmonious movement of sound, filling the soft spring night with a world of vague and strange fascination. The window was opened in their sitting-room, where they could see the lights and moving figures, and, farther off, the sea—and hear outside the English voices, which were sweet to hear to the strangers newly come home. Vincent, while he recovered himself, stood near this window by his mother's chair, paying her such stray filial attentions as he could in the bewilderment of his soul, and slowly becoming used to the two beautiful young women, unexpected apparitions, who transformed life itself and everything in it. Was one his real sister, strange as it seemed? and the other——? Vincent fell back and resigned himself to the strange, sweet, unlooked-for influence. They went up to London together next day. Sunshine did not disperse them into beautiful mists, as he had almost feared. It came upon him by glimpses to see that fiery sorrow and passion had acted like some tropical tempestuous sun upon his sister's youth; and the face of his love looked back upon him from the storm in which it died, as if somehow what was impossible might be possible again. Mrs. Mildmay, a wandering restless soul as she was, happened to be absent from London just then. Alice was still to stay with her dearest friends. The

Nonconformist went back to his little home with the sensation of an enchanted prince in a fairy tale. Instead of the mud-coloured existence, what a glowing, brilliant firmament! Life became glorious again under their touch. As for Mrs. Vincent, she was too happy in getting home—in seeing Susan, after all the anguishes and struggles which no one knew of fully but herself, rising up in all the strength of her youth to this renewed existence—to feel as much distressed as she had expected about Arthur's temporary withdrawal from his profession. It was only a temporary withdrawal, she hoped. He still wore his clerical coat, and called himself "clergyman" in the Blue Book—and he was doing well, though he was not preaching. The Nonconformist himself naturally was less sober in his thoughts. He could not tell what wonderful thing he might not yet do in this wonderful elevation and new inspiring of his heart. His genius broke forth out of the clouds. Seeing these two as they went about the house, hearing their voices as they talked in perpetual sweet accord, with sweeter jars of difference, surprised the young man's life out of all its shadows;—one of them his sister—the other——. After all his troubles, the loves and the hopes came back with the swallows to build under his eaves and stir in his heart.

THE END.

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Typographical errors corrected by the etext transcriber: I hope the congregration will=> I hope the congregation will {pg 180} shoked in all her gentle politeness=> shocked in all her gentle politeness {pg 278}