The Beth Book

by Sarah Grand

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The

Beth Book

Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure A Woman of Genius

BY Sarah Grand

IAGO. Come, hold your peace. EMILIA. 'Twill out, 'twill out:—I hold my peace, Sir? no; I'll be in speaking, liberal as the air: Let heaven, and men, and devils, let them all All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak. SHAKESPEARE

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"I cannot gather the sunbeams out of the east, or I would make them tell you what I have seen; but read this and interpret this, and let us remember together. I cannot gather the gloom out of the night sky, or I would make that tell you what I have seen; but read this and interpret this, and let us feel together. And if you have not that within you which I can summon to my aid, if you have not the sun in your spirit and the passion in your heart which my words may awaken, though they be indistinct and swift, leave me, for I will give you no patient mockery, no labouring insults of that glorious Nature whose I am and whom I serve."— Ruskin.

"The men who come on the stage at one period are all found to be related to one another. Certain ideas are in the air. We are all impressionable, for we are made of them; all impressionable, but some more than others, and these first express them. This explains the curious temporaneousness of inventions and discoveries. The truth is in the air, and the most impressionable brain will announce it first, but all will announce it a few minutes later. So women, as most susceptible, are the best index of the coming hour."—Emerson.

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CHAPTER I

The day preceding Beth's birth was a grey day, a serene grey day, awesome with a certain solemnity, and singularly significant to those who seek a sign. There is a quiet mood, an inner calm, to which a grey day adds peculiar solace. It is like the relief which follows after tears, when hope begins to revive, and the warm blood throbs rebelliously to be free of the shackles of grief; a certain heaviness still lingers, but only as a luxurious languor which is a pleasure in itself. In other moods, however, in pain, in doubt, in suspense, the grey day deepens the depression of the spirits, and also adds to the sense of physical discomfort. Mrs. Caldwell, looking up at noon from the stocking she was mending, and seeing only a slender strip of level gloom above the houses opposite, suddenly experienced a mingled feeling of chilliness and dread, and longed for a fire, although the month was June. She could not afford fires at that time of year, yet she thought how nice it would be to have one, and the more she thought of it the more chilly she felt. A little comfort of the kind would have meant so much to her that morning. She would like to have felt it right to put away the mending, sit by a good blaze with a book, and absorb herself in

somebody else's thoughts, for her own were far from cheerful. She was weak and ill and anxious, the mother of six children already, and about to produce a seventh on an income that would have been insufficient for four. It was a reckless thing for a delicate woman to do, but she never thought of that. She lived in the days when no one thought of the waste of women in this respect, and they had not begun to think for themselves. What she suffered she accepted as her "lot," or "The Will of God"—the expression varied with the nature of the trouble; extreme pain was "The Will of God," but minor discomforts and worries were her "lot." That much of the misery was perfectly preventable never occurred to her, and if any one had suggested such a thing she would have been shocked. The parson in the pulpit preached endurance; and she understood that anything in the nature of resistance, any discussion even of social problems, would not only have been a flying in the face of Providence, but a most indecent proceeding. She knew that there was crime and disease in the world, but there were judges and juries to pursue criminals, doctors to deal with diseases, and the clergy to speak a word in season to all, from the murderer on the scaffold to the maid who had misconducted herself. There was nothing eccentric about Mrs. Caldwell; she accepted the world just as she found it, and was satisfied to know that effects were being dealt with. Causes she never considered, because she knew nothing about them.

But she was ill at ease that morning, and did think it rather hard that she should not have had time to recover from her last illness. She acknowledged to herself that she was very weak, that it was hard to drag the darning-needle through that worn stocking, and, oh dear! the holes were so many and so big that week, and there were such quantities of other things to be done, clothes mended and made for the children, besides household matters to be seen to generally; why wasn't she strong? That was the only thing she repined about, poor woman, her want of physical strength. She would work until she dropped, however, and mortal man could expect no more of her, she assured herself with a sigh of satisfaction, in anticipation of the inevitable

event which would lay her by, and so release her from all immediate responsibility. Worn and weary working mothers, often uncomplaining victims of the cruelest exactions, toilers whose day's work is never done, no wonder they welcome even the illness which enforces rest in bed, the one holiday that is ever allowed them. Mrs. Caldwell thought again of the fire and the book. She had read a good deal at one time, and had even been able to play, and sing, and draw, and paint with a dainty touch; but since her marriage, the many children, the small means, and the failing strength had made all such pursuits an impossible luxury. The fire and the book—who knows what they might not have meant, what a benign difference the small relaxation allowed to the mother at this critical time might not have made in the temperament of the child? Perhaps, if we could read the events even of that one day aright, we should find in them the clue to all that was inexplicable in its subsequent career.

In deciding that she could not afford a fire for herself, Mrs. Caldwell had glanced round the room, and noticed that the whisky bottle on the sideboard was all but empty. She got up hastily, and went into the kitchen.

"I had quite forgotten the whisky," she said to the maid-of-all-work, who was scraping potatoes at the sink. "Your master will be so put out if there isn't enough. You must go at once and get some—six bottles. Bring one with you, and let them send the rest."

The girl turned upon her with a scowl. "And who's to do my dinner?" she demanded.

"I'll do what I can," Mrs. Caldwell answered. The servant threw the knife down on the potatoes, and turned from the sink sullenly, wiping her hands on her apron as she went.

Mrs. Caldwell rolled up her sleeves, and set to work, but awkwardly. Household work comes naturally to many educated women; they like it, and they do it well; but Mrs. Caldwell was not one of this kind. She was not made for labour, but for luxury;

her hands and arms, both delicately beautiful in form and colour, alone showed that. Her whole air betokened gentle birth and breeding. She looked out of place in the kitchen, and it was evident that she could only acquit herself well among the refinements of life. She set to work with a will, however, for she had the pluck and patience of ten men. She peeled vegetables, chopped meat, fetched water, carried coals to mend the fire, did all that had to be done to the best of her ability, although she had to cling many times to table, or chair, or dresser, to recover from the exertion, and brace herself for a fresh attempt. When she had done in the kitchen she went to the dining-room and laid the cloth. The sulky servant did not hurry back. She had a trick of lingering long on errands, and when at last she did appear she brought no whisky.

"They're going to send it," she explained. "They promised to send it at once."

"But I told you to bring a bottle!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, stamping her foot imperiously.

The girl walked off to the kitchen, and slammed the door.

Mrs. Caldwell's forehead was puckered with a frown, but she got out the mending again, and sat down to it in the dining-room with dogged determination.

Presently there was a step outside. She looked up and listened. The front door opened. Her worn face brightened; backache and weariness were forgotten; her husband had come home; and it was as if the clouds had parted and the sun shone forth.

She looked up brightly to greet him. "You've got your work over early to-day," she said.

"I have," he answered drily, without looking at her.

The smile froze on her lips. He had come back in an irritable mood. He went to the sideboard when he had spoken, and poured himself out a stiff glass of whisky-and-water, which he carried to the window, where he stood with his back to

his wife, looking out. He was a short man, who made an instant impression of light eyes in a dark face. You would have looked at him a second time in the street, and thought of him after he had passed, so striking was the peculiar contrast. His features were European, but his complexion, and his soft glossy black hair, curling close and crisp to the head, betrayed a dark drop in him, probably African. In the West Indies he would certainly have been set down as a quadroon. There was no record of negro blood in the family, however, no trace of any ancestor who had lived abroad; and the three moors' heads with ivory rings through their noses which appeared in one quarter of the scutcheon were always understood by later generations to have been a distinction conferred for some special butchery-business among the Saracens.

Mrs. Caldwell glanced at her husband, as he stood with his back to her in the window, and then went on with the mending, patiently waiting till the mood should have passed off, or she should have thought of something with which to beguile him.

When he had finished the whisky-and-water, he turned and looked at her with critical disapprobation.

"I wonder why it is when a woman marries she takes no more pains with herself," he ejaculated. "When I married you, you were one of the smartest girls I ever saw."

"It would be difficult to be smart just now," she answered.

He made a gesture of impatience. "But why should a woman give up everything when she marries? You had more accomplishments than most of them, and now all you do, it seems to me, is the mending."

"The mending must be done," she answered deprecatingly, "and I'm not very strong. I'm not able to do everything. I would if I could."

There was a wild stampede at this moment. The four elder children had returned from school, and the two younger ones from a walk with their nurse, and now burst into the room, in wild spirits, demanding dinner. It was the first bright moment of the morning for their mother, but her husband promptly spoilt her pleasure.

"Sit down at table," he roared, "and don't let me hear another word from any of you. A man comes home to be quiet, and this is the kind of thing that awaits him!"

The children shrank to their places abashed, while their mother escaped to the kitchen to hurry the dinner. The form—or farce—of grace was gone through before the meal commenced. The children ate greedily, but were obediently silent. All the little confidences and remarks which it would have been so healthy for them to make, and so good for their mother to hear, had to be suppressed, and the silence and constraint made everyone dyspeptic. The dinner consisted of only one dish, a hash, which Mrs. Caldwell had made because her husband had liked it so much the last time they had had it. He turned it over on his plate now, however, ominously, blaming the food for his own want of appetite. Mrs. Caldwell knew the symptoms, and sighed.

"I can't eat this stuff," he said at last, pushing his plate away from him.

"There's a pudding coming," his wife replied.

"Oh, a pudding!" he exclaimed. "I know what our puddings are. Why aren't women taught something sensible? What's the use of all your accomplishments if you can't cook the simplest dish? What a difference it would have made to my life if you had been able to make pastry even."

Mrs. Caldwell thought of the time she had spent on her feet in the kitchen that morning doing her best, and she also thought how easy it would have been for him to marry a woman who could cook, if that were all he wanted; but she had no faint glimmering conception that it was unreasonable to expect a woman of her class to cook her dinner as well as eat it. One servant is not expected to do another's work in any establishment; but a mother on a small income, the most cruelly tried of women, is too often required to be equal to anything. Mrs. Caldwell said nothing, however. She belonged to the days when a wife's meek submission to anything a man chose to say made nagging a pleasant relaxation for the man, and encouraged him to

persevere until he acquired a peculiar ease in the art, and spoilt the tempers of everybody about him.

The arrival of the family doctor put an end to the scene. Mrs. Caldwell told the children to run away, and her husband's countenance cleared.

"Glad to see you, Gottley," he said. "What will you have?"

"Oh, nothing, thank you. I can't stay a moment. I just looked in to see how Mrs. Caldwell was getting on."

"Oh, she's all right," her husband answered for her cheerfully. "How are you all, especially Miss Bessie?"

"Ha! ha!" said the old gentleman, sitting down by the table. "That reminds me I'm not on good terms with Bessie this morning. I'm generally careful, you know, but it seems I said something disrespectful about a Christian brother—a Christian brother, mind you—and I've been had up before the family tribunal for blasphemy, and condemned to everlasting punishment. Lord!—But, mark my words," he exclaimed emphatically, "a time will come when every school-girl will see, what my life is made a burden to me for seeing now, the absurdity of the whole religious superstition."

"O doctor!" Mrs. Caldwell cried, "surely you believe in God?"

"God has not revealed Himself to me, madam; I know nothing about Him," the old gentleman answered gently.

"Ah, there you know you are wrong, Gottley," Mr. Caldwell chimed in, and then he proceeded to argue the question. The old doctor, being in a hurry, said little in reply, and when he had gone Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, with wifely tact—

"Well, I think you had the best of that!"

"Well, I think I had, poor old buffer!" her husband answered complacently, his temper restored. "By the way, I've brought in the last number of Dickens. Shall I

read it to you?"

Her face brightened. "Yes, do," she rejoined. "One moment, till Jane has done clearing the table. Here's your chair," and she placed the only easy one in the room for him, in the best light.

These readings were one of the joys of her life. He read to her often, and read exceedingly well. Books were the bond of union between them, the prop and stay of their married life. Poor as they were, they always managed to find money for new ones, which they enjoyed together in this way. Intellectuality balanced the morbid irritability of the husband's temperament, and literature made life tolerable to them both as nothing else could have done. As he read now, his countenance cleared, and his imaginary cares fell from him; while his wife's very real ones were forgotten as she listened, and there was a blessed truce to trouble for a time. Unfortunately, however, as the reading proceeded, he came to a rasping bit of the story, which began to grate upon his nerves. The first part had been pleasurably exciting, but when he found the sensation slipping from him, he thought to stay it with a stimulant, and went to the sideboard for the purpose. Mrs. Caldwell's heart sank; the whisky bottle was all but empty.

"Oh, damn it!" he exclaimed, banging it down on the sideboard. "And I suppose there is none in the house. There never is any in the house. No one looks after anything. My comfort is never considered. It is always those damned children."

"Henry!" his wife protested; but she was too ill to defend herself further.

"What a life for a man," he proceeded; "stuck down in this cursed hole, without a congenial soul to speak to, in or out of the house."

"That is a cruel thing to say, Henry," she remonstrated with dignity.

"Well, I apologise," he rejoined ungraciously. "But you must confess that I have some cause to complain."

He was standing behind her as he spoke, and she felt that he eyed her the while with

disapproval of her appearance, and anger at her condition. She knew the look only too well, poor soul, and her attitude was deprecating as she sat there gazing up pitifully at the strip of level greyness above the houses opposite. She said nothing, however, only rocked herself on her chair, and looked forlornly miserable; seeing which brought his irritation to a climax. He flung the book across the room; but even in the act, his countenance cleared. He was standing in the window, and caught a glimpse of Bessie Gottley, who was passing at the moment on the opposite side of the road, and looked across at him, smiling and nodding invitingly. Mrs. Caldwell saw the pantomime, and her heart contracted with a pang when she saw how readily her husband responded. It was hard that the evil moods should not be conquered for her as well as for Bessie Gottley.

Bridget came in just then, bringing the belated whisky.

"Oh, you did order it," he graciously acknowledged. "Why didn't you say so?" He opened the bottle, and poured some out for himself. "Here's to the moon-faced Bessie!" he said jocularly.

Mrs. Caldwell went on with the mending. Her husband began to walk up and down the room, in a good humour again. He walked peculiarly, more on his toes than his heels, with an odd little spring in each step, as if it were the first step of a dance. This springiness gave to his gait a sort of buoyancy which might have seemed natural to him, if exaggerated, in his youth, but had the air of an affectation in middle life, as if it were part of an assumption of juvenility.

"Won't you go on with the reading?" his wife said at last. His restlessness worried her.

"No," he answered; "I shall go out. I want exercise."

"When will you be back?" she asked wistfully.

"Oh, hang it all! don't nag me. I shall come back when I like."

He left the room as he spoke, slamming the door behind him. Mrs. Caldwell did not

alter her attitude, but the tears welled up in her eyes, and ran down her haggard cheeks unheeded. The children came in, and finding her so, quietly left the room, all but the eldest girl, who went and leant against her, slipping her little hand through her mother's arm. The poor woman kissed the child passionately; then, with a great effort, recovered her self-control, put her work away, gave the children their tea, read to them for an hour, and saw them to bed. The front door was open when she came downstairs, and she went to shut it. A lady, who knew her, happened to be passing, and stopped to shake hands. "I saw your husband just now sitting on the beach with Bessie Gottley," she informed Mrs. Caldwell pleasantly. "They were both laughing immoderately."

"Very likely," Mrs. Caldwell responded with a smile. "She amuses my husband immensely. But won't you come in?"

"No, thank you. Not to-night. I am hurrying home. Glad to see you looking so well;" with which she nodded, and went her way; and Mrs. Caldwell returned to the little dining-room, holding her head high till she had shut the door, when she burst into a tempest of tears. She was a lymphatic woman ordinarily, but subject to sudden squalls of passion, when she lost all self-control.

She would have sobbed aloud now, when the fit was on her, in the face of the whole community, although the constant effort of her life was to keep up appearances. She had recovered herself, however, before the servant came in with the candles, and was sitting in the window looking out anxiously. The greyness of the long June day was darkening down to night now, but there was no change in the sultry stillness of the air. Summer lightning played about in the strip of sky above the houses opposite. One of the houses was a butcher's shop, and while Mrs. Caldwell sat there, the butcher brought out a lamb and killed it. Mrs. Caldwell watched the operation with interest. They did strange things in those days in that little Irish seaport, and, being an Englishwoman, she looked on like a civilised traveller intelligently studying the

customs of a savage people.

But as the darkness gathered, the trouble of her mind increased. Her husband did not return, and a sickening sensation of dread took possession of her. Where had he gone? What was he doing? Doubtless enjoying himself—what bitterness there was in the thought! She did not grudge him any pleasure, but it was hard that he should find so little in her company. Why was there no distraction for her? The torment of her mind was awful; should she try his remedy? She went to the sideboard and poured herself out some whisky, but even as she raised it to her lips she felt it unworthy to have recourse to it, and put the glass down untouched.

After that she went and leant against the window-frame. It was about midnight, and very few people passed. Whenever a man appeared in the distance, she had a moment of hope, but only to be followed by the sickening sensation of another disappointment. The mental anguish was so great that for some time she paid no attention to physical symptoms which had now begun. By degrees, however, these became importunate, and oh the relief of it! The trouble of her mind ceased when the physical pain became acute, and therefore she welcomed it as a pleasant distraction. She was obliged to think and be practical too; there was no one in the house to help her. The sleeping children were of course out of the question, and the two young servants, maid-of-all-work and nurse, nearly as much so. Besides, there was the difficulty of calling them. She felt she must not disturb Jane who was in the nursery, for fear of rousing the children; but should she ever get to Bridget's room, which was further off? Step by step she climbed the stairs, clinging to the banister with one hand, holding the candle in the other. Several times she sank down and waited silently, but with contracted face, till a paroxysm had passed. At last she reached the door. Bridget was awake and had heard her coming. "Holy Mother!" she exclaimed, startled out of her habitual sullenness by her mistress's agonised face. "Yer ill, ma'am! Let me help you to your bed!"

"Fetch the doctor and the nurse, Bridget," Mrs. Caldwell was just able to gasp.

In the urgency and excitement of the moment, there was a truce to hostilities. Bridget jumped up, in night-dress and bare feet, and supported her mistress to her room. There she was obliged to leave her alone; and so it happened that, just as the grey dawn trembled with the first flush of a new and brighter day, the child arrived unassisted and without welcome, and sent up a wail of protest. When the doctor came at last, and had time to attend to her, he pronounced her to be a fine child, and declared that she had made a good beginning, and would do well for herself, which words the nurse declared to be of happy omen. Her father was not fit to appear until late in the day. He came in humbly, filled with remorse for that mis-spent night, and was received with the feeble flicker of a smile, which so touched and softened him that he made more of the new child, and took a greater interest in her than he had done in any of the others at the time of their birth. There was some difficulty about a name for her. Her father proposed to call her Elizabeth—after his sister, he said—but Mrs. Caldwell objected. Elizabeth was Miss Gottley's name also, a fact which she recollected, but did not mention. That she did not like the name seemed reason enough for not choosing it; but her husband persisted, and then there was a hot dispute on the subject above the baby's cradle. The dispute ended in a compromise, the mother agreeing to have the child christened Elizabeth if she were not called so; and she would not have her called Eliza, Elsie, Elspeth, Bessie, Betsy, or Bess either. This left nothing for it but to call her Beth, and upon consideration both parents liked the diminutive, her father because it was unaccustomed, and her mother because it had no association of any kind attached to it.

For the first three months of her life Beth cried incessantly, as if bewailing her advent. Then, one day, she opened her eyes wide, and looked out into the world with interest.

CHAPTER II

It was the sunshine really that first called her into conscious existence, the blessed heat and light; up to the moment that she recognised these with a certain acknowledgment of them, and consequently of things in general outside herself, she had been as unconscious as a white grub without legs. But that moment roused her, calling forth from her senses their first response in the thrill of warmth and well-being to which she awoke, and quickening her intellect at the same time with the stimulating effort to discover from whence her comfort came. She could remember no circumstance in connection with this earliest awakening. All she knew of it was the feeling of warmth and brightness, which she said recurred to her at odd times ever afterwards, and could be recalled at will.

Some may see in this first awakening a foreshadowing of the fact that she was born to be a child of light, and to live in it; and certainly it was always light for which she craved, the actual light of day, however; but nothing she yearned for ever came to her in the form she thought of, and thus, when she asked for sunshine it was grudgingly given, fate often forcing her into dark dwellings; but all the time that light which illumines the spirit was being bestowed upon her in limitless measure.

The next step in her awakening was to a kind of self-consciousness. She was lying on her nurse's lap out of doors, looking up at the sky, and some one was saying, "Oh, you pretty thing!" But it was long years before she connected the phrase with herself, although she smiled in response to the voice that uttered it. Then she found herself on her feet in a garden, moving very carefully for fear of falling; and everything about her was gigantic, from Jane Nettles, the nurse, at whose skirt she tugged when she wanted to attract attention, to the brown wallflower and the purple larkspur which she could not reach to pull. There was a thin hedge at the end of the garden, through which she looked out on a path across a field, and a thick hedge on her left, in which a thrush had built a nest at an immense height above her head. Jane

lifted her up to look into the nest, and there was nothing in it; then Jane lifted her up again, and, oh! there was a blue egg there; and Jane lifted her up a third time, and the egg had brown spots on it. The mystery of the egg awed her. She did not ask herself how it came to be there, but she felt a solemn wonder in the fact, and the colour caused a sensation of pleasure, a positive thrill, to run through her. This was her first recognition of beauty, and it was to the beauty of colour, not of form, that her senses awoke! Through life she had a keen joy and nice discrimination in colours, and seemed to herself to have always known their names.

But those spots on the egg. She was positive that they had come between her first and second peep, which shows how defective her faculty of observation, which became so exact under cultivation, was to begin with. Beth also betrayed other traits with regard to the spots, which she carried through life—the trick of being most positive when she was quite in the wrong, for one; and want of faith in other people, for another.

Jane said: "Did you see the spots that time, dearie?"

"Spots just comed," Beth declared.

"No, dearie, spots always there," Jane answered.

"Spots comed," Beth maintained.

"No, dearie. Spots always there, only you didn't see them."

"Spots comed now!" Beth stamped, and then, because Jane shook her head, she sat down suddenly on the gravel, and sent up a howl which brought her father out. He chucked Jane under the chin. Jane giggled, then made a sign; and there was Mrs. Caldwell looking from one to the other.

To Beth's recollection it seemed as if she had rapidly acquired the experiences of this first period. Each incident that she remembered is apparently trifling in itself, but who can say of what significance as an indication? In those first few years, had there been any there with intelligence to interpret, they probably would have found

foreshadowings of all she might be, and do, and suffer; and that would have been the time to teach her. To me, therefore, these earliest impressions are more interesting than much that occurred to her in after life, and I have carefully collected them in the hope of finding some clue in them to what followed. In several instances it seems to me that the impression left by some chance observation or incident on her baby mind, made it possible for her to do many things in after life which she certainly never would have done but for those early influences. It would be affectation, therefore, to apologise for such detail. Nothing can be trivial or insignificant that tends to throw light on the mysterious growth of our moral and intellectual being. Many a cramped soul that struggles on in after years, vainly endeavouring to rise on a broken wing, might, had the importance of such seeming trifles in its development been recognised, have won its way upward from the first, untrammelled and uninjured. It was a Jesuit, was it not, who said: "Give me the child until it is six years old; after that you can do as you like with it." That is the time to make an indelible impression of principles upon the mind. In the first period of life, character is a blossom that should be carefully touched; in the second the petals fall, and the fruit sets; it is hard and acrid then until the third period, when, if things go well, it will ripen on the bough, and be sweet and wholesome—if ill, it will drop off immediately, and rot upon the ground.

Beth was a combative child, always at war with Jane. There was a great battle fought about a big black velvet bonnet that Beth wanted to wear one day. Beth screamed and kicked and scratched and bit, and finally went out in the bonnet triumphantly, and found herself standing alone on the edge of a great green world dotted with yellow gorse. A hot, wide dusty road stretched miles away in front of her; and at an infinite distance overhead was the blue sky flecked with clouds so white and dazzling that her eyes ached when she looked at them. She had stopped a moment to cry, "Wait for me!" Jane walked on, however, taking no notice, and Beth struggled after her, whimpering, out of breath, choked with dust, scorched with heat,

parched with thirst, tired to death—how she suffered! A heartless lark sang overhead, regardless of her misery: and she never afterwards heard a lark without recalling the long white road, the heat, and dust, and fatigue. She tore off the velvet bonnet, and threw it away, then began another despairing "Wait for me!" But in the midst of the cry she saw some little yellow flowers growing in the grass at the roadside, and plumped down then and there inconsequently to gather them. By that time Jane was out of sight; and at the moment Beth became aware of the fact, she also perceived an appalling expanse of bright blue sky above her, and sat, gazing upwards, paralysed with terror. This was her first experience of loneliness, her first terrified sensation of immensity.

Then the snowdrops and crocuses were out, and the sky grew black, and she sat on the nursery floor and looked up at it in solemn wonder. Flakes of snow began to fall, a few at first, then thicker and thicker, till the air was full of them, and Jane said, "The Scotch are picking their geese," and immediately Beth saw the Scotch sitting in some vague scene, picking geese in frenzied haste, and throwing great handfuls of feathers up in the air; which was probably the first independent flight of her imagination.

It is astonishing how little consciousness of time there is in these reminiscences. The seasons are all confounded, and it is as if things had happened not in succession but abreast. There was snow on the ground when her brother Jim was with her in the wash-house, making horse-hair snares to catch birds. They made running loops of the horse-hair, and tied them on to sticks, then went out and stuck them in the ground in the garden outside the wash-house window, sprinkled crumbs of bread, and crept carefully back to watch. First came a robin with noiseless flight, and lit on the ground with its head on one side; but the children were too eager, and in their excitement they made a noise, and the robin flew away. Next came a sparrow, saw the children, saw the crumbs, and, with the habitual self-possession of his race, stretched in his head between the sticks, picked out the largest piece of bread, and

carried it off in triumph. Immediately afterwards a blackbird flew down, and hopped in among the snares unconsciously. In a moment he was caught, and, with a wild shout of joy, the children rushed out to secure their prize; but when they reached the spot the blackbird had burst his bonds and escaped. Then Beth threw a chunk of wood at her brother, and cut his head open. His cries brought out the household, and Beth was well shaken—she was always being shaken at this time—and marched off promptly to papa's dressing-room, and made to sit on a little chair in the middle of the floor, where she amused herself by singing at the top of her voice—

"All around Sebastopol, All around the ocean, Every time a gun goes off, Down falls a Russian."

She wondered why her father and mother were laughing when they came to release her. Before they appeared, however, brother Jim, her victim, had come to the door with his head tied up, and peeped in; and she knew that they were friends again, because he shot ripe gooseberries at her across the floor as if they had been marbles. There is a discrepancy here, seeing that snow and ripe gooseberries are not in season at the same time. It is likely, however, that she broke her brother's head more than once, and the occasions became confounded in her recollection.

When the children went to bathe off the beach, Beth would not let Jane dip her if kicking, scratching, and screaming could prevent it. There used to be terrible scenes between them, until at last one day somebody else's old Scotch nurse interfered, and persuaded Beth to go into the water with her and consent to be dipped three times. Beth went like a lamb—instead of having to be dragged in and pushed under, given no time to recover her breath between each dip, half choked with sand and salt water, and finally dragged out, exhausted by the struggle, and certainly suffering more than she had benefited by the immersion. The cold water came up about her and took her breath away as the old Scotch nurse led her in, and Beth clung to her hand and panted "Wait!" as she nerved herself for the dip. Nurse had promised to

wait until Beth was ready, and it was Beth's faith in her promise that gave her courage to go bravely through the ordeal. The old Scotch nurse never deceived her as Jane had done, and so Beth learnt that there are people in the world you can depend on.

There was one painful circumstance in connection with those battles on the beach. Beth was such a tiny girl, they did not think it necessary to give her a bathing dress, and consequently she was marched into the water with nothing on; and the agony of shame she suffered is indescribable. But the worst of it was, the shame wore off. Jim teased her about it and called her "a little girl," a dreadful term of reproach in those days, when the boys were taught to consider themselves superior beings. Beth flew at him, and fought him for it, but was beaten; and then she took off her things in the nursery, and scampered up and down before them all, with nothing on, just to show how little she cared.

It is astonishing how small a part Beth's family play in these childish recollections. Her father took very little notice of the children. He was out of health and irritable, and only tried to save himself annoyance; not to disturb him was the object of everybody's life. Probably he only appeared on the scene when Beth was naughty, and the recollection, being painful, was quickly banished. She remembered him coming downstairs when she was standing in the hall one day, when her mother was away from home. He had a letter in his hand, and asked her if she would send her love to mamma. Her heart bounded; it seemed to her such a tremendous thing to be asked; and she was dying to send her love; but such an agony of shyness came upon her, she could not utter a word. She had a little hymn-book in her hand, however, which she held out to her father. No, that would not do. He could not send the book, only her love. Didn't she love mamma? Didn't she! But not a word would come.

All through life she was afflicted with that inability to speak at critical times. Dumb always was she apt to be when her affections were concerned, except occasionally,

in moments of strong excitement; and in anger, when she was driven to bay. The intensity of her feelings would probably have made her dumb in any case in moments of emotion; but doubtless the hardness of those about her at this impressionable period strengthened the defect. It is impossible to escape from the hampering influences of our infancy. Among Beth's many recollections of these days, there was not one of a caress given or received, or of any expression of tenderness; and so she never became familiar with the exquisite language of love, and was long in learning that it is not a thing to be ashamed of and concealed.

Later that day, with a mighty effort, she summoned up courage enough to go down to her father. She was determined to send the message to mamma; but when it came to the point, she was again unable to utter a word on the subject. Her mother had gone to stay with her relations in England. Beth found her father in the dining-room, and several other people were present. He was standing by the sideboard, mixing whisky-and-water, so, instead of sending her love to mamma, Beth exclaimed, confidently and pleasantly, "If you drink whisky, you'll be drunk again."

A smart slap rewarded this sally. Beth turned pale and recoiled. It was her first taste of human injustice. To drink and to be drunk was to her merely the natural sequence of cause and effect, and she could not conceive why she should be slapped and turned out of the room so promptly for uttering such a simple truth.

Beth was present at many discussions between her father and mother, and took much interest in them, all the more perhaps, because most of what was said was a mystery to her. She wondered why any mention of the "moon-faced Bessie" disturbed her mother's countenance. Jane Nettles, too—when her mother was out, her father used to come and talk to Jane, and they laughed a good deal. He admired Jane's white teeth, and the children used to make Jane show them her teeth after that.

"Papa says Jane's got nice white teeth," Beth said to her mother one day, and she never forgot the glance which Mrs. Caldwell threw at her husband. His eyes fell

before it.

"What! even the servants, Henry!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, and then she left the room. Beth learned what it all meant in after years, the career of one of her brothers furnishing the clue. Like father, like son.

It was after this that Mrs. Caldwell went to visit her relations in England, accompanied by two of the children. It was in the summer, and Jane took Beth to the Castle Hill that morning to see the steamer, with her mother on board, go by. The sea was iridescent, like molten silver, the sky was high and cloudless, and where sea and sky met and mingled on the horizon it was impossible to determine. Numbers of steamers passed far out. They looked quite small, and Beth did not think there was room in any of them for her mother and brother and sister. They did not, therefore, interest her much, nor did the policeman who came and talked to Jane. But the Castle Hill, and the little winding path up which she had come, the green of the grass, the brambles, the ferns, the ruined masonry against which she leant, the union of sea and sky and shore, the light, the colour, absorbed her, and drew her out of herself. Her soul expanded, it spread its wings, it stretched out spiritual arms to meet and clasp the beloved nature of which it felt itself to be a part. It was her earliest recognition of their kinship, a glimpse of greatness, a moment of ecstasy never to be forgotten, the first stirring in herself of the creative faculty, for in her joy she burst out into a little song—

"Far on the borders of the Arcane."

It was as if the pleasure played upon her, using her as a passive instrument by which it attained to audible expression. For how should a child know a word like Arcane? It came to her as things do which we have known and forgotten—the whole song did in fact; but she held it as a possession sacred to herself, and never recorded it, or told more than that one line, although it stayed with her, lingered on her lips, and in her heart, for the rest of her life. It was a great moment for Beth, the moment when her

further faculty first awoke. On looking back to it in after years, she fancied she found in it confirmation of an opinion which she afterwards formed. Genius to her was yet only another word for soul. She could not believe that we all have souls, or that they are at all equally developed even in those who have obtained them. She was a child under six at this time, Jane Nettles was a woman between twenty and thirty, and the policeman—she could not say what age he was; but she was the only one of the three that throbbed responsive to the beauty of the wonderful scene before them, or felt her being flooded with the glory of the hour.

Meanwhile, what her parents would have called her education had begun. She went with Mildred, her elder sister, to a day school. They used to run down the street together without a nurse, and the sense of freedom was delicious to Beth. They had to pass the market where the great mealy specimen potatoes were displayed, and Mary Lynch's shop—she was the vegetable woman, who used to talk to Mrs. Caldwell about the children when they went there, and one or the other always called them "poor little bodies," upon which they commented afterwards among themselves. Mary Lynch was a large red-faced woman, and when the children wanted to describe a stout person they always said, "As fat as Mary Lynch." One house which Beth had to pass on her way to school made a strong impression on her imagination. It was a gloomy abode with a broad doorstep and deep portico, broken windows, and a mud-splashed door, from beneath which she always expected to see a slender stream of blood slowly trickling. For a man called Macgregor had murdered his wife there—beaten her brains out with a poker. Beth never heard the name Macgregor in after life without a shiver of dislike. Much of her time at school was spent in solitary confinement for breaches of the peace. With a face as impassive as a monkey's she would do the most mischievous things, and was always experimenting in naughty tricks, as on one occasion when Miss Deeble left the schoolroom for a minute, but had to come hurrying back, recalled by wild shrieks; and found that Beth had managed in that minute to tip up a form with four children

on it, throw their books out of the window, and sprinkle ink all over the floor. Miss Deeble marched her downstairs to an empty kitchen, and left her sitting on a stool in the middle of it with an A B C in her hand. But Beth took no interest in the alphabet in those days, and hunted black-beetles with the bellows instead of learning it. The hearthstone was the place of execution. When she found a beetle, she would blow him along to it with the bellows, and there despatch him. She had no horror of any creature in her childhood, but as she matured, her whole temperament changed in this respect, and when she met a beetle on the stairs she would turn and fly rather than pass it, and she would feel nauseated, and shiver with disgust for hours after if she thought of it. She knew the exact moment that this horror came upon her; it happened when she was ten years old. She found a beetle one day lying on its back, and thinking it was dead, she took it up, and was swinging it by its antennæ when the creature suddenly wriggled itself round, and twined its prickly legs about her finger, giving her a start from which she never recovered.

Beth probably got as far as A B ab, while she was at Miss Deeble's; but if she were backward with her book, her other faculties began to be acute. It was down in that empty kitchen that she first felt the enchantment of music. Some one suddenly played the piano overhead and Beth listened spell-bound. Again and again the player played, and always the same thing, practising it. Beth knew every note. Long afterwards she was trying some waltzes of Chopin's, and came upon one with which she was quite familiar. She knew that she had heard it all, over and over again, but could not think when or where. Presently, however, as she played it, she perceived a smell of black-beetles, and instantly she was back in that disused kitchen of Miss Deeble's, listening to the practising overhead.

All Beth's senses were acute, and from the first her memory helped itself by the involuntary association of incongruous ideas. Many people's recollections are stimulated by the sense of smell, but it is a rarer thing for the sense of taste to be associated with the past in the same way, as it was in Beth's case. There were many

circumstances which were recalled by the taste of the food she had been eating at the time they occurred. The children often dined in the garden in those early days, and once a piece of apple-dumpling Beth was eating slid off her plate on to the gravelled walk. Some one picked it up, and put it on her plate again, all covered with stones and grit, and the sight of hot apple-dumpling made her think of gravel ever afterwards, and filled her with disgust; so that she could not eat it. She had a great aversion to bread and butter too for a long time, but that she got over. It would have been too great an inconvenience to have a child dislike its staple food, and in all probability she was forced to conquer her aversion, and afterwards she grew to like bread and butter; but still, if by any chance the circumstances which caused her dislike to it recurred to her when she was eating a piece, she was obliged to stop. The incident which set up the association happened one evening when her father and mother were out. Beth was alone in the dining-room eating bread and butter, and Towie, the cat, came into the room with a mouse in her mouth. The mouse was alive, and Towie let it run a little way, and then pounced down upon it, then gave it a pat to make it run again. Beth, lying on her stomach on the floor, watching these proceedings, naturally also became a cat with a mouse. At last Towie began to eat her mouse, beginning with its head, which it crushed. Beth, eating her bread and butter in imitation, saw the white brains, but felt no disgust at the moment. The next time she had bread and butter, however, she thought of the mouse's brains and felt sick; and always afterwards the same association of ideas was liable to recur to her with the same result.

But even the description of anything horrifying affected her in this way. One day when she was growing up her mother told her at dinner that she had been on the pier that morning and had seen the body of a man, all discoloured and swollen from being in the water a long time, towed into the harbour by a fishing boat. Beth listened and asked questions, as she always did on these occasions, with the deepest interest. She was taking soup strongly flavoured with catsup at the moment, and the

story in no way interfered with her appetite; but the next time she tried catsup, and ever afterwards, she perceived that swollen, discoloured corpse, and immediately felt nauseated. It is curious that all these associations of ideas are disagreeable. She had not a single pleasant one in connection with food.

CHAPTER III

All of Beth that was not eyes at this time was ears, and her brain was as busy as a squirrel in the autumn, storing observations and registering impressions. It does not do to trust to a child's not understanding. It may not understand at the moment, but it will remember all the same—all the more, perhaps, because it does not understand; and its curiosity will help it to solve the problem. Beth did humorous things at this time, but she had no sense of humour; she was merely experimenting. Her big eyes looked out of an impassive face solemnly; no one suspected the phenomenal receptivity which that stolid mask concealed, and, because the alphabet did not interest her, they formed a poor opinion of her intellect. The truth was that she had no use for letters or figures. The books of nature and of life were spread out before her, and she was conning their contents to more purpose than any one else could have interpreted them to her in those days. And as to arithmetic, as soon as her father began to allow her a penny a week for pocket-money, she discovered that there were two half-pennies in it, which was all she required to know. She also mastered the system of debit and credit, for, when she found herself in receipt of a regular income, and had conquered the first awe of entering a shop and asking for things, she ran into debt. She received the penny on Saturday, and promptly spent it in sweets, but by Monday she wanted more, and the craving was so imperative, that when Miss Deeble sent her down to the empty kitchen in the afternoon, she could not blow black-beetles with any enthusiasm, and began to look about for something else to interest her. It being summer, the window was open, but it was rather out of

her reach. She managed, however, with the help of her stool, to climb on to the sill, and there, in front of her, was the sea, and down below was the street—a goodish drop below if she had stopped to think of it; but Beth dropped first and thought afterwards, only realising the height when she had come down plump, and looked up again to see what had happened to her, surprised at the thud which had jarred her stomach and made her feet sting. She picked herself up at once, however, and limped away, not heeding the hurt much, so delightful was it to be out alone without her hat. By the time she got to Mary Lynch's she was Jane Nettles going on an errand, an assumption which enabled her to enter the shop at her ease.

"Good-day," she began. "Give me a ha'porth of pear-drops, and a ha'porth of raspberry-drops, Mary Lynch, please. I'll pay you on Saturday."

"What are you doing out alone without your hat?" Mary Lynch rejoined, beaming upon her. "I'm afraid you're a naughty little body."

"No, I'm not," Beth answered. "It's my own money." Mary Lynch laughed, and helped her liberally, adding some cherries to the sweets; and, to Beth's credit be it stated, the money was duly paid, and without regret, she being her mother at the moment, looking much relieved to be able to settle the debt, which shows that, even by this time, Beth had somehow become aware of money-troubles, and also that she learned to read a countenance long before she learned to read a book.

She straggled home with the sweets in her hand, but did not eat them, for now she was a lady going to give a party, and must await the arrival of her guests. She did not go in by the front door for obvious reasons, but up the entry down which the open wooden gutter-spout ran, at a convenient height, from the house into the street. The wash-house was covered with delicious white roses, which scented the summer afternoon. Beth concealed her sweets in the rose-tree, and then leant against the wall and buried her nose in one of the flowers, loving it. The maids were in the wash-house; she heard them talking; it was all about what he said and she said.

Presently a torrent of dirty water came pouring down the spout, mingling its disagreeable soapy smell with that of the flowers. Beth plucked some petals from the rose she was smelling, set them on the soapy water, and ran down the passage beside them, until they disappeared in the drain in the street. This delight over, she wandered into the garden. She was always on excellent terms with all animals, and was treated by them with singular confidence. Towie, the cat, had been missing for some time, but now, to Beth's great joy, she suddenly appeared from Beth could not tell where, purring loudly, and rubbing herself against Beth's bare legs. The sun poured down upon them, and the sensation of the cat's warm fur above her socks was delicious. Beth tried to lift her up in her arms, but she wriggled herself out of them, and began to run backwards and forwards between her and a gap in the hedge, until Beth understood that she wished her to follow her through it into the next garden. Beth did so, and the cat led her to a little warm nest where, to Beth's wild delight, she showed her a tiny black kitten. Beth picked it up, and carried it, followed by the cat, into the house in a state of breathless excitement, shrieking out the news as she ran. Beth was immediately seized upon. What was she doing at home when she ought to have been at school? and without her hat, too! Beth had no explanation to offer, and was hustled off to the nursery, and there shut up for the rest of the day. She stood in the window most of the time, a captive princess in the witch's palace, waiting for the fairy-prince to release her, and catching flies.

The sky became overcast, and a big gun was fired. Beth's father had something to do with the firing of big guns, and she connected this with the gathering gloom, stories of God striking wicked people down with thunder and lightning for their sins, and her own naughtiness, and felt considerably awed. Presently a little boy was carried down the street on a bed. His face looked yellow against the sheets. He was lying flat on his back, and had a little black cap on, which was right out of doors, but wrong in bed. He smiled up at Beth as they carried him under the window, and she stretched out her arms to him with infinite pity. She knew he was going to die. They

all died, that family, or had something dreadful happen to them. Jane Nettles said there was a curse upon them, and Beth never thought of them without a shudder. That boy's sisters both died, and one had something dreadful happen to her, for they dug her up again, and when they opened the coffin the corpse was all in a jelly, and every colour of the rainbow, according to Jane Nettles. Beth believed she had been present upon the occasion, in a grass-grown graveyard, by the wall of an old church, beneath which steps led down into a vault. The stones of the steps were mossy, and the sun was shining. There was a little group of people standing round, with pale, set, solemn faces, and presently something was brought up, and they all pressed forward to look at it. Beth could not see what it was for the grown-up people, and never knew whether or not the whole picture had been conjured up by her imagination; but as there was always a foundation of fact in the impressions of this period of her life, it is not improbable that she really was present at the exhumation, with the curious and indefatigable Jane Nettles.

Opposite the nursery window, on the other side of the road, was the butcher's shop, in front of which the butcher made his shambles. Late in the evening he brought out a board and set it on trestles, then he brought a sheep, lifted it up by its legs and put it on its back on the board, tied its feet, and cut its throat. Beth watched the operation with grave interest, but no other feeling. She had been accustomed to see it all her life.

Presently Beth's father and mother went out together, and then Beth stole downstairs, and out to the wash-house to find the sweets in the white rose-tree. Mildred and Jim were doing their lessons in the dining-room, and she burst in upon them with the sweets; but Mildred was cross, and said:

"Don't make such a noise, Beth, my head aches."

The next day was Sunday. Beth knew it by the big black bonnet which played such a large part in her childish recollections. She had a kind of sensation of having seen

herself in it, bobbing along to church, a sort of Kate Greenaway child, with a head out of all proportion to the rest of her body, and feeling singularly satisfied—a feeling, however, which was less a recollection than an experience continually renewed, for a nice gown or bonnet was always a pleasure to her.

In church she sat in a big square pew on one side of the aisle, and on the other side was another pew exactly like it, in which sat a young lady whom Beth believed to be Miss Augusta Noble in the Fairchild Family. Augusta Noble was very vain, and got burnt to death for standing on tiptoe before the fire to look at herself in a new frock in the mirror on the mantelpiece. Beth thought it a suitable end for her, and did not pity her at all—perhaps because she went on coming to church regularly all the same.

After the service they climbed the Castle Hill; and there was the grey of stonework against a bright blue sky, and green of grass and trees against the grey, and mountainous clouds of dazzling white hung over a molten sea; and because of the beauty of it all, Beth burst into a passion of tears.

"What is the matter with that child?" her father exclaimed impatiently. "It's very odd other people can bring up their children properly, Caroline, but you never seem to be able to manage yours."

"What's the matter with you, you tiresome child?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, shaking Beth by the arm. Beth only sobbed the more. "Look," said her mother, pointing to a small lake left by the sea on the shore when the tide went out, where the children used to wade knee-deep, or bathe when it was too rough for them to go into the sea; "look, there's the pond, that bright round thing over there. And look below, near the Castle—that great green mound is the giant's grave. When the giant died they buried him there, and he was so big, he reached all that length when they laid him in the ground."

"And when he stood up where did he reach to?" said Beth, interested in a moment.

"Oh, when he sat here, I should think he could make a footstool of his own grave, and when he stood up he could look over the Castle."

Beth, with big dilated eyes and wet cheeks, saw him do both, and was oppressed to tears no more that day by delight and wonder of the beautiful; but she was always liable to these paroxysms, the outcome of an intensity of pleasure which was positive pain. So, from the first, she was keenly susceptible to outdoor influences, and it was now that her memory was stored with impressions which were afterwards of inestimable value to her, for she never lived amongst the same kind of scenery again.

The children had the run of some gentleman's grounds, which they called The Walks. There were banks of flowers, and sidewalks where the London pride grew, and water, and great trees with hollows in them where the water lodged. Beth called these fairy wells, and put her fingers in to see how deep they were, and there were dead leaves in them; and there, on a memorable occasion, she found her first skeleton leaf, and told Jane Nettles she really didn't know before that there were such things. Once there was a wasp's nest hanging from a branch, and they met a young man coming away from it, holding a handkerchief to his face. He stopped to tell Jane Nettles how he had been stung, and the children wandered off unheeded to look at the nest. It was all grey and gossamer, like cobwebs laid in layers. Beth was an Indian scout inspecting it from behind a neighbouring tree; and then she shelled it with sticks, but did not wait to see it surrender.

They picked up horse-chestnuts from under the trees, in the season, and hammered the green rind off with stones for the joy of seeing the beautiful shining, slippery, dark brown, or piebald, polished fruit within; and also, when there were wet leaves on the ground, they gathered walnuts from out of the long tangled grass, and stained their fingers picking off the covering, which was mealy-green when it burst, and smelt nice; but the nut itself, when they came to it, was always surprisingly small.

There were horrid mahogany-coloured pieces of liver put about the walks on sticks sometimes. Jane Nettles said they were to poison the dogs because they came in and destroyed the flowers. Beth wondered how it was people could eat liver if it poisoned dogs, and was careful afterwards not to touch it herself. Most children would have worried the reason out of their nurse, but Jane Nettles was not amiable, and Beth could never bring herself to ask a question of any one who was likely either to snub her for asking, or to jeer at her for not knowing. There are unsympathetic people who have a way of making children feel ashamed of their ignorance, and rather than be laughed at, a sensitive child will pretend to know. Beth was extraordinarily sensitive in this respect, and so it happened that, in later life, she sometimes found herself in ignorance of things which less remarkable people had learnt in their infancy for the asking.

These were certainly days of delight to Beth, but the charm of them was due less to people than to things—to some sight or scent of nature, the smell of new-mown hay from a waggon they had stood aside to let pass in a narrow lane, a glimpse of a high bank on the other side of the road—a high grassy bank, covered and crowned with trees, chiefly chestnuts, on which the sun shone; hawthorn hedgerows from which they used to pick the green buds children call bread-and-butter, and eat them; and one privet-hedge in their own garden, an impenetrable hedge, on the other side of which, as Beth imagined, all kinds of wonderful things took place. The flowers of those early days were crocuses, snowdrops, white roses, a little yellow flower they called ladies' fingers, sea-pinks, and London pride—particularly London pride. In the walks Jane Nettles used to teach her the wonderful rhyme of—

"London Bridge is broken down, Grand, said the little Dee, London Bridge is broken down, Fair-Lade-ee."

And so the rhyme, London pride amongst the rock-work, the ornamental water, a rustic bridge, shining laurel leaves, mahogany-coloured liver, warmth, light, and

sweet airs all became mingled in one gracious memory.

People, however, as has been already shown, also came into her consciousness, but with less certainty of pleasing, wherefore she remembered them less, for it was always her habit to banish a disagreeable thought if she could. One day she went into the garden with her spade and an old tin biscuit-box. She put the box on the ground beside her, with the lid off, and began to dig. By-and-by the kitten came crooning and sidling up to her, and hopped into the box. Beth instantly put on the lid, and the kitten was a corpse which must be buried. She hurriedly dug its grave, put in the box, and covered it up with earth. Just as she had finished, a gruff voice exclaimed: "What are ye doing there, ye little divil?" and there was old Krangle the gardener, looking at her over the hedge. "Dig it up again directly," he said, and Beth, much startled, dug it up quicker than she had buried it. The kitten had been but loosely covered, and was not much the worse, but had got some earth in its eye, which was very sore afterwards. People wondered what had hurt it, and Beth looked from one to the other and listened with grave attention to their various suppositions on the subject. She said nothing, however, and Krangle also held his peace, which led to a very good understanding between them. Krangle had a cancer on his lip, and Beth was forbidden to kiss him for fear of catching it. He had a garden of his own too, and a pig, and little boiled potatoes in his cottage. The doctor's brother died of cancer, and Beth supposed he had been naughty and kissed old Krangle, though she wondered he cared to, as Krangle had a very prickly chin. The doctor often came to see papa. He used to talk about the Bible, and then the children were sent out of the room. Once Beth hid under the table to hear what he said. It was all about God, whom it appeared that he did not like. He had a knob at the end of his nose, and Beth laughed at it, in punishment of which, as she used to believe, her own nose developed a little knob at the end. Her mind was very much exercised about the doctor and his household. He and his brother and sister used to live together, but now he lived alone, and on a bed in one of the rooms, according to Jane Nettles,

there were furs, and lovely silks, satins, and laces, all being eaten by moths and destroyed because there was no one to look after them. It seemed such a pity, but whose were they? Where was the lady?

Bridget used to come up to the nursery when the children were in bed, to talk to Jane Nettles, and look out of the window. Those gossips in the nursery were a great source of disturbance to Beth when she ought to have been composing herself to sleep. She recollected nothing of the conversations more corrupting than that ghastly account of how the girl was exhumed, so it is likely that the servants exercised some discretion when they dropped their voices to a whisper, as they often did; but these whispered colloquies made her restless and cross, and brought down upon her a smart order to go to sleep, to which she used to answer defiantly, "I will if you'll ask me a riddle." One of the riddles was: "Between two sticks, between two stones, between two old men's shin-bones. What's that?" The answer had something to do with a graveyard, but Beth could not remember what.

She used to suffer a small martyrdom in her little crib on those evenings from what she called "snuff up her nose," a hot, dry, burning sensation which must have been caused by a stuffy room, and the feverish state she tossed herself into when she was kept awake after her regular hour for sleep. Sometimes she sat up in bed suddenly, and cried aloud. Then Jane Nettles would push her down again on her pillow roughly, and threaten to call mamma if she wasn't good directly. Occasionally mamma heard her, and came up of her own accord, and shook her by the shoulder, and scolded her. Then Beth would lie still sobbing silently, and wretched as only a lonely, uncomprehended, and uncomplaining child can be. No one had the faintest conception of what she suffered. Her naughtinesses were remembered against her, but her latent tenderness was never suspected. Once the old Doctor said: "That's a peculiarly sensitive, high-strung, nervous child; you must be gentle with her," and both parents had stared at him. They were matter-of-fact creatures themselves, comparatively speaking, with a notion that such nonsense as nervousness should be

shaken out of a child.

At dinner, one day, Beth saw little creatures crawling in a piece of cheese she had on her plate, and uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Those are only mites, you silly child," her father said, and then to her horror, he took up the piece, and ate it. "Do look at that child, Caroline!" he exclaimed, "she's turned quite pale."

Beth puzzled her head for long afterwards to know what it meant to turn pale.

Little seeds of superstition were sown in her mind at this time, and afterwards flourished. She found a wedding-ring in her first piece of Christmas cake, and was told she would be the first of the party to marry, which made her feel very important.

Being so sensitive herself, she was morbidly careful of the feelings of others, and committed sins of insincerity without compunction in her efforts to spare them. She and Mildred were waiting ready dressed one day to go and pay a call with mamma. Beth had her big bonnet on, and was happy; and Mildred also was in a high state of delight. She said Beth's breath smelt of strawberries, and wanted to know what her own smelt of.

"Raspberries," Beth answered instantly. It was not true, but Beth felt that something of the kind was expected of her, and so responded sympathetically. When they got to the house, they were shown into an immense room, and wandered about it. Beth upset some cushions, and had awful qualms, expecting every moment to be pounced upon, and shaken; but she forgot her fright on approaching her hostess, and discovering to her great surprise that she was busy doing black monkeys on a grey ground in woolwork. She was astonished to find that it was possible to do such wonderful work, and she wanted to be taught immediately; but her mother made her ashamed of herself for supposing that she could do it, silly little body. They stayed dinner, and Beth cried with rage because the servant poured white sauce over her fish, and without asking her too. The fish was an island, and Beth was the hungry

sea, devouring it bit by bit. Of course if you put white sauce over it, you converted it into a table with a white cloth on, or something of that kind, which you could not eat, so the fish was spoilt. She got into a difficulty, too, about Miss Deeble's drawing-room, which was upstairs, overlooking the bay, and you could only see the water from the window, so there were water-colours on the wall. Her mother smilingly tried to explain, but Beth stamped, and stuck to her point; the water accounted for the water-colours.

On the way home, Beth found a new interest in life. The mill had been burnt down, and they went to see the smouldering embers, and Beth smelt fire for the first time. The miller's family had been burnt out, and were sheltering in a shed. One little boy had his fingers all crumpled up from the fire. Beth's benevolence awoke. She was all sympathetic excitement, and wanted to do something for somebody. The miller's wife was lying on a mattress on the floor. She had a little baby, a new one, a pudgy red-looking thing. Mrs. Caldwell fed the other children with bread-and-milk, and Beth offered to teach them their letters.

Mrs. Caldwell laughed at her: "You teach them their letters!" she exclaimed. "You had better learn your own properly." And Mildred also jeered. Beth subsided, crimson with shame at being thus lowered in everybody's estimation. She was deficient in self-esteem, and required to be encouraged. Praise merely gave her confidence; but her mother never would praise her. She brought all her children up on the same plan, regardless of their different dispositions. It made Mildred vain to praise her, and therefore Beth must not be praised; and so her mother checked her mental growth again and again instead of helping her to develop it. "It's no use your trying to do that, Beth, you can't," she would say, when Beth would have done it easily, if only she had been assured that she could.

Beth had a strange dream that night after the fire, which made a lasting impression upon her. Dorman's Isle was a green expanse, flat as a table, and covered with the

short grass that grows by the sea. At high tide it was surrounded by water, but when the tide was low, it rested on great grey, rugged rocks, as the lid of a box rests upon its sides. Between the grey of the rocks and the green of the grass there was a fringe of sea-pinks. That night she dreamt that she was under Dorman's Isle, and it was a great bare cave, not very high, and lighted by torches which people held in their hands. There were a number of people, and they were all members of her own family, ancestors in the dresses of their day, distant relations—numbers of strange people whom she had never heard of; as well as her own father and mother, brothers and sisters. She knew she was under Dorman's Isle, but she knew also that it was the dark space beneath the stage of a theatre. When she entered, the rest of the family were already assembled; but they none of them spoke to each other, and the doors kept opening and shutting, and the people seemed to melt away, until at last only three or four remained, and they were just going. She saw the shine on the paint of the door-posts, and the smoke of the torches, as they let themselves out. Then they had all gone, and left her alone in a cave full of smoke. Vainly she struggled to follow them, the doors were fast, the smoke was smothering her, and in the agony of a last effort to escape she awoke.

In after days, when Beth began to think, she used to wonder how it was she knew those people were her ancestors, and that the place was like any part of a theatre. She had never heard either of ancestors or theatres at that time. Was it recollection? Or is there some more perfect power to know than the intellect—a power lying latent in the whole race, which will eventually come into possession of it; but with which, at present, only some few rare beings are perfectly endowed. Beth had the sensation of having been nearer to something in her infancy than she ever was again—nearer to knowing what it is the trees whisper—what the murmur means, the all-pervading murmur which sounds incessantly when everything is hushed, as at night; nearer to the "arcane" of that evening on the Castle Hill when she first felt her kinship with nature, and burst into song. It may have been hereditary memory, a

knowledge of things transmitted to her by her ancestors along with their features, virtues, and vices; but, at any rate, she herself was sure that she possessed a power of some kind in her infancy which gradually lapsed as her intellectual faculties developed. She was conscious that the senses had come between her and some mysterious joy which was not of the senses, but of the spirit. There lingered what seemed to be the recollection of a condition anterior to this, a condition of which no tongue can tell, which is not to be put into words, or made evident to those who have no recollection; but which some will comprehend by the mere allusion to it. All her life long Beth preserved a half consciousness of this something—something which eluded her—something from which she gradually drifted further away as she grew older—some sort of vision which opened up fresh tracts to her; but whether of country, or whether of thought, she could not say. Only, when it came to her, all was immeasurable about her; and she was above—above in a great calm through which she moved without any sort of effort that is known to us; she just thought it, and was there; while humanity dwindled away into insignificance below.

One other strange vision she had which she never forgot. With her intellect, she believed it to have been a dream, but her further faculty always insisted that it was a recollection. She was with a large company in an indescribable, hollow space, bare of all furnishments because none were required; and into this space there came a great commotion, bright light and smoke, without heat or sense of suffocation. Then she was alone, making for an aperture; struggling and striving with pain of spirit to gain it; and when she had found it, she shot through, and awoke in the world. She awoke with a terrible sense of desolation upon her, and with the consciousness of having traversed infinite space at infinite speed in an interval of time which her mortal mind could not measure.

All through life, when she was in possession of her further faculty, and perceived by that means—which was only at fitful intervals, doubtless because of unfavourable circumstances and surroundings—she was calm, strong, and confident. She looked

upon life as from a height, viewing it both in detail and as a whole. But when she had only her intellect to rely upon, all was uncertain, and she became weak, vacillating, and dependent. So that she appeared to be a singular mixture of weakness and strength, courage and cowardice, faith and distrust; and just what she would do depended very much on what was expected of her, or what influence she was under, and also on some sudden impulse which no one, herself included, could have anticipated.

CHAPTER IV

Up to this time, Beth's reminiscences jerk along from incident to incident, but now there come the order and sequence of an eventful period, perfectly recollected. The date is fixed by a change of residence. Her father, who was a commander in the coastguard, was transferred on promotion from the north of Ireland to another appointment in the wild west, and Beth was just entering upon her seventh year when they moved. Captain Caldwell went on in advance to take up his appointment, and Jim accompanied him; Mildred, Beth, and Bernadine, the youngest, who had arrived two years after Beth, being left to follow with their mother. The elder children had been sent to England to be educated. In their father's absence Mildred and Bernadine were transferred to their mother's room, Jane Nettles and Bridget, the sulky, had disappeared, and Kitty slept in the nursery with Beth. Beth had grown too long for her crib, but still had to sleep in it, and her legs were cramped at night and often ached because she could not stretch them out, and the pain kept her awake.

"Mamma, my legs do ache in bed," she said one day.

"Beth, you really are a whiny child, you always have a grievance," her mother complained.

"But, mamma, they do ache."

"Well, it's only growing pains," Mrs. Caldwell replied with a satisfied air, as if to

name the trouble were to ease it. And so Beth's legs ached on unrelieved, and, when they kept her awake, Kitty became the object of her contemplation. The sides of the crib were like the seat of a cane-bottomed chair, and Beth had enlarged one of the holes by fidgeting at it with her fingers. This was her look-out station. A night-light had been conceded to her nervousness at the instance of Dr. Gottley, when it became a regular thing for her to wake in the dark out of one of her vivid dreams, and shriek because she could not see where she was. The usual beating and shaking had been tried to cure her of her nonsense, but this sensible treatment only seemed to make her worse, she was such a tiresome child, till at last, when Dr. Gottley threatened serious consequences, the light was allowed, a dim little float that burned on an inch of oil in a glass of water, and made Kitty look so funny when she came up to bed. Kitty began to undress, and at the same time to mutter her prayers, as soon as she got into the room; and sometimes she would go down on her knees and beat her breast, and sigh and groan to the Blessed Virgin, beseeching her to help her. Beth thought at first she was in great distress, and pitied her, but after a time she believed that Kitty was enjoying herself, perhaps because she also had begun to enjoy these exercises. Beth had been taught to say her Protestant prayers, but not made to feel that she was addressing them to any particular personality that appealed to her imagination, as Kitty's Blessed Lady did.

"Kitty, Kitty," she cried one night, sitting up in her crib, with a great dry sob. "Tell me how to do it. I want to speak to her too."

Kitty, who was on her knees on the floor, with her rosary clasped in her hands, her arms and shoulders bare, and her dark hair hanging down her back, looked up, considerably startled: "Holy Mother! how you frightened me!" she exclaimed. "Go to sleep."

"But I want to speak to her," Beth persisted.

"Arrah, be good now, Miss Beth," Kitty coaxed, still on her knees.

"I'll be good if you'll tell me what to say," Beth bargained.

Kitty rose from her knees, went to the side of the crib, and looked down at the child.

"What do ye want to say to her at all?" she asked.

"I don't know," Beth answered. "I just want to speak to her. I just want to say, 'Holy Mother, come close, I love you. Stay by me all night long, and when the daylight comes don't forget me.' How would you say that, Kitty?"

"Bless your purty eyes, darlint!" said Kitty, "just say it that way every time. It couldn't be better said, not by the praste himself. An' if the Blessed Mother ever hears anything from this world," she added in an undertone, "she'll hear that. But turn over now, an' go to sleep, honey. See! I'll stand here till ye do, and sing to you!"

Beth turned over on her left side with her face to the wall, and settled herself to sleep contentedly, while Kitty stood beside her, patting her shoulder gently, and crooning in a low sweet voice—

"Look down, O Mother Mary, From thy bright throne above; Send down upon thy children One holy glance of love! And if a heart so tender With pity flows not o'er, Then turn, O Mother Mary, And smile on me no more."

As Beth listened her little heart expanded, and presently the Blessed Virgin stood beside her bed, a heavenly vision, like Kitty, with dark hair growing low on her forehead and hanging down her back, blue eyes, and an earnest, guileless face. Beth's little mouth, drooping with dissatisfaction ordinarily, curled up at the corners, and so, thoroughly tranquillised, she fell happily asleep, with a smile on her lips.

Kitty bent low to look at her, and shook her head several times. "Coaxin's better nor bating you, anyway," she muttered. "But what are they going to do wid ye at all?" She stood up, and raised her clasped hands. "Holy Mother, it 'ud be well maybe if ye'd take her to yourself—just now—God forgive me for saying it."

Next morning Mrs. Caldwell was sitting at breakfast with Beth and Mildred. Every

moment she glanced at the window, and at last the postman passed. She listened, but there was no knock, and her heart sank.

"Beth, will you stop drumming with your spoon?" she exclaimed irritably. As she spoke, however, Kitty came in with the expected letter in her hand, and Mrs. Caldwell's countenance cleared: "I thought the postman had passed," she exclaimed.

"No, m'em," Kitty rejoined. "I was standin' at the door, an' he gave me the letter."

Mrs. Caldwell had opened it by this time, but it was very short. "How often am I to tell you not to stand at the door, letting in the cold air, Kitty?" she snapped.

"And how'd I sweep the steps, m'em, if you plase, when I'm not to stand at the door?"

But Mrs. Caldwell was reading the letter, and again her countenance cleared. "Papa wants us to go to him as soon as ever we can get ready!" was her joyful exclamation. "And, oh, they've had such snow! See, Mildred, here's a sketch of the chapel nearly buried."

"Oh, let me see, too," Beth cried, running round the table to look over Mildred's shoulder.

"Did papa draw that? How wonderful!"

"Beth, don't lean on me so," Mildred said crossly, shaking her off.

The sketch, which was done in ink on half a sheet of paper, showed a little chapel with great billows of snow rolling along the sides and up to the roof. After breakfast, Mildred sat down and began to copy it in pencil, to Beth's intense surprise. The possibility of copying it herself would never have occurred to her, but when she saw Mildred doing it of course she must try too. She could make nothing of it, however, till Mildred showed her how to place each stroke, and then she was very soon weary of the effort, and gave it up, yawning. Drawing was not to be one of her accomplishments.

Kitty was to accompany them to the west.

When the day of departure arrived, a great coach and pair came to the door, and the luggage was piled up on it. Beth, with her mouth set, and her eyes twice their normal size from excitement, was everywhere, watching everybody, afraid to miss anything that happened. Her mother's movements were a source of special interest to her. At the last moment Mrs. Caldwell slipped away alone to take leave of the place which had been the first home of her married life. She was a young girl when she came to it, the daughter of a country gentleman, accustomed to luxury, but right ready to enjoy poverty with the man of her heart; and poverty enough she had had to endure, and sickness and sorrow too—troubles inevitable—besides some of those other troubles, which are the harder to bear because they are not inevitable. But still, she had had her compensations, and it was of these she thought as she took her last leave of the little place. She went to the end of the garden first, closely followed by Beth, and looked through the thin hedge out across the field. She seemed to be seeing things which were farther away than Beth's eyes could reach. Then she went to an old garden seat, touched it tenderly, and stood looking down at it for some seconds. Many a summer evening she had sat there at work while her husband read to her. It was early spring, and the snowdrops and crocuses were out. She gathered a little bunch of them. When she had made the tour of the garden, she returned to the house, and went into every room, Beth following her faithfully, at a safe distance. In the nursery she stood some little time looking round at the bare walls, and seeming to listen expectantly. No doubt she heard ghostly echoes of the patter of children's feet, the ring of children's voices. As she turned to go she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. In her own room she lingered still longer, going from one piece of furniture to another, and laying her hand on each. It was handsome furniture, such as a lady should have about her, and every piece represented a longer or shorter period of self-denial, both on her own part and on her husband's, and a proportionately keen joy in the acquisition of it. She remembered so well when the wardrobe came home,

and the dressing-table too, and the mahogany drawers. The furniture was to follow to the new home, and each piece would still have its own history, but, once it was moved from its accustomed place, new associations would have to be formed, and that was what she dreaded. She could picture the old home deserted, and herself yearning for it, and for the old days; but she could not imagine a new home or a new chapter of life with any great interest or pleasure in it, anything, in fact, but anxiety.

When at last she left the house, she was quite overcome to find that a little crowd of friends of every degree had collected to wish her good speed. She went from one to the other, shaking hands, and answering their words in kindly wise. Mary Lynch gave Beth a currant-cake, and lifted her into the coach, though she could quite well have got in by herself. Then they were off, and Mrs. Caldwell stood at the door, wiping her eyes, and gazing at the little house till they turned the corner of the street, and lost sight of it for ever.

The tide was out, Dorman's green Isle rested on its grey rocks, the pond shone like a mirror on the shore, and the young grass was springing on the giant's grave; but the branches were still bare and brown on the Castle Hill, and the old grey castle stood out whitened by contrast with a background of dark and lowering sky. Beth's highly-strung nerves, already overstrained by excitement, broke down completely under the oppression of those heavy clouds, and she became convulsed with sobs. Kitty took her on her knee, but tried in vain to soothe her before the currant-cake and the motion of the coach had made her deadly sick, after which she dozed off from sheer exhaustion.

The rest of the journey was a nightmare of nausea to her. She was constantly being lifted out of the carriage, and made to lie on a sofa somewhere while the horses were being changed, or put to bed for the night, and dragged up again unrefreshed in the early morning, and consigned once more to misery. Sometimes great dark mountains towered above her, filling her with dread; and sometimes a long lonely level of bare

brown bogs was all about her, overwhelming her little soul with such a terrible sense of desolation that she cowered down beside Kitty, and clung to her shivering.

Once her mother shook her for something, and Beth turned faint.

"What's the matter with her, Kitty?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, alarmed by her white face.

"You've jest shook the life out of her, m'em, I think," Kitty answered her tranquilly: "An' ye'll not rare her that way, I'm thinking."

Mrs. Caldwell began to dislike Kitty.

On the third day they drove down a delightful road, with hedges on either hand, footpaths, and trees, among which big country-houses nestled. The mountains were still in the neighbourhood, but not near enough to be awesome. On one side of the road was a broad shallow stream, so clear you could see the brown stones at the bottom, a salmon-stream with weirs and waterfalls.

They were nearing a town, and Kitty began to put the things together. Beth became interested. Mamma looked out of the window every instant, and at last she exclaimed in a tone of relief, which somehow belied the words: "Here's papa! I knew he would come!" And there was a horse at the window, and papa was on the horse, looking in at them. Mamma's face became quite rosy, and she laughed a good deal and showed her teeth. Beth had not noticed them before.

"What are you staring at, Beth?" Mildred whispered.

"Mamma's all pink," Beth said.

"That's blushing," said Mildred.

"What's blushing?" said Beth.

"Getting pink."

"What does she do it for?"

"She can't help it."

Beth continued to stare, and at last Mrs. Caldwell noticed it, and asked her what she was looking at.

"You've got nice white teeth," said Beth. Mrs. Caldwell smiled.

"Have you only just discovered that?" papa asked through the window.

"You never told me," Beth protested, thinking herself reproached. "You said Jane Nettles had."

The smile froze on mamma's lips, and papa's horse became unmanageable. Beth saw there was something wrong, and stopped, looking from one to the other intently.

Mrs. Caldwell recovered herself. "What a stolid face she has!" she remarked presently by way of breaking an awkward pause.

Beth wondered what "stolid" meant, and who "she" was.

"She doesn't look well," papa observed.

"She's jest had the life shook out of her, sir," Kitty put in.

"Kitty, how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell began.

"It's to the journey I'm alludin' now, m'em," Kitty explained with dignity. "The child can't bear the travellin'."

"Well, it won't last much longer now," said papa, and then made some remark to mamma in Italian, which brought back her good-humour. They always spoke Italian to each other, because papa did not know French so well as mamma did. Beth supposed at that time that all grown-up people spoke French or Italian to each other, and she used to wonder which she would speak when she was grown up.

They stopped at an inn for an hour or two, for there was still another stage of this interminable journey. Mildred had a bag with a big doll in it, and some almond-sweets. She left it on a window-seat when they went to have something to eat, and when she thought of it again it was nowhere to be found.

"They would steal the teeth out of your head in this God-forsaken country," Captain

Caldwell exclaimed, in a tone of exasperation.

An awful vision of igneous rocks, with mis-shapen creatures prowling about amongst them, instantly appeared to Beth in illustration of a God-forsaken country, but she tried vainly to imagine how stealing teeth out of your head was to be managed.

When they set off again, and had left the grey town with its green trees and clear rivulet behind, the road lay through a wild and desolate region. Great dark mountains rolled away in every direction, and were piled up above the travellers to the very sky. The scene was most melancholy in its grandeur, and Beth, gazing at it fascinated, with big eyes dilated to their full extent, became exceedingly depressed. At one turn of the way, in a field below, they saw a gentleman carrying a gun, and attended by a party of armed policemen.

"That's Mr. Burke going over his property," Captain Caldwell observed to his wife. "He's unpopular just now, and daren't move without an escort. His life's not worth a moment's purchase a hundred yards from his own gate, and I expect he'll be shot like a dog some day, with all his precautions."

"Oh, why does he stay?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"Just pluck," her husband answered; "and he likes it. It certainly does add to the interest of life."

"O Henry! don't speak like that," Mrs. Caldwell remonstrated. "They can't owe you any grudge."

Captain Caldwell flipped a fly from his horse's ear.

Beth gazed down at the doomed gentleman, and fairly quailed for him. She half expected to see the policemen turn on him and shoot him before her eyes, and a strange excitement gradually grew upon her. She seemed to be seeing and hearing and feeling without eyes, or ears, or a body.

The carriage rocked like a ship at sea, and once or twice it seemed to be going right over.

"What a dreadfully bad road!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"Yes," her husband rejoined, "the roads about here are the very devil. This is one of the best. Do you see that one over there?" pointing with his whip to a white line that zigzagged across a neighbouring mountain. "It's disused now. That's Gallows Hill, where a man was hanged."

Beth gazed at the spot with horror. "I see him!" she cried.

"See whom?" said her mother.

"I see the man hanging."

"Oh, nonsense!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. "Why, the man was hanged ages ago. He isn't there now."

"You must speak the truth, young lady," papa said severely.

Beth, put to shame by the reproof, shrank into herself. She was keenly sensitive to blame. But all the same her great grey eyes were riveted on the top of the hill, for there, against the sky, she did distinctly see the man dangling from the gibbet.

"Kitty," she whispered, "don't you see him?"

"Whisht, darlint," Kitty said, covering Beth's eyes with her hand. "I don't see him. But I'll not be after calling ye a liar because ye do, for I guess ye see more nor most, Holy Mother purtect us! But whisht now, you mustn't look at him any more."

The carriage came to the brow of the mountain, and down below was their destination, Castletownrock, a mere village, consisting principally of one long, steep street. Some distance below the village again, the great green waves of a tempestuous sea broke on a dangerous coast.

"The two races don't fuse," papa was saying to mamma, "in this part of the country, at all events. There's an Irish and an English side to the street. The English side has a

flagged footpath, and the houses are neat and clean, and well-to-do; on the Irish side all is poverty and dirt and confusion."

Just outside the village, a little group of people waited to welcome them—Mr. Macbean the rector, Captain Keene, the three Misses Keene, and Jim.

The carriage was stopped, and they all got out and walked the rest of the distance to the inn, where they were to stay till the furniture arrived. On the way down the street they saw their new home. It made no impression on Beth. But she recognised the Roman Catholic Chapel on the other side of the road from papa's drawing, only it looked different because there was no snow.

The "gentleman and lady" who kept the inn, Mr. and Mrs. Mayne, with their two daughters, met them at the door, and shook hands with mamma, and kissed the children.

Then they went into the inn parlour, and there was wine and plum-cake, and Dr. and Mrs. Macdougall came with their little girl Lucy, who was eleven years old, Mildred's age.

Mr. Macbean, the rector, who was tall and thin, and had a brown beard that waggled when he talked, drew Beth to his side, and began to ask her questions, just when she wanted so much to hear what everybody else was saying, too.

"Well, and what have you been taught?" he began.

Beth gazed at him blankly.

"Do you love God?" he proceeded, putting his hand on her head.

Beth looked round the room, perplexed, then fixed her eyes on his beard, and watched it waggle with interest.

"Ask her if she knows anything about the other gentleman," Captain Keene put in jocosely—"here's to his health!" and he emptied his glass.

Beth's great eyes settled upon him with sudden fixity.

"I suppose you never heard of the devil?" he proceeded.

"Oh yes, I have," was Beth's instant and unexpected rejoinder. "The devil is a bad road."

There was an explosion of laughter at this.

"But you said so, papa," Beth remonstrated indignantly.

"My dear child, I said just the reverse."

"What's the reverse?" said Beth, picturing another personality.

"There now, that will do," Mrs. Caldwell interposed. "Little bodies must be seen and not heard."

Mr. Macbean stroked Beth's head—"There is something in here, I expect," he observed.

"Not much, I'm afraid," Mrs. Caldwell answered. "We've hardly been able to teach her anything."

"Ah!" Mr. Macbean ejaculated, reflecting on the specimen he had heard of the method pursued. "You must let me see what I can do."

CHAPTER V

In a few days all the bustle of getting into the new house began. The furniture arrived in irregular batches. Some of it came and some of it did not come. When a box was opened there was nothing that was wanted in it, only things that did not go together, and mamma was worried, and papa was cross.

The workpeople were wild and ignorant, and only trustworthy as long as they were watched. They were unaccustomed to the most ordinary comforts of civilised life, particularly in the way of furniture. When the family arrived at the house one morning, they found Mrs. Caldwell's wardrobe, mahogany drawers, and other articles of bedroom furniture, set up in conspicuous positions in the sitting-room,

and the carpenter was much ruffled when he was ordered to take them upstairs.

"Shure it's mad they are," he remonstrated to one of the servants, "to have sich foine things put in a bedroom where nobody'll see thim."

The men came up from the coastguard station to scrape the walls, and Ellis, the petty officer, used the bread-knife, and broke it, and papa bawled at him. Beth was sorry for Ellis.

The house was built of stone, and very damp. There was a great deal of space in it, but little accommodation. On the ground-floor were a huge hall, kitchen, pantry and sitting-room, all flagged. The sitting-room was the only one in the house, and had to be used as dining-room and drawing-room, but it was large enough for that and to spare. There was a big yard and a big garden too, and Riley was in the stable, and Biddy and Anne in the kitchen, and Kitty in the nursery. This increase of establishment, which meant so much to the parents, was accepted as a matter of course by the children.

Kitty told Riley and Biddy and Anne about what Beth had seen on Gallows Hill, and they often asked Beth what she saw when she used to sit looking at nothing. Then Beth would think things, and describe them, because it seemed to please the servants. They used to be very serious, and shake their heads and cross themselves, with muttered ejaculations, but all the time they liked it. This encouraged Beth, and she used to think and think of things to tell them.

Beth was exceedingly busy in her own way at this time. Her mind was being rapidly stored with impressions, and nothing escaped her.

The four children and Kitty were put all together in one great nursery, an arrangement of which Kitty, with the fastidious delicacy of a strict Catholic, did not at all approve.

"Indeed, m'em," she said, "I'm thinkin' Master Jim's too sharp to be in the nursery wid his sisters now."

"Nonsense, Kitty," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. "How can you be so evil-minded? Master Jim's only a child—a baby of ten!"

"Och, thin, me'm, it's an ould-fashioned baby he is," said Kitty; "and I'm thinkin' it's a bit of a screen or a curtain I'd like for dressin' behind if he's to be wid us."

"I have nothing of the kind to give you," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. And afterwards she made merry with papa about Kitty's prudishness.

But Kitty was right as it happened. Jim had been left pretty much to his own devices during the time he had been alone with his father at Castletownrock. Captain Caldwell's theory was that boys would look after themselves, "and the sooner you let 'em the sooner you'd make men of 'em. Blood will tell, sir. Your gentleman's son is a match for any ragamuffin"—a theory which Jim justified in many a free fight; but, during the suspension of hostilities he hobnobbed with the ragamuffins, who took a terrible revenge, for by the time Mrs. Caldwell arrived Jim was thoroughly corrupted. Kitty took precautions, however. She arranged the nursery-life so that Master Jim did not associate with his sisters more than was absolutely necessary. She had him up in the morning, bathed, and sent off to school before she disturbed the little girls, and at night she never left the nursery until he was asleep. Out of her slender purse she bought some print, and fixed up a curtain for his sisters to dress behind, and all else that she had to do for the children was done decently and in order. She had almost entire charge of them, their mother being engrossed with her husband, whose health and spirits had already begun to suffer from overwork and exposure to the climate.

Kitty was teaching her charges dainty ways, mentally as well as physically. When she had washed them at night, she made them purge their little souls of all the sins of the day in prayer, and in the morning she taught them how to fortify themselves with good resolutions. Beth took naturally to the Catholic training, and solemnly dedicated herself to the Blessed Virgin; Mildred conformed, but without enthusiasm;

the four-year-old baby Bernadine lisped little Aves; but Jim, in the words of Captain Keene, "the old buffalo," as their father called him, sneered at that sort of thing "as only fit for women."

"Men drink whisky," said Jim, puffing out his chest.

"True for ye," said Kitty; "but I've been told that them as drinks whisky here goes dry in the next world."

"Well, I shall drink whisky and kiss the girls all the same," said Jim. "And I wouldn't be a Catholic now, not to save me sowl. I owe the Catholics a grudge. They insulted me."

"How so?" asked Kitty.

"At the midnight Mass last Christmas. Father John got up, and ordered all heretics out of the sacred house of God, and Pat Fagan ses to me, 'Are ye a heretic?' and I ses, 'I am, Pat Fagan.' 'Thin out ye go,' ses he, and, but for that, I'd 'a' bin a Catholic; so see what you lose by insulting a gentleman."

"What's insulting?" Beth asked.

Jim slapped her face. "That's insulting," he explained.

Beth struck him back promptly, and a scuffle ensued.

"Oh, but it's little divils yez are, the lot of ye!" cried Kitty as she separated them.

During fits of nervous irritability Captain Caldwell had a habit of pacing about the house for hours at a time. One evening he happened to be walking up and down on the landing outside the nursery door, which was a little way open, and his attention was attracted by Beth's voice. She was reciting a Catholic hymn softly, but with great feeling, as if every word of it were a pleasure to her.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded, breaking in on her devotions. "What papistical abominations have you been teaching the child, Kitty?"

"Shure, sorr, it's jest a bit of a hymn," said Kitty bravely; but her heart sank, and the

colour left her lips.

Captain Caldwell was furious.

"Caroline!" he called peremptorily, going to the head of the stairs, "Caroline, come up directly!"

Mrs. Caldwell fussed up in hot haste.

"Do you know," Captain Caldwell demanded, "that this woman is making idolaters of your children? I heard this child just now praying to the Virgin Mary! Do you hear?"

Mrs. Caldwell's pale face flushed with anger.

"How dare you do such a thing, you wicked woman?" she exclaimed. "I shall not keep you another day in the house. Pack up your things at once, and go the first thing in the morning."

"O mamma!" Beth cried, "you're not going to send Kitty away? Kitty, Kitty, you won't go and leave me?"

"There, you see!" Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "You see the influence she's got over the child already! That's the Jesuit all over!"

"An ignorant woman like you, who can hardly read and write, setting up to teach my children, indeed—how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell stormed.

"Well, m'em, I am an ignorant woman that can hardly read and write," Kitty answered with dignity; "but I could tell you some things ye'll not find out in all yer books, and may be they'd surprise ye."

"Kitty, ye'll not go and leave me," Beth repeated passionately.

"Troth, an' I'd stay for your sake if I could," said Kitty, "fur it's a bad time I'm afraid ye'll be havin' once I'm gone."

"Do you hear that?" Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "Now you see what comes of getting people of this kind into the house. She's going to make out that the child is

ill-treated."

"One of my children ill-treated!" Mrs. Caldwell cried scornfully. "Who would believe her?" Then turning to Beth: "If I ever hear you repeat a word that wicked woman has taught you, I'll beat you as long as I can stand over you."

Kitty looked straight into Mrs. Caldwell's face, and smiled sarcastically, but uttered not a word.

"How dare you stand there, grinning at me in that impertinent way, you low woman?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed with great exasperation. "I believe you are a Jesuit, sent here to corrupt my children. But go you shall to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I'll go, m'em," Kitty answered quietly. She knew the case was hopeless.

"There, now," said Mrs. Caldwell, turning to her husband. "Do you see? That shows you! She doesn't care a bit."

Beth was clinging to Kitty, but her mother seized her by the arm, and flung her half across the room, and was about to follow her, but Captain Caldwell interfered. "That will do," he said significantly. "It's no use venting your rage on the child. In future choose your nurses better."

"Then, in future, give me better advice when I consult you about them," Mrs. Caldwell retorted, following him out of the room.

Beth clung to Kitty the whole night long, and had to be torn from her in the morning, screaming and kicking. She stood in front of her mother, her eyes and cheeks ablaze:—

"I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin—I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin—every hour of my life," she gasped, "and you can't prevent me. Beat me as long as you can stand over me if you like, but I'll only pray the harder."

"For God's sake, m'em," Kitty cried, clasping her hands, "let that child alone. Shure she's a sweet lamb if you'd give her a chance. But ye put the divil into her wid yer

shakin' an' yer batin', and mischief'll come of it sooner or later, mark my words."

When Kitty had gone, Mrs. Caldwell shut Beth up in the nursery with Baby Bernadine. Beth threw herself on the floor, and sobbed until she had exhausted her tears; then she gathered herself together, and sat on the floor with her hands clasped round her legs, her chin on her knees, looking up dreamily at the sky, through the nursery window. Her pathetic little face was all drawn and haggard and hopeless. But presently she began to sing—

"Ave Maria! Mother of the desolate! Guide of the unfortunate! Hear from thy starry home our prayer: If sorrow will await us, Tyrants vex and hate us, Teach us thine own most patient part to bear! Sancta Maria! When we are sighing, When we are dying, Give to us thine aid of prayer!"

As she sang, comfort came to her, and the little voice swelled in volume.

Baby Bernadine also sat on the floor, opposite to Beth, and gazed at her, much impressed. When she had finished singing, Beth became aware of her sister's reverent attention, and put out her tongue at her. Bernadine laughed. Then Beth crisped up her hands till they looked like claws, and began to make a variety of hideous faces. Bernadine thought it was a game and smiled at first, but finally she ceased to recognise her sister and shrieked aloud in terror. Beth heard her mother hurrying up, and got behind the door so that her mother could not see her as she opened it. Mrs. Caldwell hurried up to the baby—"The darling, then, what have they been doing to you?"—and Beth made her escape. As she crossed the hall, some one knocked at the front door. Beth opened it a crack. Captain Keene was outside. When she saw him, she recollected something she had heard about his religious opinions, and began to question him eagerly. His answers were apparently exciting, for presently she flung the door wide open to let him in, then ran to the foot of the stairs, and shouted at the top of her voice—

"Papa, papa, come down! come directly! Here's old Keene, the old Buffalo, and he

says there is no God!"

Captain Caldwell descended the stairs hurriedly, but, on catching a glimpse of his countenance, Beth did not wait to receive him.

She had to pass through the kitchen to get into the yard. It was the busy time of the day, and Biddy and Anne and Riley, all without shoes or stockings, were playing football with a bladder.

Biddy tried to detain Beth.

"Arrah, bad luck to ye, Biddy," Beth cried, imitating the brogue. "Let me go, d'ye hear?"

"Holy Mother, preserve us!" Biddy exclaimed, crossing herself. "Don't ye ever be afther wishin' anybody bad luck, Miss Beth; shure ye'll bring it if ye do."

"Thin don't ye ever be afther stoppin' me when I want to be going, Biddy," Beth rejoined, stamping her foot, "or I'll blast ye," she added as she passed out into the sunlight.

Fowls and ducks and Jim's pet pigeons were the only creatures moving in the yard. Beth stood among them, watching them for a little, then went to the cornbin in the stable, and got some oats. There was a shallow tub of water for the birds to drink; Beth hunkered down beside it, and held out her hand, full of corn. The pigeons were very tame, and presently a beautiful blue-rock came up confidently, and began to eat. His eyes were a deep rich orange colour. Beth caught him, and stroked his glossy plumage, delighting in the exquisite metallic sheen on his neck and breast. The colour gave her an almost painful sensation of pleasure, which changed on a sudden into a fit of blind exasperation. Her grief for the loss of Kitty had gripped her again with a horrid twinge. She clenched her teeth in her pain, her fingers closed convulsively round the pigeon's throat, and she held him out at arm's length, and shook him viciously till the nictitating membrane dropped over his eyes, his head sank back, his bill opened, and he hung from her hand, an inert heap of ruffled

feathers. Then the tension of her nerves relaxed; it was a relief to have crushed the life out of something. She let the bird drop, and stood looking at him, as an animal might have looked, with an impassive face which betrays no shade of emotion. As she did so, however, the bird showed signs of life; and, suddenly, quickening into interest, she stooped down, turned him over, and examined him; then sprinkled him with water, and made him drink. He rapidly revived, and when he was able to stand, she let him go; and he was soon feeding among his companions as if nothing had happened.

Beth watched them for a little with the same animal-like expressionless gravity of countenance, then moved off unconcernedly.

She never mentioned the incident to any one, and never forgot it; but her only feeling about it was that the pigeon had had a narrow escape.

CHAPTER VI

Beth was a fine instrument, sensitive to a touch, and, considering the way she was handled, it would have been a wonder if discordant effects had not been constantly produced upon her. Hers was a nature with a wide range. It is probable that every conceivable impulse was latent in her, every possibility of good or evil. Exactly which would predominate depended upon the influences of these early years; and almost all the influences she came under were haphazard. There was no intelligent direction of her thoughts, no systematic training to form good habits. Her brothers were sent to school as soon as they were old enough, and so had the advantage of regular routine and strict discipline from the first; but a couple of hours a day for lessons was considered enough for the little girls; and, for the rest of the time, so long as they were on the premises and not naughty, that is to say, gave no trouble, it was taken for granted that they were safe, morally and physically. Neither of their parents seem to have suspected their extreme precocity; and there is no doubt that

Beth suffered seriously in after life from the mistakes of those in authority over her at this period. People admired her bright eyes without realising that she could see with them, and not only that she could see, but that she could not help seeing. But even if they had realised it, they would merely have scolded her for learning anything in that way which they preferred that she should not know. They were not sufficiently intelligent themselves to perceive that it is not what we know of things, but what we think of them, which makes for good or evil. Beth was accordingly allowed to run wild, and expected to see nothing; but all the time her mind was being involuntarily stored with observations from which, in time to come, for want of instruction, she would be forced to draw her own—often erroneous—conclusions.

Kitty's departure was Beth's first great grief, and she suffered terribly. The prop and stay of her little life had gone, the comfort and kindness, the order and discipline, which were essential to her nature. Mrs. Caldwell was a good woman, who would certainly do what she thought best for her children; but she was exhausted by the unconscionable production of a too numerous family, a family which she had neither the means nor the strength to bring up properly. Her husband's health, too, grew ever more precarious, and she found herself obliged to do all in her power to help him with his duties, which were arduous. There was a good deal that she could do in the way of writing official letters and managing money-matters, tasks for which she was much better fitted than for the management of children; but the children, meanwhile, had to be left to the care of others—not that that would have been a bad thing for them had their mother had sufficient discrimination to enable her to choose the proper kind of people to be with them. Unfortunately for everybody, however, Mrs. Caldwell had been brought up on the old-fashioned principle that absolute ignorance of human nature is the best qualification for a wife and mother, and she was consequently quite unprepared for any possibility which had not formed part of her own simple and limited personal experience. She never suspected, for one thing, that a servant's conversation could be undesirable if her appearance and her character

from her last mistress were satisfactory; and, therefore, when Kitty had gone, she put Anne in her place without misgiving, Anne's principal recommendation being that she was a nice-looking girl, and had pretty deferential manners.

Anne came from one of the cabins on the Irish side of the road, where people, pigs, poultry, with an occasional cow, goat, or donkey herded together indiscriminately. The windows were about a foot square, and were not made to open. Sometimes they had glass in them, but were oftener stopped up with rags. Before the doors were heaps of manure and pools of stagnant water. There was no regular footway, but a mere beaten track in front of the cabins, and this, on wet days, was ankle-deep in mud. The women hung about the doors all day long, knitting the men's blue stockings, and did little else apparently. Both men and women were usually in a torpid state, the result, doubtless, of breathing a poisoned atmosphere, and of insufficient food. It took strong stimulants to rouse them: love, hate, jealousy, whisky, battle, murder, and sudden death. Their conversation was gross, and they were very immoral; but it is hardly necessary to say so, for with men, women, children, and animals all crowded together in such surroundings, and the morbid craving for excitement to which people who have no comfort or wholesome interest in life fall a prey, immorality is inevitable. It was the boast of the place that there were no illegitimate children; it would have been a better sign if there had been.

Mrs. Caldwell, true to her training, lived opposite to all this vice and squalor, serenely indifferent to it. Anne, therefore, who knew nothing about the management of children, and was not in any respect a proper person to have the charge of them, had it all her own way in the nursery: and her way was to do nothing that she could help. She used to call the children in the morning, and then leave them to their own devices. The moment they were awake, which was pretty soon, for they were full of life, they began to batter each other with pillows, dance about the room in their night-dresses, pitch tents with the bed-clothes on the floor, and make noise enough to bring their mother down upon them. Then Anne would be summoned and come

hurrying up, and help them to huddle on their clothes somehow. She never washed them, but encouraged them to perform their own ablutions, which they did with the end of a towel dipped in a jug. The consequence was they were generally in a very dirty state. They took their meals with their parents, and papa would notice the dirt eventually, and storm at mamma in Italian, when words would ensue in a tone which made the children quake. Then mamma would storm at Anne, for whom the children felt sorry, and the result would be a bath, which they bore with fortitude, for fear of getting Anne into further trouble. They even made good resolutions about washing themselves, which they kept for a few days; then, however, they began to shirk again, and had again to be scrubbed. The resolutions of a child must be shored up by kindly supervision, otherwise it is hardly likely that they will cement into good habits.

Beth suffered from a continual sense of discomfort in those days for want of proper attention. All her clothing fitted badly, and were fastened on with anything that came to hand in the way of tape and buttons; her hair was ill brushed, and she was so continually found fault with that her sense of self-respect was checked in its development, and she lost all faith in her own power to do anything right or well. The consequence was the most profound disheartenment, endured in silence, with the exquisite uncomplaining fortitude of a little child. It made its mark on her countenance, however, in a settled expression of discontent, which, being mistaken for a bad disposition, repelled people, and made her many enemies. People generally said that Mildred was a dear, but Beth did not look pleasant; and for many a long day to come, very few troubled themselves to try and make her look so.

It cannot be said that Beth's parents neglected their children. On the contrary, her father thought much of their education, and of their future; it was the all-importance of the present that did not strike him, and so with her mother. Neither parent was careless, but their care stopped short too soon; and it is astonishing the amount of liberty the children had. They were sent out of doors as soon as they were dressed in

the morning, because sunshine and air are so essential to children. If they went for a walk, Anne accompanied them; but very often Anne was wanted, and then the children were left to loiter about the garden or stable-yard, where, doubtless with the help of reasoning powers much in advance of her age, Beth had soon heard and seen enough to make her feel a certain contempt for her father's veracity when he told her that she had originally been brought to the house in the doctor's black bag.

After Kitty's departure Beth had many a lonely hour, and the time hung heavy on her hands. Mildred, her senior by four years, was of a simpler disposition, and always able to amuse herself, playing with the Baby Bernadine, or with toys which were no distraction to Beth. Mildred, besides, was fond of reading; but books to be deciphered remained a wonder and a mystery to Beth.

Jim went to the national school, the only one in the place, with all the other little boys. The master was a young curate who gave Mildred and Beth their lessons also, when school-hours were over. Beth used to yearn for lesson-time, just for the sake of being obliged to do something; but lessons were disappointing, for the curate devoted himself to Mildred, who was docile and studious, and took no special pains to interest Beth, and consequently she soon wearied of the dull restraint, and became troublesome. Sometimes she was boisterous, and then the tutor had to spend half his time in chasing her to rescue his hat, a book, an ink-bottle, or some other article which she threatened to destroy; and, sometimes she was so depressed that he had to give up trying to teach her, and just do his best to distract her. In her eighth year she was able to follow the church-service in the prayer-book, and make out the hymns, but that was all.

Sunday-school was held in the church, and was attended by all the unmarried parishioners. Mildred taught some of the tiny mites, and Beth was put into her class at first; but Beth had no respect for Mildred, and had consequently to be removed. She was expected to learn the collect for the day and the verse of a hymn every

Sunday, but never by any chance knew either. No one ever thought of reading the thing over to her, and fixing her attention on it by some little explanation; and learning by heart from a book did not come naturally to her. She learned by ear easily enough, but not by sight. The hymns and prayers which Kitty had repeated to her, she very soon picked up; but Kitty had true sympathetic insight to inform her of what the child required, and all her little lessons were proper to some occasion, and had comfort in them. What Beth learned now, on the contrary, often filled her with gloom. Some of the hymns, such as,

"When gathering clouds around I view, And days are dark, and friends are few,"

made her especially miserable. It was always a dark day to her when she repeated it, with heavy clouds collecting overhead, and herself, a solitary little speck on the mountain side wandering alone.

CHAPTER VII

It is significant to note that church figures largely in Beth's recollection of this time, but religion not at all. There was, in fact, no connection between the two in her mind.

Both Captain and Mrs. Caldwell protested strongly against what they called cant; and they seemed to have called everything cant except an occasional cold reading aloud of the Bible on Sundays, and the bald observance of the church service. The Bible they read aloud to the children without expounding it, and the services they attended without comment. Displays of religious emotion in everyday life they regarded as symptoms of insanity; and if they heard people discuss religion with enthusiasm, and profess to love the Lord, they were genuinely shocked. All that kind of thing they thought "such cant," "and so like those horrid dissenters;" which made them extra careful that the children should hear nothing of the sort. This, from their point of view, was right and wise; in Beth's case especially; for her unsatisfied soul

was of the quality which soon yearns for the fine fulness of faith; her little heart would have filled to bursting with her first glad conception of the love divine, and her whole being would have stirred to speak her emotion, even though speech meant martyrdom. Thanks to the precautions of her parents, however, she heard nothing to stimulate her natural tendency to religious fervour after Kitty's departure; and gradually the image of our Blessed Lady faded from her mind, and was succeeded by that of the God of her parents, a death-dealing deity, delighting in blood, whom she was warned to fear, and from whom she did accordingly shrink with such holy horror that, when she went to church, she tried to think of anything but Him. This was how it happened that church, instead of being the threshold of the next world to her mind, became the centre of this, where she made many interesting observations of men and manners; for in spite of her backwardness in the schoolroom, Beth's intellect advanced with a bound at this period. She had left her native place an infant, on whose mind some chance impressions had been made and lingered; she arrived at Castletownrock with the power to observe for herself, and even to reflect upon what she saw—of course to a certain extent only; but still the power had come, and was far in advance of her years. So far, it was circumstances that had impressed her; she knew one person from another, but that was all. Now, however, she began to be interested in people for themselves, apart from any incident in which they figured; and most of her time was spent in a curiously close, but quite involuntary study of those about her, and of their relations to each other.

Church was often a sore penance to the children, it was so long, and cold, and dull; but they set off on Sunday happy in the consciousness of their best hats and jackets, nevertheless; and the first part of the time was not so bad, for then they had Sunday-school, and the three Misses Keene—Mary, Sophia, and Lenore—and the two Misses Mayne, Honor and Kathleen, and Mr. and Mrs. Small, the Vicar and his wife, and the curate, were all there talking and teaching. Beth remembered nothing about the teaching except that, on one occasion, Mr. Macbean, the rector, tried to

explain the meaning of the trefoil on the ends of the pews to Mildred and herself; but she could think of nothing but the way his beard wagged as he spoke, and was disconcerted when he questioned her. He had promised to be a friend to Beth; but he was a delicate man, and not able to live much at Castletownrock, where the climate was rigorous; so that she seldom saw him.

When Sunday-school was over, the children went up to the gallery; their pew and the Keenes', roomy boxes, took up the whole front of it. Mrs. Caldwell always sat up in the gallery with the children, but Captain Caldwell often sat downstairs in the rectory-pew to be near the fire; when he sat in the gallery he wore a little black cap to keep off the draught. He and Mr. O'Halloran the Squire, and Captain Keene, stood and talked in the aisle sometimes before the service commenced. One Sunday they kept looking up at the children in the gallery.

"I'll bet Mildred will be the handsomest woman," Mr. O'Halloran was saying.

"I'll back Beth," Captain Keene observed. "If all the men in the place are not after her soon, I'm no judge of her sex, eh?"

"Oh, don't look at me!" said Captain Caldwell complacently. "I can't pretend to say. But let's hope that they'll go off well, at all events. They'll have every chance I can give them of making good matches."

Beth heard her father repeat this conversation to her mother afterwards, but was too busy wondering what a handsome woman was to understand that it was her own charms which had been appraised; but Mildred understood, and was elated.

Mr. O'Halloran, the squire, had a red beard, which was an offence to Beth. His wife wore bonnets about which everybody used to make remarks to Mrs. Caldwell. Beth understood that Mrs. O'Halloran was young and pretty, and had three charming children, but was not happy because of Sophia Keene.

"Just fancy," she heard Mrs. Small, the Vicar's wife, say to her mother once. "Just fancy, he was in a carriage with them at the races, and stayed with Sophia the whole

time; and poor Mrs. O'Halloran left at home alone. I call it scandalous. But you know what Sophia is!" Mrs. Small concluded significantly.

Mrs. Caldwell drew herself up, and looked at Mrs. Small, but said nothing; yet somehow Beth knew that she too was unhappy because of Sophia Keene. Beth was not on familiar terms with her mother, and would not have dared to embrace her spontaneously, or make any other demonstration of affection; but she was loyally devoted to her all the same, and would gladly have stabbed Sophia Keene, and have done battle with the whole of the rest of the family on her mother's behalf had occasion offered.

She was curled up among the fuchsias on the window-seat of the sitting-room one day, unobserved by her parents, who entered the room together after she had settled herself there, and began to discuss the Keenes.

"You did not tell me, Henry, you spent all your time with them before we came," Mrs. Caldwell said reproachfully.

"Why should I?" he answered, with a jaunty affectation of ease.

"It is not why you should," his wife said with studied gentleness, "but why you should not. It seems so strange, making a mystery of it."

"I described old Keene to you—the old buffalo!" he replied; "and I'll describe the girls now if you like. Mary is a gawk, Sophia is as yellow as a duck's foot, and Lenore is half-witted."

The Keenes were ignorant, idle, good-tempered young women, and kind to the children, whom they often took to bathe with them. They were seldom able to go into the sea itself, for it was a wild, tempestuous coast; but there were lovely clear pools on the rocky shore, natural stone baths left full of water when the tide went out, sheltered from the wind by tall, dark, precipitous cliffs, and warmed by the sun; and there they used to dabble by the hour together. Anne went with them, and it was a pretty sight, the four young women in white chemises that clung to them when

wet, and the three lovely children—little white nudities with bright brown hair—scampering over the rocks, splashing each other in the pools, or lying about on warm sunny slabs, resting and chattering. One day Beth found some queer things in a pool, and Sophia told her they were barnacles.

"They stick to the bottom of a ship," she said, "and grow heavier and heavier till at last the ship can make no more way, and comes to a standstill in a shining sea, where the water is as smooth as a mirror; you would think it was a mirror, in fact, if it did not heave gently up and down like your breast when you breathe; and every time it heaves it flushes some colour, blue, or green, or pink, or purple. And the barnacles swell and swell at the bottom of the ship, till at last they burst in two with a loud report; and then the sailors rush to the side of the ship and look over, and there they see a flock of beautiful big white geese coming up out of the water; and sometimes they shoot the geese, but if they do a great storm comes on and engulfs the ship, and they are all drowned; but sometimes they stand stockstill, amazed, and then the birds rise up out of the air on their great white wings, up, up, drifting along, together, till they look like the clouds over there. Then a gentle breeze springs up, and the ship sails away safely into port."

"And where do the geese go?" Beth demanded, with breathless interest.

"They make for the shore too, and in the dead of winter, on stormy nights, they fly over the land, uttering strange cries, and if you wake and hear them, it means somebody is going to die."

Beth's eyes were staring far out beyond the great green Atlantic rollers that came bursting in round the sheltering headland, white-crested with foam, flying up the beach with a crash, and scattering showers of spray that sparkled in the sunshine. She could see the ships and the barnacles, and the silent sea, heaving great sighs and flushing with fine colour in the act; and the geese, and the sailors peering over the side and shooting at them and sinking immediately in a storm, but also sailing into a

safe haven triumphantly, where the sun shone on white houses, although, at the same time, it was dark night, and overhead there were strange cries that made her cower—"Beth!" cried Sophia, "what's the matter with you, child?"

Beth returned with a start, and stared at her—"I know who it will be," she said.

"Who what'll be, Miss Beth?" Anne asked in awe.

"Who'll die," said Beth.

"You mustn't say, Beth; you'll bring bad luck if you do," Miss Keene interposed hastily.

"I'm not going to say," Beth answered dreamily; "but I know."

"You shouldn't have told the child that story, miss," Anne said. "Shure, ye know what she is—she sees." Anne nodded her head several times significantly.

"I forgot," said Sophia.

"She'll forget too," said Mary philosophically. "I say, Beth," she went on, raising herself on her elbow—she was lying prone on a slab of rock in the sun—"what does your mother think of us?"

Beth roused herself. "I don't know," she answered earnestly; "she never says. But I know what papa thinks of you. He says Mary's a gawk, Sophia is as yellow as a duck's foot, and Lenore is only half-witted."

The effect of this announcement astonished Beth. The Misses Keene, instead of being interested, all looked at her as if they did not like her, and Anne burst out laughing. When they got in, Anne told Mrs. Caldwell, who flushed suddenly, and covered her mouth with her handkerchief.

"Yes, mamma," Mildred exclaimed with importance, "Beth did say so. And Mary tossed her head, and Sophia sneered."

"What is sneered?" Beth demanded importunately. "What is sneered?"

"O Beth! don't bother so," Mildred exclaimed irritably. "It's when you curl up your

lip."

"Beth, how could you be so naughty?" Mrs. Caldwell said at last from behind her handkerchief. "Don't you know you should never repeat things you hear said? A lady never repeats a private conversation."

"What's a private conversation?" said Beth.

Mrs. Caldwell gave her a broad definition, during which she lowered her handkerchief, and Beth discovered that she was trying not to smile.

This was Beth's first lesson in honour, which was her mother's god, and she felt the influence of it all her life.

Later in the day, Beth was curled up on the window-seat among the fuchsias, looking out. Behind the thatched cabins opposite, the sombre mountains rolled up, dark and distinct, to the sky; but Beth would not look at them if she could help it, they oppressed her. It was a close afternoon, and the window was wide open. A bare-legged woman, in a short petticoat, stood in an indolent attitude leaning against a door-post opposite; a young man in low shoes, light blue stockings, buff knee-breeches, a blue-tailed coat with brass buttons, and a soft high-crowned felt hat, came strolling up the street with his hands in his pockets.

"Hallo, Biddy," he remarked, as he passed the woman, "you're all swelled."

"Yes," she answered tranquilly, "I've been drinking buttermilk."

"Well, let's hope it'll be a boy," he rejoined.

The woman looked up and down the street complacently.

Presently Beth saw Honor and Kathleen Mayne come out of the inn. The Maynes used to pet the children and play the piano to them when they were at the inn, and had been very good to Jim also when he was there alone with his father before the family arrived. Their manners were gentle and caressing, and they did their best to win their way into Mrs. Caldwell's good graces, but at first she coldly repulsed them,

which hurt Beth very much. The Maynes, however, did not at all understand that they were being repulsed. A kindly feeling existed among all classes in those remote Irish villages. The squire's family, the doctor's, clergyman's, draper's, and innkeeper's visited each other, and shook hands when they met. There was no feeling of condescension on the one hand, or of pretension on the other; but Mrs. Caldwell had the strong class prejudice which makes such stupid snobs of the English. It was not what people were, but who they were, that was all important to her; and she would have bowed down cheerfully, as whole neighbourhoods do, and felt exhilarated by the notice of some stupid county magnate, who had not heart enough to be loved, head enough to distinguish himself, or soul enough to get him into heaven. She was a lady, and Mayne was an innkeeper. His daughters might amuse the children, but as to associating with Mrs. Caldwell, that was absurd!

The girls were not to be rebuffed, however. They persevered in their kindly attentions, making excuses to each other for Mrs. Caldwell's manner; explaining her coldness by the fact that she was English, and flattering her, until finally they won their way into her good graces, and so effectually too, that when they brought a young magpie in a basket for Beth one day, her mother graciously allowed her to accept it.

Beth liked the Maynes, but now as they came up the road she slid from the window-seat. She knew they would stop and talk if she waited, and she did not want to talk. She was thinking about something, and it irritated her to be interrupted. So she tore across the hall and through the kitchen out into the yard, impelled by an imperative desire to be alone.

The magpie was the first pet of her own she had ever had, and she loved it. At night it was chained to a perch stuck in the wall of the stable-yard. On the other side of that wall was the yard of Murphy the farrier. The magpie soon became tame enough to be let loose by day, and Beth always went to release it the first thing in the

morning and give it its breakfast. It came hopping to meet her now, and followed her into the garden. The garden was entered by an archway under the outbuildings, which divided it from the stable-yard. It was very long, but narrow for its length. On the right was a high wall, but on the left was a low one—at least one half of it was low—and Beth could look over it into the farrier's garden next door. The other half had been raised by Captain Caldwell on the understanding that if he raised one half the farrier would raise the other, but the farrier had proved perfidious. The wall was built without mortar, of rough, uncut stones. Captain Caldwell had his half neatly finished off at the top with sods, but Murphy's piece was still all broken down. The children used to climb up by it on to the raised half, and dance there at the risk of life and limb, and jeer at Murphy as he dug his potatoes, calling his attention to the difference between the Irish and English half of the wall, till he lost his temper and pelted them. This was the signal for a battle. The children returned his potatoes with stones by way of interest, and hit him as often as he hit them. (Needless to say, their parents were not in the garden at the time.) They had a great contempt for the farrier because he fought them, and he used to go about the village complaining of them and their "tratement" of him, "the little divils, spoilin' the pace of the whole neighbourhood."

There was a high wall at the end of the garden, and Beth liked to sit on the top of it. She went there now, picked up her magpie, and climbed up with difficulty by way of Pat Murphy's broken bit. Immediately below her was a muddy lane, beyond which the land sloped down to the sea, and as she sat there, the sound of the waves, that dreamy, soft murmur for which we have no word, filled the interstices of her consciousness with something that satisfied.

She was not left long in peace to enjoy it that afternoon, however, for the farrier was at work in his garden below, and presently he looked up and saw the magpie.

"There ye are agin, Miss Beth, wi' yer baste of a burrd; bad luck to it!" he exclaimed,

crossing himself. "Shure, don't I tell ye ivery day uf your life it's wan fur sorrow."

"Bad luck to yerself, Pat Murphy," Beth rejoined promptly. "It's a foine cheek ye have to be spakin' to a gentleman's daughter, an' you not a man uv yer wurrd."

"Not a man o' me wurrd! what d'ye mane?" said Murphy, firing.

"Look at that wall," Beth answered; "didn't ye promise ye'd build it?"

"An' so I will when yer father gives me the stones he promised me," Murphy replied. "It's a moighty foine mon uv his wurrd he is."

"Is it my father yer maning, Pat Murphy?" Beth asked.

"It is," he said, sticking his spade in the ground emphatically.

"Ye know yer lying," said Beth. "My father promised you no stones. He's not a fool."

"I niver met a knave that was," Pat observed, turning over a huge spadeful of earth, and then straightening himself to look up at her.

Beth's instinct was always to fight when she was in a rage; words break no bones, and she preferred to break bones at such times. It was some seconds before she saw the full force of Pat's taunt, but the moment she did, she seized the largest loose stone within reach on the top of the wall, and shied it at him. It struck him full in the face, and cut his cheek open.

"That'll teach ye," said Beth, blazing.

The man turned on her with a very ugly look.

"Put yer spade down," she said. "I'm not afraid of you."

"Miss Beth! Miss Beth!" some one called from the end of the garden.

Murphy stuck his spade in the ground, and wiped his jaw. "Ye'll pay for this, ye divil's limb," he muttered, "yew an' yours."

"Miss Beth! Miss Beth!"

"I'm coming!" Beth rejoined irritably, and slid from the wall to the ground regardless of the rough loose stones she scattered in her descent. "Ye'll foind me ready to pay when ye send in yer bill, Pat," she called out as she ran down the garden.

The children were to have tea at the vicarage that day, and Anne had been sent to fetch her.

In the drawing-room at the vicarage there was a big bay-window which looked out across a desolate stretch of bog to a wild headland, against which the waves beat tempestuously in almost all weathers. The headland itself was high, but the giant breakers often dashed up far above it, and fell in showers of spray on the grass at the top. There was a telescope in the window at the vicarage, and people used to come to see the sight, and went into raptures over it. Beth, standing out of the way, unnoticed, would gaze too, fascinated; but it was the attraction of repulsion. The cruel force of the great waves agitated her, and at the same time made her unutterably sad. Her heart beat painfully when she watched them, her breath became laboured, and it was only with an effort that she could keep back her sobs. It was not fear that oppressed her, but a horrible sort of excitement, which so gained upon her on that afternoon in particular that she felt she must shriek aloud, or make her escape. If she showed any emotion she would be laughed at, if she made her escape she would probably be whipped; she preferred to be whipped; so, watching her opportunity, she quietly slipped away.

At home the window of the sitting-room was still wide open, and as she ran down the street she noticed some country people peeping in curiously, and apparently astonished by the luxury they beheld. Beth, who was picking up Irish rapidly, understood some exclamations she overheard as she approached, and felt flattered for the furniture.

She ran up the steps and opened the front door: "Good day to ye all," she said sociably; "will ye not come in and have a look round? now do!"

She led the way as she spoke, and the country people followed her, all agape. In the hall they paused to wonder at the cocoanut matting; but when they stood on the soft pile carpet, so grateful to their bare feet, in the sitting-room, and looked round, they lowered their voices respectfully, and this gave Beth a sudden sensation of superiority. She began to show them the things: the pictures on the walls, the subjects of which she explained to them; the egg-shell china, which she held up to the light that they might see how thin it was; and some Eastern and Western curios her father had brought home from various voyages. She told them of tropical heat and Canadian cold, and began to be elated herself when she found all that she had ever heard on the subject flowing fluently from her lips.

The front door had been left open, and the passers-by looked in to see what was going on, and then entered uninvited. Neighbours, too, came over from the Irish side of the road, so that the room gradually filled, and as her audience increased, Beth grew excited and talked away eloquently.

"Lord," one man exclaimed with a sigh, on looking round the room, "it's aisy to see why the likes of these looks down on the likes of us."

"Eh, dear, yes!" a woman with a petticoat over her head solemnly responded.

"The durrty heretics," a slouching fellow, with a flat white face, muttered under his breath. "But if they benefit here, they'll burn hereafter, holy Jasus be praised."

"Will they?" said Beth, turning on him. "Will they burrn hereafter, Bap-faced Flanagan? No, they won't! They'll hunt ye out of heaven as they hunted ye out o' Maclone.

"Oh, the Orange militia walked into Maclone, And hunted the Catholics out of the town. Ri' turen nuren nuren naddio, Right tur nuren nee."

She sang it out at the top of her shrill little voice, executing a war-dance of defiance to the tune, and concluding with an elaborate curtsey.

As she recovered herself, she became aware of her father standing in the doorway.

His lips were white, and there was a queer look in his face.

"Oh! So this is your party, is it, Miss Beth?" he said. "You ask your friends in, and then you insult them, I see."

Beth was still effervescing. She put her hands behind her back and answered boldly—

"'Deed, thin, he insulted me, papa. It was Bap-faced Flanagan. He said we were durrty heretics, and—and—I'll not stand that! It's a free country!"

Captain Caldwell looked round, and the people melted from the room under his eye. Then Anne appeared from somewhere.

"Anne, do you teach the children party-songs?" he demanded.

"Shure, they don't need taching, yer honour," said Anne, disconcerted. "Miss Beth knows 'em all, and she shouts 'em at the top of her voice down the street till the men shake their fists at her."

"Why do you do that, Beth?" her father demanded.

"I like to feel," Beth began, gasping out each word with a mighty effort to express herself—"I like to feel—that I can make them shake their fists."

Her father looked at her again very queerly.

"Will I take her to the nursery, sir?" Anne asked.

Beth turned on her impatiently, and said something in Irish which made Anne grin. Beth did not understand her father in this mood, and she wanted to see more of him.

"What's that she's saying to you, Anne?" he asked.

"Oh—sure, she's just blessin' me, yer honour," Anne answered unabashed.

"I believe you!" Captain Caldwell said dryly, as he stretched himself on the sofa. "Go and fetch a hair-brush."

While Anne was out of the room he turned to Beth. "I'll give you a penny," he said,

"if you'll tell me what you said to Anne."

"I'll tell you for nothing," Beth answered. "I said, 'Yer soul to the devil for an interfering hussy.'"

Captain Caldwell burst out laughing, and laughed till Anne returned with the brush. "Now, brush my hair," he said to Beth; and Beth went and stood beside the sofa, and brushed, and brushed, now with one hand, and now with the other, till she ached all over with the effort. Her father suffered from atrocious headaches, and this was the one thing that relieved him.

"There, that's punishment enough for to-day," he said at last.

Beth retired to the foot of the couch, and leant there, looking at him solemnly, with the hair-brush still in her hand. "That's no punishment," she observed.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean I like it," she said. "I'd brush till I dropped if it did you any good."

Captain Caldwell looked up at her, and it was as if he had seen the child for the first time.

"Beth," he said, after a while, "would you like to come out with me on the car to-morrow?"

"'Deed, then, I would, papa," Beth answered eagerly.

Then there was a pause, during which Beth rubbed her back against the end of the couch thoughtfully, and looked at the wall opposite as if she could see through it. Her father watched her for a little time with a frown upon his forehead from the pain in his head.

"What are you thinking of, Beth?" he said at last.

"I've got to be whipped to-night," she answered drearily; "and I wish I hadn't. I do get so tired of being whipped and shaken."

Her little face looked pinched and pathetic as she spoke, and for the first time her

father had a suspicion of what punishment was to this child—a thing as inevitable as disease, a continually recurring torture, but quite without effect upon her conduct—and his heart contracted with a qualm of pity.

"What are you going to be whipped for now?" he asked.

"We went to tea at the vicarage, and I ran away home."

"Why?"

"Because of the great green waves. They rush up the rocks—wish—st—st!" (she took a step forward, and threw up her little arms in illustration)—"then fall, and roll back, and gather, and come rushing on again; and I feel every time—every time—that they are coming right at me!"—she clutched her throat as if she were suffocating; "and if I had stayed I should have shrieked, and then I should have been whipped. So I came away."

"But you expect to be whipped for coming away?"

"Yes. But you see I don't have the waves as well. And mamma won't say I was afraid."

"Were you afraid, Beth?" her father asked.

"No!" Beth retorted, stamping her foot indignantly. "If the waves did come at me, I could stand it. It's the coming—coming—coming—I can't bear. It makes me ache here." She clutched at her throat and chest again.

Captain Caldwell closed his eyes. He felt that he was beginning to make this child's acquaintance, and wished he had tried to cultivate it sooner.

"You shall not be whipped to-night, Beth," he said presently, looking at her with a kindly smile.

Instantly an answering smile gleamed on the child's face, transfiguring her; and, by the light of it, her father realised how seldom he had seen her smile.

Unfortunately for Beth, however, while her countenance was still irradiated, her

mother swooped down upon her. Mrs. Caldwell had come hurrying home in a rage in search of Beth; and now, mistaking that smile for a sign of defiance, she seized upon her, and had beaten her severely before it was possible to interfere. Beth, dazed by this sudden onslaught, staggered when she let her go, and stretched out her little hands as if groping for some support.

"It wasn't your fault!—it wasn't your fault!" she gasped, her first instinct being to exonerate her father.

Captain Caldwell had started up and caught his wife by the arm.

"That's enough," he said harshly. "You are going altogether the wrong way to work with the child. Let this be the last time, do you understand? Beth, go to the nursery, and ask Anne to get you some tea." A sharp pain shot through his head. He had jumped up too quickly, and now fell back on the sofa with a groan.

"Oh, let me brush it again," Beth cried, in an agony of sympathy.

Her father opened his haggard eyes and smiled.

"Go to the nursery, like a good child," he said, "and get some tea."

Beth went without another word. But all that evening her mind was with her parents in the sitting-room, wondering—wondering what they were saying to each other.

CHAPTER VIII

Next day Beth jumped out of bed early, and washed herself all over, in an excess of grateful zeal, because she was to be taken out on the car. As soon as she had had her breakfast, she ran into the yard to feed her magpie. Its perch was in a comfortable corner sheltered by the great turf-stack which had been built up against the wall that divided the Caldwells' yard from that of Pat Murphy, the farrier. Beth, in wild spirits, ran round the stack, calling "Mag, Mag!" as she went. But Mag, alas! was never more to respond to her call. He was hanging by the leg from his perch, head

downward, wings outstretched, and glossy feathers ruffled; and below him, on the ground, some stones were scattered which told the tale of cruelty and petty spite.

Beth stood for a moment transfixed; but in that moment the whole thing became clear to her—the way in which the deed was done, the man that did it, and his motive. She glanced up to the top of the high wall, and then, breathing thick through her clenched teeth, in her rage she climbed up the turf-stack with the agility of a cat, and looked over into the farrier's yard.

"Come out of that, Pat Murphy, ye black-hearted, murthering villain," she shrieked. "I see ye skulking there behind the stable-door. Come out, I tell ye, and bad luck to you for killing my bird."

"Is it me, miss?" Pat Murphy exclaimed, appearing with an injured and innocent look on his face. "Me kill yer burrd! Shure, thin, ye never thought such a thing uv me!"

"Didn't I, thin! and I think it still," Beth cried. "Say, 'May I never see heaven if I kilt it'—or I'll curse ye."

"Ah, thin, it isn't such bad language ye'd hev me be using, and you a young lady, Miss Beth," said Pat in a wheedling tone.

"'Deed, thin, it is, Pat Murphy; but I know ye daresn't say it," said Beth. "Oh, bad luck to ye! bad luck to ye every day ye see a wooden milestone, and twice every day ye don't. And if ye killed my bird, may the devil attend ye, to rob ye of what ye like best wherever ye are."

She slid down the stack when she had spoken, and found her father standing at the bottom, looking at the dead bird with a heavy frown on his dark face. He must have heard Beth's altercation with Murphy, but he made no remark until Mrs. Caldwell came out, when he said something in Italian, to which she responded, "The cowardly brute!"

Beth took her bird, and buried it deep in her little garden, by which time the car was

ready. She had not shed a tear, nor did she ever mention the incident afterwards; which was characteristic, for she was always shy of showing any feeling but anger.

Captain Caldwell had a wild horse called Artless, which few men would have cared to ride, and fewer still have driven. People wondered that he took his children out on the car behind such an animal, and perhaps he would not have done so if he had had his own way, but Mrs. Caldwell insisted on it.

"They've no base blood in them," she said; "and I'll not have them allowed to acquire any affectation of timidity."

Artless was particularly fresh that morning. He was a red chestnut, with a white star on his forehead, and one white stocking.

When Beth returned to the stable-yard she found him fidgeting between the shafts, with his ears laid back, and the whites of his wicked eyes showing, and Riley struggling with his head in a hard endeavour to keep him quiet enough for the family to mount the car. Captain and Mrs. Caldwell and Mildred were already in their seats, and Beth scrambled up to hers unconcernedly, although Artless was springing about in a lively manner at the moment. Beth sat next her father, who drove from the side of the car, and then they were ready to be off as soon as Artless would go; but Artless objected to leave the yard, and Riley had to lead him round and round, running at his head, and coaxing him, while Captain Caldwell gathered up the reins and held the whip in suspense, watching his opportunity each time they passed the gate to give Artless a start that would make him bound through it. Round and round they went, however, several times, with Artless rearing, backing, and plunging; but at last the whip came down at the right moment, just the slightest flick, Riley let go his head, and out he dashed in his indignation, the battle ending in a wild gallop up the street, with the car swinging behind him, and the whole of the Irish side of the road out cheering and encouraging, to the children's great delight. But their ebullition of glee was a little too much for their father's nerves.

"These children of yours are perfect little devils, Caroline!" he exclaimed irritably. Mrs. Caldwell smiled as at a compliment. She had been brought up on horseback herself, and insisted on teaching the children to regard danger as a diversion—not that that was difficult, for they were naturally daring. She would have punished them promptly on the slightest suspicion of timidity. "Only base-born people were cowardly," she scornfully maintained. "No lady ever shows a sign of fear."

Once, when they were crossing Achen sands, a wide waste, innocent of any obstacle, Artless came down without warning, and Mildred uttered an exclamation.

"Who was it made that ridiculous noise?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, looking hard at Beth.

Beth could not clear herself without accusing her sister, so she said nothing, but sat, consumed with fiery indignation; and for long afterwards she would wake up at night, and clench her little fists, and burn again, remembering how her mother had supposed she was afraid.

Artless went at breakneck speed that day, shied at the most unexpected moments, bolted right round, and stopped short occasionally; but Beth sat tight mechanically, following her own fancies. Captain Caldwell was going to inspect one of the outlying coastguard stations; and they went by the glen road, memorable to Beth because it was there she first felt the charm of running water, and found her first wild violets and tuft of primroses. The pale purple of the violets and the scent of primroses, warm with the sun, were among the happy associations of that time. But her delight was in the mountain-streams, with their mimic waterfalls and fairy wells. She loved to loiter by them, to watch them bubbling and sparkling over the rocks, to dabble her hands and feet in them, or to lie her length upon the turf beside them, in keen consciousness of the incessant, delicate, delicious murmur of the water, a sound which conveyed to her much more than can be expressed in articulate speech. At times too, when she was tired of loitering, she would look up and see the

mountain-top just above her, and begin to climb; but always when she came to the spot, there was the mountain-top just as far above her as before; so she used to think that the mountain really reached the sky.

When they returned, late that afternoon, Riley met them with a very serious face, and told Captain Caldwell mysteriously that Pat Murphy's horse was ill.

"What a d——d unfortunate coincidence," Captain Caldwell muttered to his wife; and Beth noticed that her mother's face, which had looked fresh and bright from the drive, settled suddenly into its habitual anxious, careworn expression.

Beth loitered about the yard till her parents had gone in; then she climbed the turf-stack, and looked over. The sick horse was tied to the stable-door, and stood, hanging his head with a very woebegone expression, and groaning monotonously. Murphy was trying to persuade him to take something hot out of a bucket, while Bap-faced Flanagan and another man, known as Tony-kill-the-cow, looked on and gave good advice.

Beth's fury revived when she saw Murphy, and she laughed aloud derisively. All three men started and looked up, then crossed themselves.

"Didn't I tell ye, Pat!" Beth exclaimed. "Ye may save yourself the trouble of doctoring him. He's as dead as my magpie."

Murphy looked much depressed. "Shure, Miss Beth, the poor baste done ye no harm," he pleaded.

"No," said Beth, "nor my bird hadn't done you any harm, nor the cow Tony cut the tail off hadn't done him any harm."

"I didn't kill yer burrd," Murphy asserted doggedly.

"We'll see," said Beth. "When the horse dies we'll know who killed the bird. Then one of you skunks can try and kill me. But I'd advise you to use a silver bullet; and if you miss, you'll be damned.—Blast ye, Riley, will ye let me alone!"

Riley, hearing what was going on, and having called to her vainly to hold her tongue, had climbed the stack himself, and now laid hold of her. Beth struck him in the face promptly, whereupon he shook her, and loosening her hold of the wall, began to carry her down—a perilous proceeding, for the stack was steep, and Beth, enraged at the indignity, doubled herself up and scratched and bit and kicked the whole way to the ground.

"Ye little divil," said Riley, setting her on her feet, "ye'll get us all into trouble wid that blasted tongue o' yours."

"Who's afraid?" said Beth, shaking her tousled head, and standing up to Riley with her little fists clenched.

"If the divil didn't put ye out when he gave up housekeeping, I dunno where you come from," Riley muttered as he turned away and stumped off stolidly.

During the night the horse died, and Beth found when she went out next day that the carcass had been dragged down Murphy's garden and put in the lane outside. She climbed the wall, and discovered the farrier skinning the horse, and was much disgusted to see him using his hands without gloves on in such an operation. Her anger of the day before was all over now, and she was ready to be on the usual terms of scornful intimacy with Murphy.

"Ye'll never be able to touch anything to eat again with those hands," she said.

"Won't I, thin!" he answered sulkily, and without looking up. He was as inconsequent as a child that resents an injury, but can be diverted from the recollection of it by anything interesting, only to return to its grievance, however, the moment the interest fails. "Won't I, thin! Just you try me wid a bit o' bread-an'-butter this instant, an' see what I'll do wid it."

Beth, always anxious to experiment, tore indoors to get some bread-and-butter, and never did she forget the horror with which she watched the dirty man eat it, with unwashed hands, sitting on the horse's carcass.

That carcass was a source of interest to her for many a long day to come. She used to climb on the wall to see how it was getting on, till the crows had picked the bones clean, and the weather had bleached them white; and she would wonder how a creature once so full of life could become a silent, senseless thing, not feeling, not caring, not knowing, no more to itself than a stone—strange mystery; and some day she would be like that, just white bones. She held her breath and suspended all sensation and thought, time after time, to see what it felt like; but always immediately there began a great rushing sound in her ears as of a terrific storm, and that, she concluded, was death coming. When he arrived then all would be blotted out.

The country was in a very disturbed state, and it was impossible to keep all hints of danger from the children's sharp ears. Beth knew a great deal of what was going on and what might be expected, but then a few chance phrases were already enough for her to construct a whole story upon, and with wonderful accuracy generally. Her fine faculty of observation developed apace at this time, and nothing she noticed now was ever forgotten. She would curl up in the window-seat among the fuchsias, and watch the people in the street by the hour together, especially on Sundays and market-days, when a great many came in from the mountains, women in close white caps with goffered frills, short petticoats, and long blue cloaks; and men in tail-coats and knee-breeches, with shillalahs under their arms, which they used very dexterously. They talked Irish at the top of their voices, and gesticulated a great deal, and were childishly quarrelsome. One market-day, when Beth was looking out of the sitting-room window, her mother came and looked out too, and they saw half-a-dozen countrymen set upon a young Castletownrock man. In a moment their shillalahs were whirling about his head, and he was driven round the corner of the house. Presently he came staggering back across the road, blubbering like a child, with his head broken, and the blood streaming down over his face, which was white and distorted with pain. They had knocked him down, and kicked him when he was

on the ground.

"Oh! the cowards! the cowards!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. Beth felt sick, but it was not so much what she saw as what she heard that affected her—the man's crying, and the graphic description of the nature and depth of the wound which another man, who had been present while the doctor dressed it, stopping at the window, kindly insisted on giving them, Mrs. Caldwell being obliged to listen courteously for fear of making herself unpopular. The man's manner impressed Beth—there was such a solemn joy in it, as of one who had just witnessed something refreshing.

There were two priests in the place, Father Madden and Father John. Captain Caldwell said Father Madden was a gentleman. He shook hands with everybody, even with the curate and Mr. Macbean; but Father John would not speak to a protestant, and used to scowl at the children when he met them, and then Mildred would seize Bernadine's hand and drag her past him quickly, because she hated to be scowled at; but Beth always stopped and made a face at him. He used to carry a long whip, and crack it at the people, and on Sunday mornings, if they did not go to mass, he would patrol the streets in a fury, rating the idlers at the top of his voice, and driving them on before him. Beth used to glance stealthily at the chapel as she went to church; it had the attraction of forbidden fruit for her, and of Father John's exciting antics—nothing ever happened in church. Chapel she associated with the papists, and not at all with Kitty, whose tender teaching occupied a separate compartment of her consciousness altogether. There she kept the "Blessed Mother" and the "Dear Lord" for her comfort, although she seldom visited them now. Terms of endearment meant a great deal to Beth, because no one used them habitually in her family; in fact, she could not remember ever being called dear in her life by either father or mother.

Since the day when she had run away from the great green waves, however, her father had taken an interest in her. He often asked her to brush his hair, and laughed

very much sometimes at things she said. He used to lie on the couch reading to himself while she brushed.

"Read some to me, papa," she said one day. He smiled and read a little, not in the least expecting her to understand it, but she soon showed him that she did, and entreated him to go on; so he gradually fell into the habit of reading aloud to her, particularly the "Ingoldsby Legends." She liked to hear them again and again, and would clamour for her favourites. On one occasion when he had stopped, and she had been sitting some time at the foot of the couch, with the brush in her hand, she suddenly burst out with a long passage from "The Execution"—the passage that begins:—

"God! 'tis a fearsome thing to see That pale wan man's mute agony."

Captain Caldwell raised his eyebrows as she proceeded, and looked at his wife.

"I thought a friend of ours was considered stupid," he said.

"People can do very well when they like," Mrs. Caldwell answered tartly; "but they're too lazy to try. When did you learn that, Beth?"

"I didn't learn it," Beth answered.

"Then how do you know it?"

"It just came to me," Beth said.

"Then I wish your lessons would just come to you."

"I wish they would," said Beth sincerely.

Mrs. Caldwell snapped out something about idleness and obstinacy, and left the room. The day was darkening down, and presently Captain Caldwell got up, lit a lamp at the sideboard, and set it on the dining-table. When he had done so, he took Beth, and set her on the table too. Beth stood up on it, laughing, and put her arm round his neck.

"Look at us, papa!" she exclaimed, pointing at the window opposite. The blinds

were up, and it was dark enough outside for them to see themselves reflected in the glass.

"I think we make a pretty picture, Beth," her father said, putting his arm round her.

He had scarcely spoken, when there came a terrific report and a crash; something whizzed close to Beth's head; and a shower of glass fell on the floor. In a moment Beth had wriggled out of her father's arm, slid from the table, and scrambled up on to the window-seat, scattering the flower-pots, and slapping at her father's hand in her excitement, when he tried to stop her.

"It's Bap-faced Flanagan—or Tony-kill-the-cow," she cried. "I can see—O papa! why did you pull me back? Now I shall never know!"

The servants had rushed in from the kitchen, and Mrs. Caldwell came flying downstairs.

"What is it, Henry?" she cried.

"The d——d scoundrels shot at me with the child in my arms," he answered, looking in his indignation singularly like Beth herself in a stormy mood. As he spoke he turned to the hall door, and walked out into the street bareheaded.

"For the love of the Lord, sir," Riley remonstrated, keeping well out of the way himself.

But Captain Caldwell walked off down the middle of the road alone deliberately to the police station, his wife standing meanwhile on the doorstep, with the light behind her, coolly awaiting his return.

"Pull down the blind in the sitting-room, Riley, and keep Miss Beth there," was all she said.

Presently Captain Caldwell returned with a police-officer and two men. They immediately began to search the room. The glass of a picture had been shattered at the far end. Riley pulled the picture to one side, and discovered something imbedded

in the wall behind, which he picked out with his pocket-knife and brought to the light. It looked like a disc all bent out of shape. He turned it every way, examining it, then tried it with his teeth.

"I thought so," he said significantly. "It wouldn't be yer honour they'd be afther wid a silver bullet. I heard her tell 'em herself to try one."

"And I said if they missed they'd be damned," Beth exclaimed triumphantly.

"Beth!" cried her mother, seizing her by the arm to shake her, "how dare you use such a word?"

"I heard it in church," said Beth, in an injured tone.

"Look here, Beth," said her father, rescuing her from her mother's clutches, and setting her on the table—he had been talking aside with the police officer—"I want you to promise something on your word of honour as a lady, just to please me."

Beth's countenance dropped: "O papa!" she exclaimed, "it's something I don't want to promise."

"Well, never mind that, Beth," he answered. "Just promise this one thing to please me. If you don't, the people will try and kill you."

"I don't mind that," said Beth.

"But I do—and your mother does."

Beth gave her mother a look of such utter astonishment, that the poor lady turned crimson.

"And perhaps they'll kill me too," Captain Caldwell resumed. "You see they nearly did to-night."

This was a veritable inspiration. Beth turned pale, and gasped: "I promise!"

"Not so fast," her father said. "Never promise anything till you hear what it is. But now, promise you won't say bad luck to any of the people again."

"I promise," Beth repeated; "but"—she slid from the table, and nodded

emphatically—"but when I shake my fist and stamp my foot at them it'll mean the same thing."

It was found next morning that Bap-faced Flanagan and Tony-kill-the-cow had disappeared from the township; but Murphy remained; and Beth was not allowed to go out alone again for a long time, not even into the garden. All she knew about it herself, however, was, that she had always either a policeman or a coastguardsman to talk to, which added very much to her pleasure in life, and also to Anne's.

CHAPTER IX

One of the interests of Captain Caldwell's life was his garden. He spent long hours in cultivating it, and that summer his vegetables, fruits, and flowers had been the wonder of the neighbourhood. But now autumn had come, vegetables were dug, fruits gathered, flowers bedraggled; and there was little to be done but clear the beds, plant them with bulbs, and prepare them for the spring.

Now that Captain Caldwell had made Beth's acquaintance, he liked to have her with him to help him when he was at work in the garden, and there was nothing that she loved so much.

One day they were at work together on a large flower-bed. Her father was trimming some rose-bushes, and she was kneeling beside him on a little mat, weeding.

"I'm glad I'm not a flower," she suddenly exclaimed, after a long silence.

"Why, Beth, flowers are very beautiful."

"Yes, but they last so short a time. I'd rather be less beautiful, and live longer. What's your favourite flower, papa?"

She had stopped weeding for the moment, but still sat on the mat, looking up at him. Captain Caldwell clipped a little more, then stopped too, and looked down at her.

"I don't get a separate pleasure from any particular flower, Beth; they all delight

me," he answered.

Beth pondered upon this for a little, then she asked, "Do you know which I like best? Hot primroses." Captain Caldwell raised his eyebrows interrogatively. "When you pick them in the sun, and put them against your cheek, they're all warm, you know," Beth explained; "and then they are good! And fuchsias are good too, but it isn't the same good. You know that one in the sitting-room window, white outside and salmon-coloured inside, and such a nice shape—the flowers—and the way they hang down; you have to lift them to look into them. When I look at them long, they make me feel—oh—feel, you know—feel that I could take the whole plant in my arms and hug it. But fuchsias don't scent sweet like hot primroses."

"And therefore they are not so good?" her father suggested, greatly interested in the child's attempt to express herself. "They say that the scent is the soul of the flower."

"The scent is the soul of the flower," Beth repeated several times; then heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction. "I want to sing it," she said. "I always want to sing things like that."

"What other 'things like that' do you know, Beth?"

"The song of the sea in the shell, The swish of the grass in the breeze, The sound of a far-away bell, The whispering leaves on the trees,"

Beth burst out instantly.

"Who taught you that, Beth?" her father asked.

"Oh, no one taught me, papa," she answered. "It just came to me—like this, you know. I used to listen to the sea in that shell in the sitting-room, and I tried and tried to find a name for the sound, and all at once song came into my head—The song of the sea in the shell. Then I was lying out here on the grass when it was long, before you cut it to make hay, and you came out and said, 'There's a stiff breeze blowing.' And it blew hard and then stopped, and then it came again; and every time it came the grass went—swish-h-h! The swish of the grass in the breeze. Then you know

that bell that rings a long way off, you can only just hear it out here—The sound of a far-away bell. Then the leaves—it was a long time before anything came that I could sing about them. I used to try and think it, but you can't sing a thing you think. It's when a thing comes, you can sing it. I was always listening to the leaves, and I always felt they were doing something; then all at once it came one day. Of course they were whispering—The whispering leaves on the trees. That was how they came, papa. At first I used to sing them by themselves; but now I sing them all together. You can sing them three different ways—the way I did first, you know, then you can put breeze first—

The swish of the grass in the breeze, The whispering leaves on the trees, The song of the sea in the shell, The sound of a far-away bell.

Or you can sing—

The sound of a far-away bell, The whispering leaves on the trees, The swish of the grass in the breeze, The song of the sea in the shell.

Which way do you think the nicest?" She had rattled all this off as fast as she could speak, looking and pointing towards the various things she mentioned as she proceeded, the sea, the grass, the trees, the distance; now she looked up to her father for an answer. He was looking at her so queerly, she was filled with alarm. "Am I naughty, papa?" she exclaimed.

"Oh no," he said, with a smile that reassured her. "I was just thinking. I like to hear how 'things come' to you. You must always tell me—when new things come. By the way, who told you that fuchsia was salmon-coloured?"

"I saw it was," she said, surprised that he needed to ask such a question. "I saw it one day when we had boiled salmon for dinner. Isn't it nice when you see that one thing's like another? I have a pebble, and it's just the shape of a pear—now you know what shape it is, don't you?" He nodded. "But if I said it's thick at one end and thin at another, you wouldn't know what shape it is a bit, would you?"

"No, I should not," he answered, beginning to prune again, thoughtfully. "Beth," he said presently, "I should like to see you grow up."

"Shan't I grow up?" said Beth in dismay.

"Oh yes—at least I should hope so. But—it's not likely that I shall be—looking on. But, Beth, I want you to remember this. When you grow up, I think you will want to do something that only a few other people can do well—paint a picture, write a book, act in a theatre, make music—it doesn't matter what; if it comes to you, if you feel you can do it, just do it. You'll not do it well all at once; but try and try until you can do it well. And don't ask anybody if they think you can do it; they'll be sure to say no; and then you'll be disheartened—What's disheartened? It's the miserable feeling you would get if I said you would never be able to learn to play the piano. You'd try to do it all the same, perhaps, but you'd do it doubtfully instead of with confidence."

"What's confidence?" said Beth.

"You are listening to me now with confidence. It is as if you said, I believe you."

"But I can't say 'I believe you' to arithmetic, if I want to do it."

"No, but you can say, I believe I can do it—I believe in myself."

"Is that confidence in myself?" Beth asked, light breaking in upon her.

"That's it. You're getting quite a vocabulary, Beth. A vocabulary is all the words you know," he added hastily, anticipating the inevitable question.

Beth went on with her weeding for a little.

"And there is another thing, Beth, I want to tell you," her father recommenced. "Never do anything unless you are quite sure it is the right thing to do. It doesn't matter how much you may want to do it, you mustn't, if you are not quite, quite sure it is right."

"Not even if I am just half sure?"

"No, certainly not. You must be quite, quite sure."

Beth picked some more weeds, then looked up at him again: "But, papa, I shall never want to do anything I don't think right when I'm grown up, shall I?"

"I'm afraid you will. Everybody does."

"Did you want to, papa?" Beth asked in amazement.

"Yes," he answered.

"And did you do it?"

"Yes," he repeated.

"And what happened?"

"Much misery."

"Were you miserable?"

"Yes, very. But that wasn't the worst of it."

"What was the worst of it?"

"The worst of it was that I made other people miserable."

"Ah, that's bad," said Beth, with perfect comprehension. "That makes you feel so horrid inside yourself."

"Well, Beth, just you remember that. You can't do wrong without making somebody else miserable. Be loyal, be loyal to yourself, loyal to the best that is in you; that means, be as good as your friends think you, and better if you can. Tell the truth, live openly, and stick to your friends; that's the whole of the best code of morality in the world. Now we must go in."

As they walked down the garden together, Beth slipped her dirty little hand into his, and looked up at him: "Papa," she said solemnly, "when you want to be with somebody always, more than with anybody else; and want to look at him, and want to talk to him, and you find you can tell him lots of things you couldn't tell anybody

else if you tried, you know; what does it mean?"

"It means you love him very much."

"Then I love you, papa, very much," she said, nestling her head against his arm. "And it does make me feel so nice inside. But it makes me miserable too," she added, sighing.

"How so?"

"When you have a headache, you know. I used only to be afraid you'd be angry if I made a noise. But now I'm always thinking how much it hurts you. I wake up often and often at night, and you are in my mind, and I try and see you say, 'It's better,' or 'It's quite well.'"

"And what then, Beth?" her father asked, in a queer voice.

"Then I don't cry any more, you know."

She looked up at her father as she spoke, and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER X

That was almost the last of those happy autumn days. Winter fell upon the country suddenly with nipping cold. The mountains, always sombre, lowered in great tumbled masses from under the heavy clouds that seldom rose from their summits. Terrible gales kept the sea in torment, and the voice of its rage and pain filled Castletownrock without ceasing. Torrents of rain tore up the roads, and rendered them almost impassable. There was stolid endurance and suffering written on every face out of doors, while within the people cowered over their peat fires, a prey to hunger, cold, and depression. Draughts made merry through the large rooms and passages in Captain Caldwell's house; the wind howled in the chimneys, rattled at the windows, and whistled at the keyholes, especially at night, when Beth would hide her head under the bed-clothes to keep out the racket, or, in another mood, lie

and listen to it, and imagine herself out in the storm, till her nerves were strung to a state of ecstatic tension, and her mind fairly revelled in the sense of danger. When her father was at home in the evening, she would sit still beside the fire in the sitting-room, listening in breathless awe, and excitement wholly pleasurable, to the gale raging without; but if Captain Caldwell had not returned, as frequently happened now that the days were short, and the roads so bad, well knowing the risks he ran, she would see the car upset a hundred times, and hear the rattle of musketry in every blast that shook the house, and so share silently, but to the full, the terrible anxiety which kept her mother pacing up and down, up and down, unable to settle to anything until he entered and sank into a seat, often so exhausted that it was hard to rouse him to change his dripping clothes. His duties, always honourably performed whatever the risk to himself, were far too severe for him, and he was rapidly becoming a wreck;—nervous, liverish, a martyr to headache, and a slave to stimulants, although not a drunkard—he only took enough to whip him up to his work. His digestion too had become seriously impaired, and he had no natural appetite for anything. He was fond of his children, and proud of them, but had hitherto been too irritable to contribute anything to their happiness; on the contrary, his name was a terror to them, and "Hush, papa has come in!" was enough at any time to damp their wildest spirits. Now, however, he suffered more from depression than from irritability, and would cower over the fire on stormy days in a state of despondency which was reflected in every face, taking no notice of any of them. The children would watch him furtively in close silent sympathy, sitting still and whispering for fear of disturbing him; and if perchance they saw him smile, and a look of relief came into their mother's anxious face, their own spirits went up on the instant. But everything was against him. The damp came up from the flags in the sitting-room through the cocoanut matting and the thick carpet that covered it, which it defaced in great patches. Close to the fire the wires of the piano rusted, and had to be rubbed and rubbed every day, or half the notes went dumb. The paper, a rare

luxury in those parts, began to drop from the walls. Great turf-fires were constantly kept up, but the damp stole a march on them when they smouldered in the night, and made mildew-marks upon everything.

Good food and cooking would have helped Captain Caldwell, but the food was indifferent, and there were no cooks to be had in the country. Biddy had never seen such a thing as a kitchen-range before she took the situation, and when she first had to use the oven, she put the turf on the bottom shelf in order to heat the top one. Mrs. Caldwell made what were superhuman efforts to a woman of her training and constitution, to keep the servants up to the mark, and grew grey in the endeavour; but Mrs. Caldwell in the kitchen was like a racehorse at the plough; and even if she had been a born housewife, she could have done little with servants who would do nothing themselves except under her eyes, and stole everything they could lay their hands on, including the salt out of the salt-cellars between meals, if it were not locked up.

Towards the end of January, Captain Caldwell was ill in bed; he had wet cloths on his head, and seemed as if he could hardly speak. Beth hung about his door all day, watching for opportunities to steal in. Mamma always sent her away if she could, but if papa heard her, he would whisper, "Let the child come in," and then mamma would let her in, but would still look cross. And Beth sat at one side of the bed, and mamma sat on the other, and no one spoke except papa sometimes; only you could seldom understand what he said. And mamma cried, but Beth did not. She ached too much inside for that. You can't cry when you ache so much.

Beth day after day sat with her hands folded on her lap, and her feet dangling from a chair that was much too high for her, watching her father with an intensity of silent anxiety that was terrible to witness in so young a child. Her mother might have beaten her to death, but she could never have dislodged her from the room once she had her father's leave to stay there. Mrs. Caldwell rarely beat her now, however; she

generally ignored her; so Beth came and went as she chose. She would climb up on to the bed when there was nobody in the room, and kiss the curls of papa's thick glossy black hair so softly that he never knew, except once, when he caught her, and smiled. His dark face grew grey in bed, and his blue eyes sunken and haggard; but he battled it out that time, and slowly began to recover.

Beth was sitting in her usual place beside her father's bed one day when the doctor came and discovered her. He was standing on the other side of the bed, and exclaimed, "Why, it's all eyes!"

"Yes, it's a queer pixie," her father said. "But it's going to do something some day, or I'm much mistaken."

"It's going to make a nuisance of itself if you put such nonsense into its head, or I'm much mistaken," Mrs. Caldwell observed.

"I shall not make a nuisance of myself," Beth indignantly protested.

"I shall never be able to make you understand, Caroline," Captain Caldwell exclaimed. "Little pitchers are generally bad enough, but when there is large intelligence added to the long ears, they're the devil."

Before the doctor left he said to Mrs. Caldwell, "We must keep our patient amused, you know."

"O doctor!" Beth exclaimed, clasping her hands in her earnestness, "do you think if Sophie Keene came?"

The doctor burst into a shout of laughter, in which Captain Caldwell also joined. "Just stay here yourself, Beth," he said, when he had recovered himself. "For amusement, neither Sophie Keene nor any one else I ever knew could hold a candle to you."

"What's 'hold a candle to you'?" Beth instantly demanded.

And then there was more laughter, in which even Mrs. Caldwell joined; and

afterwards, when the doctor had gone, she actually patted Beth on the back, and stroked her hair, which was the first caress Beth ever remembered to have received from her mother.

"Now, mamma," she exclaimed, with great feeling, in the fulness of her surprise and delight, "now I shall forget that you ever beat me."

Her mother coloured painfully.

Her father muttered something about a noble nature.

"And that was the child you never wanted at all!" slipped, with a ring of triumph, from Mrs. Caldwell unawares—an interesting example of the complexity of human feelings.

Captain Caldwell soon went back to his duty—all too soon for his strength. The dreadful weather continued. Day after day he returned soaking from some distant station to the damp and discomfort of the house, and the ill-cooked, unappetising food, which he could hardly swallow. And to all this was added great anxiety about the future of his family. His boys were doing well at school by this time; but he was not satisfied with the way in which the little girls were being brought up. There was no order in their lives, no special time for anything; and he knew the importance of early discipline. He tried to discuss the subject with his wife, but she met his suggestions irritably.

"There's time enough for that," she said. "I had no regular lessons till I was in my teens."

"But what answered with you may be disastrous to these children," he ventured. "They are all unlike you in disposition, more especially Beth."

"You spoil that child," Mrs. Caldwell protested. "And at any rate I can do no more. I am run off my feet."

This was true, and Captain Caldwell let the subject drop. His patience was

exemplary in those days. He suffered severely both mentally and physically, but never complained. The shadow was upon him, and he knew it, but he met his fate with fortitude. Whatever his faults, they were expiated in the estimation of all who saw him suffer now.

Mrs. Caldwell never realised how ill he was, but still she was uneasy, and it was with intense relief that she welcomed a case of soups and other nourishing delicacies calculated to tempt the appetite, which arrived for him one day from one of his sisters in England.

"This is just what you want, Henry," she said, with a brighter look in her face than he had seen there for months. "I shall soon have you yourself again now."

Captain Caldwell's spirits also went up.

In the evening they were all together in the sitting-room. Mrs. Caldwell was playing little songs for Mildred to sing, Baby Bernadine was playing with her bricks upon the floor, and Beth as usual was hanging about her father. He had shaken off his despondency, and was quite lively for the moment, walking up and down the room, and making merry remarks to his wife in Italian, at which she laughed a good deal.

"Come, Beth, fetch 'Ingoldsby.' We shall just come to my favourite, and finish the book before you go to bed," he said.

Beth brought the book, and then climbed up on his knee, and settled there happily, with her head on his shoulder.

"As I laye a-thynkynge, the golden sun was sinking, O merrie sang that Bird as it glitter'd on her breast, With a thousand gorgeous dyes, While soaring to the skies, 'Mid the stars she seem'd to rise, As to her nest;

As I laye a-thynkynge, her meaning was exprest:— 'Follow, follow me away, It boots not to delay,'— 'Twas so she seemed to saye, 'HERE IS REST!'"

After he had read those last lines, there was a moment's silence, and then Beth burst

into a tempest of tears. "O papa—papa! No, no, no!" she sobbed. "I couldn't bear it."

"What is the matter with the child?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, starting up.

"'The vision and the faculty divine,' I think," her father answered. "Leave her to me."

Beth was awake when Anne entered the nursery next morning to call the children.

"Get up, and be good," Anne said. "Your pa's ill."

Mrs. Caldwell came into the nursery immediately afterwards, very much agitated. She kissed Beth, and from that moment the child was calm; but there settled upon her pathetic little face a terrible look of age and anxiety.

When she was dressed, she ran right into her father's room before any one could stop her. He was moaning—"O my head, my head! O my head, my head!" over and over again.

"You mustn't stay here, little woman—not to-day," the doctor said. "It will make your father worse if you do."

Beth stole from the room, and returned to the nursery. There, however, she could still hear her father moaning, and she could not bear it, so she took her prayer-book, by way of life-saving apparatus, and went down to the kitchen to "see" what the servants were thinking—her own significant expression. They were all strangely subdued. "Sit down, Miss Beth," Biddy said kindly. "Sit down in the window there wid your book if you want company. It's a sore heart you'll be having, or I'm much mistaken."

Beth sat in the window the whole morning, reading prayers to herself, while she watched and waited. The doctor sent Riley down from the sick-room several times to fetch things, and each time Beth consulted his countenance anxiously for news, but asked no questions. Biddy tried to persuade her to eat, but the child could not touch anything.

Late in the afternoon Riley came down in a hurry.

"Is the master better, Pat?" Biddy demanded.

"'Deed, thin, he isn't," Riley replied; "and the doctor's sending me off on the horse as hard as I can go for Dr. Jamieson."

"Och, thin, if the doctor's sending you for Dr. Jamieson it's all up. He's niver sent for till the last. The Lord himself won't save him now."

Beth shuffled over the leaves of her prayer-book hurriedly. She had been crying piteously to God in her heart for hours to save her father, and He had not heard; now she remembered that the servants said if you read the Lord's Prayer backwards it would raise the devil. Beth tried; but the invocation was unavailing. Before Riley could saddle the horse, a message was sent down to stop him; and then Anne came for Beth, and took her up to her father's room. The dreadful sounds had ceased at last, and there was a strange silence in the house. Mrs. Caldwell was sitting beside her husband's bed, rocking herself a little as if in pain, but shedding no tears. Mildred was standing with her arm round her mother's neck crying bitterly, while Baby Bernadine gazed at her father wonderingly.

He was lying on his side with his arms folded. His eyes were shut, and there was a lovely look of relief upon his face.

"I sent for you children," their mother said, "to see your father just as he died. You must never forget him."

Ellis and Rickards, two of papa's men, were in the room, and Mrs. Ellis too, and the doctor, and Riley, and Biddy, and Anne; and there was a foot-bath, with steaming hot water in it, on the floor; some mustard on the table; and the fire burnt brightly. These details impressed themselves on Beth's mind involuntarily, as indeed did everything else connected with that time. It seemed to her afterwards as if she had seen everything and felt nothing for the moment—nothing but breathless excitement and interest. Her grief was entirely suspended.

Mrs. Ellis and the doctor led mamma down to the sitting-room; they didn't seem to

think that she could walk. And then Mrs. Ellis made her some tea, and stood there, and coaxed her to drink it, just as if mamma had been a child. Mrs. Caldwell sat on the big couch with her back to the window, and Mildred sat beside her, with her arm round her, crying all the time. Bernadine cried too, but it was because she was hungry, and no one thought of giving her anything to eat. Beth fetched her some bread-and-butter, and then she was good. People began to arrive—Mr. Macbean, Captain and Mrs. Keene, the Smalls, the curate—Father Madden even. He had heard the news out in the country, and came hurrying back to pay his respects, and offer his condolences to Mrs. Caldwell, and see if there was anything he could do. He hoped it was not taking a liberty to come; but indeed he came in the fulness of his heart, and because he couldn't help it, for he had known him well, and a better man and truer gentleman never breathed. The widow held out her hand to the priest, and looked up at him gratefully.

Beth opened the door for Mrs. Small, who exclaimed at once: "Oh, my dear child, how is your poor mother? Does she cry at all? I do hope she has been crying."

"No," Beth answered, "nobody cries but Mildred."

When Mrs. Small went in, Mrs. Caldwell spoke to her quite collectedly. "He was taken ill at eight o'clock this morning with a dreadful pain in his head," she told her. "He had suffered fearfully from his head of late. I sent for the doctor at once. But nothing relieved him. From ten o'clock he got worse and worse, and at four he was gone. He always wished to die suddenly, and be spared a lingering illness. He has been depressed of late, but this morning, early, he woke up quite brightly; and last night he was wonderfully better. After the children had gone to bed, he read aloud to me as he used to do in the old days; and he looked so much more like his old self again that I thought a happier time was coming. And so it was. But not for me."

"Poor lady!" Mrs. Small whispered. "It has been a fearful shock."

Mrs. Caldwell showed strength of character in the midst of the overwhelming

calamity which had fallen upon her with such awful suddenness. She had a nice sense of honour, and her love was great; and by the help of these she was enabled to carry out every wish of her dead husband with regard to himself. He had had a fastidious horror of being handled after death by the kind of old women who are accustomed to lay out bodies, and therefore Mrs. Caldwell begged Ellis and Rickards to perform that last duty for him themselves.

When the children went to bed, she took them to kiss their father. The stillness of the chamber struck a chill through Beth, but she thought it beautiful. The men had draped it in white, and decorated it with evergreens, there being no flowers in season. Papa was smiling, and looked serenely happy.

"Years ago he was like that," mamma said softly, as if she were speaking to herself; "but latterly there has been a look of pain. I am glad to see him so once more. You are at peace now—dearest." She stroked his dark hair, and as she did so her hand showed white against it.

The children kissed him; and then Mrs. Ellis persuaded mamma to come and help her to put them to bed; and mamma taught them to say: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." She told them to remember they had learnt it on the day their father died, and asked them to say it always in memory of him. Beth believed for a long time that it was he who would walk with her through the valley of the shadow, and in after years she felt sure that her mother had thought so too.

Mrs. Ellis stayed all night, and slept with the children.

When their mother left them, Beth could not sleep. She had noticed how cold her father was when she kissed him, and was distressed to think he had only a sheet to cover him. The longer she thought of it, the more wretched she became, especially when she contrasted the warmth and softness of her own little bed with the hardness and coldness of the one they had made up for him; and at last she could bear it no

longer. She sat up in bed and listened. She could hear by their breathing that the other children were asleep, but she was not sure about Mrs. Ellis. Very stealthily, therefore, she slipped out of bed, and pulled off the clothes. She could only just clasp them in both arms, but the nursery door was ajar, and she managed to open it with her foot. It creaked noisily, and Beth waited, listening in suspense; but nobody moved; so she slipped out into the passage. It was quite dark there, and the floor felt very cold to her bare feet. She stumbled down the passage, tripping over the bed-clothes as she went, and dreading to be caught and stopped, but not afraid of anything else. The door was open when she reached it, and there was a dim light in the room. This was unexpected, and she paused to peep in before she entered. Two candles were burning on a table at the foot of the bed. Their flames flickered in a draught, and cast shadows on her father's face, so that it seemed as if he moved and breathed again. Her mother was kneeling beside the bed, with her face hidden on her husband's breast, her left arm round him, while with the fingers of her right hand she incessantly toyed with his hair. "Only last night," she was saying, "only last night; oh, I cannot believe it!—perhaps I ought to be glad—there will be no more pain for you—oh, my darling, I would have given my life to save you a moment's pain—and I could do so little—so little. Oh, if only you could come back to tell me that your life had ever been the better for me, that I had not spoilt it utterly, that I brought you some happiness." She raised her head and looked into the tranquil face. The flickering shadows flitted across it, but did not deceive her. She must ache on always for an answer now—always, for ever. With a convulsive sob, she crawled up closer on her knees, and laid her cheek beside his, but no tears came. She had not wept at all that day.

Beth stood for a long time in the doorway, listening to her mother's rambling talk, and watching her white fingers straying through her father's hair. She hugged the bed-clothes close, but she had forgotten why she came. She felt no cold; she held no thought; her whole being was absorbed in the scene before her.

Presently, however, something that her mother said aroused her—"Cold," she was murmuring, "so cold. How you dreaded it too! You were always delicate and suffering, yet you did more than the strongest men, for our sakes. You never spared yourself. What you undertook to do, you did like an honourable gentleman, neglecting nothing. You have died doing your duty, as you wished to die. You have been dying all these months—and I never suspected—I did not know—dying—killed by exposure—and anxiety—and bad food. You came home hungry, and you could not eat what I had to give you—cold, and I could not warm you—oh, the cruel, bitter cold!"

Beth slipped up to her noiselessly.

"Mamma!"

Mrs. Caldwell started.

Beth held out the blankets—"to cover him."

Her mother caught her in her arms. "O my poor little child! my poor little child!" she cried; and then at last she burst into tears.

During the days that preceded her father's funeral, Beth did not miss him. It was as if he were somewhere else, that was all—away in the mountains—and was himself thinking, as Beth did continually, about the still, cold, smiling figure that reposed, serenely indifferent to them all, in his room upstairs. One day, what he had said about being laid out by old women came into her head, and she wondered what he would have looked like when they laid him out that he should have objected so strongly to their seeing him. She was near the death-chamber at the moment, and went in. No one was there, and she stood a long time looking at the figure on the bed. It was entirely covered, but she had only to lift the sheet and learn the secret. She turned it back from the placid face, then stopped, and whispered half in awe, half in interrogation, "Papa!" As she pronounced the word, the inhuman impulse passed and was forgotten.

Hours later, Mrs. Ellis found her sitting beside him as she had so often done during his illness, on that same chair which was too high for her, her feet dangling, and her little hands folded in her lap, gazing at him with a face as placidly set, save for the eyes, as his own.

The next day they had all to bid him the long farewell. Mrs. Caldwell stood looking down upon him, not wiping the great tears that welled up painfully into her eyes, lest in the act she should blot out the dear image and so lose sight of it for one last precious moment. She was an undemonstrative woman, but the lingering way in which she touched him, his hair, his face, his waxen hands, was all the more impressive for that in its restrained tenderness.

Suddenly she uncovered his feet. They were white as marble, and beautifully formed. "Ah, I feared so!" she exclaimed. "They put them into hot water that day. I knew it was too hot, and I said so; he seemed insensible, but I felt him wince—and see!" The scar of a scald proved that she had been right. This last act, due to the fear that he had been made to suffer an unnecessary pang, struck Beth in after years as singularly pathetic.

It was not until after the funeral that Beth herself realised that she had lost her father. When they returned, the house had been set in order, and made to look as usual—yet something was missing. The blinds were up, the sun was streaming in, the "Ingoldsby Legends" lay on the sofa in the sitting-room. When Beth saw the book her eyes dilated with a pang. It lay there, just as he had left it; but he was in the ground. He would never come back again.

Suddenly the child threw herself on the floor in an agony of grief, sobbing, moaning, writhing, tearing her hair, and calling aloud, "Papa! papa! Come back! come back! come back!"

Mrs. Caldwell in her fright would have tried her old remedy of shaking and beating; but Mrs. Ellis snatched the child up and carried her off to the nursery, where she

kept her for the rest of that terrible day, rocking her on her knee most of the time, and talking to her about her father in heaven, living the life eternal, yet watching over her still, and waiting for her, until she fired Beth's imagination, and the terrible grave was forgotten.

That night, however, and for many nights to come, the child started up out of her sleep, and wept, and wailed, and tore her hair, and had again to be nursed and comforted.

CHAPTER XI

Just like the mountains, all jumbled up together when you view them from a distance, had Beth's impulses and emotions already begun to be in their extraordinary complexity at this period; and even more like the mountains when you are close to them, for then, losing sight of the whole, you become aware of the details, and are surprised at their wonderful diversity, at the heights and hollows, the barren wastes, fertile valleys, gentle slopes, and giddy precipices—heights and hollows of hope and despair, barren wastes of mis-spent time, fertile valleys of intellectual accomplishment, gentle slopes of aspiration undefined, and giddy precipices of passionate impulse and desperate revolt. Genius is sympathetic insight made perfect; and it must have this diversity if it is ever to be effectual—must touch on every human experience, must suffer, and must also enjoy; great, therefore, are its compensations. It feels the sorrows of all mankind, and is elevated by them; whereas the pain of an individual bereavement is rather acute than prolonged. Genius is spared the continuous gnawing ache of the grief which stultifies; instead of an ever-present wearing sense of loss that would dim its power, it retains only those hallowed memories, those vivid recollections, which foster the joy of a great yearning tenderness; and all its pains are transmuted into something subtle, mysterious, invisible, neither to be named nor ignored—a fertilising essence which

is the source of its own heaven, and may also contain the salvation of earth. So genius has no lasting griefs.

Beth utterly rejected all thought of her father in his grave, and even of her father in heaven. When her first wild grief subsided, he returned to her, to be with her, as those we love are with us always in their absence, enshrined in our happy consciousness. She never mentioned him in these days, but his presence, warm in her heart, kept her little being aglow; and it was only when people spoke to her, and distracted her attention from the thought of him, that she felt disconsolate. While she could walk with him in dreams, she cared for no other companionship.

It was a dreadful position for poor Mrs. Caldwell, left a widow—not without friends, certainly, for the people were kind—but with none of her own kith and kin, in that wild district, embarrassed for want of money, and broken in health. But, as is usual in times of great calamity, many things happened, showing both the best and the worst side of human nature.

After Captain Caldwell's death, old Captain Keene, who had once held the appointment himself, and was indebted to Captain Caldwell for much kindly hospitality, went about the countryside telling people that Captain Caldwell had died of drink. Some officious person immediately brought the story to Mrs. Caldwell.

Mrs. Caldwell had the house on her hands, but the officer who was sent to succeed Captain Caldwell would be obliged to take it, as there was no other. He arrived one day with a very fastidious wife, who did not like the house at all. There was no accommodation in it, no china cupboard, nothing fit for a lady. She must have it all altered. From the way she spoke, it seemed to Beth that she blamed her mother for everything that was wrong.

Mrs. Caldwell said very little. She was suffering from a great swelling at the back of her neck—an anthrax, the doctor called it—and was not fit to be about at all, but her indomitable fortitude kept her up. Mrs. Ellis had stayed to nurse her, and help with

the children. She and Mrs. Caldwell looked at each other and smiled when the new officer's wife had gone.

"She's a very fine lady indeed, Mrs. Ellis," Mrs. Caldwell said, sighing wearily.

"Yes, ma'am," Mrs. Ellis answered; "but people who have been used to things all their lives think less about them."

Mrs. Ellis was very kind to the children, and when wet days kept Beth indoors, she would stay with her, and study her with interest. She was thin, precise, low-voiced, quiet in her movements, passionless, loyal; and every time she took a mouthful at table, she wiped her mouth.

The doctor came every day to dress the abscess on Mrs. Caldwell's neck, and every day he said that if it had not burst of itself he should have been obliged to make a deep incision in it in the form of a cross. Mildred and Beth were always present on these occasions, fighting to be allowed to hold the basin. Mrs. Ellis wanted to turn them out, but Mrs. Caldwell said: "Let them stay, poor little bodies; they like to be with me."

The poor lady, ill as she was, had neither peace nor quiet. The yard was full of great stones now, and stone-masons hammered at them from early morning till late at night, chipping them into shape for the alterations and additions to be made to the house; the loft was full of carpenters preparing boards for flooring; the yard-gates were always open, and people came and went as they liked, so that there was no more privacy for the family. Mildred stayed indoors with her mother a good deal; but Beth, followed by Bernadine, who had become her shadow, was continually in the yard among the men, listening, questioning, and observing. To Beth, at this time, the grown-up people of her race were creatures with a natural history other than her own, which she studied with great intelligence and interest, and sometimes also with disgust; for, although she was so much more with the common people, as she had been taught to call them, than with her own class, she did not adopt their standards,

and shrank always with innate refinement from everything gross. No one thought of shooting her now. She had not only lived down her unpopularity, but, by dint of her natural fearlessness, her cheerful audacity of speech, and quick comprehension, had won back the fickle hearts of the people, who weighed her words again superstitiously, and made much of her. The workmen, with the indolent, inconsequent Irish temperament which makes it irksome to follow up a task continuously, and easier to do anything than the work in hand, would break off to amuse her at any time. One young carpenter—lean, sallow, and sulky—who was working for her mother, interested her greatly. He was making packing-cases, and the first one was all wrong, and had to be pulled to pieces; and the way he swore as he demolished it, ripping out oaths as he ripped up the boards, impressed Beth as singularly silly.

There was another carpenter at work in the loft, a little wizened old man. He always brought a peculiar kind of yellow bread, and shared it with the children, who loved it, and took as much as they wanted without scruple, so that the poor old man must have had short-commons himself sometimes. He could draw all kinds of things—fish with scales, ships in full sail, horses, coaches, people—and Beth often made him get out his big broad pencil and do designs for her on the new white boards. When he was within earshot, the people in the yard were particular about what they said before the children; if they forgot themselves he called them to order, and silenced them instantly, which surprised Beth, because he was the smallest man there. There was one man, however, whom the old carpenter could never suppress. Beth did not know how this man got his living. He came from the village to gossip, wore a tweed suit, not like a workman's, nor was it the national Irish dress. He had a red nose and a wooden leg, and, after she knew him, for a long time she always expected a man with a wooden leg to have a red nose, but, somehow, she never expected a man with a red nose to have a wooden leg. This man was always cheery, and very voluble. He used the worst language possible in the pleasantest way, and

his impervious good-humour was proof against all remonstrance. What he said was either blasphemous or obscene as a rule, but in effect it was not at all like the same thing from the other men, because, with them, such language was the expression of anger and evil moods, while with him it was the vehicle of thought from a mind habitually serene.

Mrs. Caldwell was being hurried out of the house with indecent haste, considering the state of her health and all the arrangements she had to make; but she bore up bravely. She was touched one day by an offer of help from Beth, and begged her to take charge of Bernadine and be a little mother to her. Beth promised to do her best. Accordingly, when Bernadine was naughty, Beth beat her, in dutiful imitation. Bernadine, however, invariably struck back. When other interests palled, Beth would encourage Bernadine to risk her neck by persuading her to jump down after her from high places. She was nearly as good a jumper as Beth, the great difference being that Beth always lit on her feet, while Bernadine was apt to come down on her head; but it was this peculiarity that made her attempts so interesting.

The yard very soon became a sociable centre for the whole idle place. Any one who chose came into it in a friendly way, and lounged about, gossiping, and inspecting the works in progress. Women brought their babies, and sat about on the stones suckling them and talking to the men—a proceeding which filled Beth with disgust, she thought it so peculiarly indelicate.

Beth stood with her mother at the sitting-room window one day to see the last of poor Artless, as he was led away on a halter by a strange man, his glossy chestnut coat showing dappled in the sunshine, but his wild spirit much subdued for want of corn. The first time they had seen him was on the day of their arrival, when Captain Caldwell had ridden out on him to meet them. Mrs. Caldwell burst into tears at the recollection.

"He was the first evidence of promotion and prosperity," she said. "But the

promotion has been to a higher sphere, and I much fear that the prosperity, like Artless himself, has departed for ever."

Mrs. Caldwell had decided to return to her own people in England, and a few days later they started. She took the children to see their father's grave the last thing before they left Castletownrock, and stood beside it for a long time in silence, her gloveless hand resting caressingly on the cold tombstone, her eyes full of tears, and a pained expression in her face. It was the real moment of separation for her. She had to tear herself away from her beloved dead, to leave him lonely, and to go out alone herself, unprotected, unloved, uncomforted, into the cold world with her helpless children. Poverty was in store for her; that she knew; and doubtless she foresaw many another trouble, and, could she have chosen, would gladly have taken her place there beside the one who, with all his faults, had been her best friend on earth.

Her cold, formal religion was no comfort to her in moments like these. She was a pagan at heart, and where she had laid her dead, there, to her mind, he would rest for ever, far from her. The lonely grave on the wild west coast was the shrine towards which her poor heart would yearn thereafter at all times, always. She had erected a handsome tombstone on the hallowed spot, and was going away in her shabby clothes, the more at ease for the self-denial she had had to exercise in order to beautify it. The radical difference between herself and Beth, which was to keep them apart for ever, was never more apparent than at this moment of farewell. The other children cried, but Beth remained an unmoved spectator of her mother's emotion. She hated the delay in that painful place; and what was the use of it when her father would be with them just the same when they got into the yellow coach which was waiting at the gate to take them away? Beth's beloved was a spirit, near at hand always; her mother's was a corpse in a coffin, buried in the ground.

A little way out of Castletownrock the coach was stopped, and Honor and Kathleen

Mayne from the inn came up to the window.

"We walked out to be the last to say good-bye to you, Mrs. Caldwell, and to wish you good luck," Kathleen said. "We were among the first to welcome you when you came. And we've brought a piece of music for Miss Mildred, if she will accept it for a keepsake."

Mrs. Caldwell shook hands with them, but she could not speak; and the coach drove on. The days when she had thought the two Miss Maynes presumptuous for young women in their position seemed a long way off to her as she sat there, sobbing, but grateful for this last act of kindly feeling.

Beth had been eager to be off in the yellow coach, but they had not long started before she began to suffer. The moving panorama of desolate landscape, rocky coast, rough sea, moor and mountain, with the motion of the coach, and the smell of stale tobacco and beer in inn-parlours where they waited to change horses, nauseated her to faintness. Her sensitive nervous system received too many vivid impressions at once; the intense melancholy of the scenes they passed through, the wretched hovels, the half-clad people, the lean cattle, and all the evidences of abject poverty, amid dreadful bogs under a gloomy sky, got hold of her and weighed upon her spirits, until at last she shrunk into her corner, pale and still, and sat with her eyes closed, and great tears running slowly down her cheeks. These were her last impressions of Ireland, and they afterwards coloured all her recollections of the country and the people.

But the travellers came to a railway station at last, and left the coach. There was a long crowded train just about to start; and Mrs. Caldwell, dragging Beth after her by the hand, because she knew she would stand still and stare about her the moment she let her go, hurried from carriage to carriage, trying to find seats.

"I saw some," Beth said. "You've passed them."

Mrs. Caldwell turned, and, some distance back, found a carriage with only two

people in it, a gentleman whom Beth did not notice particularly, and a lady, doubtless a bride, dressed in light garments, and a white bonnet, very high in front, the space between the forehead and the top being filled with roses. She sat upright in the middle of the compartment, and looked superciliously at the weary, worried widow, and her helpless children, in their shabby black, when they stopped at the carriage door. It was her cold indifference that impressed Beth. She could not understand why, seeing how worn they all were and the fix they were in, she did not jump up instantly and open the door, overjoyed to be able to help them. There were just four seats in the carriage, but she never moved. Beth had looked up confidently into her face, expecting sympathy and help, but was repelled by a disdainful glance. It was Beth's first experience of the wealthy world that does not care, and she never forgot it.

"That carriage is engaged," her mother exclaimed, and dragged her impatiently away.

In the hotel in Dublin where they slept a night, they had the use of a long narrow sitting-room, with one large window at the end, hung with handsome, heavy, dark green curtains, quite new. The valance at the top ended in a deep fringe of thick cords, and at the end of each cord there was a bright ornamental thing made of wood covered with silks of various colours. Beth had never seen anything so lovely, and on the instant she determined to have one. They were high out of her reach; but that was nothing if only she could get a table and chair under them, and the coast clear. Fortune favoured her during the evening, and she managed to secure one, and carried it off in triumph; and so great was her joy in the colour, that she took it out of her pocket whenever she had a chance next day, and gazed at it enraptured. On their way to the boat Mildred caught her looking at it, and asked her where she got it.

Beth explained exactly.

"But it's stealing!" Mildred exclaimed.

"Is it?" said Beth, in pleased surprise. She had never stolen anything before, and it was a new sensation.

"But don't you know stealing is very wicked?" Mildred asked impressively.

Beth looked disconcerted: "I never thought of that. I'll put it back."

"How can you? You'll never be there again," Mildred rejoined. "You've done it now. You've committed a sin."

Beth slipped the bright thing into her pocket. "I'll repent," she said, and seemed satisfied.

It was a lovely day, and the passage from Kingstown to Holyhead was so smooth that everybody lounged about the deck, and no one was ill. Beth was very much interested, first in the receding shore, then in the people about her. There was one group in particular, evidently of affluent people, dressed in a way that made her feel ashamed of her own clothes for the first time in her life. But what particularly attracted her attention were some bunches of green and purple grapes which the papa of the party took out of a basket and began to divide. Beth had never seen grapes before except in pictures, and thought they looked lovely. The old gentleman gave the grapes to his family, but in handing them, one little bunch fell on the deck. He picked it up, looked at it, blew some dust off it; then decided that it was not good enough for his own children, and handed it to Bernadine, who was gazing greedily.

Beth dashed forward, snatched it out of her hand, and threw it into the sea.

"We are not beggars!" she cried.

"Well done, little one," a gentleman who was sitting near exclaimed. "Won't pick up the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table, eh? That's a very proper spirit. And who may you be?"

"My father was a gentleman," Beth answered hotly.

CHAPTER XII

Uncle James Patten sent a landau to meet his sister and her family at the station, on their arrival from Ireland. Mildred was the first to jump in. She took the best seat, and sat up stiff and straight.

"I do love carriages and horses, mamma," she said, as they drove through Rainharbour, the little north-country seaside place which was henceforth to be their home. "I wonder which is to be our house. There are several empty. Do you think it is that one?" She had singled out one of the largest in the place.

"No," said Mrs. Caldwell rather bitterly, "more likely this," and she indicated a tiny two-storied tenement, wedged in between tall houses, and looking as if it had either got itself there by mistake, or had been put in in a hurry, just to fill up.

"That is the one," Beth said.

"How do you know?" Mildred snapped.

"Because we're going to live in Orchard Street, opposite the orchard; and this is Orchard Street, and there's the orchard, and that's the only house empty."

"I'm afraid the child is right," Mrs. Caldwell said with a sigh. "However," she added, pulling herself up, "it is exceedingly kind of Uncle James to give us a house at all."

"He might have given us something nicer," Mildred remarked disdainfully.

"Oh!" Beth exclaimed, "he's given us the best he has, I expect. And it's a dear little place, with a little bow-window on either side of a little front door—just like the one where Snowdrop found the empty beds when the bears were out."

"Don't talk nonsense, Beth," Mildred cried crossly.

But Beth hardly heard. She was busy peopling the quaint little town with the friends of her fancy, and sat smiling serenely as she looked about her.

They had to drive right through Rainharbour, and about a mile out into the country

on the other side, to arrive at Fairholm, Uncle James Patten's place. The sun had set, and the quaintly irregular red-brick houses, mellowed by age, shone warm in tint against the gathering grey of the sky, which rose like a leaden dome above them. At one part of the road the sea came in sight. Great dark mountainous masses of cloud, with flame-coloured fringes, hung suspended over its shining surface, in which they were reflected with what was to Beth terrible effect. She sat and shivered with awe so long as the lurid scene was in sight, and was greatly relieved when the carriage turned into a country lane, and sea and sombre sky were blotted out.

It was early spring. Buds were bursting in the hedgerows, birds were building, songsters sang among the branches, and the air was sweet and mild. Fairholm lay all among fertile fields, well wooded and watered. It was a typical English home, with surroundings as unlike the great, bare, bald mountains and wild Atlantic seas Beth had hitherto shuddered amongst, as peace is unlike war. Certain natures are stimulated by the grandeur of such scenes; but Beth was too delicate an instrument to be played upon so roughly. Storms within reflected the storms without only too readily. She was tempest-tossed by temperament, and, in nature, all her yearning was for repose; so that now, as they drove up the well-ordered avenue to the house, the tender tone of colour, green against quiet grey, and the easy air of affluence, so soothing after the sorrowful signs of a hard struggle for life by which her feelings had hitherto been harrowed, drew from her a deep sigh of satisfaction.

The hall-door stood open, but no one was looking out for them. They could hear the tinkle of a piano in the distance. Then a servant appeared, followed by a stout lady, who came forward to greet them in a hurried, nervous way.

"I'm glad to see you," she said, kissing Mrs. Caldwell. She spoke in a breathless undertone, as if she were saying something wrong, and was afraid of being caught and stopped before she had finished the sentence. "I should like to have gone to meet you, but James said there were too many for the carriage as it was. He says more

than two in the carriage makes it look like an excursion-party. But I was listening for you, only I don't hear very well, you know. You remember me, Mildred? This is Beth, I suppose, and this is Bernadine. You don't know who I am? I am your Aunt Grace Mary. James begs you to excuse him for a little, Caroline. It is his half-hour for exercises. So unfortunate. If you had only come a little later! But, however, the sooner the better for me. Come into the dining-room and see Aunt Victoria. We must stay there until Uncle James has finished practising his exercises in the drawing-room."

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench was sitting bolt upright on a high chair in the dining-room, tatting. Family portraits, hung far too high all round the room, seemed to have been watching her complacently until the travellers entered, when they all turned instantly and looked hard at Beth.

Aunt Victoria was a tall thin old lady, with a beautiful delicate complexion, an auburn front and white cap, and a severely simple black dress. She rose stiffly to receive Mrs. Caldwell, and kissed her on both cheeks with restrained emotion. Then she shook hands with each of the children.

"I hope you had a pleasant journey," she was beginning formally, when Mrs. Caldwell suddenly burst into tears. "What is the matter, Caroline?" Aunt Victoria asked.

"Oh, nothing," the poor lady answered in a broken voice. "Only it does seem a sad home-returning—alone—without him—you know."

Aunt Grace Mary furtively patted Mrs. Caldwell on the back, keeping an eye on Aunt Victoria the while, however, as if she were afraid of being caught.

All this time the tinkle-tinkle-tinkle of "Hamilton's Exercises for Beginners" on the piano had been going on; now it stopped. Aunt Grace Mary slipped into a chair, and sat with a smile on her face; Aunt Victoria became a trifle more rigid over her tatting; and Mrs. Caldwell hurriedly wiped her eyes. Then the door opened

deliberately, and there entered a great stout man, with red hair sprinkled with grey, large prominent light-coloured eyes, a nondescript nose, a wide shapeless gash of a mouth, and a red moustache with straight bristly hairs, like the bristles of a broom.

"How do you do, Caroline?" he said, holding out his big, fat, white hand, and kissing her coldly on the forehead. He drawled his words out with a decided lisp, and in a very soft voice, which contrasted oddly with his huge bulk. Having greeted his sister, he turned and looked at the children. Mildred went up and shook hands with him.

"Your sisters, I perceive, have no manners," he observed.

Beth had been beaming round blandly on the group; but upon that last remark of Uncle James's the pleased smile faded from her face, and she coloured painfully, and offered him a small reluctant hand.

"You are Elizabeth, I suppose?" he said.

"I am Beth," she answered emphatically.

She and Uncle James looked into each other's eyes for an instant, and in that instant she made a most disagreeable impression of fearlessness on the big man's brain.

"I hope, Caroline," he said precisely, "that you will not continue to call your daughter by such an absurd abbreviation. That sort of thing was all very well in the wilds of Ireland, but here we must have something rational, ladylike, and recognised."

Mrs. Caldwell looked distressed. "It would be so difficult to call her Elizabeth," she pleaded. "She is not at all—Elizabeth."

"You may call me what you like, mamma," Beth put in with decision; "but I shall only answer to Beth. That was the name my father gave me, and I shall stick to it."

Uncle James stared at her in amazement, but Beth, unabashed, stared back obstinately; and so they continued staring until Aunt Grace Mary made a diversion.

"James," she hurriedly interposed, "wouldn't they like some refreshment?"

Uncle James pulled the bell-rope. "Bring wine and cake," he lisped, when the servant answered.

Then he returned to his seat, crossed one great leg over the other, folded his fat hands on his knee, and inspected his sister.

"You certainly do not grow younger, Caroline," he observed.

Mrs. Caldwell did not look cheered by the remark; and there was a painful pause, broken, happily, by the arrival of the cake and wine.

"You will not take more than half a glass, I suppose, Caroline, at this time of the day," Uncle James said playfully, as he took up the decanter; "and marsala, not port. I know what ladies are."

Poor Mrs. Caldwell was exhausted, and would have been the better for a good glass of port; but she meekly held her peace.

Then Uncle James cut the cake, and gave each of the children a very small slice. Beth held hers suspended half-way to her mouth, and gazed at her uncle.

"What is that child staring at?" he asked her mother at last.

"I think she is admiring you," was Mrs. Caldwell's happy rejoinder.

"No, mamma, I am not," Beth contradicted. "I was just thinking I had never seen anything so big in my life."

"Anything!" Uncle James protested. "What does she mean, Caroline?"

"I don't mean this slice of cake," Beth chuckled.

"Come, dear—come, dear," Aunt Grace Mary hurriedly interposed. "Come upstairs, and see—and see—the pretty room you're to have. Come and take your things off, like a good child."

Beth rose obediently, but before she followed her aunt out of the room she said: "Here, Bernadine; you'd better have my slice. You'll howl if you don't get enough.

Cakes are scarce and dear here, I suppose."

Aunt Victoria had tatted diligently during this little scene. Now she looked up over her spectacles and inspected Uncle James.

"I like that child," she said decidedly.

"In which respect I should think you would probably find yourself in a very small minority," Uncle James lisped, spreading his mouth into what would have been a smile in any other countenance, but was merely an elongation of the lips in his.

Mrs. Caldwell rocked herself forlornly. Mildred nestled close to her mother; while Baby Bernadine, with a slice of cake in each hand, took a mouthful first from the right and then from the left, impartially.

Uncle James gazed at her. "I suppose that is an Irish custom," he said at length.

"Bernadine! what are you doing?" Mrs. Caldwell snapped; and Bernadine, startled, let both slices fall on the floor, and set up a howl with her mouth full.

"Ah!" Uncle James murmured tenderly. "Little children are such darling things! They make the sense of their presence felt the moment they enter a house. It becomes visible also in the crumbs on the floor. There is evidently nothing the matter with her lungs. But I should have thought it would be dangerous to practise her voice like that with the mouth full. Perhaps she would be more at her ease upstairs." Mrs. Caldwell took the hint.

When the child had gone, Uncle James rang for a servant to sweep up the cake and crumbs, and carefully stood over her, superintending.

"That will do," he said at length, "so far as the cake and crumbs are concerned, but I beg you to observe that you have brushed the pile of the carpet the wrong way."

Meanwhile Aunt Grace Mary had taken Beth up a polished staircase, through a softly carpeted, airy corridor, at the end of which was a large room with two great mahogany four-post beds, hung with brown damask, the rest of the heavy

old-fashioned furniture being to match. All over the house there was a delicious odour of fresh air and lavender, everything shone resplendent, and all was orderly to the point of stiffness; nothing looked as if it had ever been used.

"This was your mamma's room when she was a girl," Aunt Grace Mary confided to Beth. "She used to fill the house with her girl-friends, and that was why she had such big beds. She used to be a very high-spirited girl, your dear mamma was. You are all to sleep here."

"How good it smells," said Beth.

"Ah, that's the lavender. I often burn lavender. Would you like to see me burn some lavender? Come to my room, then, and I'll show you. But take your things off first."

Beth dragged off her hat and jacket and threw them aside. They happened to fall on the floor.

"My dear child!" Aunt Grace Mary exclaimed, "look at your things!"

Beth looked at them, but nothing occurred to her; so she looked at her aunt inquiringly.

"I always put mine away—at least I should, you know, if I hadn't a maid," said Aunt Grace Mary.

"Oh, let your maid put mine away too," Beth answered casually.

"But, my dear child, you must learn," Aunt Grace Mary insisted, picking up Beth's things and putting them in a drawer as she spoke. "Who puts your things away at home?"

"Mamma," Beth answered laconically. "She says it's less trouble to do things herself."

"Oh, but you must save your mother the trouble, dear," said Aunt Grace Mary in a shocked tone.

"Well, I will next time—if I remember," Beth rejoined. "Come and burn lavender."

For the next few days, which happened to be very fine, Beth revelled out of doors. Everything was a wonder and a joy to her in this fertile land, the trees especially, after the bleak, wild wastes to which she had been accustomed in the one stormy corner of Ireland she knew. Leaves and blossoms were just bursting out, and one day, wandering alone in the grounds, she happened unawares upon an orchard in full bloom, and fairly gasped, utterly overcome by the first shock of its beauty. For a while she stood and gazed in silent awe at the white froth of flowers on the pear-trees, the tinted almond blossom, and the pink-tipped apple. She had never dreamed of such heavenly loveliness. But enthusiasm succeeded to awe at last, and, in a wild burst of delight, she suddenly threw her arms around a gnarled tree-trunk and clasped it close.

There was a large piece of artificial water in the grounds, in which were three green islands covered with trees and shrubs. Beth was standing on the bank one morning in a contemplative mood, admiring the water, and yearning for a boat to get to the islands, when round one of them, unexpectedly, a white wonder of a swan came gliding towards her in the sunshine.

"Oh, oh! Mildred! Mildred! Oh, the beautiful, beautiful thing!" she cried. Mildred came running up.

"Why, Beth, you idiot," she exclaimed in derision, "it's only a swan. I really thought it was something."

"Is that a swan?" Beth said slowly; then, after a moment, she added, in sorrowful reproach: "O Mildred! you had seen it and you never told me."

Alas, poor Mildred! she had not seen it, and never would see it, in Beth's sense of the word.

On wet days, when they had to be indoors, Aunt Grace Mary waylaid Beth continually, and trotted her off somewhere out of Uncle James's way. She would take her to her own room sometimes, a large, bright apartment, spick-and-span like

the rest of the house; and show her the pictures—pastels and water-colours chiefly—with which it was stiffly decorated.

"That was your uncle when he was a little boy," she said, pointing to a pretty pastel.

"Why, he was quite a nice little boy," Beth exclaimed.

"Yes, nice and plump," Aunt Grace Mary rattled off breathlessly. "And your grandmamma did those water-colours and those screens. That lovely printing too; can you guess how she did it? With a camel's hair brush. She did indeed. And she used to compose music. She was a very clever woman. You are very like her."

"But I am not very clever," said Beth.

"No, dear; no, dear," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined, pulling herself up hurriedly from this indiscretion. "But in the face. You are very like her in appearance. And you must try. You must try to improve yourself. Your uncle is always trying to improve himself. He reads 'Doctor Syntax' aloud to us. In the evening it is our custom to read aloud and converse."

An occasional phrase of Uncle James's would flow from Aunt Grace Mary in this way, with incongruous effect.

"Do you try to improve yourself?" Beth asked.

"Yes, dear."

"How?"

"Oh, well—that reminds me. I must write a letter. You shall stay and see me if you like. But you mustn't move or speak."

Beth, deeply interested, watched her aunt, who began by locking the door. Then she slipped a pair of spectacles out of her pocket, and put them on, after glancing round apprehensively as if she were going to do something wrong. Then she sat down at a small bureau, unlocked a drawer, and took out a little dictionary, unlocked another drawer and took out a sheet of notepaper, in which she inserted a page of black lines.

Then she proceeded to write a letter in lead-pencil, stopping often to consult the dictionary. When she had done, she took out another sheet of a better quality, put the lines in it, and proceeded to copy the letter in ink. She blotted the first attempt, but the next she finished. She destroyed several envelopes also before she was satisfied. But at last the letter was folded and sealed, and then she carefully burnt every scrap of paper she had spoiled.

"I was educated in a convent in France," she said to Beth. "If you were older you would know that by my handwriting. It is called an Italian hand, but I learnt it in France. I was there five years."

"What else did you learn?" said Beth.

"Oh—reading. No—I could read before I went. But music, you know, and French."

"Say some French," said Beth.

"Oh, I can't," Aunt Grace Mary answered. "But I can read it a little, you know."

"I should like to hear you play," said Beth.

"But I don't play," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined.

"I thought you said you learnt music."

"Oh yes. I had to learn music; and I practised for hours every day; but I never played."

Aunt Grace Mary smiled complacently as she spoke, took off her spectacles, and locked up her writing materials—Beth, the while, thoughtfully observing her. Aunt Grace Mary's hair was a wonderful colour, neither red, yellow, brown, nor white, but a mixture of all four. It was parted straight in the middle, where it was thin, and brought down in two large rolls over her ears. She wore a black velvet band across her head like a coronet, which ended in a large black velvet bow at the back. Long heavy gold ear-rings pulled down the lobes of her ears. All her dresses were of rustling silk, and she had a variety of deep lace-collars, each one of which she

fastened with a different brooch at the throat. She also wore a heavy gold watch-chain round her neck, the watch being concealed in her bosom; and jet bracelets by day, but gold ones in the evening.

Beth was deeply interested in her own family history, and intelligently pieced together such fragments of it as she could collect from the conversations of the people about her. She was sitting in one of the deep window-seats in the drawing-room looking out one day, concealed by a curtain, when her mother and Great-Aunt Victoria Bench came into the room, and settled themselves to chat and sew without observing her.

"Where is Grace Mary?" Aunt Victoria asked.

"Locked up in her own room writing a letter, I believe," Mrs. Caldwell replied, "a long and mysterious proceeding. We shall not see her again this morning, I suppose."

"Ah, well," said Aunt Victoria considerately, "she writes a very beautiful hand."

"James thought he was doing so well for himself, too!" Mrs. Caldwell interjected. "He'd better have married the mother."

"There was the making of a fine woman in Grace Mary if she had had a chance," Aunt Victoria answered, pursing up her mouth judicially. "It was the mother made the match. When he came across them in Switzerland, Lady Benyon got hold of him, and flattered him, made him believe Grace Mary was only thirty-eight, not too old for a son-and-heir, but much too old for a large family. She was really about fifty; but he never thought of looking up her age until after they were married. However, James got one thing he likes, and more than he deserved; for Grace Mary is amiable if she's ignorant; and I should say had tact, though some people might call it cunning. But, at any rate, she's the daughter of one baronet and the sister of another."

"What's a baronet?" Beth demanded, tumbling off the window-seat on to the floor

with a crash as she spoke, having lost her balance in peering round the curtain.

Both ladies jumped, quite contrary to their principles.

"You naughty child, how dare you?" Mrs. Caldwell began.

Beth picked herself up. "I want to know," she interrupted.

"You've been listening."

"No, I've not. I was here first, and you came and talked. But that doesn't matter. I shan't tell. What's a baronet?"

Aunt Victoria explained, and then turned her out of the room. Uncle James was crossing the hall at the moment; he had a large bunch of keys in his hand, and went through the double-doors which led to the kitchen and offices. Beth followed him into the kitchen. The cook, an old servant, came forward curtseying. The remains of yesterday's dinner, cold roast beef, tongue, chicken, and plum-pudding, were spread out on the table. Uncle James inspected everything.

"For luncheon," he said, "the beef can remain cold on the sideboard, also the tongue. The chicken you will grill for one hot dish, and do not forget to garnish with rolls of bacon. The pudding you can cut into slices, fry, and sprinkle with a little sifted sugar. Mind, I say a little; for, as the pudding is sweet enough already, the sugar is merely an ornament to make it agreeable to the eye. For the rest, as usual."

"Yes, sir. And dinner, sir?"

"Here is the menu." He handed her a paper. "I will give you out what is necessary."

He led the way down a stone passage to the store-room door, which he unlocked.

"I am out of sifted sugar, sir," the cook said nervously.

"What, again?" Uncle James sternly demanded. "This is only Thursday, and I gave you some out on Saturday."

"Yes, sir, but only a quarter of a pound, sir, and I had to use it for the top of the rice-pudding, and the pancakes, and the Charlotte Russe, and the

plum-pudding——"

"How?" said Uncle James—"the plum-pudding, which is not yet fried?"

"Beg pardon, sir. I'm all confused. But, however," she added desperately, "the sugar is done."

"Well, I suppose I must give you some more this time. But do not let it occur again. You may weigh out a quarter of a pound."

When that was done, Uncle James consulted a huge cookery-book which lay on a shelf in the window. "We shall require another cake for tea," he said, and then proceeded to read the recipe aloud, keeping an observant eye upon the cook as she weighed out the various ingredients.

"And the kitchen meals, sir?" she asked, as he locked up the store-room.

"Make what you have do," he said, "make what you have do."

"But there is hardly meat enough to go round once, sir."

"You must make it do. People are much healthier and happier when they do not eat too much."

This ceremony over, he went to the poultry-yard, followed by Beth (who carefully kept in the background), the yard-boy, and the poultry-maid who carried some corn in a sieve, which she handed to her master when he stopped. Uncle James scattered a little corn on the ground, calling "chuck! chuck! chuck!" at the same time, in a dignified manner. Chickens, ducks, turkeys and guinea-fowl collected about him, and he stood gazing at them with large light prominent eyes, blandly, as if he loved them—as indeed he did when they appeared like ladies at table, dressed to perfection.

"That guinea-fowl!" he decided, after due consideration.

The yard-boy caught it and gave it to the poultry-maid, who held it while Uncle James carefully felt its breast.

"That will do," he said. "Quite a beauty."

The yard-boy took it from the poultry-maid, tied its legs together, cut its throat, and hung it on a nail.

"That drake!" Uncle James proceeded. The same ceremony followed, Uncle James bearing his part in it without any relaxation of his grand manner.

When a turkey-poult had also been executed, he requested the yard-boy to fetch him his gun from the harness-room.

"We must have a pigeon-pie," he observed as he took it.

Beth, in great excitement, stalked him to the orchard, where there was a big pigeon-house covered with ivy. In front of it the pigeons had a good run, enclosed with wire netting when they were shut in; but they were often let out to feed in the fields. The yard-boy now reached up and opened a little door in the side of the house. As he did so he glanced at Uncle James somewhat apprehensively. Uncle James, with a benign countenance, suddenly lifted his gun and fired. The yard-boy dropped.

"What is the matter?" said Uncle James.

The yard-boy gathered himself up with a very red face. "I thought you meant to shoot me, sir."

Uncle James smiled gently. "May I ask when it became customary for gentlemen to shoot yard-boys?" he said.

"Beg pardon, sir," the boy rejoined sheepishly. "There's accidents sometimes."

The pigeons were wary after the shot, and would not come out, so the yard-boy had to go into the house and drive them. There was a shelf in front of the little door, on which they generally rested a moment, bewildered, before they flew. Uncle James knew them all by sight, and let several go, as being too old for his purpose. Then, standing pretty close, he shot two, one after the other, as they stood hesitating to take

flight. While loading again, he discovered Beth; but as he liked an audience when he was performing an exploit, he was quite gracious.

"Nothing distinguishes a gentleman more certainly than a love of sport," he observed blandly, as he shot another pigeon sitting.

This entertainment over, he looked at his watch. He had the whole day divided into hours and half-hours, each with its separate occupation or recreation; and nothing short of a visit from some personage of importance was ever allowed to interrupt him in any of his pursuits. For recreation he sometimes did a little knitting or a piece of Berlin woolwork, because, he said, a gentleman should learn to do everything, so as not to be at a loss if he were ever wrecked on a desert island. For the same reason, he had also trained himself to sleep at odd times, and in all sorts of odd places, choosing by preference some corner where Aunt Grace Mary and the maids would least expect to find him, the consequence being wild shrieks and shocks to their nerves, such as, to use his own bland explanation, might be expected from undisciplined females. Beth found him one day spread out on a large oak chest in the main corridor upstairs, with two great china vases, one at his head and one at his feet, filled with reeds and bulrushes, which appeared to be waving over him, and looking in his sleep, with his cadaverous countenance, like a self-satisfied corpse. She had been on her way downstairs to dispose of the core of an apple she had eaten; but, as Uncle James's mouth was open, she left it there.

Uncle James was wont to deliver little lectures to the children, for the improvement of their minds, during luncheon, which was their dinner-hour.

"With regularity and practice you may accomplish great things," he said on one occasion. "I myself always practise 'Hamilton's Exercises' on the pianoforte for one hour every day, from half-past ten till eleven, and from half-past three till four. I have done so now for many years."

Beth sat with her spoon suspended half-way up to her mouth, drinking in these

words of wisdom. "And when will you be able to play?" she asked.

Uncle James fixed his large, light, ineffectual eyes upon her; but, as usual, this gaze direct only excited Beth's interest, and she returned it unabashed in simple expectation of what was to follow. So Uncle James gave in, and to cover his retreat he said: "Culture. Cultivate the mind. There is nothing that elevates the mind like general cultivation. It is cultivation that makes us great, good, and generous."

"Then, I suppose, when your mind is cultivated, Uncle James, you will give mamma more money," Beth burst out hopefully.

Uncle James blinked his eyes several times running, rapidly, as if something had gone wrong with them.

"Beth, you are talking too much; go to your room at once, and stay there for a punishment," her mother exclaimed nervously.

Beth, innocent of any intent to offend, looked surprised, put down her spoon deliberately, got off her chair, took up her plate of pudding, and was making off with it. As she was passing Uncle James, however, he stretched out his big hand suddenly, and snatched the plate from her; but Beth in an instant doubled her little fist, and struck the plate from underneath, the concussion scattering the pudding all over the front of Uncle James.

In the confusion which followed, Beth made her escape to the kitchen, where she was already popular.

"I say, cook," she coaxed, "give me something good to eat. My pudding's got upset all over Uncle James."

The cook sat down suddenly, and twinkled a glance of intelligence at Horner, the old coachman, who happened to be in the kitchen.

"Give me a cheesecake—I won't tell," Beth pleaded.

"That's doubtful, I should think," Horner said aside to the cook.

"Oh, bless you, she never do, not she!" cook answered, and then she fetched Beth a big cheesecake from a secret store. Beth took it smiling, and retired to the brown bedroom, where she was left in solitary confinement until Uncle James drove out with mamma in Aunt Grace Mary's pony-carriage to pay a call in the afternoon. When they had gone, Aunt Grace Mary peeped in at Beth, and said, with an unconvincing affectation of anger: "Beth, you are a naughty little girl, and deserve to be punished. Say you're sorry. Then you shall come to my room, and see me write a letter."

"All right," Beth answered, and Aunt Grace Mary took her off without more ado.

It was a great encouragement to Beth to find that Aunt Grace Mary was obliged to take pains with her writing. All the other grown-up people Beth knew, seemed to do everything with such ease, it was quite disheartening. Beth was allowed a pencil, a sheet of paper, and some lines herself now, and Aunt Grace Mary was taking great pains to teach her to write an Italian hand. Beth was also trying to learn: "because there are such lots of things I want to write down," she explained; "and I want to do it small like you, because it won't take so much paper, you know."

"What kind of things do you want to write down, Beth?" Aunt Grace Mary asked. Beth treated her quite as an equal, so they chatted the whole time they were together, unconstrainedly.

"Oh, you know—things like—well, the day we came here there were great grey clouds with crimson caps hanging over the sea, and you could see them in the water."

"See their reflection, you mean, I suppose."

Beth looked puzzled. "When you think of things, isn't that reflection?" she asked.

"Yes; and when you see yourself in the looking-glass, that's your reflection too," Aunt Grace Mary answered.

"Oh, then I suppose it was the sea's thought of the sky I saw in the water—that

makes it nicer than I had it before," Beth said, trying to turn the phrase as a young bird practises to round its notes in the spring. "The sea shows its thoughts, the thought of the sea is the sky—no, that isn't right. It never does come right all at once, you know. But that's the kind of thing."

"What kind of thing?" Aunt Grace Mary asked, bewildered.

"The kind of thing I am always wanting to write down. You generally forget what we're talking about, don't you?—I say, don't you want to drive your own ponies yourself sometimes?"

"No, not when your dear uncle wants them."

"Dear uncle wants them almost always, doesn't he? Horner ses as 'ow——"

"Beth, don't speak like that!"

"That's Horner, not me," Beth snapped, impatient of the interruption. "How am I to tell you what he said if I don't say what he said? Horner ses as 'ow, when Lady Benyon gev them there white ponies to 'er darter fur 'er own use, squire 'e sells two on 'is 'orses, an' 'as used them ponies ever since. Squire's a near un, my word!" Beth perceived that Aunt Grace Mary looked very funny in the face. "You're frightened to death of Uncle James, arn't you?" she asked, after sucking her pencil meditatively for a little.

"No, dear, of course not. I am not afraid of any one but the dear Lord."

"But Uncle James is the lord."

"Nonsense, child."

"Mildred says so. She says he's lord of the manor. Mildred says it's fine to be lord of the manor. But it doesn't make me care a button about Uncle James."

"Don't speak like that, Beth. It's disrespectful. It was the Lord in heaven I alluded to," said Aunt Grace Mary in her breathless way.

"Ah, that is different," Beth allowed. "But I'm not afraid of Him either. I don't think

I'm afraid of any one really, not even of mamma, though she does beat me. I'd rather she didn't, you know. But one gets used to it. The worst of it is," Beth added, after sucking the point of her pencil a little—"The worst of it is, you never know what will make her waxy. To-day, at luncheon, you know—now, what did I say?"

"Oh," said Aunt Grace Mary vaguely; "you oughtn't to have said it, you know."

"Now, that's just like mamma! She says 'Don't!' and 'How dare you!' and 'Naughty girl!' at the top of her voice, and half the time I don't know what she's talking about. When I grow up, I shall explain to children. Do you know, sometimes I quite want to be good"—this with a sigh. "But when I'm bad without having a notion what I've done, why, it's difficult. Aunt Grace Mary, do you know what Neptune would say if the sea dried up?" Aunt Grace Mary smiled and shook her head. "I haven't an ocean," Beth proceeded. "You don't see it? Well, I didn't at first. You see an ocean and a notion sound the same if you say them sharp. Now, do you see? They call that a pun."

"Who told you that?"

"A gentleman in the train."

Beth put her pencil in her mouth, and gazed up at the sky. "I don't suppose he'd be such a black-hearted villain as to break his word," she said at last.

"Who?" Aunt Grace Mary asked, in a startled tone.

"Uncle James—about leaving Jim the place, you know. Why, don't you know? Mamma is the eldest, and ought to have had Fairholm, but she was away in Ireland, busy having me, when grandpapa died, and couldn't come; so Uncle James frightened the old man into leaving the place to him, and mamma only got fifty pounds a year, which wasn't fair."

"Who told you this, Beth?"

"Mildred. Mamma told her. And Horner said the other day to cook—I'll have to say

it the way Horner says it. If I said it my way, you know, then it wouldn't be Horner—Horner said to cook as 'ow Captain Caldwell 'ud 'a' gone to law about it, but squire 'e swore if 'e'd let the matter drop, 'e'd make 'is nevee, Master Jim, as is also 'is godson, 'is heir, an' so square it; and Captain Caldwell, as was a real gen'lmon, an' fond of the ladies, tuk 'im at 'is word, an' furgiv' 'im. But, lardie! don't us know the worth o' Mr. James Patten's word!"

Aunt Grace Mary had turned very pale.

"Beth," she gasped, "promise me you will never, never, never say a word about this to your uncle."

"Not likely," said Beth.

"How do you remember these things you hear?"

"Oh, I just think them over again when I go to bed, and then they stay," Beth answered. "I wouldn't tell you half I hear, though—only things everybody knows. If you tell secrets, you know, you're a tell-pie. And I'm not a tell-pie. Now, Bernadine is. She's a regular tell-pie. It seems as if she couldn't help it; but then she's young," Beth added tolerantly.

"Were you ever young, I wonder?" Aunt Grace Mary muttered to herself.

CHAPTER XIII

Meanwhile the English spring advanced in the beautiful gardens of Fairholm, and was a joy to Beth. Blossoms showered from the fruit-trees, green leaves unfurled, the birds were in full song, and the swans curved their long necks in the sunshine, and breasted the waters of the lake, as if their own grace were a pleasure to them. Beth was enchanted. Every day she discovered some new wonder—nests in the hedgerows, lambs in the fields, a foal and its mother in the paddock, a calf in the byre—more living interests in one week than she had dreamt of in the whole of her

little life. For a happy interval the scenes which had oppressed her—the desolation, the sombre colours of the great melancholy mountains, the incessant sound of the turbulent sea, the shock and roar of angry breakers warring with the rocks, which had kept her little being all a-throb, braced to the expectation of calamity—lapsed now into the background of her recollection, and under the benign influence of these lovelier surroundings her mind began to expand in the most extraordinary way, while her further faculty awoke, and gave her glimpses of more delights than mortal mind could have shown her. "Such nice things," as she expressed it, "keep coming into my head, and I want to write them down." Books she flung away impatiently; but the woods and streams, and the wild flowers, the rooks returning to roost in the trees at sunset, the horses playing in the paddocks, the cows dawdling back from their pastures, all sweet country scents and cheerful country sounds she became alive to and began to love. There would be trouble enough in Beth herself at times, wherever she was; it was hard that she could not have been kept in some such paradise always, to ease the burden of her being.

One morning her mother told her that Uncle James was extremely displeased with her because he had seen her pelting the swans.

"He didn't see me pelting the swans," Beth asseverated. "I was feeding them with crusts. And how did he see me, any way? He wasn't there."

"He sees everything that's going on," Mrs. Caldwell assured her.

"He's only pretending," Beth argued, "or else he must be God."

But she kept her eyes about her the next time she was in the grounds, and at last she discovered him, sitting in the little window of his dressing-room with a book before him, and completely blocking the aperture. She had never noticed him there before, because the panes were small and bright, and the shine on them made it difficult to see through them from below. After this discovery she always felt that his eyes were upon her wherever she went within range of that window. Not that that would have

deterred her had she wanted to do anything particularly; but even a child feels it intolerable to be spied upon; and as for a spy! Beth scorned the creature.

That day at luncheon Uncle James made an announcement.

"Lady Benyon is going to honour us with a visit," he began in his most impressive manner. There is no snob so inveterate as your snob of good birth; and Uncle James said "Lady" as if it were a privilege just to pronounce the word. "She will arrive this afternoon at a quarter to four."

"But you will be practising," Beth exclaimed.

"The rites of hospitality must be observed," he condescended to inform her.

"Lady Benyon is my mother, Beth," Aunt Grace Mary put in irrelevantly.

"I know," Beth answered. "Your papa was a baronet; Uncle James loves baronets; that was why he married you." Having thus disposed of Aunt Grace Mary, Beth turned to the other end of the table, and resumed: "But you went on practising when we arrived, Uncle James."

Uncle James gazed at her blandly, then looked at his sister with an agreeable smile. "Lady Benyon will probably like to see the children. You do not dress them in the latest fashion, I observe."

"They are shabby," Mrs. Caldwell acknowledged with a sigh, apologetically.

Beth shovelled some spoonfuls of pudding into her mouth very quickly. "That's the money bother again," she said, and then she sang out at the top of her voice—

"Bryan O'Lynn had no breeches to wear, He bought a sheepskin for to make him a pair, With the skinny side out, and the woolly side in, 'They're warm in the winter,' said Bryan O'Lynn."

"I suppose it would be quite impossible to suppress this child?" Uncle James lisped with deceptive mildness. "I observe that she joins in the conversation always, with great intelligence and her mouth full. It might be better, perhaps, if she emptied her

mouth. However, I suppose it would be impossible to teach her."

"Not at all," Beth answered for herself, cheerfully. "I'm not too stupid to empty my mouth! Only just you tell me what it is you want. Don't bottle things up. I expect I've been speaking with my mouth full ever since I came, and you've been hating me for it; but you never told me."

"May I ask," said Uncle James politely, "by whom you were informed that I 'bottled things up'?"

"Ah, that would be telling," said Beth, and recommenced gobbling her pudding, to the intense relief of some of the party.

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench, sitting upright opposite, looked across the table at the child, and a faint smile flickered over her wrinkled rose-leaf cheek.

Beth finished her pudding, dropped her spoon on her plate with a clatter, leant back in her chair, and sighed with satisfaction. She possessed a horrid fascination for Uncle James. Almost everything she did was an offence to him, yet he could not keep his eyes off her or let her alone.

"Pudding seems to be a weakness of hers," he now observed. "I hope her voracity is satisfied. I should say that it resembles the voracity of the caterpillar."

"What's voracity, Aunt Victoria?" Beth asked.

"Greediness," Aunt Victoria rejoined sententiously.

"He means I'm greedy for pudding? I just am! I'd like to be a caterpillar for pudding. Caterpillars eat all day. But then God's good to them. He puts them on a tree with lots of leaves. I wish He'd put me in a pantry with lots of puddings! My vorass—vor—what is it? Any way, it's satisfied now, Uncle James, and if you'll let me go, I'll wash myself, and get ready for Lady Benyon."

Rather than let her go when she wanted to, however, Uncle James sat some time longer at table than he had intended. It was he who always gave the signal to rise;

before he did so on this occasion, he formally requested his sister to request Beth to be silent during Lady Benyon's visit.

Lady Benyon was a shrewd, active little old woman, with four dark curls laid horizontally on either side of her forehead. She had bright black sparkling eyes that glanced about quickly and seemed to see everything. Before she arrived, Uncle James assembled his family in the drawing-room, and set the scene, as it were, for her reception.

"Sit here, facing the window, Caroline," he said. "It will interest Lady Benyon to see how you have aged. And, Aunt Victoria, this Chippendale chair, so stiff and straight, is just like you, I think; so oblige me by sitting on it. Grace Mary, take this easy lounge; it suits your yielding nature. Elizabeth"—Beth, who was perched on the piano-stool, looked up calmly at the clouds through the window opposite. "Elizabeth," he repeated sharply. Beth made no sign.

"Beth, answer your uncle directly," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"He has not yet addressed me," Beth rejoined, in the manner of Uncle James.

"Don't call your uncle 'he,' you naughty girl. You know your name is Elizabeth."

"Yes, and I know I said I wouldn't answer to it, and I'm not going to break me oath."

"Me oath!" Uncle James ejaculated.

Beth looked disconcerted. It irked her horribly to be jeered at for making a mistake in speaking, and Uncle James, seeing she was hurt, rested satisfied for the moment, and arranged Mildred and Bernadine together in a group, leaving Beth huddled up on the piano-stool, frowning.

When Lady Benyon's carriage stopped at the door, Uncle James stood bareheaded on the steps, ready to receive her.

"So glad to see you, mamma," he lisped, as he handed her out. "Do take my arm."

But the little old lady waved him aside unceremoniously, and hobbled in with the

brisk stiffness of age.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed when she saw the party arranged in the drawing-room. "You all look as if you were having your likeness taken—all except Puck there, on the piano-stool."

When Uncle James had manœuvred Lady Benyon into the seat of honour he intended her to take in order to complete the picture, she frankly inspected each member of the group, ending with Beth.

"And who may you be?" she asked.

Beth smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Why don't you speak?"

Beth made another gesture.

"Goodness!" Lady Benyon cried; "is the child an idiot?"

"Beth, answer Lady Benyon directly," Mrs. Caldwell angrily commanded.

"Uncle James requested mamma to request me not to speak when you were present," Beth explained suavely.

The old lady burst out laughing. "Well, that's droll," she said—"requested mamma to request me—why, it's James Patten all over. And who may you be, you monkey?"

"I am Elizabeth Caldwell, but I only answer to Beth. Papa called me Beth."

"Good!" said the little old lady. "And what's Ireland like?"

"Great dark mountains," Beth rattled off, with big eyes dilated and fixed on space, as if she saw what she described. "Long, long, long, black bogs; all the poor people starving; and the sea rough—just like hell, you know, but without the fire."

"Oh, now, this is delightful!" the old lady chuckled. "I'm to enjoy myself to-day, it seems. You didn't prepare me for this treat, James Patten!"

Uncle James simpered, as though taking to himself the credit of the whole

entertainment.

"So you hate Ireland?" said Lady Benyon.

"No, I love it," said Beth. "It's me native country; and they don't give you little bits of cake there the size of sixpence. What they have you're welcome to. Long live Ireland!"

"Good!" Lady Benyon ejaculated; then turned to Mildred. "And are you another naughty little patriot?" she asked.

"No, I'm not naughty," Mildred answered piously.

"Beth's naughty," said Bernadine.

"I'm sure I don't know what Beth is not," the old lady declared, turning to Beth again.

"Riley said I was one of the little girls the devil put out when he gave up housekeeping," Beth remarked casually.

"Beth!" Mrs. Caldwell remonstrated.

"He did, mamma. He said it the day that perjured villain Pat Murphy killed my magpie. And Riley's a good man. You said so yourself."

"You can hear that the young lady has been in Ireland, I suppose, mamma," Uncle James observed.

"I hear she can imitate the Irish," Lady Benyon rejoined bluntly; "and not the Irish only," she added with a chuckle.

Beth was still sitting on the music-stool opposite the window, and presently she saw some one cross the lawn. "Oh, do look at the lovely lady," she cried enthusiastically. "She's just like the Princess Blue-eyes-and-golden-hair."

Lady Benyon glanced over her shoulder. "Why, it's my maid," she said.

Beth's countenance dropped, then cleared again. Even a maid might be a princess in disguise.

Lady Benyon was going to stay all night, and at her special request Mildred and Beth were allowed to sit up to late dinner and prayers. She expected Beth to amuse her, but Beth was busy the whole time weaving a romance about the lovely lady's-maid, and scarcely spoke a word. When the servants came in to prayers, she sat and gazed at her heroine, and forgot to stand or kneel. She noticed, however, that Uncle James read the evening prayers with peculiar fervour.

When Beth went to bed, she found Bernadine, who slept with her, fast asleep. Beth was not at all sleepy. Her intellect had been on the alert all day, and would not let her rest now; she must do something to keep up the excitement. She pulled the blind aside, and, looking out of the window, discovered an enchanted land, all soft shadow and silver sheen, and above it an exquisite moon, in an empty sky, floated serenely. "Oh, to be out in the moonlight!" she sighed to herself. "The fairy-folk—the fairy-folk." For a little her mind was a blank as she gazed; then words came tripping a measure—

"The fairy-folk are calling me, Are calling me, are calling me; They come across the stormy sea, To play with me, to play with me."

Beth's vague longing crisped itself into a resolution. She looked at the big four-post bed. The curtains were drawn on one side of it. Should she draw them on the other, on the chance of her mother not looking in? No, she must wait, because of Mildred. Mildred was undressing, and would say her prayers presently. Beth waited until she knelt down, then slipped her night-dress on over her clothes, and got into bed, without disturbing Bernadine. Now she must wait for her mother; but Mrs. Caldwell came up very soon, Uncle James having hurried every one off to bed unusually early that evening. Mrs. Caldwell was a long time undressing, as it seemed to Beth; but in the meantime Mildred had fallen asleep, and very soon after her mother got into bed she too began to breathe with reassuring regularity.

Then Beth got up, opened the door very gently, and slipped out into the dark

passage.

"The fairy-folk are calling me, Are calling me, are calling me; They come across the stormy sea, To play with me, to play with me."

The words set themselves to a merry tune, and carried Beth on with them.

All was dark in the hall. The front door was locked and bolted, and the shutters were up in all the rooms; how was she to get out? She felt for the green baize double-door which shut off the kitchen from the other parts of the house, opened it, and groped her way down the passage. As she did so, she saw a faint glimmer of light at the far end—not candlelight, moonlight—and at the same moment she became aware of some one else moving. At the end of the passage she was in, there was a little door leading out into a garden. If that were open all would be easy. She had stopped to listen. Certainly some one else was moving quite close to her. What was she near? Oh, the store-room. Something grated like a key in a lock—a door was opened, a match struck, a candle lighted; and there was Mrs. Cook in the store-room itself, hurriedly filling paper-bags with tea, sugar, raisins, currants, and other groceries from Uncle James's carefully guarded treasure, and packing them into a small hamper with a lid. When the hamper was full she blew out the candle, came out of the store-room, locked the door after her, and went into the kitchen, without discovering Beth. She left the kitchen door open; the blind was up; and Beth could see a man, whom she recognised as the cook's son, standing in the moonlight.

"Is there much this time, mother?" he asked.

"A goodish bit," cook replied, handing him the hamper.

"'E 'asn't 'ad 'is eyes about 'im much o' late, then?"

"Oh, 'e allus 'as 'is eyes about 'im, but 'e doan't see much. You'll get me what ye can?"

"I will so," her son replied, and kissed cook as she let him out of the back-door, which she fastened after him. Then she went off herself up the back-stairs to bed.

When all was quiet again, Beth thought of the garden-door at the end of the passage. To her relief she found it ajar; the gleam of light she had seen in that direction was the moonlight streaming through the crevice. She slipped out cautiously; but the moment she found herself in the garden she became a wild creature, revelling in her freedom. She ran, jumped, waved her arms about, threw herself down on the ground, and rolled over and over for yards, walked on all fours, turned head over heels, embraced the trunks of trees, and hailed them with the Eastern invocation, "O tree, give me of thy strength!"

For a good hour she rioted about the place in this way, working off her superfluous energy. By that time she had come to the stackyard. There, among the great stacks, she played hide-and-seek with the fairy-folk for a little. Very cautiously she would steal round in the black shadows, stalking her imaginary play-fellows, and then would go flying out into the moonlight, pursued by them in turn; and looking herself, with her white night-dress over her clothes, and her tousled hair, the weirdest little elfin figure in the world. Finally, to escape capture, she ran up a ladder that had been left against a haystack. Blocks of hay had been cut out, leaving a square shelf half way down the stack, on to which Beth scrambled from the ladder. There was room enough for her to lie at her ease up there and recover her breath. The hay and the night-air smelt deliciously sweet. The stack she was on was one of the outer row. Beneath was the road along which the waggons brought their loads in harvest time; and this was flanked by a low wall, on the other side of which was a meadow, bordered with elms. Beth pulled up the hay about her, covered herself with it, and nestled amongst it luxuriously. The moon shone full upon her, but she had quite concealed herself, and would probably have fallen asleep after her exertions had it not been that just when drowsiness was coming upon her she was startled by the sound of a hurried footstep, and a girl in a light dress, with a shawl about her shoulders, came round the stack, and stood still, looking about her, as if she expected some one. Beth recognised her as Harriet Elvidge, the kitchen-maid; and

presently Russell, one of the grooms, came hurrying to meet her from the other direction. They rushed into each other's arms.

"Thou'st laäte," the girl grumbled.

"Ah bin waatin' ower yon'er this good bit," he answered, putting his arm round her, and drawing her to the wall, on which they sat, leaning against each other, and whispering happily. The moon was low, and her great golden disk illumined the sky, against which the two dark figures stood out, silhouetted distinctly. The effect gave Beth a sensation of pleasure, and she racked her brains for words in which to express it. Presently the lovers rose and strolled away together. Then for a little it was lonely, and Beth thought of getting down; but before she had made up her mind, two other people appeared, strolling in the moonlight, whom Beth instantly recognised as Uncle James and the beautiful princess Blue-eyes-and-golden-hair. The princess had both her hands clasped round Uncle James's arm, and every now and then she nestled her face against his shoulder lovingly.

"What will Jimmie-wimmie give his Jenny-penny?" she was saying as they approached.

"First what will Jenny-penny give her Jimmie-wimmie?" Uncle James cooed.

"First, a nice—sweet—kiss!"

"Duckie-dearie!" Jimmie-wimmie gurgled ecstatically, taking the kiss with the playful grace of an elephant gambolling.

Beth on the haystack writhed with suppressed merriment until her sides ached.

But Jimmie-wimmie and Jenny-penny passed out of sight like Harriet and Russell before them. The moon was sinking rapidly. A sudden gust of air blew chill upon Beth. She was extremely sensitive to sudden changes of temperature, and as the night grew dull and heavy, so did her mood, and she began to be as anxious to be indoors again as she had been to come out. The fairy-folk had all vanished now, and ghosts and goblins would come in their stead, and pounce upon her as she passed, if

she were not quick. Beth scrambled down from the haystack, and made for the side-door in hot haste, and was half-way upstairs, when it suddenly occurred to her that if she locked the door, Jimmie-wimmie and Jenny-penny would not be able to get in. So she retraced her steps, accomplished her purpose, slipped back to bed, and slept until she was roused in the morning by a shrill cry from Bernadine—"See, mummy! see, mummy! lazy Beth is in bed with all her clothes on!"

Beth sat up, and slapped Bernadine promptly; whereupon Mrs. Caldwell slapped Beth.

"Such is life," said Beth, in imitation of Aunt Grace Mary; and Mrs. Caldwell smiled in spite of herself.

Later in the day Beth complained to Mildred of a bad cold in her head.

"Oh dear!" Mildred exclaimed, "I expect Uncle James will talk at that cold as long as it lasts."

"I know," Beth said. "Grace Mary, dear—or Aunt Victoria—have you observed that children always have colds and never have pocket-handkerchiefs?"

Uncle James, however, had a bad cold himself that morning, and described himself as very much indisposed.

"I went out of doors last night before retiring," he explained at luncheon, "tempted by the glorious moonlight and the balmy air; but before I returned the night had changed and become chilly, and unfortunately the side-door had shut itself, and every one was in bed, so I could not get in. I threw pebbles up at Grace Mary's window, but failed to rouse her, she being somewhat deaf. I also knocked and rang, but no one answered, so I was obliged to shelter in the barn. Harriet, however, appeared finally. She—er—gets the men's breakfasts, and—er—the kitchen-window—" But here Uncle James was seized with a sudden fit of sneezing, and the connection between the men's breakfasts and the kitchen-window was never explained. "She is an extremely good girl, is Harriet," he proceeded as soon as he

could speak; "up at four o'clock every morning."

"I wish to goodness my trollop was," said Lady Benyon. "She gets later every day. Where did you go last night?"

"Oh—I had been loitering among the tombs, so to speak," he answered largely.

Beth was eating cold beef stolidly, but without much appetite because of her cold, and also because there was hot chicken, and Uncle James had not given her her choice. Uncle James kept looking at her. He found it hard to let her alone, but she gave him no cause of offence for some time. Her little nose was troublesome, however, and at last she sniffed. Uncle James looked at Lady Benyon.

"Have you observed," he said, "that when a child has a cold she never has a pocket-handkerchief?"

Beth produced a clean one with a flourish, and burst out laughing.

"What's the matter, Puck?" Lady Benyon asked, beaming already in anticipation.

"Oh, nothing. Only I said Uncle James would say that if I sniffed. Didn't I, Mildred?"

But Mildred, too wary to support her, looked down demurely.

"Puck," said Lady Benyon, "you're a character."

"There are good characters and there are bad characters," Uncle James moralised.

"Arrah, thin, it isn't a bad character you'd be afther givin' your own niece," Beth blarneyed; and then she turned up her naughty eyes to the ceiling and chanted softly: "What will Jimmie-wimmie give his duckie-dearie to be good? A nice—sweet—kiss!"

Uncle James's big white face became suddenly empurpled.

"Gracious! he's swallowed wrong," Lady Benyon exclaimed in alarm. "Drink something. You really should be careful, a great fat man like you."

Uncle James coughed hard behind his handkerchief, then began to recover himself.

Beth's eyes were fixed on his face. Her chaunt had been a sudden inspiration, and its effect upon the huge man had somewhat startled her; but clearly Uncle James was afraid she was going to tell.

"How funny!" she ejaculated.

Uncle James gasped again.

"What is the matter, Puck?" Lady Benyon asked.

"Oh, I was just thinking—thinking I would ask Uncle James to give Mildred some chicken."

"Why, of course, my dear child!" Uncle James exclaimed, to everybody's astonishment. "And have some yourself, Beth?"

"No, thank you," Beth answered. "I'm full."

"Beth!" her mother was beginning, when she perceived that Uncle James was laughing.

"Now, that child is really amusing," he said—"really amusing."

No one else thought this last enormity a happy specimen of her wit, and they looked at Uncle James, who continued to laugh, in amazement.

"Beth," he said, "when luncheon is over I shall give you a picture-book."

Beth accordingly had to stay behind with him after the others had left the dining-room.

"Beth," he began in a terrible voice, as soon as they were alone together, trying to frighten her; "Beth, what were you doing last night?"

"I was meditating among the tombs," she answered glibly; "but I never heard them called by that name before."

"You bad child, I shall tell your mamma."

"Oh for shame!" said Beth. "Tell-tale! And if you tell I shall. I saw you kissing

Jenny-penny."

Uncle James collapsed. He had been prepared to explain to Beth that he had met the poor girl with some rustic lover, and was lecturing her kindly for her good, and making her go in, which would have made a plausible story had it not been for that accursed kissing. Of course he could insist that Beth was lying; the child was known to be imaginative; but then against that was the emotion he had shown. Lady Benyon had no very high opinion of him, he knew, and once she obtained a clue she would soon unravel the truth. No, the only thing was to silence Beth.

"Beth," he said, "I quite agree with you, my dear child. I was only joking when I said I would tell your mamma. Nothing would induce me to tell tales out of school."

Beth smiled up at him frankly: "Nor me neither. I don't believe you're such a bad old boy after all."

Uncle James winced. How he would have liked to throttle her! He controlled himself, however, and even managed to make a smile as he got up to leave the room.

"I say, though," Beth exclaimed, seeing him about to depart, "where's that picture-book?"

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "I had forgotten. But no, Beth, it would never do. If I give it to you now, it would look like a bribe; and I'm sure you would never accept a bribe."

"I should think not," said Beth.

And it was long years before she understood the mean adroitness of this last evasion.

CHAPTER XIV

There are those who maintain that a man can do everything better than a woman can do it. This is certainly true of nagging. When a man nags, he shows his thoroughness, his continuity, and that love of sport which is the special pride and attribute of his sex. When a man nags, he puts his whole heart into the effort; a

woman only nags, as a rule, because the heart has been taken out of her. The nagging woman is an over-tasked creature with jarred nerves, whose plaint is an expression of pain, a cry for help; in any interval of ease which lasts long enough to relax the tension, she feels remorse, and becomes amiably anxious to atone. With the male nag it is different. He is usually sleek and smiling, a joyous creature, fond of good living, whose self-satisfaction bubbles over in artistic attempts to make everybody else uncomfortable. This was the kind of creature Uncle James Patten was. He loved to shock and jar and startle people, especially if they were powerless to retaliate. Of two ways of saying a thing he invariably chose the more disagreeable; and when he had bad news to break, it added to his interest in it if the victim felt it deeply and showed signs of suffering.

One morning at breakfast it might have been suspected that there was something unpleasant toward. Uncle James had read prayers with such happy unction, and showed such pleased importance as he took his seat.

"Aunt Victoria," he lisped, "I have just observed in yesterday's paper that money matters are in a bad way. There has been a crisis in the city, and your investments have sunk so low that your income will be practically nil."

"What!" said Aunt Victoria incredulously, "the shares you advised me to buy?"

"Those are the ones, yes," he answered.

"But, then—I fear you have lost money too," she exclaimed.

"Oh no, thank you," he assured her, in a tone which implied reproach, "I never speculate."

"James Patten," said Aunt Victoria quietly, "am I to understand that you advised me to buy stock in which you yourself did not venture to speculate?"

"Well—er—you see," he answered with composure, "as speculation was against my principles, I could not take advantage of the opportunity myself, but that seemed to me no reason why you should not try to double your income. It may have been an

error of judgment on my part; I am far from infallible—far from infallible. But I think I may claim to be disinterested. I did not hope to benefit myself——"

"During my lifetime," Aunt Victoria suggested, in the same tone of quiet self-restraint. "I see. My modest fortune would not have been much in itself to a man of your means; but it would have been a considerable sum if doubled."

"Yes, doubles or quits, doubles or quits," said Uncle James, beaming on Aunt Victoria as if he were saying something reassuring. "Alas! the family failing!"

"It is a new departure, however, for the family—to gamble at other people's expense," said Aunt Victoria.

"Alas! poor human nature," Uncle James philosophised, shaking his head. "You never know—you never know."

Aunt Victoria looked him straight in the eyes, but made no further show of emotion, except that she sat more rigidly upright than usual perhaps, and the rose-tint faded from her delicate face, leaving it waxen-white beneath her auburn front.

Uncle James ate an egg, with a pious air of thankfulness for the mercies vouchsafed him.

"And where will you live now, Aunt Victoria?" he asked at last, with an affectation of as much concern as he could get into his fat voice. For many years he had insisted that Fairholm was the proper place for his mother's sister, but then she had had money to leave. "Do not desert us altogether," he pursued. "You must come and see us as often as your altered circumstances will admit."

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench bowed expressively. Aunt Grace Mary grew very red in the face. Mrs. Caldwell seemed to be controlling herself with difficulty.

"There will be a spare room in my cottage, Aunt Victoria," she said. "I hope you will consider it your own, and make your home with me."

"Thank you kindly, Caroline," the old lady answered; "but I must consider."

"It would be a most proper arrangement," Uncle James genially decided; "and you would have our dear little Beth, of whom you approve, you know, for an interest in life."

Beth left her seat impulsively, and, going round to the old lady, nestled up to her, slipped her little hand through her arm, and glared at Uncle James defiantly.

The old lady's face quivered for a moment, and she patted the child's hand.

But no more was said on the subject in Beth's hearing; only, later, she found that Aunt Victoria was going to live with them.

Uncle James had suddenly become quite anxious that Mrs. Caldwell should be settled in her own little house; he said it would be so much more comfortable for her. The little house was Aunt Grace Mary's property, by the way—rent, ten pounds a year; but as it had not been let for a long time, and it did houses no good to stand empty, Uncle James had graciously lent it to his sister. When she was so settled in it that it would be a great inconvenience to move, he asked for the rent.

During the next week he drove every day to the station in Aunt Grace Mary's pony-carriage, to see if Mrs. Caldwell's furniture had arrived from Ireland; and when at last it came, he sent every available servant he had to set the house in order, so that it might be ready for immediate occupation. He also persuaded Harriet Elvidge, his invaluable kitchen-maid, to enter Mrs. Caldwell's service as maid-of-all-work. There is reason to believe that this arrangement was the outcome of Uncle James's peculiar sense of humour; but Mrs. Caldwell never suspected it.

"It will be nice for you to have some one I know all about," Uncle James insisted, "and with a knowledge of cooking besides. And how glad you will be to sleep under your own roof to-night!" he added in a tone of kindly congratulation.

"And how glad you will be to get rid of us," said Beth, thus early giving voice to what other people were only daring to think.

As soon as they were settled in the little bow-windowed house, it became obvious

that there would be differences of opinion between mamma and Great-Aunt Victoria Bench. They differed about the cooking, about religion, and about the education of children. Aunt Victoria thought that if you cooked meat a second time it took all the goodness out of it. Mrs. Caldwell liked stews, and she said if the joints were under-done at first, as they should be, re-cooking did not take the goodness out of the meat; but Aunt Victoria abominated under-done joints more than anything.

The education of the children was a more serious matter, however—a matter of principle, in fact, as opposed to a matter of taste. Mrs. Caldwell had determined to give her boys a good start in life. In order to do this on her very limited income, she was obliged to exercise the utmost self-denial, and even with that, there would be little or nothing left to spend on the girls. This, however, did not seem to Mrs. Caldwell to be a matter of much importance. It is customary to sacrifice the girls of a family to the boys; to give them no educational advantages, and then to jeer at them for their ignorance and silliness. Mrs. Caldwell's own education had been of the most desultory character, but such as it was, she was content with it. "The method has answered in my case," she complacently maintained, without the slightest suspicion that the assertion proved nothing but extreme self-satisfaction. Accordingly, as she could not afford to send her daughters to school as well as the boys, she decided to educate them herself. Everybody who could read, write, and cipher was supposed to be able to teach in those days, and Mrs. Caldwell undertook the task without a doubt of her own capacity. But Aunt Victoria was not so sanguine.

"I hope religious instruction will be a part of their education," she said, when the subject was first discussed.

"They shall read the Bible from beginning to end," Mrs. Caldwell answered shortly.

"That, I should think, would be hardly desirable," Aunt Victoria deprecated gently.

"And I shall teach them their Catechism, and take them to church," Mrs. Caldwell

proceeded. "That is the way in which I was taught."

"We were instructed in doctrine, and taught to order our conduct on certain fixed principles, which were explained to us," Aunt Victoria ventured.

"Indeed, yes, I dare say," Mrs. Caldwell observed politely; so there the subject had to drop.

But Aunt Victoria was far from satisfied. She shook her head sadly over her niece's spiritual state, and determined to save the souls of her great-nieces by instructing them herself as occasion should offer.

"What is education, mamma?" Beth asked.

"Why, learning things, of course," Mrs. Caldwell replied, with a smile at the child's simplicity.

"I know that," Beth snapped, irritated by her mother's manner.

"Then why did you ask?" Mrs. Caldwell wished to know.

"The child has probably heard that that is not all," said Aunt Victoria. "'Learning things' is but one item of education—if you mean by that the mere acquisition of knowledge. A well-ordered day, for instance, is an essential part of education. Education is a question of discipline, of regular hours for everything, from the getting up in the morning to the going to bed at night. No mind can be properly developed without routine. Teach a child how to order its time, and its talents will do the rest."

"Get out your books, children," said Mrs. Caldwell, and Aunt Victoria hurriedly withdrew.

Beth put a large Bible, Colenso's arithmetic, a French grammar, and Pinnock (an old-fashioned compilation of questions and answers), on the table, and looked at them despondently. Then she took a slate, set herself the easiest addition sum she could find in Colenso, and did it wrong. Her mother told her to correct it.

"I wish you would show me how, mamma," Beth pleaded.

"You must find out for yourself," her mother answered.

This was her favourite formula. She had no idea of making the lessons either easy or interesting to the children. Teaching was a duty she detested, a time of trial both to herself and to her pupils, to be got over as soon as possible. The whole proceeding only occupied two or three dreadful hours of the morning, and then the children were free for the rest of the day, and so was she.

After lessons they all went out together to the north cliffs, where Aunt Victoria and Mrs. Caldwell walked to and fro on a sheltered terrace, while the children played on the sands below. It was a still day when Beth first saw the sands, and the lonely level and the tranquil sea delighted her. On her left, white cliffs curved round the bay like an arm; on her right was the grey and solid old stone pile, and behind her the mellow red brick houses of the little town scrambled up an incline from the shore irregularly. Silver sparkles brightened the hard smooth surface of the sand in the sunshine. The tide was coming in, and tiny waves advanced in irregular curves, and broke with a merry murmur. Joy got hold of Beth as she gazed about her, feeling the beauty of the scene. With the infinite charity of childhood, she forgave her mother her trespasses against her for that day, and her little soul was filled with the peace of the newly shriven. She flourished a little wooden spade that Aunt Victoria had given her, but did not dig. The surface of the sand was all unbroken; no disfiguring foot of man had trodden the long expanse, and Beth hesitated to be the first to spoil its exquisite serenity. Her heart expanded, however, and she shouted aloud in a great, uncontrollable burst of exultation.

A man with a brown beard and moustache, short, crisp, curly hair, and deep-set, glittering dark grey eyes, came up to her from behind. He wore a blue pilot-coat, blue trousers, and a peaked cap, the dress of a merchant-skipper.

"Don't desecrate this heavenly solitude with discordant cries," he exclaimed.

Beth had not heard him approach, and she turned round, startled, when he spoke.

"I thought I was singing!" she rejoined.

"Don't dig and disfigure the beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore," he pursued.

"I did not mean to dig," Beth said, looking up in his face; and then looking round about her in perfect comprehension of his mood—"The beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore," she slowly repeated, delighting in the phrase. "It's the kind of thing you can sing, you know."

"Yes," said the man, suddenly smiling; "it is pure poetry, and I make you a present of the copyright."

"But," Beth objected, "the shore is not brown. I've been thinking and thinking what to call it. It's the colour—the colour of—the colour of tarnished silver," she burst out at last triumphantly.

"Well observed," he said.

"Then I make you a present of the copyright," Beth answered readily.

"Thank you," he said; "but it will not scan."

"What is scan?"

"It won't fit into the verse, you know."

"The beautiful bare colour-of-tarnished-silver bosom of the shore," she sang out glibly; then agreed, with a wise shake of her head, that the phrase was impossible; and recurred to another point of interest, as was her wont—"What is copyright?"

Before he could answer, however, Mrs. Caldwell had swooped down upon them. She had seen him from the cliff talking to Beth, and hastened down the steps in her hot-tempered way, determined to rebuke the man for his familiarity, and heedless of Aunt Victoria, who had made an effort to stop her.

"May I ask why you are interfering with my child, sir?" she demanded.

The man in the sailor-suit raised his hat and bowed low.

"Excuse me, madam," he said. "I could not possibly have supposed that she was your child."

Mrs. Caldwell coloured angrily as at an insult, although the words seemed innocent enough. When he had spoken, he turned to Beth, with his hat still in his hand, and added—"Good-bye, little lady. We must meet again, you and I—on the beautiful bare brown bosom of the shore."

Beth's sympathy shone out in a smile, and she waved her hand confidingly to him as he turned away. Mrs. Caldwell seized her arm and hurried her up the steps to Aunt Victoria, who stood on the edge of the cliff blinking calmly.

"Imagine Beth scraping acquaintance with such a common-looking person!" Mrs. Caldwell cried. "You must never speak to him or look at him again—do you hear? I wonder what taste you will develop next!"

"It is a pity that you are so impetuous, Caroline," Aunt Victoria observed quietly. "That gentleman is the Count Gustav Bartahlinsky, who may perhaps be considered eccentric here, where noblemen of great attainments and wealth are certainly not numerous; but is hardly to be called common-looking."

Beth saw her mother's countenance drop.

"Then I may speak to him," she decided for herself. "What's a copyright, mamma?"

"Oh, don't bother, Beth!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed irritably.

When they went home, Bernadine clamoured for food, and her mother gave her a piece of bread. They were to have dinner at four o'clock, but no luncheon, for economy's sake. Beth was hungry too, but she would not confess it. What she had heard of their poverty had made a deep impression on her, and she was determined to eat as little as possible. Aunt Victoria glanced at Bernadine and the bread as she went up to her room, and Beth fancied she heard her sigh. Was the old lady hungry too, she wondered, and her little heart sank.

This was Beth's first exercise in self-denial, but she had plenty of practice, for the scene was repeated day after day.

The children being free, had to amuse themselves as best they could, and went out to play in the little garden at the back of the house. Mrs. Caldwell's own freedom was merely freedom for thought. Most of the day she spent beside the dining-room table, making and mending, her only distraction being an occasional glance through the window at the boughs of the apple-trees which showed above the wall opposite, or at the people passing. Even when teaching the children she made, mended, and pursued her own thoughts, mapping out careers for her boys, making brilliant matches for Mildred and Bernadine, and even building a castle for Beth now and then. She made and mended as badly as might be expected of a woman whose proud boast it was that when she was married she could not hem a pocket-handkerchief; and she did it all herself. She had no notion of utilising the motive-power at hand in the children. As her own energy had been wasted in her childhood, so she wasted theirs, letting it expend itself to no purpose instead of teaching them to apply it. She was essentially a creature of habit. All that she had been taught in her youth, she taught them; but any accomplishment she had acquired in later life, she seemed to think that they also should wait to acquire. She had always dressed for dinner; so now, at half-past three every day, she put away her work, went into the kitchen for some hot water, which she carried upstairs herself, called the children, and proceeded to brush her own hair carefully, and change her dress. She expected the children to follow her example, but did not pay much attention to their proceedings, and they, childlike, constantly and consistently shirked as much of the ceremony as possible. If their mother caught them with unwashed hands and half-brushed hair, she thumped them on the back, and made them wash and brush; but she was generally thinking about something else, and did not catch them. The rite, however, being regularly although imperfectly performed, resulted in a good habit.

There was another thing too for which Beth had good reason to be grateful to her

mother. During winter, when the days were short, or when bad weather made it impossible to go out on summer evenings, Mrs. Caldwell always read aloud to the children after tea till bed-time. Most mothers would have made the children read; but there was a great deal of laxity mixed with Mrs. Caldwell's harshness. She found it easier to do things herself than to make the children do them for her. They objected to read, and liked to be read to, so she read to them; and as, fortunately, she had no money to buy children's books, she read what there were in the house. Beth's ear was still quicker than her eye, and she would not read to herself if she could help it; but before she was fourteen, thanks to her mother, she knew much of Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer Lytton, and even some of Shakespeare, well; besides such books as "The Woman in White," "The Dead Secret," "Loyal Heart; or, The Trappers," "The Scalp Hunters," and many more, all of which helped greatly to develop her intelligence.

CHAPTER XV

During the next two years, Beth continued to look on at life, with eyes wide open, deeply interested. Her mind at this time, acting without conscious effort, was a mere photographic apparatus for the registration of impressions on the brain. Every incident stored and docketed itself somewhere in her consciousness for future use, and it was upon this hoard that she drew eventually with such astonishing effect.

Rousseau in "Emile" chose a common capacity to educate, because, he said, genius will educate itself; but even genius would find its labours lightened by having been taught the use of some few tools, such as are supplied by the rudiments of a conventional education. Beth was never taught anything thoroughly; very few girls were in her day. A woman was expected at that time to earn her livelihood by marrying a man and bringing up a family; and, so long as her face was attractive, the fact that she was ignorant, foolish, and trivial did not, in the estimation of the

average man, at all disqualify her for the task. Beth's education, at this most impressionable period of her life, consisted in the acquisition of a few facts which were not made to interest her, and neither influenced her conduct nor helped to form her character. She might learn in the morning, for instance, that William the Conqueror arrived 1066, but the information did not prevent her being as naughty as possible in the afternoon. One cannot help speculating on how much she lost or gained by the haphazard of her early training; but one thing is certain, had the development of her genius depended upon a careful acquisition of such knowledge as is to be had at school, it must have remained latent for ever.

As it was, however, being forced out into the life-school of the world, she there matriculated on her own account, and so, perhaps, saved her further faculty from destruction. For theoretical knowledge would have dulled the keenness of her insight probably, confused her point of view, and brought in accepted commonplaces to spoil the originality of her conclusions. It was from practical experience of life rather than from books that she learnt her work; she saw for herself before she came under the influence of other people's observations; and this was doubtless the secret of her success; but it involved the cruel necessity of a hard and strange apprenticeship. From the time of their arrival in Rainharbour she lived three lives a day—the life of lessons and coercion which was forced upon her, an altogether artificial and unsatisfactory life; the life she took up the moment she was free to act for herself; and a life of endless dreams, which mingled with the other two unwholesomely. For the rich soil of her mind, left uncultivated, was bound to bring forth something, and because there was so little seed sown in it, the crop was mostly weeds.

When we review the march of events which come crowding into a life, seeing how few it is possible to describe, no one can wonder that there is talk of the difficulty of selection. Who, for instance, could have supposed that a good striped jacket Jim had outgrown, and Mrs. Caldwell's love of grey, would have had much effect upon

Beth's career? And yet these trifles were epoch-making. Mrs. Caldwell thought grey a ladylike colour, and therefore bought Beth a carmelite dress of a delicate shade for the summer. For the first few weeks the dress was a joy to Beth, but after that it began to be stained by one thing and another, and every spot upon it was a source of misery, not only because she was punished for messing the dress, but also because she had messed it; for she was beginning to be fastidious about her clothes; and every time she went out she was conscious of those unsightly stains, and fancied everybody was looking at them. She had to wear the frock, however, for want of another; and in the autumn, when the days began to be chilly, a cast-off jacket of Jim's was added to the affliction. Mrs. Caldwell caught her trying it on one day, and after shaking her for doing so, she noticed that the jacket fitted her, and the bright idea of making Beth wear it out, so that it might not be wasted, occurred to her. To do her justice, Mrs. Caldwell had no idea of the torture she was inflicting upon Beth by forcing her to appear in her soiled frock and a boy's jacket. The poor lady was in great straits at the time, and had nothing to spend on her daughters, because her sons were growing up, and beginning to clamour for pocket-money. Their mother considered it right that they should have it too; and so the tender, delicate, sensitive little girl had to go dirty and ashamed in order that her brothers might have the wherewithal to swing a cane, smoke, drink beer, play billiards, and do all else that makes boys men in their own estimation at an early age.

Rainharbour was little more than a fishing village in those days, though it became a fashionable watering-place in a very few years. When Mrs. Caldwell first settled there, a whole codfish was sold for sixpence, fowls were one-and-ninepence a pair, eggs were almost given away, and the manners of the people were in keeping with the low prices. The natives had no idea of concealing their feelings, and were in the habit of expressing their opinions of each other and things in general at the top of their voices in the open street. They were as conservative as the Chinese too, and thought anything new and strange ridiculous. Consequently, when a little girl

appeared amongst them in a boy's jacket, they let her know that they resented the innovation.

"She's getten a lad's jacket on! oh! oh! she's getten a lad's jacket on!" the children called aloud after her in the street, while their mothers came to the cottage-doors, wiping soap-suds from their arms, and stood staring as at a show; and even the big bland sailors lounging on the quay expanded into broad grins or solemnly winked at one another. Beth flushed with shame, but her courageous little heart was instantly full of fight. "What ignorant people these are!" she exclaimed haughtily, turning to Bernadine, who had dropped behind out of the obloquy. "What ignorant people these are! they know nothing of the fashions." The insinuation stung her persecutors, but that only made them the more offensive, and wherever she went she was jeered at—openly if there were no grown-up person with her, covertly if there were, but always so that she understood. After that first explosion she used to march along with an air of calm indifference as if she heard nothing, but she had to put great constraint upon herself in order to seem superior while feeling deeply humiliated; and all the time she suffered so acutely that at last she could hardly be induced to go out at all.

Mrs. Caldwell, who never noticed the "common people" enough to be aware of their criticism, would not listen to anything Beth had to say on the subject, and considered that her objection to go out in the jacket was merely another instance of her tiresome obstinacy. Punishments ensued, and Beth had the daily choice whether she should be scolded and beaten for refusing to go out, or be publicly jeered at for wearing a "lad's jacket."

Sometimes she preferred the chance of public derision to the certainty of private chastisement; but oftener she took the chastisement. This state of things could not last much longer, however. Hitherto her mother had ruled her by physical force, but now their wills were coming into collision, and it was inevitable that the more

determined should carry her point.

"Go and put your things on directly, you naughty, obstinate child," her mother screamed at her one day. Beth did not move.

"Do you hear me?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

Beth made no sign. And suddenly Mrs. Caldwell realised that if Beth would not go out, she could not make her. She never thought of trying to persuade her. All that occurred to her was that Beth was too big to be carried or pulled or pushed; that she might be hurt, but could not be frightened; and that there was nothing for it, therefore, but to let her have her own way.

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Caldwell, "I shall go without you. But you'll be punished for your wickedness some day, you'll see, and then you'll be sorry."

Mildred had gone to be educated by a rich sister of her father's by this time, Aunt Victoria and Bernadine usually went out with Mrs. Caldwell, so it came to pass that Beth began to be left pretty much to her own resources, of which Harriet Elvidge in the kitchen was one, and a considerable one.

Harriet was a woman of well-marked individuality and brilliant imagination. She could never separate fact from fiction in any form of narrative, and narrative was her speciality. She was always recounting something. Beth used to follow her from room to room, as she went about her work, listening with absolute faith and the deepest interest to the stream of narrative which flowed on without interruption, no matter what Harriet was doing. Sometimes, when she was dusting the drawing-room mantelpiece, she would pause with a china cup in one hand and her duster in the other, to emphasise a thrilling incident, or make a speech impressive with suitable gesticulation; and sometimes, for the same purpose, she would stop with her hand on the yellowstone with which she was rubbing the kitchen-hearth, and her head in the grate almost. Often, too, Beth in her eager sympathy would say, "Let me do that!" and Harriet would sit in an arm-chair if they were in the drawing-room, and resign

the duster—or the dishcloth, if they were in the kitchen—and continue the recital, while Beth showed her appreciation, and encouraged her to proceed, by doing the greater part of her work for her. Mrs. Caldwell never could make out why Beth's hands were in such a state. "They are all cracked and begrimed," she would exclaim, "as if the child had to do dirty work like a servant!" And it was a good thing for Beth that she did it, for otherwise she would have had no physical training at all, and would have suffered as her sister Mildred did for want of it. Mildred, unlike Beth, held her head high, and never forgot that she was a young lady by right of descent, with an hereditary aptitude for keeping her inferiors in their proper place. She only went into the kitchen of necessity, and would never have dreamed of dusting, sweeping, bed-making, or laying the table, to help the servant, however much she might have been over-tasked; neither would Harriet have dared to approach her with the familiar pleading: "I say, miss, 'elp uz, I'm that done," to which Beth so readily responded. Mildred was studious; she had profited by the good teaching she had had while her father was alive, and was able to "make things out" for herself; but she cultivated her mind at the expense of her body. She was one of those delicate, nervous, sensitive girls, whose busy brains require the rest of regular manual exercise; and for want of it, she lived upon books, and very literally died of them eventually. She was naturally, so to speak, an artificial product of conventional ideas; Beth, on the contrary, was altogether a little human being, but one of those who answer to expectation with fatal versatility. She liked blacking grates, and did them well, because Harriet told her she could; she hated writing copies, and did them disgracefully, because her mother beat her for a blot, and said she would never improve. For the same reason, long before she could read aloud to her mother intelligibly, she had learnt all that Harriet could teach her, not only of the house-work, but of the cooking, from cleaning a fish and trussing a fowl to making barley-broth and puff-pastry. Harriet was a good cook if she had the things, as she said herself, having picked up a great deal when she was kitchen-maid in Uncle

James's household.

Harriet was the daughter of a labourer. Her people lived at a village some miles away, and every Saturday morning a carrier with a covered cart brought her a letter from home, and a little parcel containing a cheesecake or some other dainty. Beth took a lively interest both in the cheesecake and the letter. "What's the news from home to-day?" she would ask. "How's Annie, and what has mother sent?" Whereupon Harriet would share the cheesecake with her, and read the letter aloud, work being suspended as long as possible for the purpose.

Harriet was about twenty-five at this time. She had very black silky hair, straight and heavy, parted in the middle, drawn down over her ears, and gathered up in a knot behind. Her face was oval, forehead high, eyebrows arched and delicate, nose straight, and she had large expressive dark grey eyes, rather deeply set, with long black lashes, and a mouth that would have been handsome of the sensual full-lipped kind, had it not been distorted by a burn, which had disfigured her throat and chin as well. She had set her pinafore on fire when she was a child, and it had blazed up under her chin, causing irreparable injury before the flames could be extinguished. But for that accident she would have been a singularly good-looking woman of a type which was common in books of beauty at the beginning of this reign.

She could read and write after a fashion, and was intelligent, but ignorant, deceitful, superstitious, and hysterical. Mrs. Caldwell continually lectured Beth about going into the kitchen so much; but she only lectured on principle really. Young ladies could not be allowed to associate with servants as a rule, but an exception might be made in the case of a good, steady, sober sort of person, such as Mrs. Caldwell believed Harriet to be, who would keep the troublesome child out of mischief, and do her no harm. Harriet, as it happened, delighted in mischief, and was often the instigator; but Mrs. Caldwell might be excused for not suspecting this, as she only saw her on her best behaviour. When the children were safe in bed, and Miss

Victoria Bench, who was an early person, had also retired, Harriet would put on a clean apron, and appear before Mrs. Caldwell in the character of a respectable, vigilant domestic, more anxious about her mistress's interests than her own; and she would then make a report in which Beth figured as a fiend of a child who could not be trusted alone for a moment, and Harriet herself as a conscientious custodian, but for whom nobody knows what might have happened.

When Harriet had no particular incident to report at these secret conferences, she would tell Mrs. Caldwell her dreams, and describe signs and portents of coming events which she had observed during the day; and Mrs. Caldwell would listen with interest. Superstition is a subject on which the most class-proud will consult with the lowest and the wickedest; it is a mighty leveller downwards. But the poor lady had a lonely life. It was not Mrs. Caldwell's fault, but the fault of her day, that she was not a noble woman. She belonged to early Victorian times, when every effort was made to mould the characters of women as the homes of the period were built, on lines of ghastly uniformity. The education of a girl in those days was eminently calculated to cloud her intelligence and strengthen every failing developed in her sex by ages of suppression. Mrs. Caldwell was a plastic person, and her mind had been successfully compressed into the accustomed groove until her husband came and helped it to escape a little in one or two directions—with the effect, however, of spoiling its conventional symmetry without restoring its natural beauty. If the mind be tight-laced long enough, it is ruined as a model, just as the body is; and throwing off the stays which restrained it, merely exposes its deformities without remedying them; so that there is nothing for the old generation but to remain in stays. Mrs. Caldwell, with all her deformities, was just as heroic as she knew how to be. She lived for her children to the extent of denying herself the bare necessaries of life for them; and bore poverty and obscurity of a galling kind without a murmur. She scarcely ever saw a soul to speak to. Uncle James Patten and the Benyon family did not associate much with the townspeople, and were not popular in the county; so

that Mrs. Caldwell had very few visitors. Of course it was an advantage to be known as a relation of the great people of the place, although the great people had a bad name; but then she was evidently a poor relation, which made it almost a virtue to neglect her in a community of Christians who only professed to love the Lord Himself for what they could get. "You must worship God because He can give you everything," was what they taught their children. Even the vicar of the parish would not call on anybody with less than five hundred a year. He kept a school for boys, which paid him more than cent. per cent., but did nothing for his parishioners except preach sermons an hour long on Sundays. Self-denial and morality were his favourite subjects. He had had three wives himself, and was getting through a fourth as fast as one baby a year would do it.

Mrs. Caldwell, left to herself, found her evenings especially long and dreary. It was her habit to write her letters then, and read, particularly in French and Italian, which, she had some vague notion, helped to improve her mind. But she often wearied for a word, and began to hear voices herself in the howling winter winds, and to brood upon the possible meaning of her own dreams, and to wonder why a solitary rook flew over her house in particular, and cawed twice as it passed. Little things naturally become of great importance in such a life, and Harriet kept up the supply; she being the connecting link between Mrs. Caldwell and the outer world. She knew all that was happening in the place, and she claimed to know all that was going to happen; and by degrees the mistress as well as the maid fell into the way of comparing events with the forebodings which had preceded them, and often established a satisfactory connection between the two.

Mrs. Caldwell always made coffee in the kitchen for breakfast in the morning, and while she was so engaged, Harriet, busy making toast, would begin—"Did you 'ear a noise last night, m'em?"

"No, Harriet—at least—was it about ten o'clock?"

"Yes, m'em, just about—a sort of scraping rattling noise, like a lot of people walking over gravel."

"I did hear something of the kind. I wonder what it was," Mrs. Caldwell would rejoin.

"Well, m'em, I think it means there are people coming to the 'ouse, for I remember it 'appened the night before your brother come, m'em, unexpected, and the lawyer."

If nobody came during the day, the token would be supposed to refer to some future period; and so, by degrees, signs and portents took the place of more substantial interests in Mrs. Caldwell's dreary life. Such things were in the air, for the little seaside place was quite out of the world at the time, and the people still had more faith in an incantation than a doctor's dose. If an accident happened, or a storm decimated the fishing-fleet, signs innumerable were always remembered which had preceded the event. If you asked why nobody had profited by the warning, people would shake their heads and tell you it was to be; and if you asked what was the use of the warning then, they would say to break the blow—in which idea there seemed to be some sense.

"When they told Tom's wife 'e was drownded, she'd 'a' dropped down dead 'erself and left the children, if she 'adn't 'a' knowed it all along," Harriet explained to Beth. "Eh! lass, you mark my words, warnin's comes for one thing, and warnin's comes for another, but they always comes for good, an' you're forced to take notice an' act on 'em or you're forced to leave 'em alone, just as is right, an' ye can't 'elp it yerself, choose 'ow. There's Mrs. Pettinger, she dreamed one night 'er husband's boat was lost, an' next mornin' 'e was to go out fishin', but she wouldn't let 'im. 'No, 'Enery John,' she ses, 'you'll not go, not if ah 'as to 'old you,' ses she, an' 'e was that mad 'e struck 'er an' knocked 'er down an' broke 'er arm, an' then, needs must, 'e 'ad to fetch the doctor to set it, an' by the time that was done, the boat 'ad gone wi'out 'im. The other men thought 'e was drunk—'e often was—an' they wouldn't wait. Well, that

boat never came back."

"And did he beat his wife again?" Beth asked.

"Oh, as to that, 'ow could it make any difference?" Harriet answered.

Beth was fascinated by the folk-lore of the place, and soon surpassed Harriet herself in the interpretation of dreams and the reading of signs and tokens. She began to invent methods of divination for herself too, such as, "If the boards don't creak when I walk across the room I shall get through my lessons without trouble this morning," a trick which soon became a confirmed habit into which she was apt to lapse at any time; and so persistent are these early impressions that to the end of her days she would always rather have seen two rooks together than one alone, rooks being the birds of omen in a land where magpies were scarce. Mrs. Caldwell knew nothing of Beth's proficiency in the black arts. She would never have discussed such a subject before the children, and took it for granted that Harriet was equally discreet; while Beth on her part, with her curious quick sense of what was right and proper, believed her mother to be above such things.

Harriet was a person of varied interests, all of which she discussed with Beth impartially. She had many lovers, according to her own account, and was stern and unyielding with them all, and so particular that she would dismiss them at any moment for nothing almost. If she went out at night she had always much to tell the next morning, and Beth would hurry over her lessons, watch her mother out of the way, and slip into the kitchen or upstairs after Harriet, and question her about what she had said, and he had said, and if she had let him kiss her even once.

"Well, last night," Harriet said on one occasion, in a tone of apology for her own weakness and good-nature. "Last night I couldn't 'elp it. 'E just put 'is arm round me, and, well, there! I was sorry for 'im."

"Why don't you say he and him and his, Harriet?"

"I do."

"No, you don't. You say 'e and 'im and 'is."

"Well, that's what you say."

Beth shouted the aspirates at her for answer, but in vain; with all the will in the world to "talk fine," as she called it, Harriet could never acquire the art, for want of an ear to hear. She could not perceive the slightest difference between him and 'im.

Even at this age Beth had her own point of view in social matters, and frequently disconcerted Harriet by a word or look or inflection of the voice which expressed disapproval of her conduct. Harriet had been at home on one occasion for a week's holiday, a charwoman having done her work in her absence, and on her return she had much to relate of Charles Russell, the groom at Fairholm, who continued to be an ardent admirer of hers, but not an honourable one, because he did not realise what a very superior person Harriet was. He thought she was no better than other girls, and when they were sitting up one night together in her mother's cottage, the rest of the family having gone to bed, he made her a proposal which Harriet indignantly rejected.

"And ah ses to 'im, 'Charles Russell,' ah ses to 'im, 'not was it ever so,' ah ses to 'im"—she was proceeding emphatically when Beth interrupted her.

"Did you say you sat up with him alone all night?" she asked.

"Yes, there's no 'arm, you know," Harriet answered on the defensive, without precisely knowing why.

"Well, what did he say?" Beth rejoined without comment.

But Harriet, put out of countenance, omitted the details, and brought the story to an abrupt conclusion.

Another of Harriet's interests in life was the Family Herald, which she took regularly, and as regularly read aloud to Beth, to the best of her ability—from the verses to "Violet," or "My own Love," on the first page, to the "Random Readings"

on the last. They laughed at the jokes, tried to guess the riddles, were impressed with the historical anecdotes and words of wisdom, and became so hungry over the recipes for good dishes that they frequently fried eggs and potatoes, or a slice stolen from the joint roasting at the fire, and feasted surreptitiously.

Beth tried in after years to remember what the stories in the Family Herald had been about, but all she could recall was a vague incident of a falling scaffold, of a heroine called Margaret taking refuge in the dark behind a hoarding, and of a fascinating hero whom Harriet called Ug Miller. Long afterwards it dawned upon Beth that his name was Hugh.

When Mildred went to her aunt, Beth and Bernadine became of necessity constant companions, and it was a curious kind of companionship, for their natures were antagonistic. Like rival chieftains whose territories adjoin, they professed no love for each other, and were often at war, but were intimate nevertheless, and would have missed each other, because there was no one else with whom they could so conveniently quarrel. Harriet took the liveliest interest in their squabbles, which, under her able direction, rapidly developed from the usual little girls' scrimmages into regular stand-up fights.

One day Beth pulled Bernadine's hair passionately, and Bernadine retaliated by clawing Beth's face, and then howled as a further relief to her feelings. Mrs. Caldwell rushed to see what accident had happened to the dear child, and Harriet came to see the sport.

"Mamma, Beth pulled my hair," Bernadine whined.

Mrs. Caldwell immediately thumped Beth, who seldom said a word in her own defence. Harriet was neutral till her mistress had disappeared, and then she supported Beth.

"Just you wait till after dinner," she said. "Come into the kitchen when your ma's asleep, and fight it out. Don't you be put upon by tell-pie-tits."

"What's the use of my going into the kitchen?" Beth rejoined; "Bernadine doesn't fight fair. She's a horrid, low little coward."

"Am I!" Bernadine howled. "Just you wait till after dinner! I'm as brave as you are, and as strong, though you are the biggest." Which was true. Bernadine was sallow, thin, wiry, and muscular; Beth was soft, and round, and white. She had height, age, and weight on her side; Bernadine had strength, agility, and cunning.

"Phew—w—w!" Beth jeered, mimicking her whine. "You'd 'tell mamma' if you got a scratch."

"I won't, Beth, if you'll fight," Bernadine protested.

"We'll see after dinner," Harriet put in significantly, and then returned to her work.

After the four o'clock dinner, during the dark winter months, Mrs. Caldwell dozed for half-an-hour in her chair by the fire. This was the children's opportunity. They were supposed to sit still and amuse themselves quietly while their mother slept; and, until she slept, they would sit motionless, watching her, the greater their anxiety to get away the more absolute their silence. Mrs. Caldwell looked as if she were being mesmerised to sleep by the two pairs of bright eyes so resolutely and patiently fixed upon her. The moment her breathing showed she was sound asleep, the children stole to the kitchen, shutting the doors after them softly, and instantly set to work.

It was a gruesome sight, those two children, with teeth set and clenched fists, battering each other in deadly earnest, but with no noise save the fizzle of feet on the brick floor, an occasional thump up against a piece of furniture, or the thud when they fell. They were afraid to utter a sound lest Aunt Victoria, up in her room, should hear them, and come down interfering; or their mother should wake, and come out and catch them. They bruised and blackened and scratched each other, and were seldom without what they considered the honourable scars of these battles. Sometimes, when Bernadine was badly mauled, she lost her temper, and threatened

to tell mamma. But Beth could always punish her, and did so, by refusing to fight next time, although, without that recreation, life were a blank.

Harriet always cleared away obstacles to give them room, and then sat down to eat her dinner, and watch the fight. She had the tastes, and some of the habits, of a Roman empress, and encouraged them with the keenest interest for a long time, but when she had finished her dinner she usually wearied of the entertainment, and would then stop it.

"I say, yer ma's comin'! I can 'ear 'er!" she would exclaim. "'Elp us to wash up, or I shan't be done for the reading."

When Harriet wanted help, Bernadine usually slipped away, helping anybody not being much in her line; but Beth set to work with a will.

Beth, always sociable, had persuaded her mother to let Harriet come to the reading; and Harriet accordingly, in a clean cap and apron, with a piece of sewing, was added to the party.

So long as she sat on a high chair, at a respectful distance, and remembered that she was a servant, her being there rather gratified Mrs. Caldwell than otherwise, once she had yielded to Beth's persuasion, and saw the practical working of the experiment; it made her feel as if she were doing something to improve the lower classes. It was a pity she did not try to improve Beth and Bernadine by finding some sewing for their idle hands to do. During the reading, dear little Bernadine, "so good and affectionate always," would sit on the floor beside her mother, whose pocket she often picked of a penny or sixpence to vary the monotony when she did not understand the book. Beth also sat idle, listening intently, and watching her sister. If the reading had been harrowing or exciting, she would fight Bernadine for the sixpence when they went to bed. There were lively scenes during the readings. They all wept at the pathetic parts, laughed loudly when amused, and disputed about passages and incidents at the top of their voices. Mrs. Caldwell forgot that Harriet

was a servant, Harriet forgot herself, and the children, unaccustomed to wordy warfare, forgot their fear of their mother, and flew at each other's throats.

When the story was very interesting, Mrs. Caldwell read until she was hoarse, and then went on to herself—"dipping," the children called it. It was a point of honour with them not to dip, and they would remonstrate with their mother loudly when they caught her at it. Their feeling on the subject was so strong that she was ashamed to be seen dipping at last. She used to put the book away until they were safe in bed, and then gratify her curiosity; but they suspected her, because once or twice they noticed that she was unaffected by an exciting part; so one night they came down in their night-dresses and caught her, and after that the poor lady had to be careful. She might thump the children for coming downstairs, but she could not alter the low opinion they had of a person who dipped.

CHAPTER XVI

Beth's brain began to be extraordinarily busy. She recorded nothing, but her daily doings were so many works of her imagination. She was generally somebody else in these days, seldom herself; and people who did not understand this might have supposed that she was an exceedingly mendacious little girl, when she was merely speaking consistently in the character which she happened to be impersonating. She would spend hours of the afternoon alone in the drawing-room, standing in the window looking out while she wove her fancies; and she soon began to go out also, by the back-door, when the mood was upon her, without asking anybody's leave. She had wandered off in this way on one occasion to the south side, whither her people rarely went. At the top of the cliff, where the winding road began which led down to the harbour, a paralysed sailor was sitting in a wickerwork wheeled chair, looking over the sea. Beth knew the man by sight. He had been a yachtsman in the service of one of her great-uncles, and she had heard hints of extraordinary

adventures they had had together. It filled her with compassion to see him sitting there so lonely and helpless, and as she approached she resolved herself into a beneficent being, able and willing to help. She had a book under her arm, a costly volume which Mrs. Caldwell had borrowed to read to the children. Beth had been looking at the pictures when the desire to go out suddenly seized upon her, and had carried the book off inadvertently.

"How are you to-day, Tom?" she said, going up to the invalid confidently. "I'm glad to see you out. We shall soon have you about again as well as ever. I knew a man in Ireland much worse than you are. He couldn't move his hands and arms. Legs are bad enough, but when it's hands and arms as well, you know, it's worse. Well, now you couldn't tell there'd ever been anything the matter with him."

"And what cured 'im?" Tom asked with interest.

"Oh, he just thought he'd get well, you know. You've got to set yourself that way, don't you see? If mountains can be moved by faith, you can surely move your own legs!"

"That sounds reasonable any way," Tom ejaculated.

"Do you like reading?" said Beth.

"Yes, I read a bit at times."

"Well, I've brought you a book," Beth proceeded, handing him the borrowed volume. "You'll find it interesting, I'm sure. It's a great favourite of mine."

"You're mighty good," the sailor said.

"Oh, not at all," Beth answered largely. Then she wished him good-bye. But she often visited him again in the same character, and the stories she told that unhappy invalid for his comfort and encouragement were amazing. When the book was missed, and her mother bothered about it, she listened serenely, and even helped to look for it.

Beth strolled homewards when she left her protégé, and on the way she became Norna of the Fitful Head. She tried Minna and Brenda first, but these characters were too insipid for her taste. Norna was different. She did things, you know, and made charms, and talked poetry, and people were afraid of her. Beth believed in her thoroughly. She'd be Norna, and make charms. But she had no lead. Norna looked about her. She knew by magic that Cleveland was coming to consult her, and she had no lead. There was a border of lead, however, over the attic window outside. All she had to do was to steal upstairs, climb out of the window on to the roof, and cut a piece of the lead off. It was now the mystic moment to obtain lead, but she must be wary. She strolled through the kitchen in a casual way. Harriet was busy about the grate, and paid no attention to her; so she secured the carving-knife without difficulty, went up to the attic, and opened the window. She was now on the dangerous pinnacle of a temple, risking her life in order to obtain the materials for a charm which would give her priceless power.

On the other side of the street, there lived in the Orchard House another widow-woman with three daughters. She let lodgings, and was bringing up her children to honest industry in that state of life. She and Mrs. Caldwell took a kindly interest in each other's affairs. Mrs. Davy happened to be changing the curtains in front that afternoon when Beth crept out of the attic window on to the roof, and she was paralysed with horror for a moment, expecting to see the child roll off into the street. She was a sensible woman, however, and quickly recovering herself, she ran across the road, with her spectacles on, and rapped at Mrs. Caldwell's door. Beth, hacking away at the lead with the carving-knife, did not heed the rap. Presently, however, she heard hurried footsteps on the stairs, and climbed back into the attic incontinently, putting her spoils in her pocket. When Mrs. Davy, her mother, and Harriet, all agitated, burst open the door, she was standing at the window looking out tranquilly.

"What were you doing on the roof, Beth?" her mother demanded.

"Nothing," Beth answered.

"Mrs. Davy says she saw you get out of the window."

Beth was silent.

"You're a bad girl, giving your mother so much trouble," Mrs. Davy exclaimed, looking at her under her spectacles sternly. "If you was my child I'd whack you, I would."

Beth was instantly a lady, sneering at this common woman who was taking a liberty which she knew her mother would resent as much as she did.

"And what were you doing with the carving-knife, Miss Beth?" cried Harriet, spying it on the floor, and picking it up. Criminals are only clever up to a certain point; Beth had forgotten to conceal the carving-knife. "Oh dear! oh dear! If you 'aven't 'acked it all the way along!"

"Oh dear! oh dear!" Mrs. Caldwell echoed. It was her best carving-knife, and Beth would certainly have been beaten if Mrs. Davy had not suggested it. As it was, however, Mrs. Caldwell controlled her temper, and merely ordered her to go downstairs immediately. In the management of her children she would not be dictated to by anybody.

This was Beth's first public appearance as a disturber of the peace, and the beginning of the bad name she earned for herself in certain circles eventually. But she was let off lightly for it. Mrs. Caldwell's punishments were never retrospective. She was thunder and lightning in her wrath; a flash and then a bang, and it was all over. If she missed the first movement, the culprit escaped. She could no more have punished one of her children in cold blood than she could have cut its throat.

Beth ran down to the acting-room, so called because the boys had brought home the idea of acting in the holidays, and they had got up charades there on a stage made of boxes, with an old counterpane for a curtain, and farthing candles for footlights. It was a long, narrow room over the kitchen, with a sloping roof. Three steps led down

into it. There was a window at one end, a small lattice with an iron bar nailed to the outside vertically. Beth swung herself out round the bar, dropped on to the back-kitchen roof, crept across the tiles to the chimney at the far corner, stepped thence on to the top of the old wooden pump, and from the top to the spout, from the spout to the stone trough, and so into the garden. Then she ran round to the kitchen, and got a candle, a canister, and some water in a pail, all of which she took up to the acting-room by way of the back-kitchen roof. The canister happened to contain allspice, but this was not to be considered when she wanted the canister, so she emptied it from the roof on to Harriet's head as she happened to be passing, and so got some good out of it, for Harriet displayed strong feeling on the subject both at the moment and afterwards, when she was trying to get the stuff out of her hair; which interested Beth, who in some such way often surprised people into the natural expression of emotions which she might never otherwise have discovered. Bernadine had been playing alone peaceably in the garden, but Beth persuaded her to come upstairs. She found Beth robed in the old counterpane, with her hair dishevelled, and the room darkened. Beth was Norna now in her cell on the Fitful Head, and Bernadine was the shrinking but resolute Minna come to consult her. Beth made her sit down, drew a magic circle round her with a piece of chalk, and, in a deep tragic voice, warned her not to move if she valued her life, for there were evil spirits in the room. The pail stood on a box draped with an old black shawl, and round this she also drew a circle. Then she put some lead in the canister, melted it over the candle, dropped it into the water, and muttered—

"Like snakes the molten metal hisses, Curses come instead of kisses."

She plunged her hand into the water—

"I search a harp for harmony, But daggers only do I see; I search a heart for love and hope, But find a ghastly hangman's rope. Woe! Woe!"

Three times round the pail she went, moaning, groaning, writhing her body, and

wringing her hands—

"Woe! Woe! Thy courage will be sorely tried, Thou shalt not be the pirate's bride."

At this Bernadine, whose nerves were completely shaken, set up such a howl that Harriet came running to see what was the matter. She soon let light into the acting-room. Mrs. Caldwell and Aunt Victoria had gone to see Aunt Grace Mary, so Harriet was in charge of the children, and to save herself further trouble, she took them up to a black-hole there was without a window at the top of the house, and locked them in. The place was quite empty, so that they could do no harm, and they did not seem to mind being locked up. Harriet intended to give them a little fright and then let them out; but, being busy, she forgot them, and when at last she remembered, it was so dark she had to take a candle; and great was her horror, on opening the door, to see both children stretched out on the bare boards side by side, apparently quite dead. One glance at their ghastly faces was enough for Harriet. She just looked and then fled, shrieking, with the candle alight in her hand, right out into the street. Several people who happened to be passing at the time stopped to see what was the matter. Harriet's talent for fiction furnished her with a self-saving story on the instant. She said the children had shut themselves up and got smothered.

"We'd better go and see if there's nothing can be done," a respectable workman suggested.

Harriet led the way, about a dozen people following, all awe-stricken and silent. When they came to the door, they peeped in over each other's shoulders at the two poor children, stretched out stiff and stark, the colour of death, their jaws dropped, their glazed eyes shining between the half-closed lids, a piteous spectacle.

"Just let's see the candle a moment," the workman said. He took it from Harriet, and entered stooping—the place was a mere closet just under the roof, and he could not stand upright in it. He peered into the children's faces, then knelt down beside them, and felt their arms and chests. Suddenly he burst out laughing.

"You little devils," he said, "what 'a' ye done this for?"

Beth sat up. "Harriet locked us in to give us a fright, so we thought we'd frighten Harriet," she said.

The walls were whitewashed, and the children had made themselves ghastly by rubbing their faces all over with the whitening.

"You've getten yer 'ands full wi' them two, I'm thinkin', missis," the workman remarked to Harriet as he went off chuckling.

"Did you hear, Beth?" Bernadine complained; "he called us little devils."

"All right," Beth answered casually. But Bernadine was disgusted. She was one of those pious children who like to stand high in the estimation of the grown-up people; and she disapproved of Beth's conduct when it got her into trouble. She was like the kind of man who enjoys being vicious so long as he is not found out by any one who will think the less of him for it; when he is found out he excuses himself, and blames his associates. Bernadine never resisted Beth's eloquent persuasions, nor the luring fascination of her schemes; but when she had had her full share of the pleasures of naughtiness, and was tired and cross, her conscience smote her, and then she told mamma. This did her good, and got Beth punished, which made Bernadine feel that she had expiated her own naughtiness and been forgiven, and also made her feel sorry for Beth—a nice kind feeling, which she always enjoyed.

Beth despised her for her conscientious treachery, and retaliated by tempting her afresh. One day she lured her out on to the tiles through an attic window in the roof, at the back of the house. It would be such fun to sit astride on the roof-ridge, and look right down into the street, she said, and across Mrs. Davy's orchard to the fields on that side, and out to sea on the other.

"And things will come into our minds up there—such lovely things," she proceeded, beguiling Bernadine to distract her attention as she helped her up. When they were securely seated, Bernadine began to grumble.

"Things don't come into my mind," she whined.

"Don't they? Why, I was just thinking if we were to fall we should certainly be killed," Beth answered cheerfully. "We should come down thump, and that would crack our skulls, and our brains would roll out on the pavement. Ough! wouldn't they look nasty, just like a sheep's! And mamma and Aunt Victoria would rush out, and Harriet and Mrs. Davy, and they'd have to hold mamma up by the arms. Then they'd pick us up, and carry us in, and lay us out on a bed, and say they were beautiful in their lives, and in death they were not divided; and when they shut the house up at night and it was all still, mamma would cry. She'd be always crying, especially for you, Bernadine, because you're not such a trouble as I am. And when you were buried, and the worms were eating you, she would give all the world to have you here again."

This sad prospect was too much for the sensitive Bernadine. "Don't, Beth," she whimpered. "You frighten me."

"Oh, you mustn't be frightened," said Beth encouragingly. "When people up on a height like this get frightened, they always roll off. Do you feel as if the roof were moving?" she exclaimed, suddenly clutching hold.

Bernadine fell down flat on her face with a dismal howl.

"Let's be cats now," said Beth. "I'll say miew-ow-ow, and you oo-oo-owl-hiss-ss-ss."

"Don't, Beth. I want to go back."

"Come along then," said Beth.

"I can't. I daren't move."

"Oh, nonsense," said Beth; "just follow me. I shall go and leave you if you don't. You shouldn't have come up if you were afraid."

"You made me," Bernadine whimpered with her eyes shut.

"Of course it was me!" said Beth, on her way back to the skylight. "You haven't a

will of your own, I suppose!"

"You aren't leaving me, Beth!" Bernadine cried in an agony. "Don't go! I'm frightened! Help me down! I'll tell mamma!"

"Then there you'll sit, tell-pie-tit," Beth chanted, as she let herself down through the skylight.

Presently she appeared on the other side of the street, and performed a war-dance of delight as she looked up at her sister, prone upon the roof-ridge.

"You do look so funny, Bernadine," she cried. "Your petticoats are nohow; and you seem to have only one leg, and it is so long and thin!"

Bernadine howled aloud. Mrs. Caldwell was not at home; but the cry brought Mrs. Davy out in her spectacles. When she saw the child's dangerous predicament, she seized Beth and shook her emphatically.

"Oh, thank you," said Beth.

"What 'a' you bin doin' now, you bad girl?" said Mrs. Davy. "Hold on, missy," she called up to Bernadine. "We'll soon 'ave ye down. You're all right! You'll not take no 'arm."

Harriet now came running out, wringing her hands, and uttering hysterical exclamations.

"Shut up, you fool," said Mrs. Davy.

Doors opened all the way down the street, and a considerable crowd had soon collected. Beth, quite detached from herself, leant against the orchard-wall and watched the people with interest.

How to get the child down was the difficulty, as there was no ladder at hand long enough to reach up to the roof.

"I'll go and fetch her down if you like," said Beth.

"I should think so! and then there'd be two of you," said Mrs. Davy.

"I don't see how you'll manage it then," said Beth. "There isn't foothold for a man to get out of the attic-window." Having spoken, she strolled off with an air of indifference, and disappeared. She was a heroine of romance now, going to do a great deed; and before she was missed, the horrified spectators saw her climbing out of the front attic-window smiling serenely. The people held their breath as they watched her go up the roof on the slippery tiles at a reckless rate to her sister.

"Come along, Bernadine," she whispered. "Such fun! There's a whole crowd down there watching us. Just let them see you're not afraid."

Bernadine peeped. It was gratifying to be an object of such interest.

"Come along, don't be an idiot," said Beth. "Just follow me, and don't look at anything but the tiles. That's the way I learnt to do it."

Bernadine's courage revived. Slowly she slid from the roof-ridge, Beth helping her carefully. It looked fearfully dangerous, and the people below dared not utter a sound. When they got to the attic-window, Beth, herself on the edge of the roof, guided her sister past her, and helped her in. She was following herself, when some tiles gave way beneath her, and fell with a crash into the street. Fortunately she had hold of the sill, but for a moment her legs hung over; then she pulled herself through, and, falling head first on to the floor, disappeared from sight. The people below relieved their feelings with a faint cheer.

"Eh, but she's a bad un," said Mrs. Davy, who was trembling all over.

"Well, she's a rare plucky un, at any rate," said a man in the crowd, admiringly.

Crowds constantly collected at the little house in Orchard Street in those days. When Mrs. Caldwell had to go out alone she was always anxious, not knowing what might be happening in her absence. Coming home from Lady Benyon's one summer evening, she found the whole street blocked with people, and the roadway in front of her own house packed so tight she could not get past. Beth had dressed herself up in a mask and a Russian sheepskin cloak which had belonged to her father, and sat

motionless in the drawing-room window on a throne made of an arm-chair set on a box; while Bernadine played Scotch airs on the piano. A couple of children passing had stopped to see what on earth the thing was, then a man and woman had come along and stopped too, then several girls, some sailors, the bellman, and many more, until the street was full. Harriet was enjoying the commotion in the background, but when Mrs. Caldwell appeared, she gave the signal, the piano stopped, and the strange beast roared loudly and fled.

But Beth had her human moments. They generally came on in wet weather, which depressed her. She would then stand in the drawing-room window by the hour together, looking out at the miserable street, thinking of the poor people, all cold and wet and hungry. She longed to do something for them, and one day she stopped a little girl who was going with a jug for some beer to the "Shining Star," a quiet little public-house on the same side of the street.

"I suppose you are a very ignorant little girl," said Beth severely.

"Aw?"

"What's your name?"

"Emily Bean."

"Do you learn lessons?"

"Naw."

"Dear me, how dreadful!" said Beth. "You ought to be taught, you know. Would you like to be taught?"

"Ah should."

"Well, you come here every afternoon at two o'clock, and I'll teach you."

"Ah mon jest ass mother first," said Emily.

"Yes—I'd forgotten that," Beth rejoined. "Well, you come if she lets you."

Emily nodded, and was going on her errand, but stopped. "Did you ass yer own

mother if you might?" she wanted to know.

"No, I didn't think of that either," Beth rejoined. "But I will."

"Will she let you?"

"I don't know"—rather doubtfully.

"I expect she will if you wait until she's in a good humour," the child of the people sagely suggested.

"All right. You come at any rate," Beth answered boldly.

Mrs. Caldwell consented. She came of a long line of lady patronesses, and thought it natural and becoming that her child should wish to improve the "common people." Punctually to the moment Emily arrived next day, and Beth sat down with her in the kitchen, and taught her a, b, ab, and b, a, d, bad. Then she repeated a piece of poetry to her, and read her a little story. Harriet was busy in the back kitchen, and Bernadine was out with her mother and Aunt Victoria, so Beth and her pupil had the kitchen to themselves. The next day, however, Harriet wanted to clean the kitchen, so they had to retire to the acting-room. This was Beth's first attempt to apply such knowledge as she possessed, and in her anxiety to improve the child of the people, she improved herself in several respects. She began to read better, became less afraid of writing and spelling, mastered the multiplication table, and found she could "make out" how to do easy sums from the book. This gave her the first real interest she had ever had in school-work, and inspired her with some slight confidence in herself. She felt the dignity of the position of teacher too, and the responsibility. She never betrayed her own ignorance, nor did anything to shake Emily's touching belief in her superiority; and she never shook Emily. She knew she could have done better herself if there had been less thumping and shaking, and she had the wisdom to profit by her mother's errors of judgment already—not that Emily ever provoked her. The child was apt and docile, and the lessons were a sort of improving game.

How to impart religious instruction was the thing that troubled Beth most: she used

to lie awake at night thinking out the problem. She found that Emily had learnt many texts and hymns in the Sunday-school to which she went regularly, and Beth made her repeat them, and soon knew them all by heart herself; but she did not think that she taught Emily enough. One day in church, however, she thought of a way to extend her teaching. Bernadine had joined her class for fun, and was playing at learning too; and now Beth proposed that they should fit up a chapel in the acting-room, and resolve themselves occasionally into a clergyman and congregation. A chair with the bottom knocked out was the pulpit, and a long narrow box stood on end was the reading-desk. Beth was the parson, of course, in a white sheet filched from the soiled-clothes bag, and changed for a black shawl for the sermon. She read portions of Scripture standing, she read prayers on her knees, she led a hymn; and then she got into the black shawl and preached. What these discourses were about, she could not remember in after years; but they must have been fascinating, for the congregation listened unwearied so long as she chose to go on.

Emily was a disappointment in one way: she had no imagination. Beth pretended to take her photograph one day, after the manner of the photographers on the sands.

"Now, this is the picture," she said, showing her a piece of glass.

"But there isn't no picture on it," said Emily, staring hard at the glass.

"How stupid you are," said Beth, disgusted. "Look again."

"There isn't," Emily protested. "Just you show it to Bernadine."

"You should say Miss Bernadine," that young lady admonished her.

A few minutes afterwards Emily corrected Bernadine for not saying miss to Beth and herself. Beth tried to explain, but Emily could not see why she should say miss to them if they did not say miss to her and to each other.

Poor Mrs. Caldwell was in great straits for want of money at this time. She had scarcely enough to pay for their meagre fare, and her own clothes and the children's

were almost beyond patching and darning. Beth surprised her several times sitting beside the dining-table with the everlasting mending on her lap, fretting silently, and the child's heart was wrung. There was some legal difficulty, and letters which added to her mother's trouble came to the house continually.

The same faculty made Beth either the naughtiest or the best of children; the difference depended on her heart: if that were touched, she was all sympathy; but if no appeal was made to her feelings, her daily doings were the outcome of so many erratic impulses acted on without consideration, merely to vary the disastrous monotony of those long idle afternoons.

The day after she had surprised her mother fretting over her letters, another packet arrived. Beth happened to be early up that morning, and opened the door to the postman. She would like to have given the packet back to him, but that being impossible, she carried it up to the acting-room and hid it in the roof. When her mother came down, however, she found to her consternation that the fact of there being no letter at all that morning was a greater trouble if anything than the arrival of the one the day before; so she boldly brought it down and delivered it, quite expecting to be whipped. But for once Mrs. Caldwell asked for an explanation, and the child's motive was so evident that even her mother was more affected by her sympathy than enraged by the inconvenient expression of it.

The next day she was playing on the pier with Bernadine. Her mother and Aunt Victoria were walking up and down, not paying much attention to the children. First they swung on a chain that was stretched from post to post down the middle of the pier to keep people from being washed off in stormy weather; but Bernadine tumbled over backwards and hurt her head, and was jeered at besides by some rude little street children, who could not understand why the little Caldwells, who were as shabby as themselves, should look down on them, and refuse to associate with them. It was not Beth's nature to be exclusive. She had no notion of differences of degree.

Any pleasant person was her equal. She was as much gratified by friendly notice from the milkman, the fishwoman, and the sweep as from Lady Benyon or Count Bartahlinsky; and very early thought it contemptible to jeer at people for want of means and defects of education. She never talked of the "common people," after she found that Harriet was hurt by the phrase; and she would have been on good terms with all the street children had it not been for what Mrs. Caldwell called "Bernadine's superior self-respect." Bernadine told if Beth spoke to one of them, and as Beth had no friends amongst them as yet, she did not feel that their acquaintance was worth fighting for. But the street children resented the attitude of the two shabby little ladies, and were always watching for opportunities to annoy them. Accordingly, when Bernadine tumbled off the chain head-over-heels backwards, there was a howl of derision. "Oh my! Ain't she getten thin legs!" "Ah say, Julia, did you see that big 'ole i' her stockin'?" "Naw, but ah seed the patch on 'er petticoat!" "Eh—an' she's on'y getten one on, an' it isn't flannel." "An' them's ladies!"

Bernadine's pride came to her rescue on these occasions. At home she howled when she was hurt, but now she affected to laugh, and both sisters strolled off with their little heads up, and an exasperating air of indifference to the enemy. The tide was out, and they went down into the harbour and found a large oyster among the piles of the wooden jetty. When they got home, the difficulty was how to open it; but they managed to make it open itself by holding it over the kitchen fire on the shovel. When it began to lift its lid, Beth sent Bernadine for a fork, and while she was getting it Beth ate the oyster. But Bernadine could not see the joke, and her rage was not to be appeased even by the oyster-shell, which Beth said she might have the whole of.

The battle came off after dinner that evening But it was a day of disaster. Harriet was out of temper; and Mrs. Caldwell appeared mysteriously, just as Beth knocked Bernadine down and sat on her stomach.

They were reading a story of French life at that time, and something came into it about snail-broth as a cure for consumption, and snail-oil as a remedy for rheumatism. The next day there was a most extraordinary smell all over the house. Mrs. Caldwell, Aunt Victoria, Harriet, and Bernadine went sniffing about, but could find nothing to account for it. Beth sat at the dining-table with a book before her, taking no notice. At last Harriet had occasion to open the oven door, and just as she did so there was a loud explosion, and the kitchen wall opposite was bespattered with boiling animal matter. Beth had got up early, and collected snails enough in the garden to fill a blacking-bottle, corked them up tight, and put them into the darkest corner of the oven, her idea being to render them into oil, as Harriet rendered suet into fat, and go and rub rheumatic people with it. As usual, however, her motive was ignored, while a great deal was made of the mess on the kitchen wall—which disheartened her, especially as several other philanthropic enterprises happened to fail about the same time.

Emily appeared with a bad toothache one day, and finding a remedy for it gave Beth a momentary interest in life. She told Emily she had a cure for toothache, and Emily, never doubting, let her put some soft substance into the tooth with the end of a match.

"It won't taste very nice," said Beth; "but you mustn't mind that. You just go home, and you'll find it won't ache any more."

When Emily returned next day she gratefully proclaimed herself cured, and her mother wanted to know "whatever the stuff was."

"Soap," said Beth.

"Oh, you mucky thing!" Emily exclaimed. She resented the application of such a substance to the inside of her person. Her plebeian mind was too narrow to conceive a second legitimate use for soap, and from that day Beth's influence declined. Emily's attendance became irregular, then gradually ceased altogether; not, however,

before Beth's own interest in the lessons was over, and her mind much occupied with other things.

CHAPTER XVII

The dower-house of the Benyon family stood in a street which was merely an extension of Orchard Street, and could be seen from Mrs. Caldwell's windows. Lady Benyon, having produced a huge family, and buried her husband, had done her day's work in the world, as it were, and now had full leisure to live as she liked; so she "lived well"; and in the intervals of living, otherwise eating, she sat in the big bow-window of her sitting-room, digesting, and watching her neighbours. From her large old-fashioned house she commanded a fine view down the wide irregular front street to the sea, with a diagonal glimpse down two other streets which ran parallel with the front street; while on the left she could see up Orchard Street as far as the church; so that everybody came under her observation sooner or later, and, to Beth, it always seemed that she dominated the whole place. Most of the day her head could be seen above the wire-blind; but, as she seldom went out, her acute old face and the four dark sausage-shaped curls, laid horizontally on either side of it, were almost all of her that was known to the inhabitants.

Mrs. Caldwell went regularly to see Lady Benyon, and sometimes took the children with her. On one occasion when she had done so, Lady Benyon made her take a seat in the window where she was sitting herself, so that they could both look out. Beth and Bernadine sat in the background with a picture-book, in which they seemed so absorbed that the conversation flowed on before them with very little constraint. Beth's ears were open, however, as usual.

"After twenty-two children," Lady Benyon remarked, "one cannot expect to be as active as one was."

"No, indeed," Mrs. Caldwell answered cheerfully. "I have only had as good as

fourteen, and I'm quite a wreck. I don't know what it is to pass a day free from pain. But, however, it is so ordered, and I don't complain. If only they turn out well when they do come, that's everything."

"Ah, you're right there," Lady Benyon answered.

"You know my trial," Mrs. Caldwell pursued—Beth's face instantly became a blank. "I am afraid she cares for no one but herself. It shows what spoiling a child does. Her father could never make enough of her."

"Well, I suppose she's naughty," Lady Benyon rejoined with a laugh; "but she's promising all the same—and not only in appearance. The things she says, you know!"

"Oh, well, yes," Mrs. Caldwell allowed. "She certainly says things sometimes, but that's not much comfort when you never know what she'll be doing. Now Mildred has never given me a moment's anxiety in her life, except on account of her delicate health, poor little body; and Bernadine is a dear, sweet little thing. She is the only one who is thoroughly unruly and selfish."

Beth's blood boiled at the accusation.

"How does the old aunt get on?" Lady Benyon asked presently.

"Oh, she seems to be very well."

"Don't you find it rather a trial to have her about always?"

Mrs. Caldwell shrugged her shoulders with an air of resignation. "Oh, you know, she means well," she replied, "and there really was nothing else for it. But I must say I have no patience with cant."

Beth, in opposition, still smarting from her mother's accusation of selfishness, determined at once to inquire into Aunt Victoria's religious tenets, with a view to approving of them.

"Well, James Patten played a mean part in that business," Lady Benyon observed.

"But I always say, beware of a man who does his own housekeeping. When they keep the money in their own hands, and pay the bills themselves, don't trust them. That sort of man is a cur at heart, you may be sure. And as for a man who takes possession of his wife's money, and doles it out to her a little at a time—! I know one such—without a penny of his own, mind you! He gives his wife a cheque for five pounds a month; the rest goes on other women, and she never suspects it! He's one of those plausible gentlemen who's always looking for a post that will pay him, and never gets it—you know the kind of thing." Here the old lady caught Beth's eye. "You take my advice," she said. "Don't ever marry a man who does his own housekeeping. He's a crowing hen, that sort of man, you may be sure. I warn you against the man who does a woman's work."

"And if a woman does a man's work?" said the intelligent Beth.

"It is often a very great help," Mrs. Caldwell put in, with a quick mental survey of the reams of official letters she had written for her husband.

Lady Benyon pursed up her mouth.

Aunt Victoria was one of those forlorn old ladies who have nobody actually their own to care for them, although they may have numbers of relations, and acquire odd habits from living much alone. She was a great source of interest to Beth, who would sit silently watching her by the hour together, her bright eyes steady and her countenance a blank. The intentness of her gaze fidgeted the old lady, who would look up suddenly every now and then and ask her what she was staring at. "Nothing, Aunt Victoria; I was only thinking," Beth always answered; and then she affected to occupy herself until the old lady returned to her work or her book, when Beth would resume her interrupted study. But she liked Aunt Victoria. The old lady was sharp with her sometimes, but she meant to be kind, and was always just; and Beth respected her. She had more faith in her, too, than she had in her mother, and secretly became her partisan on all occasions. She had instantly detected the tone of

detraction in the allusions Lady Benyon and her mother had made to Aunt Victoria that afternoon, and stolidly resented it.

When they went home, she ran upstairs and knocked at Aunt Victoria's door. It was immediately opened, and Beth, seeing what she took for an old gentleman in a short black petticoat and loose red jacket, with short, thick, stubbly white hair standing up all over his head, started back. But it was only Aunt Victoria without her cap and front. When she saw Beth's consternation, the old lady put her hand up to her head. "I had forgotten," she muttered; then she added severely, "But you should never show surprise, Beth, at anything in anybody's appearance. It is very ill-bred."

"I don't think I shall ever be surprised again," Beth answered quaintly. "But I want you to tell me, Aunt Victoria. What do you believe in?"

"What do you mean, child?"

"Oh, you know, about God, and the Bible, and cant, and that sort of thing," Beth answered evenly.

"Come in and sit down," said Aunt Victoria.

Beth sat on a classical piece of furniture that stood in the window, a sort of stool or throne, with ends like a sofa and no back. It had belonged to Aunt Victoria's father, and she valued it very much. Beth's feet, as she sat on it, did not touch the ground. Aunt Victoria stood for a moment in the middle of the room reflecting, and, as she did so, she looked, with her short, thick, stubbly white hair, more like a thin old gentleman in a black petticoat and loose red jacket than ever.

"I believe, Beth," she said solemnly, "I believe in God the Father Almighty. I believe that if we do His holy will here on earth, we shall, when we die, be received by Him into bliss everlasting; but if we do not do His holy will, then He will condemn us to the bad place, where we shall burn for ever."

"But what is His holy will?" Beth asked.

"It is His holy will that we should do right, and that we should not do wrong. But this is a big subject, Beth, and I can only unfold it to you bit by bit."

"But will you unfold it?"

"I will, as best I can, if you will listen earnestly."

"I am always in earnest," Beth answered sincerely.

"No one can teach you God," Aunt Victoria pursued. "He must come to you. 'Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright of heart. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty.'"

Beth, in a burst of enthusiasm, jumped down from her perch, clasped her hands to her chest, and cried—"O Aunt Victoria! that is—that is"—she tore at her hair—"I want a word—I want a word!"

"It is grand, Beth!"

"Grand! grand!" Beth shouted. "Yes, it is grand."

"Beth," said Aunt Victoria emphatically, "remember that you are a Christian child, and not a dancing-dervish. If you do not instantly calm yourself, I shall shake you. And if I ever see you give way to such wild excitement again, I shall shake you, for your own good. Calm is one of the first attributes of a gentlewoman."

Teachers of religion do not always practise what they preach. Up to this moment, although Beth had done her best to teach Emily, she had had no idea of being religious herself; but now, on a sudden, there came upon her that great yearning tenderness towards God, and desire for goodness, which some sects call conversion, and hold to be the essential beginning of a religious life. This was the opportunity

Aunt Victoria had prayed for, and from that time forward she began to instruct Beth systematically in religious matters. The subject fascinated Beth, and she would make opportunities to be alone with her aunt, and go to her room willingly whenever she asked her, for the pleasure of hearing her. Aunt Victoria often moved about the room, and dressed as she talked, and Beth, while listening, did not fail to observe the difficulty of keeping stockings up on skinny legs when you wore woollen garters below the knee; and also that it looked funny to have to tuck up your dress to get your purse out of a pocket in your petticoat at the back. But when Aunt Victoria sat down and read the Bible aloud, Beth became absorbed, and would even read whole chapters again to herself in order to remember how to declaim the more poetical passages as Aunt Victoria did—all of which she relished with the keenest enthusiasm. Unfortunately for Beth, however, Aunt Victoria was strongly Calvinistic, and dwelt too much on death and the judgment for her mental health. The old lady, deeply as she sympathised with Beth, and loved her, did not realise how morbidly sensitive she was; and accordingly worked on her feelings until the fear of God got hold of her. Just at this time, too, Mrs. Caldwell chose "The Pilgrim's Progress" for a "Sunday book," and read it aloud to the children; and this, together with Aunt Victoria's views, operated only too actively on the child's vivid imagination. A great dread seized upon her—not on her own account, strange to say; she never thought of herself, but of her friends, and of the world at large. She was in mortal dread lest they should be called to judgment and consigned to the flames. While the sun was out such thoughts did not trouble her; but as the day declined, and twilight sombrely succeeded the sunset, her heart sank, and her little being was racked with one great petition, offered up to the Lord in anguish, that He would spare them all.

The season was beginning, the little place was already full of visitors, and Beth used to stand at the dining-room window while Mrs. Caldwell was reading aloud on Sunday evenings, and watch the congregation stream out of the church at the end of

the road, and suffer agonies because of the torments that awaited them all, including her mother, brothers and sisters, Harriet in the kitchen, and Mrs. Davy at Orchard House opposite—everybody, indeed, except Aunt Victoria—in a future state. Out on the cliffs in the summer evenings, when great dark masses of cloud tinged with crimson were piled to the zenith at sundown, and coldly reflected in the dark waters of the bay, she saw the destination of the world; she heard cries of torment, too, in the plash of breaking waves and the unceasing roar of the sea; and as she watched the visitors lounging about in bright dresses, laughing and talking, careless of their doom, she could hardly restrain her tears. Night after night when she went to bed, she put her head under the clothes that Bernadine might not hear, and her chest was torn with sobs until she fell asleep.

At that time she devised no more tricks, she took no interest in games, and would not fight even. Bernadine did not know what to make of her. All day she was recovering from the lassitude caused by the mental anguish of the previous evening, but regularly at sunset it began again; and the more she suffered, the less able was she to speak on the subject. At first she had tried to discuss eternal punishment with Harriet, Bernadine, and Aunt Victoria, and each had responded characteristically. Harriet's imagination dwelt on the particular torments reserved for certain people she knew, which she described graphically. Bernadine listened to Beth's remarks with interest, then accused Beth of trying to frighten her, and said she would tell mamma. Aunt Victoria discoursed earnestly on the wages of sin, the sufferings of sinners, the glories of salvation, the peace on earth from knowing you are saved, and the pleasures of the world to come; but the more Beth heard of the joys of heaven, the more she dreaded the horrors of hell. Still, however, she was too shy to say anything about her own acute mental misery, and no one suspected that anything was wrong, until one day something dejected in the child's attitude happened to catch Aunt Victoria's attention.

Beth was sitting on an African stool, her elbow on her knee, her chin resting on her

little hand, her grey eyes looking up through the window at the summer sky. What could the child be thinking of, Aunt Victoria wondered, and surely she was looking thin and pale—quite haggard.

"Why don't you get something to do, Beth?" the old lady asked. "It's bad for little girls to idle about all day."

"I wish I had something to do," Beth answered. "I'm so tired."

"Does your head ache, child?" Aunt Victoria asked, speaking sharply because her mind was disturbed.

"No."

"You should answer politely, and say 'No, thank you.'"

"No, thank you, Aunt Victoria," was the docile rejoinder.

Aunt Victoria resolved to speak to Mrs. Caldwell, and resumed her knitting. She was one of those people who can keep what they have to say till a suitable occasion offers. Her mind was never so full of any one subject as to overflow and make a mess of it. She would wait a week watching her opportunity if necessary; and she did not, therefore, although she saw Mrs. Caldwell frequently during the day, speak to her about Beth until the children had gone to bed in the evening, when she was sure of her effect.

Then she began abruptly.

"Caroline, that child Beth is ill."

Mrs. Caldwell was startled. It was very inconsiderate of Aunt Victoria. She knew she was nervous about her children; how could she be so unfeeling? What made her think Beth ill?

"Look at her!" said Aunt Victoria. "She eats nothing. She has wasted to a skeleton, she has no blood in her face at all, and her eyes look as if she never slept."

"I am sure she sleeps well enough," Mrs. Caldwell answered, inclined to bridle.

"I feel quite sure, Caroline," Aunt Victoria said solemnly, "that if you take a candle, and go upstairs this minute, you will find that child wide awake."

Mrs. Caldwell felt that she was being found fault with, and was indignant. She went upstairs at once, with her head held high, expecting to find Beth in a healthy sleep. The relief, however, of finding that the child was well, would not have been so great at the moment as the satisfaction of proving Aunt Victoria in the wrong.

But Beth was wide awake, petitioning God in an agony to spare her friends. When Mrs. Caldwell entered she started up.

"O mamma!" she exclaimed, "I'm so glad you've come; I've been so frightened about you."

"What is the matter with you, Beth?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, not over-gently. "What are you frightened about?"

"Nothing," Beth faltered, shrinking back into herself.

"Oh, that's nonsense," her mother answered. "It's silly to be frightened at nothing, and cowardly to be frightened at all. Lie down and go to sleep, like a good child. Come, turn your face to the wall, and I'll tuck you in."

Beth obeyed, and her mother left her to her fears, and returned to Aunt Victoria in the drawing-room.

"Well?" Aunt Victoria asked anxiously.

"She was awake," Mrs. Caldwell acknowledged. "She said she was frightened, but didn't know what of. I expect she'd been dreaming. And I'm sure there is nothing the matter with her. She's been subject to queer fits of alarm at night ever since she was a baby. It's the dark, I think. It makes her nervous. At one time the doctor made us have a night-light for her, which was great nonsense, I always said; but her father insisted. When it suits her to play in the dark, she's never afraid."

It was at this time that Rainharbour set up a band of its own. Beth was always

peculiarly susceptible to music. Her ear was defective; she rarely knew if any one sang flat; but the poorest instrument would lay hold of her, and set high chords of emotion vibrating, beyond the reach of words. The first time she heard the band, she was completely carried away. It was on the pier, and she happened to be close beside it when it began to play, and stood still in astonishment at the crash of the opening bars. Her mother, after vainly calling to her to come on, snatched impatiently at her arm to drag her away; and Beth, in her excitement, set her teeth and slapped at her mother's hand—or rather at what seemed to her the importunate thing that was trying to end her ecstasy.

Of course Mrs. Caldwell would not stand that, so Beth, victim of brute force, was hustled off to the end of the pier, and then slapped, shaken, and reviled, for the enormity of her offence, until, in an acute nervous crisis, she wrenched herself out of her mother's clutches, and sprang over into the harbour. It was high-water happily, and Count Gustav Bartahlinsky, who was just going out in his yacht, saw her drop, and fished her out with a boat-hook.

"Look here, young woman," he said, "what do you mean by tumbling about like this? I shall have the trouble of turning back and putting you on shore."

"No, don't; no, don't," Beth pleaded. "Take me along with you."

He looked at her an instant, considering, then went to the side of the yacht, and called up to her frantic mother: "She's all right. I'll have her dried, and bring her back this afternoon,"—with which assurance Mrs. Caldwell was obliged to content herself, for the yacht sailed on; not that she would have objected. Beth and Count Gustav were sworn allies by this time, and Mrs. Caldwell knew that Beth could not be in better hands. Beth had seen Count Gustav passing their window a few days after their first meeting, and had completed her conquest of him by tearing out, and running down Orchard Street after him with nothing on her head, to ask what copyright was; and since then they had often met, and sometimes spent delightful

hours together, sitting on the cliffs or strolling along by the sea. He had discovered her talent for verse-making, and given her a book on the subject, full of examples, which was a great joy to her. When the yacht was clear of the harbour, he took her down to the saloon, and got out a silk shirt. "I'm going to leave you," he said, "and when I'm gone, you must take off all your things, and put this shirt on. Then tumble into that berth between the blankets, and I'll come back and talk to you." Beth promptly obeyed. She was an ill-used heroine now, in the hands of her knightly deliverer, and thoroughly happy.

When Count Gustav returned, he was followed by Gard, a tall, dark, handsome sailor, a descendant of black Dane settlers on the coast, and for that reason commonly called Black Gard. He brought sandwiches, cakes, and hot tea on a tray for Beth. She had propped herself up with pillows in the berth, and was looking out of an open port-hole opposite, listening enraptured to the strains of the band, which, mellowed by distance, floated out over the water.

"What a radiant little face!" the Count thought, as he handed her the tea and sandwiches.

Beth took them voraciously.

"Did you have any breakfast?" the Count asked, smiling.

"Yes," Beth answered.

"What did you have?"

"Milk and hot water and dry toast. I made the toast myself."

"No butter?"

"No. The butter's running short, so I wouldn't take any."

"When do you lunch?"

"Oh, we don't lunch. Can't afford it, you know. The boys have got to be educated, and Uncle James Patten won't help, though Jim's his heir."

Count Gustav looked at her little delicate hand lying on the coverlet, and then at the worn little face.

"You've been crying," he said.

"Ah, that was only last night after I went to bed," Beth answered. "It makes you cry when people aren't saved, doesn't it? Are you saved? If you're not it will be awful for me."

"Why?"

"'Cos it would hurt so here to think of you burning in hell"—Beth clasped her chest. "It always begins to ache here—in the evening—for the people who aren't saved, and when I go to bed it makes me cry."

"Who told you about being saved, and that?"

"Aunt Victoria. She lives with us, you know. She's going away now to pay a visit, because the boys are coming home, and Mildred, for the holidays, and there wouldn't be room for her. I'm dreadfully sorry; but I shall go to church, and read the Bible just the same when she's away."

Count Gustav sat down on the end of the saloon-table and reflected a little; then he said—"I wouldn't read anything, if I were you, while Aunt Victoria's away. Just play about with Mildred and the boys, and come out fishing with me sometimes. God doesn't want you to save people. He does that Himself. I expect He's very angry because you cry at night. He thinks you don't trust Him. All He wants you to do is to love Him, and trust Him, and be happy. That's the creed for a little girl."

"Do you think so?" Beth gasped. Then she began to reflect, and her big grey eyes slowly dilated, while at the same time a look of intense relief relaxed the muscles of her pinched little face. "Do you think so?" she repeated. Then suddenly she burst into tears.

Count Gustav, somewhat disconcerted, hurriedly handed her a handkerchief.

Another gentleman came into the saloon at the moment, and raised inquiring eyebrows.

"Only a little martyr, momentarily released from suffering, enjoying the reaction," Count Gustav observed. "Come on deck, and let her sleep. Do you hear, little lady, go to sleep."

Beth, docile to a fault when gently handled, nestled down among the blankets, shut her eyes, and prepared to obey. The sound of the water rippling off the sides of the yacht as it glided on smoothly over the summer-sea both soothed and cheered her. Heavenly thoughts came crowding into her mind; then sleep surprised her, with the tears she had been shedding for the sufferings of others still wet upon her cheek. When she awoke, her clothes were beside her, ready to put on. She jumped up instantly, dressed, and went on deck. The yacht was almost stationary, and the two gentlemen, attended by the black Dane, Gard, were fishing. Away to starboard, the land lay like a silver mist in the heat of the afternoon. Beth turned her sorrowful little face towards it.

"Are you homesick, Beth?" Count Gustav asked.

"No, sick of home," Beth answered; "but I suppose I shall have to go back."

"And what then?"

"Mamma will punish me for jumping into the harbour, I expect."

"Jumping in!" he ejaculated, and then a great gravity settled upon him, and he cogitated for some time. "Why did you jump in?" he said at last.

"Because mamma—because mamma—" her chest heaved. She was ashamed to say.

Count Gustav exchanged glances with the other gentleman, and said no more. But he took her home himself in the evening, and had a long talk with mamma and Aunt Victoria; and after he had gone they were both particularly nice to Beth, but very solemn. That night, too, Aunt Victoria did not mention death and the judgment, but

talked of heaven and the mercy of God until Beth's brow cleared, and she was filled with hope.

It was the next day that Aunt Victoria left them to make room for Mildred and the boys. Beth went with her mother to see the old lady off at the station. On account of their connections the little party attracted attention, and Mrs. Caldwell, feeling her importance, expected the officials to be obsequious, which they were; and, in return, she also expected Aunt Victoria to make proper acknowledgment of their attentions. She considered that sixpence at least was necessary to uphold the dignity of the family on such occasions; but, to her horror, when the moment came, Aunt Victoria, after an exciting fumble, drew from her reticule a tract entitled "The Man on the Slant," and, in the face of everybody, handed it to the expectant porter.

Mrs. Caldwell assured Lady Benyon afterwards that she should never forget that moment. Beth used to wonder why.

CHAPTER XVIII

The end of the holidays found Beth in a very different mood. Jim had come with the ideas of his adolescence, and Mildred had brought new music, and these together had helped to take her completely out of herself. The rest from lessons, too—from her mother's method of making education a martyrdom, and many more hours of each day than usual spent in the open air, had also helped greatly to ease her mind and strengthen her body, so that, even in the time, which was only a few weeks, she had recovered her colour, shot up, and expanded.

Most of the time she had spent with Jim, whom she had studied with absorbing interest, his point of view was so wholly unexpected. And even in these early days she showed a trait of character for which she afterwards became remarkable; that is to say, she learned the whole of the facts of a case before she formed an opinion on its merits—listened and observed uncritically, without prejudice and without

personal feeling, until she was fully informed. Life unfolded itself to her like the rules of arithmetic. She could not conjecture what the answer would be in any single example from a figure or two, but had to take them all down in order to work the sum. And her object was always, not to prove herself right in any guess she might have made, but to arrive at the truth. She was eleven years old at this time, but looked fourteen.

It was when she went out shooting with Jim that they used to have their most interesting discussions. Jim used to take her to carry things, but never offered her a shot, because she was a girl. She did not care about that, however, because she had made up her mind to take the gun when he was gone, and go out shooting on her own account; and she abstracted a certain amount of powder and shot from his flasks each day to pay herself for her present trouble, and also to be ready for the future. Uncle James had given Jim leave to shoot, provided he sent the game he killed to Fairholm; and sometimes they spent the day wandering through the woods after birds, and sometimes they sat on the cliffs, which skirted the property, potting rabbits. Jim expected Beth to act as a keeper for him, and also to retrieve like a well-trained dog; and when on one occasion she disappointed him, he had a good deal to say about the uselessness of sisters and the inferiority of the sex generally. Women, he always maintained, were only fit to sew on buttons and mend socks.

"But is it contemptible to sew on buttons and mend socks?" Beth asked, one day when they were sitting in a sandy hollow waiting for rabbits.

"It's not a man's work," said Jim, a trifle disconcerted.

Beth looked about her. The great sea, the vast tract of sand, and the blue sky so high above them, made her suffer for her own insignificance, and feel for the moment that nothing was worth while; but in the hollow where they sat it was cosy and the grass was green. Miniature cliffs overhung the rabbit-holes, and the dry soil was silvered by sun and wind and rain. There was a stiff breeze blowing, but it did not

touch them in their sheltered nook. They could hear it making its moan, however, as if it were vainly trying to get at them; and there also ascended from below the ceaseless sound of the sea. Beth turned her back on the wild prospect, and watched the rabbit-holes.

"There's one on the right," she said at last, softly.

Jim raised his gun, aimed, and fired. The rabbit rolled over on its back, and Beth rose in a leisurely way, fetched it, carrying it by its legs, and threw it down on the bag.

"And when all the buttons are sewed on and all the socks mended, what is a girl to do with her time?" she asked dispassionately, when she had reseated herself. "The things only come home from the wash once a week, you see."

"Oh, there's lots to be done," Jim answered vaguely. "There's the cooking. A man's life isn't worth having if the cooking's bad."

"But a gentleman keeps a cook," Beth observed.

"Oh yes, of course," Jim answered irritably. "You would see what I mean if you weren't a girl. Girls have no brains. They scream at a mouse."

"We never scream at mice," Beth protested in surprise. "Bernadine catches them in her hands."

"Ah, but then you've had brothers, you see," said Jim. "It makes all the difference if you're taught not to be silly."

"Then why aren't all girls taught, and why aren't we taught more things?"

"Because you've got no brains, I tell you."

"But if we can be taught one thing, why can't we be taught another? How can you tell we've no brains if you never try to teach us?"

"Now look here, Miss Beth," said brother Jim in a tone of exasperation, "I know what you'll be when you grow up, if you don't mind. You'll be just the sort of

long-tongued shrew, always arguing, that men hate."

"Do you say 'that men hate' or 'whom men hate'?" Beth interrupted.

"There you are!" said Jim; "devilish sharp at a nag. That's just what I'm telling you. Now, you take my advice, and hold your tongue. Then perhaps you'll get a husband; and if you do, make things comfortable for him. Men can't abide women who don't make things comfortable."

"Well," said Beth temperately, "I don't think I could 'abide' a man who didn't make things comfortable."

Jim grunted, as though that point of view were a different thing altogether.

By degrees Beth discovered that sisters did not hold at all the same sort of place in Jim's estimation as "the girls." The girls were other people's sisters, to whom Jim was polite, and whom he even fawned on and flattered while they were present, but made most disparaging remarks about and ridiculed behind their backs; to his own sisters, on the contrary, he was habitually rude, but he always spoke of them nicely in their absence, and even boasted about their accomplishments.

"Your brother Jim says you can act anything," Charlotte Hardy, the doctor's daughter, told Beth. "And you recite wonderfully, although you've never heard any one recite; and you talk like a grown-up person."

Beth flushed with surprise and pleasure at this; but her heart had hardly time to expand before she observed the puzzling discrepancy between what Jim said to her and what he had been saying to other people, and found it impossible to reconcile the two, so as to have any confidence in Jim's sincerity.

Before the end of the holidays she had learned to enjoy Jim's companionship, but she had no respect for his opinions at all. He had taught her a good deal, however. He had taught her, for one thing, the futility of discussion with people of his capacity. The small intellect should be treated like the small child—with tenderest consideration. It must not hear too much of anything at a time, and there are certain

things that it must never be told at all. Simple familiar facts, with obvious little morals, are the right food for it, and constant repetition of what it knows is safe; but such heavy things as theories, opinions, and arguments must be kept carefully concealed from it, for fear of causing congestion or paralysis, or, worse still, that parlous condition which betrays itself in distressing symptoms such as one sees daily in society, or sits and shudders at in one's own friends, when the victim, swelling with importance, makes confident mis-statements, draws erroneous conclusions, sums up and gives advice so fatuous that you blush to be a biped of the same species.

There was an hotel in Rainharbour called the "United Kingdom," where Jim spent much of his time playing billiards, drinking beer, and smoking pipes. He had to coax money out of his mother continually for these pursuits.

"It's the kind of thing a fellow must do, you know, mamma," he said. "You can't expect him to stick at home like a girl. He must see life, or he'll be a muff instead of a man of the world. How shall I get on at Fairholm, when I come in for the property, if I'm not up to things?"

This was said at breakfast one morning, and Mrs. Caldwell, sitting opposite the window, raised her worn face and looked up at the sky, considering what else there was that she could do without.

"Do you learn how to manage estates at the 'United Kingdom'?" Beth put in innocently.

"Now, look here, Beth, just you shut up," said Jim. "You're always putting your oar in, and its deuced impertinent of a child like you, when I'm talking to my mother. She knows what I'm talking about, and you don't; but you'll be teaching her next, I expect. You're far too cheeky."

"I only wanted to know," Beth protested.

"That will do," said Mrs. Caldwell impatiently. She was put out by Jim's demand for

money, which she had not got to spare, and found it a relief to expend some of her irritation on Beth. "Jim is quite right, and I won't have you hanging about always, listening to things you don't understand, and rudely interrupting."

"I thought we were at breakfast," Beth exclaimed, furious at being unjustly accused of hanging about.

"Be good enough to leave the table," said Mrs. Caldwell; "and you shall have nothing but bread and water for the rest of the day."

"It will be a dinner of herbs with contentment, then, if I have it alone," said Beth; for which impertinence she was condemned to be present at every meal.

Having extracted the money from his mother, Jim went off to the "United Kingdom," and came back in the afternoon, somewhat the worse for beer; but Mrs. Caldwell did not perceive it. He complained of the poor dinner, the cooking, and Beth's shabby appearance.

"How can you go out with me like that?" he said. "Why can't you dress properly? Look at my things! I'm decent."

"So should I be," said Beth, without malice, her eyes shining with mortification. "So should I be if anybody bought me decent clothes."

She did not think it unfair, however, that she should go shabby so that Jim might be well dressed. Nor did she feel it wrong, when the holidays were over, and the boys had gone, that she should be left idly drumming on the window-pane; that they should have every advantage while she had none, and no prospect but the uncertain chance of securing a husband if she held herself well and did as she was told—a husband whom she would be expected to obey whatever he might lack in the way of capacity to order. It is suffering which makes these things plain to a generous woman; but usually by the time she has suffered enough to be able to blame those whom it has been her habit to love and respect, and to judge of the wrong they have done her, it is too late to remedy it. Even if her faculties have not atrophied for want

of use, all that should have been cultivated lies latent in her; she has nothing to fall back upon, and her life is spoilt.

Beth stood idly drumming on the window-pane for long hours after the boys had gone. Then she got her battered old hat, walked out to Fairholm, and wandered over the ground where she had been wont to retrieve for Jim. When she came to the warren, the rabbits were out feeding, and she amused herself by throwing stones at them with her left hand. She had the use of both hands, and would not have noticed if her knife had been put where her fork should have been at table; but she threw stones, bowled, batted, played croquet, and also tennis in after years, with her left hand by preference, and she always held out her left hand to be handed from a carriage.

She succeeded in killing a rabbit with a stone, to her own surprise and delight, and carried it off home, where it formed a welcome addition to the meagre fare. She skinned and cleaned it herself, boiled it, carved it carefully so that it might not look like a cat on the dish, covered it with good onion-sauce, and garnished it with little rolls of fried bacon, and sent it to table, where the only other dish was cold beef-bones with very little meat on them.

"Where did it come from?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, looking pleased.

"From Fairholm," Beth answered.

"I must thank your uncle," said Mrs. Caldwell.

"It was not my uncle," Beth answered, laughing; "and you're not to send any thanks."

"Oh, very well," said Mrs. Caldwell, still more pleased, for she supposed it was a surreptitious kindness of Aunt Grace Mary's. She ate the rabbit with appetite, and Beth, as she watched her, determined to go hunting again, and see what she could get for her. Beth would not have touched a penny of Uncle James's, but from that time forward she did not scruple to poach on his estate, and bring home anything she

could catch. She had often prayed to the Lord to show her how to do something to help her mother in her dire poverty, and when this idea occurred to her, she accepted it as a direct answer to her prayer.

Mrs. Caldwell and the three girls slept in the largest bedroom in the house. It was at the back, looking into the little garden, and out to the east. The early morning sun, making black bars of the window-frame on the white blind, often awoke Beth, and she would lie and count the white spaces between the bars, where the window-panes were,—three, six, nine, twelve; or two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve. One morning after Jim left she was lying awake counting the window-panes when Harriet knocked at the door with the hot water. Mildred had not yet gone back to her aunt, and was sleeping with Beth, Bernadine being with her mother.

"Come, get up, children," said Mrs. Caldwell, as she got out of bed herself.

"Mamma, mayn't I have breakfast in bed?" said Bernadine in a wheedling tone.

"No, no, my little body," Mrs. Caldwell answered.

"But, mamma," whined the little body, "I've got such a headache!" She very often had when she ought to have been getting up.

"Cry, baby, cry," sang out Beth. "Mamma, give me my stockings."

Mrs. Caldwell picked them up off the floor, and gave them to her. Beth began to put them on in bed, and diverted herself as she did so by making diabolical grimaces at the malingering imp opposite.

"Mamma," Bernadine whined again, "Beth's teasing me."

"Beth, how often am I to tell you that I will not allow you to tease the child?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

Beth solemnly gartered her stockings. Then she gave Mildred a dig in the ribs with her heel, and growled, "Get up!"

"Mamma, Beth is teasing me, now," said Mildred promptly.

"Well, I don't see why I should be obliged to do all the getting up for the family," said Beth.

Her mother turned from the looking-glass with her hair-brush in her hand, and gazed at her sternly. Beth hummed a tune, but kept at a safe distance until she was dressed, then made her escape, going straight to the kitchen, where Harriet was cutting bread to toast. "That's all the bread there is," she said, "and it won't be enough for breakfast if you eat any."

"All right, then; I haven't any appetite," Beth answered casually. "What did you dream last night?"

"I dreamt about crocodiles," Harriet averred.

"A crocodile's a reptile," said Beth, "and a reptile is trouble and an enemy. You always dream nasty things; I expect it's your inside."

"What's that to do wi' it?" said Harriet.

"Everything," said Beth. "Don't you know the stuff that dreams are made of? Pickles, pork, and plum-cake."

"Dreams is sent for our guidance," Harriet answered portentously, shaking her head at Beth's flippancy.

"Well, I'm glad of it," said Beth, "for I dreamt I was catching Uncle James's trout in a most unsportsmanlike way, and I guess the dream was sent to show me how to do it. When I have that kind of dream, I notice it nearly always comes true. But where's the 'Dream Book'?"

"'Ook it," said Harriet. "'Ere's your ma."

As the other little bodies had their breakfasts in bed, Beth had to face her lessons alone that morning, and Mrs. Caldwell was not in an amiable mood; but she was absent as well as irritable, so Beth did some old work over again, and as she knew it thoroughly, she got on well until the music began.

Beth had a great talent as well as a great love for music. When they were at Fairholm, Aunt Grace Mary gave her Uncle James's "Instruction Book for Beginners" one wet day to keep her quiet, and she learnt her notes in the afternoon, and began at once to apply them practically on the piano. She soon knew all the early exercises and little tunes, and was only too eager to do more; but her mother hated the music-lesson more than any of the others, and was so harsh that Beth became nervous, and only ventured on the simplest things for fear of the consequences. When her mother went out, however, she tried what she liked, and, if she had heard the piece before, she could generally make something satisfactory to herself out of it. One day Aunt Victoria found her sitting on the music-stool, solemnly pulling at her fingers, one after the other, as though to stretch them.

"What are you doing, child?" she said.

"O Aunt Victoria," Beth answered in a despairing way, "here's such a lovely thing, and my head will play it, only my fingers are not long enough."

Mildred had brought a quantity of new music home with her these holidays. She promised to play well also, and her aunt was having her properly taught. Beth listened to her enraptured when she first arrived, and then, to Mildred's surprise and admiration, tried the pieces herself, and in a few weeks knew all that it had taken Mildred six months to learn.

That morning, as ill-luck would have it, when she was waiting at the piano for her mother to come and give her her lesson, Beth began to try a piece with a passage in it that she could not play.

"Do show me how to do this," she said when Mrs. Caldwell came.

"Oh, you can't do that," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed. "It is far too difficult for you."

"But I do so want to learn it," Beth ventured.

"Oh, very well," her mother answered. "But I warn you!"

Beth began, and got on pretty well till she came to the passage she did not understand, and there she stumbled.

"What are you doing?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

Beth tried again nervously.

"That's not right," her mother cried. "What does that sign mean? Now, what is it? Just think!"

Beth, with a flushed face, was thinking hard, but nothing came of it.

"Will you speak?" her mother said angrily. "You are the most obstinate child that ever lived. Now, say something."

"It's not a shake," Beth ventured.

"A shake!" her mother exclaimed, giving her a hard thump on the back with her clenched fist. "Now, no more obstinacy. Tell me what it is at once."

"I don't know that sign," Beth faltered in desperation.

"Oh, you don't know it!" her mother said, now fairly fuming, and accompanying every word by a hard thump of her clenched fist. "Then I'll teach you. I've a great mind to beat you as long as I can stand over you."

Beth was a piteous little figure, crouched on the piano-stool, her back bent beneath her mother's blows, and every fibre of her sensitive frame shrinking from her violence; but she made no resistance, and Mrs. Caldwell carried out her threat. When she could beat Beth no longer, she told her to sit there until she knew that sign, and then she left her. Beth clenched her teeth, and an ugly look came into her face. There had been dignity in her endurance—the dignity of self-control; for there was the force in her to resist, had she thought it right to resist. What she was thinking while her mother beat her was: "I hope I shall not strike you back."

Harriet had heard the scolding, and when Mrs. Caldwell had gone she came and peeped in at the door.

"She's bin' thumpin' you again, 'as she?" she said with a grin. "Wot 'a ye bin' doin' now?"

"What business is that of yours?" said Beth defiantly. It was bad enough to be beaten, but it was much worse to have Harriet peeping in to gloat over her humiliation. Harriet was not to be snubbed, however. She went up to the piano and looked at the music.

"It's precious hard, I should think," she remarked.

"It's not hard," Beth answered positively, "if anybody tells you what you don't know and can't make out for yourself. I always remember when I'm told or shown how to do it; but what's the use of staring at a sign you've never seen before? Just you look at that! Can you make anything out of it?" Harriet approached, and, after staring at the sign curiously for some time, shook her head. "Of course not," said Beth, snatching up her music, and throwing it on the floor; "and neither can anybody else. It isn't fair."

Bernadine had begun her lessons by this time in the next room, and Mrs. Caldwell suddenly began to scold again. "Oh, that awful voice!" Beth groaned aloud, her racked nerves betraying her.

"She's catchin' it now!" said Harriet, after listening with interest. She seemed to derive some sort of gratification from the children's troubles. "But don't you bother any more, Miss Beth.—Your ma'll 'ave forgotten all about it by goin'-out time—or she'll pertend she 'as to save 'erself trouble. Come and 'elp us wi' the beds."

Beth rose slowly from the piano-stool, and followed Harriet upstairs to the bedroom at the back of the house. She was at once attracted to the open window by an uproar of voices—"the voices of children in happy play." There was a girls' day-school next door kept by the Misses Granger. Miss Granger had called on Mrs. Caldwell as soon as she was settled in her house, to beg for the honour of being allowed to educate her three little girls, and Beth had assisted at the interview with serious attention. It

would have been the best thing in the world for her had she been allowed to romp and learn with that careless, happy, healthy-minded crew of respectable little plebeians; but Mrs. Caldwell would never have dreamt of sending any of her own superior brood to associate with such people, even if she could have afforded it. She politely explained to Miss Granger that she was educating her children herself for the present; and it was then, with a sickening sense of disappointment, that Beth rejected her mother's social standard, with its "vulgar exclusiveness," once for all.

She hung out of the window now, heedless of Harriet's appeals to be "'elped wi' the beds," and watched the games going on in the next garden with pathetic gravity. The girls were playing rounders among the old fruit-trees on the grass-plot, with a loud accompaniment of shrieks and shouts of laughter. They tumbled up against the trees continually, and shook showers of autumn leaves down upon themselves; and then, tiring of the game, they began to pelt each other with the leaves, and laughed and shrieked still louder. Some of them looked up and made faces at Beth, but she did not acknowledge the discourtesy. She knew that they were not ladies, but did not feel, as her mother did, that this was a fault for which they should be punished, but a misfortune, rather, for which she pitied them, and she would have liked to have made it up to them by knowing them. Suddenly she remembered that Aunt Victoria was coming back that day, which was something to look forward to. She took Harriet's duster, and went to see if the old lady's room was all in order for her, and arranged as she liked it. Then she returned to the drawing-room, and sat down on the piano-stool, and rage and rebellion uprose in her heart. The piece of music still lay on the floor, and she stamped her foot on it. As she did so, her mother came into the room.

"Do you know your lesson?" she demanded.

"No, I do not," said Beth, and then she doubled her fist, and brought it down bang on the keyboard.

"How dare you!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, startled by the vehemence of the blow, and jarred by the discordant cry of the poor piano.

"I felt I must—I felt I must make something suffer," said Beth, in a deep chest-voice and with knitted brows, twisting her fingers and rising to face her mother as she spoke; "and if I had not struck the piano, I should have struck you."

Mrs. Caldwell could not have been more taken aback if Beth had struck her. The colour left her face, a chill succeeded the heat of temper, and her right mind returned as to a drunken man suddenly sobered. She noticed that Beth's eyes were almost on a level with her own, and once again she realised that if Beth chose to rebel, she would be powerless to control her. For some seconds they looked at each other without a word. Then Beth stooped, picked up the piece of music, smoothed it out, and put it on the stand; and then she shut up the piano deliberately, but remained standing in front of it with her back to her mother. Mrs. Caldwell watched her for a little in silence.

"It's your own fault, Beth," she said at last. "You are so conceited; you try to play things that are too difficult for you, and then you get into trouble. It is no pleasure to me to punish you."

Beth remained with her back turned, immovable, and her mother looked at her helplessly a little longer, and then left the room. When she had gone, Beth sat down on the piano-stool. Her shabby shoes had holes in them, her dress was worn thread-bare, and her sleeves were too short for her. She had no collar or cuffs, and her thin hands and long wrists looked hideous to her as they lay in her lap. Great tears gathered in her eyes. So conceited indeed! What had she to be conceited about? Every one despised her, and she despised herself. Here the tears overflowed, and Beth began to cry at last, and cried and cried for a long time very bitterly.

That afternoon, after Aunt Victoria had arrived, Lady Benyon and Aunt Grace Mary called. Mrs. Caldwell had recovered her good-humour by that time, and was all

smiles to everybody, including Beth, when she came sauntering in, languid and heavy-eyed, with half a sheet of notepaper in her hand.

"What have you there, Puck?" said Lady Benyon, catching sight of some hieroglyph drawn on the paper. Beth gave it to her, and she turned it this way and that, but could make nothing of it.

"Mamma will tell us what it is," said Beth, taking it to her mother.

Mrs. Caldwell, still smiling, looked at the drawing. "It's an astronomical sign, surely," she ventured.

"No, it is not," Beth said.

"Then I don't know what it is," her mother rejoined.

"Oh, but you must know, mamma," said Beth. "Look again."

"But I don't know, Beth," Mrs. Caldwell insisted.

"Couldn't you make it out if Aunt Victoria beat you?" Beth suggested.

Mrs. Caldwell changed countenance.

"That is what you expect me to do, at all events," Beth pursued. "Now, you see, you can't do it yourself; and I ask you, was it fair to expect me to make out a strange sign by staring at it?" She set her mouth hard when she had spoken, and looked her mother straight in the face. Mrs. Caldwell winced.

"What's the difficulty, Puck?" Lady Benyon asked.

"The difficulty is between me and mamma," Beth answered with dignity, and then she left the room, sauntering out as she had come in, with an utterly dispirited air.

The next morning she went to practice as usual, but Mrs. Caldwell did not come to give her her music-lesson. Beth thought she had forgotten it, and went to remind her.

"No, Beth, I have not forgotten," said Mrs. Caldwell; "but after your conduct yesterday, I do not know how you can expect me to give you another music-lesson."

"Are you not going to give me any more?" Beth exclaimed.

"No, certainly not," her mother answered.

Beth's heart sank. She stood for some little time in the doorway looking at her mother, who sat beside the table sewing, and pointedly ignored her; then Beth turned, and went back to the drawing-room slowly, and carefully practised the usual time, with great tears trickling down her cheeks. It did not seem to make much difference what happened, whether she was on her best behaviour or her worst, the tears were bound to come. But Beth had a will of her own, and she determined to learn music. She said no more on the subject to her mother, however, but from that day forward she practised regularly and hard, and studied her instruction books, and listened to other people playing when she had a chance, and asked to have passages explained to her, until at last she knew more than her mother could have taught her.

CHAPTER XIX

But well-springs, mortal and immortal, were beginning to bubble up brightly in Beth, despite the hard conditions of her life. She sharpened her wits involuntarily on the people about her, she gathered knowledge where she listed; her further faculty flashed forth fine rays at unexpected intervals to cheer her, and her hungry heart also began to seek satisfaction. For Beth was by nature well-balanced; there was to be no atrophy of one side of her being in order that the other might be abnormally developed. Her chest was not to be flattened because her skull bulged with the big brain beneath. Rather the contrary. For mind and body acted and reacted on each other favourably, in so far as the conditions of her life were favourable. Such congenial intellectual pursuits as she was able to follow, by tranquillising her, helped the development of her physique, while the healthy condition of her body stimulated her to renewed intellectual effort—and it was all a pleasure to her.

At this time she had a new experience, an experience for which she was totally

unprepared, but one which helped her a great deal, and delighted as much as it surprised her.

There were high oak pews in the little church at the end of the road which the Caldwells attended on Sunday; in the rows on either side of the main aisle the pews came together in twos, so that when Beth sat at the end of theirs, as she always did, the person in the next pew sat beside her with only the wooden partition between. One Sunday, when she was on her knees, drowsing through the Litany with her cheek on her prayer-book, she became aware of a boy in the next pew with his face turned to her in exactly the same attitude. He had bright fair hair curling crisply, a ruddy fair fat face, and round blue eyes, clear as glass marbles. Beth was pleased with him, and smiled involuntarily. He instantly responded to the smile; and then they both got very red; and, in their delicious shyness, they turned their heads on their prayer-books, and looked in opposite directions. This did not last long, however. The desire for another look seized them simultaneously, and they turned their faces to each other, and smiled again the moment their eyes met. All through the service they kept looking at each other, and looking away again; and Beth felt a strange glad glow begin in her chest and spread gradually all over her. It continued with her the whole day; she was conscious of it throughout the night; and directly she awoke next morning there it was again; and she could think of nothing but the apple-cheeked boy, with bright blue eyes and curly fair hair; and as she dwelt upon his image she smiled to herself, and kept on smiling. There came upon her also a great desire to please, with sudden energy which made all effort easy to her, so that, instead of being tiresome at her lessons, she did them in a way that astonished her mother—such a wonderful incentive is a little joy in life. She would not go out when lessons were over, however, but stood in the drawing-room window watching the people pass. Harriet came and worried her to help with the dusting.

"Go away, you chattering idiot," said Beth. She had found Harriet out in many meannesses by this time, and had lost all respect for her. "Don't you see I'm

thinking? If you don't bother me now I'll help you by-and-by, perhaps."

On the other side of the road, in the same row as the Benyon dower-house, but well within sight of the window, was the Mansion-House Collegiate Day and Boarding School for the Sons of Gentlemen. Beth kept looking in that direction, and presently the boys came pouring out in their mortar-boards, and, among them, she soon discovered the one she was thinking of. She discovered him less by sight than by a strange sensation in herself, a pleasure which shot through her from top to toe. For no reason, she stepped back from the window, and looked in the opposite direction towards the church; but she could see him when he came bounding past with his satchel of books under his arm, and she also knew that he saw her. He ran on, however, and going round the corner, where Orchard Row turned off at an angle out of Orchard Street, was out of sight in a moment.

But Beth was satisfied. Indeed she was more than satisfied. She ran into the kitchen, and astonished Harriet by a burst of hilarious spirits, and a wild demand for food, for a duster, for a scrubbing-brush. She wanted to do a lot, and she was hungry.

"You're fond, ah think," said Harriet dryly.

"You're fond, too," Beth cried. "We're all fond! The fonder the better! And I must have something to eat."

"Well, there's nothing for you but bread."

"I must have meat," said Beth. "Rob the joint, and I'll not take any at dinner."

"Ah'd tak' it w'eniver ah could get it, if ah was you," Harriet advised.

"If you was or were me, you'd do as I do," said Beth; "and I won't cheat. If I say I won't take it, I won't. I'm entitled to meat once a day, and I'll take my share now, please; but I won't take more than my share."

"You'll be 'ungry again by dinner-time."

"I know," said Beth. "But that won't make any difference."

She got out the sirloin of beef which was to be roasted for dinner, deftly cut some slices off it, fried them with some cold potatoes, and ate them ravenously, helped by Harriet. When dinner-time came Beth was ravenous again, but she was faithful to her vow, and ate no meat. Harriet scoffed at her for her scrupulousness.

The next day, at the same time, Beth was again in the window, waiting for her boy to come out of the Mansion-House School. When he appeared, the most delightful thrill shot through her. Her first impulse was to fly, but she conquered that and waited, watching him. He made straight for the window, and stopped in a business-like way; and then they laughed and looked into each other's faces.

"What are you doing there?" he asked, as if he were accustomed to see her somewhere else.

"I live here," she said.

"I live in Orchard Row, last house," he rejoined.

"Old Lee's?" Beth inquired.

"Yes, he's my grandfather. I'm Sammy Lee."

"He's a licensed victualler, retired," Beth repeated, drawing upon her excellent verbal memory.

"Yes," said Sammy. "What's yours?"

"I haven't one."

"What's your father?"

"He's dead too."

"What was he?"

"He was a gentleman."

"A retired gentleman?"

"No," said Beth, "an officer and a gentleman."

"Oh," said Sammy. "My father's dead too. He was a retired gentleman."

"What's a retired gentleman?" Beth asked.

"Don't you know?" Sammy exclaimed. "I thought everybody knew that! When you make a fortune you retire from business. Then you're a retired gentleman."

"But gentlemen don't go into business," Beth objected.

"What do they do then?" Sammy retorted.

"They have professions or property."

"It's all the same," said Sammy.

"It isn't," Beth contradicted.

"Yah! you don't know," said Sammy, laughing; and then he ran on, being late for his dinner.

The discussion had been carried on with broad smiles, and when he left her, Beth hugged herself, and glowed again, and was glad in the thought of him. But it was not his conversation so much as his appearance that she dwelt upon—his round blue eyes, his bright fair curly hair, his rosy cheeks. "He is beautiful! he is beautiful!" she exclaimed; then added upon reflection, "And I never thought a boy beautiful before."

The next day she was making rhymes about him in the acting-room, and forgot the time, so that she missed him in the morning; but when he left school in the afternoon she was at the window, and she saw him trotting up the street as hard as his little legs could carry him.

"Where were you at dinner-time?" he said.

"How funny!" she exclaimed in surprise and delight.

"What's funny?" he demanded, looking about him vaguely.

"You were wanting to see me."

"Who told you so?" Sammy asked suspiciously.

"You did yourself just now," Beth answered, her eyes dancing.

"I didn't."

"You did, Sammy."

"You're a liar!" said Sammy Lee.

"Sammy, that's rude," she exclaimed. "And it's not the way to speak to a young lady, and I won't have it."

"Well, but I did not tell you I wanted to see you at dinner-time," Sammy retorted positively.

"Yes, you did, stupid," said Beth. "You asked where I was at dinner-time, and then I knew you had missed me, and you wouldn't have missed me if you hadn't wanted to see me."

"But," Sammy repeated with sulky obstinacy, unable to comprehend the delicate subtilty of Beth's perception,—"But I did not tell you."

"Didn't you want to see me, then?" Beth said coaxingly, waiving the other point with tact.

But Sammy, feeling shy at the question and vaguely aggrieved, looked up and down the street and kicked the pavement with his heel instead of answering.

"I shall go, then," said Beth, after waiting for a little.

"No, don't," he exclaimed, his countenance clearing. "I want to ask you—only you put it out of my head—gels do talk so."

"Gels!" Beth exclaimed derisively. "I happen to be a girl."

Sammy looked at her with a puzzled expression, and forgot what he was going to say. She diverted his attention, however, by asking him how old he was.

"Eleven," Sammy answered promptly.

"So am I. When were you eleven?"

"The twentieth of February."

"Oh, then you're older than me—March, April, May, June—four months. My birthday's in June. What do you do at school? Let's see your books. I wish I went to school!"

"Shu!" said Sammy. "What's the use of sending a gel to school? Gels can't learn."

"So Jim says," Beth rejoined with an absence of conviction that roused Sammy.

"All boys say so," he declared.

"All boys are silly," said Beth. "What's the use of saying things? That doesn't make them true. You're as bad as Jim."

"Who's Jim?" Sammy interrupted jealously.

"Jim's my brother."

Sammy, relieved, kicked his heel on the pavement.

"Which is tallest?" he asked presently, "you or me?"

"I'm tallest, I think," Beth answered; "but never mind. You're the fattest. I've grown long, and you've grown broad."

"You're mighty sharp," said Sammy.

"You're mighty blunt," said Beth. "And you'll be mighty late for tea, too. Look at the church-clock!"

Sammy glanced up, then fled precipitately; and Beth, turning to leave the window, discovered Harriet standing in the background, grinning.

"So you've getten a sweetheart!" she exclaimed. "There's nothing like beginning early."

"So you've been listening again," Beth answered hotly. "Bad luck to you!"

A few days later Mrs. Caldwell was sitting with Lady Benyon, who was in the

bow-window as usual, looking out.

"If I am not mistaken," said Lady Benyon suddenly, "there is a crowd collecting at your house."

"What! again?" Mrs. Caldwell groaned, jumping up.

"If I'm not mistaken," Lady Benyon repeated.

Mrs. Caldwell hurried off without even waiting to shake hands. On getting into the street, however, she was relieved to find that Lady Benyon had been mistaken. There was no crowd collecting in Orchard Street, but, as she approached her own house, she became aware of a small boy at the drawing-room window talking to some one within, whom she presently discovered to be Beth.

"What are you doing there, Beth?" she demanded severely. "Who is this boy?"

Beth started. "Sammy Lee," she gasped. "Mr. Lee's grandson at the end of Orchard Row."

"Why are you talking to him?" her mother asked harshly. "I won't have you talking to him. Who will you scrape acquaintance with next?" Then she turned to Sammy, who stood shaking in his shoes, with all the rosy colour faded from his fair fat cheeks, too frightened to stir. "Go away," said Mrs. Caldwell, "you've no business here talking to my daughter, and I won't allow it."

Sammy sidled off, not daring to turn his back full till he was at a safe distance, lest he should be seized from behind and shaken. He was not a heroic figure in retreat, but Beth, in her indignation, noted nothing but the insult that had been offered him. For several days, when her mother was out, she watched and waited for him, anxious to atone; but Sammy kept to the other side of the road, and only cast furtive smiles at her as he ran by. It never occurred to Beth that he was less valiant than she was, or less willing to brave danger for her sake than she was for his. She thought he was keeping away for fear of getting her into trouble; and she beckoned to him again and again in order to explain that she did not care; but he only fled the faster. Then

Beth wrote him a note. It was the first she had ever written voluntarily, and she shut herself up in the acting-room to compose it, in imitation of Aunt Grace Mary, whose beautiful delicate handwriting she always did her best to copy—with very indifferent success, however, for the connection between her hand and her head was imperfect. She could compose verses and phrases long before she could commit them to paper intelligibly; and it was not the composition of her note to Sammy that troubled her, but her bad writing. She made a religious ceremony of the effort, praying fervently, "Lord, let me write it well." Every day she presented a miscellaneous collection of petitions to the Lord, offering them up as the necessity arose, being in constant communication with Him. When she wanted to go out, she asked for fine weather; when she did not want to go out, she prayed that it might rain. She begged that she might not be found out when she went poaching on Uncle James's fields; that she might be allowed to catch something; that new clothes might be sent her from somewhere, she felt so ashamed in her dirty old shabby ones. She asked for boots and shoes and gloves, and for help with her lessons; and, when she had no special petition to offer, she would ejaculate at intervals, "Lord, send me good luck!" But, however great the variety of her daily wants, one prayer went up with the others always, "Lord, let me write well!" meaning, let me write a good hand; yet her writing did not improve, and she was much disheartened about it. She took the Lord into her confidence on the subject very frankly. When she had been naughty, and was not found out and punished, she thanked Him for His goodness; but why would He not let her write well? She asked Him the question again and again, lifting her grey eyes to the grey sky pathetically; and all the time, though she never suspected it, she was learning to write more than well, but in a very different sense of the word.

Her note to Sammy was as follows:—

Dear Sammy ,—Come and talk to me. Do not be afrade. I do not mind rows, being always in them. And she can't do anything to you. I miss you. I want to tell you

things. Such nice things keep coming to me. They make me feel all comfortable inside. I looked out of the window in the dark last night. There was a frost. The sky was dark dark blue like sailor's suits only bright and the stars looked like holes bored in the floor of heaven to let the light through. It was so white and bright it must have been the light of heaven. I never saw such light on earth. Sunshine is more buffy. Do come Sammy I want you so Beth. P.S. I can't stop right yet; but I'm trying. It seems rather difficult to stop: but nobody can write without stops. I always look at stops in books when I read but sometimes you put a coma and sometimes a semicollon. I expect you know but I don't so you must teach me. Its so nice writing things down. Come to the back gait tonight.

When the letter was written in queer, crabbed characters, on one side of a half-sheet of paper, then folded so that she could write the address on the other side, because she had no envelope—she wondered how she should get it delivered. There was a coolness between her and Harriet. Beth resented the coarse insinuation about having a sweetheart, and shrank from hearing any more remarks of a like nature on the subject. And she couldn't send the letter by post because she had no stamp. Should she lay it on his doorstep. No, somebody else might get it. How then? She was standing on her own doorstep with the letter in her pocket when she asked herself the question, and just at the moment Sammy himself appeared, coming back from school. Quick as thought, Beth ran across the road, whipped out the letter and gave it to him. Sammy stood still in astonishment with his mouth open, gazing at it when he found it in his hand, as if he could not imagine how it got there.

As soon as it was dark, Beth stationed herself at the back gate, which looked out into Orchard Street, and waited and waited, but Sammy did not come. He had not been able to get out; that was it—she was sure of it; yet still she waited, although the evening was very cold. Her mother and Aunt Victoria had gone to dine with Lady Benyon. She did not know what Harriet was doing, but she had disposed of Bernadine for some time to come by lending her her best picture-book to daub with

paint; so it was pretty safe to wait; and at first the hope of seeing Sammy come running round the corner was pleasure enough. As the time went on, however, she became impatient, and at last she ventured a little way up the street, then a little farther, and then she ran on boldly into Orchard Row. As she approached the Lees' back-gate, she became aware of a round thing that looked like a cannon-ball glued to the top, and her fond heart swelled, for she knew it must be Sammy's head.

"O Sammy! why didn't you come?" she cried.

"I didn't like," said Sammy.

"I've been waiting for hours," Beth expostulated with gentle reproach.

"So have I, and it's cold," said Sammy disconsolately.

"Come now. She's out," Beth coaxed.

"So she was the other day," Sammy reminded her.

"But we'll go into the garden. She can't catch us there. It's too dark."

Sammy, half persuaded, ventured out from the gateway, then hesitated.

"But is it very dark?" he said.

"Not so very, when you're used to it," Beth answered. "But it's nice when it's dark. You can fancy you see things. Come! run!" She seized his hand as she spoke, and set off, and Sammy, overborne by the stronger will, kept pace with her.

"But I don't want to see things," he protested, trying to hold back when they came to the dark passage which led into the garden.

"Don't be a fool, Sammy," said Beth, dragging him on. "I believe you're a girl."

"I'm not," said Sammy indignantly.

"Then come and sit on the see-saw."

"Oh, have you a see-saw?" he asked, immediately diverted.

"Yes—this way—under the pear-tree. It's a swing, you know, tied to the branch, and

I put this board across it. I pulled the board up out of the floor of the wood-house. Do you like see-sawing?"

"Yes," said Sammy with animation.

"Catch hold, then," said Beth, tipping up the board at her end. "What are you doing, butter-fingers?" she cried, as Sammy failed to catch hold. "I'm sorry I said you were a girl. You're much too clumsy."

She held the board until Sammy got astride of it at one end, then she bestrode it herself at the other, and started it with a vigorous kick on the ground. Up and down they went, shaking showers of leaves from the old tree, and an occasional winter pear, which fell with a thud, being hard and heavy.

"Golly! this is fine!" Sammy burst out. "I say, Beth, what a jolly sort of a girl you are!"

"Do you think so?" said Beth, amply rewarded for all her trouble.

"Yes. And you can write a letter! My! What a time it must 'a' took you! But, I say, it's all rot about stops, you know. Stops is things in books. You'd never learn stops."

"How do you know?" Beth demanded, bridling.

"Men write books," said Sammy, proud of his sex, "not women, let alone gels!"

"That's all you know about it, then!" cried Beth, better informed. "Women do write books, and girls too. Jane Austen wrote books, and Maria Edgeworth wrote books, and Fanny Burney wrote a book when she was only seventeen, called 'Evelina' and all the great men read it."

"Oh!" said Sammy, jeering, "so you're as clever as they are, I suppose!"

Sammy was up in the air as he spoke; the next moment he came down bump on the ground.

"There," said Beth, "that'll teach you. You be rude again if you dare."

"I'll not come near you again, spit-cat," cried Sammy, picking himself up.

"I know you won't," Beth rejoined. "You daren't. You're afraid."

"Who's afraid?" said Sammy, blustering.

"Sammy Lee," said Beth. "Oh, Sammy Lee's afraid of me, riding the see-saw under the tree."

"I say, Beth," said Sammy, much impressed, "did you make that yourself?"

"Make what myself? Make you afraid? Yes, I did."

"No, you didn't," said Sammy, plucking up spirit. "I'm not afraid."

"Then don't be a fool," said Beth.

"Fool yourself," Sammy muttered, but not very valiantly.

The church-clock struck nine. They were standing about, Beth not knowing what to do next, and Sammy waiting for her to suggest something; and in the meantime the night became colder and the darkness more intense.

"I think I'd better take you home," Beth said at last. "Here, give me your hand."

She dragged him out of the garden in her impetuous way, and they scampered off together to Orchard Row, and when they reached the Lees' house they were so warmed and cheered by the exercise that they parted from each other in high good-humour.

"I'll come again," said Sammy.

"Do!" said Beth, giving him a great push that sent him sprawling up the passage. This was the kind of attention he understood, so he went to bed satisfied.

There was only one great interest in life for the people at Rainharbour. Their religion gave them but cold comfort; their labour was arduous and paid them poorly; they had no books, no intellectual pursuits, no games to take them out of themselves, nothing to expand their hearts as a community. There were the races, the fair, and the hirings for excitement, but of pleasure such as satisfies because it is soul-sustaining and continuous enough to be part of their lives, they knew nothing.

The upper classes were idle, self-satisfied, selfish, and sensual; the lower were industrious enough, but ignorant, superstitious, and depressed. The gentry gave themselves airs of superiority, really as if their characters were as good as their manners; but they did not impose upon the people, who despised them for their veneer. Each class displayed its contempt for the other openly when it could safely do so, but was ready to cringe when it suited its own convenience, the workers for employment, and the gentry for political purposes. But human beings are too dependent on each other for such differences to exist without detriment to the whole community. Society must cohere if it is to prosper; individuals help themselves most, in the long run, when they consider each other's interests. At Rainharbour nothing was done to promote general good fellowship; the kind of Christianity that was preached there made no mention of the matter, and society was disintegrated, and would have gone to pieces altogether but for the one great interest in life—the great primitive interest which consists in the attraction of sex to sex. The subject of sweethearts was always in the air. The minds of boys and girls, youths and maidens, men and women were all full of it; but it was not often openly discussed as a pleasant topic—in fact, not much mentioned at all except for fault-finding purposes; for it was the custom to be censorious on the subject, and naturally those were most so who knew most about it, like the vicar, who had married four times. He was so rabid that he almost went the length of denouncing men and maidens by name from the pulpit if he caught them strolling about together in pairs. His mind was so constituted that he could not believe their dalliance to be innocent, and yet he did not try to introduce any other interest or pleasure into their lives to divert them from the incessant pursuit of each other.

It was the grown-up people who were so nasty on the subject of sweethearts; the boys and girls never could understand why. Their own inclination was to go about together openly in the most public places; that was how they understood sweethearting; part of the pleasure of it consisted in other people seeing them, and

knowing that they were sweethearts, and smiling upon them sympathetically. This, however, the grown-up people never did; on the contrary, they frowned and jeered; and so the boys and girls kept out of their way, and sought secret sympathy from each other.

Any little boy at the Mansion-House School who secured a sweetheart enjoyed a proud distinction, and Sammy soon found that his acquaintance with Beth placed him in quite an enviable position. He therefore let his fear of Mrs. Caldwell lapse, and did his best to be seen with Beth as much as possible. And to her it was a surprise as well as a joy to find him hanging about, waiting to have a word with her. Her mother's treatment of her had so damaged her self-respect that she had never expected anybody to care for her particularly, and Sammy's attentions, therefore, were peculiarly sweet. She did not consider the position at all, however. There are subjects about which we think, and subjects upon which we feel, and the two are quite distinct and different. Beth felt on the subject of Sammy. The fact of his having a cherubic face made her feel nice inside her chest—set up a glow there which warmed and brightened her whole existence—a glow which never flickered day or night, except in Sammy's presence, when it went out altogether more often than not; only to revive, however, when the real Sammy had gone and the ideal Sammy returned to his place in her bosom. For Sammy adored at a distance and Sammy within range of criticism were two very different people. Sammy adored at a distance was all-ready response to Beth's fine flights of imagination; but Sammy on the spot was dull. He was seldom on the spot, however, so that Beth had ample leisure to live on her love undisturbed, and her mind became extraordinarily active. Verse came to her like a recollection. On half-holidays they sometimes went for a walk together over the wild wide waste of sand when the tide was out, and she would rhyme to herself the whole time; but she seldom said anything to Sammy. So long as he was silent he was a source of inspiration—that is to say, her feeling for him was inspiring; but when she tried to get anything out of him, they generally

squabbled.

Beth lived her own life at this time almost entirely. Since that startling threat of rebellion, her mother had been afraid to beat her lest she should strike back; scolding only made her voluble, and Mrs. Caldwell never thought of trying to manage her in the only way possible, by reasoning with her and appealing to her better nature. There was, therefore, but one thing for her mother to do in order to preserve her own dignity, and that was to ignore Beth. Accordingly, when the perfunctory lessons were over in the morning, Beth had her day to herself. She began it generally by practising for at least an hour by the church-clock, and after that she had a variety of pursuits which she preferred to follow alone if Sammy were at school, because then there was no one to interrupt her thoughts. When the larder was empty, she became Loyal Heart the Trapper, and would wander off to Fairholm to set snares or catapult anything she could get near. The gun she had found impracticable, because she was certain to have been seen out with it; her snares, if they were found, were supposed to have been set by poachers. She herself was known to every one on the estate, and was therefore sure of respect, no matter who saw her; even Uncle James himself would have let her alone had they met, as he was of her mother's opinion, that it was safer to ignore her than to attempt to control her. The snares, although of the most primitive kind, answered the purpose. The great difficulty was how to get the game home; but that she also managed successfully, generally by returning after dark. Her mother, concluding that she owed whatever came to Aunt Grace Mary's surreptitious kindness, said nothing on the subject except to Beth, whom she supposed to be Aunt Grace Mary's agent; but she very much enjoyed every addition to her monotonous diet, especially when Beth did the cooking. In fact, had it not been for Loyal Heart, the family would have pretty nearly starved that winter, because of Jim, who had contracted debts like a man, which his mother had to pay.

With regard to Beth's cooking, it is remarkable that, although Mrs. Caldwell herself had suffered all through her married life for want of proper training in household

matters, she never attempted to have her own daughters better taught. On the contrary, she had forbidden Beth to do servant's work, and objected most strongly to her cooking, until she found how good it was, and even then she thought it due to her position only to countenance it under protest. The extraordinary inefficiency of the good-old-fashioned-womanly woman as a wife on a small income, the silly pretences which showed her want of proper self-respect, and the ill-adjusted balance of her undeveloped mind which betrayed itself in petty inconsistencies, fill us with pity and surprise us, yet encourage us too by proving how right and wise we were to try our own experiments. If we had listened to advice and done as we were told, the woman's-sphere-is-home would have been as ugly and comfortless a place for us to-day as it used to be when Beth was forced by the needs of her nature to poach for diversion, cook for kindness, and clean, and fight, and pray, and lie, and love, in her brave struggle against the hard and stupid conditions of her life—conditions which were not only retarding the development, but threatening utterly to distort, if not actually to destroy, all that was best, most beautiful, and most wonderful in her character.

Beth rather expected to get into difficulties eventually about the game, but she calculated that she would have a certain time to run before her head was snapped off, and during that time her mother would enjoy her good dinners and be the better for them, and she herself would enjoy the sport—facts which no amount of anger afterwards could alter. Since Mrs. Caldwell had washed her hands of Beth, they were beginning to be quite good friends. Sometimes her mother talked to her just as she would to anybody else; that is to say, with civility. She would say, "And what are you going to do to-day, Beth?" quite pleasantly, as though speaking to another grown-up person; and Beth would answer politely, and tell the truth if possible, instead of making some sulky evasion, as she had begun to do when there was no other way of keeping the peace. She was fearlessly honest by nature, but as she approached maturity, she lost her nerve for a time, and during that time she lied, on

occasion, to escape a harrowing scene. She always despised herself for it, however, and therefore, as she grew stronger, she became her natural straightforward self again, only, if anything, all the more scrupulously accurate for the degrading experience. For she soon perceived that there is nothing that damages the character like the habit of untruth; the man or woman who makes a false excuse has already begun to deteriorate. If a census could be taken to establish the grounds upon which people are considered noble or ignoble, we should find it was in exact proportion to the amount of confidence that can be placed first of all in their sincerity, and then in their accuracy. Sincerity claims respect for character, accuracy estimation for ability; no high-minded person was ever insincere, and no fool was ever accurate.

When the close season began, Beth left the plantations, and took to fishing in the sea. She would sit at the end of the pier in fine weather, baiting her hooks with great fat lob-worms she had dug up out of the sands at low tide, and watching her lines all by herself; or, if it were rough, she would fish in the harbour from the steps up against the wooden jetty, where the sailors hung about all day long with their hands in their pockets when the boats were in. Some of them would sit with her, all in a row, fishing too, and they would exchange bait with her, and give her good advice, while others stood behind looking on and listening. And as of old in Ireland she had fascinated the folk, so here again these great simple bearded men listened with wondering interest to her talk, and never answered at all as if they were speaking to a child. Beth heard some queer things, sitting down there by the old wooden jetty, fishing for anything she could catch, and she said some queer things too when the mood was upon her.

Sometimes, when she wanted to be alone and think, she would go off to the rocks that appeared at low-water down behind the south pier, and fish there. She loved this spot; it was near to nature, yet not remote from the haunts of man. She sat there one afternoon, holding her line, and dreamily watching the fishing boats streaming across the bay, with their brown sails set to catch the fitful breeze which she could

see making cat's-paws on the water far out, but could not feel, being sheltered from it by the old stone pier. The sea was glassy smooth, and lapped up the rocks, heaving regularly like the breast of a tranquil sleeper. Beth gazed at it until she was seized with a great yearning to lie back on its shining surface and be gently borne away to some bright eternity, where Sammy would be, and all her other friends. The longing became imperative. She rose from the rock she was sitting on, she raised her arms, her eyes were fixed. Then it was as if she had suddenly awakened. The impulse had passed, but she was all shaken by it, and shivered as if she were cold.

Fortunately the fish were biting well that day. She caught two big dabs, four whitings, a small plaice, and a fine fat sole. The sole was a prize, indeed, and mamma and Aunt Victoria should have it for dinner. As she walked home, carrying the fish on a string, she met Sammy.

"Where did you get those fish?" he asked.

"Caught them," she answered laconically.

"What! all by yourself? No! I don't believe it."

"I did, all the same," she answered; "and now I'm going to cook them—some of them at least."

"Yourself? Cook them yourself? No!" he cried in admiration. Cooking was an accomplishment he honoured.

"If you'll come out after your tea, I'll leave the back-gate ajar, and you can slip into the wood-house; and I'll bring you a whiting on toast, all hot and brown."

With such an inducement, Sammy was in good time. Beth found him sitting contentedly on a heap of sticks, waiting for the feast. She had brought the whiting out with a cover over it, hot and brown, as she had promised; and Sammy's mouth watered when he saw it.

"What a jolly girl you are, Beth!" he exclaimed.

But Beth was not so much gratified by the praise as she might have been. The vision and the dream were upon her that evening, her nerves were overwrought, and she was yearning for an outlet for ideas that oppressed her. She stood leaning against the door-post, biting a twig; restless, dissatisfied; but not knowing what she wanted.

When Sammy had finished the whiting, he remembered Beth, and asked what she was thinking about.

"I'm not thinking exactly," she answered, frowning intently in the effort to find expression for what she had in her consciousness. "Things come into my mind, but I don't think them, and I can't say them. They don't come in words. It's more like seeing them, you know, only you don't see them with your eyes, but with something inside yourself. Do you know what it is when you are fishing off the rocks, and there is no breaking of waves, only a rising and falling of the water; and it comes swelling up about you with a sort of sob that brings with it a whiff of fresh air every time, and makes you take in your breath with a sort of sob too, every time—and at last you seem to be the sea, or the sea seems to be you—it's all one; but you don't think it."

Sammy looked at her in a blank, bewildered way. "I like it best when you tell stories, Beth," he said, under the impression that all this incomprehensible stuff was merely a display for his entertainment. "Come and sit down beside me and tell stories."

"Stories don't come to me to-night," said Beth, with a tragic face. "Do you remember the last time we were on the sands—oh! I keep feeling—it was all so—peaceful, that was it. I've been wondering ever since what it was, and that was it—peaceful;

The quiet people, The old church steeple; The sandy reaches Of wreck-strewn beaches—"

"Who made that up?" said Sammy suspiciously.

"I did," Beth answered offhand. "At least I didn't make it up, it just came to me. When I make it up it'll most likely be quite different. It's like the stuff for a dress,

you know, when you buy it. You get it made up, and it's the same stuff, and it's quite different, too, in a way. You've got it put into shape, and it's good for something."

"I don't believe you made it up," said Sammy doggedly. "You're stuffing me, Beth. You're always trying to stuff me."

Beth, still leaning against the door-post, clasped her hands behind her head and looked up at the sky. "Things keep coming to me faster than I can say them to-night," she proceeded, paying no heed to his remark; "not things about you, though, because nothing goes with Sammy but jammy, clammy, mammy, and those aren't nice. I want things to come about you, but they won't. I tried last night in bed, and what do you think came again and again?

Yes, yes, that was his cry, While the great clouds went sailing by; Flashes of crimson on colder sky; Like the thoughts of a summer's day, Colour'd by love in a life which else were grey.

But that isn't you, you know, Sammy. Then when I stopped trying for something about you, there came such a singing! What was it? It seems to have gone—and yet it's here, you know, it's all here," she insisted, with one hand on the top of her head, and the other on her chest, and her eyes straining; "and yet I can't get it."

"Beth, don't get on like that," Sammy remonstrated. "You make me feel all horrid."

"Make you feel," Beth cried in a deep voice, clenching her fists and shaking them at him, exasperated because the verses continued to elude her. "Don't you know what I'm here for? I'm here to make you feel. If you don't feel what I feel, then you shall feel horrid, if I have to kill you."

"Shut up!" said Sammy, beginning to be frightened. "I shall go away if you don't."

"Go away, then," said Beth. "You're just an idiot boy, and I'm tired of you."

Sammy's blue eyes filled with tears. He got down from the heap of sticks, intent on making his escape; but Beth changed her mind when she felt her audience melting

away.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"I'm going home," he said deprecatingly. "I can't stay if you go on in that fool-fashion."

"It isn't a fool-fashion," Beth rejoined vehemently. "It's you that's a fool. I told you so before."

"If you wasn't a girl, I'd punch your 'ead," said Sammy, half afraid.

"I believe you!" Beth jeered. "But you're not a girl, anyway." She flew at him as she spoke, caught him by the collar, kicked his shins, slapped his face, and drubbed him on the back.

Sammy, overwhelmed by the sudden onslaught, made no effort to defend himself, but just wriggled out of her grasp, and ran home, with great tears streaming down his round red cheeks, and sobs convulsing him.

Beth's exasperation subsided the moment she was left alone in the wood-house. She sat down on the sticks, and looked straight before her, filled with remorse.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she kept saying to herself. "Oh dear! oh dear! Sammy! Sammy! He's gone. I've lost him. This is the most dreadful grief I have ever had in my life."

The moment she had articulated this full-blown phrase, she became aware of its importance. She repeated it to herself, reflected upon it, and was so impressed by it, that she got up, and went indoors to write it down. By the time she had found pencil and paper, she was the sad central figure of a great romance, full of the most melancholy incidents; in which troubled atmosphere she sat and suffered for the rest of the evening; but she did not think of Sammy again till she went to bed. Then, however, she was seized anew with the dread of losing him for ever, and cried helplessly until she fell asleep.

For days she mourned for him without daring to go to the window, lest she should see him pass by on the other side of the road with scorn and contempt flashing forth from his innocent blue eyes. In the evening, however, she opened the back-gate, as usual, and waited in the wood-house; but he never came. And at first she was in despair. Then she became defiant—she didn't care, not she! Then she grew determined. He'd have to come back if she chose, she'd make him. But how? Oh, she knew! She'd just sit still till something came.

She was sitting on a heap of beech branches opposite the doorway, picking off the bronze buds and biting them. The blanched skeleton of Sammy's whiting, sad relic of happier moments, grinned up at her from the earthen floor. Outside, the old pear-tree on the left, leafless now and motionless, showed distinctly in silhouette against the night-sky. Its bare branches made black bars on the face of the bright white moon which was rising behind it. What a strange thing time is! day and night, day and night, week and month, spring, summer, autumn, winter, always coming and going again, while we only come once, go, and return no more. It was getting on for Christmas now. Another year had nearly gone. The years slip away steadily—day by day—winter, spring. Winter so cold and wet; March all clouds and dust—comes in like a lion, goes out like a lamb; then April is bright.

The year slips away steadily; slips round the steady year; days come and go—no, no! Days dawn and disappear, winters and springs—springs, rings, sings? No, leave that. Winter with cold and rain—pain? March storms and clouds and pain, till April once again light with it brings.

Beth jumped down from the beech boughs, ran round to the old wooden pump, clambered up by it on to the back-kitchen roof, and made for the acting-room window. It was open, and she screwed herself in round the bar and fastened the door. It was quite dark under the sloping roof, but she found the end of a tallow candle, smuggled up there for the purpose, lighted it, and stuck it on to the top of the

rough deal box which formed her writing-table. She had a pencil, sundry old envelopes carefully cut open so as to save as much of the clean space inside as possible, margins of newspapers, precious but rare half-sheets, and any other scrap of paper on which she could write, all carefully concealed in a hole in the roof, from which she tore the whole treasure now in her haste.

"Winter, summer, Sammy," she kept saying to herself. "Autumn, autumn-tinted woods—my king—Ministering Children—ministering—king. Moon, noon. Story, glory. Ever, never, endeavour. Oh, I can do it! I can! I can! Slips round the steady year—"

It took her some days to do it to her satisfaction, but they were days of delight, for the whole time she felt exactly as she had done when first she found Sammy. She had the same warm glow in her chest, the same sort of yearning, half anxious, half pleasant, wholly desirable.

It was late in the evening when she finished, and she had to put her work away in a hurry, because her mother sent Harriet to tell her she must go to bed; but all night long she lay only half asleep, and all the time conscious of joy to come in the morning.

She was up early, but had too much self-restraint to go to the acting-room till lessons were over. She was afraid of being disturbed and so having her pleasure spoilt. As soon as she could safely lock herself up, however, she took her treasure out. It was written on the precious half-sheets in queer little crabbed characters, very distinctly:—

Slips round the steady year, Days dawn and disappear, Winters and springs; March storms and clouds and rain, Till April once again Light with it brings.

Then comes the summer song, Birds in the woods prolong Day into night. Hot after tepid showers Beats down this sun of ours, Upward the radiant flowers Look their delight.

O summer scents at noon! O summer nights and moon! Season of story. Labour and love for ever Strengthen each hard endeavour, Now climb we up or never, Upward to glory!

Winter and summer past, Autumn has come at last, Hope in its keeping. Beauty of tinted wood, Beauty of tranquil mood, Harvest of earned good Ripe for the reaping.

Thus on a torrid day Slipped my fond thoughts away, Book from thy pages. Seasons of which I sing, Are they not like, my king, Thine own life's minist'ring In all its stages?

First in the spring, I ween, Were all thy powers foreseen— Storms sowed renown. Then came thy summer climb, Then came thy golden-prime, Then came thy harvest-time, Bringing thy crown.

When Beth had read these lines, she doubled the half sheets on which they were written, and put them in her pocket deliberately. She was sitting on the acting-room floor at the moment, near the window.

"Now," she exclaimed, folding her delicate nervous hands on her lap, and looking up at the strip of sky above her, "now I shall be forgiven!"

It was dark at this time when the boys left school in the evening, and Beth stood at the back-gate waiting to waylay Sammy. He came trotting along by himself, and saw her as he approached, but did not attempt to escape. On the contrary, he stopped, but he had nothing to say; the relief of finding her friendly again was too great for words. Had she looked out, she might have seen him any day since the event, bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked as usual, prowling about, anxious to obtain a reassuring smile from her on his way to and from school. It was not likely that he would lose the credit of being Beth Caldwell's sweetheart if he could help it, just because she beat him. Already he had suffered somewhat in prestige because he had not been seen with her so often lately; and he had been quite as miserable in his own way, under the impression that she meant to cast him off, as she had in hers.

"Come in, Sammy," she cried, catching hold of his hand. "Come in, I've something to show you; but it's too cold to sit in the wood-house, and we can't have a light there either. Come up by the pump to the acting-room. I've fastened the door inside, and nobody can get in. Come! I'll show you the way."

Sammy followed her obediently and in silence, although somewhat suspiciously as usual; but she piloted him safely, and, once in the acting-room, with the candle lighted, he owned that it was jolly.

"Sammy, I have been sorry," Beth began. "I've been quite miserable about—you know what. It was horrid of me."

"I told you scratch-cats were horrid," said Sammy solemnly.

"But I've done something to atone," Beth proceeded. "Something came to me all about you. You shall have it, Sammy, to keep. Just listen, and I'll read it."

Sammy listened with his mouth and eyes open, but when she had done he shook his head. "You didn't make that up yourself," he said decidedly.

"O Sammy! yes, I did," Beth protested, taken aback and much pained.

"No, I don't believe you," said Sammy. "You got it out of a book. You're always trying to stuff me up."

"I'm not stuffing you, Sammy," said Beth, suddenly flaming. "I made it myself, every word of it. I tell you it came to me. It's my own. You've got to believe it."

Sammy looked about him. There was no escape by the door, because that led into the house, and Beth was between him and the window, with her brown hair dishevelled, and her big eyes burning.

"Well," he said, a politic desire to conciliate struggling with an imperative objection to be stuffed, "of course you made it yourself if you say so. But it's all rot anyway."

The words slipped out unawares, and the moment he uttered them he ducked his head: but nothing happened. Then he looked up at Beth, and found her gazing hard

at him, and as she did so the colour gradually left her cheeks and the light went out of her eyes. Slowly she gathered up her papers and put them into the hole in the roof. Then she sat on one of the steps which led down into the room, but she said nothing.

Sammy sat still in a tremor until the silence became too oppressive to be borne; then he fidgeted, then he got up, and looked longingly towards the window.

"I shall be late," he ventured.

Beth made no sign.

"When shall I see you again?" he recommenced, deprecatingly. "Will you be at the back-gate to-morrow?"

"No," she said shortly. "It's too cold to wait for you."

"Then how shall I see you?" he asked, with a blank expression.

Beth reflected. "Oh, just whistle as you pass," she said at last, in an offhand way, "and I'll come out if I feel inclined."

The next evening Mrs. Caldwell was taking her accustomed nap after dinner in her arm-chair by the fire in the dining-room, and Beth was sitting at the table dreaming, when she was suddenly startled by a long, loud, shrill whistle. Another and another of the most piercing quality followed in quick succession. Swiftly but cautiously she jumped up, and slipped into the drawing-room, which was all in darkness. There were outside shutters to the lower windows, but the drawing-room ones were not closed, so she looked out, and there was Sammy, standing with his innocent fat face as close to the dining-room shutters as he could hold it, with his fingers in his mouth, uttering shrill whistles loud and long and hard and fast enough to rouse the whole neighbourhood. Beth, impatient of such stupidity, returned to the dining-room and sat down again, leaving Sammy to his fate.

Presently Mrs. Caldwell started wide awake.

"What is that noise, Beth?" she exclaimed.

"It seems to be somebody whistling outside," Beth answered in deep disgust. Then her exasperation got the better of her self-control, and she jumped up, and ran out to the kitchen.

"Harriet," she said between her clenched teeth, "go out and send that silly fool away."

Harriet hastened to obey; but at the opening of the front door, Sammy bolted.

The next evening he began again, however, as emphatically as before; but Beth could not stand such imbecility a second time, so she ran out of the back-gate, and seized Sammy.

"What are you doing there?" she cried, shaking him.

"Why, you told me to whistle," Sammy remonstrated, much aggrieved.

"Did I tell you to whistle like a railway engine?" Beth demanded scornfully. "You've no sense at all, Sammy. Go away!"

"Oh, do let's come in, Beth," Sammy pleaded. "I've something to tell you."

"What is it?" said Beth ungraciously.

"I'll tell you if you'll let me come in."

"Well, come then," Beth answered impatiently, and led the way up over the roof to the acting-room. "What is it?" she again demanded, when she had lighted a scrap of candle and seated herself on the steps. "I don't believe it's anything."

"Yes, it is, so there!" said Sammy triumphantly. "But I'll lay you won't guess what it is. Mrs. Barnes has got a baby."

Mrs. Barnes was the wife of the head-master of the Mansion-House School, and all the little boys, feeling that there was more in the event than had been explained to them, were vaguely disgusted.

"I don't call that anything," Beth answered contemptuously. "Lots of people have

babies."

"Well," said Sammy, "I wouldn't have thought it of him."

"Thought what of whom?" Beth snapped in a tone which silenced Sammy. He ventured to laugh, however.

"Don't laugh in that gigantic way, Sammy," she exclaimed, still more irritated. "When you throw back your head and open your mouth so wide, I can see you have no wisdom-teeth."

"You're always nasty now, Beth," Sammy complained.

Which was true. Love waning becomes critical. Beth's own feeling for Sammy had been a strong mental stimulant at first, and, in her enjoyment of it, she had overlooked all his shortcomings. There was nothing in him, however, to keep that feeling alive, and it had gradually died of inanition. His slowness and want of imagination first puzzled and then provoked her; and, little-boy-like, he had not even been able to respond to such tenderness as she showed him—not that she had ever showed him much tenderness, for they were just like boys together. She had kissed him, however, once or twice, after a quarrel, to make it up; but she did not like kissing him: little boys are rank. His pretty colouring was all that he had had to attract her, and that, alas! had lost its charm by this time. For a little longer she looked out for him and troubled about him, then let him go gradually—so gradually, that she never knew when exactly he lapsed from her life altogether.

CHAPTER XX

For two years after Beth was outlawed by her mother, Great-Aunt Victoria Bench was her one link with the civilised world. The intimacy had lapsed a little while Sammy was the prevailing human interest in Beth's life, but gradually as he ceased to be satisfactory, she returned to the old lady, and hovered about her, seeking the sustenance for which her poor little heart ached on always, and for want of which

her busy brain ran riot; and the old lady, who had not complained of Beth's desertion, welcomed her back in a way which showed that she had felt it.

For Great-Aunt Victoria Bench was lonely in the days of her poverty and obscurity. Since the loss of her money, there had been a great change in the attitude of most of her friends towards her, and such attentions as she received were of a very different kind from those to which she had been accustomed. Mrs. Caldwell had been the most generous to her, for at the time that she had offered Aunt Victoria a home in her house, she had not known that the old lady would be able to pay her way at all. Fortunately Aunt Victoria had enough left for that, but still her position in Mrs. Caldwell's house was not what it would have been had she not lost most of her means. Mrs. Caldwell was not aware of the fact, but her manner had insensibly adjusted itself to Aunt Victoria's altered circumstances, her care and consideration for her being as much reduced in amount as her income; and Aunt Victoria felt the difference, but said nothing. Slowly and painfully she learnt to realise that it was for what she had had to bestow, and not for what she was, that people used to care; they had served her as they served their God, in the hope of reaping a rich reward. Like many other people with certain fine qualities of their own, Aunt Victoria knew that there was wickedness in the outside world, but never suspected that her own immediate circle, the nice people with whom she talked pleasantly every day, could be tainted; and the awakening to find that her friends cared less disinterestedly for her than she did for them was a cruel disillusion. Her first inclination was to fly far from them all, and spend the rest of her days amongst strangers who could not disappoint her because she would have nothing to expect of them, and who might perhaps come to care for her really. Long hours she sat and suffered, shut up in her room, considering the matter, yearning to go, but restrained by the fear that, as an old woman, she would be unwelcome everywhere. In Aunt Victoria's day old people were only too apt to be selfish, tyrannical, narrow, and ignorant, a terror to their friends; and they were nearly always ill, the old men from lives of self-indulgence,

and the old women from unwholesome restraint of every kind. Now we are beginning to ask what becomes of the decrepit old women, there are so few to be seen. This is the age of youthful grandmothers, capable of enjoying a week of their lives more than their own grandmothers were able to enjoy the whole of their declining years; their vitality is so much greater, their appearance so much better preserved; their knowledge so much more extensive, their interests so much more varied, and their hearts so much larger. Aunt Victoria nowadays would have struck out for herself in a new direction. She would have gone to London, joined a progressive women's club, made acquaintance with work of some kind or another, and never known a dull moment; for she would have been a capable woman had any one of her faculties been cultivated to some useful purpose; but as it was, she had nothing to fall back upon. She was just like a domestic animal, like a dog that has become a member of the family, and is tolerated from habit even after it grows old, and because remarks would be made if it were put out of the way before its time; and she had been content with the position so long as much was made of her. Now, however, all too late, a great yearning had seized upon her for an object in life, for some pursuit, some interest that would remain to her when everything else was lost; and she prayed to God earnestly that He would show her where to go and what to do, or give her something—something which at last resolved itself into something to live for.

Then one day there came a little resolute tap at the door, and Beth walked in without waiting to be asked, and seeing in a moment with that further faculty of hers into the old lady's heart that it was sad, she went to her impulsively, and laid her unkempt brown head against her arm in an awkward caress, which touched the old lady to tears. Beth was lonely too, thought Aunt Victoria, a strange, lonely little being, neglected, ill-used, and misunderstood, and the question flashed through the old lady's mind, if she left the child, what would become of her? The tangled brown head, warm against her arm, nestled nearer, and Aunt Victoria patted it protectingly.

"Do you want anything, Beth?" she asked.

"No, Aunt Victoria. I just wanted to see you. I was lying on the see-saw board, looking up through the leaves, and I suddenly got a fancy that you were here all by yourself, and that you didn't like being all by yourself. I feel like that sometimes. So I came to see you."

"Thank you, Beth," said Aunt Victoria, with her hand still on Beth's head as if she were blessing her; and when she had spoken she looked up through the window, and silently thanked the Lord. This was the sign. He had committed Beth to her care and affection, and she was not to think of herself, but of the child, whose need was certainly the greater of the two.

"Have you nothing to do, Beth?" she said after a pause.

"No, Aunt Victoria," Beth answered drearily—"at least there are plenty of things I could do, but everything I think of makes me shudder. I feel so sometimes. Do you? There isn't a single thing I want to do to-day. I've tried one thing after the other, but I can't think about what I'm doing. Sometimes I like to sit still and do nothing; but to-day I don't even like that. I think I should like to be asked to do something. If I could do something for you now—something to help you——"

"Well, you can, Beth," Aunt Victoria answered, after sitting rigidly upright for a moment, blinking rapidly. "Help me to unpick an old gown. I am going to make another like it, and want it unpicked for a pattern."

"Can you make a gown?" Beth asked in surprise.

Aunt Victoria smiled. Then she took down an old black gown that was hanging behind the door, and handed it to Beth with a pair of sharp scissors.

"I'll undo the body part," Beth said, "and that will save your eyes. I don't think this gown owes you much."

"I do not understand that expression, Beth," said Aunt Victoria.

"Don't you," said Beth, working away with the scissors cheerfully. "Harriet always says that, when she's got all the good there is to be got out of anything—the dusters, you know, or the dishcloth. I once did a piece of unpicking like this for mamma, and she didn't explain properly, or something—at all events, I took out a great deal too much, so she——"

"Don't call your mamma 'she.' 'She' is the cat."

"Mamma, then. Mamma beat me."

"Don't say she beat you."

"I said mamma."

"Well, don't talk about your mamma beating you. That is not a nice thing to talk about."

"It's not a nice thing to do either," said Beth judicially. "And I never used to talk about it; didn't like to, you know. But now she—mamma—doesn't beat me any more—at least only sometimes when she forgets."

"Ah, then, you have been a better girl."

"No, not better—bigger. You see if I struck her back again she wouldn't like it."

"Beth! Beth! strike your mother!"

"That was the danger," said Beth, in her slow, distinct, imperturbable way. "One day she made me so angry I very nearly struck her, and I told her so. That made her look queer, I can tell you. And she's never struck me since—except in a half-hearted sort of way, or when she forgot, and that didn't count, of course. But I think I know now how it was she used to beat me. I did just the same thing myself one day. I beat Sammy——"

"Who is Sammy?" said Aunt Victoria, looking over her spectacles.

"Sammy Lee, you know."

Aunt Victoria recollected, and felt she should improve the occasion, but was at a

loss for a moment what to say. She was anxious above everything that Beth should talk to her freely, for how could she help the child if she did not know all she had in her mind? It is upon the things they are never allowed to mention that children brood unwholesomely.

"I thought that you were not allowed to know Sammy Lee," she finally observed.

"No more I was," Beth answered casually.

"Yet you knew him all the same?" Aunt Victoria ventured reproachfully.

"Aunt Victoria," said Beth, "did the Lord die for Sammy?"

"Ye—yes," said Aunt Victoria, hesitating, not because she doubted the fact, but because she did not know what use Beth would make of it.

"Then why can't I know him?" Beth asked.

"Oh, be—because Sammy does not live as if he were grateful to the Lord."

"If he did, would he be a gentleman?" Beth asked.

"Yes," Aunt Victoria answered decidedly.

Beth stopped snipping, and looked at her as if she were looking right through her, and out into the world beyond. Then she pursed up her mouth and shook her head.

"That won't hold water," she said. "If a man must live like the Lord to be a gentleman, what is Uncle James? And if living like the Lord makes a man a gentleman, why don't we call on old Job Fisher?"

Aunt Victoria began to fear that the task she had undertaken would prove too much for her. "It is hard, very hard," she muttered.

"Well, never mind," said Beth, resuming her work. "When I grow up I mean to write about things like that. But what were we talking about? Oh, beating Sammy. I did feel bad after I beat him, and I vowed I'd never do it again however tiresome he was, and I never did. It makes it easier if you vow. It's just as if your hands were tied then. I'd like to tell mamma to try it, only she'd be sure to get waxy. You tell her,

Aunt Victoria."

Aunt Victoria made some reply which was lost in the noise of vehicles passing in the street, followed by the tramp of many feet and a great chattering. An excursion train had just arrived, and the people were pouring into the place. Beth ran to the window and watched them.

"More confounded trippers," she ejaculated. "They spoil the summer, swarming everywhere."

"Beth, I wish, to please me, you would make another vow. Don't say 'confounded trippers.'"

"All right, Aunt Victoria. Jim says it. But I know all the bad words in the language were made for the men. I suppose because they have all the bad thoughts, and do all the bad things. I shall say 'objectionable excursionists' in future." She went to the door. "I'm just going to get something," she said. "You won't go away now, will you? I shall be a minute or two, but I want you to be here when I come back. I shall be wild if you're not."

She banged the door after her and ran downstairs.

Aunt Victoria looked round the room; it no longer seemed the same place to her. Beth's cheerful chatter had already driven away the evil spirit of dejection, and taken the old lady out of herself. Untidy child! She had left her work on the floor, her scissors on the bed, disarranged the window-curtain, and upset a chair. If she would not do any more unpicking when she returned, she must be made to put things straight. There was one little easy-chair in the room. Aunt Victoria sat down in it, a great piece of self-indulgence for her at that time of day, folded her hands, and closed her weary old eyes just to give them a rest, while a nice little look of content came into her face, which it was good to see there.

When she opened her eyes again, Beth was setting a tray on a tiny table beside her.

"I think you've been having a nap, Miss Great-Aunt Victoria Bench," she said.

"Now, have some tea! and buttered toast!!"

"O Beth!" cried the old lady, beaming. "How could you—at this time of day? Well, to please you. It is quite delicious. So refreshing. What, another piece of toast! Must I take another?"

"You must take it all," said Beth. "I made it for you. I do like doing things for you, Aunt Victoria. It makes me feel nice all over. I'll just unpick a little more. Then I'll tidy up."

"You're a good child to think of that," said Aunt Victoria. "I did not think you would."

"Didn't you?" said Beth. "How funny! But I like things tidy. I often tidy up."

"I—I suppose Harriet says tidy up," the old lady observed gently, not liking to be censorious at this happy moment of relaxation, but still anxious to do her duty. Beth understood her perfectly and smiled.

"I like you to tell me when I say things wrong," she said; "and I like to know how Harriet talks too. You can't write if you don't know how every one talks."

"What are you going to write?" Aunt Victoria asked, taking up another piece of buttered toast.

"Oh, books," Beth answered casually.

"Write something soul-sustaining then, Beth," said Aunt Victoria. "Try to make all you say soul-sustaining. And never use a word you would be ashamed to hear read aloud."

"You mean like those things they read in church?" said Beth. "I don't think I ever could use such words. When Mr. Richardson comes close to them, I get hot all over and hate him. But I promise you, Aunt Victoria, I will never write anything worse than there is in the Bible. There's a man called Ruskin who writes very well, they say, and he learnt how to do it from reading the Bible. His mother taught him when

he was a little boy, just as you taught me. I always read the Bible—search the Scriptures—every day. You say it's a sacred book, don't you, Aunt Victoria? Harriet says it's smutty."

"Says what?" Aunt Victoria exclaimed, sitting bolt upright in her horror. "What does she mean by such an expression?"

"Oh, she just means stories like Joseph and Potiphar's wife, David and Bathsheba, Susanna and the elders."

"My dear child!" Aunt Victoria gasped.

"Well, Aunt Victoria, they're all in the Bible, at least Susanna and the elders isn't. That's in the Apocrypha."

Aunt Victoria sat silent a considerable time. At last she said solemnly: "Beth, I want you to promise me one thing solemnly, and that is that all your life long, whatever may be before you, whatever it may be your lot to learn, you will pray to God to preserve your purity."

"What is purity?" said Beth.

Aunt Victoria hesitated: "It's a condition of the mind which keeps us from ever doing or saying anything we should be ashamed of," she finally decided.

"But what kind of things?" Beth asked.

Unfortunately Aunt Victoria was not equal to the occasion. She blinked her eyes very hard, sipped some tea, and left Beth to find out for herself, according to custom.

"We must only talk about nice things," she said.

"Well, I shouldn't care to talk nastily about people as Lady Benyon does sometimes," Beth rejoined.

"But, my dear child, that is not a nice thing to say about Lady Benyon."

"Isn't it?" said Beth, then added: "Oh dear, how funny things are!" meaning how

complicated.

"Where did you get this tea, Beth?" said Aunt Victoria. "It is very good, and I feel so much the better for it."

"I thought you wanted something," said Beth. "Your face went all queer. That means people want something. I got the tea out of the store-cupboard. It has a rotten lock. If you shake it, it comes open."

"But what does your mamma say?"

"Oh, she never notices. Or, if she does, she thinks she left it open herself. Harriet has a little sometimes. She takes it because she says mamma should allow her a quarter of a pound of dry tea a week, so it isn't stealing. And I took it for you because you pay to live here, so you're entitled to the tea. I don't take it for myself, of course. But I'm afraid I oughtn't to have told you about Harriet. I'm so sorry. It slipped out. It wasn't sneaking. But I trust to your honour, Aunt Victoria. If you sneaked on Harriet, I could never trust you again, now could I?" She got up as she spoke, folded her work, picked up the chair, arranged the window-curtain, moved the tray, and put the table back in its place, at the same time remarking: "I shall take these things downstairs now, and go for a run."

She left Aunt Victoria with much to reflect upon. The glimpse she had accidentally given the old lady of Harriet's turpitude had startled her considerably. Mrs. Caldwell had always congratulated herself on having such a quiet respectable person in the house as Harriet to look after Beth, and now it appeared that the woman was disreputable both in her habits and her conversation, the very last person whom a girl, even of such strongly marked individuality as Beth, should have been allowed to associate with intimately. But what ought Miss Victoria to do? If she spoke to Mrs. Caldwell, Beth would never forgive her, and the important thing was not to lose Beth's confidence; but if she did not speak to Mrs. Caldwell, would she be doing right? Of course, if Mrs. Caldwell had been a different sort of person, her duty

would have been clear and easy; but as it was, Aunt Victoria decided to wait.

The next day Beth returned of her own accord to finish the unpicking. She wanted to know what "soul-sustaining" meant; and in ten minutes she had cross-questioned Aunt Victoria into such a state of confusion that the old lady could only sit silently praying to Heaven for guidance. At last she got up, and took a little packet out of one of her trunks. She had to live in her boxes because there was no closet or wardrobe or chest of drawers in the room.

"See, Beth," she said, "here is some tea and sugar. I don't think it nice of you to go to your mother's cupboard without her leave. That's rather a servant's trick, you know, and not honest; so give it up, like a dear child, and let us have tea together, you and I, up here, when we want it. I very much enjoy a good cup of tea, it is so refreshing, and you make it beautifully."

Beth changed colour and countenance while Aunt Victoria was speaking, and she sat for some time afterwards looking fixedly at the empty grate; then she said, "You always tell me things nicely, Aunt Victoria; that's what I like about you. I'll not touch the cupboard again, I vow; and if you catch me at any other 'servant's tricks' just you let me know."

The old lady's heart glowed. The Lord was showing her how to help the child.

But the holidays were coming on; she would have to go away to make room for the boys; and she dreaded to leave Beth at this critical time, lest she should relapse, just as she was beginning to form nice feminine habits. For Beth had taken kindly to the sewing and tea-drinking and long quiet chats; it was a delight to her to have some one to wait on, and help, and talk to. "I'm so fond of you, Aunt Victoria," she said one day; "I even like you to snap at me; and if we lived quite alone together, you and I, I should do everything for you."

"Would you like to come away with me these holidays?" said Aunt Victoria, seized suddenly with a bright idea.

"Oh, wouldn't I!" said Beth. "But then, the expense!"

"I think I can manage it, if your mamma has no objection," said Aunt Victoria, nodding and blinking, and nodding again, as she calculated.

"I should think mamma would be only too glad to get rid of me," said Beth hopefully.

And she was not mistaken.

CHAPTER XXI

The next few weeks, in their effect upon Beth's character, were among the most important of her life. She did not know until the day before where she was to go with Aunt Victoria. It was the habit of the family to conceal all such arrangements from the children, and indeed from each other as much as possible. Aunt Victoria observed that Caroline was singularly reticent, and Mrs. Caldwell complained that Aunt Victoria made a mystery of everything. It was a hard habit, which robbed Beth of what would have been so much to her, something to look forward to. Since she knew that she was to go somewhere, however, she had lived upon the idea; her imagination had been busy trying to picture the unknown place, and her mind full of plans for the comfort of Aunt Victoria.

It was after breakfast one day, while her mother and Aunt Victoria were still at table, that the announcement was made. "You need not do any lessons this morning, children," Mrs. Caldwell said. "Beth is going to Harrowgate with Aunt Victoria to-morrow, and I must see to her things and get them packed."

Aunt Victoria looked round at Beth with a carefully restrained smile, expecting some demonstration of joy. Beth was standing in the window looking out, and turned with a frown of intentness on her face when her mother mentioned Harrowgate, as if she were trying to recall something.

"Harrowgate!" she said slowly. "Harrowgate!"

"Beth, do not frown so," Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed irritably. "You'll be all wrinkled before you're twenty."

Beth gazed at her solemnly without seeing her, then fixed her eyes upon the ground as if she were perusing it, and began to walk slowly up and down with her head bent, her hands clasped behind her, her curly brown hair falling forward over her cheeks, and her lips moving.

"What is it you're muttering, child?" Aunt Victoria asked.

"I'm trying to think," Beth rejoined.

""Twas in the prime of summer time, An evening calm and cool....

"'Two sudden blows with a ragged stick, And one with a heavy stone....

"'And yet I feared him all the more, For lying there so still....

"'I took the dreary body up.'...

"Ah, I know—I have it!" she exclaimed joyfully, and with a look of relief; "Harrowgate—Knaresboro'—the cave there——

"'Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn, Through the cold and heavy mist; And Eugene Aram walked between, With gyves upon his wrist.'"

"My dear child," said Aunt Victoria sternly, "what is it you are trying to say? and how often are you to be told not to work yourself up into such a state of excitement about nothing?"

"Don't you know about Eugene Aram, Aunt Victoria?" Beth rejoined with concern, as if not to know about Eugene Aram were indeed to have missed one of the great interests of life. Then she sat down at the table with her elbows resting on it, and her delicate oval face framed in her slender hands, and gave Aunt Victoria a graphic sketch of the story from Bulwer Lytton.

"Dear me, Caroline," said Aunt Victoria, greatly horrified, "is it possible that you

allow your children to read such books?"

"I read such books to my children myself when I see fit," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. "I may be allowed to judge what is good for them, I suppose?"

"Good for them!" Aunt Victoria ejaculated. "Accounts of murder, theft, and executions!"

"But why not, Aunt Victoria?" Beth put in. "Why not read about Eugene Aram as well as about Barabbas?"

Aunt Victoria looked so shocked, however, at the mention of Barabbas in this connection, that Beth broke off and hastened to add for the relief of the old lady's feelings—"Only of course Barabbas was a sacred sort of thief, and that is different."

On the journey next day a casual remark let fall by a stranger made a curious impression upon Beth. They were travelling second-class, and Aunt Victoria, talking to another lady in the carriage, happened to mention that Beth was twelve years old. A gentleman, the only other passenger, who was sitting opposite to Beth, looked up at her over his newspaper when her age was mentioned, and remarked—"Are you only twelve? I should have thought you were older. Rather nice-looking too, only freckled."

Beth felt her face flush hotly, and then she laughed. "Nice-looking! Nice-looking!" She repeated the words to herself again and again, and every time they recurred to her, she lost countenance in spite of herself, and laughed and flushed, being strangely surprised and pleased.

It was that remark that first brought home to Beth the fact that she had a personal appearance at all. Hitherto she had thought very little of herself. The world without had been, and always would be, much more to her than the world within. She was not to be one of those narrow, self-centred, morbid beings whose days are spent in introspection, and whose powers are wasted in futile efforts to set their own little peculiarities forth in such a way as to make them seem of consequence. She never at

any time studied her own nature, except as a part of human nature, and in the hope of finding in herself some clue which would help her to a sympathetic understanding of other people.

Great-Aunt Victoria Bench, in these days of her poverty, lodged with an old servant of the family, who gave her for ten shillings a week a bedroom at the top of the house, and a little sunny sitting-room on the ground-floor at the back, looking out into an old-fashioned garden, full of flowers such as knights in olden times culled for their ladies. The little sitting-room was furnished with Chippendale chairs, and a little Chippendale sideboard with drawers, and a bookcase with glass doors above and a cupboard below, in which Aunt Victoria used to keep her stores of tea, coffee, sugar, and currants in mustard-tins. Beth heard with surprise that the hearthrug was one which Aunt Victoria had worked herself as a present for Prentice when she married. Prentice was now Mrs. Pearce, but Aunt Victoria always called her Prentice. The hearthrug was like a Turkey carpet, only softer, deeper, and richer. Aunt Victoria had sat on Chippendale chairs in her youth, and she was happy amongst them. When she sat down on one she drew herself up, disdaining the stiff back and smiled and felt young again, while her memory slipped away to pleasant days gone by; and Mrs. Pearce would come and talk to her, standing respectfully, and reminding her of little things which Aunt Victoria had forgotten, or alluding with mysterious nods and shakings of the head to other things which Beth was not to hear about. When this happened Beth always withdrew. She was becoming shy of intruding now, and delicate about overhearing anything that was not intended for her; and when she had gone on these occasions, the two old ladies would nod and smile to each other, Prentice in respectful approval, and Aunt Victoria in kindly acknowledgment. Prentice wore a cap and front like Aunt Victoria, but of a subdued brown colour, as became her humble station.

Beth took charge of the housekeeping as soon as they arrived, made tea, arranged the groceries in the cupboard, and put the key in her pocket; and Aunt Victoria, who

was sitting upright on a high Chippendale chair, knitting, and enjoying the dignity of the old attitude after her journey, looked on over her spectacles in pleased approval. Before they went to bed, they read the evening psalms and lessons together in the sitting-room, and Aunt Victoria read prayers. When they went upstairs they said their private prayers, kneeling beside the bed, and Aunt Victoria made Beth wash herself in hot water, and brush her hair for half-an-hour. Aunt Victoria attributed her own slender, youthful figure and the delicate texture of her skin to this discipline. She said she had preserved her figure by never relaxing into languid attitudes, and her complexion by washing her face in hot water with fine white soap every night, and in cold water without soap every morning. She did not take her fastidious appetite into consideration, nor her simple, regular life, nor the fact that she never touched alcohol in any shape or form, nor wore a tight or heavy garment, nor lost her self-control for more than a moment whatever happened, but Beth discovered for herself, as she grew older, that these and that elevated attitude of mind which is religion, whatever the form preferred to express it, are essential parts of the discipline necessary for the preservation of beauty.

In the morning Beth made breakfast, and when it was over, if crusts had accumulated in the cupboard, she steeped them in hot milk in a pie-dish, beat them up with an egg, a little butter, sugar, currants, and candied peel, and some nutmeg grated, for a bread-pudding, which Prentice took out to bake for dinner, remarking regularly that little miss promised to be helpful, to which Aunt Victoria as regularly responded Yes, she hoped Miss Beth would become a capable woman some day.

After breakfast they read the psalms and lessons together, verse by verse, and had some "good talk," as Beth called it. Then Aunt Victoria got out an old French grammar and phrase-book, a copy of "Télémaque," and a pocket-dictionary, treasured possessions which she always carried about with her, and had a kind of pride in. French had been her speciality, but these were the only French books she had, and she certainly never spoke the language. She would have shrunk modestly

from any attempt to do so, thinking such a display almost as objectionable as singing in a loud professional way instead of quietly, like a well-bred amateur, and showing a lack of that dignified reserve and general self-effacement which she considered essential in a gentlewoman.

But she was anxious that Beth should be educated, and therefore the books were produced every morning. Mrs. Caldwell had tried in vain to teach Beth anything by rule, such as grammar. Beth's memory was always tricky. Anything she cared about she recollected accurately; but grammar, which had been presented to her not as a means to an end but as an end in itself, failed to interest her, and if she remembered a rule she forgot to apply it, until Aunt Victoria set her down to the old French books, when, simply because the old lady looked pleased if she knew her lesson and disturbed if she did not, she began at the beginning of her own accord, and worked with a will—toilsomely at first, but by degrees with pleasure as she proceeded, and felt for the first time the joy of mastering a strange tongue.

"You learnt out of this book when you were a little girl, Aunt Victoria, didn't you?" she said, looking up on the day of the first lesson. She was sitting on a high-backed chair at one end of the table, trying to hold herself as upright as Aunt Victoria, who sat at the other and opposite end to her, pondering over her knitting. "I suppose you hated it."

"No, I did not, Beth," Aunt Victoria answered severely. "I esteemed it a privilege to be well educated. Our mother could not afford to have us all instructed in the same accomplishments, and so she allowed us to choose French, or music, or drawing and painting. I chose French."

"Then how was it grandmamma learned drawing and painting, and playing, and everything?" Beth asked. "Mamma knows tunes she composed."

"Your dear grandmamma was an exceedingly clever girl," Aunt Victoria answered stiffly, as if Beth had taken a liberty when she asked the question; "and she was the

youngest, and desired to learn all we knew, so we each did our best to impart our special knowledge to her. I taught her French."

"How strange," said Beth; "and out of this very book? And she is dead. And now you are teaching me."

The feeling in the child's voice, and the humble emphasis on the pronoun me, touched the old lady; something familiar too in the tone caused her to look up quickly and kindly over her spectacles, and it seemed to her for a moment as if the little, long-lost sister sat opposite to her—great grey eyes, delicate skin, bright brown hair, expression of vivid interest, and all.

"Strange! strange!" she muttered to herself several times.

"I am supposed to be like grandmamma, am I not?" said Beth, as if she read her thoughts.

"You are like her," Aunt Victoria rejoined.

"But you can be a plain likeness of a good-looking person, I suppose?" Beth said tentatively.

"Certainly you can," Miss Victoria answered with decision; and the spark of pleasure in her own personal appearance, which had recently been kindled in Beth, instantly flickered and went out.

Their little sitting-room had a bow-window down to the ground, the front part of which formed two doors with glass in the upper part and wood below, leading out into the garden. On fine days they always stood wide open, and the warm summer air scented with roses streamed in. Both Beth and Aunt Victoria loved to look out into the garden. From where Beth sat to do her French at the end of the table, she could see the soft green turf, a bright flower-border, and an old brick wall, mellowed in tone by age, behind it; and a little to the left, a high, thick screen of tall shrubs of many varieties, set so close that all the different shades of green melted into each other. The irregular roof of a large house, standing on lower ground than the garden,

with quaint gables and old chimneys, rose above the belt of shrubs; the tiles on it lay in layers that made Beth think of a wasp's nest, only that they were dark-red instead of grey; but she loved the colour as it appeared all amongst the green trees and up against the blue sky. She often wondered what was going on under that roof, and used to invent stories about it. She did not write anything in these days, however, but stored up impressions which were afterwards of inestimable value to her. The smooth grey boles of the beeches, the green down on the larches, the dark, blue-green crown which the Scotch fir held up, as if to accentuate the light blue of the sky, and the wonderful ruddy-gold tones that shone on its trunk as the day declined; these things she felt and absorbed rather than saw and noted, but because she felt them they fired her soul, and resolved themselves into poetic expression eventually.

They dined early, and on the hot afternoons they sat and worked together after dinner, Beth sewing and Aunt Victoria knitting, until it was cool enough to go out. Aunt Victoria was teaching Beth how to make some new underclothing for herself, to Beth's great delight. All of her old things that were not rags were patches, and the shame of having them so was a continual source of discomfort to her; but Aunt Victoria, when she discovered the state of Beth's wardrobe, bought some calico out of her own scanty means, and set her to work. During these long afternoons, they had many a conversation that Beth recollected with pleasure and profit. She often amused and interested the old lady; and sometimes she drew from her a serious reprimand or a solemn lecture, for both of which she was much the better. Aunt Victoria was severe, but she was sympathetic, and she was just; she seldom praised, but she showed that she was satisfied, and that was enough for Beth; and she never scolded or punished, only spoke seriously when she was displeased, and then Beth was overwhelmed.

One very hot day when they were working together, Aunt Victoria sitting on a high-backed chair with her back to the open doors because the light was too much

for her eyes, and Beth sitting beside her on a lower seat, but so that she could look up at her, and also out into the garden, it occurred to her that once on a time, long ago, Aunt Victoria must have been young, and she tried artfully to find out first, if Aunt Victoria remembered the fact, and secondly, what little girls were like at that remote period.

"Was your mamma like mine, Aunt Victoria?" she asked.

Aunt Victoria had just made a mistake in her knitting, and answered shortly: "No, child."

"When you were all children," Beth pursued, "did you play together?"

"Not much," Aunt Victoria answered grimly.

"Did you quarrel?"

"My dear child! what could put such a notion into your head?"

"What did you do then?" said Beth. "You couldn't have been all the time learning to sit upright on a high-backed chair; and I am trying so hard to think what your home was like. I wish you would tell me."

"It was not at all like yours," Aunt Victoria replied with emphasis. "We were most carefully brought up children. Our mother was an admirable person. She lived by rule. If one of her children was born at night, it was kept in the house until the morning, and then sent out to nurse until it was two years old. If it was born by day, it was sent away at once."

"And didn't great-grandmamma ever go to see it?"

"Yes, of course; twice a year."

"I think," said Beth, reflecting, "I should like to keep my babies at home. I should want to put their little soft faces against mine, and kiss them, you know."

"Your great-grandmamma did her duty," said Aunt Victoria with grim approval. "She never let any of us loll as you are doing now, Beth. She made us all sit up, as I

always do, and as I am always telling you to do; and the consequence was our backs grew strong and never ached."

"And were you happy?" Beth said solemnly.

Aunt Victoria gazed at her vaguely. She had never asked herself the question. Then Beth sat with her work on her lap for a little, looking up at the summer sky. It was an exquisite deep blue just then, with filmy white clouds drawn up over it like gauze to veil its brightness. The red roofs and gables and chimneys of the old house below, the shrubs, the dark Scotch fir, the copper-beech, the limes and the chestnut stood out clearly silhouetted against it; and Beth felt the forms and tints and tones of them all, although she was thinking of something else.

"Mamma's back is always aching," she observed at last, returning to her work.

"Yes, that is because she was not so well brought up as we were," Aunt Victoria rejoined.

"She says it is because she had such a lot of children," said Beth. "Did you ever have any children, Aunt Victoria?"

Miss Victoria Bench let her knitting fall on her lap—"My—dear—child!" she gasped, holding up both her hands in horror.

"Oh, I forgot," said Beth. "Only married ladies have children. Servants have them, though, sometimes before they are married, Harriet says, and then they call them bad girls. Grandmamma wasn't as wise as great-grandmamma, I suppose, but perhaps great-grandmamma had a good husband. Grandpapa was an awful old rip, you know."

Aunt Victoria stared at her aghast.

"He used to drink," Beth proceeded, lowering her voice, and glancing round mysteriously as the old servants at Fairholm did when they discussed these things; "and grandmamma couldn't bear his ways or his language, and used to shut herself

up in her own room more and more, and they never agreed, and at last she went quite mad, so the saying came true. Did you never hear the saying? Why, you know her father's crest was a raven, and grandpapa's crest was a bee, and for generations the families had lived near each other and never been friends; and it was said, if the blood of the bees and the ravens were ever put in the same bowl it wouldn't mingle. Do you say 'if it were,' or 'if it was,' Aunt Victoria? Mamma says 'if it were.'"

"We were taught to say 'if it was,'" Aunt Victoria answered stiffly; "but your mamma may know better."

Beth thought about this for a minute, then set it aside for further inquiry, and dispassionately resumed. "That was a mean trick of Uncle James's, but it was rather clever too; I should never have thought of it. I mean with the fly, you know. When grandpapa died, Uncle James got his will and altered it, so that mamma mightn't have any money; and he put a fly in grandpapa's mouth, and swore that the will was signed by his hand while there was life in him."

"My dear child," said Aunt Victoria sharply, "who told you such a preposterous story?"

"Oh, I heard it about the place," Beth answered casually; "everybody knows it." She took another needleful of thread, and sewed on steadily for a little, and Aunt Victoria kept glancing at her meanwhile, with a very puzzled expression.

"But what I want to know is why did grandmamma stay with grandpapa if he were, or was, such a very bad man?" Beth said suddenly.

"Because it was her duty," said Aunt Victoria.

"And what was his duty?"

"I think, Beth," said the old lady, "you have done sewing enough for this afternoon. Run out into the garden."

Beth knew that this was only an excuse not to answer her, but she folded her work

up obediently, observing as she did so, however, with decision, "If I ever have a bad husband, I shall not stay with him, for I can't see what good comes of it."

"Your grandmamma had her children to think of," said Aunt Victoria.

"But what good did she do them?" Beth wanted to know. "She devoted herself to Uncle James, but she didn't make much of a man of him! And she had no influence whatever with mamma. Mamma was her father's favourite, and he taught her to despise grandmamma because she couldn't hunt, and shrieked if she saw things killed. I think that's silly myself, but it's better than being hard. Of course mamma is worth a dozen of Uncle James, but—" Beth shrugged her shoulders, then added temperately, "You know mamma has her faults, Aunt Victoria, it's no use denying it. So what good did grandmamma do by staying? She just went mad and died! If she'd gone away, and lived as you do, she might have been alive and well now."

"Ah, my dear child," said the old lady sorrowfully, "that never could have been; for I have observed that no woman who marries and becomes a mother can ever again live happily like a single woman. She has entered upon a different phase of being, and there is no return for her. There is a weight of meaning in that expression: 'the ties of home.' It is 'the ties of home' that restrain a loving woman, however much she suffers; there are the little daily duties that no one but herself can see to; and there is always some one who would be worse off if she went. There is habit too; and there are those small possessions, each one with an association of its own perhaps, that makes it almost a sacred thing; but above all, there is hope—the hope that matters may mend; and fear—the fear that once she deserts her post things will go from bad to worse, and she be to blame. In your grandmamma's day such a thing would never have been thought of by a good woman; and even now, when there are women who actually go away and work for themselves, if their homes are unhappy—" Aunt Victoria pursed up her lips, and shook her head. "It may be respectable, of course," she concluded magnanimously; "but I cannot believe it is either right or wise, and

certainly it is not loyal."

"Loyal!" Beth echoed; "that was my father's word to me: 'Be loyal.' We've got to be loyal to others; but he also said that we must be loyal to ourselves."

Aunt Victoria had folded up her knitting, and now rose stiffly, and went out into the garden with an old parasol, and sat meditating in the sun on the trunk of a tree that had been cut down. She often sat so under her parasol, and Beth used to watch her, and wonder what it felt like to be able to look such a long, long way back, and have so many things to remember.

CHAPTER XXII

Aunt Victoria was surprised herself to find how kindly Beth took to a regular life, how exact she was in the performance of her little housekeeping duties, and how punctual in everything; she had never suspected that Beth's whole leaning was towards law and order, nor observed that even in her most lawless ways there was a certain system; that she fished, and poached, and prowled, fought Bernadine, and helped Harriet, as regularly as she dined, and went to bed. Habits, good or bad, may be formed in an incredibly short time if they are congenial; the saints by nature will pray, and the sinners sin, as soon as the example is set them; and Beth, accordingly, fell into Aunt Victoria's dainty fastidious ways, which were the ways of a gentlewoman, at once and without effort; and ever afterwards was only happy in her domestic life when she could live by the same rule in an atmosphere of equal refinement—an honest atmosphere where everything was done thoroughly, and every word spoken was perfectly sincere. Of course she relapsed many times—it was her nature to experiment, to wander before she settled, to see for herself; but it was by intimacy with lower natures that she learned fully to appreciate the higher; by the effect of bad books upon her that she learned the value of good ones; by the lowering of her whole tone which came of countenancing laxity in others, and by the

discomfort and degradation which follow on disorder, that she was eventually confirmed in her principles. The taste for the higher life, once implanted, is not to be eradicated; and those who have been uplifted by the glory of it once will strive to attain to it again, inevitably.

It was through the influence of this time that the most charming traits in Beth's character were finally developed—traits which, but for the tender discipline of the dear old aunt, might have remained latent for ever.

It would be misleading, however, to let it be supposed that Beth's conduct was altogether satisfactory during this visit. On the contrary, she gave Miss Victoria many an anxious moment; for although she did all that the old lady required of her, she did many other things besides, things required of her by her own temperament only. She had to climb the great tree at the end of the lawn, for instance, in order to peep into the nest near the top, and also to see into the demesne beyond the belt of shrubs, where the red-roofed house stood, peopled now by friends of her fancy. This would not have been so bad if she had come down safely; but a branch broke, and she fell and hurt herself, which alarmed Miss Victoria very much. Then Miss Victoria used to send her on errands to develop her intelligence; but Beth invariably lost herself at first; if she only had to turn the corner, she could not find her way back. Aunt Victoria tried to teach her to note little landmarks in her own mind as she went along, such as the red pillar-box at the corner of the street where she was to turn, and the green shutters on the house where she was to cross; and Beth noticed these and many more things carefully as she went, and could describe their position accurately afterwards; but, by the time she turned, the vision and the dream would be upon her as a rule, and she would walk in a world of fancy, utterly oblivious of red pillar-boxes, green shutters, or anything else on earth, until she was brought up wondering by a lamp-post, tree, or some unoffending person with whom she had collided in her abstraction; then she would have to ask her way; but she was slow to find it by direction; and all the time she was wandering about, Aunt Victoria would

be worrying herself with fears for her safety until she was quite upset.

Beth was rebellious, too, about some things. There was a grocery shop at one end of the street, kept by a respectable woman, but Beth refused to go to it because the respectable woman had a fussy little Pomeranian dog, and allowed it to lick her hands and face all over, which so disgusted Beth that she could not eat anything the woman touched. It was in this shop that Beth picked up the moribund black beetle that kicked out suddenly, and set up the horror of crawling things from which she ever afterwards suffered. This was another reason for not going back to the shop, but Aunt Victoria could not understand it, and insisted on sending her. Beth was firmly naughty in the matter, however, and would not go, greatly to the old lady's discomposure.

One means of torture, unconsciously devised by Aunt Victoria, tried Beth extremely. Aunt Victoria used to send her to church alone on Sunday afternoons to hear a certain eloquent preacher, and required her to repeat the text, and tell her what the whole sermon was about on her return. Beth did her best, but if she managed to remember the text by repeating it all the time, she could not attend to the sermon, and if she attended to the sermon, she invariably forgot the text. It was another instance of the trickishness of her memory; she could have remembered both the text and sermon without an effort had she not been afraid of forgetting them.

But the thing that gave her aunt most trouble of mind was Beth's habit of making acquaintance with all kinds of people. It was vain to warn her, and worse than vain, for the reasons Aunt Victoria gave her for not knowing people only excited her interest in them, and she would wait about, watching, to see for herself, studying their habits with the patient pertinacity of a naturalist. The drawing-room floor was let to a lady whose husband was at sea, a Mrs. Crome. She was very intimate with a gentleman who also lodged in the house, a friend of her husband's, she said, who had promised to look after her during his absence. Their bedrooms adjoined, and Beth

used to see their boots outside their doors every morning when she went down to breakfast, and wonder why they got up so late.

"Out again together nearly all last night," Prentice remarked to Aunt Victoria one morning; and then they shook their heads, but agreed that there was nothing to be done. From this and other remarks, however, Beth gathered that Mrs. Crome was going to perdition; and from that time she had a horrid fascination for Beth, who would gaze at her whenever she had an opportunity, with great solemn eyes dilated, as if she were learning her by heart—as, indeed, she was—involuntarily, for future reference; for Mrs. Crome was one of a pronounced type, as Beth learnt eventually, when she knew the world better, an example which helped her to recognise other specimens of the kind whenever she met them.

She scraped acquaintance with Mrs. Crome on the stairs, at last, and was surprised to find her as kind as could be, and was inclined to argue from this that Prentice and Aunt Victoria must be mistaken about her. But one evening Mrs. Crome tempted her into the drawing-room. The gentleman was there, smoking a cigar and drinking whisky-and-water; and there was something in the whole aspect and atmosphere of the room that made Beth feel exceedingly uncomfortable, and wish she was out of it immediately.

"Aren't you very dull with that old lady?" said Mrs. Crome. "I suppose she never takes you to the theatre or anything."

"No," said Beth; "she does not approve of theatres."

"Then I suppose she doesn't approve of me?" Mrs. Crome observed good-naturedly.

"No," said Beth solemnly; "she does not."

Mrs. Crome burst out laughing, and so did the gentleman.

"This is rich, really," he said. "What a quaint little person!"

"Oh, but she's sweet!" said Mrs. Crome; and then she kissed Beth, and Beth noticed

that she had been eating onions, and for long afterwards she associated the smell with theatres, frivolous talk, and a fair-haired woman smiling fatuously on the brink of perdition.

Aunt Victoria retired early to perform her evening ablutions, and on this occasion she had gone up just as usual, with a little bell, which she rang when she was ready for Beth to come. In the midst of the talk and laughter in the drawing-room the little bell suddenly sounded emphatically, and Beth fled. She found Aunt Victoria out on the landing in her petticoat and dressing-jacket, and without her auburn front, a sign of great perturbation. She had heard Beth's voice in the drawing-room, and proceeded to admonish her severely. But Beth heard not a word; for the sight of the old lady's stubbly white hair had plunged her into a reverie, and already, when the vision and the dream were upon her, no Indian devotee, absorbed in contemplation, could be less sensitive to outward impressions than Beth was. Aunt Victoria had to shake her to rouse her.

"What are you thinking of, child?" she demanded.

"Riding to the rescue," Beth answered dreamily.

"Don't talk nonsense," said Aunt Victoria. Beth gazed at her with a blank look. She was saving souls just then, and could attend to nothing else.

Beth's terror of the Judgment never returned; but after she had been away from home a few weeks she began to have another serious trouble which disturbed her towards evening in the same way. The first symptom was a curious lapse of memory which worried her a good deal. She could not remember how much of the garden was to be seen from her mother's bedroom window at home, and she longed to fly back and settle the question. Then she became conscious of being surrounded by the country on every side, and it oppressed her to think of it. She was a sea-child, living inland for the first time, and there came upon her a great yearning for the sight and sound of moving waters. She sniffed the land-breeze, and found it sweet but insipid in her

nostrils after the tonic freshness of the sea-air. She heard the voice of her beloved in the sough of the wind among the trees, and it made her inexpressibly melancholy. Her energy began to ebb. She did not care to move about much, but would sit silently sewing by the hour together, outwardly calm, inwardly all an ache to go back to the sea. She used to wonder whether the tide was coming in or going out; wonder if the fish were biting, how the sands looked, and who was on the pier. She devoured every scrap of news that came from home in the hope of finding something to satisfy her longing. Bernadine wrote her an elaborate letter in large hand, which Beth thought very wonderful; Harriet sent her a letter also, chiefly composed of moral sentiments copied from the Family Herald, with a view to producing a favourable impression on Miss Victoria; and Mrs. Caldwell wrote regularly once a week, a formal duty-letter, but a joy to Beth, to whom letters of any kind were a new and surprising experience. She had never expected that any one would write to her; and in the first flush of her gratitude she responded with enthusiasm, sending her mother, in particular, long descriptions of her life and surroundings, which Mrs. Caldwell thought so good she showed them to everybody. In replying to Beth, however, she expressed no approval or pleasure; on the contrary, she put Beth to shame by the way she dwelt on her mistakes in spelling, which effectually checked the outpourings, and shut Beth up in herself again, so that she mourned the more. During the day she kept up pretty well, but towards twilight, always her time of trial, the yearning for home, for mamma, for Harriet, for Bernadine, began again; the most gloomy fears of what might be happening to them in her absence possessed her, and she had great difficulty in keeping back her tears. Aunt Victoria noticed her depression, but mistook it for fatigue, and sent her to bed early, which Beth was glad of, because she wanted to be alone and cry. But one evening, when she was looking particularly sad, the old lady asked if she did not feel well.

"Yes, I feel quite well, thank you, Aunt Victoria," Beth answered with a great sigh;

"but I know now what you meant about home-ties. They do pull strong."

"Ah!" said Aunt Victoria, enlightened; "you are homesick, are you?"

And from that day forward, when she saw Beth moping, she took her out of herself by making her discuss the subject, and so relieved her; but Beth continued to suffer, although less acutely, until her return.

CHAPTER XXIII

Rainharbour was not yet deserted by summer visitors, although it was late in the autumn when Beth and Aunt Victoria returned. It had been such a lovely season that the holiday people lingered, loath to leave the freshness of the sea and the freedom of the shore for the stuffy indoor duties and the conventional restrictions of their town lives.

On the day of their arrival, Beth looked about her in amaze. She had experienced such a world of change in herself since she went away, that she was surprised to find the streets unaltered; and yet, although they were unaltered, they did not look the same. It was as if the focus of her eyes had been readjusted so as to make familiar objects seem strange, and change the perspective of everything; which gave the place a different air, a look of having been swept and garnished and set in order like a toy-town. But the people they passed were altogether unchanged, and this seemed stranger still to Beth. There they had been all the time, walking about as usual, wearing the same clothes, thinking the same thoughts; they had had no new experiences, and, what was worse, they were not only unconscious of any that she might have had, but were profoundly indifferent; and to Beth, on the threshold of life, all eager interest in everything, caring greatly to know, and ready to sympathise, this vision of the self-centred with shrivelled hearts was terrible; it gave her the sensation of being the one living thing that could feel in a world of automata moved by machinery.

Bernadine and her mother had met them at the station, but Beth was so busy looking about her, collecting impressions, she had hardly a word to say to either of them. Mrs. Caldwell set this down as another sign of want of proper affection, but Aunt Victoria grumped that it was nothing but natural excitement.

The first thing Beth did after greeting Harriet, who stood smiling at the door, was to run upstairs to her mother's bedroom to settle the question of how much of the garden was visible from the window; and then she rushed on up to the attic, dragged a big box under the skylight in hot haste, and climbed up on it to look at the sea. It was the one glimpse of it to be had from the house, just a corner, where the water washed up against the white cliffs that curved round an angle of the bay. Beth flung the skylight open, and gazed, then drew in her breath with a great sigh of satisfaction. The sea! The sea! Even that glimpse of it was refreshing as a long cool drink to one exhausted by heat and cruelly athirst.

While she was away, Beth had made many good resolutions about behaving herself on her return. Aunt Victoria had talked to her seriously on the subject. Beth could be good enough when she liked: she did all that her aunt expected of her; why could she not do all that her mother expected? Beth promised she would; and was beginning already to keep her promise faithfully by being as troublesome as possible, which was all that her mother ever expected of her. Whether or not thoughts are things which have power to produce effects, there are certainly people who answer to expectation with fatal facility, and Beth was one of them. Eventually she resisted with all her own individuality, but at this time she acted like an instrument played upon by other people's minds. This peculiar sensitiveness she turned to account in after life, using it as a key to character; she had merely to make herself passive, when she found herself reflecting the people with whom she conversed involuntarily; and not as they appeared on the surface, but as they actually were in their inmost selves. In her childhood she unconsciously illustrated the thoughts people had in their minds about her. Aunt Victoria believed in her and

trusted her, and when they were alone together, Beth responded to her good opinion; Mrs. Caldwell expected her to be nothing but a worry, and was not disappointed. When Beth was in the same house with both aunt and mother, she varied, answering to the expectation that happened to be strongest at the moment. That afternoon Aunt Victoria was tired after her journey, and did not think of Beth at all; but Mrs. Caldwell was busy in her own mind anticipating all the trouble she would have now Beth was back; and Beth, standing on the box under the attic skylight, with her head out, straining her eyes to seaward, was seized with a sudden impulse which answered to her mother's expectation. That first day she ought to have stayed in, unpacked her box, exhibited her beautiful needlework, got ready for dinner in good time, and proved her affection for her mother and sister by making herself agreeable to them; but instead of that, she stole downstairs, slipped out by the back-gate, and did not return until long after dinner was over.

She did not enjoy the scamper, however. Her home-sickness was gone, but her depression returned nevertheless, as the day declined, only in another form. She had still that curious sensation of being the only living thing in a world of figures moved by mechanism. She stood at the top of the steps which led down on to the pier, where the sailors loitered at idle times, and was greeted by those she knew with slow smiles of recognition; but she had nothing to say to any of them.

The tide was going out, and had left some of the ships in the harbour all canted to one side; cobles and pleasure-boats rested in the mud; a cockle-gatherer was wading about in it with his trousers turned up over his knees, and his bare legs so thickly coated, it looked as if he had black leggings on. Beth went to the edge of the pier, and stood for a few minutes looking down at him. She was facing west, but the sun was already too low to hurt her eyes. On her right the red-roofed houses crowded down to the quay irregularly. Fishing-nets were hanging out of some of the windows. Here and there, down in the harbour, the rich brown sails had been hoisted on some of the cobles to dry. There were some yachts at anchor, and Beth looked at

them eagerly, hoping to find Count Bartahlinsky's Seagull amongst them. It was not there; but presently she became conscious of some one standing beside her, and on looking up she recognised Black Gard, the Count's confidential man. He was dressed like the fishermen in drab trousers and a dark blue jersey, but wore a blue cloth cap, with the name of the yacht on it, instead of a sou'wester.

"Has your master returned?" she said.

"No, miss," he answered. "He's still abroad. He'll be back for the hunting, though."

"I doubt it," said Beth, resentful of that vague "abroad," which absorbed him into itself the greater part of the year. When she had spoken, she turned her back on Gard and the sunset, and wandered off up the cliffs. She had noticed a sickly smell coming up from the mud in the harbour, and wanted to escape from it, but somehow it seemed to accompany her. It reminded her of something—no, that was not it. What she was searching about in her mind for was some way, not to name it, but to express it. She felt there was a formula for it within reach, but for some time she could not recover it. Then she gave up the attempt, and immediately afterwards she suddenly said to herself—

"... the smell of death Came reeking from those spicy bowers, And man, the sacrifice of man, Mingled his taint with every breath Upwafted from the innocent flowers."

She did not search for any occult meaning in the lines, nor did they convey anything special to her; but they remained with her for the rest of the day, haunting her, in among her other thoughts, and forcing themselves upon her attention with the irritating persistency of a catchy tune.

On the cliffs she paused to look about her. It was a desolate scene. The tide was so far out by this time it looked as if there were more sand than sea in the bay. The water was the cloudy grey colour of flint, with white rims where the waves broke on the shore. The sky was low, level, and dark; where it met the water there was a heavy bank of cloud, from which an occasional flash of summer lightning, dimmed

by daylight, shot along the horizon. The air was peculiarly clear, so that distant objects seemed nearer than was natural. The sheltering headland on the left, which formed the bay, stood out bright white with a crown of vivid green against the sombre sea and sky; while, on the right, the old grey pier, which shut in the view in that direction, and the red-roofed houses of the town crowding down to it, showed details of design and masonry not generally visible to the naked eye from where Beth stood. There were neither ships nor boats in the bay; but a few cobles, with their red-brown sails flapping limp against their masts, rocked lazily at the harbour-mouth waiting for the tide to rise and float them in. Beth heard the men on them shouting an occasional remark to one another, and now and then one of them would sing an uncouth snatch of song, but the effort was spiritless, and did not last.

Leaving the harbour behind, Beth walked on towards the headland. Presently she noticed in front of her the dignified and pathetic figure of an old man, a Roman Catholic priest, Canon Hunter, who, sacrificing all worldly ease or chance of advancement, had come to minister to the neglected fisherfolk on the coast, most of whom were Roman Catholics. He led the life of a saint amongst them, living in dire poverty, his congregation being all of the poorest, with the exception of one lady in the neighbourhood, married to a man whose vices were too expensive to leave him much to spare for his wife's charities. She managed, however, to raise enough money for the rent of the top room in the public hall, which they used as a chapel, and so kept the flickering flame of the old religion alight in the place; but it was a severe struggle. It was whispered, indeed, that more of the gentry in the neighbourhood sympathised with the Catholics than was supposed, and would have helped them but for the discredit—did help them, in fact, when they dared; but no one outside the communion knew how true this report might be, and the fisherfolk loyally held their peace.

It was natural that Beth as she grew up should be attracted by the mystery that surrounded the Roman Catholics, and anxious to comprehend the horror that

Protestants had of them. She knew more of them herself than any of the people whom she heard pass uncharitable strictures upon them, and knew nothing for which they could justly be blamed. For the old priest himself she had a great reverence. She had never spoken to him, but had always felt strongly drawn towards him; and now, when she overtook him, her impulse was to slip her hand into his, less on her own account, however, than to show sympathy with him, he seemed so solitary and so suffering, with his slow step and bent back; and so good, with his beautiful calm face.

As she approached, lost in her own thoughts, she gazed up at him intently.

"What is it, my child?" he asked, with a kindly smile. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I was thinking of the beauty of holiness," Beth answered, and passed on.

The old man looked after her, too surprised for the moment to speak, and by the time he had recovered himself, she had turned a corner and was out of sight.

After Beth went home that evening, and had been duly reproached by her mother for her selfish conduct, she stole upstairs to Aunt Victoria's room, and found the old lady sitting with her big Bible on her knee, looking very sad and serious.

"Beth," she said severely, "have you had any food? It is long past your dinner-time, and it does not do for young girls to fast too long."

"I'll go and get something to eat, Aunt Victoria," Beth answered meekly, overcome by her kindness. "I forgot."

She went down to the pantry, and found some cold pie, which she took into the kitchen and ate without appetite.

The heat was oppressive. All the doors and windows stood wide open, but there was no air, and wherever Beth went she was haunted by the sickly smell which she had first perceived coming up from the mud in the harbour, and by the lines which seemed somehow to account for it:—

"... the smell of death Came reeking from those spicy bowers, And man, the sacrifice of man, Mingled his taint with every breath Upwafted from the innocent flowers."

When she had eaten all she could, she went back to Aunt Victoria.

"Shall we read the psalms?" she said.

"Yes, dear," the old lady answered. "I have been waiting for you a long time, Beth."

"Aunt Victoria, I am very sorry," Beth protested. "I didn't think."

"Ah, Beth," the old lady said sorrowfully, "how often is that to be your excuse? You are always thinking, but it is only your own wild fancies that occupy you. When will you learn to think of others?"

"I try always," Beth answered sincerely; "but what am I to do when 'wild fancies' come crowding in spite of me, and all I ought to remember slips away?"

"Pray," Aunt Victoria answered austerely. "Prayer shapes a life; and those lives are the most beautiful which have been shaped by prayer. Prayer is creative; it transposes intention into action, and makes it inevitable for us to be and to do more than would be possible by any other means."

There was a short silence, and then Miss Victoria began the psalm. It was a joy to Beth to hear her read, she read so beautifully; and it was from her that Beth herself acquired the accomplishment, for which she was afterwards noted. Verse by verse they read the psalms together as a rule, and Beth was usually attentive; but that evening, before the end, her attention became distracted by a loud ticking; and the last word was scarcely pronounced before she exclaimed, looking about her—"Aunt Victoria, what is that ticking? I see no clock."

The old lady looked up calmly, but she was very pale. "You do hear it then?" she replied. "It has been going on all day."

Beth's heart stood still an instant, and, in spite of the heat, her skin crisped as if the surface of her body had been suddenly sprayed with cold water. "The Death Watch!"

she ejaculated.

The ticking stopped a moment as if in answer to the words, and then began again. A horrible foreboding seized upon Beth.

"Oh, no—no, not that!" she exclaimed, shuddering; and then, all at once, she threw herself upon her knees beside Aunt Victoria, clasped her arms round her, and burst into a tempest of tears and sobs.

"Beth, Beth, my dear child," the old lady cried in dismay, "control yourself. It is only a little insect in the wood. It may mean nothing."

"It does mean something," Beth interrupted vehemently; "I know—I always know. The smell of death has been about me all the afternoon, but I did not understand, although the words were in my mouth. When things mean nothing, they don't make you feel queer—they don't impress you. Nine times running you may see a solitary crow, or spill the salt, or sit down thirteen to table, and laugh at all superstitious nonsense; then the sign was not for you; but the tenth time, something will come over you, and you won't laugh; then be warned and beware! I sometimes feel as if I were listening, but not with my ears, and waiting for things to happen that I know about, but not with my head; and I try always to understand when I find myself listening, but not with my ears, and something surely comes; and so also when I am waiting for things to happen that I know about, but not with my head; they do happen. Only most of the time I know that something is coming, but I cannot tell what it is. In order to be able to tell exactly, I have to hold myself in a certain attitude—not my body, you know, myself—hold myself in suspense, as it were, or suspend something in myself, stop something, push something aside—I can't get it into words; I can't always do it; but when I can, then I know."

"Who taught you this?" Aunt Victoria asked, as if she were startled.

"Oh, no one taught me," Beth answered. "I just found myself doing it. Then I tried to notice how it was done. I wanted to be able to do it myself when I liked. And it was

just as if there were two doors, and one had to be shut before I could look out of the other—the one that is my nose and eyes and ears; when that is shut, then I know; I look out of the other. Do things come to you so, Aunt Victoria?"

The old lady had taken Beth's hand, and was stroking it and looking at her very seriously. "No," she said, shaking her head, "no, things do not come to me like that. But although I have only one set of faculties myself, my outlook is not so limited by them that I cannot comprehend the possibility of something beyond. There are written records of people in olden times who must have possessed some such power—some further faculty such as you describe. It may be that it lies latent in the whole race, awaiting favourable conditions to develop itself, and some few rare beings have come into possession of it already. We are complex creatures—body, soul, and spirit, says the saint; and there is spiritual power. Beth, lay hold of that which you perceive in yourself, cherish it, cultivate it, live the life necessary to develop it; for be sure it is a great gift—it may be a divine one."

When the old lady stopped, Beth raised her head and looked about her, as if she had just awakened from sleep. "What were we talking about before that?" she said. "Oh, I know—the Death Watch. It has stopped."

The equinoctial gales set in early that year, and severely. Great seas washed away the silver sands which had been the delight of the summer visitors, leaving miles of clay exposed at low water to add to the desolation of the scene. The bay was full of storm-stayed vessels, all headed to the wind, close reefed, and straining at their anchors. There were days when the steamers had to steam full speed ahead in order to keep at their berths; and then the big sailing ships would drag their anchors and come drifting, drifting helplessly towards the shore, and have to fly before the gale if they could, or take their chance of stranding if the water were low, or being battered to bits against the cliffs if the tide were in. Many a time Beth stood among the fishermen watching, waiting, praying; her whole being centred on some hapless

crew, making for the harbour, but almost certain to be carried past. There was a chain down the middle of the pier in the winter to prevent people from being washed off, and she had stood clinging to this, and seen a great ship, with one ragged sail fluttering from a broken mast, carried before the wind right on to the pier-head, which it struck with a crash that displaced great blocks of granite as if they had been sponge-cakes; and when it struck, the doomed sailors on its decks sent up an awful shriek, to which those on the pier responded. Then there was a pause. Beth held her breath and heard nothing; but she saw the ship slip back, back—down amongst the mountainous waves, which sported with it once or twice, tossed it up, and sucked it down, tossed it again, then suddenly engulfed it. On the water afterwards there were ropes and spars, and dark things bobbing like corks, but she knew they were men in mortal agony; and she found herself shouting encouragement, telling them to hold on bravely, help was coming—the lifeboat! the lifeboat! She joined in the sob of excitement too, and the cheers of relief when it returned with its crew complete, and five poor wretches rescued—only five out of fifteen, but still——

"Blessed be God," said the old priest, "for those whom He has received into glory; and blessed be His holy name for those whom He deigns to let live."

Beth, standing beside him, heard the words, and wonderingly contrasted him with Parson Richardson, who remained shut up with his fourth wife in his fat living, making cent. per cent. out of his school, and heedless of the parish, while one so old and feeble as Canon Hunter stood by his people at all times, careless of himself, enduring hardship, braving danger, a man among men in spite of age and weakness, by reason of great love.

The pinch of poverty was severely felt again that winter in the Caldwell household. Beth, who was growing rapidly, became torpid from excessive self-denial; she tried to do without enough, to make it as if there were one mouth less to feed, and the privation told upon her; her energy flagged; when she went out, she found it difficult

to drag herself home, and the exuberant spirit of daring, which found expression in naughty enterprises, suddenly subsided. She poached on principle still for the benefit of the family; but the cool confidence born of a sort of inward certainty, which is a premonition of success, if it is not the power that compels it, was wanting; and it was as if her own doubts when she set the snares released the creatures from the fascination that should have lured them, so that she caught but little. The weather, too, was very severe; every one in the house, including Beth, was more or less ill from colds and coughs, and Aunt Victoria suffered especially; but none of them complained, not even to themselves; they just endured. They felt for each other, however.

"Mamma, don't you think Aunt Victoria should have a fire in her room?" Beth said one day.

"I do, my dear child," Mrs. Caldwell answered tartly; "but I can't afford the fuel, and she can't afford it either."

"I wish I had known that," said Beth. "I wouldn't have let her afford to take me away in the summer, spending all her money for nothing."

"What a grateful and gracious child you are!" her mother exclaimed.

Beth went frowning from the room.

The snow was several feet deep on the ground already, and was still falling heavily. Beth put on her things and stole out, her idea being to gather sticks to make a fire for the old lady; but after a weary trudge she was obliged to return empty-handed, wet, weary, and disheartened. The sticks were deep down under the snow; there were none to be seen.

"O God!" Beth prayed as she stumbled home, raising her pinched face to the sombre sky, "O God, save Aunt Victoria all suffering. Don't let her feel the cold, dear Lord, don't let her feel it."

Aunt Victoria herself was stoical. She came down to breakfast every morning, and

sat up stiffly at the end of the table away from the fire, her usual seat, eating little, and saying little, but listening with interest when the others spoke. Beth watched her, waited on her, and lay awake at night fretting because there was nothing more to be done for her.

One stormy night in particular, Beth could not sleep. There was a great gale blowing. It came in terrific gusts that shook the house, rattled the windows, and made the woodwork creak; then died away, and was followed by an interval of comparative quiet, broken by strange, mysterious sounds, to which Beth listened with strained attention, unable to account for them. One moment it was as if trailing garments swept down the narrow stairs, heavy woollen garments that made a soft sort of muffled sound, but there was no footfall, as of some one walking. Then there came stifled voices, whisperings, as of people talking eagerly yet cautiously. Then there were heavy steps, distinct yet slow, followed, after an interval, by the tramp of shuffling feet, like those of people carrying an awkward burden, and stumbling under it. But always, before Beth could think what the noise meant, the gust came again, racking her nerves, rattling the windows, making the doors creak; then dying away, to be followed by more mysterious sounds, but of another character.

"If only there were time—if only they would last long enough, I should know—I should understand," Beth thought, full of foreboding. She was not frightened, only greatly excited. Something was coming, something was going to happen, and these were the warnings, of that she was certain. It was as if she were sensitive to some atmosphere that surrounds an event and becomes perceptible to those whom it concerns if they are of the right temperament to receive the impression.

When the blast struck the house, blotting out the strange sounds which puzzled Beth, it released her strained attention, and had the effect of silence upon her after noise. In one of these pauses, she wondered if her mother and Bernadine, in the next bed, were asleep.

"Mamma," she said softly, "mamma!" There was no response. The gale dropped. Then Beth heard some one coughing hard.

"Mamma," she said again, "mamma!"

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Caldwell answered, awaking with a start.

"Aunt Victoria is coughing."

"Well, my dear child, I'm very sorry, but I can't help it; and it is hardly enough to wake me for," Mrs. Caldwell answered. She settled herself to sleep again, and the gale raged without; but Beth remained, resting on her elbow, not listening so much as straining her attention out into the darkness in an effort to perceive with her further faculty what was beyond the range of her limited senses.

"Mamma!" she exclaimed once more, "Aunt Victoria is moaning."

"Nonsense, Beth," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. "You couldn't possibly hear her if she were."

There was another little interval, then Beth jumped out of bed, crying as she did so, "Mamma, Aunt Victoria is calling me."

"Beth," Mrs. Caldwell said, rousing herself, and speaking sternly, "get into bed again directly, and lie down and go to sleep. It is the gale that is making you so nervous. Put the bed-clothes over your head, and then you won't hear it."

Beth had been huddling on the first thing she laid hold of in the dark, a thick woollen dressing-gown of her mother's, while she was speaking. "I shall go and see for myself," she replied.

"Oh, very well," said Mrs. Caldwell. "It wouldn't be you if you didn't upset the whole house for your fancies. When you have awakened your aunt, and spoilt her night for nothing, as you have spoilt mine, you'll be satisfied."

Beth opened the door, and stepped down into darkness, unrelieved by the slightest glimmer of light. She had to descend some steps and go up some others to get to

Aunt Victoria's room; and, after the first step, she felt as if she were floating in some new element, not moving of her own accord, but borne along confidently, without seeing and without feeling her way; and, as she went, she found that the long thick garment she wore was making the same soft muffled sound she had already heard, and also that there was no footstep audible.

She went into Aunt Victoria's room without knocking. It struck Beth as being intensely cold. A candle was burning on the little table beside the bed. The old lady was sitting, propped up uncomfortably with two thin pillows and a hassock. She was breathing with difficulty, and showed no surprise when she saw Beth enter. Her lips were moving, and Beth could see she was mumbling something, but she could distinguish no word until she went quite close, when she heard her say, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people," several times.

"Aunt Victoria, are you ill?" Beth said. The old lady looked at her with dim eyes, then stretched out her hand to her. Beth clasped it. It was deadly cold.

"I shall light the fire," Beth said with determination, "and I shall make you some tea to ease your cough. You won't mind if I take the candle a moment to go downstairs and get the things?"

Beth was practical enough now. The vision and the dream had passed, and she was wide awake again, using her eyes, and requiring a candle. Before she went downstairs she fetched extra pillows from the spare room, and propped Aunt Victoria up more comfortably. Then she set to work to light the fire, and soon had the kettle boiling. As the room began to warm, Aunt Victoria revived a little, and smiled on Beth for the first time with perfect recognition. Beth had made her some tea, and was giving it to her in spoonfuls.

"Is that nice?" she said.

"Delicious," the old lady answered.

The gale was all on the other side of the house, so that here in front it was

comparatively quiet; besides, the wind was dying away as the day approached. Beth put the teacup down when Aunt Victoria had taken the little she could, and sat on the side of the bed, holding the old lady's hand, and gazing at her intently; and, as she watched, she saw a strange change come over her. The darkness was fading from the sky and the light from Aunt Victoria's face. Beth had seen nothing like this before, and yet she had no doubt of what was coming. She had known it for days and days; she seemed to have known it always.

"Shall I go for mamma?" she asked at last.

The old lady shook her head.

Beth felt strangely benumbed. She thought of rousing Harriet to fetch the doctor, but she could not move. All feeling was suspended except the sensation of waiting. This lasted awhile, then a lump began to mount in her throat, and she had to gulp it down several times.

"Poor little girl," Aunt Victoria muttered, looking at her in her kindly way. Beth melted. "Oh, what shall I do?" she whimpered, "you have been so very good to me. You've taught me all the good I know, and I have done nothing for you—nothing but bother you. But I love you, Aunt Victoria; stay, do stay. I want to do everything you would like."

The old lady faintly pressed her hand, then made a last great effort to speak. "Bless you, Beth, my dear child," she managed to say with great difficulty. "Be comforted; you have helped me more than you know. In my sore need, I was not left comfortless. Neither will you be. May the Lord bless you, and keep you always. Amen."

Her head sank upon her breast. She seemed to settle down in the bed as if her weight had suddenly grown greater.

The sombre dawn had broken by this time, and by its light Beth saw the shadow of death come creeping over the delicate patient face.

"Aunt Victoria," she gasped breathlessly, like one in haste to deliver a message before it is too late, "shall I say 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates?' That was the first thing you taught me."

The old lady spoke no more, but Beth saw that she understood. The faint flicker of a smile, a pleased expression, came into her face and settled there. Beth, feeling the full solemnity of the moment, got down from the bed, and stood beside it, holding fast still to the kind old hand that would nevermore caress or help her, as if she could keep the dear one near her by clinging to her.

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?" she began, with a strange vibration in her voice. "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul to vanity; nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in." Beth's voice broke here, but with a great effort she began again fervently: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors——"

There she stopped, for at the words the dear good kind old lady, with a gentle sigh, as of relief, passed from the scene of her sufferings, out of this interval of time, into the measureless eternity.

CHAPTER XXIV

Aunt Victoria Bench died of failure of the heart, the medical man decided; and, he might have added, if the feelings of the family had not had to be considered, that the disease was accelerated by privation and cold.

For days after the event, Beth was not to be roused. She would sit in the tenantless room by the hour together, with the dear old aunt's great Bible on her knee open at some favourite passage, thinking of all that ought to have been done to save her, and

suffering the ache and rage of the helpless who would certainly have done all that could have been done had they had their way. Again and again her mother fetched her down to the dining-room where there was a fire, and tried to reason with her, or scolded her for her persistent grief when reasoning produced no effect.

"You must begin your lessons again, Beth," she said to her at last one morning in despair. "Giving you a holiday is doing you no good at all."

Beth went upstairs without a word, and brought down the old aunt's French books, and sat at the dining-table with one of them open before her; but the sight of it recalled the happy summer days in the bright little parlour looking out on the trees and flowers, and the dear old lady with her delicate face sitting at the end of the table placidly knitting while Beth prepared her lesson, and the tears welled up in her eyes once more, and fell on the yellow pages.

"Beth," said her mother emphatically, "you must not go on like this. Why are you so selfish? Don't I feel it too? Yet I control myself."

"You don't feel it as I do," Beth answered doggedly. "She was not so much to you when she was here, how can you miss her so much now she has gone?"

"But you have others to love," Mrs. Caldwell remonstrated. "She was not your nearest relation."

"No, but she was the dearest," Beth replied. "I may have others to love, but she was the one who loved me. She never said I had no affection for any one; she never said I was selfish and thought of nothing but my own interests. If she had to find fault with me, she did it so that she made me want to be better. She was never unkind, she was never unjust, and now I've lost her, I have no one."

"It is your own fault then," said Mrs. Caldwell, apt as usual to say the kind of thing with which fatuous parents torment the genius-child. "You are so determined not to be like other people that nobody can stand you."

"I am not determined to be unlike other people," Beth exclaimed, turning crimson

with rage and pain. "I want to be like everybody else, and I am like everybody else. And I am always ready to care for people too, if they will let me. It isn't my fault if they don't like me."

"It is your fault," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. "You have an unhappy knack of separating yourself from every one. Look at your Uncle James. He can hardly tolerate you."

"He's a fool, so that doesn't matter," said Beth, who always dealt summarily with Uncle James. "I can't tolerate him. But you can't say I separate myself from Aunt Grace Mary. She likes me, and she's kind; but she's silly, and when I'm with her any time it makes me yawn. Is that my fault? And did I separate myself from Kitty? Did I separate myself from papa? Do I separate myself from Count Bartahlinsky? Have I separated myself from Aunt Victoria?—and who else is there?"

"You gave Aunt Victoria plenty of trouble while she was here," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined drily.

"Well, that is true, at all events," Beth answered in a broken voice; and then she bowed her head on the old French grammar, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Mrs. Caldwell looked up from her work at her from time to time frowning, but she was too much ruffled by some of Beth's remarks to say anything consoling; and Beth, absorbed in her grief, lost all consciousness of everything outside herself.

At last, however, a kindly hand was laid on her head, and some one stroked her hair.

"That is the way she goes on, and I don't know what to do with her," Mrs. Caldwell was saying. "Come, Beth, rouse yourself," she added sharply.

Beth looked up, and found that it was Aunt Grace Mary who was stroking her hair.

"Poor little body!" said Aunt Grace Mary as if she were speaking to an infant, then added in a sprightly tone: "Come, dear! Come, dear! Wipe your eyes. Mamma will be here directly—my mamma—and Uncle James, and Mr. Watson."

"What are they coming for?" said Beth.

"Oh, your mamma knows," Aunt Grace Mary answered archly. "Mr. Watson was poor dear Aunt Victoria's lawyer, and he has brought her will, and is going to read it to us."

"Am I to be sent out of the room?" Beth asked.

"Of course," said Mrs. Caldwell. "It isn't a matter for you at all."

"Everything is a matter for me that concerned Aunt Victoria," Beth rejoined, "and if Lady Benyon is to be here, I shall stay."

Before Mrs. Caldwell could reply, Lady Benyon herself was ushered into the little room with great deference by Uncle James. They were followed by a little old gentleman dressed in black, with spectacles, and a pair of badly-fitting black kid gloves. He shook hands with Mrs. Caldwell, and then with Beth, whom he looked at over his spectacles shrewdly. Uncle James also shook hands, and kissed his sister. "This is a solemn occasion," he said, with emotion in his voice. Then he looked at Beth, and added, "Had she not better go?"

Beth sat down beside Aunt Grace Mary, with her mouth obstinately set; and Mrs. Caldwell, afraid of a scene, merely shrugged her shoulders helplessly. Meanwhile the lawyer was blowing his nose, wiping his spectacles, taking papers out of a pocket at the back of his frock-coat, and settling himself at the table.

"You would like this young lady to retire, I suppose," said Uncle James blandly.

"By no means," the little old gentleman answered, looking up at him over his spectacles, and then at Beth. "By no means; let the young lady remain."

Aunt Grace Mary put her arm round Beth. The lawyer broke the seal, unfolded the will, and remarked by way of preface: "The document is in the handwriting of the deceased. Ahem!"

Instantly into every face there came the expression that people wear in church. Mr. Watson proceeded to read; but in a dry, distinct, matter-of-fact tone, devoid of all

emotion. A lawyer reading a will aloud is sure of the interest of his audience, and, on this occasion, it was evident that each member of the little group listened with strained attention, but with very different feelings. What they gathered was that Miss Victoria Bench, spinster, being of sound mind, did will and bequeath everything of which she might die possessed to her beloved great-niece, Elizabeth Caldwell, commonly called Beth. Should Beth marry, the money was to be settled upon her for her exclusive use. The present income from the property, about fifty pounds a year, was to be devoted to the education of the said Elizabeth Caldwell, commonly called Beth.

Uncle James's jaw dropped during the reading. "But," he stammered when it was over, "if the investments recover?"

"Then Miss Elizabeth Caldwell, commonly called Beth, will have an income of between six and seven hundred a year, at least," said the lawyer, smiling.

Aunt Grace Mary clasped Beth close in a spasm of congratulation. Mrs. Caldwell burst into tears. Beth herself, with an unmoved countenance, perceived the disgust of Uncle James, her mother's emotion, and something like amusement in Lady Benyon's face; and she also perceived, but at a great distance as it were, that there was a dim prospect of some change for the better in her life.

"Poor little body!" said Aunt Grace Mary, caressing her.

"Rich little body!" said Lady Benyon. "Come and kiss me, Puck, and let me congratulate you."

"It is very nice for you, Beth, I am sure," said Mrs. Caldwell plaintively, holding out her hand to Beth as she passed. Beth accepted this also as a congratulation, and stooped and kissed her mother. Then the lawyer got up and shook hands with her, and thereupon Uncle James, feeling forced for decency's sake to do something, observed pointedly: "I suppose Miss Victoria Bench was quite sane when she made this bequest?"

"I should say that your supposition was correct," said the lawyer. "Miss Victoria Bench always seemed to me to be an eminently sane person."

There was no allusion whatever to Uncle James in Aunt Victoria's will. She thanked her niece, Caroline Caldwell, kindly for the shelter she had given her in her misfortune, and hoped that by providing for Beth she would relieve her mother's mind of all anxiety about the child, to whom, she proceeded to state, she left all she had in proof of the tender affection she felt for the child, and in return for the disinterested love and duty she had received from Beth. Aunt Victoria wished Beth to have her room when she was gone, in order that Beth might, as she grew up, have proper privacy in her life, with undisturbed leisure for study, reflection, and prayer. She added that she considered Beth a child of exceptional temperament, that peculiar care and kindness would be necessary to develop her character; but Miss Victoria hoped, prayed, and believed that, with the help of the excellent abilities with which she had been endowed, Beth would not only work out her own salvation eventually, but do something notable to the glory of God and for the good of mankind.

Beth's heart glowed when she heard this passage, and ever afterwards, when she recalled it, she felt strangely stimulated.

After the last solemn words of the will had been read, and the little scene of congratulation had been enacted, there was a pause in the proceedings, then Uncle James remarked in his happiest manner: "The importance which old ladies attach to their little bequests is only to be equalled by the strength of their sentiments, and the grandeur of the language in which they are expressed. One would think a principality was being bequeathed to a princess, instead of a few pounds to an obscure little girl, to judge by the tone of the whole document. Well, well!"

Beth looked at him, then drew down the corners of her mouth impertinently. "There is one thing I can console you with, Uncle James," she said. "You may be quite sure

that when I do come into my kingdom, I shall carefully conceal the fact that I am any relation of yours."

Later in the day, Beth found her mother sitting in her accustomed place by the dining-table, rocking herself sideways over her work, and with a worried expression of countenance, as if she were uneasy in her mind.

"Aren't you pleased, mamma," said Beth, "that I should be left the money?"

"Why, yes, of course, my dear child," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. Her tone to Beth had altered very much since the morning. Even in a few short hours Beth had been made to feel that mere money was making her a person of more importance than she had ever before been considered.

Her mother had stopped short, but Beth waited, and Mrs. Caldwell recommenced: "I am delighted on your account. Only, I was just thinking. The money is of no use to you just now, and it would have made all the difference to Jim. He ought to be making friends now who will last him his life and help him on in his career; but he can do nothing without an allowance, and I cannot make him one. There is no hurry for your education. In fact, I think it would be better for your health if you were not taught too much at present. But you shall have your aunt's room, Beth, to study in if you like. You may even sleep there, although I shall feel it when you leave mine. It will be breaking up the family. That remark in the will about proper privacy seems to me great nonsense, and you know I am not legally bound to give you a room to yourself. However, it was the dear old lady's last request to me, and that makes it sacred, so it shall be carried out to the letter. The room is yours, and I hope you will enjoy your privacy."

"Oh, I shall," Beth exclaimed with uncomplimentary fervour.

Mrs. Caldwell sighed and sewed on in silence for a little.

"The dear old lady left you the money because she believed you would do some good with it," she resumed. "'For the good of mankind.' Those are her own words.

And I do think that is rather your line, Beth; and what greater good can you do to begin with than help your brother on in the world? To spend the money on him instead of on yourself would really be a fine, unselfish thing to do."

Beth's great grey eyes dilated; the prospect was alluring. "I suppose there would not be enough for both of us?" she ventured tentatively—"enough for me to be taught some few things properly, you know—English, music, French."

"On fifty pounds a year, my dear child!" her mother exclaimed sorrowfully. "Fifty pounds goes no way at all." Beth sighed. "Besides," Mrs. Caldwell pursued, "I can teach you all these things. You've got beyond your childish tiresomeness now, and have only to ask, and then I will tell you all you don't know. It would be a pleasure and an occupation for me, and indeed, Beth, I have very little pleasure in life. The days are long and lonely." Beth looked up with sudden sympathy. "But if you will let me give you the lessons, and earn the money, I could send it to Jim, and that would comfort me greatly, and add also to your happiness, I should think."

It was not in Beth to resist such an appeal. She always forgot herself at the first symptom of sorrow or suffering in another, and never considered her own interests if she could help somebody else by sacrificing them.

"It would add to my happiness," she answered brightly. "And if you will just explain to me, mamma, when I don't understand things, I shall remember all right, and not be a bother to you. Will you be kind to me, and not scold me, and jeer at me, and make my life a burden to me? When you do that, I hate you."

Mrs. Caldwell stopped short with her needle up in the air, in the act of drawing the thread through her work. She was inexpressibly shocked.

"Hate your mother, Beth!" she gasped.

"I know it's abominable," said Beth, filled with compunction; "but I can't help it. It's the devil, I suppose. He gets hold of us both, and makes you torment me, and makes me—not like you for it."

Mrs. Caldwell quietly resumed her sewing. She was too much startled by this glimpse of herself from Beth's point of view to say another word on the subject; and a long silence ensued, during which she saw herself as a sadly misunderstood mother. She determined, however, to try and manage Beth on a new principle.

"I should like to help you to make the best of yourself, Beth," she burst out again abruptly; "and I think I can. You are a tall girl for your age, and are beginning to hold yourself well already. Your poor dear aunt was very particular to teach you that. And you have the complexion of the Bench family, if you will take care of it. You should wash your face in buttermilk at night after being out in the sun. I'll get you some, and I'll get you a parasol for the summer. Your hands are not nearly so coarse as they used to be, and they would really be quite nice if you attended to them properly. All your father's people had good hands and feet. I must see to your gloves and boots. I don't know what your waist is going to be, but you shall have some good stays. A fine shape goes a long way. With your prospects you really ought to make a good match, so do not slouch about any more as if you had no self-respect at all. You can really do a great deal to make yourself attractive in appearance. Your Uncle William Caldwell had a very ugly nose, but he pinched it, and pinched it every day to get it into shape, until at last he made it quite a good one."

Bernadine came into the room in time to hear this story, and was so impressed by it that she tried the same experiment on her own nose without asking if it were ugly or not, and pinched it and rubbed it so diligently that by the time it was formed she had thickened it and changed it from a good ordinary nose into something quite original.

This was the kind of thing that happened to ladies in the days when true womanliness consisted in knowing nothing accurately, and always taking advice. Efforts to improve themselves in some such way were common enough among marriageable maidens, and their mothers helped them to the best of their ability with equally happy hints. Because small feet were a beauty, therefore feet already in

perfect proportion must be squeezed to reduce their size till they were all deformed; and because slenderness was considered elegant, therefore naturally well-formed women must compress their bodies till they looked like cylinders or hour-glasses, and lace till their noses swelled and their hair fell out. Never having heard of proportion, all their ambition was to reduce themselves to something less than they were designed to be. Those were the days when women had "no nonsense about them, sir, I tell you," none of those new-fangled ideas about education and that.

It was a new notion to Beth that she could do anything to make herself attractive, and she took a solemn interest in it. She listened with absolute faith to all that her mother said on the subject, and determined to be high-principled and make the most of herself. When her mother talked to her in this genial friendly way, instead of carping at her or ignoring her, Beth's heart expanded and she was ready to do anything to please her. Lessons on the new method went on without friction. Beth never suspected that her mother was unequal to the task of educating her in any true sense of the word; her mother never suspected it, neither did anybody else; and Beth had it all her own way. If she were idle, her mother excused her; if she brought a lesson only half-learnt, her mother prompted her all through; if she asked questions, her mother answered them pleasantly; so that they got on very well together, and everybody was satisfied—especially Jim, who was benefiting by Aunt Victoria's bequest to the extent of being able to keep up with the best of his bar-loafing acquaintances.

CHAPTER XXV

When she did what Aunt Victoria approved, Beth felt that she was making Aunt Victoria happy. Her dead were never far from her, never beyond recall. She conquered her pride for Aunt Victoria's sake, and began to go out again with her mother for the morning walk that winter unasked; but Mrs. Caldwell seemed

indifferent to the attention. She let Beth walk beside her day after day, but remained absorbed in her own reflections, and made no effort to talk to Beth and take her out of herself; so that Beth very soon found the duty intolerably irksome. It irritated her, too, when she caught her mother smiling to herself, and on asking what was amusing her, Mrs. Caldwell replied, still smiling, "Never you mind." With Beth's temperament it was not possible that the sense of duty would long survive such snubs. Gradually she began to wander off by herself again, leaving her mother pacing up and down the particular sheltered terrace overlooking the sea on which she always walked at that hour, and Bernadine playing about the cliffs or the desolate shore.

The whole place was desolate and melancholy at that time of the year. The wind-swept streets were generally deserted, and the few people who ventured out looked cold and miserable in their winter wraps. When a gleam of sunshine enlivened the sky, the sailors would stand at the top of the steps that led down on to the pier, with their hands in their trousers-pockets, chewing tobacco, and straining their eyes out seaward as if they were watching for something special; and Beth would stand there among them, and look out too—out, far beyond the range of their mental vision, eastwards, to summer lands whence the swallows came, where the soft air was perfumed with flowers, and there was brightness and warmth and ease, and the sea itself, so full of complaint down below there, raged no more, neither lamented, but sang. And there Aunt Victoria would be, sitting somewhere out of doors under the trees, with good things, books and work and fruit and flowers, piled up on a little table beside her, and every wish of her heart gratified, looking serenely happy, and smiling and nodding and beckoning to Beth. But following fast upon the vision, Aunt Victoria would be beside her in the bitter wind, wearing her old brown dress with white spots that was far too thin, and making believe that she did not shiver; then they had returned from the morning walk, and Aunt Victoria was pausing a moment at the bottom of the stairs to look up, as if measuring her strength

and the distance, before she took hold of the bannister and began to mount wearily, but never once trusting herself to glance towards Bernadine and the bread, lest something should be seen in her face which she chose to conceal. From that vision Beth would fly down the steps to the sands, and escape it in a healthy race with the turgid waves that came cresting in and broke on the barren shore.

Then one day, suddenly, as it seemed, a bird sang. The winter was over, spring was upon the land again, and Beth looked up and smiled. The old pear-tree in the little garden at the back was a white wonder of blossom, and, in front, in the orchard opposite, the apple-trees blushed with a tinge of pink. Beth, seeing them one morning very early from her bed in Aunt Victoria's room, arose at once, rejoicing, and threw the window wide open. Beth might have used the same word to express the good and the beautiful, as the Greeks did, so inseparably were the two associated in her mind. At this stage of her development she felt very literally—

"The heavens are telling the glory of God, The wonder of His works displays the firmament."

"O Lord, how wondrous are Thy works," she chanted to herself softly, as she gazed, awe-stricken, at the loveliness of the rose-tinged foam on the fruit-trees, and her whole being was thrilled with gratitude for the beauty of earth. She took deep draughts of the sweet morning air, and, like the Indian devotee, she breathed a sacred word with every breath. But passive ecstasy was not enough for Beth. Her fine feelings strove for expression always in some fine act, and as she stood at the window she made good resolutions. Her life should be ordered to worthy purposes from morning till night. She would in future begin the day by getting up to greet the dawn in an ecstasy of devotion. Not a minute later than daybreak would do for her. All Beth's efforts aimed at an extreme.

She idled most of that day away in contemplation of her project, and she was as dilatory and troublesome as she could be, doing nothing she ought to have done,

because her mind was so full of all the things she was going to do. What she feared was that she would never be able to wake herself in time, and she went to bed at a preposterously early hour, and sat long in her night-dress, thinking how to manage it. At last it occurred to her that if she tied her great toe to the bed-post with a piece of string, it would give her a jerk when she moved, and so awake her.

The contrivance answered only too well. She could not sleep for a long time, and when at last she dropped off, she was almost immediately awakened by a pitiless jerk from the string. She had Aunt Victoria's old watch under her pillow, and lighted a match to see the time. It was only twelve. When would the day break? She turned, and tossed, and fidgeted. The string on her toe was very uncomfortable, but nothing would have induced her to be so weak as to take it off. One, two, three, she heard the church-clock strike, but it was still pitch dark. Then she dozed off again, but in a minute, as it seemed to her, she was re-aroused by the string. She gave a great weary sigh and opened her eyes. It was all grey daylight in the room.

Beth was out of bed as soon as she could get the string off her toe. The water was very cold, and she shivered and yawned and stretched over it, but washed herself with exaggerated conscientiousness all the same, then huddled on her clothes, and stood awhile, not knowing quite what to do next. She had slept with the window open, and now she drew up the blind. Under the leaden sky the apple-trees showed no tinge of colour, and it was as if white sheets had been spread out over them for the night. Beth thought of curl-papers and rooms all covered up from the dust when Harriet was sweeping, and felt no enthusiasm. She was on the west side of the house, and could not therefore see the sun rise; but she must see the sunrise—sunrise—sunrise. She had never seen the sunrise. The sea was east. It would rise over the sea. The sea at sunrise! The very thought of it took her breath away. She put on her things and slipped into the acting-room. Her mother took the front-door key up to her room with her when she went to bed at night, so that the only way out was by the acting-room window. Beth swung herself round the bar,

crept cautiously down the tiles to the pump, jumped to the ground, then ran up the entry, and let herself out by the back-gate into the street. There she was seized upon by a great feeling of freedom. She threw up her arms, filled her lungs with a deep breath, and ran. There was not a soul to be seen. The town was hers!

She made for a lonely spot on the cliff, where a stream fell in a cataract on to the sand, and there was a rustic seat with a lovely view of the bay. Beth dropped on to the seat out of breath and looked curiously about her. The tide was high. The water, smooth, sullen, swollen and weary, broke on the shore in waves so small that it seemed as if the sea, tired of its endless task, were doing dispiritedly as little as it dared, and murmuring at that. The curving cliffs on the left looked like white curtains, closely drawn. The low grey sky was unbroken by cloud or rift except low down on the horizon, where it had risen like a blind drawn up a little to admit the light. It was a melancholy prospect, and Beth shivered and sighed in sympathy. Then a sparrow cheeped somewhere behind her, and another bird in the hedge softly fluted a little roulade. Beth looked round to see what it was, and at that moment the light brightened as if it had been suddenly turned up. She looked at the sea again. The rift in the leaden sky had lengthened and widened, and the first pale primrose of the dawn showed beyond. A faint flush followed, and then it seemed as if the night sky slowly rolled itself up and was put away, leaving a floor of silver, deepening to lilac, for the first bright beam to disport itself upon. Then the sea smiled, and the weariness of it, back and forth, back and forth, passed into animation. Its smooth surface became diapered with light airs, and moved with a gentle roll. The sullen murmur rose to a morning song, and a boat with bare mast at anchor in the bay, the only one in sight, rocked to the tune. A great sea-bird sailed by, gazing down into the depths with piercing eyes, and a grey gull flew so close to the water, it seemed as if his wings must dip at every flap. The sky by this time was all a riot of colour, at which Beth gazed in admiration, but without rapture. Her intellect acknowledged its loveliness, but did not delight in it—heart and soul were untouched. The spirit of the

dawn refused to speak to her. She had exhausted herself in her effort to induce the intoxication of devotion which had come to her spontaneously the day before. The great spirit does not want martyrs. Joy in beauty and goodness comes of a pure and tranquil mind, not of a tortured body. The faces of the holy ones are calm and their souls serene.

A little farm-house stood back from the road just behind the seat where Beth was sitting, and a tall gaunt elderly man, with a beard on his chin, came out presently and stood staring grimly at the sunrise. Then he crossed the road deliberately, sat down at the other end of the seat, and stared at Beth.

"You're early out," he said at last.

Beth detected something hostile in the tone, and fixed her big fearless grey eyes upon him defiantly. "It's a free country," she said.

"Free or not," he answered drily, "it isn't fit fur no young gell to be out alone at sechun a time. Ye should be indoors gettin' the breakfast."

"Thank you," said Beth, "I've no need to get the breakfast."

"Well, it makes it all the worse," he rejoined; "fur if ye're by way o' bein' a lady, it not on'y means that ye're out wi' no one to tak' care of ye, but that ye've niver been taught to tak' care o' yerself. Lady!" he ejaculated. "Pride and patches! Tak' my advice, lady, go back to yer bed, get yer meed o' sleep, wak' up refreshed, and set to work."

He spat on the grass in a self-satisfied way when he had spoken, and contemplated the sunrise like a man who has done his duty and earned the right to repose.

Beth got up and walked home despondently. She climbed in at the acting-room window, and went to her own room. The sun was shining on the apple-blossom in the orchard opposite, and she looked for the charm of yesterday, but finding only the garish commonplace of fruit-trees in flower with the sun on them, she drew down the blind. Then she took off her hat and jacket, threw herself on her bed, and fell into

a heavy sleep, with her brow puckered and the corners of her mouth drooping discontentedly.

The next night she determined to take her meed of sleep, and did not tie the string to her toe. It had been a long lonely day, filled with great dissatisfaction and vague yearnings for companionship; but when she fell asleep she had a happy dream, so vivid that it seemed more real than anything she had seen in her morning ramble. It was eight o'clock in the evening, she dreamt, and there was some one waiting for her under the pear-tree in the garden. The night air was fresh and fragrant. The moonlight shone on the white blossoms overhead, which clustered so close that no ray penetrated to the ground beneath, so that there all was shadowy, but still she could see that there was some one standing in the shade, and she knew that he was waiting for her. She had never seen him before, yet she knew him well and hurried to meet him; and he took her in his arms and kissed her, and his kisses thrilled her with a thrill that remained with her for many a day.

She got up the moment she awoke, and looked about her in a kind of amaze, for everything she saw was transfigured. It was in herself, however, that the light burned which made the world so radiant. As the old apple-trees, warmed by the sun, suddenly blossomed into bridal beauty in the spring, so, in the silent night, between sundown and day-dawn, while she slept, yet another petal of her own manifold nature had unfolded, and in the glow of its loveliness there was nothing of commonplace aspect; for a new joy in life was hers which helped her to discover in all things a hitherto unsuspected charm.

Beth's little life had been full of childish irregularities, the little duties being continually slurred and neglected that the little pleasures might be indulged in the sooner. She was apt to regard bathing, hair-brushing, dressing, and lessons as mere hindrances to some of the particular great businesses of life which specially occupied her—verse-making, for instance, piano-playing, poaching, or praying,

whichever happened to be the predominant interest of the moment. But now, on a sudden, the care of her person became of extraordinary importance. All the hints, good and bad, she had had on the subject recurred to her, and she began to put them into practice systematically. She threw the clothes back from her bed to air it the moment she got up, that it might be fresh and sweet to sleep in. Her little bath had hitherto been used somewhat irregularly, but now she fetched hot and cold water for herself, and bathed every day. She brushed her hair glossy, and tightened her stays to make her waist small, and she was sorely dissatisfied because her boots did not pinch her feet. She began to take great care of her hands too, and would do no dusting without gloves on, or dirty work of any kind that was calculated to injure them. She used a parasol when she could, and if she got sunburnt bathing or boating, she washed her face in buttermilk at night, fetched from Fairholm regularly for the purpose. The minds and habits of the young are apt to form themselves in this way out of suggestions let fall by all kinds of people, the worst and most foolish as well as the wisest and best.

Beth longed that morning for something new and smart to wear. Her old black things looked so rusty in the spring sunshine, she could not satisfy herself with anything she had. All Aunt Victoria's possessions were hers, and she examined her boxes, looking for something to enliven her own sombre dress, and found some lace which she turned into a collar and cuffs and sewed on. When she saw herself in the glass with this becoming addition to her dress, her face brightened at the effect. She knew that Aunt Victoria would have been pleased to see her look like that—she was always pleased when Beth looked well; and now, when Beth recollected her sympathy, all the great fountain of love in her brimmed over, and streamed away in happy little waves, to break about the dear old aunt somewhere on the foreshore of eternity, and to add, perhaps, who knows how or what to her bliss.

When Beth went down to breakfast, she was very hungry, but there was only one little bloater, which must be left for mamma to divide with Bernadine. There was not

much butter either, so Beth took her toast nearly dry, and her thin coffee with very little milk and no sugar in it, also for economical reasons; but the coffee was hot, and she was happy. Her happiness bubbled up in bright little remarks, which brightened her mother too.

"Mamma," said Beth, taking advantage of her mood, "it's a poor heart that never rejoices. Let's have a holiday, you and I, to celebrate the summer."

"But the summer hasn't come," Mrs. Caldwell objected, smiling.

"But summer is coming, is coming," Beth chanted, "and I want to make a song about it."

"You make a song!" Bernadine exclaimed. "Why, you can't spell summer."

Beth made a face at her. "I know you want a holiday, mamma," she resumed. "Come, confess! I work you to death. And there's church to-day at eleven, and I want to go."

"Well, if you want to go to church," said Mrs. Caldwell, relieved.

Beth did not wait to hear the end of the sentence.

She went to the drawing-room first, and sat down at the little rosewood piano with a volume of Moore's "Lalla Rookh" open before her.

"From the mountain's warbling fount I come,"

she chanted, with her eyes fixed on the words, but she played as if she were reading notes. She wove all the poems she loved to music in this way, and played and sang them softly to herself by the hour together.

The Lenten service in the church at the end of the road was but poorly attended. There were not more than a dozen people present; but Beth, seated beside the door, enjoyed it. She was all fervour now, and every emotional exercise was a pleasure.

After the service she strolled down the quaintly irregular front street, which was all red brick houses with small window-panes, three to the width of the window, except

where an aspiring tradesman had introduced plate-glass and a vulgar disguise of stucco, which converted the warm-toned bricks into commonplace colourless greyness. It was on one side of this street that the principal shops were, and Beth stood for some time gazing at a print in a stationer's window—a lovely little composition of waves lapping in gently towards a sheltered nook on a sandy beach. Beth, wafted there instantly, heard the dreamy murmur and felt the delicious freshness of the sea, yet the picture did not satisfy her.

"I should want somebody," she broke out in herself. "I should want somebody—somebody to lay my head against. Ah, dear Lord, how I hate to be alone!"

Old Lady Benyon, at her post of observation in the big bow-window at the top of the street, saw Beth standing there, and speculated. "Gracious, how that child grows!" she exclaimed. "She'll be a woman directly."

As Beth went on down the street, she began to suffer from that dull irresolute feeling which comes of a want of purpose. She wanted a companion and she wanted an object. Presently she met a young man who looked at her intently as they approached each other, and as he looked his face brightened. Beth's pulse quickened pleasurably and her colour rose. Her steps became buoyant. She held up her head and glowed with animation, but was unaware of the source of this sudden happy stimulant, nor did she try to discover it. She was living her experiences then, by-and-by she would reflect upon them, then inevitably she would reproduce them, and all without intention. As the sun rises, as the birds build, so would she work when the right time came. Talent may manufacture to order, but works of genius are the outcome of an irresistible impulse, a craving to express something for its own sake and the pleasure of expressing it, with no thought of anything beyond. It is talent that thinks first of all of applause and profits, and only works to secure them—works for the result, for the end in view—never for love of the work.

Beth's heart had no satisfaction at home; she had no friend of her own sex to fill it as most girls have, and a nature like hers, rich in every healthy possibility, was bound to crave for love early. It was all very well for her mother and society as it is constituted to ignore the needs of nature; by Beth herself they would not be ignored. In most people, whether the senses or the intellect will have the upper-hand is very much a matter of early training.

Because she was a girl, Beth's intellect had been left to stagnate for want of proper occupation or to run riot in any vain pursuit she might happen upon by accident, while her senses were allowed to have their way, unrestrained by any but the vaguest principles. Thanks to her free roving outdoor habits, her life was healthy if it were not happy, and she promised to mature early. Youth and sex already began to hang out their signals—clear skin, slim figure, light step, white teeth, thick hair, bright eyes. She was approaching her blossoming time, the end of her wintry childhood, the beginning of a promising spring. It was natural and right that her pulses should quicken and her spirits rise when a young man met her with a friendly glance. Her whole being was suffused with the glory of love, and her mind held the vision; but it was of an abstract kind as yet, not inspired by man. It was in herself that the emotion arose, in happy exuberance, and bubbled over, expending itself in various forms of energy until it should find one object to concentrate itself upon. There comes a time to all healthy young people when Nature says: "Mate, my children, and be happy." If the impulse come prematurely, it is not the young people, but the old ones that are to blame; they should have seen to it that the intellect, which acts as a curb on the senses when properly trained and occupied, developed first. Beth was just at the age when the half-educated girl has nothing to distract her but her own emotions. Her religion, and the young men who are beginning to make eyes at her, interest her then about equally, and in much the same way; she owes to each a pleasurable sensation. If she can combine the two under one roof, as in church, they suffice and her happiness is complete. It cannot be said, however, that

the senses awoke before the intellect in Beth; but because of the irregularities of her training, the want of discipline and order, they took possession of her first.

Passing a shop-window, Beth caught a reflection of herself in the polished pane, and saw that her skirt hung badly: it dipped too much behind. She stopped to gauge the length, that she might alter it when she went in, and then she noticed the pretty light summer things displayed in the window, and ached to possess some. She was miserably conscious of her old ill-cut skirt, more especially of the invisible dirt on it, and she did so yearn for something new and sweet and clean. Her mother had a bill at that shop—should she—should she just go in and ask about prices? No, she could not in that horrid old frock; the shopman would not respect her. She had intended to go down to the sands and sit by the sea, and wait for things to come to her, by which she meant ideas; but the discomfort of mind set up by that glimpse of her uncouth clothes, and the horrible sense of their want of freshness, gained upon her, and drove her in hurriedly. Beth would have expressed the dainty refinement of her mind in her dress had she had the means; but it is difficult to be dainty on nothing a year.

The rest of the day she spent in her room sewing. She found that one of Aunt Victoria's summer silks would fit her with very little alteration, and set to work to make a Sunday frock of it. As she worked she thought of the dear old lady, and of the hours they had sat there together sewing, and of their teas and talks. She would not have known how to alter that dress but for Aunt Victoria; it made her both sad and glad to remember how much she owed her.

Later in the day, after dinner, when the sun had set and the darkness was beginning to gather, Beth became aware of a curious sensation. It was as if she were expecting something delightful to happen, and yet, at the same time, was all aching with anxiety. Then suddenly she remembered her dream. The old pear-tree was a pyramid of blossom. Should she go and see the white foam-flowers by moonlight? The moon had risen.

She stole out into the garden, anxious above everything to go alone. Her heart throbbed curiously; what did she expect? The young moon hung in an indigo sky, and there were some white stars. The air was fresh and fragrant as it had been in her dream, but there was less light. She had to peer into the shade beneath the pear-tree to see—to see what? If there were any one there? Of course there was no one there! How could there be? She did not trust herself closer, however, until she was quite sure that there was nothing to encounter but the trunk of the tree. Then she went bravely, and reclined on the see-saw board, looking up through the black branches to the clustering blossoms that shone so white on the topmost twigs in the moonlight. And presently she began to glow with a great feeling of exultation. It began in her chest, and spread, as from a centre, all over her. The details of her dream recurred to her, the close clasp, the tender kiss, and she thrilled again at the recollection.

But, for the present, the recollection was enough.

CHAPTER XXVI

On Sunday morning Beth went down to breakfast dressed in Aunt Victoria's light lavender silk, remodelled to suit her; and very becoming she had made it. But Mrs. Caldwell called it an absurd costume for a girl of her age, and said she looked ridiculously over-dressed; so Beth went back to her room disheartened, and reappeared at church-time, with drooping mouth, in the old black frock she usually wore on Sundays.

Vainly she tried to rouse herself to any fervour of worship during the first part of the service. She felt ill-dressed, uncomfortable, dissatisfied, and would have been glad to quarrel with anybody. Then suddenly, during the singing of a hymn, she ceased to be self-conscious. All the trouble left her, and was succeeded by that curious thrill of happy expectation which came to her continually at this time. She looked about her and saw friendly faces where before she had seen nothing but criticism and disdain

of her shabby clothes.

Those were the days of pew-letting. The nearer you sat to the pulpit, the higher the price of the pew, and the better your social position. Mrs. Caldwell was obliged to content herself with a cheap seat in one of the side aisles near the door, so the vicar had never called on her. He only called on a few front rows. His own pew was high in the chancel, where all the parish could gaze at his exhausted wife and her increasing family. His pupils used to sit in the pew opposite; but the bishop, having received complaints from the neglected parish, had lately interfered and stopped the school; and henceforth Mr. Richardson was only to be allowed to have one pupil. Mr. Richardson determined to make him profitable.

From where she sat Beth could see the vicar's pew in the chancel, and she had noticed a tall slender youth sitting at the far end, near the vestry door, but he did not interest her at first; now, however, she looked at him again, and wondered who he was, and presently she found that he was gazing at her intently. Then their eyes met, and it was as if a spark of fire had kindled a glow in her chest, high up near the throat, where the breath catches. She looked down at her book, but had no thought on the subject at all—she was all one sensation. Light had come to her, a wondrous flood of amber light, that blotted out the common congregation and all besides, but him and her. Yet she could hardly sit through the service, and the moment it was over she fled. Her great desire was to be alone, if that could be called solitude which contained all the satisfaction of the closest companionship. All the time that she was flying, however, she felt that she was being pursued, and there was the strangest excitement and delight in the sensation. But she never looked behind. She did not dare to.

She made for the cliffs on the Fairholm estate, and when she came to them her intention was to hide herself. There was a nook she knew, some distance on, a grassy space on the cliff side, not visible either from above or below. She climbed

down to it, and there ensconced herself. Beneath was a little cove sheltered from the north and south by the jutting cliffs, and floored with the firmest sand just then, for the tide was out. Beth was lying in the shadow of the cliff, but, beyond, the sun shone, the water sparkled, the sonorous sea-voice sounded from afar, while little laughing waves broke out into merry music all along the shore. Beth, lying on her face with her arms folded in front of her and her cheek resting on them, looked out, lithe, young, strong, bursting with exultation, but motionless as a manifestation of inanimate nature. That was a beautiful pause in her troublous day. Never mind if it only endured for an hour, there was certainty in it, a happy certainty. From the moment their eyes had met she was sure, she knew he would come.

The little waves rang out their laughing carillons, light grace notes to the deep solemn melody of earth and air and sea; and Beth, watching with dilated pupils and set countenance, listened intently. And presently, below, on her left, round the headland some one came striding. Beth's bright eyes flashed with a vivid interest, but she shrank back, flattening herself down on the rank grass, as though thereby she made herself the more invisible.

The young man stopped, took off his hat and wiped his forehead, glanced this way and that round the cove and out to sea, like one bewildered, who has expected to find something which is not there, and begins to look for it in the most unlikely places. Hesitating, disappointed, uncertain, he moved a little on in one direction, a little back in the other, then, drawn by a sudden impulse, that most familiar manifestation of the ruling force which disposes of us all, we know not how, he walked up the cove with swift, strong, buoyant steps, as if with a purpose, swinging his hat in his hand as he came, and threw himself full length on the smooth, hard, shining sand, and sighed a deep sigh of satisfaction, as though he knew himself within reach of what he sought. In certain states of ecstatic feeling a faculty is released which takes cognisance of things beyond the ken of our beclouded intellects, and although in the language of mind he did not know, it may be that from

the region of pure spirit there had come to him a subtle perception, not to be defined, which made it more desirable to be there on that spot alone than anywhere else in the world with no matter whom.

He was a young man of seventeen or eighteen, slenderly built, with well-shaped feet, and long, delicate, nervous hands. His face was shaved clean of the down of his adolescence, so that his somewhat sallow complexion looked smooth to effeminacy. His features were regular and refined, and his fine brown curly hair was a shade lighter in colour than his skin—which produced a noticeable effect. His pale china-blue eyes, too, showed the same peculiarity, which Beth, looking down on him through the fringe of long rank grass in front of her, remarked, but uncritically, for every inch of him was a joy to her.

She was passive. But the young man soon grew restless on his sandy couch. He changed his position a dozen times, then suddenly got on his knees, and heaped up a mound of sand, which, having patted it and pressed it down as hard as it would set, he began to model. Beth held her breath and became rigid with interest as she saw the shapeless mass gradually transformed into some semblance of a human figure, conventional as an Egyptian statue. When the young man had finished, he sat beside the figure for some time, looking fixedly out to sea. Then he turned to his work once more, and, after surveying it critically, he began to make alterations, trying to improve upon what he had done; but the result did not please him, and in a fit of exasperation he fell upon the figure and demolished it. This seemed such a wanton outrage to Beth that she uttered a low cry of remonstrance involuntarily, but the exclamation mingled with the murmur of wind and wave, and was lost in it. The young man looked disconcerted himself and ashamed, too, as a child does when it has broken something in a rage and repents; and presently he began to heap the mound once more. When it was done, he stretched himself on the sand and shut his eyes, and for a long time Beth lay still, looking down upon him.

All at once, however, the noise of the water became importunate. She had not been aware of it at all since the young man appeared, but now it came into her consciousness with the distinctness of a sudden and unexpected sound, and she looked in that direction. The last time she had noticed the tide it was far out; but now, where all had been sand beyond the sheltered cove, all was water. The silver line stretched from headland to headland, and was still advancing. Already there was no way of escape by the sands, and the cove itself would be a bay in a little while—a bay without a boat! If he did not wake and bestir himself, the callous waves would come and cover him. Should she call? She was shy of taking the initiative even to save his life, and hesitated a moment, and in that moment there came a crash. The treacherous clay cliff crumbled, and the great mass of it on which she was lying slid down bodily on to the shining sand. The young man started up, roused by the rumbling. Had he been a few feet nearer to the cliff he must have been buried alive. He and Beth stared at each other stupidly, neither realising what had happened for the first few minutes. He was the first to recover himself.

"Are you hurt?" he asked with concern, going forward to help her.

"I don't know," she answered, staggering to her feet. "No, I think not," she added. "I'm a little shaken. I'll sit down."

The sitting would have been a tumble had he not caught her in his arms and held her up. Beth felt deadly sick for an instant, then she found herself reclining on the sand, with the young man bending over her, looking anxiously into her face.

"You're faint," he said.

"Is that faint?" she answered. "What a ghastly sensation! But there is something I want to remember." She shut her eyes, then opened them, and looked up at him with a puzzled expression. "It's very odd, I can't remember," she complained.

The young man could not help her. He looked up at the cliff. "What were you doing up there?" he asked.

"What were you doing down there?" she rejoined.

"I followed you," he answered simply. "I saw you come this way, then I lost sight of you; but I thought you would be somewhere on the sands, because the cliffs are private property."

"The owner is an uncle of mine," said Beth. "I come when I like."

Then they looked into each other's faces shyly, and looked away again, smiling but confused.

"Why did you follow me?" said Beth. "You did not know me."

"No, but I wanted to," he answered readily. "Where were you?"

"Lying on a shelf where that scar is now, looking down on you."

"Then you saw me model that figure?"

"And the cliff fell," Beth put in irrelevantly to cover a blush. "It often falls. We're always having landslips here. And I think we'd better move away from it now," she added, rising. "People are killed sometimes."

"But tell me," he said, detaining her. "Didn't you know I was following you?"

Beth became embarrassed.

"You did," he persisted, "and you ran away. Why did you run away?"

"I couldn't help it," Beth confessed; then she uttered an exclamation. "Look! look! the tide! What shall we do?"

He turned and saw their danger for the first time.

"Our only way of escape is by the cliffs," Beth said, "unless a boat comes by."

"And the cliffs are perpendicular just here," he rejoined, after carefully surveying them.

They looked into each other's faces blankly.

"I can't swim—can you?" he asked.

Beth shook her head.

"What is to be done?" he exclaimed.

"There is nothing to be done, I think," she answered quietly. "We may see a boat, but hardly anybody ever comes along the cliffs. We might shout, though."

They did so until they were hoarse, but there was no response, and the tide came creeping up over the sand.

"How calm it is!" Beth observed.

He looked at her curiously. "I don't believe you're a bit afraid," he said. "I'm in a desperate funk."

"I don't believe we're going to be drowned, and I always know what's coming," she answered. Then after a little she asked him his name.

"Alfred," he answered; "and yours?"

"Beth—Beth Caldwell. Alfred!—I like Alfred."

"I like Beth. It's queer, but I like it all the better for that. It's like you."

"Do you think me queer?" Beth asked, prepared to resent the imputation.

"I think you uncommon," he replied.

Beth reflected for a little. "What is your full name?" she asked finally.

"Alfred Cayley Pounce," he replied. "My father gave me the name of Alfred that I might always remember I was A Cayley Pounce. But my ambition is to be The Cayley Pounce," he added with a nervous little laugh.

Beth compressed her lips, and looked at the rising tide. The next wave broke at their feet, and both involuntarily stepped back. Behind them was the mass of earth that had fallen from the cliff. It had descended in a solid wedge without scattering. Alfred climbed on to it, and helped Beth up. "We shall be a little higher here, at all events," he said.

Beth looked along the cliff; the high-water mark was still above their heads. "It's getting exciting, isn't it?" she observed. "But I don't feel nasty. Having you here makes—makes a difference, you know."

"If you have to die with me, how shall you feel?" he asked.

"I shall feel till my last gasp that I would much rather have lived with you," she answered emphatically.

A wavelet splashed up against the clay on which they were standing. He turned to the cliff and tore at it in a sort of exasperation, trying to scoop out footholes with his hands by which they might climb up; but the effort was futile, the soft shale crumbled as he scooped, and there was no hold to be had on it. His face had grown grey in the last few minutes, and his eyes were strained and anxious.

"I wonder how you feel," Beth said. "I think I resent the fate that threatens us more than I fear it. If my life must end now, it will be so unfinished."

He made no reply, and she stood looking out to sea thoughtfully. "It's Sunday," she observed at last. "There won't be many boats about to-day."

The water had begun to creep up on to their last refuge; it washed over her feet as she spoke, and she shrank back. Alfred put his arm round her protectingly.

"Do you still believe we shall not be drowned?" he said.

"Yes," she answered. "But, even if we were, it wouldn't be the end of us. We have been here in this world before, you and I, and we shall come again."

"What makes you think such queer things?" he asked.

"I don't think them," she answered. "I know them. The things I think are generally all wrong; but the things I know about—that come to me like this—are right. Only I can't command them. One comes to me now and again like a flash, as that one did down there just now when I said we should not be drowned; but if I put a question to myself, I can get no answer."

The water had crept up over their feet while they were speaking. It was coming in at a great rate, but there were no waves to splash them, only a sort of gentle heave and ripple that brought it on insensibly, so that it had lapped up to the cliff behind them before they suspected it. Beth shivered as it rose around her.

"It's a good thing I changed my dress," she said suddenly. "That summer silk would certainly have been spoilt."

Alfred held her tight, and looked down into her face, but said nothing.

"I'm thinking so many things," Beth broke out again. "I'm glad it's a still day for one thing, and not freezing cold. The cold would have numbed us, and we should have been swept off our feet if there had been any waves. I want to ask you so many things. Why did you make that figure on the sand?"

"I want to be a sculptor," he said; "but my people object, and they won't let me have the proper materials to model in, so I model in anything."

The water was almost up to Beth's waist. She had to turn and cling to him to keep her footing. She hid her face on his shoulder, and they stood so some time. The water rose above her waist. Alfred was head and shoulders taller than she was. He realised that she would be covered first.

"I must hold her up somehow," he muttered.

Beth raised her head. "Alfred," she began, "we're neither of us cowards, are we? You are hating to die, I can see, but you're not going to make an exhibition of yourself to the elements; and I'm hating it, too—I'm horribly anxious—and the cold makes me sob in my breath as the water comes up. It is like dying by inches from the feet up; but while my head is alive, I defy death to make me whimper."

"Do you despair, then?" he exclaimed, as if there had been some safeguard in her certainty.

"I have no knowledge at this moment," she answered. "I am in suspense. But that is

nothing. The things that have come to me like that on a sudden positively have always been true, however much I might doubt and question beforehand. I did know at that moment that we should not be drowned; but I don't know it now. My spirit can't grasp the idea, though, of being here in this comfortable body talking to you one moment, and the next being turned out of house and home into eternity alone."

"Not alone," he interrupted, clasping her closer. "I'll hold you tight through all eternity."

Beth looked up at him, and then they kissed each other frankly, and forgot their danger for a blissful interval.

They were keeping their foothold with difficulty now. The last heave of the tide came up to Beth's shoulder, and took her breath away. Had it not been for the support of the cliff behind them, they could not have kept their position many minutes. But the cliff itself was a danger, for the sea was eating into it, and might bring down another mass of it at any moment. The agony of death, the last struggle with the water, had begun.

"I hate it," Beth gasped, "but I'm not afraid."

The steady gentle heave of the sea was like the breathing of a placid sleeper. It rose round them once more, up, up, over Beth's head. They clung closer to each other and to the cliff, staggering and fighting for their foothold. Then it sank back from them, then slowly came again, rising in an irregular wavy line all along the face of the cliffs with a sobbing sound as if in its great heart it shrank from the cruel deed it was doing—rose and fell, rose and fell again.

Alfred's face was grey and distorted. He groaned aloud.

"Are you suffering?" Beth exclaimed. "Oh, I wish it was over."

She had really the more to suffer of the two, for every wave nearly covered her; but her nerve and physique were better than his, and her will was of iron. The only thing that disturbed her fortitude were the signs of distress from him.

Gently, gently the water came creeping up and up again. It had swelled so high the last time that Beth was all but gone; and now she held her breath, expecting for certain to be overwhelmed. But, after a pause, it went down once more, then rose again, and again subsided.

Alfred stood with shut eyes and clenched teeth, blindly resisting. Beth kept her wits about her.

"Alfred!" she cried on a sudden, "I was right! I was not deceived! Stand fast! The tide is on the turn."

He opened his eyes and stared about him in a bewildered way. His face was haggard and drawn from the strain, his strength all but exhausted; he did not seem to understand.

"Hold on!" Beth cried again. "You'll be a big sculptor yet. The tide has turned. It's going out, Alfred, it's going out. It washed an inch lower last time. Keep up! Keep up! O Lord, help me to hold him! help me to hold him! It's funny," she went on, changing with one of her sudden strange transitions from the part of actor to that of spectator, as it were. "It's funny we neither of us prayed. People in danger do, as a rule, they say in the books; but I never even thought of it."

The tide had seemed to come in galloping like a racehorse, but now it crawled out like a snail; and they were both so utterly worn, that when at last the water was shallow enough, they just sank down and sat in it, leaning against each other, and yearning for what seemed to them the most desirable thing on earth at that moment—a dry spot on which to stretch themselves out and go to sleep.

"I know now what exhaustion is," said Beth, with her head on Alfred's shoulder.

"Do you know, Beth," he rejoined with a wan smile, "you've been picking up information ever since you fell acquainted with me here. I can count a dozen new experiences you've mentioned already. If you go on like this always, you'll know everything in time."

"I hope so!" Beth muttered. "Fell acquainted with you, isn't bad; but I wonder if tumbled wouldn't have been better——"

She dozed off uncomfortably before she could finish the sentence. He had settled himself with his head against the uncertain cliff, which beetled above them ominously; but they were both beyond thinking or caring about it. Vaguely conscious of each other, and of the sea-voice that gradually grew distant and more distant as the water went out beyond the headland, leaving them stranded in the empty cove, they rested and slept uneasily, yet heavily enough to know little of the weary while they had to wait before they could make their escape.

For it was not until the sun had set and the moon hung high above the sea in a sombre sky, that at last they were able to go.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was dark night when Beth got back to the little house in Orchard Street. She had hoped to slip in unobserved, but her mother was looking out for her.

"Where have you been?" she demanded angrily.

Beth had come in prepared to tell the whole exciting story, but this reception irritated her, and she answered her mother in exactly the same tone: "I've been at Fairholm."

"What have you been doing there?" Mrs. Caldwell snapped.

"Getting myself into a mess, as any one might see who looked at me," Beth rejoined. "I must go and change."

"You can go to bed," said her mother.

"Thank you," said Beth, and went off straight away.

Mrs. Caldwell would have liked to have followed her, and given her a good beating, as in the old days, had she dared. Her harshness, however, had much the same effect

upon Beth that a beating used to have; it shut her up in herself, and deprived her of the power to take her mother into her confidence.

Harriet followed her to her room. "Whativer 'ave you been doin'?" she exclaimed. "You're draggled from top to toe, and your Sunday dress too!"

"I got caught by the tide," said Beth; "and I'm done."

"Just you get into bed, then," said Harriet; "and I'll fetch you up some tea when she goes out. She's off in a moment to Lady Benyon's."

"Bless you, Harriet!" Beth exclaimed. "I read in a book once that there is no crime but has some time been a virtue, and I am sure it will be a virtue to steal me some tea on this occasion, if it ever is."

"Oh, all's fair in love and war," Harriet answered cheerfully, as she helped Beth off with her boots; "and you and yer ma's at war again, I guess."

"Seems like it," Beth sighed. "But stay, though. No, you mustn't steal the tea. I promised Aunt Victoria. And that reminds me. There's some still left in her little canister. Here, take it and make it, and have some yourself as a reward for the trouble. Hot tea and toast, an you love me, Harriet, and to save my life. I've had nothing but salt water since breakfast."

When Beth went downstairs next morning, her mother scowled at her. "What did you mean by telling me you had been at Fairholm yesterday?" she asked.

"I meant to tell you where I had been," Beth answered impertinently.

"I saw your Aunt Grace Mary last night, and she told me she had not seen you."

"Well, Aunt Grace Mary is a good size," Beth rejoined, "but she doesn't cover the whole estate."

Mrs. Caldwell flushed angrily. "You're an ill-conditioned girl, and will come to a bad end, or I'm much mistaken," she exclaimed.

"With the help of my relations, it's likely," Beth retorted.

Her mother said no more until breakfast was over, and then she ordered her peremptorily to get out her lessons.

"Oh, lessons!" Beth grumbled. "What's the use of the kind of lessons I do? I'm none the better for knowing that Henry VIII. had six wives, nor the happier, nor the richer; and my wit and wisdom certainly don't increase, nor my manners improve, if you speak the truth."

Mrs. Caldwell changed countenance. If Beth rebelled against the home-teaching, what would happen about the money that Jim was enjoying? Upon reflection, her mother saw she was making a mistake.

"I think," she began in a conciliatory tone, "you are right perhaps. You had better not do any lessons this morning, for I am sure you cannot be well, Beth, or you would never speak to your mother in such a way."

"Well, I'm sorry, mamma," Beth rejoined in a mollified tone. "But you know I cannot stand these everlasting naggings and scoldings. They make me horrid. I'm pugnacious when I'm rubbed the wrong way; I can't help it."

"There, there, then; that will do," Mrs. Caldwell replied. "Run out and amuse yourself, or have a rest. You take too much exercise, and tire yourself to death; and then you are so cross there is no speaking to you. Go away, like a good child, and amuse yourself until you feel better."

Beth went back to her own room at once, only too glad to escape and be alone. She was not well. Every bone in her body ached, and her head was thumping so she had to lie down on her bed at last, and keep still for the rest of the day. But her mind was active the whole time, and it was a happy day. She expected nothing, yet she was pleasurably satisfied, perfectly content.

The next morning at eleven there was service in the church at the end of the road. Beth and her mother had been having the usual morning misery at lessons, and both were exhausted when the bell began to ring. Beth's countenance was set sullen, and

Mrs. Caldwell's showed suppressed irritation. The bell was a relief to them.

"Can I go to church?" Beth asked.

Her mother's first impulse was to say no, out of pure contrariness; but the chance of getting rid of Beth on any honourable pretext was too much of a temptation even for her to withstand. "Yes, if you like," she answered ungraciously, after a moment's hesitation; "and get some good out of it if you can," she added sarcastically.

Beth went with honest intention. There was a glow in her chest which added fervency to her devotions, and when Alfred entered from the vestry and took his seat in the chancel pew, happiness, tingling in every nerve, suffused her. His first glance was for her, and Beth knew it, but bent her head. Her soul did magnify the Lord, however, and her spirit did rejoice in God her Saviour, with unlimited love and trust. He had saved them, He would hear them. He would help them, He would make them both—both good and great—great after a pause, as being perhaps not a worthy aspiration.

She did not look at Alfred a second time, but she sat and stood and knelt, all conscious of him, and it seemed as if the service lasted but a moment.

Directly it was over, she fled, taking the narrow path by the side of the church to the fields; but before she was half way across the first field, she heard a quick step following her. Beth felt she must stop short—or run; she began to run.

"Beth! Beth! wait for me," he called.

Beth stopped, then turned to greet him shyly; but when he came close, and put his arm round her, she looked up smiling. They gazed into each other's eyes a moment, and then kissed awkwardly, like children.

"Were you any the worse for our adventure?" he asked. "I've been longing to know."

"I had a headache yesterday," said Beth. "How were you?"

"All stiff and aching," he replied, "or I should have been to ask after you."

"I'm glad you didn't come," Beth ejaculated.

"Why? I ought to know your people, you know. Why don't the Richardsons know them?"

"Because we're poor," Beth answered bluntly; "and Mr. Richardson neglects his poor parishioners."

"All the more reason that I should call," Alfred Cayley Pounce persisted. "You are people of good family like ourselves, and old Rich is a nobody."

"Yes," said Beth; "but my mother would not let me know you. She and I are always—always—we never agree, you know. I don't think we can help it; we certainly don't do it on purpose—at least I don't; but there's something in us that makes us jar about everything. I was going to tell her all about you on Sunday night; but when I got in I couldn't. She began by being angry because I was late, without waiting to know if I were to blame, and that—that shut me up, and I never told her; and now I don't think I could."

"But what objection can she have to me?" he asked loftily. "I really must make her acquaintance."

"Not through me, then," said Beth. "Do you know the Benyons?"

"No, I don't know anybody in the neighbourhood as yet. I'm here with old Rich to be crammed. My people are trying to force me into the bar or the church or something, because I want to be a sculptor."

"Don't be forced," said Beth with spirit. "Follow your own bent. I mean to follow mine."

"I didn't know girls had any bent," he answered dubiously.

There was a recoil in Beth. "How is it people never expect a girl to do anything?" she exclaimed, firing up.

"I don't see what a girl can do," he rejoined, "except marry and look after her

husband and children."

"That's all right at the proper time," Beth said. "But meanwhile, and if she doesn't marry, is she to do nothing?"

"Oh, there are always lots of little things a woman can do," he answered airily.

"But supposing little things don't satisfy her, and she has power to follow some big pursuit?"

"Oh, well, in that case," he began, somewhat superciliously. "But it's too rare to be taken into account—talent in women."

"How do you know?" Beth said. "Robbing women of the means to develop their talents doesn't prove they haven't any. The best horseman in the world could never have ridden if he hadn't had a horse. I certainly think a woman should see to the ordering of her household; but if she has it in her to do more why shouldn't she? I shall want to do more, I know. I shall want to be something; and I shall never believe that I cannot be that something until I have tried the experiment. If you have it in you to be a sculptor, be a sculptor. I certainly should, girl and all as I am. I couldn't help it."

"You're very valiant!" he said drily; "but you don't know what it is to have your whole family against you."

"Don't I?" said Beth, laughing. "I've known that all my life; but I've known something besides. I've known what it is to be myself. If you know yourself, and yourself is a sculptor, you're bound to be a sculptor in spite of your family."

He looked at her admiringly. "When you talk like that, I feel I could be anything or do anything that you like, I love you so," he ventured, flipping the grass with his stick to cover his boyish embarrassment. "I am thinking of you always, all day long."

"Isn't it strange!" Beth answered softly. "And only two days ago we had never met!"

"But now we shall never part," he said. "Only I don't want you to be anything, or to care to be anything, but just my wife."

The word wife came upon Beth with the shock of a sweet surprise. She had not realised that she would ever be asked to be any one's wife; that seemed something reserved for the honour of beings above her, beautiful beings in books; and the hot flush of joy that suffused her at the word rendered her oblivious to the condition attached. She looked up in the young man's face with eyes full of love and gratitude, her transparent skin bright with a delicate blush, and her lips just parted in a smile.

"You are sweet, Beth!" he exclaimed. "How sweet you are!"

For the next few weeks they saw each other every day, if it were only for a few minutes; but even when they contrived to spend long hours together it was not enough. Beth scarcely ate or slept at that time; the glow and spring and flood of feeling that coursed through her whole being sustained her.

"When we are married we shall always be together," Alfred would whisper when they had to separate; and then their eyes would dilate with joy at the heavenly prospect; each was covered the while with smiles and confusion neither of which they could control. They made each other no formal vows. It was all taken for granted between them. Now they were engaged; but when they were old enough, and had an income, they were to be married.

Alfred had given up the idea of making Mrs. Caldwell's acquaintance before it was absolutely necessary. For the present, it delighted them to think that their secret was all their own, and no one suspected it, except Dicksie, the vicar's hunchback son, whom Alfred had taken into his confidence. Dicksie was as old as Alfred, but his deformity had stunted his growth, and the young lovers, looking down into his pathetic face, were filled with compassion, and eagerly anxious to make atonement to him for his misfortune by sharing as much of their happiness with him as might be. They encouraged him to accompany them in their walks when he could, which

was a joy to him, for he was content to live upon the fringe of their romance unselfishly. When they separated, Beth and Alfred kissed each other frankly, and then Beth would stoop and kiss Dicksie also, in pure affection.

Neither of the three troubled themselves about other people in those days, and they never suspected that their own doings could be of consequence to anybody. They therefore remained serenely unaware of the fact that the whole place was talking about them, their own relations being the only people who did not know of the intimacy; and, worse still, everybody objected to it. All the forces of Nature combined, and the vast scheme of the universe itself had been ordered so as to unite those two young things; but, on the other hand, the whole machinery of civilisation was set in readiness to keep them apart. And the first intimation they had of this fact took them by surprise.

The whole happy summer had passed, and autumn was with them, mellow, warm, and still. The days were shorter then, and the young people delighted to slip out at dusk, and wander about the fields, all three together. A gate opened from the vicarage grounds into the field-path beside the church, and there Alfred and Dicksie waited till Beth appeared, and often waited in vain, for Beth could not always get out. Her mother told Lady Benyon that Beth was tiresome rather than naughty in those days. She seemed to have no idea of time. She would stay out so late that her mother became quite fidgety about her, not knowing what had become of her; and when Beth came in at last in a casual way, beaming blandly at every one, it was certainly provoking. Beth thought her mother unreasonable to object to her late rambles. She was not giving her any trouble; and she could not understand why her mother was not content to let her be happy in her own way.

Beth's lessons became more perfunctory than ever that summer. Mrs. Caldwell salved her own conscience on the subject by arguing that it is not wise to teach a girl too much when she is growing so fast, and Lady Benyon agreed. Lady Benyon had

no patience with people who over-educate girls—with boys it was different; but let a girl grow up strong and healthy, and get her married as soon as possible, was what she advised. Had any one asked what was to become of a girl brought up for that purpose solely, if no one were found to marry her, Lady Benyon would have disposed of the question with a shrug of the shoulders. She laid down the principle, and if it did not act, somebody must be to blame. The principle itself was good, she was sure of that. So Beth was kept without intellectual discipline to curb her senses at this critical period, and the consequence was that her energy took the form of sensuous rather than intellectual pursuits. Her time was devoted not to practising, but to playing; to poetry, and to dreamy musings. She wove words to music at the piano by the hour together, lolled about in languorous attitudes, was more painfully concerned than ever about her personal adornment, delighted in scents and in luxurious imaginings, and altogether fed her feelings to such excess, that if her moral nature were not actually weakened, it was certainly endangered.

Fortunately she had an admirable companion in Alfred. The boy is not naturally like a beast, unable to restrain his passions, a bit more than the girl. To men as to women the power to control themselves comes of the determination. There are cases of natural depravity, of course, but they are not peculiar to either sex; and as the girl may inherit the father's vices, so may the boy have his mother to thank for his virtues. Depravity is oftener acquired than inherited. As a rule, the girl's surroundings safeguard her from the acquisition; but when they do not, she becomes as bad as the boy. The boy, on the contrary, especially if he is sent to a public school, is systematically trained to be vicious. He learns the Latin grammar from his masters, and from the habitual conversation of the other boys, the books secretly circulated by them, and their traditional code of vice, he becomes familiarised with the most hoggish habits. He may escape the practical initiation by a miracle at the time; but it is from the mind familiar with ideas of vice that the vicious impulse eventually springs; and the seed of corruption once sown in it, bears fruit almost

inevitably.

Alfred had escaped this contamination by being kept at home at a day-school, and when Beth knew him he was as refined and high-minded as he was virile for his age, and as self-restrained as she was impetuous. She wanted to hurry on, and shape their lives; but he was content to let things come about. She lived in the future, he in the present; and he was teaching her to do the same, which was an excellent thing for her. Often when she was making plans he would check her by saying, "Aren't you satisfied? I can't imagine myself happier than I am at this moment."

One thing neither of them ever anticipated, and that was interference. They expected those happy days to last without interruption until the happier ones came, when they should be independent, and could do as they liked.

"When I am king, diddle, diddle, you shall be queen," Alfred used to sing to Beth; "and Dicksie shall be prime minister."

One night they were out in the fields together. Beth was sitting on a rail, with her arm round Dicksie's neck, as he stood on one side of her; Alfred being on the other, with his arm round her, supporting her. They were talking about flowers. Alfred was great on growing flowers. The vicar had given him a piece of the vicarage garden for his own, and he was going to build a little green-house to keep Beth well supplied with bouquets. They were deeply engrossed in the subject, and the night was exceedingly dark, so that they did not notice a sailor creep stealthily up the field behind them on the other side of the hedge, and crouch down near enough to hear all that they said. Certainly that sailor was never more at sea in his life than he was while he listened to their innocent prattle.

When at last Beth said it was time to go home, and they strolled away arm in arm, Alfred and Dicksie discovered that they were late, and Beth insisted on parting from them at the field-gate into the vicarage grounds instead of letting them see her safe into the street. When they left her, she hurried on down the path beside the church

alone, and she had not taken many steps before she was suddenly confronted by a tall dark man, who made as if he would not let her pass. She stopped startled, and then went straight up to him boldly and peered into his face.

"Is that you, Gard?" she exclaimed. "How dare you!"

"How dare you!" he rejoined impudently. "I've had my eye on you for some time. I saw you out there just now in the field. I was determined to know what you were up to. There's mighty little happens here that I don't know."

"Oh," said Beth, "so you're the town spy, are you? Well, you're not going to spy upon me, so I warn you, Mr. Gard. The next time I come here, I'll come armed, and if I catch you dogging me about again, I'll shoot you as dead as my father's pistols can do it. And as it is, you shall pay for this, I promise you. Just step aside now, you cowardly black devil, and let me pass. Do you think that it's milk I've got in my veins that you come out on a fool's errand to frighten me?"

Without a word the man stepped aside, and Beth walked on down the path with her head in the air, and deliberately, to let him see how little she feared him.

The next morning, directly after breakfast, she went down to the pier. Count Bartahlinsky's yacht was alongside, and Gard was on deck. He changed countenance when Beth appeared. She ran down the ladder.

"I want to see your master," she said.

"He can't see you, miss. He's given orders that he's not to be disturbed for no one whatsoever," Gard answered with excess of deference; "and it's as much as my billet is worth to go near him; he's very much occupied this morning."

"Don't tell lies," said Beth. "I'm going to see him."

She went forward to the skylight as she spoke, and called down, "Below there, Count Gustav!"

"Hello!" a voice replied. "Is that you, Beth? You know you're too big to be on the

yacht now without a chaperon."

"Rot!" said Beth.

"Don't be coarse, Beth," Count Gustav remonstrated from below in rather a precious tone. "You know how I dislike hoyden English."

"Well, then, nonsense! if that's any better," Beth rejoined. "You've got to see me—this once at all events, or there'll be a tragedy."

"Oh, in that case," was the resigned reply, "I'll come on deck."

Beth walked aft and waited for him, enthroned on the bulwark, with a coil of rope for her footstool.

When Count Gustav appeared, he looked at her quizzically. "What is the matter, Beth?" he asked. "What are you boiling with indignation about now?"

"About that man Gard," Beth replied. "What do you think he was doing last night? and not for the first time, by his own account. Spying!"

"Spying!" said Bartahlinsky. "Gard, come here."

Gard, who had been anxiously watching them from amidships, approached.

"Now, Beth, what do you mean?" said the Count.

"I mean that I was out sitting on a rail in the church-fields last night with Alfred Cayley Pounce and Dicksie Richardson talking, and this man came and listened; and then when I left them, he met me on the path beside the church, and spoke impudently to me, and would not let me pass. I know what you thought," she broke out, turning upon Gard. "You thought I was doing something that I was ashamed of, and you'd find it out, and have me in your power. But I'll have you know that I do nothing I'm ashamed of—nothing I should be ashamed to tell your master about, so you may save yourself the trouble of spying upon me, Black Gard, as they well call you."

Gard was about to say something, but Count Gustav stopped him peremptorily.

"You can go," he said. "I'll hear what you have to say later."

Then he sat down beside Beth, and talked to her long and earnestly. He advised her to give up her rambles with Alfred and Dicksie; but she assured him that that was impossible.

"Who else have I?" she asked pathetically. "And what am I to do with my days if they never come into them again?"

"You ought to have been sent to school, Beth, long ago, and I told your mother so," Count Gustav answered, frowning. "And, by Jove, I'll tell her again," he thought, "before it's too late."

The encounter with Gard added excitement to the charm of Beth's next meeting with the boys. It made them all feel rather important. They discussed it incessantly, speculating as to what the man's object could have been. Alfred said vulgar curiosity; but Beth suspected that there was more than that in the manœuvre; and when Dicksie suggested acutely that Gard had intended to blackmail them, she and Alfred both exclaimed that that was it!

They had gone about together all this time in the most open way; now they began to talk about caution and concealment, like the persecuted lovers of old romance, who had powerful enemies, and were obliged to manage their meetings so that they should not be suspected. They decided not to speak to each other in public, and, consequently, when they met in the street, they passed with such an elaborate parade of ignoring each other, and yet with such evident enjoyment of the position, that people began to wonder what on earth they were up to. Disguises would have delighted them; but the fashions of the day did not lend themselves much to disguise, unfortunately. There were no masks, no sombreros, no cloaks; and all they could think of was false whiskers for Alfred; but when he tried them, they altered him so effectually that Dicksie said he could not bear him, and Beth would not kiss him.

One evening after dinner, when Mrs. Caldwell was reading aloud to Beth and Bernadine, there came a thundering knock at the front door, which startled them all. The weather had been bad all day, and now the shutters were closed, the rain beat against them with a chilly, depressing effect, inexpressibly dreary. Instead of attending to the reading, Beth had been listening to the footsteps of people passing in the street, in the forlorn hope that among them she might distinguish Alfred's. When the knock came they thought it was a runaway, but Harriet opened the door all the same, and presently returned, smiling archly, and holding aloft a beautiful bouquet.

"What's that?" said Mrs. Caldwell. "Give it to me."

Beth's heart stood still.

There was a card attached to the flowers, and Mrs. Caldwell read aloud, "Miss Caldwell, with respectful compliments."

"Who brought this, Harriet?" she asked.

"No one, ma'am," Harriet replied. "It was 'itched on till the knocker."

"Very strange," Mrs. Caldwell muttered suspiciously. "Beth, do you know anything about it?"

"Is there no name on the card?" Beth asked diplomatically; and Mrs. Caldwell looked at the card instead of into Beth's face, and discovered nothing.

Raindrops sparkled on the flowers, their fragrance filled the room, and their colours and forms and freshness were a joy to behold. "How beautiful they are!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"May I have them, mamma?" Beth put in quickly.

"Well, yes, I suppose you may," Mrs. Caldwell decided; "although I must say I do not understand their being left in this way at all. Who could have sent you flowers?"

"There's the gardener at Fairholm," Beth ventured to suggest.

"Oh, ah, yes," said Mrs. Caldwell, handing the flowers to Beth without further demur. The gift appeared less lovely, somehow, when she began to associate it with the gardener's respectful compliments.

Beth took the flowers, and hid her burning face with them. This was her first bouquet, the most exquisite thing that had ever happened to her. She carried it off to her room, and put it in water; and when she went to bed she kept the candle burning that she might lie and look at it.

The following week a menagerie came to the place. Alfred and Dicksie went to it, and their description filled Beth with a wild desire to see the creatures, especially the chimpanzee. The boys were quite ready to take her, but how was it to be managed? The menagerie was only to be there that one night more, but it would be open late, and they would be allowed to go because animals are improving. Could she get out too? Beth considered intently.

"I can go to bed early," she said at last, "and get out by the acting-room window."

"But suppose you were missed?" Alfred deprecated.

"Then I should be found out," said Beth; "but you would not."

"How about being recognised in the menagerie, though?" said Dicksie. "You see there'll be lots of people, and it's all lighted up."

"I can disguise myself to look like an old woman," Beth rejoined, thinking of Aunt Victoria's auburn front and some of her old things.

"Oh no, Beth!" Alfred protested. "That would be worse than the whiskers."

"Can't you come as a boy?" said Dicksie.

"I believe I can," Beth exclaimed. "There's an old suit of Jim's somewhere that would be the very thing—one he grew out of. I believe it's about my size, and I think I know where it is. What a splendid idea, Dicksie! I can cut my hair off."

"Oh no! Your pretty hair!" Alfred exclaimed.

"Is it pretty?" said Beth, surprised and pleased.

"Is it pretty!" he ejaculated, lifting it with both hands, and bathing his face in it; "the brightest, brownest, curliest, softest, sweetest hair on earth! Turn it up under your cap. These little curls on your neck will look like short hair."

They were all so delighted with this romantic plan, that they danced about, and hugged each other promiscuously. But this last piece of cleverness was their undoing, for Beth was promptly recognised at the menagerie by some one with a sense of humour, who told Lady Benyon, who told Mrs. Caldwell.

Mrs. Caldwell came hurrying home from Lady Benyon's a few nights later with the queerest expression of countenance Beth had ever seen; it was something between laughing and crying.

"Beth," she began in an agitated manner, "I am told that you went with two of Mr. Richardson's sons to the menagerie on Tuesday night, dressed as a boy."

"One of his sons," said Beth, correcting her; "the other boy was his pupil."

"And you were walking about looking at the animals in that public place with your arm round the girl from the shoe-shop?"

Beth burst out laughing. "All the boys had their arms round girls," she explained. "I couldn't be singular."

Mrs. Caldwell dropped into a chair, and sat gazing at Beth as if she had never seen anything like her before, as indeed she never had.

"Who is this pupil of Mr. Richardson's?" she asked at last, "and how did you make his acquaintance?"

"His name is Alfred Cayley Pounce," Beth answered. "We were caught by the tide and nearly drowned together on the sands, and I've known him ever since."

"And do you mean to say that you have been meeting this young man in a clandestine manner—that you hadn't the proper pride to refuse to associate with him

unless he were known to your family and you could meet him as an equal?"

"He did wish to make your acquaintance, but I wouldn't let him," Beth said.

"Why?" Mrs. Caldwell asked in amazement.

"Oh, because I was afraid you would be horrid to him," Beth answered.

Mrs. Caldwell was thunderstruck. The whole affair had overwhelmed her as a calamity which could not be met by any ordinary means. Scolding was out of the question, for she was not able to utter another word, but just sat there with such a miserable face, she might have been the culprit herself, especially as she ended by bursting into tears.

Beth's heart smote her, and she watched her mother for some time, yearning to say something to comfort her.

"I don't think you need be so distressed, mamma," she ventured at last "What have I done, after all? I've committed no crime."

"You've done just about as bad a thing as you could do," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined. "You've made the whole place talk about you. You must have known you were doing wrong. But I think you can have no conscience at all."

"I think I have a conscience, only it doesn't always act," Beth answered disconsolately. "Very often, when I am doing a wrong thing, it doesn't accuse me; when it does, I stop and repent."

She was sitting beside the dining-table, balancing a pencil on her finger as she spoke.

"Look at you now, Beth," her mother ejaculated, "utterly callous!"

Beth sighed, and put the pencil down. She despaired of ever making her mother understand anything, and determined not to try again.

"Beth, I don't know what to do with you," Mrs. Caldwell recommenced after a long silence. "I've been warned again and again that I should have trouble with you, and

Heaven knows I have. You've done a monstrous thing, and, instead of being terrified when you're found out, you sit there coolly discussing it, as if you were a grown-up person. And then you're so queer. You ought to be a child, but you're not. Lady Benyon likes you; but even she says you're not a child, and never were. You say things no sane child would ever think of, and very few grown-up people. You are not like other people, there's no denying it."

Beth's eyes filled with tears. To be thought unlike other people was the one thing that made her quail.

"Well, mamma, what am I to do?" she said. "I hate to vex you, goodness knows; but I must be doing something. The days are long and dreary." She wiped her eyes. "When people warned you that you would have trouble with me, they always said unless you sent me to school."

Mrs. Caldwell rocked herself on her chair forlornly. "School would do you no good," she declared at last. "No, Beth, you are my cross, and I must bear it. If I forgive you again this time, will you be a better girl in future?"

"I don't believe it's my fault that I ever annoy you," Beth answered drily.

"Whose fault is it, then?" her mother demanded.

Beth shrugged her shoulders and began to balance the pencil on her fingers once more.

Mrs. Caldwell got up and stood looking at her for a little with a gathering expression of dislike on her face which it was not good to see; then she went towards the door.

"You are incorrigible," she ejaculated as she opened it, making the remark to cover her retreat.

Beth sighed heavily, then resolved herself into a Christian martyr, cruelly misjudged—an idea which she pursued with much satisfaction to herself for the rest of the day.

In consequence of that conversation with her mother, when the evening came her conscience accused her, and she made no attempt to go out. She was to meet Alfred and Dicksie on Saturday, their next half-holiday, and she would wait till then. That was Wednesday.

During the interval, however, a strange chill came over her feelings. The thought of Alfred was as incessant as ever, but it came without the glow of delight; something was wrong.

They were to meet on the rocks behind the far pier at low water on Saturday. Few people came to the far pier, and, when they did, it was seldom that they looked over; and they could not have seen much if they had, for the rocks were brown with seaweed, and dark figures wandering about on them became indistinguishable. Beth went long before the time. It was a beautiful still grey day, such as she loved, and she longed to be alone with the sea. The tide was going out, and she had a fancy for following it from rock to rock as it went. Some of the bigger rocks were flat-topped islands, separated from the last halting-place of the tide by narrow straits, across which she sprang; and on these she would lie her length, peering down into the clear depths on the farther side, where the healthy happy sea-creatures disported themselves, and seaweeds of wondrous colours waved in fantastic forms. The water lapped up and up and up the rocks, rising with a sobbing sound, and bringing fresh airs with it that fanned her face, and caused her to draw in her breath involuntarily, and inhale long deep draughts with delight. As the water went out, bright runnels were left where rivers had been, and miniature bays became sheltered coves, paved with polished pebbles or purple mussels, and every little sandy space was ribbed with solid waves where the busy lob-worms soon began to send up their ropy castings. Beyond the break of the water the silver sea sloped up to the horizon, and on it, rocking gently, far out, a few cobles were scattered, with rich red sails all set ready, waiting for a breeze. It was an exquisite scene, remote from all wail of human feeling, and strangely tranquillising. Gradually it gained upon Beth. Her bosom

heaved with the heaving water rhythmically, and she lost herself in contemplation of sea and sky scape. Before she had been many minutes prone upon the farthest rock, the vision and the dream were upon her. That other self of hers unfurled its wings, and she floated off, revelling in an ecstasy of gentle motion. Beyond the sea-line were palaces with terraced gardens, white palaces against which grass and trees showed glossy green; and there she wandered among the flowers, and waited. She was waiting for something that did not happen, for some one who did not come.

Suddenly she sat up on her rock. The sun was sinking behind her, the silver sea shone iridescent, the tide had turned. But where were the boys? She looked about her. Out on the sands beyond the rocks on her right, a man was wading in the water with a net, shrimping. Close at hand another was gathering mussels for bait, and a gentleman was walking towards her over the slippery rocks, balancing himself as though he found it difficult to keep his feet; but these were the only people in sight. The gentleman was a stranger. He wore a dark-blue suit, with a shirt of wonderful whiteness, and Beth could not help noticing how altogether well-dressed he was—too well-dressed for climbing on the rocks. She noticed his dress particularly, because well-dressed men were rare in Rainharbour. He was tall, with glossy black hair inclining to curl, slight whiskers and moustache, blue eyes, and a bright complexion. A woman with as much colour would have been accused of painting; in him it gave to some people the idea of superabundant health, to others it suggested a phthisical tendency. Beth looked at him as he approached as she looked at everybody and everything with interest—nothing escaped her; but he made no great impression upon her. She thought of him principally as a man with a watch; and when he was near enough she asked him what time it was. He told her, looking hard at her, and smiling pleasantly as he returned his watch to his pocket. She noticed that his teeth were good, but too far apart, a defect which struck her as unpleasant.

"Why, it is quite late!" she exclaimed, forgetting to thank him in her surprise.

"Are you all alone here?" he asked.

"I was waiting for some friends," she answered, "but they have not come. They must have been detained."

She began to walk back as she spoke, and the gentleman turned too perforce, for the tide was close upon them.

"Let me help you," he said, holding out his hand, which was noticeably white and well-shaped; "the rocks are rough and slippery."

"I can manage, thank you," Beth answered. "I am accustomed to them."

Beth involuntarily resolved herself into a young lady the moment she addressed this man, and spoke now with the self-possession of one accustomed to courtesies. Even at that age her soft cultivated voice and easy assurance of manner, and above all her laugh, which was not the silvery laugh of fiction, but the soundless laugh of good society, marked the class to which she belonged; and as he stumbled along beside her, her new acquaintance wondered how it happened that she was at once so well-bred and so shabbily dressed. He began to question her guardedly.

"Do you know Rainharbour well?" he asked.

"I live here," Beth answered.

"Then I suppose you know every one in the place," he pursued.

"Oh, no," she rejoined. "I know very few people, except my own, of course."

"Which is considered the principal family here?" he asked.

"The Benyon family is the biggest and the wickedest, I should think," she answered casually.

"But I meant the most important," he explained, smiling.

"I don't know," she said. "Uncle James Patten thinks that next to himself the Benyons are. He married one of them. He's an awful snob."

"And what is his position?"

"I don't know—he's a landowner; that's his estate over there," and she nodded towards Fairholm.

"Indeed! How far does it extend?"

"From the sea right up to the hills there, and a little way beyond."

They had left the rocks by this time, and were toiling up the steep road into the town. When they reached the top, Beth exclaimed abruptly, "I am late! I must fly!" and leaving her companion without further ceremony, turned down a side street and ran home.

When she got in, she wondered what had become of Alfred and Dicksie, and she was conscious of a curious sort of suspense, which, however, did not amount to anxiety. It was as if she were waiting and listening for something she expected to hear, which would explain in words what she held already inarticulate in some secret recess of her being—held in suspense and felt, but had not yet apprehended in the region of thought. There are people who collect and hold in themselves some knowledge of contemporary events as the air collects and holds moisture; it may be that we all do, but only one here and there becomes aware of the fact. As the impalpable moisture in the air changes to palpable rain so does this vague cognisance become a comprehensible revelation by being resolved into a shower of words on occasion by some process psychically analogous to the condensation of moisture in the air. It is a natural phenomenon known to babes like Beth, but ill-observed, and not at all explained, because man has gone such a little way beyond the bogey of the supernatural in psychical matters that he is still befogged, and makes up opinions on the subject like a divine when miracles are in question, instead of searching for information like an honest philosopher, whose glory it is, not to prove himself right, but to discover the truth.

Beth did not sleep much that night. She recalled the sigh and sob and freshness of the sea, and caught her breath again as if the cool water were still washing up and up

and up towards her. She saw the silver surface, too, stretching on to those shining palaces, where grass and tree showed vivid green against white walls, and flowers stood still on airless terraces, shedding strange perfumes. And she also saw her new acquaintance coming towards her, balancing himself on the slippery, wrack-grown rocks, in boots and things that were much too good for the purpose; but Alfred and Dicksie never appeared, and were not to be found of her imagination. They were nowhere.

She expected to see them in church next day—at least, so she assured herself, and then was surprised to find that there was no sort of certainty in herself behind the assurance, although they had always hitherto been in church. "Something is different, somehow," she thought, and the phrase became a kind of accompaniment to all her thoughts.

Dicksie was the first person she saw when she entered the church, but Alfred was not there, and he did not come. She went up the field-path after the service, and waited about for Dicksie. When Alfred was detained himself, Dicksie usually came to explain; but that day he did not appear, and they were neither of them at the evening service. Beth could not understand it, but she was more puzzled than perturbed.

She was reading French to her mother next morning by way of a lesson, when they both happened to look up and see Mrs. Richardson, the vicar's worn-out wife, passing the window. The next moment there was a knock at the door.

"Can she be coming here?" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed.

"What should she come here for?" Beth rejoined, her heart palpitating.

"Oh dear, oh dear! this is just what I expected!" Mrs. Caldwell declared. "And if only she had come last week, I should have known nothing about it."

"You don't know much as it is," Beth observed, without, however, seeing why that should make any difference.

The next moment the vicar's wife was ushered in with a wink by Harriet. Mrs. Caldwell and Beth both rose to receive her haughtily. She had entered with assurance, but that left her the moment she faced them, and she became exceedingly nervous. She was surprised at the ease and grace of these shabbily-dressed ladies, and the refinement of their surroundings—the design of the furniture, the colour of curtains and carpet, the china, the books, the pictures, all of which bespoke tastes and habits not common in the parish.

"I must apologise for this intrusion," she began nervously. "I have a most unpleasant task to perform. My husband requested me to come——"

"Why didn't he come himself?" Beth asked blandly. "Why does he make you do the disagreeable part of his duties?"

The vicar's wife raised her meek eyes and gazed at Beth. She had not anticipated this sort of reception from poor parishioners, and was completely nonplussed. She was startled, too, by Beth's last question, for she belonged to the days of brave unhonoured endurance, when women, meekly allowing themselves to be classed with children and idiots, exacted no respect, and received none—no woman, decent or otherwise, being safe from insult in the public streets; when they were expected to do difficult and dirty work for their husbands, such as canvassing at elections, without acknowledgment, their wit and capacity being traded upon without scruple to obtain from men the votes which they were not deemed wise and worthy enough to have themselves; the days when they gave all and received nothing in return, save doles of bread and contempt, varied by such caresses as a good dog gets when his master is in the mood. That was the day before woman began to question the wisdom and goodness of man, his justice and generosity, his right to make a virtue of wallowing when he chose to wallow, and his disinterestedness and discretion when he also arrogated to himself the power to order all things. Mrs. Richardson had no more thought of questioning the beauty of her husband's decisions than she had

thought of questioning the logic and mercy of her God, and this first flash of the new spirit of inquiry from Beth's bright wit came upon her with a shock at first—one of those shocks to the mind which is as the strength of wine to the exhausted body, that checks the breath a moment, then rouses and stimulates.

"May I sit down?" she gasped, then dropped into a chair. "He might have come himself, to be sure," she muttered. "I have more than enough to do that is disagreeable in my own womanly sphere without being required to meddle in parish matters."

Yet when her husband had said to her: "It is a very disagreeable business indeed this. I think I'll get you to go. You'll manage it with so much more tact than a man," the poor lady, unaccustomed to compliments, was gratified. Now, however, thanks to Beth, she had been nearer to making an acute observation than she had ever been in her life before; she all but perceived that the woman's sphere is never home exclusively when man can make use of her for his own purposes elsewhere. The sphere is the stable he ties her up in when he does not want her, and takes her from again to drag him out of a difficulty, or up to some distinction, just as it suits himself.

Mrs. Caldwell and Beth waited for Mrs. Richardson to commit herself, but gave her no further help.

"The truth is," she recommenced desperately, "we have lost an excellent pupil. His people have been informed that he was carrying on an intrigue with a girl in this place, and have taken him away at a moment's notice."

"And what has that to do with us?" Mrs. Caldwell asked politely.

"The girl is said to be your daughter."

"This is my eldest daughter at home," Mrs. Caldwell answered. "She is not yet fourteen."

"But she's a very big girl," Mrs. Richardson faltered.

"Who is this person, this pupil you allude to?" Mrs. Caldwell asked superciliously.

"He is the son of wealthy Nottingham people."

"Ah! lace manufacturers, I suppose," Mrs. Caldwell rejoined.

"Yes—s," Mrs. Richardson acknowledged with reluctance. She associated, as she was expected to do, with gentlemen who debauched themselves freely, but would have scorned the acquaintance of a shopman of saintly life.

"Then certainly not a proper acquaintance for my daughter," Mrs. Caldwell decided, with the manner of a county lady speaking to a person whom she knows to be nobody by birth. "Beth, will you be good enough to tell us what you know of this youth?"

"I was caught by the tide on the sands one day, and he was there, and helped me; and I always spoke to him afterwards. I thought I ought, for politeness' sake," Beth answered easily.

"May I ask how that strikes you?" Mrs. Caldwell, turning to Mrs. Richardson, requested to know, but did not wait for a reply. "It strikes me," she proceeded, "that your husband's parish must be in an appalling state of neglect and disorder when slander is so rife that he loses a good pupil because an act of common politeness, a service rendered by a youth on the one hand, and acknowledged by a young lady on the other, is described as an intrigue. But I still fail to see," she pursued haughtily, "why you should have come to spread this scandal here in my house."

"Oh," the little woman faltered, "I was to ask if there had been any—any presents. But," she added hastily, to save herself from the wrath which she saw gathering on Mrs. Caldwell's face, "I am sure there were not. I'm sure you would never bring a breach of promise case—I'm sure it has all been a dreadful mistake. If Mr. Richardson wants anything of this kind done in future, he must do it himself. I apologise."

She uttered the last word with a gasp.

"Let me show you out," said Beth, and the discomforted lady found herself ushered into the street without further ceremony.

When Beth returned she found her mother smiling blandly at the result of her diplomacy. It was probably the first effort of the kind the poor lady had ever made, and she was so elated by her success that she took Beth into her confidence, and forgave her outright in order to hob-nob with her on the subject.

"I think I fenced with her pretty well," she said several times. "A woman of her class, a country attorney's daughter or something of that kind, is no match for a woman of mine. I hope, Beth, this will be a lesson to you, and will teach you to appreciate the superior tact and discretion of the upper classes."

Beth could not find it in her heart to say a word to check her mother's jubilation; besides, she had played up to her, answering to expectation, as she was apt to do, with fatal versatility. But she did not feel that they had come out of the business well. It was as if their honesty had been bedraggled somehow, and she could not respect her mother for her triumph; on the contrary, she pitied her. That kind of diplomacy or tact, the means by which people who have had every advantage impose upon those who have had no advantages to speak of, did not appeal to Beth as pleasant, even at fourteen.

Mrs. Caldwell put her work away at once, and hurried off to describe the encounter to Lady Benyon.

"They had not heard of the menagerie affair, I suppose," the old lady observed, twinkling. "Thanks to yourself, I think you may consider Miss Beth is well out of that scrape. But take my advice. Get that girl married the first chance you have. I know girls, and she's one of the marrying kind. Once she's married, let her mutiny or do anything she likes. You'll be shut of the responsibility."

CHAPTER XXVIII

From that time forward it was as if Alfred had vanished into space. Whether he ever attempted to communicate with her, Beth could not tell; but she received no letter or message. She expected to hear from him through Dicksie, but it soon became apparent that Dicksie had deserted her. He came to none of their old haunts, and never looked her way in church or in the street when they met. She was ashamed to believe it of him at first, lest some defect in her own nature should have given rise to the horrid suspicion; but when she could no longer doubt it, she shrugged her shoulders as at something contemptible, and dismissed him from her mind. About Alfred she could not be sure. He might have sent letters and messages that never reached her, and therefore she would not blame him; but as the thought of him became an ache, she resolutely set it aside, so that, in a very short time, in that part of her consciousness where his image had been, there was a blank. Thus the whole incident ended like a light extinguished, as Beth acknowledged to herself at last. "It is curious, though," she thought, "but I certainly knew it in myself all along from the moment the change came, if only I could have got at the knowledge."

As a direct result of her separation from Alfred, Beth entered upon a bad phase. The simple satisfaction of her heart in his company had kept her sane and healthy. With such a will as hers, it had not been hard to cast him out of her anticipations; but with him, there went from her life that wholesome companionship of boy and girl which contains all the happiness necessary for their immaturity, and also stimulates their growth in every way by holding out the alluring prospect of the fulfilment of those hopes of their being towards which their youth should aspire from the first, insensibly, but without pause. Having once known this companionship, Beth did not thrive without it. She had no other interest in its place to take her out of herself, and the time hung heavy on her hands. With her temperament, however, more than a momentary pause was impossible. Her active mind, being bare of all expectation, soon began to sate itself upon vain imaginings. For the rational plans and pursuits she had been accustomed to make and to carry out with the boys, she had nothing to

substitute but dreams; and on these she lived, finding an idle distraction in them, until the habit grew disproportionate, and began to threaten the fine balance of her other faculties: her reason, her power of accurate observation and of assimilating every scrap of knowledge that came in her way. To fill up her empty days, she surrounded herself with a story, among the crowding incidents of which she lived, whatever she might be doing. She had a lover who frequented a wonderful dwelling on the other side of the headland that bounded Rainharbour bay on the north. He was rich, dark, handsome, a mysterious man, with horses and a yacht. She was his one thought, but they did not meet often because of their enemies. He was engaged upon some difficult and dangerous work for the good of mankind, and she had many a midnight ride to warn him to beware, and many a wild adventure in an open boat, going out in the dark for news. But there were happy times too, when they lived together in that handsome house hidden among the flowers behind the headland, and at night she always slept with her head on his shoulder. He had a confidential agent, a doctor, whom he sent to her with letters and messages, because it was not safe for him to appear in the public streets himself. This man was just like the one she had met on the rocks, and his clothes were always too good for the occasion. His name was Angus Ambrose Cleveland.

Just at this time, Charlotte Hardy, the daughter of a doctor who lived next door to the Benyon Dower House, fell in love with Beth, and began to make much of her. Beth had never had a girl companion before, and although she rather looked down on Charlotte, she enjoyed the novelty. They were about the same age, but Charlotte was smaller than Beth, less precocious, and better educated. She knew things accurately that Beth had only an idea of; but Beth could make more use of a hint than Charlotte could of the fullest information. Beth respected her knowledge, however, and suffered pangs of humiliation when she compared it to her own ignorance; and it was by way of having something to show of equal importance that she gradually fell into the habit of confiding her romance to Charlotte, who listened

in perfect good faith to the fascinating details which Beth poured forth from day to day. Beth did not at first intend to impose on her credulity; but when she found that Charlotte in her simplicity believed the whole story, she adapted her into it, and made her as much a part of it as Hector the hero, and Dr. Angus Ambrose Cleveland, the confidential agent on whom their safety depended. Charlotte was Beth's confidante now, a post which had hitherto been vacant; so the whole machinery of the romance was complete, and in excellent order.

"It's queer I never see the doctor about," Charlotte said one day, when they were out on the cliffs together.

Beth happened to look up at that moment and saw her acquaintance of the rocks coming towards them.

"Your curiosity will be gratified," she said, "for there he is."

"Where?" Charlotte demanded in an excited undertone.

"Approaching," Beth answered calmly.

"Will he speak?" Charlotte asked in a breathless whisper.

"He will doubtless make me a sign," Beth replied.

When he was near enough, the gentleman recognised Beth, and smiled as they passed each other.

"Oughtn't he to have taken off his hat?" Charlotte asked.

"He means no disrespect," Beth answered with dignity. "It is safer so. In fact, if you had not been my confidante, he would not have dared to make any sign at all."

"Oh, then he knows that I am your confidante!" Charlotte exclaimed, much gratified.

"Of course," said Beth. "I have to keep them informed of all that concerns me. I brought you here to-day on purpose. I shall doubtless have to ask you to take letters, and you could not deliver them if you did not know the doctor by sight. There is the yacht," she added, as a beautiful white-winged vessel swept round the headland into

the bay.

"O Beth! aren't you excited?" Charlotte cried.

"No," Beth answered quietly. "You see I am used to these things."

"Beth, what a strange creature you are," said Charlotte, with respect. "One can see that there's something extraordinary about you, but one can't tell what it is. You're not pretty—at least I don't think so. I asked papa what he thought, and he said you had your points, and a something beyond, which is irresistible. He couldn't explain it, though; but I know what he meant. I always feel it when you talk to me; and I believe I could die for you. There's Mrs. Warner Benyon out again," she broke off to observe. "Papa was called in to see her the other day. He isn't their doctor, but she was taken ill suddenly, so they sent for him because he was at hand; and he says her shoulders are like alabaster."

Beth pursed up her mouth at this, but made no answer. When she got home, however, she repeated the observation to her mother in order to ask her what alabaster was exactly. Mrs. Caldwell flushed indignantly at the story. "If Dr. Hardy speaks in that way of his patients to his family, he won't succeed in his profession," she declared. "A man who talks about his patients may be a clever doctor, but he's sure not to be a nice man—not high-minded, you know—and certainly not a wise one. Remember that, Beth, and take my advice: don't have anything to do with a 'talking doctor'"—a recommendation which Beth remembered afterwards, but only to note the futility of warnings.

Matters became very complicated in the story as it proceeded. It was all due to some Spanish imbroglio, Beth said. Hector ran extraordinary risks, and she was not too safe herself if things went wrong. There were implicating documents, and emissaries of the Jesuits were on the look-out.

One day, Charlotte's mother being away from home, Beth asked her mysteriously if she could conceal some one in her room at night unknown to her father.

"Easily," Charlotte answered. "He never comes up to my room."

"Then you must come and ask mamma to let me spend the day and night with you to-morrow," Beth said. "I shall have business which will keep me away all day, but I shall return at dusk, and then you must smuggle me up to your room. We shall be obliged to sit up all night. I don't know what is going to happen. Are the servants safe? If I should be betrayed——"

"Safe not to tell you are there," said Charlotte, "and that is all they will know. They won't tell on me. I never tell on them."

The next morning early, Charlotte arrived in Orchard Street with a face full of grave importance, and obtained Mrs. Caldwell's consent to take Beth back with her; but instead of having to go home to spend the day alone waiting for Beth, as she had expected, she was sent out some distance along the cliffs to a high hill, which she climbed by Beth's direction. She was to hide herself among the fir-trees at the top, and watch for a solitary rider on a big brown horse, who would pass on the road below between noon and sunset, if all went well, going towards the headland.

"I shall be that rider," Beth said solemnly. "And the moment you see me, take this blue missive, and place it on the Flat Rock, with a stone on it to keep it from blowing away; then go home. If I do not appear before sunset, here is a red missive to place on the Flat Rock instead of the blue one, which must then be destroyed by fire. If I return, I return; if not, never breathe a word of these things to a living soul as you value your life."

"I would rather die than divulge anything," Charlotte protested solemnly, and her choice of the word divulge seemed to add considerably to the dignity of the proceedings.

They separated with a casual nod, that people might not suspect them of anything important, and each proceeded to act her part in a delightful state of excitement; but what was thrilling earnest to Charlotte, calling for courage and endurance, was

merely an exhilarating play of the fancy put into practice to Beth.

By the time Charlotte arrived at the top of the hill, and had settled herself among the firs overlooking the road below, she was very tired. Beth had given her a bag, one of Aunt Victoria's many reticules, with orders not to open it before her watch began. The bag had been a burden to carry, but Charlotte was repaid for the trouble, for she found it full of good things to eat, and a bottle of cold coffee and cream to drink, with lumps of sugar and all complete. Beth had really displayed the most thoughtful kindness in packing that bag. The contents she had procured on a sudden impulse from a pastry-cook in the town, by promising to pay the next time she passed.

After having very much enjoyed a solid Melton Mowbray pie, a sausage in puff-pastry, a sponge-cake, a lemon cheesecake, and two crisp brandy snaps, and slowly sipped the coffee, Charlotte felt that this was the only life worth living, and formally vowed to dedicate herself for ever to the Secret Service of Humanity—Beth's name for these enterprises. She kept a careful eye on the road below all this time, and there ran through her head the while fragments of a ballad Beth had written, which added very much to the charm of the occasion.

"The fir-trees whisper overhead, Between the living and the dead, I watch the livelong day. I watch upon the mountain-side For one of courage true and tried, Who should ride by this way,"

it began. When she first heard that Beth had written that ballad, Charlotte was astonished. It was the only assertion of Beth's she had ever doubted; but Beth assured her that any one could write verses, and convinced her by "making some up" there and then on a subject which she got Charlotte to choose for her.

Many things passed on the road below—teams of waggons, drawn by beautiful big cart-horses with glossy coats, well cared for, tossing their headland rattling the polished brasses of their harness proudly, signs of successful farming and affluence; smart carriages with what Beth called "silly-fool ladies, good for nothing," in them;

a carrier's cart, pedestrians innumerable, and then—then, at last, a solitary big brown horse, ridden at a steady canter by a slender girl in a brown habit (worn by her mother in her youth, and borrowed from her wardrobe without permission for the occasion). The horse was a broken-down racer with some spirit left, which Beth had hired, as she had procured the provisions, on a promise to pay. In passing, she waved a white handkerchief carelessly, as if she were flicking flies from the horse, but without relenting her speed. This was the signal agreed upon. Charlotte, glowing with excitement, and greatly relieved, watched the adventurous rider out of sight; then trudged off bravely to the Flat Rock, miles away behind the far pier, where she loyally deposited the blue missive. The red one she destroyed by fire according to orders.

Beth had warned her that she would be tired to death when she got in, and had better snatch some repose in preparation for the night.

"But if I oversleep myself and am not on the look-out for you when you come, what will you do?" Charlotte objected.

"Leave that to me," said Beth.

And Charlotte did accordingly with perfect confidence.

When she awoke the room was dark, but there was a motionless figure sitting in the window, clearly silhouetted against the sky. Charlotte, who expected surprises, was pleasantly startled.

"Is all safe in the west, sister?" she said softly, raising herself on her elbow.

"Yes," was the reply, "but clouds are gathering in the north. Our hope is in the east. Let us pray for the sunrise. You left the letter?"

"Yes. As fast as I could fly I went."

"Ah! then it will be gone by this time!" Beth ejaculated with conviction. The Flat Rock was only uncovered at low water, and now the tide was high. "Can you get me

some food, little one, for I am famished?" she proceeded. "I have had nothing since the morning, and have ridden far, and have done much."

"Oh dear! oh dear!" said Charlotte. "And you got me such good things!"

"Ah! that was different," Beth rejoined.

Charlotte stole downstairs. Her father had been out seeing his patients all day, and had not troubled about her.

She returned with chicken and ham, cold apple-tart and cream, and a little jug of cider.

Poor Beth, accustomed to the most uninteresting food, and not enough of that, was so exhausted by her long fast and arduous labours, that she found it difficult to restrain her tears at the sight of such good things. She ate and drank with seemly self-restraint, however; it would have lowered her much in her own estimation if she had showed any sign of the voracity she felt.

Then the watch began. Having wrapped themselves up in their walking things to be ready for any emergency, they locked the door and opened the window softly. They were in a room at the top of the house, which, being next door to the Benyons, commanded the same extensive view down the front street and a bit of Rock Street and the back street, and up Orchard Street on the left to the church. They were watching for a sailor in a smart yachting suit, a man-of-war's man with bare feet, and a priest in a heavy black cloak. Beth, greatly refreshed and stimulated by her supper and the cider, fell into her most fascinating mood; and Charlotte listened enthralled to wonderful descriptions of places she had visited with Hector, sights she had seen, and events she had taken part in.

"But how is it you are not missed from home when you go away like that?" said Charlotte.

"How is it I am not missed to-night?" Beth answered. "When you are fully initiated into the Secret Service of Humanity you will find that things happen in a way you

would never suspect."

"I suppose it is all right and proper being so much alone with single gentlemen," Charlotte just ventured.

"All things are right and proper so long as you do nothing wrong," Beth answered sententiously.

Lights began to move from room to room in the houses about them, gigantic shadows of people appeared on white window blinds in fantastic poses, and there was much moving to and fro as they prepared for bed. Then one by one the lights went out, and in the little old-fashioned window-panes the dark brightness of the sky and the crystal stars alone were reflected. It was a fine clear night, the gas burnt brightly in the quiet streets, there was not a soul stirring.

"Isn't it exquisite?" said Beth, sniffing the sweet air. "I am glad I was born, if it is only for the sake of being alive at night."

After this they were silent. Then by degrees the desire for sleep became imperative, and they both suffered acutely in their efforts to resist it. Finally Charlotte was vanquished, and Beth made her lie down on the bed. As she dropped off she saw Beth sitting rigidly at the open window; when she awoke it was bright daylight, and Beth was still there in exactly the same attitude.

"Beth," she exclaimed, "you are superhuman!"

"Ah!" said Beth, with a mysterious smile, "when you have learnt to listen to the whispers of the night, and know what they signify as I do, you will not wonder. Marvellous things have been happening while you slept."

"O Beth!" said Charlotte reproachfully, "why didn't you wake me?"

"I was forbidden," Beth answered sadly. "But now watch for me. It is your turn, and I must sleep. A yachtsman or a man-of-war's man with bare feet, remember."

Beth curled herself up on the bed, and Charlotte, very weary and aching all over, but

sternly determined to do her duty, took her place in the window. She had her reward, however, and when Beth awoke she found her all on the alert, for she had seen the yachtsman. He came up the street and hung about a little, pretending to look at the shops, then walked away briskly, which showed Charlotte that the plot was thickening, and greatly excited her. Beth smiled and nodded as though well satisfied when she heard the news, but preserved an enigmatical silence.

Then Charlotte went downstairs and smuggled her up such a good breakfast—fried ham, boiled eggs, hot rolls with plenty of butter, and delicious coffee—that the famishing Beth was fain to exclaim with genuine enthusiasm—

"In spite of all the difficulty, danger, and privation we have to endure in the Secret Service of Humanity, Charlotte, is there anything to equal the delight of it?"

And Charlotte solemnly asseverated that there was not.

Much stimulated by her breakfast, Beth took leave of Charlotte. She must be alone, she said, she had much to think about. She went to the farther shore to be away from everybody. She wanted to hear what the little waves were saying to the sand as they rippled over it. It was another grey day, close and still, and the murmur of the calm sea threw her at once into a dreamy state, full of pleasurable excitement. She hid herself in a spot most soothing from its apparent remoteness, a sandy cove from which, because of the projecting cliffs on either hand, neither town nor coast could be seen, but only the sea and sky. Although the grey was uniform enough to make it impossible to tell where cloud met water on the horizon, it was not dull, but luminous with the sunshine it enfolded, and full of colour in fine gradations as Beth beheld it. She sat a long time on the warm dry sand, with her chin resting on her knees, and her hands clasped round them, not gazing with seeing eyes nor listening with open ears, but apprehending through her further faculty the great harmony of Nature of which she herself was one of the triumphant notes. At that moment she tasted life at its best and fullest—life all ease and grace and beauty, without regret or

longing—perfect life in that she wanted nothing more. But she rose at last, and, still gazing at the sea, slowly unclasped her waistbelt, and let it fall on the sand at her feet; then she took her hat off, her dress, her boots and stockings, everything, and stood, ivory-white, with bright brown wavy hair, against the lilac greyness under the tall dark cliffs. The little waves had called her, coming up closer and closer, and fascinating her, until, yielding to their allurements, she went in amongst them, and floated on them, or lay her length in the shallows, letting them ripple over her, and make merry about her, the gladdest girl alive, yet with the wrapt impassive face of a devotee whose ecstasy is apart from all that acts on mere flesh and makes expression. All through life Beth had her moments, and they were generally such as this, when her higher self was near upon release from its fetters, and she arose an interval towards oneness with the Eternal.

But on this occasion she was surprised in her happy solitude. A troop of what Mrs. Caldwell called "common girls" came suddenly round the cliff into her sheltered nook, with shouts of laughter, also bent on bathing. Beth plunged in deeper to cover herself the moment they appeared; but they did not expect her to have anything on, and her modesty was lost upon them.

"How's the water?" they shouted.

"Delicious," she answered, glad to find them friendly.

They undressed as they came along, and were very soon, all of them, playing about her, ducking and splashing each other, and Beth also, including her sociably in their game. And Beth, as was her wont, responded so cordially that she was very soon heading the manœuvres.

"We shall all be ill if we stay in any longer," she said at last. "I shall take one more dip and go and dress. Let's all take hands and dip in a row."

They did so, and then, still hand in hand, scampered up on to the beach.

"My!" one of them exclaimed, when they came to their clothes and had broken the

line,—"My! ain't she nice!"

Then all the other girls stood and stared at Beth, whose fine limbs and satin-smooth white skin, so different in colour and texture from their own, drew from them the most candid expressions of admiration.

Beth, covered with confusion, hurried on a garment all wet as she was, for she had no towel; and then, in order to distract their attention from her body, she began to display her mind.

"Eh, I have had a good time!" one of the girls exclaimed. "Let's come again often."

"Let us form a secret society," said Beth, "and I will be your leader, and we'll have a watchword and a sign; and when the water is right, I'll send the word round, and then we'll start out unobserved, and meet here, and bathe in secret."

"My! that would be fine!" the girls agreed.

"But that's not all," said Beth, standing with her chemise only half on, oblivious of everything now but her subject. "It would be much better than that. There would be much more in it. We could meet in the fields by moonlight, and I would drill you, and show you a great many things, all for the Secret Service of Humanity. You don't know what we're doing! We're going to make the world just like heaven, and everybody will be good and beautiful, and have enough of everything, and we shall all be happy, because nobody will care to be happy unless everybody else has been made so. But it will be very hard work to bring it about. The wicked people are doing all they can to prevent us, and the devil himself is fighting against us. We shall conquer, however; and those who are first in the fight will be first for the glory!"

The girls, some standing, some sitting, most of them with nothing on, remained motionless while she spoke, not understanding much, yet so moved by the power of her personality, that when she exclaimed, "Well, what do you say, girls? will you join?" they all exclaimed with enthusiasm, "We will! we will!"

And then they made haste to dress as if the millennium could be hurried here by the rate at which they put on their clothes. Beth then and there composed a terrible oath, binding them to secrecy and obedience, and swore them all in solemnly; then she chose one for her orderly, who was to take round the word on occasion; and they were all to meet again in the fields behind the church on Saturday at eight o'clock.

But in the meantime, not a word!

Beth made Charlotte captain of the band; and drills, bathing rites, and other mysteries were regularly conducted, the girls being bound together more securely by the fascination of Beth's discourses, and the continual interest she managed to inspire, than by any respect they had for an oath. Beth's interest in them extended to the smallest detail of their lives. She knew which would be absent from drill because it was washing-day, and which was weak for want of food; and she resumed her poaching habits—only on Uncle James Patten's estate, of course—and, having beguiled a gunsmith into letting her have an air-gun on credit, she managed to snare and shoot birds enough to relieve their necessities to an appreciable extent. She never let any one into the secret of those supplies, and the mystery added greatly to her credit with the girls.

That season some friends of the Benyons brought their boys to stay at Rainharbour for the holidays, and Beth varied her other pursuits by rambling about with them, Lady Benyon having seen to it that she made their acquaintance legitimately, for the old lady shrewdly suspected that Beth was already beginning to attract attention. From her post of observation in the window she had seen young men turn in the street and look back at the slender girl, in spite of her short petticoats, with more interest than many a maturer figure aroused; and she had heard that Beth Caldwell was already much discussed. Beth's brother Jim, when he came home that summer, also began to introduce her to his young men friends in the neighbourhood, so that very soon Beth had quite a little court about her on the pier when the band played.

She liked the boys, and the young men she found an absorbing study; but not one of them touched her heart. Her acquaintance with Alfred had made her fastidious. He had had sense enough to respect her, and his companionship had given her a fine foretaste of the love that is ennobling, the love that makes for high ideals of character and conduct, for fine purpose, spiritual power, and intellectual development, the one kind worth cultivating. In these more sophisticated youths she found nothing soul-sustaining. She philandered with some of them up to the point where comparisons become inevitable, and, so long as they met her in a spirit of frank camaraderie, it was agreeable enough; but when, with their commonplace minds, they presumed to be sentimental, they became intolerable. Still the glow was there in her breast often and often, and would be momentarily directed towards one and another; but the brightness of it only showed the defects in each; and so she remained in love with love alone, and the power of passion in her, thwarted, was transmuted into mental energy.

But Beth learnt a good deal from her young men that summer—learnt her own power, for one thing, when she found that she could twist the whole lot of them round her little finger if she chose. The thing about them that interested her most, however, was their point of view. She found one trait common to all of them when they talked to her, and that was a certain assumption of superiority which impressed her very much at first, so that she was prepared to accept their opinions as confidently as they gave them; and they always had one ready to give on no matter what subject. Beth, perceiving that this superiority was not innate, tried to discover how it was acquired that she might cultivate it. Gathering from their attitude towards her ignorance that this superiority rested somehow on a knowledge of the Latin grammar, she hunted up an old one of her brother's and opened it with awe, so much seemed to depend on it. Verbs and declensions came easily enough to her, however. The construction of the language was puzzling at the outset; but, with a little help, she soon discovered that even in that there was nothing occult. Any industrious,

persevering person could learn a language, she decided; and then she made more observations. She discovered that, in the estimation of men, feminine attributes are all inferior to masculine attributes. Any evidence of reasoning capacity in a woman they held to be abnormal, and they denied that women were ever logical. They had to allow that women's intuition was often accurate, but it was inferior, nevertheless, they maintained, to man's uncertain reason; and such qualities as were undeniable they managed to discount, as, for instance, in the matter of endurance. If women were long enduring, they said, it was not because their fortitude was greater, but because they were less sensitive to suffering, and so, in point of fact, suffered less than men would under the circumstances.

This persistent endeavour to exalt themselves by lowering women struck Beth as mean, and made her thoughtful. She began by respecting their masculine minds as much as they did themselves; but then came a doubt if they were any larger and more capable than the minds of women would be if they were properly trained and developed; and she began to dip into the books they prided themselves on having read, to see if they were past her comprehension. She studied Pope's translation of the Iliad and Odyssey indoors, and she also took the little volume out under her arm; but this was a pose, for she could not read out of doors, there were always so many other interests to occupy her attention—birds and beasts, men and women, trees and flowers, land and water; all much more entrancing than the Iliad or Odyssey. Long years afterwards she returned to these old-world works with keen appreciation, and wondered at her early self; but when she read them first, she took their meanings too literally, and soon wearied of warlike heroes, however great a number of their fellow-creatures they might slay at a time, and of chattel heroines, however beautiful, which was all that Homer conveyed to her; not did she find herself elated by her knowledge of their exploits. She noticed, however, that the acquisition of such knowledge imposed upon the boys, and gained her a reputation for cleverness which made the young university prigs think it worth their while to talk to her. They

had failed to discover her natural powers because there was no one to tell them she had any, and they only thought what they were told to think about people and things, and admired what they were told to admire. In this Beth differed from them widely, for she began by having tastes of her own. She did not believe that they enjoyed Homer a bit more than she did; but the right pose was to pretend that they did; so they posed and pretended, according to order, and Beth posed and pretended too, just to see what would come of it.

It was a young tutor in charge of a reading-party who helped Beth with the Latin grammar. He managed to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Caldwell, and came often to the house; and finally he began to teach Beth Latin at her own request, and with the consent of her mother. The lessons had not gone on very long, however, before he tried to insinuate into his teaching some of the kind of sophistries which another tutor had imposed by way of moral philosophy on Rousseau's Madame de Warens in her girlhood, to her undoing. This was all new to Beth, and she listened with great interest; but she failed utterly to see why not believing in a God should make it right and proper for her to embrace the tutor: so the lessons ended abruptly. Beth profited largely by the acquaintance, however,—not so much at the time, perhaps, as afterwards, when she was older, and had gained knowledge enough of men of various kinds to enable her to compare and reflect. It was her first introduction to the commonplace cleverness of the academic mind, the mere acquisitive faculty which lives on pillage, originates nothing itself, and, as a rule, fails to understand, let alone appreciate, originality in others. The young tutor's ambition was to be one of a shining literary clique of extraordinary cheapness which had just then begun to be formed. The taint of a flippant wit was common to all its members, and their assurance was unbounded. They undertook to extinguish anybody with a few fine phrases; and, in their conceited irreverence, they even attacked eternal principles, the sources of the best inspiration of all ages, and pronounced sentence upon them. Repute of a kind they gained, but it was by glib falsifications of all that is noble in

sentiment, thought, and action, all that is good and true. It was the contraction of her own heart, the chill and dulness that settled upon her when she was with this man, as compared to the glow and expansion, the release of her finer faculties, which she had always experienced when under the influence of Aunt Victoria's simple goodness, that first put Beth in the way of observing how inferior in force and charm mere intellect is to spiritual power, and how soon it bores, even when brilliant, if unaccompanied by other endowments, qualities of heart and soul, such as constancy, loyalty, truthfulness, and that scrupulous honesty of action which answers to what is expected as well as to what is known of us.

Beth played very diligently at learning during this experiment, but only played for a time. The mind in process of forming itself involuntarily rejects all that is unnecessary, and that kind of knowledge was not for her. It opened up no prospect of pleasure in itself. All she cared to know was what it felt like to have mastered it; and that she arrived at by resolving herself into a lady of great attainments, who talked altogether about things she had learnt, but had nothing in her mind besides. A mind with nothing else in it, in Beth's sense of the word, was to Beth what plainness is to beauty; so, while many of her contemporaries were stultifying themselves with Greek and Latin ingenuities, she pursued the cultivation of that in herself which is beyond our ordinary apprehension, that which is more potent than knowledge, more fertilising to the mind—that by which knowledge is converted from a fallow field into a fruitful garden. Altogether, apart from her special subject, she learnt only enough of anything to express herself; but it was extraordinary how aptly she utilised all that was necessary for her purpose, and how invariably she found what she wanted—if found be the right word; for it was rather as if information were flashed into her mind from some outside agency at critical times when she could not possibly have done without it.

One sad consequence of her separation from Alfred, and the strange things she did and dreamed for distraction in the unrest of her mind, was a change in her

constitution. Her first fine flush of health was over, the equability of her temper was disturbed, and she became subject to hysterical outbursts of garrulity, to fits of moody silence, to apparently causeless paroxysms of laughter or tears; and she was always anxious. She had real cause for anxiety, however, for, in her efforts to realise her romance to Charlotte's satisfaction, she had run up little bills all over the place. What would happen when they were presented, as they certainly would be sooner or later, she dared not think; but the dread of the moment preyed upon her mind to such an extent that, whenever she heard a knock at the door, she entreated God to grant that it might not be a bill. And even when there were no knocks, she went on entreating to be spared, and worked herself into such a chronic fever of worry that she was worn to a shadow, and developed a racking cough which gave her no peace.

Just at this time, too, the whole place began to be scandalised by her vagaries, her mysterious expeditions on the big brown horse, and her constant appearance in public with a coterie of young men about her. At a time when anything unconventional in a girl was clear evidence of vice to all the men and most of the women who knew of it, Beth's reputation was bound to suffer, and it became so bad at last that Dr. Hardy forbade Charlotte to associate with her. Charlotte told her with tears, and begged to be allowed to meet her in the Secret Service of Humanity as usual; but Beth refused. She said it was too dangerous just then, they must wait; the truth being that she was sick of the Secret Service of Humanity, of Charlotte, of everything and everybody that prevented her hearing when there was a knock at the door, and praying to the Lord that it might not be a bill.

The secret society was practically dissolved by this time, and very soon afterwards the catastrophe Beth had been dreading occurred, and wrought a great change in her life. It happened one day when she was not at home. Aunt Grace Mary was so alarmed by her cough and the delicacy of her appearance that she had braved Uncle James and carried her off to stay with her at Fairholm for a change. Once she was away from the sound of the knocks, Beth suffered less, and began to revive and be

herself again to the extent of taking Aunt Grace Mary into her confidence boldly.

"Beth, Beth, Beth!" said that poor good lady tenderly, "you naughty girl, how could you! Running in debt with nothing to pay; why, it isn't honest!"

"So I think," said Beth in cordial agreement, taking herself aside from her own acts, as it were, and considering them impartially. "Help me out of this scrape, Aunt Grace Mary, and I'll never get into such another."

"But how much do you owe, Beth dear?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Beth answered. "Pounds for Tom Briggs alone."

"Who's he?" was Aunt Grace Mary's horrified exclamation.

"Oh, only the horse—a dark bay with black points. I rode him a lot, and oh! it was nice! It was like poetry, like living it, you know, like being a poem one's self. And I'm glad I did it. If I should die for it, I couldn't regret it. And I shouldn't wonder if I did die, for I feel as if those knocks had fairly knocked me to bits."

"Nonsense, Beth, you silly child, don't talk like that," said Aunt Grace Mary. "What else do you owe?"

"Oh, then there's Mrs. Andrews, the confectioner's, bill."

"Confectioner's!" Aunt Grace Mary exclaimed. "O Beth! I never thought you were greedy."

"Well, I don't think I am," Beth answered temperately. "I've been very hungry, though. But I never touched any of those good things myself. I only got them for Charlotte when she had heavy work to do for the Secret Service of Humanity."

"The what?" Aunt Grace Mary demanded.

"The game we played. Then there's the hairdresser's bill, that must be pretty big. I had to get curls and plaits and combs and things, besides having my hair dressed for entertainments to which I was obliged to go——"

"Beth! are you mad?" Aunt Grace Mary interrupted. "You've never been to an

entertainment in your life."

"No," Beth answered casually, "but I've played at going to no end of a lot."

"Well, this is the most extraordinary game I ever heard of!"

"But it was such an exciting game," Beth pleaded with a sigh.

"But, my dear child, such a reckless, unprincipled game!"

"But you don't think of that at the time," Beth assured her. "It's all real and right then. We——"

But here the colloquy was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Caldwell in a state of distraction with the hairdresser's bill in her hand. Aunt Grace Mary made her sit down, and patted her shoulder soothingly. Uncle James was out. Beth, greatly relieved, looked on with interest. She knew that the worst was over.

"Never mind, Caroline," Aunt Grace Mary said cheerfully. "Beth has just been telling me all about it. Confession is good for the saints, you know, or the soul, or something; so that's cheering. She has been very naughty, very naughty indeed, but she is very sorry. She sincerely regrets. Hairdresser, did you say? Oh, give it to me! Now, do give it to me, there's a dear! And we won't have another word about it. Beth, you bad girl, be good, and say you repent."

"Say it!" Beth ejaculated, coughing. "Look at me, and you'll see it, Aunt Grace Mary. I've been repenting myself to pieces for months."

"Well, dear; well, dear," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined, beaming blandly, "that will do; that's enough, I'm sure. Mamma forgives you, so we'll have no more about it."

The hairdresser's bill was the only one Mrs. Caldwell ever heard of, for Aunt Grace Mary got the use of her pony carriage next day, by telling Uncle James her mamma had sent Caroline to say she particularly wished her to take Beth to see her. Uncle James, to whom any whim of Lady Benyon's was wisdom, ordered the carriage for them himself; and, as they drove off together, Aunt Grace Mary remarked to Beth, "I

think I managed that very cleverly; don't you?" Naturally estimable women are forced into habits of dissimulation by the unreason of the tyrant in authority in many families; and Aunt Grace Mary was one of the victims. She had been obliged to resort to these small deceits for so many years, that all she felt about them now was a sort of mild triumph when they were successful. "I mean to go and see mamma, you know, so it won't be any story," she added.

She went with Beth first, however, to the various shops where Beth owed money, and paid her debts; and Beth was so overcome by her generosity, and so anxious to prove her repentance, that she borrowed sixpence more from her, and went straightway to the hairdresser's, and had all her pretty hair cropped off close like a boy's, by way of atonement. When she appeared, Lady Benyon burst out laughing; but her mother was even more seriously annoyed than she had been by the hairdresser's bill. Beth's hair had added considerably to her market value in Mrs. Caldwell's estimation. She would not have put it so coarsely, but that was what her feeling on the subject amounted to.

"What is to be done with such a child?" she exclaimed in despair.

"Send her to school," Aunt Grace Mary gasped.

"She would be expelled in a month," Mrs. Caldwell averred.

"Possibly; but it would be worth the trial," Aunt Grace Mary rejoined in her breathless way.

"Yes," Lady Benyon agreed. "She has been at home far too long, running wild, and it's the only thing to be done. But let it be a strict school."

"How am I to afford it?" Mrs. Caldwell wailed, rocking herself on her chair.

"Well, there's the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters; you can get her in there for next to nothing, and it's strict enough," Lady Benyon suggested.

And finally, after the loss of some more precious time, and with much reluctance,

Mrs. Caldwell yielded to public opinion, and decided to deprive Jim of Beth's little income, and send Beth to school, some new enormities of Beth's having helped considerably to hasten her mother's decision.

CHAPTER XXIX

Mrs. Caldwell's married life had been one long sacrifice of herself, her health, her comfort, her every pleasure, to what she conceived to be right and dutiful. Duty and right were the only two words approaching to a religious significance that she was not ashamed to use; to her all the other words savoured of cant, and even these two she pronounced without emphasis or solemnity, lest the sense in which she used them might be mistaken for a piece of religiosity. Of the joy and gladness of religion the poor lady had no conception.

Nevertheless, as has already been said, Mrs. Caldwell was an admirable person, according to the light of her time. To us she appears to have been a good woman marred, first of all, by the narrow outlook, the ignorance and prejudices which were the result of the mental restrictions imposed upon her sex; secondly, by having no conception of her duty to herself; and finally, by those mistaken notions of her duty to others which were so long inflicted upon women, to be their own curse and the misfortune of all whom they were designed to benefit. She had sacrificed her health in her early married life to what she believed to be her duty as a wife, and so had left herself neither nerve nor strength enough for the never-ending tasks of the mistress of a household and mother of a family on a small income, the consequence of which was that shortness of temper and querulousness which spoilt her husband's life and made her own a burden to her. She was highly intelligent, but had carefully preserved her ignorance of life, because it was not considered womanly to have any practical knowledge of the world; and she had neglected the general cultivation of her mind partly because intellectual pursuits were a pleasure, and she did not feel

sufficiently self-denying if she allowed herself any but exceptional pleasures, but also because there was a good deal of her husband's work in the way of letters and official documents that she could do for him, and these left her no time for anything but the inevitable making and mending. Busy men take a sensible amount of rest and relaxation, of food and fresh air, and make good speed; but busy women look upon outdoor exercise as a luxury, talk about wasting time on meals, and toil on incessantly yet with ever-diminishing strength, because they take no time to recoup; therefore they recede rather than advance; all the extra effort but makes for leeway.

The consequence of Mrs. Caldwell's ridiculous education was that her judgment was no more developed in most respects than it had been in her girlhood, so that when she lost her husband and had to act for her children, she had nothing better to rely on for her guidance than time-honoured conventions, which she accepted with unquestioning faith in their efficacy, even when applied to emergencies such as were never known in the earlier ages of human evolution to which they belonged. She had starved herself and her daughters in mind and body in order to scrape together the wherewithal to send her sons out into the world, but she had let them go without making any attempt to help them to form sound principles, or to teach them rules of conduct such as should keep them clean-hearted and make them worthy members of society; so that all her privation had been worse than vain, it had been mischievous; for the boys, unaided by any scheme or comprehensive view of life, any knowledge of the meaning of it to show them what was worth aiming at, and also unprotected by positive principles, had drifted along the commonest course of self-seeking and self-indulgence, and were neither a comfort nor a credit to her. However, she was satisfied that she had done her best for them, and therefore, being of the days when the woman's sphere was home exclusively, and home meant, for the most part, the nursery and the kitchen, she sat inactive and suffered, as was the wont of old-world women, while her sons were sinning all the sins which she especially should have taught them to abhor; and, with regard to her girls, she was equally satisfied that she

had done the right thing by them under the circumstances. She could not have been made to comprehend that Beth, a girl, was the one member of the family who deserved a good chance, the only one for whom it would have repaid her to procure extra advantages; but having at last been convinced that there was nothing for it but to send Beth to school, she set to work to prepare her to the best of her ability. Her own clothes were in the last stage of shabbiness, but what money she had she spent on getting new ones for Beth, and that, too, in order that she might continue the allowance to Jim as long as possible. She made a mighty effort also to teach Beth all that was necessary for the entrance examination into the school, and sewed day and night to get the things ready—in all of which, be it said, Beth helped to the best of her ability, but without pride or pleasure, because she had been made to feel that she was robbing Jim, and that her mother was treating her better than she deserved, and the feeling depressed her, so that the much-longed-for chance, when it came, found her with less spirit than she had ever had to take advantage of it.

"Ah, Beth!" her mother said to her, seeing her so subdued, "I thought you would repent when it was too late. You won't find it so easy and delightful to have your own way as you suppose. When it comes to leaving home and going away among strangers who don't care a bit about you, you will not be very jubilant, I expect. You know what it is when Mildred leaves home, how she cries!"

"Summer showers, soft, warm, and refreshing," Beth snapped, irritated by the I-told-you-so tone of superiority, which, when her mother assumed it, always broke down her best resolutions, and threw her into a state of opposition. "Mildred the Satisfactory has the right thing ready for all occasions."

The result of this encounter was an elaborate pose. In dread of her mother's comments, should she betray the feeling expected of her, she set herself to maintain an unruffled calm of demeanour, whatever happened.

Autumn was tinting the woods when Beth packed up. The day before her departure

she paid a round of visits, not to people, but to places, which shows how much more real the life of her musings was to her at that time than the life of the world. She got up at daybreak and went and sat on the rustic seat at the edge of the cliff where the stream fell over on to the sand, and thought of the first sunrise she had ever seen, and of the puritan farmer who had come out and reprimanded her ruggedly for being there alone at that unseemly hour. Poor man! His little house behind her was shut up and deserted, the garden he had kept so trim was all bedraggled, neglect ruled ruin all over his small demesne, and he himself was where the worthy rest till their return. The thought, however, at that hour and in that heavenly solitude, where there was no sound but the sea-voice which filled every pause in an undertone with the great song of eternity it sings on always, did not sadden Beth, but, on the contrary, stimulated her with some singular vague perception of the meaning of it all. The dawn was breaking, and the spirit of the dawn all about her possessed and drew her till she revelled in an ecstasy of yearning towards its crowning glory—Rise, Great Sun! When she first sat down, the hollow of the sky was one dark dome, only relieved by a star or two; but the darkness parted more rapidly than her eyes could appreciate, and was succeeded, in the hollow it had held, by rolling clouds monotonously grey, which, in turn, ranged themselves in long low downs, irregularly ribbed, and all unbroken, but gradually drawing apart until at length they were gently riven, and the first triumphant tinge of topaz colour, pale pink, warm and clear, like the faint flush that shyly betrays some delicate emotion on a young cheek, touched the soft gradations of the greyness to warmth and brightness, then mounted up and up in shafts to the zenith, while behind it was breathed in the tenderest tinge of turquoise blue, which shaded to green, which shaded to primrose low down on the horizon, where all was shining silver. Then, as the grey, so was the colour riven, and rays of light shot up, crimson flashes of flame, which, while Beth held her breath, were fast followed from the sea by the sun, that rose enwrapt in their splendour, while the water below caught the fine flush, and heaved and heaved like a

breast expanding with delight into long deep sighs.

Beth cried aloud: "O Lord of Loveliness! how mighty are Thy manifestations!"

Later in the day she climbed to the top of the hill where Charlotte had kept her faithful watch for the dark-brown horse, and there, beneath the firs, she sat looking out, with large eyes straining far into the vague distance where Hector had been.

The ground was padded with pine-needles, briony berries shone in the hedgerows below, and hips and haws and rowans also rioted in red. Brambles were heavy with blue-black berries, and the bracken was battered and brown on the steep hill-side. Down in the road a team of four horses, dappled bays with black points and coats as glossy as satin, drawing a waggon of wheat, curved their necks and tossed their heads till the burnished brasses of their harness rang, and pacing with pride, as if they rejoiced to carry the harvest home. On the top of the wheat two women in coloured cotton frocks rested and sang—sang quite blithely.

Beth watched the waggon out of sight, then rose, and turning, faced the sea. As she descended the hill she left that dream behind her. Hector, like Sammy and Arthur, passed to the background of her recollections, where her lovers ceased from troubling, and the Secret Service of Humanity, superseded, was no more a living interest.

Beth went also to the farther sands to visit the spot where she had been surprised in the water by the girls, and had become the white priestess of their bathing rites, and taught that girls had a strength as great as the strength of boys, but different, if only they would do things. Mere mental and physical strength were what Beth was thinking of; she knew nothing of spiritual force, although she was using it herself at the time, and doing with it what all the boys in the diocese, taken together, could not have done. She had heard of works of the Spirit, and that she should pray to be imbued with it; but that she herself was pure spirit, only waiting to be released from her case of clay, had never been hinted to her.

The next day she travelled with her mother from the north to the south, and during the whole long journey there was no break in the unruffled calm of her demeanour. Her mother wondered at her, and was irritated, and fussed about the luggage, and fumed about trains she feared to miss; but Beth kept calm. She sat in her corner of the carriage looking out of the window, and the world was a varied landscape, to every beauty of which she was keenly alive, yet she gave no expression to her enthusiasm, nor to the discomfort she suffered from the August sun, which streamed in on her through the blindless window, burning her face for hours, nor to her hunger and fatigue; and when at last they came to the great house by the river, and her mother, having handed her over to Miss Clifford, the lady principal, said, somewhat tearfully, "Good-bye, Beth! I hope you will be happy here. But be a good girl." Beth answered, "Thank you. I shall try, mamma," and kissed her as coolly as if it were her usual good-night.

"We do not often have young ladies part from their mothers so placidly," Miss Clifford commented.

"I suppose not," Mrs. Caldwell said, sighing.

Beth felt that she was behaving horridly. There was a lump in her throat, and she would liked to have shown more feeling, but she could not. Now, when she would have laid aside the mask of calmness which she had voluntarily assumed, she found herself forced to wear it. Falsifications of our better selves are easily entered upon, but hard to shake off. They are evil things that lurk about us, ready but powerless to come till we call them; but, having been called, they hold us in their grip, and their power upon us to compel us becomes greater than ours upon them.

Mrs. Caldwell felt sore at heart when she had gone, and Beth was not less sore. Each had been a failure in her relation to the other. Mrs. Caldwell blamed Beth, and Beth, in her own mind, did not defend herself. She forbore to judge.

CHAPTER XXX

St. Catherine's Mansion, the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters, had not been built for the purpose, but bought, otherwise it would have been as ugly to look at as it was dreary to live in. As it was, however, the house was beautiful, and so also were the grounds about it, and the views of the river, the bridge with its many arches, and the grey town climbing up from it to the height above.

Beth was still standing at the top of the steps under the great portico, where her mother had left her, contemplating the river, which was the first that had flowed into her experience.

"Come, come, my dear, come in!" some one behind her exclaimed impatiently. "You're not allowed to stand there."

Beth turned and saw a thin, dry, middle-aged woman, with keen dark eyes and a sharp manner, standing in the doorway behind her, with a gentler-looking lady, who said, "It is a new girl, Miss Bey. I expect she is all bewildered."

"No, I am not at all bewildered, thank you," Beth answered in her easy way. As she spoke she saw two grown-up girls in the hall exchange glances and smile, and wondered what unusual thing she had done.

"Then you had better come at once," Miss Bey rejoined drily, "and let me see what you can do. Please to remember in future that the girls are not allowed to come to this door."

She led the way as she spoke, and Beth followed her across the hall, up a broad flight of steps opposite the entrance, down a wide corridor to the right, and then to the right again, into a narrow class-room, and through that again into another inner room.

"These are the fifth and sixth rooms," Miss Bey remarked,—"fifth and sixth classes."

They were furnished with long bare tables, forms, hard wooden chairs, a cupboard, and a set of pigeon-holes. Miss Bey sat down at the end of the table in the "sixth," with her back to the window, and made Beth sit on her left. There were some books, a large slate, a slate pencil, and damp sponge on the table.

"What arithmetic have you done?" Miss Bey began.

"I've scrambled through the first four rules," Beth answered.

"Set yourself a sum in each, and do it," Miss Bey said sharply, taking a piece of knitting from a bag she held on her arm, and beginning to knit in a determined manner, as if she were working against time.

Beth took up the slate and pencil, and began; but the sharp click-click of the needles worried her, and her brain was so busy studying Miss Bey she could not concentrate her mind upon the sums.

Miss Bey waited without a word, but Beth was conscious of her keen eyes fixed upon her from time to time, and knew what she meant.

"I'm hurrying all I can," she said at last.

"You'll have to hurry more than you can, then, in class," Miss Bey remarked, "if this is your ordinary rate of work."

When the sums were done, she took the slate and glanced over them. "They are every one wrong," she said; "but I see you know how to work them. Now clean the slate, and do some dictation."

She took up a book when Beth was ready, and began to read aloud from it. Beth became so interested in the subject that she forgot the dictation, and burst out at last, "Well, I never knew that before."

"You are doing dictation now," Miss Bey observed severely.

"All right, go on," Beth cheerfully rejoined.

Miss Bey did not go on, however, and on looking up to see what was the matter,

Beth found her gazing at her with bent brows.

"May I ask what your name is?" Miss Bey inquired.

"Beth Caldwell."

"Then allow me to inform you, Miss Beth Caldwell, that 'all right, go on,' is not the proper way to address the head-mistress of the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters."

"Thank you for telling me," Beth answered. "You see I don't know these things. I always say that to mamma."

"Have you ever been to school before?" Miss Bey asked.

"No," Beth answered.

"Oh!" Miss Bey ejaculated, with peculiar meaning. "Then you will have a great deal to learn."

"I suppose so," Beth rejoined. "But that's what I came for, you know—to learn. It's high time I began!"

She fixed her big eyes on the blank wall opposite, and there was a sorrowful expression in them. Miss Bey noted the expression, and nodded her head several times, but there was no relaxation of her peremptory manner when she spoke again.

"Go on, my dear," she said. "If I give as much time to the others as you are taking, I shall not get through the new girls to-night."

Beth finished her dictation.

"What a hand!" Miss Bey exclaimed. "Wherever did you learn to write like that?"

"I taught myself to write small on purpose," Beth replied. "You can get so much more on to the paper."

"You had better have taught yourself to spell, then," Miss Bey rejoined. "There are four mistakes in this one passage."

Beth balanced her pencil on her finger with an air of indifference. She was wondering how it was that the head-mistress of the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters used the word "wherever" as the vulgar do.

The examination concluded with some questions in history and geography, which Beth answered more or less incorrectly.

"I shall put you here in the sixth," Miss Bey informed her; "but rather for your size than for your acquirements. There is a delicate girl, much smaller than you are, in the first."

"Then I'd rather be myself, tall and strong, in the sixth," Beth rejoined. "If I don't catch her up, at all events I shall have more pleasure in life, and that's something."

Again Miss Bey gazed at her; but she was too much taken aback by Beth's readiness to correct her on the instant, although it was an unaccustomed and a monstrous thing for a girl to address a mistress in an easy conversational way, let alone differ from her.

She took Beth to the great class-room where the seventh and eighth worked, and the fifth and sixth joined them for recreation and preparation, and where also the Bible lessons were given by Miss Clifford to the whole school.

There were a good many girls of various ages in the room, who all looked up.

"This is a new girl," Miss Bey said, addressing them generally,—"Miss Beth Caldwell. Please to show her where to go and what to do."

She glanced round keenly as she spoke, then left the room; and at the same time a thin, sharp-looking little girl with short hair rose from the table at which she was sitting and went up to Beth.

"I'm head of the fifth," she said. "Has Bey been examining you? What class did she put you in?"

"The sixth," Beth said.

"I should have thought you'd have been in the third at least," the head of the fifth piped, "you're so big. Here are some sixth girls—Jessie Baker, Ina Formby, Rosa Bird."

The sixth girls were sitting at a round table, with their little desks before them, writing letters. One of them pulled out a chair for Beth. They had just returned from the holidays, and were in various stages of home-sickness—some of them crying, and the rest depressed; but they welcomed Beth kindly, as one of themselves, and inspected her with interest.

"You can write a private letter to-day, you know," Rosa Bird said to Beth.

"What is a private letter?" Beth asked.

"One to your mother, you know, that isn't read. You seal it up yourself. Public letters have to be sent in open to Miss Clifford. One week you write a public letter, and the next a private one. Hello! here's Amy Wynne!"

A dark girl of about eighteen had entered by a door at the farther end of the room, and was received with acclamation, being evidently popular. Beth, who was still in her mask of calm indifference, looked coldly on, but in herself she determined to be received like that some day.

Most of the girls in the room jumped up, and Amy Wynne kissed one after the other, and then shook hands with Beth.

"Are all my children back?" she asked.

"I don't know," Rosa Bird rejoined, glancing round. "They are not all here."

"That's one of the mothers," Rosa explained to Beth when Amy Wynne had gone again. "The first-class girls are mothers to us. You walk with your mother in the garden, and sit with her on half-holidays, and she's awfully good to you. I advise you to be one of Amy Wynne's children if you can." She was interrupted by the loud ringing of a bell in the hall. "That's for tea," Rosa added. "Come, and I'll show you

the way."

The big dining-room was downstairs in the basement, next the kitchen. Miss Clifford dined in the next room attended by her maids of honour (the two girls at the top of the first class for the time being) and the rest of the class except the girls at the bottom, who were degraded to the second-class table in the big dining-room. Here each two classes had a separate table, at either end of which a teacher sat on a Windsor chair. The girls had nothing but hard benches without backs to sit on. Miss Bey, the housekeeper Miss Winch, and the head music-mistress, irreverently called Old Tom by the girls, sat at a separate table, where, at dinner-time, they did all the carving, and snatched what little dinner they could get in the intervals, patiently and foolishly regardless of their own digestions. For tea there were great dishes of thick bread and butter on all the tables, which the girls began to hand round as soon as grace had been said. Each class had a big basin of brown sugar to put in the tea, which gave it a coarse flavour. The first cup was not so bad, but the second was nothing but hot water poured through the teapot. It was not etiquette to take more than two. When the girls were ready for a second, they put pieces of bread in their saucers that they might know their own again, and passed the cups up to the teacher who poured out tea. If any girl suspected that the cup returned to her was not her own, she would not touch the tea. When the meal was over, one of the girls took the sugar-basin, beat down the sugar in it flat and hard with the spoon, did a design on the top, and put it away.

"What's that for?" Beth asked.

"That's so that we shall know our own again," Rosa answered. "But it never lasts the proper time."

"What do you do when it's done?" said Beth.

"Do without," was the laconic rejoinder.

All the girls were talking at once.

"What a racket!" Beth exclaimed.

"It'll be quiet enough to-morrow," Rosa replied. "The first class talks at table in Miss Clifford's room, but we are not allowed to speak a word here, except to the teachers, nor in the bedrooms either, once work begins. Do you see that great fat old thing at the mistress's table? That's Old Tom, the head music-mistress. She is a greedy old cat! She likes eating! You can see it by the way she gloats over things, and she's quite put out if she doesn't get exactly what she wants. Fancy caring! It's just like a man; and that's why she's called Old Tom."

"Not that she's fastidious!" said Agnes Stewart, a tall slender girl with short crisp black hair and grey-green eyes, who was sitting opposite to Beth. "I believe she likes mutton."

"Oh, she's horrid enough for anything!" the girl next her exclaimed with an expression of disgust.

Some of the girls ate their thick bread and butter unconcernedly, others were choked with tears, and could not touch it. Most of the tearful ones were new girls, and the old ones were kind to them; the teachers, too, were sympathetic, and did their best to cheer them.

After tea they all returned to their class-rooms. Beth went and stood in one of the great windows looking out on to the grounds, the river, the old arched bridge, and the grey houses of the town climbing up the hill among the autumn-tinted trees. All the windows were shut, and she began to feel suffocated for want of fresh air, and bewildered by the clatter of voices. If only she could get out into the garden! The door at the end of the room, which led into the first and second, was open. She went through. But before she was half across the room, one of the elder girls exclaimed roughly, "Hello! what are you doing here?"

"It's a new girl, Inkie," another put in.

"Well, the sooner she learns she has no business here the better," Inkie rejoined.

Beth thought her exceedingly rude, and passed on into the vestibule unconcernedly.

"Well, that's cool cheek!" Inkie exclaimed.

"Hie—you—new girl! come back here directly, and go round the other way, just to teach you manners."

Beth turned back with flaming cheeks, looked at her hard a moment.

"That for your manners!" she said, snapping her fingers at her.

Amy Wynne rose from her seat and went up to Beth. "You must learn at once, Miss Caldwell," she said, "that you will not be allowed to speak to the elder girls like that."

"Then the elder girls had better learn at once," said Beth defiantly, "that they will not be allowed to speak to me as your Inkie-person did just now. You'll not teach me manners by being rude to me; and if any girl in the school is ever rude to me again, I'll box her ears. Now, I apologise for coming through your room, but you should keep the door shut."

When she had spoken, she returned to the big class-room deliberately, and crossed it to the other door. As she did so, she noticed that a strange hush had fallen upon the girls, and they were all looking at her curiously. She went into the hall, and was passing the vestibule door, when Miss Bey, who was sitting just inside knitting, stopped her.

"Where are you going, Miss Caldwell?" she asked in her sharp way.

"Upstairs," Beth answered.

"You speak shortly, Miss Caldwell. It would have been more polite to have mentioned my name."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bey," Beth rejoined.

Miss Bey bowed with a severe smile in acknowledgment of the apology. "What do you want upstairs?" she asked.

"To be alone," Beth answered. "I can't stand the noise."

"You must stand the noise," said Miss Bey. "Girls are not allowed to go upstairs without some very good reason; and they must always ask permission—politely—from the teacher on duty. I am the teacher on duty at this moment. If you had gone upstairs without permission, I should have given you a bad mark."

Beth looked longingly at the hall door, which had glass panels in the upper part, through which she could see the river and the trees. "What a prison this is!" she exclaimed.

Miss Bey had had great experience of girls, and her sharp manner, which was mainly acquired in the effort to maintain discipline, somewhat belied her kindly nature.

"You can bring a chair from the hall, and sit here beside me, if you like," she said to Beth.

"Thank you," Beth answered. "This is better," she said when she was seated. "May I talk to you?"

"Yes, certainly," said Miss Bey.

There was a great conservatory behind them as they sat looking into the hall; on their left was the third and fourth class-room, on their right the first and second; the doors of both stood open.

"Did you hear the row I had in there just now?" Beth asked, nodding towards the first and second.

"I did," said Miss Bey. "But you mustn't say 'row,' it is vulgar."

"Difficulty, then," Beth rejoined. "But what did you think of it?"

Miss Bey reflected. The question as Beth put it was not easy to answer. "I thought you were both very much in the wrong," she said at last.

"Well, that is fair, at all events," Beth observed with approval. "I don't mean to break any of your rules when I know what they are, and I bet you I won't have a bad mark, if there's any way to help it, the whole time I am at school; but I'm not going to be sat upon by anybody."

Miss Bey pursed up her mouth and knitted emphatically. She was accustomed to naughty girls, but the most troublesome stood in awe of the teachers.

"My dear," she said, after a little pause, "I honour your good resolutions; but I must request you not to say 'I'll bet,' or talk about 'being sat upon.' Both expressions are distinctly unladylike. I must also tell you that at school the teachers are not on the same level as the girls; they are in authority, you see."

"I see," said Beth. "I spoke to you as one lady might speak to another. I won't again, Miss Bey."

Miss Bey paused once more, with bent brows, to reflect upon this ambiguous announcement; but not being able to make anything of it, she proceeded: "It is a matter of discipline. Without strict discipline an establishment of this size would be in a state of chaos. The girls must respect the teachers, and the younger girls must respect the elder ones. All become elder ones in turn, and are respected."

"Well, I mean to be respected all through," Beth declared, and set her mouth hard on the determination.

At eight o'clock Miss Bey rang a big handbell for prayers, and the whole household, including the servants, came trooping into the hall. The girls sat together in their classes, and, when all were in their places, Miss Clifford came in attended by her maids-of-honour, mounted the reading-desk, and read the little service in a beautiful voice devoutly. Beth softened as she listened, and joined in with all her heart towards the end.

When prayers were over, and the servants had gone downstairs, one of the maids-of-honour set a chair under the domed ceiling in front of the vestibule for

Miss Clifford, who went to it from the reading-desk, and sat there. Then the first-class girls rose and left their seats in single file, and each as she passed walked up to Miss Clifford, took the hand which she held out, and curtsied good-night to her. The other classes followed in the same order. Miss Clifford said a word or two to some of the girls, and had a smile for all. When Beth's turn came, she made an awkward curtsey in imitation of the others. Miss Clifford held her hand a moment, and looked up into her face keenly; then smiled, and let her go. Beth felt that there was some special thought behind that smile, and wondered what it was. Miss Clifford made it her duty to know the character, temper, constitution, and capacity of every one of the eighty girls under her, and watched carefully for every change in them. This good-night, which was a dignified and impressive ceremony, gave her an opportunity of inspecting each girl separately every day, and very little escaped her. If a girl looked unhappy, run down, overworked, or otherwise out of sorts, Miss Clifford sent for her next morning to find out what was the matter; and she was scolded, comforted, put on extras, had a tonic to take, or was allowed another hour in bed in the morning, according to the necessities of her case.

The girls who were in certain bedrooms sat up an hour after prayers, and had dry bread and water for supper; they turned to the left and went back to their class-rooms when they had made their curtseys. The others turned to the right and went upstairs. Beth was one of these. She was in No. 6. There were several beds in the room, and beside each bed was a washstand, and a box for clothes. The floor was carpetless. There were white curtains hung on iron rods to be drawn round the beds and the space beside them, so that each girl had perfect privacy to dress and undress. The curtains were all drawn back for air when the girls were ready, but no girl drew her curtain without the permission of the girl next to her. When a bell rang, they all knelt down, and had ten minutes for private prayers night and morning, the bell being rung again when the time was up. The girls had to turn down their beds to air them before they left their rooms in the morning. They had an hour's lessons before

breakfast, then prayers. After prayers the monitresses rose from their seats below the reading-desk, and, as they filed out, each in turn reported if any one had spoken or not spoken in the bedrooms. Breakfast consisted of thick bread and butter and tea for the girls, with the addition of an insufficient quantity of fried bacon for the teachers. After breakfast the girls went upstairs again and made their beds in a given time; then all but a few, who were kept in for music, went out into the garden for half-an-hour. Beth had to go out that first morning. The sun was shining, bright drops sparkled on grass and trees, the air was heavy with autumn odours, but fresh and sweet, and the birds chirped blithely. Beth felt like a free creature once more directly she got out, and, throwing up her arms with a great exclamation of relief after the restraint indoors, she ran out on to the wide grass-plot in front of the house at the top of her speed.

"Come back, come back, new girl!" cried the head French mistress, Mademoiselle Duval, the teacher on duty. "You are not allowed to go on the grass, nor must you run in that unseemly way."

"I'm sorry," said Beth. "I didn't know."

She moved off on to the path which overlooked the river, and began to walk soberly up and down, gazing at the water.

"Mademoiselle!" the French mistress screamed again shrilly, "come away from there! The girls are not allowed to walk on that path."

"Oh dear!" said Beth. "Where may I go?"

"Just go where you see the other girls go," Mademoiselle rejoined sharply.

Not being a favourite, the French mistress was left to wander about alone. Popular teachers always had some girls hanging on to their arms out in the garden, and sitting with them when they were on duty indoors; but Mademoiselle seldom had a satellite, and never one who was respected. The girls thought her deceitful, and deceit was one of the things not tolerated in the school. Miss Bey was believed to be

above deceit of any kind, and was liked and respected accordingly in spite of her angular appearance, sharp manner, the certainty that she was not a lady by birth, and the suspicion that her father kept a shop. The girls had certain simple tests of character and station. They attend more to each other's manners in the matter of nicety at girls' schools than at boys', more's the pity for those who have to live with the boys afterwards. If a new girl drank with her mouth full, ate audibly, took things from the end instead of the side of a spoon, or bit her bread instead of breaking it at dinner, she was set down as nothing much at home, which meant that her people were socially of no importance, not to say common; and if she were not perfectly frank and honest, or if she ever said coarse or indelicate things, she was spoken of contemptuously as a dockyard girl, which meant one of low mind and objectionable manners, who was in a bad set at home and made herself cheap after the manner of a garrison hack, the terms being nearly equivalent. There was no pretence of impossible innocence among the elder girls, but neither was there any impropriety of language or immodesty of conduct. Certain subjects were avoided, and if a girl made any allusion to them by chance, she was promptly silenced; if she recurred to them persistently, she was set down at once as a dockyard girl and an outsider. The consequence of this high standard was an extremely good tone all through the school.

Beth turned into the lime-tree avenue, where she met several sets of girls all walking in rows with their arms round each other. None of them took any notice of her, until she got out on to the drive, where she met Amy Wynne with her children. Amy let go the two she had her arms round, sent them all on, and stopped to speak to Beth.

"Have you no mother?" she asked.

"I have one at home," Beth answered coldly in spite of herself.

"But you know our custom here," Amy rejoined. "The elder girls are mothers to the young ones."

"I know," said Beth, "but I don't want a mother. I should hate to have my thoughts interrupted by a lot of little girls in a row, all cackling together."

"I was going to offer," Amy began, "but, of course, if you are so self-reliant, it would only be an impertinence."

"Oh no!" said Beth, sincerely regretting her own ungraciousness. "It is kind of you, and if it were you alone, I should be glad, but I could not stand the others."

"Well, I hope you won't be lonely," Amy answered, and hurried on after her children.

"Lonely I must be," Beth muttered to herself with sudden foreboding.

When the girls went in, Beth was summoned to the big music-room. "Old Tom" was there with Dr. Centry, who came twice a week to hear the girls play. There were twelve pianos in the room, ten upright and two grand, besides Old Tom's own private grand, all old, hard, and metallic; and twelve girls hammered away on them, all together, at the same piece; but if one made a mistake, Old Tom instantly detected it, and knew which it was.

"Do ye know any music?" she asked Beth in a gruff voice with a rough Scotch accent.

"A little," Beth answered.

"What, for instance?" Old Tom pursued, looking at Beth as if she were a culprit up for judgment.

"Some of Chopin," Beth replied. "I like him best."

Old Tom raised her eyebrows incredulously. "Sit down here and play one of his compositions, if you please—here, at my piano," she said, opening the instrument.

But Beth felt intimidated for once, partly by the offensive manners of the formidable-looking old woman, her bulk and gruffness, but also because Old Tom's doubt of her powers, which she perceived, was shaking her confidence. She sat

down at the piano, however, and struck a few notes; then her nerve forsook her.

"I can't play," she said. "I'm nervous."

"Humph!" snarled Old Tom. "I thought that 'ud be your Chopin! Go and learn exercises with the children in Miss Tait's class-room."

Miss Tait, acting on Old Tom's report, put Beth into one of her lower classes, and left her to practise with the beginners. When she had gone, Beth glanced at the exercises, and then began to rattle them off at such a rate that no one in the class could keep up with her. Miss Tait came hurrying back.

"Who is that playing so fast?" she said. "Was it you, Miss Caldwell?"

"Yes," Beth answered.

"Then you must go into a higher class," said Miss Tait.

But the same thing happened in every class until at last Beth had run up through them all, as up a flight of stairs, into Old Tom's first. Her piano in the first, when the whole class was present and she had no choice, was a hard old instrument, usually avoided because it was the nearest to the table at which Old Tom sat (when she did not walk about) during a lesson. The first time Beth took her place at it, the other girls were only beginning to assemble, and Old Tom was not in the room. A great teasing of instruments, as Old Tom called it, was going on. A new piece was to be taken that morning, and each girl began to try it as soon as she sat down, so that they were all at different passages. They stopped, however, and looked up when Beth appeared.

"That's your piano," the head girl said.

"I hope you'll like it!" one of the others added sarcastically.

"Oh, but I'm glad to be here!" said Beth, striking a few firm chords. "Now I feel like Chopin," and she burst out into one of his most brilliant waltzes triumphantly.

Old Tom had come in while she was speaking, but Beth did not see her. Old Tom

waited till she had done.

"Oh, so now ye feel like Chopin, Miss Caldwell," she jeered. "And it appears ye are not above shamming nervous when it suits ye to mak' yerself interesting. I shall remember that."

Old Tom taught by a series of jeers and insults. If a girl were poor, she never failed to remind her of the fact. "But, indeed, ye're beggars all," was her favourite summing up when they stumbled at troublesome passages. Most of the girls cowered under her insults, but Beth looked her straight in the face at this second encounter, and at the third her spirit rose and she argued the point. Old Tom tried to shout her down, but Beth left her seat, and suggested that they should go and get Miss Clifford to decide between them. Then Old Tom subsided, and from that time she and Beth were on amicable terms.

Beth had an excellent musical memory when she went to school, but she lost it entirely whilst she was there, and the delicacy of her touch as well; both being destroyed, as she supposed, by the system of practising with so many others at a time, which made it impossible for her to feel what she was playing or put any individuality of expression into it.

On that opening day, Beth had to go from the music-room to her first English lesson in the sixth. All the girls sat round the long narrow table, Miss Smallwood, the mistress, being at the end, with her back to the window. The lesson was "Guy," a collection of questions and answers, used also by the first-class girls, only that they were farther on in the book. Who was William the Conqueror? When did he arrive? What did he do on landing? and so on. Beth, at the bottom of the class on Miss Smallwood's right, was in a good position to ask questions herself. She could have told the whole history of William the Conqueror in her own language after once reading it over; but the answers to the questions had to be learnt by heart and repeated in the exact language of the book, and in the struggle to be word-perfect

enough to keep up with the class, the significance of what she was saying was lost upon her. It was her mother's system exactly, and Beth was disappointed, having hoped for something different These pillules of knowledge only exasperated her; she wanted enough to enable her to grasp the whole situation.

"What is the use of learning these little bits by heart about William the Conqueror and the battle of Hastings, and all that, Miss Smallwood?" she exclaimed one day.

"It is a part of your education, Beth," Miss Smallwood answered precisely.

"I know," Beth grumbled, "but couldn't one read about it, and get on a little quicker? I want to know what he did when he got here."

"Why, my dear child, how can you be so stupid? You have just said he fought the battle of Hastings."

"Yes, but what did the battle of Hastings do?" Beth persisted, making a hard but ineffectual effort to express herself.

"Oh, now, Beth, you are silly!" Miss Smallwood rejoined impatiently, and all the girls grinned in agreement. But it was not Beth who was silly. Miss Smallwood had had nothing herself but the trumpery education provided everywhere at that time for girls by the part of humanity which laid undisputed claim to a superior sense of justice, and it had not carried her far enough to enable her to grasp any more comprehensive result of the battle of Hastings than was given in the simple philosophy of Guy. Most of the girls at the Royal Service School would have to work for themselves, and teaching was almost the only occupation open to them, yet such education as they received, consisting as it did of mere rudiments, was an insult to the high average of intelligence that obtained amongst them. They were not taught one thing thoroughly, not even their own language, and remained handicapped to the end of their lives for want of a grounding in grammar. When you find a woman's diction at fault, never gird at her for want of intelligence, but at those in authority over her in her youth, who thought anything in the way of education good enough

for a girl. Even the teachers at St. Catherine's, some of them, wrote in reply to invitations, "I shall have much pleasure in accepting." The girls might be there eight years, but were never taught French enough in the time either to read or speak it correctly. Their music was an offence to the ear, and their drawings to the eye. History was given to them in outlines only, which isolated kings and their ministers, showing little or nothing of their influence on the times they lived in, and ignoring the condition of the people, who were merely introduced as a background to some telling incident in the career of a picturesque personage; and everything else was taught in the same superficial way—except religion. But the fact that the religious education was good in Beth's time was an accident due to Miss Clifford's character and capacity, and therefore no credit to the governors of the school, who did not know that she was specially qualified in that respect when they made her Lady Principal. She was a high-minded woman, Low Church, of great force of character and exemplary piety, and her spirit pervaded the whole school. She gave the Bible lessons herself in the form of lectures which dealt largely with the conduct of life; and as she had the power to make her subject interesting, and the faith which carries conviction, both girls and mistresses profited greatly by her teaching. Many of them became deeply religious under her, and most of them had phases of piety; whilst there were very few who did not leave the school with yearnings at least towards honour and uprightness, which were formed by time and experience into steady principles.

Beth persisted in roaming the garden alone. She loved to hover about a large fountain there, with a deep wide basin round it, in which gold-fish swam and water-lilies grew. She used to go and hang over it, peering into the water, or, when the fountain played, she would loiter near, delighting in the sound of it, the splash and murmur.

One of the windows of Miss Clifford's sitting-room overlooked this part of the garden, and Beth noticed the old lady once or twice standing in the window, but it

did not occur to her that she was watching her. One day, however, Miss Clifford sent a maid-of-honour to fetch her; and Beth went in, wondering what she had done, but asked no questions; calm indifference was still her pose.

Miss Clifford dismissed the maid-of-honour. She was sitting in her own special easy-chair, and Beth stood before her.

"My dear child," she said to Beth, "why are you always alone? Are the girls not kind to you?"

"Oh yes, thank you," Beth answered, "they are quite kind."

"Then why are you always alone?"

"I like it best."

"Are you sure," said Miss Clifford, "that the others do not shun you for some reason or other?"

"One of them wished to be my mother," Beth rejoined, "but I did not care about it."

"But you cannot be happy always alone like that," Miss Clifford observed.

Beth was silent.

Miss Clifford looked at her earnestly for a little, then she shook her head.

"I tell you what I will do if you like, Miss Clifford," Beth said upon reflection. "I will form a family of my own."

Miss Clifford smiled. "Ah! I see you are ambitious," she said, "but, my dear child, a sixth girl can't expect to have that kind of influence."

"It is not ambition," Beth answered, "for I shall feel it no distinction, only a great bother. Nevertheless, I will do it to show you that I am not shunned; and to please you, as you do not like me to wander alone."

A week or two later Beth appeared in the garden with six of the worst girls in the school clinging to her, fascinated by her marvellous talk.

Miss Clifford sent for her again. "I am sorry to see you in such company," she said. "Those girls are all older than you are, and they will lead you into mischief."

"On the contrary, Miss Clifford," Beth replied, "I shall keep them out of mischief. Not one of them has had a bad mark this week."

Then Miss Clifford sent for Miss Smallwood, the mistress of the sixth. "What do you make of Beth Caldwell?" she asked.

"I can't make anything of her," Miss Smallwood answered. "I think she tries, but she does not seem able to keep up with the other girls at all. She seldom knows a lesson or does a sum correctly. I sometimes think she ought to be in the eighth. But then occasionally she shows a knowledge far beyond her years; not a knowledge of school work, but of books and life."

"How about her themes?"

"I don't know what to think of them; they are too good. But she declares emphatically that she does them all out of her own head."

"What sort of temper has she?"

"Queer, like everything else about her. Not unamiable, you know, but irritable at times, and she has days of deep depression, and moments of extreme elation."

"Ah!" Miss Clifford ejaculated, and then reflected a little. "Well, be patient with her," she said at last. "If she hasn't exceptional ability of some kind, I am no judge of girls; but she is evidently unaccustomed to school work, and is suffering from the routine and restraint, after being allowed to run wild. She should have been sent here years ago."

CHAPTER XXXI

From the foregoing it will be seen that Beth made her mark upon the school from the day of her arrival in the way of getting herself observed and talked about. She was

set down as queer to begin with, and when lessons began both girls and mistresses decided that she was stupid; and queer she remained to the end in the estimation of those who had no better word to express it, but with regard to her stupidity there soon began to be differences of opinion.

At preparation one evening she talked instead of doing her work, and gradually all the girls about her had stopped to listen.

"Gracious!" Beth exclaimed at last, "the bell will go directly, and I've not done a sum. Show me how to work them, Rosa."

"Oh, bother!" Rosa rejoined. "Find out for yourself! My theme was turned, and I've got to do it again."

"Look here," said Beth, "if you'll do my sums, I'll do your theme now, and your thorough bass on Thursday."

"I wish to goodness you wouldn't talk, Beth!" Agnes Stewart exclaimed. "We shall all get bad marks to-morrow."

"Then why do you listen?" Beth retorted.

"I can't help it," Agnes grumbled. "You fascinate me. I should have thought you were clever if I had only heard you talk, and not known what a duffer you are at your lessons."

"Well, she's not a duffer at thorough bass anyway," Rosa put in. "She only began this term, and she's a long way ahead even of some of the first. Old Tom's given her a little book to herself."

"I began thorough bass with the rest of you," Beth observed. "It's the only thing we started fair in. You are years ahead of me in all the other work."

The girls reflected upon this for a little.

"And you can write themes," Rosa finally asseverated.

"Oh, that's nothing," Beth protested. "Themes are easy enough. I could write them

for the whole school."

"Well, that's no reason why you should put your nose in your cup every time you drink," Lucy Black, the sharpest shrimp of a girl in the class, said, grinning.

"I never did such a thing in my life," Beth exclaimed, turning crimson. "You'll say I eat audibly next."

"No, you don't do that," Rosa said solemnly; "but you do put your nose in your cup."

The colour flickered on Beth's sensitive cheek, and she shrank into herself.

"There, don't tease her!" Mary Wright, the eldest, stupidest, and most motherly girl in the school, exclaimed. "How can you drink without putting your nose in your cup, stupid?"

Then Beth saw it and smiled, greatly relieved. This venerable pleasantry was a sign that she had been taken once for all into the good graces of her schoolmates. The girls who were liked were usually nicknamed and always chaffed; the rest were treated with different degrees of politeness, the dockyard girls, as the lowest of all, being called miss, even by the teachers.

On Thursday evenings the girls in the fifth and sixth were allowed to do fancy work for an hour while a story-book was read aloud to them, either by Miss Smallwood or one of themselves when her voice was tired. The book was always either childish or dull, generally both, and Beth, who had been accustomed to Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray, grew restive under the infliction. One evening when she had twice been reprimanded for yawning aggressively, she exclaimed, "Well, Miss Smallwood, it is such silly stuff! Why, I could tell you a better story myself, and make it up as I go on."

"Then begin at once and tell it," said Miss Smallwood, glancing round at the girls, who smiled derisively, thinking that Beth would have to excuse herself and thereby tacitly acknowledge that she had been boasting. To their surprise, however, Beth took the request seriously, settled herself in her chair, folded her hands, and, with

her eyes roaming about the room as if she were picking up the details from the walls, the floor, the ceiling, and all it contained, started without hesitation. It was the romantic story of a haunted house on a great rocky promontory, and the freshness and sound of the sea pervaded it. The girls went on with their work for a little, but by degrees first one and then another stopped, and just sat staring at Beth, while gravity settled on every face as the interest deepened.

Suddenly the bell rang, and the story was not finished.

"Oh dear!" Miss Smallwood exclaimed, "it is very fascinating, Beth; but I really am afraid I ought not to have allowed you to tell it. I had no idea—I must speak to Miss Clifford."

The fame of this wonderful story spread through the school, and the next half-holiday the first-class girls sent to ask Beth to go to their room and repeat it; but Beth was not in the mood, and answered their messenger tragically:—

"'Twas not for this I left my father's home! Go, tell your class, that Vashti will not come."

"Vashti's a little beast, I think," the head girl observed when the message was delivered.

Miss Clifford also sent for Beth, and requested her to repeat the story, that she might judge for herself if she should be allowed to go on with it; and Beth repeated it, being constrained; but the recital was so wearisome that Miss Clifford dismissed her before she was half-way through, with leave to finish it if anybody cared to hear it. When Thursday came, the girls and Miss Smallwood cared very much to hear it, and Beth, stimulated by their clamours, went on without a break for the whole hour, and ended with a description of a shipwreck, which was so vivid that the whole class was shaken with awe, and sat silent for a perceptible time after she stopped.

Beth could rarely be persuaded to repeat this performance; but from that time her standing was unique, both with girls and mistresses, a fact, however, of which she

herself was totally unaware. She felt her backwardness in school work and nothing else, and petitioned God incessantly to help her with her lessons, and get her put up; and put up she was regularly until she reached the third, when she was among the elder girls. She was never able to do the work properly of any class she was in, however, and her class mistresses were always against her being put up, but Miss Clifford insisted on it.

Beth was never anything but miserable at school. The dull routine of the place pressed heavily upon her, and everything she had to do was irksome. The other girls accommodated themselves more or less successfully to the circumstances of their lives; but Beth in herself was always at war with her surroundings, and her busy brain teemed with ingenious devices to vary the monotony. The confinement, want of relaxation, and of proper physical training, very soon told upon her health and spirits, as indeed they did upon the greater number of the girls, who suffered unnecessarily in various ways. Beth very soon had to have an extra hour in bed in the morning, a cup of soup at eleven o'clock, a tonic three times a day, and a slice of thick bread and butter with a glass of stout on going to bed; such things were not stinted during Miss Clifford's administration; but it was a case of treating effects which all the time were being renewed by causes that might and ought to have been removed, but were let alone.

St. Catherine's Mansion was regulated on a system of exemplary dulness. There is a certain dowager still extant who considers it absurd to provide amusement for people of inferior station. All people who earn their living are people of inferior station to her; she has never heard of such a thing as the dignity of labour. Because many of the girls at St. Catherine's were orphans without means, and would therefore have to earn their own living as governesses when their education was finished, the dowager-persons who interested themselves in the management of the school had used their influence strenuously to make the life there as much of a punishment as possible. "You cannot be too strict with girls in their position," was

what they continually averred, their own position by birth being in no way better, and in some instances not so good, as that of the girls whom they were depriving of every innocent pleasure natural to their age and necessary for the good of their health and spirits. They were not allowed to learn dancing; they had no outdoor games at all, not even croquet—nothing whatever to exhilarate them and develop them physically except an hour's "deportment," the very mildest kind of calisthenics, in the big class-room once a fortnight, and the daily making of their little beds. For the rest, monotonous walks up and down the garden-paths in small parties, or about the dreary roads two and two in long lines, was their only exercise, and even in this they were restricted to such a severe propriety of demeanour that it almost seemed as if the object were to teach them to move without betraying the fact that they had legs. The consequence of all this restraint was a low state of vitality among the girls, and the outbreak of morbid phases that sometimes went right through the school. Beth, as might have been expected, was one of the first to be caught by anything of this kind; and she arrived, by way of her own emotions, at the cause of a great deal that was a mystery to older people, and also thought out the cure eventually; but she suffered a great deal in the process of acquiring her special knowledge of the subject. She was especially troubled by her old malady—depression of spirits. Sometimes, on a summer evening, when all the classes were at preparation, and the whole great house was still, a mistress would begin to practise in one of the music-rooms, and Beth would be carried away by the music, so that work was impossible. One evening, when this happened, she sat, with a very sad face, looking out on the river. Pleasure-boats were gliding up and down; a gay party went by, dancing on the deck of a luxurious barge to the music of a string-band; a young man skimmed the surface in a skiff, another punted two girls along; and people walked on the banks or sat about under the trees, and children played—and they were all free! Suddenly Beth burst into tears. Miss Smallwood questioned her. Was she ill? had she any pain? had any one been unkind to her? No? What was the matter then?

Nothing; she was just miserable!

"Beth, don't be so silly," Miss Smallwood remonstrated. "A great girl like you, crying for nothing! It is positively childish."

The other girls stole glances at her and looked grave. At the beginning of the term they would not have sympathised perhaps; but this was the middle, and many of them were in much the same mood themselves.

When the bell rang, and the recreation hour began, they got out their little bits of fancy-work, and such dull childish books as they were allowed, and broke up into groups. Beth was soon surrounded by the cleverer girls in the class.

"I sympathise with you, Beth," said Janey North, a red-haired Irish girl, "for I felt like it myself, I did indeed."

"Will the holidays never be here?" sighed Rosa Bird.

"I can't think why I stay at all," said Beth. "I hate it—I hate it all the time."

"But how could one get away?" said Janey.

"Only by being ill," Agnes Stewart answered darkly. She was a delicate girl, and from that time she starved herself resolutely, until she was so wasted that Miss Clifford in despair sent her home. Another girl was seized with total deafness suddenly, and had also to go; the change brought her hearing back in a very short time; and some of the dockyard girls received urgent summonses from dying relations, and were allowed to go to them. They always returned the brighter for the experience.

One day, after the weather became cold, a girl appeared in class wrapped up in a shawl, and with her head all drawn down to one side. Her neck was stiff, and she could not straighten it. She was sent to the infirmary. The girls thought her lucky. For it was warm there, and nurse was kind, and sang delightful songs. She would be able to do fancy-work, too, and read as much as she liked, and would not have to get

up till she had had her breakfast and the fire was lighted, and need not trouble about lessons at all—a stiff neck was a very small drawback to the delights of such a change.

Next day another girl's neck was stiff. Miss Smallwood searched for a draught, but did not succeed in finding one. That evening at prayers one of the girls in the first appeared in a shawl with her head on one side and a white worn face; and next day there was another case from the third and fourth. So it was evident that there was something like an epidemic going through the school; but the doctor had never seen one of the kind before, and was at a loss to account for it. The cases were all exactly alike: stiff neck, with the head drawn down to one side, accompanied by feverishness, and followed by severe prostration.

Beth sat with a stolid countenance, and stared solemnly at every girl that was attacked, as if she were studying her case. Then, one morning, she came down in a shawl herself, with her head on one side and a very white face. Nurse marched her off at once to the infirmary, and put her in a bed beside the fire, and Beth, as she coiled herself up, and realised that she need not worry about lessons, or rush off to practise when the bell rang, or go out to walk up and down in the garden till she hated every pebble on the path, heaved a great sigh of relief and fell asleep. When she awoke the doctor was feeling her pulse.

"She's very low," he said. "Is she a delicate girl naturally?"

"She looked strong enough when she came to school," nurse answered; "but she soon went off, as so many of them do."

"The loss of vitality amongst them is really extraordinary," the doctor observed. "Give her port wine and beef-tea. Don't keep her in bed too much, but don't hurry her up. Rest and relief from lessons is the great thing."

Some healthy pleasure to vary the monotonous routine, some liberty of action and something to look forward to, would have been better; but nobody thought of that.

How many of those necks were really stiff beyond the will of the sufferer to move it, no one will ever know; but when it occurred to Beth to straighten her own one day, she found no difficulty.

CHAPTER XXXII

When Beth was moved into the upper school, she came under the direct influence of Miss Crow, the English mistress of the third and fourth, who had been educated at St. Catherine's herself, and was an ardent disciple of Miss Clifford's. Beth, although predisposed to pietism, had not been sensibly influenced by Miss Clifford's teaching heretofore; now, however, she attached herself to Miss Crow, who began at once to take a special interest in her spiritual welfare. She encouraged Beth to sit and walk with her when she was on duty, and invited her to her room during recreation in order to talk to her earnestly on the subject of salvation, or to read to her and expound portions of Scripture, fine passages from religious books, and beautiful hymns. Some of the hymns she took the trouble to copy out for Beth's help and comfort when they were specially appropriate to the needs of her nature, such as "Calm me, my God, and keep me calm," or specially suited to her case, like "Call me! and I will answer, gladly singing!" Beth responded readily to her kindness, and very soon became a convert to her views; but she did not stop there, for it was not in Beth's nature to rest content with her own conversion while there were so many others still sitting in darkness who might be brought to the light. No sooner was she convinced herself than she began to proselytise among the other girls, and in a short time her eloquence and force of character attracted a following from all parts of the school. Miss Crow told Miss Clifford that she spoke like one inspired, and high hopes were entertained of the work which they somewhat prematurely concluded she was destined to do. Unfortunately Beth's fervent faith received a check at a critical time when it was highly important to have kept it well nourished—that is to

say, when she was being prepared for confirmation. It happened when Miss Crow was hearing the girls their Scripture lesson one morning, the subject being the escape of the children of Israel from Egypt, and the destruction of Pharaoh's hosts in the Red Sea.

"I know a man who says the whole of that account has been garbled," Beth remarked in a dreamy way, meaning Count Gustav Bartahlinsky, but not thinking much of what she was saying.

Miss Crow nearly dropped the Bible, so greatly was she startled and shocked by the announcement.

"Beth!" she exclaimed, directly the class was over and she could speak to Beth privately, "how could you be so wicked as to say that anything in Holy Scripture is a garbled account?"

"I said I knew a man who said so," Beth answered, surprised that so simple a remark should have created such consternation.

But Miss Crow saw in her attitude a dangerous tendency to scepticism, and expressed strong condemnation of any one who presumed to do other than accept Holy Writ in blind unquestioning faith. She talked to Beth with horror about the ungodly men who cast doubt on the unity of the Bible, called its geology in question, and even ventured to correct its chronology by the light of vain modern scientific discoveries; and Beth shocked her again by the questions she asked, and the intelligent interest she showed in the subject. She told Miss Crow that Count Gustav had also said that the Old Testament was bad religion and worse history, but she did not know that other people had thought so too. Whereupon Miss Crow went to Miss Clifford and reported Beth's attitude as something too serious for her to deal with alone, and Miss Clifford sent for Beth and talked to her long and earnestly. She told her that it was absurd for a girl of her age to call in question the teaching of the best and greatest men that ever lived, which somehow reminded Beth of the many

mistakes made by the best and greatest men that ever lived, of their differences of opinion and undignified squabbles, the instances of one man discovering and suffering for a truth which the rest refused to accept, and the constant modification, alteration, and rejection by one generation of teaching which had been upheld by another with brutality and bloodshed,—instances of all of which were notorious enough even to be known at a girls' school. Beth said very little, however; but she determined to read the Bible through from beginning to end, and see for herself if she could detect any grounds for the mischief-making doubts and controversies she had been hearing about. She began in full faith, but was brought up short at the very outset by the discrepancy between the first and second chapters of Genesis, which she perceived for the first time. She went steadily on, however, until she had finished the Book of Job, and then she paused in revolt. She could not reconcile the dreadful experiment which had entailed unspeakable suffering and loss irreparable upon a good man with any attribute she had been accustomed to revere in her deity. There might be some explanation to excuse this game of god and devil, but until she knew the excuse she would vow no adhesion to a power whose conduct on that occasion seemed contrary to every canon of justice and mercy. She did not belong to the servile age when men, forgetting their manhood, fawned on patrons for what they could get, and cringingly accepted favours from the dirtiest hands. Even her God must be worthy to help her, worthy to be loved, good as well as great. The God who connived at the torment of Job could not be the God of her salvation.

Beth had spoken casually in class. She had never questioned her religion, and would not have done so now if the remark had been allowed to pass; but the fuss that was made about it, and the severity with which she was rebuked, by putting her mind into a critical attitude, had the effect of concentrating her attention on the subject; so that it was the very precautions which were taken to check her supposed scepticism that first made her sceptical. The immediate consequence was that she gave up preaching and refused to be confirmed. Miss Clifford, Miss Crow, and the chaplain

argued, expostulated, and punished in vain. It was the first case of the kind that had occurred in the school, and Beth was treated as a criminal; but she felt more like a martyr, and was not to be moved. She did not try to make partisans for herself, however; on the contrary, she deserted her family as well as her congregation, and took to wandering about alone again; but she was not unhappy. Her old faith had gone, it is true, but it had left the way prepared for a new one. She did not believe in the God of Job—because she was sure that there must be a better God—that was all.

From this time, however, her imagination rode rampant once more over everything. The vision and the dream were upon her. All wholesome interest in her work was over. There was an old piano in the reception-room which the girls were allowed to use for their amusement on half-holidays, and she often went there; but even when she practised, she moved her fingers mechanically, her mind busy with vivid scenes and moving dramatic incidents; so that her beloved music was gradually converted from an object in itself into an aid to thought.

It was only six weeks to the holidays, but oh! how the days dragged! She struggled to be conscientious, to be good, to please Miss Crow, to escape bad marks; but everything was irksome. Getting up, lessons, breakfast, making her bed, practising, lessons again, dressing, going out, dinner—the whole round of regular life was an effort. Her face grew thin and pale, she began to cough, and was put upon extras again. "We can't let you go home looking like that, you know," nurse said. Beth looked up at her out of her dream absently and smiled. She was enjoying a visionary walk at the moment with a vague being who loved her. They were out on a white cliff overlooking the sea in a wild warm region. The turf they trod on was vivid green, and short and springy; the water below was green and bright and clear, sea-birds skimmed the surface, and the air was sweet. But presently the road was barred by a rail, so they had to stop, and he put his arm round her, and she laid her head on his shoulder; and the murmur of wind and water was in her ears, and she became as the lark that sang above them, the curlew that piped, the quiet cattle, and

all inanimate things—untroubled, natural, complete. All intellectual interest being suspended, she had begun to yearn for a companion, a mate. Her delicate mind refused to account for the tender sensation; but it was love, or rather the mood for love she had fallen into—the passive mood, which can be converted into the active in an ordinary young girl by almost any man of average attractions, provided she is not already yearning happily for some one in particular. It is not until much later that she learns to discriminate. There were girls at the school who saw in every man they met a possible lover, and were ready to accept any man who offered himself; but they were of coarser fibre than Beth, more susceptible to the physical than to the ideal demands of love, and fickle because the man who was present had more power to please than the one who was merely a recollection. The actual presence was enough for them, they had no ideals. With Beth it was different. Her present was apt to be but a poor faded substitute for the future with the infinite range of possibilities she had the power to perceive in it, or even for the past as she glorified it.

While she was in this mood she was particularly provoking to those in authority over her.

"Beth," said Miss Crow one day severely, "you are to go to Miss Clifford directly." Beth went.

"I hear," said Miss Clifford in her severest tone, "that you have not made your bed this morning."

"I went up to make it," Beth answered, trying dreamily to recollect what had happened after that.

"I must give you a bad mark," Miss Clifford said, and then paused; and Beth, who had not been attending, becoming conscious that something had been bestowed upon her, answered politely, "Thank you."

"Beth, you are impertinent," Miss Clifford exclaimed, "and I must punish you severely. Stay in the whole of your half-holiday and do arithmetic."

Then Beth awoke with a start, and realising what she had done, struggled to explain; but the moment she became herself again, an agony of dumbness came upon her, and she left the room without a word.

She spent the long bright afternoon cowering over her arithmetic, and crying at intervals, being in the lowest spirits, so that by prayer-time she was pretty well exhausted. She tried to attend to the psalms, but in the middle of them she became a poor girl suffering from a cruel sense of injustice. All her friends misunderstood her and were unkind to her, in consequence of which she pined away, and one day, in the midst of a large party, she dropped down dead.

And at this point she actually did fall fainting with a thud on the floor. Miss Clifford, who was giving out the hymn, stopped startled, and some of the girls shrieked. Miss Crow and one of the other teachers carried Beth out by the nearest door.

"Poor little thing!" said Miss Crow, looking pityingly at her drawn white face and purple eyelids. "I'm afraid she's very delicate."

Miss Clifford came also, when prayers were over, and said kind things; and from that time forward Beth received a great deal of sympathetic attention, which did her good, but in no way reconciled her to her imprisonment.

The following term, Beth watched the spring come in at school with infinite yearning. To be out—to be free to sit under the apple-trees and look up through the boughs at the faintly flushed blossom, till the vision and the dream came upon her, and she passed from conscious thought into a higher phase of being—just to do that was her one desire till the petals fell. Then pleasure-boats began to be rowed on the river, rowed or steered by girls no older than herself, in summer dresses delicately fresh; and she, seeing them, became aware of the staleness of her own shabby clothing, and writhed under the rules which would not allow her even to walk on the path overlooking the river, and gaze her fill at it. The creamy white flowers of the great magnolia on the lawn came out, and once she slipped across the grass to peer

into them and smell them. She got a bad mark for that, the second she had had.

At preparation that evening she sat so that she could see the river, and watched it idly instead of working; and presently there floated into her mind the rhyme she made when she was a little child at Fairholm—

"The fairy folk are calling me."

Suddenly she caught her breath, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled, her whole aspect changed from apathy to animation, and she laughed.

"What has happened to please you, Beth; you look quite bright?" Miss Bey said, meeting her in the vestibule when preparation was over. Miss Bey was said to favour Beth by some; Beth was said to toady Bey by others; the truth being that they had taken to each other from the first, and continued friends.

"I've got a sort of singing at my heart," Beth answered, sparkling. "The fairy folk are calling me."

Beth slept in No. 5 then, and had the bed nearest to the window. There was a moon that night, and she lay long watching the light of it upon the blind—long after the gas was put out and the teachers had gone to their rooms. Wondering at last if the girls in the room were asleep, she sat up in bed, the better to be able to hear; and judged that they were. Then she got out of bed, walked quietly down the room in her night-dress and bare feet, opened the door cautiously, and found herself out in the carpetless passage. It was dark there, but she walked on confidently to the head of the grand staircase, which the girls were only allowed to use on special occasions. "This is a special occasion," Beth said to herself with a grin. "The fairy folk are calling me, and I must go out and dance on the grass in that lovely moonlight."

But how to get out was the difficulty. The hall door was bolted and barred. She went into the first and second. There were two large windows in the room which looked into the great conservatory, and one of them was open a crack. She pushed it up higher, and got through into the conservatory. There she found a large side window

on the left of the first and second also open a little. The shelf in front of the window had flower-pots on it, which she moved aside, then got up herself, and with a tug, managed to raise the heavy sash. Then she sat on the sill and looked down. It was too far to jump, but a sort of dado of ornamental stonework came right up to the window, and by the help of this she managed to descend to the ground, and found herself free. For a moment she stood stretching herself like one just released from a cramped position, drawing in deep draughts of the delicious night air the while; then she bounded off over the dewy grass, and ran, and jumped, and waved her arms, every muscle of her rejoicing in an ecstasy of liberty. She ran round to the front of the house, regardless of the chance of some one seeing her from one of the windows, and danced round and round the magnolia, and buried her face in the big white flowers one after the other, and bathed it in the dew on their petals. Then she went to the path by the river and hung over the railing, and after that she visited the orchard, and every other forbidden place in the grounds. In the orchard she found some half-ripe fruit under the trees, and gathered it; and finding that she could not climb into the conservatory again with the fruit in her hands, she amused herself by throwing it through the open window.

It was harder to climb up than it had been to get down, but she accomplished the feat at last with sundry abrasions, shut the window, replaced the flower pots, got into the first and second, and went back to bed. Her night-dress was wet with dew, and her feet were scratched and dirty; but she was too much exhilarated by the exercise and adventure to feel any discomfort. She was sitting up in bed, hungrily munching some of her spoils, when Janey North, the girl in the next bed, awoke.

"What are you eating, Beth?" she asked in a cautious voice, whispering, fearful of awaking a monitress and being reported for talking.

"Apples," Beth answered. "Have some?"

"All right! but where did you get them?" Janey asked.

"Never you mind!" said Beth.

Janey did not mind at the moment, and ate the greater number, but next day she went treacherously and told, in order to ingratiate herself with one of the mistresses, and the matter was reported to Miss Clifford, who sent for Beth. Janey North was also sent for.

"What is this I hear about your having apples in your bedroom last night, Beth?" Miss Clifford said.

"A story, I should think," Beth answered readily. "Who told you?"

Janey North looked disconcerted.

"What have you to say, Miss North?" Miss Clifford asked.

"You were eating apples," Janey said to Beth.

"How do you know?" Beth asked suavely.

"I saw you."

"What, in the middle of the night when the gas was out?"

"Ye-yes," Janey faltered.

Beth shrugged her shoulders and looked at Miss Clifford, who said severely: "I think, Miss North, you have either dreamt this story or invented it."

Janey was barred in the school after that, the girls deciding that, whether the story were true or not, she was a dockyard girl for telling it. It was Beth's sporting instinct that had made her evade the question. When she had won the game, and the excitement was over, she felt she had been guilty of duplicity, and determined to confess when Miss Clifford sent for her next and gave her a good opportunity. She would have gone at once but for the dread of losing the precious liberty that was life to her. All through the weeks that followed she kept herself sane and healthy by midnight exercises in the moonlight. Her appetite had failed her till she took to this diversion, but after her second ramble she was so hungry that she went down to the

kitchen boldly to forage in the hope of finding a crust. The fire was still burning brightly, and by its light she discovered on the table the thick bread and butter for the next morning's breakfast, all cut ready, and piled up under covers on the dishes. There was half a jug of beer besides, doubtless left from the servants' supper. It was rather flat, but she thought it and the new bread and butter delicious. She had a bad cold after the first ramble, but that was the only one, strange to relate, for she always went out in her night-dress, and bare-footed.

During this time her imagination was exceedingly active and her health improved, but her work was a greater trouble than ever. She had just been put into the third, but Miss Clifford threatened to put her down again if she did not do better, and one day she sent for Beth, who went trembling, under the impression that that was what the summons was for. She found Miss Clifford and Miss Bey discussing a letter, and both looking very serious.

"Beth," Miss Clifford began, "a gentleman whom I know well has written to tell me that he was walking home by the river-path at two o'clock on Monday morning, and saw a girl here at St. Catherine's with only her night-dress on, hanging over the railing looking into the river; and I am sure from the description it was you."

"Yes," said Beth, "I saw him."

Miss Clifford let the letter fall on her lap, and Miss Bey dropped into a chair. Beth looked on with interest, and wondered about that accurate description of herself; she would have given anything to see it.

"What were you doing there?" Miss Clifford asked; and Beth noticed that she was treating the matter just as her mother had treated the menagerie business.

"Just looking at the water," Beth said.

"At two o'clock in the morning! How did you get out?"

"By the conservatory window."

"Had you been out before?"

"Oh yes, often."

"Do any of the other girls go out?"

"Not that I know of," said Beth, then added, "No, I'm sure they don't."

"Thank Heaven for that, at all events!" Miss Clifford ejaculated. Then she made Beth sit down beside her, and took her hand, and gazed at her long and sorrowfully.

"Was it such a very dreadful thing to do?" Beth asked at last.

"You have been a great disappointment to me, Beth," Miss Clifford answered indirectly, "and to Miss Bey. We expected more of you than of any other girl now in the school—you promised so well in many ways at one time."

"Did I?" said Beth, looking from one to the other in consternation. "Oh, why didn't you tell me? I thought you all fancied I should never do anything well, and that disheartened me. If I had known——" She burst into tears.

Late that night Miss Clifford and Miss Bey sat together discussing Beth.

"I feel more than ever convinced there is something exceptional about the child," Miss Clifford declared. "I hope it is not insanity; but, at all events, it is not sin, and I won't have her punished. I say now what I said at first, she should have been sent here early, or not at all. And now she must go."

"What, expel her!" Miss Bey ejaculated.

"No. Didn't I say I would not have her punished? There is some explanation of her wild escapade besides mere naughtiness, I feel sure, and she shall have every chance that I can give her. There is no vice in her of any kind that I can discover, and she is fearlessly honest. If she were grown-up we should call her eccentric, and be interested and amused by her vagaries; and I do not see why she should not be allowed the same excuse as it is, only St. Catherine's is not the place for her. Here all must move in the common orbit, to save confusion. So I shall write to her mother,

and get her to take her from the school at the end of the term in the regular way."

"But in the meantime?" Miss Bey asked.

"Beth has given me her word that she will be good, and do nothing I should disapprove of, and she will keep it."

So Beth's credit was saved by the good judgment of this kind, wise woman, and her career at St Catherine's ended honourably, if somewhat abruptly.

CHAPTER XXXIII

When it was rumoured amongst the mistresses that Beth was to leave that term, Old Tom put her on to play first piano in the first-class solo, and to lead the treble in the second-class duet at the examination.

"For I rather like ye, Miss Beth Caldwell," she said. "You're not a sycophant, whatever else ye are. They've not been able to do much wi' ye in regard to yer work in the rest of the school, but ye've done well under me, and I'll let ye have yer chance to distinguish yerself before ye go."

"Oh, but do you think I can do it?" Beth exclaimed.

"Ye can do anything ye set yerself to do, Beth Caldwell," Old Tom shouted at her.

Beth set herself accordingly, and when the day came she led the solo and duet with the precision of a musical box, but with such an expenditure of nerve-power that she was prostrated by the effort. She was considered quite a musician at St. Catherine's, but by this time the dire method of teaching had had its effect. Her confidence and her memory for music were gone, the beauty of her touch spoilt, and the further development of her talent effectually checked.

She did not go home for the holidays. Miss Clifford had advised, Lady Benyon approved, and Mrs. Caldwell decided, that she should be sent direct to a finishing school in London, and when St. Catherine's broke up, Miss Bey, who happened to be

going that way, good-naturedly undertook to see Beth safely to her destination.

Miss Clifford held Beth's hand long, and gazed into her face earnestly when she took leave of her. "I shall hear of you again," she said, "and I pray God it may be good news; but it depends upon yourself, Beth. We are free agents. Good-bye, my dear child, and God bless you."

Beth had been eighteen intolerable months at the school, and had been exceedingly miserable most of the time, yet she left it with tears in her eyes, melted and surprised by the kindest farewells from every one. It had never dawned upon her until that moment that she was really very much liked.

Her new school was a large house in a long wide street of houses, all exactly alike. When she arrived with Miss Bey, they were shown into a deliciously cool shady drawing-room, charmingly furnished, and the effect upon Beth, after the graceless bareness of St. Catherine's, was altogether reassuring.

In front of the fireplace, which was hidden by ferns and flowering plants, a slender girl, with thick dark hair down her back, was lying on the white woolly hearthrug, reading. She got up to greet the visitors without embarrassment, still holding her book in her hand.

"Miss Blackburne will be here directly," she said. "Will you sit down?" Then there was a little pause, which Miss Bey broke by asking in her magisterial way, "What is that you are reading, my dear?"

"The Idylls of the King," the girl answered.

Miss Bey's nostrils flapped.

"Is it not rather advanced for you, my dear?" she said. "We do not allow it at all, even to our first-class girls."

"Oh, Miss Blackburne likes us to read it," was the easy answer. "She says that Tennyson and all the good modern writers are a part of our education."

"Thank goodness!" Beth ejaculated fervently. "At St. Catherine's our minds were starved on books suited to the capacity of infants and imbeciles."

"I should think, Beth, you are hardly old enough or educated enough to be a judge of literature as yet," Miss Bey said severely.

"Nor do I pretend to be a judge. How can I know anything of literature when literature is unknown at St. Catherine's? But I should think babes and sucklings would be wise enough to object to the silly trash we had instead of literature."

Beth spoke emphatically, shaking herself free of the restrictions of the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters once for all.

Miss Blackburne came in while she was speaking, and smiled.

"I like to hear a girl express an opinion," she said. "She may be quite wrong, but she must have some mind if she attempts to think for herself at all; and mind is material to work upon."

"I'm afraid I haven't much mind," Beth said, sighing, "or manner either."

Miss Blackburne smiled again, and looked at Miss Bey; but Miss Bey supported Beth in her self-depreciation by preserving an ominous silence.

"This is one of your new school-fellows," Miss Blackburne said to Beth; "let me introduce you to each other. Clara Herring, Beth Caldwell."

When Miss Bey took her leave, Miss Blackburne left the room with her, and immediately afterwards another girl came in, clapping her hands.

"Oh, I say!" she exclaimed, "Signor Caponi is a dear! He has the nicest chocolate eyes, and he says my Italian is wonderful! Now I've done all my work for to-day."

"Have you?" said Beth. "Why, it isn't five o'clock yet!"

"Miss Blackburne won't let us work long hours," the girl rejoined. "She says it destroys our freshness. But let us know each other's names. I am Geraldine Tressillion. Good name for a novel, isn't it?" and she clapped her little white hands

and laughed again.

"That's just what you're made to be—the heroine of a novel," Clara Herring observed, looking at her admiringly. "I always think of you when I come across a gay one, with golden hair and blue eyes."

"I have my good points, I know," Geraldine rejoined. "But how about my hips? Too high, alas!"

"Oh, that won't show much while you're slight," said Clara, looking at her critically.

"Well, I'll make haste and marry me before I'm afflicted with flesh, as I'm sure to become. For I deny myself nothing—I live to eat," Geraldine rattled on cheerfully. "One can't get very fat before one comes out; and I hate a thin dowager. I'm engaged already, you know, but I don't like the man much—don't like him at all, in fact; and my sister says I can do better. She's been married a year, and has a baby. She told me all about it. Mamma imagines we're all innocent. A lady implored her to tell my sister things before she married, but she said she really could not speak to an innocent girl on such a subject. I don't believe she was ever so innocent herself. A grown girl can't be innocent unless she's a fool; but anyway, it's the right pose to pretend. You've got to play the silly fool to please a man; then he feels superior."

"But it's hypocritical," said Beth.

"Yes, my dear. But you must be hypocritical if you want to be a man's ideal of a woman. You must know nothing, do nothing, see nothing, but just what suits his pleasure and convenience; and in order to answer to his requirements you must be either a hypocrite, or a blind worm without eyes or intelligence. Men don't like innocence because it's holy, but because it whets their appetites, my sister says, and if they're deceived it serves them right. They work the world for their own pleasure, not ours; and we must look out for ourselves. If we want money, liberty, devotion, admiration, and any other luxury, we must pretend. Don't you see?"

"I don't know," Beth rejoined. "But, personally, I shall never pretend anything."

"Then you will suffer for your sincerity," Geraldine rejoined.

Beth shrugged her shoulders. The turn the conversation had taken was distasteful to her, and she would not pursue it.

There was a pause, then Clara observed sententiously:

"Innocence is not impossible, Geraldine. Surely Adelaide is innocent enough."

"I said innocence and intelligence were incompatible," Geraldine answered. "You don't call Adelaide intelligent, do you?"

"Who is Adelaide?" Beth asked.

"The daughter of a Roman Catholic peer," Geraldine replied. "She is eighteen, and her mind is absolutely undeveloped. We think she's in training for a convent, and that's why they don't let her learn much. Miss Ella Blackburne is a Roman Catholic, and so also is Adelaide's maid; They trot her round to all the observances of her Church regularly, and in the intervals she plays with the kitten. I don't know why she should have been sent here at all, for this is a regular forcing-house for the marriage market. Miss Blackburne expects all her girls to marry well, and they generally do. I should think, Miss Beth, she will be able to make something of you with those eyes!"

"Look at its neck and shoulders, too, and the way its head is set on them!" Clara exclaimed.

"Not to mention its hands and its complexion!" Geraldine supplemented. "But its voice alone—soft, gentle, and low—would get it into the peerage!"

Beth, unused to be appraised in this way, blushed and smiled, rather pleased, but confused.

"How many girls are there here?" she asked, to change the subject.

"Six boarders till you came, but now we are seven," Clara answered. "There are some day-girls too, but they are children, and don't count. The greatest pickle in the

school is the daughter of an Archbishop—at least, she has been the greatest pickle so far—we don't know you as yet, however. But we have heard things!"

"Come and see my room," Geraldine interrupted. "And perhaps you'd like to see your own. It's next to mine."

"Are you allowed to go up and down stairs just as you like?" Beth asked in surprise.

"Why, of course!" Geraldine cried. "You can go where you like and sit where you like when you've done your work. We're not in prison!"

Beth had a dainty little room, hung with white curtains, all to herself. Her heart expanded when she saw it. The delightful appearance of her new surroundings had already begun to have the happiest effect upon her mind.

When Geraldine took her into her own room she drew a yellow book from under a quantity of linen in a drawer. "It's a French novel," she said. "Miss Blackburne wouldn't let me read it for worlds if she knew, so you mustn't tell. I'll lend it to you if you like."

"I couldn't read it if I would; I don't know enough," Beth said.

"Oh, you'll soon learn; and I'll tell you all there is in it. I say, what size is your waist? Mine is only seventeen inches; but I laced till I got shingles to reduce it to that. I know a doctor who says small waists are neither healthy nor beautiful; but then they're the fashion, and men are such awful fools about fashion. They sneer at a healthy figure, and saddle themselves every day with ailing wives, all deformed, because they're accustomed to see women so; and then they call us silly! My husband won't think me silly once I get command of his money, whatever else he may think me. Till then—!" she made a pretty gesture with her hands and laughed—Beth observing her the while with deep attention as a new specimen.

She found eventually that Geraldine was not at all a bad girl, or in the least inclined to be vicious, her conversation notwithstanding; she was merely a shrewd one learning how to protect herself in that state of life to which she was destined. If a

woman is to make her way in society and keep straight, she must have wits and knowledge of a special kind. There is probably no more delightful, high-minded, charming-mannered, honourable and trustworthy woman in the world than a well-bred Englishwoman; but, on the other hand, there can be nothing more vulgar-minded, coarse, and despicable than women of fashion tend to become. There is no meanness nor shabbiness, not to mention fraud, that they will not stoop to when it suits themselves, from tricking a tradesman and sweating a servant, to neglecting their children, deceiving their husbands, and slandering their friends. They are sheep running hither and thither in servile imitation of each other, without an original thought amongst them; the froth of society, with the natural tendency of froth to rise to the surface and thence be swept aside; mere bubbles, that shine a moment and then burst. It is fashion that unsexes women and unmakes men. To be in the world of fashion and of it, is to degenerate; but to be in it and not of it, to know it and remain untainted, despising all it has to give, makes towards solid advance. There are some ugly stages to be gone through, however, before the advancement is pronounced.

The six girls at Miss Blackburne's were all daughters of people of position, all enjoying the same advantages and under the same influences; but three of them were already shaping themselves into women of fashion, while the other three were tending as inevitably to develop into women of fine character and cultivated mind. Beth was attracted to all such women, and recognised their worth, often long before they appreciated her at all. She was seventh among the girls, her place being in the middle, as it were, with three on either side of her, teaching her all they could, as was inevitable. In association with the budding women of fashion, she lost the first fine delicacy of maiden modesty of mind; but the example of the young gentlewomen, on the other hand, confirmed her taste and settled her convictions. The ladies who kept the school were high-minded themselves and exemplary in every possible way, and if they did not make all their pupils equally so, it was

because factors go to the formation of character with which, for want of knowledge, no one can reckon at present. The influence of these ladies upon Beth was altogether benign. She was in a new world with them—a world of ease and refinement, of polished manners, of kindly consideration, where, instead of being harried by nagging rules, stultified by every kind of restraint, and lowered in her own estimation for want of proper respect and encouragement, she was allowed as much liberty as she would have had in a well-ordered home, and found herself and her abilities of special interest to each of her teachers. Instead of being an item, a part of a huge piece of machinery to be strictly kept in the particular place assigned to her, whether it were adapted to the needs of her nature or not, for fear of putting the whole mechanism out of order, her present and future being less considered than the smooth working of the machine—she was a girl again with some character of her own to be formed and developed. Here, too, she was put upon her honour to do all that was expected of her, and the immediate consequence of this in her case was the most scrupulous exactness. She attached herself to Miss Ella, attracted first of all by the fact that she was a Roman Catholic. How she could be one was a mystery Beth longed to solve; but Miss Ella did not consider it loyal to Protestant parents to influence their daughters at school, and would give her no help in this. In every other respect, however, Beth found her exceedingly kind and sympathetic, a serene, strong woman, who began to curb the exuberance of Beth's naughtiness from the first, and to direct the energy of which it was the outcome into profitable channels.

There was no monotony in Miss Blackburne's establishment. The girls were taken in turns to operas, concerts, picture-galleries, and every kind of exhibition that might help to cultivate their minds. To be able to discuss such things was a part of their education. They were expected to describe all they saw, fluently and pleasantly, but without criticism enough to require thought and provoke argument, which is apt to be tedious; and thus was formed the habit of chatting in the genial light frothy way which does duty for conversation in society. Geraldine had not exaggerated when

she called Miss Blackburne's school a forcing house for the marriage market. At that time marriage was the only career open to a gentlewoman, and the object of her education was to make her attractive. The theory then was that solid acquirements were beyond the physical strength of girls, besides being unnecessary. Showy accomplishments, therefore, were all that was aimed at; but they had to be thorough. Music, singing, drawing, dancing, French, German, Italian—whatever it might be; the girl who was learning it had the greatest attention from her master or mistress during the lesson; she was made to do it as much by the will of the teacher as by her own intelligence. This was the first experience of thorough teaching Beth had ever had, and she enjoyed it, and would have worked harder to profit by it than Miss Blackburne would allow. As it was, she made great progress with her work, while all the time the more informal but most valuable part of her education, which was directed to the strengthening of every womanly attribute, went on steadily under the influence of Miss Ella.

It would have been well for Beth if she had been left at Miss Blackburne's for the next three years; but just when the rebellious beating of her wings against the bars had ceased, and they had folded themselves contentedly behind her for awhile; just when the wild flights of her imagination were giving way to wholesome habits of thought, and her own vain dreams were being dissipated by the honest ambition to accomplish something actual—she was summoned away. Her sister Mildred had died suddenly of meningitis, and the immediate effect of the shock on Mrs. Caldwell, who had dearly loved her eldest daughter, was a kindlier feeling for Beth, and a wish to have her at home—for a time at all events. And Beth went willingly under the circumstances. She sympathised deeply with her mother, and was full of grief herself for her sister, to whom she had been tenderly attached although they had seen so little of each other. Beth was not yet sixteen, and this was the third blow that death had dealt her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Beth had a natural love of order, and at school she had learnt the necessity for it. She did not mean to give up work when she went home; on the contrary, she determined to do more than ever. Miss Ella had taught her to be deliberate, neither to haste nor to rest, but steadily to pursue. She insisted that things to be well done must be done regularly, and Beth, in accordance with this precept, mapped out her day so as to make the most of it. She got up at seven, opened her window wider, threw the clothes back from her bed to air it, had her bath, brushed her hair; left nothing untidy lying about her room; did her good reading, the psalms and lessons; breakfasted, made her bed, studied French, went out for exercise, sewed, and read so much, all in the same order every day. She paid particular attention to her personal appearance, too, that being the one of her mother's principles which had also been most particularly enjoined by Miss Blackburne. At both of her schools marriage was the great ambition of most of the girls. At St Catherine's it meant a means of escape from many hardships; to Miss Blackburne's girls it offered the chance of a better position, and more money and luxury. There was a nicer tone among the Royal Service girls, and more reticence in their discussions of the subject than at Miss Blackburne's, where the girls were not at all high-minded, and talked of their chances with the utmost frankness, not to say coarseness; but good looks were held to be the best, if not the only means to the end in both sets. Money and accomplishments might help, but personal appearance was the great certainty; and Beth was naturally impressed with this idea like the rest. Marriage, however, was far from being the distinct object of her life; in fact, she had no distinct object at all as yet. She had always meant to do something, or rather to be something; but further than that she had not got.

Miss Blackburne had paid particular attention to the cultivation of the speaking voice, and it was from her that Beth had learnt how to round hers to richness, and

modulate it so that its natural sweetness and charm were greatly enhanced. There was considerable difference of opinion about her looks. She was always striking in appearance, but dress, for one thing, altered her very much, and the state of her mind still more. People who met her on one occasion admired her exceedingly, and on the next wondered why they had thought her good-looking at all. She had the mesmeric quality which makes it impossible to escape observation, and her personality never failed to interest the intelligent whether it pleased them or not; but she was only at her best in mind, manner, and appearance when her fitful further faculty was active; then indeed she shone with a strange loveliness, a light to be felt rather than seen, and not to be described at all. At such times the mere physical beauty of other women went out in her immediate neighbourhood, and was no more thought of. It was not until she was quite mature, however, that her manner permanently acquired that subtle indefinable quality called charm, which is the outcome of a large tolerant nature and kindness of heart. It was as if she did not come into full possession of her true self until she had experienced numberless other phases of being common to the race. Hence the apparently incongruous mixture she presented in the earlier stages of her youth, her sluggish indifference at times, her excesses of energy and zeal, her variations of taste.

At first, after she left school, as was inevitable, her self-discipline was irksome enough at times, and some of the details she shirked; but not for long, because the time which accustomed duties should have occupied hung heavy on her hands, and she felt dissatisfied with herself rather than relieved when she neglected them. So by degrees her habits were formed, and in after life she found them a very present help in time of trouble, anchors which kept her from drifting to leeward, as she must have done but for their hold upon her. Some of her erratic tricks were not to be cured, but they came to be part of the day's work rather than a hindrance to it. She saw many a sunrise, for instance, and revelled with uplifted spirit in the beauty and wonder of the hour; but the soul that sang responsive to the glories of the summer dawn, the

colour, the freshness, the perfume, was steeped at noon with equal energy in the book she was studying, so that, instead of losing anything, she gained that day one sunrise more.

When she left school Beth was fastidiously refined. She hurried over all the hateful words and passages in the Bible, Shakespeare, or any other book she might be reading. The words she would not even pronounce to herself, so strongly did her delicate mind revolt from a vile idea, and sicken at the expression of it. But, nevertheless, she pored patiently over every book she could get that had a great reputation, and in this way she read many not usually given to girls, and became familiarised with certain facts of life not generally supposed to be of soul-making material. But she took no harm. The soul that is shaping itself to noble purpose, the growing soul, tries more than is proper for its nourishment in its search for sustenance, but rejects all that is unnecessary or injurious, as water creatures without intelligence reject any unsuitable substance they collect with their food.

Before she had been many days at home, Beth found that her mother had made a new acquaintance, who came to the house often in a casual way like an intimate friend. He came in on the day of her arrival after dinner, and was introduced to Beth by her mother as "the doctor." Beth broke into smiles, for she recognised her long-ago acquaintance of the rocks, the doctor of her Hector-romance. And it seemed he really was a doctor; now that was a singular coincidence! In their little drawing-room she discovered him to be a bigger man than she had supposed, but otherwise he was like her first impression of him, striking because of his colouring; the red and white of his complexion, which was unusually clear for a man, and the lightness of his grey-green eyes being in peculiar contrast to the blackness of his hair. She noticed again, too, that the expression of his face when he smiled was not altogether agreeable, because his teeth were too far apart; and she also thought his finely-formed hands would have looked better had they not been so obtrusively white.

"But we have met before," he exclaimed when Beth acknowledged the introduction. "You are the young lady I helped on the rocks one day, quite a long time ago now, when you were a little girl."

"I remember," Beth said, noticing that he claimed to have helped her on that occasion, and remembering also that she had declined his help.

"You never told me, Beth," her mother said reproachfully.

"There was really nothing to tell," he answered, coming to the rescue.

"What a day that was!" Beth observed. "Did you notice the sea? It was the sort of sea that might make one long to be a crab to live in it. Though a crab is not the animal that I should specially choose to be. I long to be a cat sometimes. To be able to fluff out my fur and spit would be such a satisfaction. There are feelings that can be expressed in no other way. And then to be able to purr! Purring is the one sound in nature that expresses perfect comfort and content, I think."

"Beth, don't talk nonsense," her mother said impatiently.

"Oh, it's not nonsense altogether," the doctor interposed. "It is just cheery chatter, and that is good. Miss Beth will raise your spirits in no time, or I'm much mistaken." He had watched Beth with gravity while she was speaking, as one sees people watch an actress critically, obviously marking her points, but betraying no emotion.

Mrs. Caldwell sighed heavily. "The doctor has been so good, Beth," she said. "He has come here continually, and done more to cheer me than anybody."

"Oh now, Mrs. Caldwell, you exaggerate," he remonstrated with a smile. "But it's my principle, you know, to be cheery. I always say be cheery whatever happens. It's no use crying over spilt milk!"

"A merry heart goes all the day, Your sad tires in a mile-a,"

Beth rattled off glibly, and again the doctor considered her.

"Now that's good," he said, just as if he had never heard it before; "and it's my

meaning exactly. Don't let your spirits go down——"

"For there's many a girl, as I know well, A-looking for you in the town,"

Beth concluded, her spirits rising uproariously.

"Beth!" her mother remonstrated, but with a smile.

"The worst of it is, the ones on the look-out are not the ones with the good looks," the doctor observed, also smiling.

"But they are the ones with the money," Beth rejoined. "I wonder how it is that plain girls so often have money. I suppose the money-grubbing spirit comes out in ugliness in the female branch."

Tea was brought in, but Beth refused to take any. The doctor tried to persuade her.

"You had better change your mind," he said. "Ladies are privileged to change their minds."

"I know," said Beth. "Ladies are privileged to be foolish. It is almost the only privilege men allow them. I scorn it myself. At school we were warned to be firm when once we had said 'No, thank you.' Miss Ella used to say that people who allowed themselves to be over-persuaded and changed their minds lost self-control and became self-indulgent eventually."

"Ah, that makes me think of my poor dear mother," said the doctor. "A better and more consistent woman never lived. Once she said a thing, you couldn't move her. She was a good mother to me! I was always her favourite son. But, like other young fellows, I'm afraid I didn't half appreciate her till I had lost her."

"All the same, I am sure you were all that a good son should be," Mrs. Caldwell observed sincerely.

The doctor's eyes shone with emotion.

When he had gone, Mrs. Caldwell began to discuss him.

"He really is cheery," she said, "he always raises my spirits; and I am sure he is good

and kind. Did you see how his eyes filled with tears when he mentioned his mother? He is handsome, too, don't you think so? Such a colour! And always so well dressed. Lady Benyon admires him very much. But he gets on with every one, even Uncle James! What do you think of him, Beth?"

"I think he looks neat to the point of nattiness, which is finical in a man," Beth answered.

"Ah, that is because you are not accustomed to well-dressed men," her mother assured her. "Here in Rainharbour you don't often see one."

"I have been in London lately," Beth observed.

"Beth," her mother began emphatically, "that is so like you! Will you never get out of the habit of answering so? You are always in opposition, and it is too conceited of you at your age. I did hope they would have cured you of the trick at school; but no sooner do you get home, than you begin again as bad as ever."

"Well, rather than displease you, mamma, I'll do my best to hold my tongue for the future when I can't say what you want me to say," Beth answered cheerfully. "I came home to be a comfort to you, and if I can't be a comfort to you and express myself as well, why, I must go unexpressed."

"Now, there you are again, Beth," Mrs. Caldwell cried peevishly. "Is that a nice thing to say?"

Beth looked at her mother and smiled enigmatically. Then she reflected. Then her countenance cleared.

"Mamma," she said, "your hair is much whiter than it was; but I don't think I ever saw you look so nice. You have such a pretty complexion, and so few wrinkles, and such even teeth! What a handsome girl you must have been!"

Mrs. Caldwell smiled complacently, and went to bed in high good humour. She told Bernadine, as they undressed, that she thought Beth greatly improved.

But Beth herself lay long awake that night; tossing and troubled, feeling far from satisfied either with herself or anybody else.

The next morning she rose early and drew up her plan of life.

CHAPTER XXXV

As that first day at home wore on, Beth was seized with an importunate yearning to go out, and it was with difficulty that she got through her self-appointed tasks. She thought of the sea, the shore, the silence and solitude, which were apt to be so soothing to her dull senses that she ceased to perceive with them, and so passed into the possession of her farther faculty for blissful moments. She fancied the sea was as she best loved to have it, her favourite sea, with tiny wavelets bringing the tide in imperceptibly over the rocks, and the long stretch of water beyond heaving gently up to the horizon, with smooth unruffled surface shining in the sun. When she had done her work she fared forth to the sea, to sit by it, and feel the healthy happy freshness of it all about her, and in herself as well. She went to the rocks. The tide was coming in. The water, however, was not molten silver-grey, as she had imagined it, but bright dark sapphire blue, with crisp white crests to the waves, which were merry and tumbled. It was the sea for an active, not for a meditative mood; its voice called to play, rather than to that prayer of the whole being which comes of the contemplation of its calmness; it exhilarated instead of soothing, and made her joyous as she had not been since she went to school. She stood long on the rocks by the water's edge, retreating as the tide advanced, watching wave after wave curve and hollow itself and break, and curve and hollow itself and break again. The sweet sea-breeze sang in her ears, and braced her with its freshness, while the continuous sound of wind and water went from her consciousness and came again with the ebb and flow of her thoughts. But the strength and swirl of the water, its tireless force, its incessant voices choiring on a chorus of numberless notes, invited her, fascinated

her, filled her with longing—longing to trust herself to the waves, to lie still and let them rock her, to be borne out by them a little way and brought back again, passive yet in ecstatic enjoyment of the dreamy motion. The longing became an impulse. She put her hand to her throat to undo her dress—but she did not undo it—she never knew why. Had she yielded to the attraction, she must have been drowned, for she could swim but little, and the water was deeper than she knew, and the current strong; and she might have yielded just as she resisted, for no reason that rendered itself into intelligible thought.

She turned from the scene of her strange impulse, and began to wander back over the rocks, suffering the while from that dull drop of the spirit which sets in at the reaction after moments of special intensity; and in this mood she came upon "the doctor," also climbing the rocks.

"Now, it is a singular coincidence that I should meet you here again," he said.

Beth smiled. "I am afraid those nice boots of yours will suffer on these sharp rocks," she remarked by way of saying something. "We natives keep our old ones for the purpose."

"Ah," he said, "I don't keep old ones for any purpose. I have an objection to everything old, old people included."

Beth had a book under her arm, and he coolly took it from her as he spoke, and read the title: "Dryden's Poetical Works." "Ah! So you carry the means of improving your mind at odd moments about with you. Well, I'm not surprised, for I heard you were clever."

Beth smiled, more pleased than if he had called her beautiful; but she wondered if Dryden could properly be called improving.

"It is absurd to keep a girl at school who has got as far as this kind of thing," he added, tapping the old brown book; "but it seems to me they don't understand you much at home, little lady."

"What makes you think so?" Beth asked shrewdly.

"Oh," he answered, somewhat disconcerted, "I judge from—from things I hear and see."

This implied sympathy, and again Beth was pleased.

It was late when she got in, and she expected her mother to be annoyed; but Mrs. Caldwell was all smiles.

"I suppose the doctor found you?" she said. "He asked where you were, and I said on the rocks probably."

"That accounts for the singular coincidence," Beth observed; but, girl-like, she thought less at the moment of the little insincerity than of the compliment his following her implied.

They dined that evening with Lady Benyon. It was a quiet little family party, including Uncle James and Aunt Grace Mary. The doctor was the only stranger present. He looked very well in evening dress.

"Striking, isn't he?" Aunt Grace Mary whispered to Beth. "Such colouring!"

"And how are you, Dan?" was Uncle James's greeting, uttered with an affectation of cordiality in his unexpected little voice that interested Beth. She wondered what was toward. She noticed, too, that she herself was an object of special attention, and her heart expanded with gratification. Very little kindness went a long way with Beth.

Dr. Dan took her in to dinner.

"By the way," he said, looking across the table at Uncle James, "I went to see that old Mrs. Prince, your keeper's mother, as I promised. She's a wonderful old woman for eighty-five. I shouldn't be surprised if she lived to a hundred."

"Dear! dear!" Uncle James ejaculated with something like consternation.

"I seem to have put my foot in it somehow," Dr. Dan remarked to Beth confidentially.

"If you do anything to keep her alive you will," Beth answered. "Uncle James always speaks bitterly about elderly women;—about old ones he is perfectly rabid. He seems to think they rob worthy men of part of their time by living so long."

It was arranged before the party broke up that the doctor should drive Beth to Fairholm in the Benyon dogcart to lunch next day. Beth was surprised and delighted to find herself the object of so much consideration. Dr. Dan, as they all called him, began to be associated in her mind with happy days.

"Have you come to live here?" she asked as they drove along.

"No," he answered. "I am only putting in the time until I can settle down to a practice of my own. I have just heard of one which I shall buy if I can get an appointment I am trying for in the same place."

"What is the appointment?" Beth asked.

"It's a hospital I want to be put in charge of," he answered casually,—"a small affair, but I should get a regular income from it, and that would make my rent, and all that sort of thing, secure. A doctor has to set up with a show of affluence."

"It is a terrible profession to me, the medical profession," Beth said. "The responsibilities must be so great and so various."

"Oh, I never think of that," he answered easily.

"I should," Beth rejoined.

"Yes, you would, of course," he said; "and that shows what folly it is for women to go in for medicine. They worry about this and that, things that are the patient's look-out, not the doctor's, and make no end of mischief; besides always losing their heads in a difficulty."

Just then the horse, which had been very fidgety all the way, bolted. The blood rushed into the doctor's face. "Sit tight! sit tight!" he exclaimed. "Don't now,—now don't move and make a fuss. Keep cool."

"Keep cool yourself," said Beth dryly. "I'm all right."

Dr. Dan glanced at her sideways, and saw that she was laughing.

When they arrived at Fairholm, he made much of the incident. "If I hadn't had my wits about me, there would have been a smash," he vowed. "But I happened to be on the spot myself, and Miss Beth behaved admirably. Most girls would have shrieked, you know, but she behaved heroically."

This was all rather gushing, but it did not offend Beth, because she associated gush with Aunt Grace Mary, who had always been kind to her. Gushing people are usually weak and amiable, gush being the ill-judged outcome of a desire to please; but at that happy age it was the amiable intention that Beth took into account. Her desire to be pleased, which had so seldom been gratified, had become a danger to her judgment by this time; it made her apt to respond to any attempt to please her without considering means and motives which should have discounted her appreciation. Everybody was trying to please her now, and all her being answered only too readily. She spent a delightful day at Fairholm, and went home in extravagantly high spirits.

Dr. Dan called early the next morning, and found her with her hat on, just going out.

"How are you this misty cold grey day?" he asked.

"Oh, very bright," she answered. "I feel as if I were the sun, and I'm just going to shine out on the world to enliven it."

"May I accompany you?" he asked.

"The sun, alas! is a solitary luminary," she answered, shaking her head.

"Then I shall hope for better luck next time," he said, and let her go alone.

In the evening he came in again to have a game of cribbage with Mrs. Caldwell. Beth was sleepy and had gone to bed early. In the pauses of the game they talked about her, and the responsibilities of a family.

"A girl wants some one to look after her," the doctor said, "especially if she has money."

"Yes, indeed," Mrs. Caldwell replied, "girls are a great anxiety. Now a boy you can put into a profession and have done with it. But it is not so easy to find a suitable husband for a girl."

"But, of course, if she has a little money it makes a difference," he observed. "Only she should have some one to advise her in the spending of it. Now, Miss Beth, for instance, will be as much a child at twenty-one in money matters as she is now."

"I hope we shall find the right man for her before then," Mrs. Caldwell answered archly; "not that I think her aunt's fortune will cause her much anxiety." She alluded to the smallness of the sum.

"She gets some of the interest, I suppose, to go on with," he said.

"Just enough to dress on."

Beth saw a great deal of Dr. Dan after that. She was not in the least in love with him, but they became intimate all the sooner on that account. A girl shrinks more shyly from a man she loves than from one for whom she has only a liking; in the one case every womanly instinct is on the alert, in the other her feeling is not strong enough to seem worth curbing. Beth was fond of men's companionship, and Dr. Dan's assiduous attentions enlivened her, made her brain active, and brought the vision and the dream within reach; so that she moved in a happy light, but considered the source of it no more than she would have considered the stick that held the candle by which she read an entrancing book.

There are idyllic gleams in all interesting lives; but life as we live it from day to day is not idyllic. In Beth's case there was the inevitable friction, the shocks and jars of difficulties and disagreements with her mother. These had been suspended for a time after her return, but began to break out again, fomented very often by Bernadine, who was always her mother's favourite, but was never a pleasant child. Dr. Dan

came one very wet day, and found Beth sitting in the drawing-room alone, looking miserable. She had done all her little self-imposed tasks honestly, but had reaped no reward. On the contrary, there had come upon her a dreadful vision of herself doing that sort of thing on always into old age, as Aunt Victoria did her French, with no object, and to no purpose; and for the first time she formulated a feeling that had gradually been growing up in her of late: "I must have more of a life than this." What could she do, however, tied to that stupid place, without a suspicion as yet that she had it in her to do anything special, and without friends to help her, with no one to advise. As she reflected, the hopelessness of it all wrung from her some of the bitterest tears she ever shed. If her mother would only send her back to Miss Blackburne she would be learning something, at all events; but, although Mrs. Caldwell had said nothing definite on the subject, Beth was pretty certain by this time that she did not mean to let her return to school.

Beth was in the middle of this misery when Dr. Dan arrived.

"How's this?" he said, "Down? You should have the window open. It's not cold to-day, though it's wet; and the room is quite stuffy. Never be afraid of fresh air, you know."

"I'm not," Beth said. "I didn't know the window was shut. Open it as wide as you like—the wider the better for me."

"That's better," he said, as the fresh air flowed in. "It's singular how women will shut themselves up. No wonder they get out of spirits! Now, I never let myself run down. When one thing goes wrong, I just take up another, and don't bother. You'd think I wasn't having much of a time here; but I'm as happy as the day is long, and I want to see you the same." He sat down beside her on the old-fashioned sofa, took her hand, and began to stroke it gently. "Cheer up, little girl," he added. "I believe you've been crying. Aren't they kind to you?"

"Oh yes, they're kind enough," Beth answered, soothed by the caress; "at least they

mean to be. The misery is in myself. I feel all dissatisfied."

"Not when I'm with you, do you?" he asked reproachfully.

"No, I don't bother about myself when I have you to talk to," Beth answered. "You come in fresh, and give me something else to think about."

"Then, look here, Beth," he said, putting his arm round her. "I don't think I can do better than take you away with me. You've a head on your shoulders, and an original way with you that would be sure to bring people about the house, and you're well connected and look it;—all of which would be good for my practice. Besides, a young doctor must marry. I'm over thirty, though you might not think it. Come, what do you say? You'd have a very good time of it as my wife, I can tell you. All your own way, and no nagging. You know what I am, a cheery fellow, never put out by anything. Now, what do you say?"

"Are you asking me to marry you?" said Beth, breaking into a smile. The position struck her as comical rather than serious.

"Why, what else?" he replied, smiling also. "I see you are recovering your spirits. You'll be as happy as the day is long when we're married. You'd never get on with anybody else as you'd do with me. I don't think anybody else would understand you."

Beth laughed. She liked him, and she liked to be caressed. Why not marry him and be independent of every one? She hadn't the slightest objection at the moment; far from it, for she saw in the offer the one means of escape she was likely to have from the long dull dreary days, and the loneliness, which was all the life she could have to look forward to when he had gone. And he was good-looking, too, and nice—everybody said so. Besides, they would all be pleased if she accepted him, her mother especially so. Now that she came to think of it, she perceived that this was what they had been suggesting to her ever since her return.

"It is settled then?" he said, stooping forward to look into her face.

She looked at him shyly and laughed again. For the life of her she could not keep her countenance, although she felt she was behaving in the silly, giggling-girl sort of way she so much despised.

"That's all right," he exclaimed, looking extremely well pleased; and at that moment Mrs. Caldwell walked into the room, just in time to witness a lover-like caress. Beth jumped up, covered with confusion. Mrs. Caldwell looked from one to the other, and waited for an explanation.

"We've just come to the conclusion that we cannot live apart," Dan said deliberately, rising at the same time and taking Beth's hand.

"My dear child!" Mrs. Caldwell exclaimed, embracing Beth with happy tears in her eyes. "This is a joy! I do congratulate you."

Beth became suddenly serious. The aspect of the affair had changed. It was no longer a game of the moment, but a settled business, already irrevocable. She wanted to explain that she had not actually pledged herself, that she must take time to consider; but her heart failed her in view of her mother's delight. It was Beth's great weakness that, as a rule, she could neither spoil pleasure nor give pain to save herself in an emergency.

CHAPTER XXXVI

When Dan came to see her the next morning, he found her in a mixed mood. Half-a-dozen times during the night she had declined to marry him in a painful scene, but just as often her imagination would run on into the unknown life she would have to lead with him. She saw herself in white satin and lace and pearls, a slender figure at the head of a long dining-table, interesting to everybody, and Dan was at the foot, looking quite distinguished in evening dress, with his glossy black hair and wonderful clear skin. She had gathered the nicest people in the neighbourhood about her, and on her right there was a shadowy person, a man of

mark, and knightly, who delighted in her conversation.

When she came downstairs to receive Dan she was coughing, and he showed his devotion by being greatly concerned about her health. He said she must have port wine and a tonic, and be out in the air as much as possible, and suggested that they should go for a walk at once as it was a lovely day, though still wet under foot.

"I would not ask you to walk if I had a carriage to offer you," he said, "for I hate to see a delicate lady on foot in the mud. But you shall have your carriage yet, please God, all in good time!"

"Where shall we go?" said Beth when they left the house.

"Oh, anywhere," he answered. "Take me to one of your own favourite haunts."

She thought of the Fairholm cliffs for a moment, but felt that they were sacred to many recollections with which she would not care to associate this new experience. "I'll show you the chalybeate spring," she said.

They turned out of Orchard Street, and went down the hill to the Beck, a broad, clear, shallow rivulet, that came round a sharp green curve between high banks, well wooded with old trees, all in their heavy, dark-green, summer foliage. As they crossed the rustic wooden bridge Beth paused a little to look up at the trees and love them, and down into the clear water at the scarlet sticklebacks heading up stream. Her companion looked at her in surprise when she stopped, and then followed the direction of her eyes. All he saw, however, was a shallow stream, a green bank, and some trees.

"This is not very interesting," he observed.

Beth made no reply, but led the way up the hill on the other side, and, to the right, passed a row of cottages with long gardens at the back running down to the brow of the bank that overhung the Beck. In most of these cottages she was an object of suspicion because of her uncanny words and ways, and she knew it, and the thought of it was a grief to her. She wanted the people to like her as she would have liked

them had they let her. The wish to win them fired her imagination. She looked on ahead into futurity, and was a beautiful lady, driving a pair of ponies down a wooded lane, with a carriage full of good things for the cottagers, and they all loved her, and were very glad to see her.

"What are you thinking about?" Dan asked.

"How nice it would be to be rich," she replied.

"But you will be well off when you're twenty-one, I am told."

"I suppose there's a chance of it," she answered dreamily.

(The ponies had arrived at the village by this time, and she was looking up at an old grey church with a red roof.)

"Do you know what your aunt's income was?" he asked.

"Seven or eight hundred a year," she answered absently.

(The sexton's little house stood by the gate leading into the churchyard. His wife came out when the carriage stopped, wiping soap-suds from her bare arms with her apron. Beth leaned forward and held out her hand to her, and the woman smiled a cordial welcome. She had a round flat face and fair hair. Then Beth handed her a mysterious package from the carriage, which she received half in delight and half in inquiry.)

But Beth's imagination stopped there, for she perceived that she had passed the gate of the garden in which was the chalybeate spring. There was a cottage in the garden, and Beth turned back, and went up to the door, where a woman was standing holding a plump child, whose little fat thigh, indented by the pressure, bulged over her bare arm.

"May we have a drink, please?" Beth asked.

"Yes, and welcome," the woman answered. "I'll fetch you a glass."

"Let me hold the baby," said Beth.

The woman smiled, and handed him to her. Beth took him awkwardly, and squeezed him up in her arms as a child holds a kitten.

"Isn't he nice?" she said.

"That's a matter of taste," Dan answered. "I don't like 'em fat-bottomed myself."

Beth froze at the expression. When the woman returned, she handed the child back to her carefully, but without a smile, took the glass, and went down to the spring by a narrow winding path which took them out of sight of the cottage directly. Here it was old trees again, and green banks, with the Beck below. When they were under the trees Beth looked up at a big elm, and her companion noticed her lips move.

"What are you saying to yourself?" he asked.

"Nothing to myself," she answered. "I'm saying, 'Oh, tree, give me of thy strength!' the Eastern invocation."

He laughed, and wanted to know what rot that was; and again Beth was jarred.

"You'll have no luck if you don't respect the big trees," she said.

"Oh, by Jove, if we wait for the big trees to make our luck, we shan't have much!" he rejoined, picking up a pebble and firing it into the Beck below.

They were on a narrow path now, about half-way down the bank, and here, in a hollow, the chalybeate spring bubbled out, and was gathered by a wooden spout into a slender stream, which fell on the ground, where, in the course of time, it had made a basin for itself that was always partly full. The water was icy cold, and somewhat the colour of light on steel. Beth held the glass to the spout, rinsed it first, then filled it, and offered it to Dan, but he dryly declined to take it "Not for me, thank you," he said; "I never touch any medicinal beastliness."

For the third time Beth was jarred. She threw the water on the ground, refilled the glass, and drank. Dan saw he had made a mistake.

"I'll change my mind and have some too," he said, anxious to mollify her.

Beth filled the glass again, and handed it to him in silence, but no after-thought could atone for the discourtesy of his first refusal, and she looked in another direction, not even troubling herself to see whether he tried the water or not.

There was a rustic seat in the hollow of the bank, and he suggested that they should sit there a while before they returned. Beth acquiesced; and soon the sputter of the little spring bubbling into its basin, the chitter of birds in the branches above, the sunbeams filtering from behind through the leaves, the glint of the Beck below slipping between its banks, soundless, to the sea, enthralled her.

"Isn't this lovely?" she ejaculated.

"Yes, it's very jolly—with you," he said.

"You wouldn't like it so well without me?" Beth asked.

"No, I should think not," he rejoined. "And you wouldn't like it as well without me, I hope."

"No," Beth responded. "It makes it nicer having some one to share it."

"Now that's not quite kind," he answered in an injured tone. "Some one is any one; and I shouldn't be satisfied with anybody but you."

"Well, but I am satisfied with you," Beth answered dispassionately.

He took her hand, laid it in his own palm, and looked at it. It was a child's hand as yet, delicately pink and white.

"What a pretty thing!" he said. "Oh, you smile at that." He reached up to put a lock of her brown hair back from her cheek, and then he put his arm round her.

Next day he was obliged to go away—Beth never thought of inquiring why or wherefore; but she heard her mother and Lady Benyon talking about the very eligible appointment he was hoping to get. He took an affectionate leave of her. When he had gone she went off to the sands, and was surprised to find how glad she was to be alone again. The tide was far out, and there were miles and miles of the

hard buff sand, a great, open space, not empty to Beth, but teeming with thought and full of feeling. Some distance on in front of her there was a solitary figure, a man walking with bent head and hands folded behind him, holding a stick—Count Gustav Bartahlinsky's favourite attitude when deep in meditation. Beth hurried on, and soon overtook him.

"Would you rather be alone, Count Gustav?" she said.

He turned to look at her, then smiled, and they walked on together.

"So they are going to marry you off," he said abruptly.

"Yes," Beth answered laconically.

"Do you wish to be married?"

"No, I do not."

"Then why do you consent?"

"Because I'm weak; I can't help it," she said.

"Nonsense!"

"I can't," she repeated. "I'm firm enough about some things, but in this I vacillate. When I am alone I know I am making a mistake, but when I am with other people who think differently, my objection vanishes."

"What is your objection?" he asked.

"That is the difficulty," she said. "I can't define it. Do you know Dr. Dan?"

"I can't say I know him," he answered. "I have met him and talked to him. He expresses the most unexceptional opinions; but it is premature to respect a man for the opinions he expresses—wait and see what he does. Words and acts don't necessarily agree. Sometimes, however, a chance remark which has very little significance for the person who makes it, is like an aperture that lets in light on the whole character." He cogitated a little, then added, "Don't let them hurry you. Take time to know your man, and if you are not satisfied yourself, if there is anything that

jars upon you, never mind what other people think, have nothing to do with him."

When Beth went home, she found her mother sitting by the drawing-room window placidly knitting and looking out. "I am afraid I am very late," Beth said. "I have been on the sands with Count Gustav."

"Ah, that was nice, I should think," Mrs. Caldwell observed graciously. "And what were you talking about?"

"Being married, principally," Beth answered.

Mrs. Caldwell beamed above her knitting. "And what did he say?"

"He strongly advised me not to marry if I didn't want to."

Mrs. Caldwell changed countenance. "Did he indeed?" she observed with a sniff. Then she reflected. "And what had you been saying to draw such a remark from him?"

"I said I didn't want to be married," Beth blurted out with an effort.

"How could you tell Count Gustav such a story, Beth?" Mrs. Caldwell asked, shaking her head reproachfully.

"It was no story, mamma."

"Nonsense, Beth," her mother rejoined. "It is nothing but perverseness that makes you say such things. You feel more interesting, I believe, when you are in opposition. If I had refused to allow you to be married, you would have been ready to run away. I know girls! They all want to be married, and they all pretend they don't. Why, when I was a girl I thought of nothing else; but I didn't talk about it."

"Perhaps you had nothing else to think about," Beth ventured.

"And what have you to think about, pray?"

Beth clasped her hands, and her grey eyes dilated.

"Beth, don't look like that," her mother remonstrated. "You are always acting, and it is such a pity—as you will find when you go out into the world, I am afraid, and

people avoid you."

"I didn't know I was doing anything peculiar," Beth said; "and how am I to help it if I don't know?"

"Just help it by only doing as you are told until you are able to judge for yourself. Look at the silly way you have been talking this afternoon! What must Count Gustav have thought of you? Never be so silly again. You must be married now, you know. When a girl lets a man kiss her, she has to marry him."

Beth had been watching her mother's fingers as she knitted until she was half mesmerised by the bright glint of the needles; but now she woke up and burst out laughing. "If that be the case," she said, "he is not the only one that I shall have to marry."

Mrs. Caldwell's hands dropped on her lap, and she looked up at Beth in dismay. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Just that," Beth answered.

"Do you mean to tell me you have allowed men to kiss you?" Mrs. Caldwell cried.

Beth looked up as if trying to keep her countenance.

"You wicked girl, how dare you?"

"Well, mamma, if it were wicked, why didn't you warn me?" Beth said. "How was I to know?"

"Your womanly instincts ought to have taught you better."

Unfortunately for this theory, all Beth's womanly instincts set in the opposite direction. Her father's ardent temperament warred in her with Aunt Victoria's Puritan principles, and there was no telling as yet which would prevail.

Beth made no reply to that last assertion of her mother's, but remained half sitting on the table, with her feet stretched out in front of her, and her hands supporting her on either side, which brought her shoulders up to her ears. It was a most inelegant

attitude, and peculiarly exasperating to Mrs. Caldwell.

"Oh, you wicked—you bad—you abandoned girl!" she exclaimed, losing her temper altogether. "My heart is broken with you. Go to your room, and stay there. I feel as if I could never endure the sight of you again."

Beth gathered herself together slowly, and strolled away with an air of indifference; but as soon as she found herself alone in her own room with the door shut, she dropped on her knees and lifted her clasped hands to heaven in an agony of remorse for having tormented her mother, and in despair about that wretched engagement. "O Lord, what am I to do?" she said; "what am I to do?" If she could make up her mind once for all either way, she would be satisfied; it was this miserable state of indecision that was unendurable.

Presently in the room below, she thought she heard her mother sob aloud. She listened, breathless. Her mother was sobbing. Beth jumped up and opened her door. What should she do? Her unhappy mother—heart-broken, indeed. What a life hers was—a life of hard privation, of suffering most patiently borne, of the utmost self-denial for her children's sake, of loss, of loneliness, of bitter disappointment! First her husband taken, then her dearest child; her ungrateful boys not over-kind to her; and now this last blow dealt her by Beth, just when the prospect of getting her well married was bringing a gleam of happiness into her mother's life. The piteous sobs continued. Beth stole downstairs, bent on atoning in her own person by any sacrifice for all the sorrows, no matter by whom occasioned, which she felt were culminating in this final outburst of grief. She found her mother standing beside the high old-fashioned mantelpiece, leaning her poor head against it.

"Mamma," Beth cried, "do forgive me. I never meant to—I never meant to hurt you so. I will do anything to please you. I was only teasing you about kissing men. I haven't been in the habit of kissing any one. And of course I'll marry Dan as soon as you like. And we'll all be happy—there!"

Mrs. Caldwell held out her arms, and Beth sprang into them, and hugged her tight and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXXVII

That autumn Beth was married to Daniel Maclure, M.D., &c., &c. At the time of her marriage she hardly knew what his full name was. She had always heard him called "the doctor" or "Dr. Dan," and had never thought of him as anything else, nor did she know anything else about him—his past, his family, or his prospects, which, considering her age, is not surprising; but what did surprise her in after years, when she discovered it, was to find that her friends who made the match knew no more about him than she did. He had scraped acquaintance with her brother Jim in a public billiard-room in Rainharbour, and been introduced by him to the other members of her family, who, because his address was good and his appearance attractive, had taken it for granted that everything else concerning him was equally satisfactory.

Beth decided to keep her surname for her father's sake, and also because she could not see why she should lose her identity because she had married. Everybody said it was absurd of her; but she was determined, and from the time of her marriage she signed herself Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure.

Dan confided to Mrs. Caldwell that he was troubled by some few small debts which he was most anxious to pay in order that he might start his married life clear, and the poor lady generously reduced her slender income by selling some shares to raise the money for him. When he accepted it, his eyes filled with tears, as was usual with him in moments of emotion.

"O mamma!" Beth exclaimed when she heard of the sacrifice, "how could you? I do not deserve such generosity, for I have never been any comfort to you; and I shall always be miserable about it, thinking how badly you want the money."

"There will be one mouth less to feed when you have gone, you know, Beth," Mrs. Caldwell answered bravely, "and I shall be the happier for thinking that you start clear. Debt crushed us our whole married life. I shall be the easier if I know you haven't that burden to bear. Besides, Dan will repay me as soon as he can. He is a thoroughly good fellow."

"You shall be repaid, mamma, in more ways than one, if I live," Beth vowed.

Uncle James Patten doled out a five-pound-note to Beth by way of a wedding present from the long rent-roll her mother should have inherited.

"This is to help with your trousseau, but do not be extravagant," he said in his pleasant way. "As the wife of a professional man, you will descend from my class to the class below, the middle class, and you should dress according to your station. But you are doing as well as we could expect you to do, considering your character and conduct. Some doubted if you would ever receive an offer of marriage, or have the sense to accept it if one were made you; but I always said you would have the doctor if he would have you."

Beth's impulse was to throw the note at him, but she restrained herself on her brother Jim's account. It was suspected that Uncle James was only waiting for a plausible excuse to disinherit Jim; and he found it the next time Jim stayed at Fairholm. They were in the drawing-room together one day, and a maid was mending the fire. Uncle James was sitting at a writing-table with a mirror in front of him, and he declared that in that mirror he distinctly saw his nephew chuck the maid-servant under the chin, which was conduct such as Mr. James Patten could not be expected to tolerate in his heir; so he altered his will, and after that all communication ceased between the two families, except such as Aunt Grace Mary managed to keep up surreptitiously.

Aunt Grace Mary was very generous to Beth, and so also was old Lady Benyon. Had it not been for these two, Beth would have left home ill-provided for. Thanks to

them, however, she was spared that humiliation, and went with an ample outfit.

In the days preceding her marriage, Beth sometimes thought of Charlotte, and of the long fiction of that wonderful time when they were friends. Her busy brain had created many another story since then, but none that had the fascination of that first sustained effort. Hector's mysterious establishment on the other side of the headland, the troubles in Spain, the wicked machinations of their enemies, the Secret Service of Humanity, the horses, yacht, and useful doctor—who had not held a high place in their estimation, being merely looked upon as a trustworthy tool of Hector's; yet it was he whom Beth was to marry. She wondered what Charlotte would think of her when she heard it, and of Hector and the whole story; but she never knew, for Charlotte was at school in France during this period, and never came into Beth's life again.

During the early days of her married life a sort of content settled upon Beth; a happy sense of well-being, of rest and satisfaction, came to her, and that strange vague yearning ache, the presence of which made all things incomplete, was laid. The atmosphere in which she now lived was sensuous, not spiritual, and although she was unaware of this, she felt its influence. Dan made much of her, and she liked that; but the vision and the dream had ceased. Her intellectual activity was stimulated, however, and it was not long before she began to think for herself more clearly and connectedly than she had ever done before.

They spent the first few weeks in London in a whirl of excitement, living at sumptuous restaurants, and going to places of amusement every night, where Beth would sit entranced with music, singing, dancing, and acting, never taking her eyes from the stage, and yearning in her enthusiasm to do the same things herself—not doubting but that she could either, so perfectly had she the power to identify herself with the performers, and realise, as from within, what their sensations must be.

When she had been in London as a girl at school, she had seen nothing but the bright

side of life, the wholesome, happy, young side. A poor beggar to be helped, or a glimpse in the street of a sorrowful face that saddened her for a moment, was the worst she knew of the great wicked city; but now, with Dan for a companion, the realities of vice and crime were brought home to her; she learnt to read signs of depravity in the faces of men and women, and to associate certain places with evil-doers as their especial haunts. Her husband's interest in the subject was inexhaustible; he seemed to think of little else. He would point out people in places of public amusement, and describe in detail the loathsome lives they led. Every well-dressed woman he saw he suspected. He would pick out one because she had yellow hair, and another because her two little children were precocious and pretty, and declare them to be "kept women." That a handsome woman could be anything but vicious had apparently never occurred to him. He was very high-minded on the subject of sin if the sinner were a woman, and thought no degradation sufficient for her. In speaking of such women he used epithets from which Beth recoiled. She allowed them to pass, however, in consideration of the moral exasperation that inspired them, and the personal rectitude his attitude implied. The subject had a horrible kind of fascination for her; she hated it, yet she could not help listening, although her heart ached and her soul sickened. She listened in silence, however, neither questioning nor discussing, but simply attending; collecting material for which she had no use at the moment, and storing it without design—material which she would find herself forced to turn to account eventually, but in what way and to what purpose there was no knowing as yet.

They were to live at Slane, an inland town near Morningquest, where modern manufactures had competed successfully with ancient agricultural interests, and altered the attitude of the landed gentry towards trade, and towards the townspeople, beguiling them to be less exclusive because there was money in the town, self-interest weighing with them all at once in regard to the neighbours whom Christian precept had vainly urged them to recognise.

Dr. Maclure had taken an old-fashioned house in a somewhat solitary position on the outskirts of Slane, but near enough to the town to secure paying patients, as he hoped, while far enough out of it to invite county callers. It stood just on the highroad, from which it was only divided by a few evergreen shrubs and an iron railing; but it was picturesque, nevertheless, with creepers—magnolia, wisteria, and ivy—clustering on the dark red bricks. At the back there was a good garden, and in front, across the road, were green meadows with hedgerows—a tangle of holly, hawthorn, and bramble—and old trees, surviving giants of a forest long uprooted and forgotten. It was a rich and placid scene, infinitely soothing to one fresh from the turmoil of the city, and weary of the tireless motion, the incessant sound and tumult of the sea. When Beth looked out upon the meadows first, she sighed and said to herself, "Surely, surely one should be happy here!"

The house was inconveniently arranged inside, and had less accommodation than its outside pretensions promised; but Beth was delighted with it all, and took possession of her keys with pride. She was determined to be a good manager, and make her housekeeping money go a long way. Her dream was to save out of it, and have something over to surprise Dan with when the bills were paid. To her chagrin, however, she found that she was not to have any housekeeping money at all.

"You are too young to have the care of managing money," said Dan. "Just give the orders, and I'll see about paying the bills."

But the system did not answer. Beth had no idea what she ought to be spending, and either the bills were too high or the diet was too low, and Dan grumbled perpetually. If the housekeeping were at all frugal, he was anything but cheery during meals; but if she ordered him all he wanted, there were sure to be scenes on the day of reckoning. He blamed her bad management, and she said nothing; but she knew she could have managed on any reasonable sum to which he might have limited her. She had too much self-respect to ask for money, however, if he did not choose to give it

to her.

It surprised her to find that what he had to eat was a matter of great importance to him. He fairly gloated over things he liked, and in order to indulge him, and keep the bills down besides, she went without herself; and he never noticed her self-denial. He was apt to take too much of his favourite dishes, and was constantly regretting it. "I wish I had not eaten so much of that cursed vol au vent; it never agrees with me," he would say; but he would eat as much as ever next time. Beth could not help observing such traits. She did not set them down to his personal discredit, however, but to the discredit of his sex at large. She had always heard that men were self-indulgent, and Dan was a man; that was the nearest she came to blaming him at first. Being her husband had made a difference in her feeling for him; before their marriage she was not so tolerant.

Her housekeeping duties by no means filled her day. An hour or so in the morning was all they occupied at most, and the time must have hung heavy on her hands had she had no other pursuit to beguile her. Fortunately she had no intention of allowing her plans for the improvement of her mind to lapse simply because she had married. On the contrary, she felt the defects of her education more keenly than ever, and expected Dan to sympathise with her in her efforts to remedy them. He came in one day soon after they were settled, and found her sitting at the end of the dining-room table with her back to the window and a number of books spread out about her.

"This looks learned," he said. "What are you doing?"

"I am looking for something to study," she answered. "What writers have helped you most?"

"Helped me most!—how do you mean?"

"Well, helped you to be upright, you know, to make good resolutions and keep straight."

"Thank you," he said; "I have not felt the need of good resolutions, and this is the

first hint I have had that I require any. If you will inquire among my friends, I fancy you will find that I have the credit of going pretty straight as it is."

"O Dan!" Beth exclaimed, "you quite misunderstand me. I never meant to insinuate that you are not straight. I was only thinking of the way in which we all fall short of our ideals."

"Ideals be hanged!" said Dan. "If a man does his duty, that's ideal enough, isn't it?"

"I should think so," Beth said pacifically.

Dan went to the mantelpiece, and stood there, studying himself with interest in the glass. "A lady told me the other day I looked like a military man," he said, smoothing his glossy black hair and twisting the ends of his long moustache.

"Well, I think you look much more military than medical," Beth replied, considering him.

"I'm glad of that," he said, smiling at himself complacently.

"Are you?" Beth exclaimed in surprise. "Why? A medical man has a finer career than a military man, and should have a finer presence if ability, purpose, and character count for anything towards appearance. Personally I think I should wish to look like what I am, if I could choose."

"So you do," he rejoined, adjusting his hat with precision as he spoke, and craning his neck to see himself sideways in the glass. "You look like a silly little idiot. But never mind. That's all a girl need be if she's pretty; and if she isn't pretty, she's of no account, so it doesn't matter what she is."

When he had gone, Beth sat for a long time thinking; but she did no more reading that day, nor did she ever again consult Dan about the choice of books, or expect him to sympathise with her in her work.

For the first few months of her married life, she had no pocket-money at all. Aunt Grace Mary slipped two sovereigns into her hand when they parted, but these Beth

kept, she hardly knew why, as she had her half-year's dividend to look forward to. About the time that her money was due, Dan began to talk incessantly of money difficulties. Bills were pressing, and he did not know where on earth to look for a five-pound-note. He did not think Beth too young to be worried morning, noon, and night on the subject, although she took it very seriously. One morning after he had made her look anxious, he suddenly remembered a letter he had for her, and handed it to her. It was from her lawyer, and contained a cheque for twenty-five pounds, the long-looked-forward-to pocket money.

"Will this be of any use to you?" Beth asked, handing him the cheque.

His countenance cleared. "Of use to me? I should think it would!" he exclaimed. "It will just make all the difference. You must sign it, though."

When she had signed it, he put it in his pocket-book, and his spirits went up to the cheery point. He adjusted his hat at the glass over the dining-room mantelpiece, lit a shilling cigar, and went off to his hospital jauntily. Beth was glad to have relieved him of his anxiety. She half hoped he might give her something out of the cheque, if it were only a pound or two, she wanted some little things so badly; but he never offered her a penny. She thought of Aunt Grace Mary's two sovereigns, but the dread of having nothing in case of an emergency kept her from spending them.

There was one thing Dan did which Beth resented. He opened her letters.

"Husband and wife are one," he said. "They should have no secrets from each other. I should like you to open my letters, too, but they contain professional secrets, you see, and that wouldn't do."

He spoke in what he called his cheery way, but Beth had begun to feel that there was another word which would express his manner better, and now it occurred to her.

"You have no right to open my letters," she said; "and being facetious on the subject does not give you any."

"But if I chose to?" he asked.

"It will be a breach of good taste and good feeling," she answered.

No more was said on the subject, and Dan did not open her letters for a little, but then he began again. He had always some excuse, however—either he hadn't looked at the address, or he had been impatient to see if there were any message for himself, and so on; but Beth was not mollified although she said nothing, and her annoyance made her secretive. She would watch for the postman, and take the letters from him herself, and conceal her own, so that Dan might not even know that she had received any.

She had a difficulty with him about another matter too. His lover-like caresses while they were engaged had not been distasteful to her; but after their marriage he kept up an incessant billing and cooing, and of a coarser kind, which soon satiated her. She was a nicely balanced creature, with many interests in life, and love could be but one among the number in any case; but Dan almost seemed to expect it to be the only one.

"Oh dear! must I be embraced again?" she exclaimed one day, with quite comical dismay on being interrupted in the middle of a book that was interesting her at the moment.

Dan looked disconcerted. In his cheerful masculine egotism it had not occurred to him that Beth might find incessant demonstrations of affection monotonous. He would smile at pictures of the waning of the honeymoon, where the husband returns to his book and his dog, and the wife sits apart sad and neglected; it was inevitable that the man should tire, he had other things to think of; but that the wife should be the first to be bored was incredible, and worse: it was unwomanly.

Dan went to the mantelpiece, and stood looking down into the fire, and his grey-green eyes became suffused.

"Have I hurt you, Dan?" Beth exclaimed, jumping up and going to him.

"Hurt me!" he said, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, "that is not the word for it.

You have made me very unhappy."

"Oh!" said Beth, her own inclinations disregarded at once, "I am sorry!"

But he had satiated her once for all, and she never recovered any zest for his caresses. She found no charm or freshness in them, especially after she perceived that they were for his own gratification, irrespective of hers. The privileges of love are not to be wrested from us with impunity. Habits of dutiful submission destroy the power to respond, and all that they leave to survive of the warm reality of love at last is a cold pretence. By degrees, as Beth felt forced to be dutiful, she ceased to be affectionate.

Although Dan dressed to go out with scrupulous care, he took no trouble to make himself nice in the house. Care in dress was not in him a necessary part and expression of a refined nature, but an attempt to win consideration. He never dressed for dinner when they were alone together. It was a trouble rather than a refreshment to him to get rid of the dust of the day and the associations of his walking-dress. This was a twofold disappointment to Beth. She had expected him to have the common politeness to dress for her benefit, and she was not pleased to find that the punctiliousness he displayed in the matter on occasion was merely veneer. It was a defect of breeding that struck her unpleasantly. They had been poor enough at home, but Beth had been accustomed all her life to have delicate china about her, and pictures and books, to walk on soft carpets and sit in easy-chairs; possessions of a superior class which, in her case, were symbols bespeaking refinement of taste and habits from which her soul had derived satisfaction even while her poor little fragile body starved. She dressed regularly and daintily herself, and Dan at the bottom of the table in his morning coat was an offence to her. She said nothing at first, however, so his manners still further deteriorated, until one night, after she had gone to her room, he walked in with his hat on, smoking a cigar. It was this last discourtesy that roused her to rebel.

"This is my bedroom," she said significantly.

"I know," he answered.

"You know—yet you keep your hat on, and you are smoking," she proceeded.

"Why," he rejoined, "and if I do, what then? I know ladies who let their husbands smoke in bed."

"Probably," she said. "I have heard of more singularly coarse things than that even. But I am accustomed to pure air in my room, and I must have it."

"And suppose I should choose to stay here and smoke?" he said.

"Of course I could not prevent you," she answered; "but I should go and sleep in another room."

"H'm," he grunted. "You're mighty particular."

But he went away all the same, and did not appear there again either with his hat on or smoking a cigar.

Beth suffered miserably from the want of proper privacy in her life. She had none whatever now. It had been her habit to read and reflect when she went to bed, to prepare for a tranquil night by setting aside the troubles of the day, and purifying her mind systematically even as she washed her body; but all that was impossible if her husband were at home. He would break in upon her reading with idle gossip, fidget about the room when she wished to meditate, and leave her no decent time of privacy for anything. He had his own dressing-room, where he was secure from interruption, but never had the delicacy to comprehend that his presence could be any inconvenience to Beth. And it was worse than an inconvenience. It was a positive hardship—never to be sure of a moment alone.

One afternoon, when she had locked herself in her bedroom, he came and turned the handle of the door noisily.

"Open the door," he said.

"Do you want anything?" she asked.

"Open the door," he repeated.

She obeyed, and he came in, and glanced round suspiciously.

"What were you doing?" he asked.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "this is intolerable!"

"What is intolerable?" he demanded.

"This intrusion," she replied. "I want to be alone for a little; can't you understand that?"

"No, I cannot understand a wife locking her husband out of her room, and what's more, you've no business to do it. I've a legal right to come here whenever I choose."

Then Beth began to realise what the law of man was with regard to her person.

"I never intrude upon you when you shut yourself up," she remonstrated.

"Oh, that is different," he answered arrogantly. "I may have brainwork to do, or something important to think about There is no comparison."

Beth went to her dressing-table, sat down in front of it, folded her hands, and waited doggedly.

He looked at her for a little; then he said, "I don't understand your treatment of me at all, Beth. But there's no understanding women." He spoke as if it were the women's fault, and to their discredit, that he couldn't understand them.

Beth made no answer, and he finally took himself off, slamming the door after him.

"Thank goodness!" Beth exclaimed. "One would think he had bought me."

Then she sat wondering what she should do. She must have some corner where she would be safe from intrusion. He had his consulting-room, a room called his laboratory, a surgery, and a dressing-room, where no one would dream of following him if he shut the door; she had literally not a corner. She left her bedroom, and

walked through the other rooms on the same floor as she considered the matter; then she went up to the next floor, where the servants slept. Above that again there was an attic used as a box-room, and she went up there too. It was a barn of a place, supported by pillars, and extending apparently over the whole of the storey below. The roof sloped to the floor on either side, and the whole place was but ill-lighted by two small windows looking to the north. Dr. Maclure had taken over the house as it stood, furniture and all, from the last occupants, by whom this great attic had evidently been used as a lumber-room. There were various pieces of furniture in it—tables, chairs, and drawers, some broken, some in fair condition. At the farther end, opposite to the door, there was a pile of packing-cases and travelling-trunks. Beth had always thought that they stood up against the wall, but on going over to them now, she discovered that there was a space behind. The pile was too high for her to see over it, but by going down on her hands and knees where the sloping roof was too low for her to stoop, she found she could creep round it. It was the kind of thing a child would have done, but what was Beth but a child? On the other side of the pile it was almost dark. She could see something, however, when she stood up, which looked like a mark on the whitewash, and on running her hand over it she discovered it to be a narrow door flush with the wall. There was no handle or latch to it, but there was a key which had rusted in the keyhole and was not to be turned. The door was not locked, however, and Beth pushed it open, and found herself in a charming little room with a fireplace at one end of it, and opposite, at the other end, a large bow window. Beth was puzzled to understand how there came to be a room there at all. Then she recollected a sort of tower there was at the side of the house, which formed a deep embrasure in the drawing-room, a dressing-room to the visitor's room, and a bath-room on the floor above. The window looked out on the garden at the back of the house. A light iron balcony ran round it, the rail of which was so thickly covered with ivy that very little of the window was visible from below. Beth had noticed it, however, only she thought it was a dummy, and so also

did Dan. The little room looked bright and cosy with the afternoon sun streaming in. It seemed to have been occupied at one time by some person of fastidious taste, judging by what furniture remained—a square Chippendale table with slender legs, two high-backed chairs covered with old-fashioned tapestry, and a huge mahogany bookcase of the same period, with glass doors above and cupboards below. The high white mantelpiece, adorned with vases and festoons of flowers, was of Adam's design, and so also was the dado and the cornice. The walls were painted a pale warm pink. A high brass fender, pierced, surrounded the fireplace, and there were a poker, tongs, and shovel to match, and a small brass scuttle still full of coals. There were ashes in the grate, too, as if the room had only lately been occupied. The boards were bare, but white and well-fitting, and in one corner of the room there was a piece of carpet rolled up.

Beth dropped on to one of the dusty chairs, and looked round. Everything about her was curiously familiar, and her first impression was that she had been there before. On the other hand, she could hardly believe in the reality of what she saw, she thought she must be dreaming, for here was exactly what she had been pining for most in the whole wide world of late, a secret spot, sacred to herself, where she would be safe from intrusion.

She went downstairs for some oil for the lock, and patiently worked at it until at last she succeeded in turning the key. Then, as it was too late to do anything more that day, she locked the door, and carried the key off in her pocket triumphantly.

Half the night she lay awake thinking of her secret chamber; and as soon as Dan had gone out next morning, and she had done her housekeeping, she stole upstairs with duster and brush, and began to set it in order. All her treasures were contained in some old trunks of Aunt Victoria's which were in the attic, but had not been unpacked because she had no place to put the things. Dan had seen some of these treasures at Rainharbour, and considered them old rubbish, and, not thinking it likely

that there would be anything else in the boxes, he had taken no further interest in them. He would have liked to have left them behind altogether, and even tried to laugh Beth out of what he called her sentimental attachment to odds and ends; but as most of the things had belonged to Aunt Victoria, she took his ridicule so ill that he wisely let the subject drop. He had been somewhat hasty in his estimation of the value of the contents of the boxes, however, for there were some handsome curios, a few miniatures and pictures of great artistic merit, some rare editions of books, besides laces, jewels, brocades, and other stuffs in them.

When Beth had swept and dusted, she put down the carpet. Then she began to unpack. Among the first things she found were the old French books, a quarto Bible with the Apocrypha in it, Shakespeare in several volumes, and her school-books and note-books; some ornaments, some beautiful old curtains, and a large deep rug, like a Turkey carpet, in crimson and green and purple and gold, worked by Aunt Victoria. This she spread before the fireplace. The doorway she covered with a curtain, and two more she hung on either side of the window, so that they could not be seen from below. Her books of reference, desk, note-books, and writing materials she put on the table, arranged the ornaments on the mantelpiece, and hung the miniatures and pictures on the walls. Then she sat down and looked about her, well pleased with the whole effect. "Now," she exclaimed, "I am at home, thank God! I shall be able to study, to read and write, think and pray at last, undisturbed."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

As Dan sympathised with none of Beth's tastes or interests, and seemed to have none of his own with which she could sympathise, their stock of conversation was soon exhausted, and there was nothing like companionship in their intercourse. If Beth had had no resources in herself, she would have had but a sorry time of it in those days, especially as she received no kindness from any one in Slane. Some of the

other medical men's wives called when she first arrived, and she returned their calls punctually, but their courtesy went no farther. Mrs. Carne, the wife of the leading medical practitioner, asked her to lunch, and Mrs. Jeffreys, a surgeon's wife, asked her to afternoon tea; but as these invitations did not include her husband, she refused them. She invited these ladies and their husbands in return, however, but they both pleaded previous engagements.

After the Maclures had been some little time at Slane, Lady Benyon bethought her of an old friend of hers, one Lady Beg, who lived in the neighbourhood, and asked her to call upon Beth, which she did forthwith, for she was one of those delightful old ladies who like nothing better than to be doing a kindness. She came immediately, bringing an invitation to lunch on the following Sunday, already written in case she should find no one at home.

Dan was delighted, "We shall meet nothing but county people there," he said, "and that's the proper set for us. They always do the right thing, you see. They're the only people worth knowing."

"But Beg is miles away from here," Beth said; "how shall we go?"

"We'll go in the dogcart, of course," Dan answered.

He had set up a dogcart on their arrival, but this was the first time he had proposed to take Beth out in it.

As they drove along on Sunday morning in the bright sunshine, Dan's spirits overflowed in a characteristic way at the prospect of meeting "somebody decent," as he expressed it, and he made remarks about the faces and figures of all the women they passed on the road, criticising them as if they were cattle to be sold at so much a point.

"That little girl there," he said of one, whom he beamed upon and ogled as they passed, "reminds me of a fair-haired little devil I picked up one night in Paris. Gad! she was a bad un! up to more tricks than any other I ever knew. She used to—" (here

followed a description of some of her peculiar practices).

"I wish you would not tell me these things," Beth remonstrated.

But he only laughed. "You know you're amused," he said. "It's just your conventional affectation that makes you pretend to object. That's the way women drive their husbands elsewhere for amusement; they won't take a proper intelligent interest in life, so there's nothing to talk to them about. I agree with the advanced party. They're always preaching that women should know the world. Women who do know the world have no nonsense about them, and are a jolly sight better company than your starched Puritans who pretend to know nothing. It's the most interesting side of life after all, and the most instructive; and I wonder at your want of intelligence, Beth. You shouldn't be afraid to know the natural history of humanity."

"Nor am I," Beth answered quietly; "nor the natural—or unnatural—depravity either, which is what you really mean, I believe. But knowing it, and delighting in it as a subject of conversation, are two very different things. Jesting about that side of life affects me like mud on a clean coat. I resent being splashed with it, and try to get rid of it, but unfortunately it sticks and stains."

"Oh, you're quite right," Dan answered unctuously. "It's just shocking the stories that are told—" and for the rest of the way he discoursed about morals, illustrating his meaning as he proceeded with anecdotes of the choicest description.

When they arrived at Beg House, they found the company more mixed than Dan had anticipated. Dr. and Mrs. Carne were there, Mr. and Mrs. Jeffreys, and Mr., Mrs., and Miss Petterick. Mr. Petterick was a solicitor of bumptious manners and doubtful reputation, whom the whole county hated, but tolerated because of his wealth and shrewdness, either of which they liked to be in a position to draw upon if necessary. But besides these townspeople, there were Sir George and Lady Galbraith, Mr. and Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe, and Mrs. Orton Beg, a widowed daughter-in-law of Lady

Beg's.

Dr. Maclure immediately made up to Sir George Galbraith, who was also a medical man, and of great repute in his own line. He was a county magnate besides, and a man of wealth and importance by reason of a baronetcy somewhat unexpectedly inherited, and a beautiful country-seat. He continued to practise, however, for love of his profession, but used it as a means of doing good rather than as a source of income. In appearance he was a tall, rather awkward man, with a fine head and a strong, plain face. He spoke in that deliberate Scotch way which has a ring of sincerity in it and inspires confidence, and the contrast between his manner and Dan's struck Beth unpleasantly. She wished Dan would be less effusive; it was almost as if he were cringing; and she thought he should have waited for Sir George Galbraith, who was the older man, to have made the first advance.

Beth herself was at her ease as soon as she came among these people. It was the social atmosphere to which she had been accustomed. Mrs. Carne, Mrs. Jeffreys, and Mrs. Petterick were on their best behaviour, but Beth had only to be natural. The county people were all nice to her, and the other town ladies, who had hitherto slighted her, looked on and wondered to see her so well received. At luncheon, as there were not gentlemen enough to go round, she sat between Sir George Galbraith and Mrs. Orton Beg. Mrs. Kilroy sat opposite. Sir George had known Mrs. Kilroy all her life. It was he, in fact, who nicknamed her and her brother "The Heavenly Twins" in the days when, as children, they used to be the delight of their grandfather, the old Duke of Morningquest, and the terror of their parents, Mr. and Lady Adeline Hamilton-Wells.

As soon as they were seated, Mrs. Kilroy attacked Sir George on some subject which they had previously discussed, and there ensued a little playful war of words.

"Oh, you're just a phrase-maker," Mrs. Kilroy exclaimed at last, finding herself worsted; "and phrases prove nothing."

"What is a phrase-maker?" he asked with a twinkle.

"Why, a phrase-maker is a person who recklessly launches a saying, winged by wit, and of superior brevity and distinctness, but not necessarily true—a saying which flies direct to the mind, and, being of a cutting nature, carves an indelible impression there," said Mrs. Kilroy—"an impression which numbs the intellect and prevents us reasoning for ourselves. Opinion is formed for the most part of phrases, not of knowledge and observation. The things people say smartly are quoted, not because they are true, but because they are smart. A lie well put will carry conviction to the average mind more surely than a good reason if ill-expressed, because most people have an æsthetic sense that is satisfied by a happy play upon words, but few have reason enough to discriminate when the brilliant ingenuity of the phrase-maker is pitted against a plain statement of the bald truth."

"As, for instance?" asked Sir George.

"Man's love is of his life a thing apart, 'Tis woman's whole existence,"

Mrs. Kilroy responded glibly. "That is quoted everywhere, and I have never heard it questioned, yet it is a flagrant case of confounding smartness with accuracy. Love of the kind that Byron meant is quite as much a thing apart from woman's life as from man's; more men, in fact, make the pursuit of it their whole existence than women do."

"You are right," said Sir George thoughtfully. "Love is certainly not a modern woman's whole existence, and she never dies of it. She feels it strongly, but it does not swamp her. In a bad attack, she may go to bed young one night and rise next day with grey hairs in her head, and write a book about it; but then she recovers: and I think you are right about phrases, too. 'Syllables govern the world,' John Selden said; but 'phrases' would have been the better word. Phrases are the keynotes to life; they set the tune to which men insensibly shape their course, and so rule us for good and ill. This is a time of talk, and formidable is the force of phrases. Catch-words are

creative; they do not prove that a thing is—they cause it to be."

"Then an unscrupulous phrase-maker may be a danger to the community," Beth observed.

"Yes," said Sir George; "but on the other hand, one who is scrupulous would be a philanthropist of extraordinary power."

"Now, isn't that like his craft and subtlety, Evadne?" said Mrs. Kilroy to Lady Galbraith. "He has been gradually working up to that in order to make Mrs. Maclure suppose I intended to pay him a compliment when I called him a phrase-maker."

"You are taking a mean advantage of an honest attempt on my part to arrive at the truth," said Sir George.

"I believe you blundered into that without seeing in the least where you were going," Beth observed naïvely.

Everybody smiled, except Dan, who told her on the way home she had made a great mistake to say such a thing, and she must be careful in future, or she would give offence and make enemies for him.

"No fear with people like that," said Beth. "They all understood me."

"Which is as much as to say that your husband does not," said Dan, assuming his hurt expression. "Very well. Go your own way. But you'll be sorry for it."

"What a delightful person Mrs. Orton Beg is," Beth observed, to make a diversion; "and so nice-looking too!"

"You are easily pleased! Why, she's forty if she's a day!" Dan ejaculated, speaking as if that were to her discredit, and must deprive her of any consideration from him.

The next excitement was a military ball. Dan determined to go, and Beth was ready enough; she had never been to a ball.

"But how about a dress?" she said. "There has been such a sudden change in the fashion since mine were made, I'm afraid I have nothing that will do."

"Then get a new one," Dan said.

"What! and add to the bills?" Beth objected.

"Oh, bother the bills!" he answered in the tone he called cheery. "I've had them coming in all my life and I'm still here. Get a thing when you want it, and pay for it when you can—that's my motto. Why, my tailor's bill alone is up in the hundreds.

"But that was the bill mamma gave you the money to settle," Beth exclaimed.

"I know," he answered casually. "I got the money out of her for that, but I had to spend it on your amusement in town, my dear."

"Oh!" Beth ejaculated—"how could you?"

"How could I?" he answered coolly. "Well, I couldn't of course if I hadn't been clever; but I can always get anything I like out of old ladies. They dote on me. You've only got to amuse them, you know, and pour in a little sentiment on occasion. Let them understand you've been rather a naughty man, but you know what's right—that always fetches them. Your mother would have sold out all she had to help me when she found I meant to repent and settle. But of course I wouldn't take anything that was not absolutely necessary," he added magnanimously.

Beth compressed her lips and frowned. "Do you mean to say you obtained money from a poor woman like my mother for a special purpose which she approved, and spent that money on something else?" she asked.

Dan changed countenance. "I got the money from your mother to pay my tailor's bill; but the circumstance of your spending more money in town than I could afford compelled me to use it for another purpose," he answered in rather a blustering tone.

"I spent no money in town," Beth said.

"I had to spend it on you then," he rejoined, "and a nice lament you would have made if I hadn't! But it's all the same. Husband and wife are one; and I maintain that the money was given to me to pay a just debt, and I paid a just debt with it. Now,

what have you to say against that to the disparagement of your husband?"

He looked Beth straight in the face as he spoke, as if the nature of the transaction would be changed by staring her out of countenance, and she returned his gaze unflinchingly; but not another word would she say on the subject. There is a sad majority of wives whose attitude towards their husbands must be one of contemptuous toleration—toleration of their past depravity and of their present deceits, whatever form they may take. Such a wife looks upon her husband as a hopeless incurable, because she knows that he has not the sense, even if he had the strength of character, to mend his moral defects. Beth fully realised her husband's turpitude with regard to the money, and also realised the futility of trying to make him see his own conduct in the matter in any light not flattering to himself, and she was deeply pained. She had taken it for granted that Dan would pay interest on the money, but had not troubled herself to find out if he were doing so, as she now thought that she ought to have done, for clearly she should have paid it herself if he did not. True, she never had any money; but that was no excuse, for there were honest ways of making money, and make it she would. She was on her way upstairs to her secret chamber to think the matter out undisturbed when she came to this determination; and as soon as she had shut herself in, she sank upon her knees, and vowed to God solemnly to pay back every farthing, and the interest in full, if she had to work her fingers to the bone. Curiously enough, it was with her fingers she first thought of working, not with her brain. She had seen an advertisement in a daily paper of several depôts for the sale of "ladies' work" in London and other places, and she determined at once to try that method of making money. Work of all kinds came easily to her, and happily she still had her two sovereigns, which would be enough to lay in a stock of materials to begin with. Her pin-money Dan regularly appropriated as soon as it arrived, with the facetious remark that it would just pay for her keep; and so far Beth had let him have it without a murmur, yielding in that as in all else, however much against her own inclinations, for gentleness, and also

with a vague notion of making up to him in some sort for his own shortcomings, which she could not help fancying must be as great a trouble to him as they were to her. She had grown to have a very real affection for Dan, as indeed she would have had for any one who was passably kind to her; but her estimate of his character, as she gradually became acquainted with it, was never influenced by her affection, except in so far as she pitied him for traits which would have made her despise another man.

Since her marriage she had given up her free, wild, wandering habits. She would go into the town to order things at the shops in the morning, and take a solitary walk out into the country in the afternoon perhaps, but without any keen enjoyment. Her natural zest for the woods and fields was suspended. She had lost touch with nature. Instead of looking about her observantly, as had been her wont, she walked now, as a rule, with her eyes fixed on the ground, thinking deeply. She was losing vitality too; her gait was less buoyant, and she was becoming subject to aches and pains she had never felt before. Dan said they were neuralgic, and showed that she wanted a tonic, but troubled himself no more about them. He always seemed to think she should be satisfied when he found a name for her complaint. She had also become much thinner, which made her figure childishly young; but in the face she looked old for her age—five-and-twenty at least—although she was not yet eighteen.

There was one particularly strong and happy point in Beth's character: she wasted little or no time in repining for the thing that was done. All her thought was how to remedy the evil and make amends; so now, when she had recovered from the first shock of her husband's revelation, she put the thought of it aside, pulled herself together quickly, and found relief in setting to work with a will. The exertion alone was inspiriting, and re-aroused the faculty which had been dormant in her of late. She went at once to get materials for her work, and stepped out more briskly than she had done for many a day. She perceived that the morning air was fresh and sweet, and she inhaled deep draughts of it, and rejoiced in the sunshine. Just

opposite their house, across the road, on the other side of a wooden paling, the park-like meadow was intensely green; old horse-chestnuts dotted about it made refreshing intervals of shade; in the hedgerows the tall elms stood out clear against the sky, and the gnarled oaks cast fantastic shadows on the grass; while beyond it, at the farther side of the meadow by the brook, the row of Canadian poplars which bordered it kept up a continuous whispering, as was their wont, even on the stillest days. When Beth first heard them, they spoke a language to her which she comprehended but could not translate; but the immediate effect of her life with Dan had been to deaden her perception, so that she could not comprehend. Then the whispering became a mere rustle of leaves, appealing to nothing but her sense of hearing, and her delight in their murmur lapsed when its significance was lost to her spirit.

But that morning Nature spoke to her again and her eyes were opened. She saw the grey-green poplars, the gnarled oaks, the dark crests of the elms upraised against the radiant blue of the sky, and felt a thrill like triumph as she watched the great masses of cloud, dazzlingly white, floating in infinite space majestically. The life about her, too—the twittering of birds in the hedgerows; an Alderney cow with its calf in the fields; a young colt careering wildly, startled by a passing train; a big dog that saluted her with friendly nose as he trotted by—all these said something to her which made her feel that, let what might happen, it was good to be alive.

On her way into town she thought out a piece of work, something more original and effective than the things usually sold in fancy-work shops, which did not often please her. When she had bought all the materials that she required, there was very little of her two pounds left, but she returned in high spirits, carrying the rather large parcel herself, lest, if it were sent, it should arrive when Dan was at home and excite his curiosity. He always appeared if he heard the door-bell ring, and insisted on knowing who or what had come, an inquisitive trick that irritated Beth into baffling him whenever she could.

She carried her precious packet up to her secret chamber, and set to work at once. Dan, when he came in to lunch, was surprised to find her unusually cheerful. After the temper she had displayed at breakfast, he had expected to have anything but a pleasant time of it for a little. Seeing her in good spirits put him also into a genial mood, and he began at once to talk about himself—his favourite topic.

"Well, I've had a rattling hard day," he observed. "You'd be surprised at the amount I've done in the time. I don't believe any other man here could have done it. I was at that confounded hospital a couple of hours, and after that I had a round! People are beginning to send for me now as the last from school. They think I'm up to the latest dodges. The old men won't like it! I had to go out to the Pettericks to see that girl Bertha again. Their family doctor could make nothing of her case, but it's simple enough. The girl's hysterical, that's what she is; and I know what I'd like to prescribe for her, and that's a husband. Hee-hee! Soon cure her hysterics! As to the old girl, her mother, she's got"—then followed a minute description of her ailments, told in the baldest language. Of two words Dan always chose the coarsest in talking to Beth, now that they were married, which had made her writhe at first; but when she had remonstrated, he assumed an injured air, after which she silently endured the infliction for fear of wounding him. And it was the same with regard to his patients. The first time he described the ailment of a lady patient, and made gross comments about her, Beth had exclaimed—

"O Dan! what would she think of you if she knew you had told me? Surely it is a breach of confidence!"

"Well," he exclaimed, trying to wither her with a look, "you have a nice opinion of your husband! Is it possible that I cannot speak to my own wife without bringing such an accusation upon myself! Well, well! And I'm slaving for you morning, noon, and night, to keep you in some sort of decency and comfort; and when I come home, and do my best to be cheery and amuse you, instead of being morose after the strain

of the day, as most men are, all the thanks I get is a speech like that! O holy matrimony!"

"I did not mean to annoy you, Dan; I'm sorry," Beth protested.

"So you should be!" he said; "so you should be! It's mighty hard for me to feel that my own wife hasn't confidence enough in me to be sure that I should never say a word either to her or anybody else about any of my patients to which they'd object."

"People feel differently on the subject, perhaps," Beth ventured. "I only know that if I had a doctor who talked to his wife about my complaints, I should"—despise him, was what she was going to say, but she changed the phrase—"I should not like it. But you should know what your own patients feel about it better than I do."

Even as she spoke, however, her mother's remark of long ago about a "talking doctor" recurred to her, and she felt lowered in her own estimation by the kind of concession she was making to him. The tragedy of such a marriage consists in the effect of the man's mind upon the woman's, shut up with him in the closest intimacy day and night, and all the time imbibing his poisoned thoughts. Beth's womanly grace pleaded with her continually not to hurt her husband since he meant no offence, not to damp his spirits even when they took a form so distasteful to her. To check him was to offend him and provoke a scene for nothing, since his taste was not to be improved; and she would have to have checked him perpetually, and made a mere nag of herself; for to talk in this way to her, to tell her objectionable stories, and harp on depravity of all kinds, was his one idea of pleasurable conversation. It was seldom, therefore, that she remonstrated—especially in those early days when she had not as yet perceived that by tacitly acquiescing she was lending herself to inevitable corruption.

Just at that time, too, she did not trouble herself much about anything. She was entirely absorbed in her new object in life—to get the work done, to make the money, to pay her mother with interest; there was continual exaltation of spirit in the

endeavour. Every moment that she could safely secure, she spent in her secret chamber, hard at work. Her outlook was on the sky above, for ever changing; on the gay garden below, whence light airs wafted the fragrance of flowers from time to time, to her delight; and on a gentle green ascent, covered and crowned with trees, which shut out the world beyond. Here there was a colony of rooks, where the birds were busy all day long sometimes, and from which they were sometimes absent from early morning till sundown, when they came back cawing by ones and twos and threes, a long straggling procession of them, their dark iridescent forms with broad black wings outspread, distinct and decorative, against the happy blue. Beth loved the birds, and even as she worked she watched them, their housekeepings and comings and goings; and heard their talk; and often as she worked she looked out at the fair prospect and up at the sky hopefully, and vowed again to accomplish one act of justice at all events. She stopped her regular studies at this time, because she conceived them to be for her own mere personal benefit, while the task which she had set herself was for a better purpose. But, although she did not study as had been her wont, while she sewed she occupied her mind in a way that was much more beneficial to it than the purposeless acquisition of facts, the solving of mathematical problems, or conning of parts of speech. Beside her was always an open book, it might be a passage of Scripture, a scene from Shakespeare, a poem or paragraph rich in the wisdom and beauty of some great mind; and as she sewed she dwelt upon it, repeating it to herself until she was word-perfect in it, then making it even more her own by earnest contemplation. These passages became the texts of many observations; and in them was also the light which showed her life as it is, and as it should be lived. In meditating upon them she taught herself to meditate; and in following up the clues they gave her in the endeavour to discriminate and to judge fairly, by slow degrees she acquired the precious habit of clear thought. This lifted her at once above herself as she had been; and what she had lost of insight and spiritual perception since her marriage, she began to recover in another and more

perfect form. Wholesome consideration of the realities of life now took the place of fanciful dreams. Her mind, wonderfully fertilised, teemed again—not with vain imaginings, however, as heretofore, but with something more substantial. Purposeful thought was where the mere froth of sensuous seeing had been; and it was thought that now clamoured for expression instead of the verses and stories—fireworks of the brain, pleasant, transient, futile distractions with nothing more nourishing in them than the interest and entertainment of the moment—which had occupied her chiefly from of old. It was natural to Beth to be open, to discuss all that concerned herself with her friends; but having no one to talk to now, she began on a sudden to record her thoughts and impressions in writing; and having once begun, she entered upon a new phase of existence altogether. She had discovered a recreation which was more absorbing than anything she had ever tried before; for her early scribbling had been of another kind, not nearly so entrancing. Then it had been the idle gossip of life, and the mere pictorial art of word-painting, an ingenious exercise, that had occupied her; now it was the more soul-stirring themes in the region of philosophy and ethics which she pursued, and scenes and phases of life interested her only as the raw material from which a goodly moral might be extracted. Art for art's sake she despised, but in art for man's sake she already discovered noble possibilities. But her very delight in her new pursuit made her think it right to limit her indulgence in it. Duty she conceived to be a painful effort necessarily, but writing was a pleasure; she therefore attended first conscientiously to her embroidery, and any other task she thought it right to perform, although her eager impatience to get back to her desk made each in turn a toil to her. Like many another earnest person, she mistook the things of no importance for things that matter because the doing of them cost her much; and it was the intellectual exercise, the delicate fancy work of her brain, a matter of enormous consequence, that she neglected. Not knowing that "If a man love the labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him," she made the fitting of herself for the work of her life her last

exercise at the tired end of the day. She rose early and went to bed late in order to gain a little more time to write, but never suspected that her delight in the effort to find expression for what was in her mind of itself proclaimed her one of the elect.

When she had finished her embroidery, she despatched it secretly to the depôt in London; but then she found that she would have to pay a small subscription before she could have it sold there, and she had no money. She wrote boldly to the secretary and told her so, and asked if the subscription could not be paid out of the price she got for her work. The secretary replied that it was contrary to the rules, but the committee thought that such an artistically beautiful design as hers was sure to be snapped up directly, and they had therefore decided to make an exception in her case.

While these letters were going backwards and forwards, Beth suffered agonies of anxiety lest Dan should pounce upon them and discover her secret; but he happened to be out always at post-time just then, so she managed to secure them safely.

As she had no money, she could not buy any more materials for embroidery, so she was obliged to take a holiday, the greater part of which she spent in writing. She was deeply engrossed by thoughts on progress, which had been suggested by a passage in one of Emerson's essays: "All conservatives are such from natural defects. They have been effeminated by position or nature, born halt and blind, through luxury of their parents, and can only, like invalids, act on the defensive." Even in her own little life Beth had seen so much of the ill effects of conservatism in the class to which she belonged, and had suffered so much from it herself already, that the subject appealed to her strongly, and she pursued it with enthusiasm—more from the social than the political point of view, however. But, unfortunately, in all too short a time, her holiday came to an end. Her beautiful embroidery had sold for six guineas, and she found herself with the money for more materials, and three pounds in hand besides, clear profit, towards the debt. She had also received an order from the depôt

for another piece of work at the same price, which caused her considerable elation, and set her to work again with a will; and it was only when she could no longer ply her needle that she allowed herself to take up her pen.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Beth had no more zest for the ball after that conversation with Daniel about the money her mother had given him. She felt obliged to go to it because he insisted that it was necessary for the wives of professional men to show themselves on public occasions; but she would not get a new dress. She had never worn her white silk trimmed with myrtle, and when she came to look at it again, she decided that it was not so much out of the fashion after all, and, at any rate, it must do.

When she came down to dinner dressed in it on the night of the ball, she looked very winsome, and smiled up at Dan in shy expectation of a word of approval; but none came. In the early days of their acquaintance he had remarked that she was much more easily depressed than elated about herself, and would be the better of a little more confidence—not to say conceit; but since their marriage he had never given her the slightest sympathy or encouragement to cure her of her diffidence. If anything were amiss in her dress or appearance, he told her of it in the offensive manner of an ill-conditioned under-bred man, generally speaking when they were out of doors, or in some house where she could do nothing to put herself right, as if it were some satisfaction to him to make her feel ill at ease; and if she were complimented by any one else about anything, he had usually something derogatory to say on the subject afterwards. Now, when he had inspected her, he sat down to table without a word.

"Is there anything wrong?" Beth asked anxiously.

"No," he answered. "That stuff on your sleeves might have been fresher, that's all."

"This will be my first ball," Beth ventured, breaking a long silence.

"Well, don't go and tell everybody," he rejoined. "They'll think you want to make yourself interesting, and it's nothing to boast about. Just lay yourself out to be agreeable to people who will further your husband's interests, for once."

"But am I not always agreeable?" Beth exclaimed, much mortified.

"It doesn't appear so," he answered drily. "At any rate, you don't seem to go down here."

"How do you mean?" Beth asked.

"Why, the ladies in the place all seem to shun you, for some reason or other; not one of them ever comes near you in a friendly way."

"They were all very nice to me the other day at Beg," Beth protested, her heart sinking at this recurrence of the old reproach; for to be shunned, or in any way set apart, seemed even more dreadful to her now than it had done when she was a child.

"See that they keep it up then," he answered grimly.

"If it depends upon me, they will," said Beth, setting her sensitive mouth in a hard determined line that added ten years to her age and did not improve her beauty. And it was with a sad heart, and sorely dissatisfied with herself, that she drove to her first ball.

When they entered the ball-room, however, and Dan beamed about him on every one in his "thoroughly good fellow" way, her spirits rose. The decorations, the handsome uniforms, the brilliant dresses and jewels, the flowers and foliage plants, and, above all, the bright dance-music and festive faces, delighted her, and she gazed about her with lips just parted in a little smile, wondering to find it all so gay.

A young military man was brought up to her and introduced by one of the stewards before she had been five minutes in the room. He asked for the pleasure of a dance; but, alas! thanks to the scheme of education at the Royal Service School for Officers' Daughters having been designed by the authorities to fit the girls for the next world

only, Beth could not dance. She had had some lessons at Miss Blackburne's, but not enough to give her confidence, so she was obliged to decline. Another and another would-be partner, and some quite important people, as Dan said, offered, but in vain; and he looked furious.

"Well," he exclaimed, "this is nice for me!"

"I am sorry," Beth answered nervously. She was beginning to have a painful conviction that a man had to depend almost entirely on his wife for his success in life, and the responsibility made her quail.

"I shall have to go and do my duty, at any rate," he proceeded. "I must leave you alone."

"Yes, do," said Beth. "Mrs. Kilroy and Mrs. Orton Beg have just come in; I will go and join them." She naturally expected Dan to escort her, and he probably would have done so had he waited to hear what she was saying; but his marital manners were such that he had taken himself off while she was speaking, and left her to fend for herself. She was too glad, however, to see her charming new acquaintances, who had been so kindly, to care much, and she crossed the room to them, smiling confidently. As she approached, she saw that they recognised her and said something to each other. When she came close, they both bowed coldly, and turned their heads in the opposite direction.

Beth stopped short and her heart stood still. The slight was unmistakable; but what had she done? She looked about her as if for an explanation, and saw Lady Beg close beside her, talking to Mrs. Carne.

"Ah, how do you do? Nice ball, isn't it?" Lady Beg observed, but without shaking hands.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Carne, and then they resumed their conversation, taking no further notice of Beth, who would probably have turned and fled from the dreadful place incontinently, if Mrs. Petterick had not come up at that moment and

spoken to her as one human being to another, seizing upon Beth as Beth might have seized upon her, in despair; for Mrs. Petterick had also been having her share of snubs. Oh, those Christians! how they do love one another! how tender they are to one another's feelings! how careful to make the best of one another! how gentle, good, and kind, and true! How singular it is that when the wicked unbeliever comes to live amongst them, and sees them as they are, he is not immediately moved by admiration to adopt their religion in order that he also may acquire the noble attributes so conspicuously displayed by them!

"You're not dancing, my dear," Mrs. Petterick said. "Come along and sit with me on that couch against the wall yonder. We shall see all that's going on from there."

Beth was only too thankful to go. A waltz was being played, and Dan passed them, dancing with Bertha Petterick. They glided over the floor together with the gentle voluptuous swing, dreamy eyes, and smiling lips of two perfect dancers, conscious of nothing but the sensuous delight of interwoven paces and clasping arms.

"My! but they do step well together, him and Bertha!" Mrs. Petterick exclaimed. "He's a handsome man, your husband, and a gay one—flirting about with all the ladies! I wonder you're not jealous!"

"Jealous!" Beth answered, smiling. "Not I, indeed! Jealousy is a want of faith in one's self."

"Well, my dear, if you always looked as well as you do just now, you need not want confidence in yourself," Mrs. Petterick observed. "But what would you do if your husband gave you cause for jealousy?"

"Despise him," Beth answered promptly.

Mrs. Petterick looked as if she could make nothing of this answer. Then she became uneasy. The music had stopped, but Bertha had not returned to her. "I must go and look after my daughter," she said, rising from her comfortable seat with a sigh. "Gels are a nuisance. You've got to keep your eye on them all the time, or you never know

what they're up to."

Beth stayed where she was, and soon began to feel uncomfortable. People stared coldly at her as they passed, and she could not help fancying herself the subject of unpleasant remark because she was alone. She prayed hard that some one would come and speak to her. Dan had disappeared. After a time she recognised Sir George Galbraith among the groups of people at the opposite side of the room. He was receiving that attention from every one which is so generously conferred on a man or woman of consequence, whose acquaintance adds to people's own importance, and to whom it is therefore well to be seen speaking; but although his manner was courteously attentive he looked round as if anxious to make his escape, and finally, to Beth's intense relief, he recognised her, and, leaving the group about him unceremoniously, came across the room to speak to her.

"Would it be fair to ask you to sit out a dance with me?" he said. "I do not dance."

"I would rather sit out a dance with you than dance it with any one else I know here," she answered naïvely; "but, as it happens, I do not dance either."

"Indeed! How is that? I should have thought you would like dancing."

"So I should, I am sure, if I could," she replied. "But I can't dance at all. They would not let me learn dancing at one school where I was, and I was not long enough at the other to learn properly."

"Now, that is a pity," he said, considering Beth, his professional eye having been struck by her thinness and languor. "But have some lessons. Dancing in moderation is capital exercise, and it exhilarates; and anything that exhilarates increases one's vitality. Why don't you make your husband teach you? He seems to know all about it."

"Yes," Beth answered, smiling; "but I shouldn't think teaching me is at all in his line. Why don't you dance yourself?"

"Oh, I am far too clumsy," he said good-naturedly. "My wife says if I could even

learn to move about a room without getting in the way and upsetting things, it would be something."

"Is she here to-night?" Beth asked.

"No, she was not feeling up to it," he answered. "She tired herself in the garden this afternoon, helping me to bud roses."

"Oh, can you bud roses?" Beth exclaimed. "I should so like to know how it is done."

"I'll show you with pleasure."

"Will you really?" said Beth. "How kind of you."

"Not at all. Let me see, when will you be at home? We mustn't lose any time, or it will be too late in the year."

"I'm pretty nearly always at home," Beth said.

"Then if I came to-morrow morning would that be convenient?"

"Quite; and I hope you will stay lunch," Beth answered.

Dan returned to the ball-room just then, and, on seeing who was with her, he immediately joined them; but Sir George only stayed long enough to exchange greetings politely.

"You seem to get on very well with Galbraith," Dan observed.

"Don't you like him?" Beth asked in surprise, detecting a note of enmity in his voice.

"I haven't had much chance," he said bitterly. "He doesn't play the agreeable to me as he does to you."

Beth missed the drift of this remark in considering the expression "play the agreeable," which was unpleasantly suggestive to her of under-bred gentility.

"You will be able to give him an opportunity to-morrow then," she said, "if you are in at lunch-time, for he is coming to show me how to bud roses, and I have asked him to stay."

"Have you, indeed?" Dan exclaimed, obviously displeased, but why or wherefore Beth could not conceive. "I hope to goodness there's something to eat in the house," he added upon reflection, fussily.

"There is as much as there always is," Beth placidly rejoined.

"Well, that's not enough then. Just think what a man like that has on his own table!"

"A man like that won't expect our table to be like his."

"You'd better make it appear so for once then, or you'll be having our hospitality criticised as I heard the Barrack fellows criticise Mrs. Jeffery's the other day. A couple of them called about lunch-time, and she asked them to stay, and they said there was nothing but beer and sherry, and the fragments of a previous feast, and they were blessed if they'd go near the old trout again."

"An elegant expression!" said Beth. "It gives the measure of the mind it comes from. Please don't introduce the person who uses it to me. But as to Sir George Galbraith, you need not be afraid that he will accept hospitality and criticise it in that spirit. He will neither grumble at a cutlet, nor describe his hostess by a vulgar epithet after eating it."

She shut her mouth hard after speaking. Disillusion is a great enlightener; our insight is never so clear as when it is turned on the character of a person in whom we used to believe; and as Dan gradually revealed himself to Beth, trait by trait, a kind of distaste seized upon her, a want of respect, which found involuntary expression in trenchant comments upon his observations and in smart retorts. She did not seek sympathy from him now for the way in which she had been slighted at the ball, knowing perfectly well that he was more likely to blame her than anybody else. He had, in fact, by this time, so far as any confidence she might have reposed in him was concerned, dropped out of her life completely, and left her as friendless and as much alone as she would have been with the veriest stranger.

That night when she went home she felt world-worn and weary, but next morning,

out in the garden with Sir George Galbraith budding roses, she became young again. Before they had been together half-an-hour she was chatting to him with girlish confidence, telling him about her attempts to cultivate her mind, her reading and writing, to all of which he listened without any of that condescension in his manner which Dan displayed when perchance he was in a good-humour and Beth had ventured to expand. Sir George was genuinely interested.

Dan came in punctually to lunch, for a wonder. He glanced at Beth's animated face sharply when he entered, but took no further notice of her. He was one of those husbands who have two manners, a coarse one for their families, and another, much more polished, which they assume when it is politic to be refined. But Dan's best behaviour sat ill upon him, because it was lacking in sincerity, and Beth suffered all through lunch because of the obsequious pose he thought it proper to assume towards his distinguished guest.

After lunch, when Sir George had gone, he took up his favourite position before the mirror over the chimney-piece, and stood there for a little, looking at himself and caressing his moustache.

"You talk a great deal too much, Beth," he said at last.

"Do you think so?" she rejoined.

"Yes, I do," he assured her. "Of course Galbraith had to be polite and affect to listen, but I could see that he was bored by your chatter. He naturally wanted to talk to me about things that interest men."

"Then why on earth didn't he talk to you?" Beth asked.

"How could he when you monopolised the conversation?"

"It was he who kept me talking," she protested.

"Oh yes; I notice you are very animated when anything in the shape of a man comes in," Dan sneered.

Beth got up and left the room, less affected by the insinuation, however, than by the vulgar expression of it.

The following week Sir George came in one morning with some cuttings, and stayed a while in the garden with Beth, showing her how to set them; but he would not wait for lunch. Dan showed considerable annoyance when he heard of the visit.

"He should come when I am at home," he said. "It is damned bad taste his coming when you are alone."

The next time Sir George came Dan happened to be in, to Beth's relief. She had brought her writing down that day, and was working at it on the dining-room table, not expecting Dan till much later. He was in a genial mood, for a wonder.

"What on earth are you scribbling about there?" he asked.

"Just something I was thinking about," Beth answered evasively.

"Going in for authorship, eh?"

"Why not?" said Beth.

Dan laughed. "You are not at all ambitious," he remarked; then added patronisingly, "A little of that kind of thing will do you no harm, of course; but, my dear child, your head wouldn't contain a book, and if you were just a little cleverer you would know that yourself."

Beth bit the end of her pencil and looked at him dispassionately, and it was at this moment that Sir George Galbraith was announced.

Dan received him with effusion as usual; and also, as usual, Sir George responded with all conventional politeness, but the greeting over, he turned his attention to Beth. He had brought her a packet of books.

"This looks like work in earnest," he said, glancing at the table. "I see you have a good deal of something done. Is it nearly finished?"

"All but," Beth rejoined.

"What are you going to do with it?"

Beth looked at him, and then at her manuscript vaguely. "I don't know," she said. "What can I do with it?"

"Publish it, if it is good," he answered.

"But how am I to know?" Beth asked eagerly. "Do you think it possible I could do anything fit to publish?"

Before he could reply, Dan chimed in. "I've just been telling her," he said, "that little heads like hers can't contain books. It's all very well to scribble a little for pastime, and all that, but she mustn't seriously imagine she can do that sort of work. She'll only do herself harm. Literature is men's work."

"Yet how many women have written, and written well, too," Beth observed.

"Oh yes, of course—exceptional women."

"And why mayn't I be an exceptional woman?" Beth asked, smiling.

"Coarse and masculine!" Dan exclaimed. "No, thank you. We don't want you to be one of that kind—do we, Galbraith?"

"There is not the slightest fear," Sir George answered dryly. "Besides, I don't think any class of women workers—not even the pit-brow women—are necessarily coarse and masculine. And I differ from you, too, with regard to that head," he added, fixing his keen, kindly eyes deliberately on Beth's cranium till she laughed to cover her embarrassment, and put up both hands to feel it. "I should say there was good promise both of sense and capacity in the size and balance of it—not to mention anything else."

"Well, you ought to know if anybody does," said Dan with a facetious sort of affectation of agreement, which left no doubt of his insincerity.

"I wish," Sir George continued, addressing Beth, "you would let me show some of your work to a lady, a friend of mine, whose opinion is well worth having."

"I would rather have yours," Beth jerked out.

"Oh, mine is no good," he rejoined. "But if you will let me read what you give me to show my lady, I should be greatly interested. We were talking about style in prose the other day, and I have ventured to bring you these books—some of our own stylists, and some modern Frenchmen. You read French, I know."

"There is nothing like the French," Dan chimed in. "We have no literature at all now. Look at their work compared to ours, how short, crisp, and incisive it is! How true to life! A Frenchman will give you more real life in a hundred pages than our men do in all their interminable volumes."

"More sexuality, you mean, I suppose," said Galbraith, "Personally I find them monotonous, and barren of happy phrases to enrich the mind, of noble sentiments to expand the heart, of great thoughts to help the soul; without balance, with little of the redeeming side of life, and less aspiration towards it. If France is to be judged by the tendency of its literature and art at present, one would suppose it to be dominated and doomed to destruction by a gang of lascivious authors and artists who are sapping the manhood of the country and degrading the womanhood by idealising self-indulgence and mean intrigue. The man or woman who lives low, or even thinks low, in that sense of the word, will tend always to descend still lower in times of trial. Moral probity is the backbone of our courage; without it we have nothing to support us when a call is made upon our strength." [1]

[1] The truth of this assertion was lately proved in a terrible manner at the burning of the Charity Bazaar in the Rue Jean Goujon, when the nerves of the luxurious gentlemen present, debilitated by close intimacy with the haute cocotterie in and out of society, betrayed them, and they displayed the white feather of vice by fighting their own way out, not only leaving the ladies to their fate, but actually beating them back with their sticks and trampling on them in their frantic efforts to save themselves, as many a bruised white arm or shoulder afterwards testified. There was

scarcely a man burnt on the occasion, husbands, lovers, and fathers escaped, leaving all the heroic deeds to be done by some few devoted men-servants, some workmen who happened to be passing, a stray Englishman or American, and mothers who perished in attempting to rescue their children.

"I can't stand English authors myself," was Dan's reply. "They're so devilish long-winded, don't you know."

"Poverty of mind accounts for the shortness of the book as a rule," said Galbraith. "I like a long book myself when it is rich in thought. The characters become companions then, and I miss them when we are forced to part."

Beth nodded assent to this. She had been turning over the books that Galbraith had brought her, with the tender touch of a true book-lover and that evident interest and pleasure which goes far beyond thanks. Mere formal thanks she forgot to express, but she had brightened up in the most wonderful way since Galbraith appeared, and was all smiles when he took his leave.

Not so Dan, however; but Beth was too absorbed in the books to notice that.

"How kind he is!" she exclaimed. "Dan, won't it be delightful if I really can write? I might make a career for myself."

"Rot!" said Dan.

"Sir George differs from you," Beth rejoined.

"I say that's all rot. What does he know about it? I tell you you're a silly fool, and your head wouldn't contain a book. I ought to know!"

"Doctors differ again, then, it seems," Beth said. "But in this case the patient is going to decide for herself. What is the use of opinion in such matters? One must experiment. I'm going to write, and if at first I don't succeed—I shall persevere."

"Oh, of course!" Dan sneered. "You'll take anybody's advice but your husband's. However, go your own way, as I know you will. Only, I warn you, you'll regret it."

Beth was dipping into one of the books, and took no notice of this. Dan's ill-humour augmented.

"Did you know the fellow was coming to-day?" he asked.

"No—if by fellow you mean Sir George Galbraith," she answered casually, still intent on the book.

"You know well enough who I mean, and that's just a nag," he retorted. "And it looks uncommonly as if you did expect him, and had set all that rubbish of writing out to make a display."

Beth bit the end of her pencil, and looked at Dan contemptuously.

"I dare say he'd like to get hold of you to make a tool of you," he pursued. "He's in with Lord Dawne and the whole of that advanced woman's party at Morne, who are always interfering with everything."

"How?" Beth asked.

"By poking their noses into things that don't concern them," he asseverated, "things they wouldn't know anything about if they weren't damned nasty-minded. There's that fanatical Lady Fulda Guthrie, and Mrs. Orton Beg, and Mrs. Kilroy, besides Madam Ideala—they're all busybodies, and if they succeed in what they're at just now, by Jove, they'll ruin me! I'll have my revenge, though, if they do! I'll attack your distinguished friend. He has established himself as a humanitarian, and travels on that reputation; but he has an hospital of his own, where I have no doubt some pretty games are played in the way of experiments which the public don't suspect. I know the kind of thing! Patients mustn't ask questions! The good doctor will do his best for them—trust him! He'll try nothing that he doesn't know to be for their good; and when they're under chloroform he'll take no unfair advantage in the way of cutting a little more for his own private information than they've consented to. Oh, I know! Galbraith seems to be by way of slighting me, but I'll show him up if it comes to that—and, at any rate, I'm on the way to discoveries myself, and I bet I'll teach

him some things in his profession yet that will make him sit up—things he doesn't suspect, clever and all as he is."

Beth knew nothing of the things to which Dan alluded, and therefore missed the drift of this tirade; but the whole tone of it was so offensive to her that she gathered up her books and papers and left the room. Silence and flight were her weapons of defence in those days.

CHAPTER XL

There was a gap of six months between that last visit of Sir George Galbraith's and the next, and in the interval Beth had worked hard, reading and re-reading the books he had lent her, writing, and perhaps most important of all, reflecting, as she sat in her secret chamber, busy with the beautiful embroideries which were to pay off that dreadful debt. She had made seven pounds by this time, and Aunt Grace Mary had sent her five for a present surreptitiously, advising her to keep it herself and say nothing about it—Aunt Grace Mary knew what husbands were. Beth smiled as she read the letter. She, too, was beginning to know what husbands are—husbands of the Uncle James kind. She added the five pounds to her secret hoard, and thanked goodness that the sum was mounting up, little by little.

But she wished Sir George would return. He was a busy man, and lived at the other side of the county, so that she could not expect him to come to Slane on her account; but surely something more important would bring him eventually, and then she might hope to see him. She knew he would not desert her. And she had some manuscript ready to confide to him now if he should repeat his offer; but she was too diffident to send it to him except at his special request.

She was all energy now that the possibility of making a career for herself had been presented to her, but it was the quietly restrained energy of a strong nature. She never supposed that she could practise a profession without learning it, and she was

prepared to serve a long apprenticeship to letters if necessary. She meant to write and write and write until she acquired power of expression. About what she should have to express she never troubled herself. It was the need to express what was in her that had set her to work. She would never have to sit at a writing-table with a pen in her hand waiting for ideas to come. She had discovered by accident that she could have books in plenty, and of the kind she required, from the Free Library at Slane. Dan never troubled himself to consult her taste in books, but he was in the habit of bringing home three-volume novels for himself from the library, a form of literature he greatly enjoyed in spite of his strictures. He made Beth read them aloud to him in the evening, one after the other—an endless succession—while he smoked, and drank whiskies-and-sodas. He brought them home himself at first, but soon found it a trouble to go for them, and so sent her; and then it was she discovered that there were other books in the library. The librarian, an educated and intelligent man, helped her often in the choice of books. They had long talks together, during which he made many suggestions, and gave Beth many a hint and piece of information that was of value to her. He was her only congenial friend in Slane, and her long conversations with him often took her out of herself and raised her spirits. He little suspected what a help he was to the lonely little soul. For the most part she took less interest in the books themselves than in the people who wrote them; biographies, autobiographies, and any scrap of anecdote about authors and their methods she eagerly devoured. Life as they had lived it, not as they had observed and imagined it, seemed all-important to her; and as she read and thought, sitting alone in the charmed solitude of her secret chamber, her self-respect grew. Her mind, which had run riot, fancy-fed with languorous dreams in the days when it was unoccupied and undisciplined, came steadily more and more under control, and grew gradually stronger as she exercised it. She ceased to rage and worry about her domestic difficulties, ceased to expect her husband to add to her happiness in any way, ceased to sorrow for the slights and neglects that had so wounded and perplexed her during

the first year of her life in Slane; and learnt by degrees to possess her soul in dignified silence so long as silence was best, feeling in herself that something which should bring her up out of all this and set her apart eventually in another sphere, among the elect—feeling this through her further faculty to her comfort, although unable as yet to give it any sort of definite expression. As she read of those who had gone before, she felt a strange kindred with them; she entered into their sorrows, understood their difficulties, was uplifted by their aspirations, and gloried in their successes. Their greatness never disheartened her; on the contrary, she was at home with them in all their experiences, and at her ease as she never was with the petty people about her. It delighted her when she found in them some small trait or habit which she herself had already developed or contracted, such as she found in the early part of George Sand's Histoire de ma Vie, and in the lives of the Brontës. Under the influence of nourishing books, her mind, sustained and stimulated, became nervously active. It had a trick of flashing off from the subject she was studying to something wholly irrelevant. She would begin Emerson's essay on Fate or Beauty with enthusiasm, and presently, with her eyes still following the lines, her thoughts would be busy forming a code of literary principles for herself. In those days her mind was continually under the influence of any author she cared about, particularly if his style were mannered. Involuntarily, while she was reading Macaulay, for instance, her own thoughts took a dogmatic turn, and jerked along in short, sharp sentences. She caught the peculiarities of De Quincey too, of Carlyle, and also some of the simple dignity of Ruskin, which was not so easy; and she had written things after the manner of each of these authors before she perceived the effect they were having upon her. But it was unfortunate for her that her attention had been turned from the matter which she had to express to the manner in which she should express it. From the time she began to think of the style and diction of prose as something to be separately acquired, the spontaneous flow of her thoughts was checked and hampered, and she expended herself in fashioning her tools, as it

were, instead of using her tools to fashion her work. When, in her reading, she came under the influence of academic minds, she lost all natural freshness, and succeeded in being artificial. Her English became turgid with Latinities. She took phrases which had flowed from her pen, and were telling in their simple eloquence, and toiled at them, turning and twisting them until she had laboured all the life out of them; and then, mistaking effort for power, and having wearied herself, she was satisfied. Being too diffident to suspect that she had any natural faculty, she conceived that the more trouble she gave herself the better must be the result; and consequently she did nothing worth the doing except as an exercise of ingenuity. She was serving her apprenticeship, however—making her mistakes.

It was late in the autumn before she saw her good friend Sir George Galbraith again. He came on a bright, clear, frosty morning, and found her out in the garden, pacing up and down briskly, and looking greatly exhilarated by the freshness. When she saw him coming towards her, she uttered a little joyful exclamation, and hurried forward to meet him.

"I have been longing to see you," she said in her unaffected way; "but I know what the distance is, and how fully your time is occupied. It is very good of you to come at all."

"Only the time and distance have prevented me coming sooner," he rejoined. "But, tell me, how have you been getting on? And have you thought any more of making a career for yourself?"

"I have thought of nothing else," Beth answered brightly; "and I wonder I ever thought of anything else, for the idea has been in me, I believe, all my life. I must have discussed it, too, at a very early age, for I have remembered lately that I was once advised by an old aunt of mine, the best and dearest friend I ever had, to write only that which is—or aims at being—soul-sustaining."

He nodded his head approvingly. "From such seed a good crop should come," he

said. "But what line shall you take?"

"I don't know."

"Not novels then, for certain?"

"Nothing for certain—whatever comes and calls for expression."

They were pacing up and down together, and there was a pause.

"Did you expect I should try to write novels, and do you think I ought?" Beth asked at last.

"I think I did expect it," he answered; "but as to whether you ought or ought not, that is for you to decide. There is much to be said against novel reading and writing. I think it was De Quincey who said that novels are the opium of the West; and I have myself observed that novel-reading is one of those bad habits that grow upon people until they are enslaved by it, demoralised by it; and if that is the case with the reader, what must the writer suffer?"

Beth bent her brows upon this. "But that is only one side of it, is it not?" she asked after a moment's reflection. "I notice in all things a curious duality, a right side and a wrong side. Confusion is the wrong side of order, misery of happiness, falsehood of truth, evil of good; and it seems to me that novel-reading, which can be a vice, I know, may also be made a virtue. It depends on the writer."

"And on the taste of the reader," he suggested. "But I believe the taste of the intelligent 'general reader' is much better than one supposes. The mind craves for nourishment; and the extraordinary success of books in which any attempt, however imperfect, is made to provide food for thought, as distinguished from those which merely offer matter to distract the attention, bears witness, it seems to me, to the involuntary effort which is always in progress to procure it. I believe myself that good fiction may do more to improve the mind, enlarge the sympathies, and develop the judgment than any other form of literature—partly because it looks into the hidden springs of action, and makes all that is obscure in the way of impulse and

motive clear to us. Biography, for instance, merely skims the surface of life, as a rule; and in history, where man is a puppet moved by events, there can be very little human nature."

"I wonder if you read many novels," said Beth. "I have to read them aloud to my husband until I am satiated. And I am determined, if I ever do try to write one, to avoid all that is conventional. I never will have a faultlessly beautiful heroine, for instance. I am sick of that creature. When I come to her, especially if she has golden hair yards long, a faultless complexion, and eyes of extraordinary dimensions, I feel inclined to groan and shut the book. I have met her so often in the weary ways of fiction! I know every variety of her so well! She consists of nothing but superlatives, and is as conventional as the torso of an Egyptian statue, with her everlasting physical perfection. I think her as repulsive as a barber's block. I confess that a woman who has golden hair and manages to look like a lady, or to be like one even in a book, is a wonder, considering all that is associated with golden hair in our day; but I should avoid the abnormal as much as the conventional. I would not write plotty-plotty books either, nor make a pivot of the everlasting love-story, which seems to me to show such a want of balance in an author, such an absence of any true sense of proportion, as if there was nothing else of interest in life but our sexual relations. But, oh!" she broke off, "how I do appreciate what the difficulty of selection must be! In writing a life, if one could present all sides of it, and not merely one phase—the good and the bad of it, the joys and the sorrows, the moments of strength and of weakness, of wisdom and of folly, of misery and of pure delight—what a picture!"

"Yes; and how utterly beyond the average reader, who never understands complexity," he answered. "But I think it a good sign for your chances of success that you should have complained of the difficulty of selection in the matter of material rather than bemoan your want of experience of life. Most young aspirants to literary fame grumble that they are handicapped for want of experience. They are

seldom content with the material they have at hand—the life they know. They want to go and live in London, where they seem to think that every one worth knowing is to be found."

"That isn't my feeling at all," said Beth. "The best people may be met in London, but I don't believe that they are at their best. The friction of the crowd rubs out their individuality. In a crowd I feel mentally as if I were in a maze of telegraph wires. The thoughts of so many people streaming out in all directions about me entangle and bewilder me."

"You do not seem to like anything exceptional."

"No, I do not," said Beth. "I like the normal—the everyday. Great events are not the most significant, nor are great people the most typical. It is the little things that make life livable. The person who comes and talks clever is not the person we love, nor the person who interests us most. Those we love sympathise with us in the ordinary everyday incidents of our lives, and discuss them with us, merely touching, if at all, on the thoughts they engender. I don't want to know what people think as a rule; I want to know what they have experienced. People who talk facts, I like; people who talk theories, I fly from. And I think upon the whole that I shall always like the kind people better than the clever ones. I believe we owe more to them, too, and learn more from them—more human nature, which after all is what we want to know."

"But the clever people are kind also sometimes," said Sir George.

"When they are, of course it is perfect," Beth answered. "But judging the clever ones of to-day by what they write, I cannot often think them so. The works of our smartest modern writers, particularly the French, satiate me with their cleverness; but they are vain, hollow, cynical, dyspeptic; they appeal to the head, but the heart goes empty away. Few of them know or show the one thing needful—that happiness is the end of life; and that by trying to live rightly we help each other to happiness. That is the one thing well worth understanding in this world; but that, with all their

ingenuity, they are not intelligent enough to see."

"You are an optimist, I perceive," Sir George said, smiling, "and I entirely agree with you. So long as we understand that happiness is the end of life, and that the best way to secure it for ourselves is by helping others to attain to it, we are travelling in the right direction. By happiness I do not mean excitement, of course, nor the pleasure we owe to others altogether; but that quiet content in ourselves, that large toleration and love which should overflow from us continually, and make the fact of our existence a source of joy and strength to all who know us."

They walked up and down a little in silence, then Sir George asked her what she thought of some of the specimens of style and art in literature he had lent her to study.

"I don't know yet," Beth said. "My mind is in a state of chaos on the subject. I seem to reject 'style' and 'art.' I ask for something more or something else, and am never satisfied. But tell me what you think of the stylists."

"I think them brilliant," he rejoined, "but their work is as the photograph is to the painting, the lifeless accuracy of the machine to the nervous fascinating faultiness of the human hand. No, I don't care for the writers who are specially praised for their style. I find their productions cold and bald as a rule. I want something warmer—more full-blooded. Most of the stylists write as if they began by acquiring a style and then had to sit and wait for a subject. I believe style is the enemy of matter. You compress all the blood out of your subject when you make it conform to a studied style, instead of letting your style form itself out of the necessity for expression. This is rank heresy, I know, and I should not have ventured on it a few years ago; but now, I say, give me a style that is the natural outcome of your subject, your mind, your character, not an artificial but a natural product; and even though it be as full of faults as human nature is, faults of every kind, so long as there is no fault of the heart in it, that being the one unpardonable fault in an author—if you

have put your own individuality into your work—I'll answer for it that you will arrive sooner and be read longer than the most admired stylist of the day. Be prepared to sacrifice form to accuracy, to avoid the brilliant and the marvellous for the simple and direct. What matters it how the effect is got so that it comes honestly? But of course it will be said that this, that, and the other person did not get their effects so; they will compare you to the greatest to humiliate you."

"Oh, that would be nothing to me so that I produced my own effects," Beth broke in. "That is just where I am at present. I mean to be myself. But please do not think that I have too much assurance. If I go wrong, I hope I shall find it out in time; and I shall certainly be the first to acknowledge it. I do not want to prove myself right; I want to arrive at the truth."

"Then you will arrive," he assured her. "But above everything, mind that you are not misled by the cant of art if you have anything special to say. If a writer would be of use in his day, and not merely an amuser of the multitude, he must learn that right thinking, right feeling, and knowledge are more important than art. When you address the blockhead majority, you must not only give them your text, you must tell them also what to think of it, otherwise there will be fine misinterpretation. You may be sure of the heart of the multitude if you can touch it; but its head, in the present state of its development, is an imperfect machine, manœuvred for the most part by foolishness. People can see life for themselves, but they cannot always see the meaning of it, the why and wherefore, whence things come and whither they are tending, so that the lessons of life are lost—or would be but for the efforts of the modern novelist."

Beth reflected a little, then she said: "I am glad you think me an optimist. It seems to me that healthy human nature revolts from pessimism. The work that lasts is the work that cheers. Give us something with hope in it—something that appeals to the best part of us—something which, while we read, puts us in touch with fine ideals,

and makes us feel better than we are."

"That is it precisely," said he. "The school of art-and-style books wearies us because there is no aspiration in it, nothing but a deadly dull artistic presentment of hopeless levels of life. It is all cold polish, as I said before, with never a word to warm the heart or stir the better nature."

"That is what I have felt," said Beth; "and I would rather have written a simple story, full of the faults of my youth and ignorance, but with some one passage in it that would put heart and hope into some one person, than all that brilliant barren stuff. And I'm going to write for women, not for men. I don't care about amusing men. Let them see to their own amusements, they think of nothing else. Men entertain each other with intellectual ingenuities and Art and Style, while women are busy with the great problems of life, and are striving might and main to make it beautiful."

"Now that is young in the opprobrious sense of the word," said Sir George. "It is only when we are extremely young that we indulge in such sweeping generalisations."

Beth blushed. "I am always afraid my judgment will be warped by my own narrow personal experience,—I must guard against that!" she exclaimed, conscious that she had had her husband in her mind when she spoke.

Sir George nodded his head approvingly, and looked at his watch. "I must go," he said, "but I hope there will not be such a long interval before I come again. My wife is sorry that she has not been able to call. She is not equal to such a long drive. But she desired me to explain and apologise; and she has sent you some flowers and fruit which she begs you will accept. Have you some of your work ready for me this time? I have asked my friend Ideala to give you her opinion, which is really worth having, and she says she will with pleasure. You must know her. I am sure you would like her extremely."

"But would she like me?" slipped from Beth unawares.

"Now, that is young again," he said, with his kindly smile-indulgent.

"It is the outcome of sad experience," Beth rejoined with a sigh. "No woman I have met here so far has shown any inclination to cultivate my acquaintance. I think I am being punished for some unknown crime."

Sir George became thoughtful, but said nothing.

As they approached the house, Beth saw Dan peeping at them from behind the curtain of an upstairs window. The hall-table was covered with the fruit and flowers Sir George had brought. Beth sent a servant for Dan. The girl came back and said that the doctor was not in.

"Nonsense!" said Beth. "I saw him at one of the windows just now. If you will excuse me, Sir George, I will find him myself."

She called him as she ran upstairs, and Dan made his appearance, looking none too well pleased.

He went down to Sir George, and Beth ran on up to her secret chamber for her manuscripts and the books Sir George had lent her, which had been waiting ready packed for many a day.

When he had gone, Beth danced round the dining-room, clapping her hands.

"I can't contain myself," she exclaimed. "I do feel encouraged, strengthened, uplifted."

She caught a glimpse of Dan's face, and stopped short.

"What's the matter?" she said.

"The matter is that I'll have no more of this," he answered in a brutal tone.

"No more of what?" Beth demanded.

"No more of this man's philandering after you," he retorted.

"I don't understand you," Beth gasped.

"Oh, you're mighty innocent," he sneered. "You'll be telling me next that he comes to see me, lends me books, walks up and down by the hour together with me, brings me fruit and flowers! You think I'm blind, I suppose! You're a nice person! and so particular too! and so fastidious in your conversation! Oh, trust a prude! But I tell you," he bawled, coming up close to her, and shaking his fist in her face, "I tell you I won't have it. Now, do you understand that?"

Beth did not wince, but oh, what a drop it was from the heights she had just left to this low level! "Be good enough to explain your meaning precisely," she said quietly. "I understand that you are bringing some accusation against me. It is no use blustering and shaking your fist in my face. I am not to be frightened. Just explain yourself. And I advise you to weigh your words, for you shall answer to me in public for any insult you may offer me in private."

Dr. Maclure was sobered by this unexpected flash of spirit. They had been married nearly three years by this time, and Beth's habitual docility had deceived him. Hitherto men have been able to insult their wives in private with impunity when so minded, and Dan was staggered for a moment to find himself face to face with a mere girl who boldly refused to suffer the indignity. He was not prepared for such a display of self-respect.

"You're very high and mighty!" he jeered at last.

"I am very determined," Beth rejoined, and set her lips.

He tried to subdue her by staring her out of countenance; but Beth scornfully returned his gaze. Then suddenly she stamped her foot, and brought her clenched fist down on the dining-room table, beside which she was standing. "Come, come, sir," she said, "we've had enough of this theatrical posing. You are wasting my time, explain yourself."

He took a turn up and down the room.

"Look here, Beth," he began, lowering his tone, "you cannot pretend that Galbraith

comes to see me."

"Why should I?" she asked.

"Well, it isn't right that he should come to see you, and I won't have it," he reiterated.

"Do you mean that I am not to have any friends of my own?" she demanded.

"He is not to be one of your friends," Dan answered doggedly.

"And what explanation am I to give him, please?" she asked politely.

"I won't have you giving him any explanation."

"My dear Dan," she rejoined, "when you speak in that way, you show an utter want of knowledge of my character. If I will not allow you to insult me, and bully me, and bluster at me, it is not likely that I will allow you to insult my friends. If Sir George Galbraith's visits are to stop, I shall tell him the reason exactly. He at least is a gentleman."

"That is as much as to say that I am not," Dan blustered.

"You certainly are not behaving like one now," Beth coolly rejoined. "But there! You have my ultimatum. I am not going to waste any more time in vulgar scenes with you."

"Ultimatum, indeed!" he jeered. "Well, you are, you know! You'll write and explain to him, will you, that your husband's jealous of him? That shows the terms you are on!"

"It is jealousy then, is it?" said Beth. "Thank you. Now I understand you."

Dan's evil mood took another turn. His anger changed to self-pity. "Oh dear! oh dear! what am I to do with you?" he exclaimed. "And after all I've done for you—to treat me like this." He took out his pocket-handkerchief and wiped away the tears which any mention of his own goodness and the treatment he received from others always brought to his eyes.

Beth watched him contemptuously, yet her heart smote her. He was a poor creature, but for that very reason, and because she was strong, surely she should be gentle with him.

"Look here, Dan," she said. "I have never knowingly done you any wrong in thought, or word, or deed; all you have said to me to-day has been ridiculously wrong-headed; but never mind. Stop crying, do, and don't let us have any more idiotic jealousy. Why, it was Lady Galbraith who sent me the flowers and fruit, with a kind message of apology because she has not been able to call. Why should not she be jealous?"

"Oh, she's a fool!" Dan rejoined, recovering himself. "She leads him the life of a dog with her fears and fancies, and she won't take any part in his philanthropic work, though he wishes it. She's a pretty pill!"

The servant came in at this moment to lay the table for lunch, and Dan went to the looking-glass with the inconsequence of a child, and forgot his grievance in the contemplation of his own beloved image and in abusing Lady Galbraith. Abusing somebody was mental relaxation of the most agreeable kind to him. Feeling that he had gone too far, he was gracious to Beth during lunch, and just before he went out he kissed her, and said, "We won't mention that fellow again, Beth. I don't believe you'd do anything dishonourable."

"I should think not!" said Beth.

When he had gone, she returned to her secret chamber, the one little corner sacred to herself, to her purest, noblest thoughts, her highest aspirations; and as she looked round, it seemed as if ages had passed since she last entered it, full of happiness and hope. It was as if she had been innocent then, and was now corrupted. Her self-control did not give way, but she could do nothing, and just sat there, wan with horror; and as she sat, every now and then she shivered from head to foot. She had known of course in a general way that such things did happen, that married women

did give their husbands cause for jealousy; but to her mind they were a kind of married women who lived in another sphere where she was not likely to encounter them. She had never expected to be brought near such an enormity, let alone to have it brought home to herself in a horrible accusation; and the effect of it was a shock to her nervous system—one of those stunning blows which are scarcely felt at first, but are agonising in their after effects. When the reaction set in, Beth's disgust was so great it took a physical form, and ended by making her violently sick. It was days before she quite recovered, and in one sense of the word she was never the same again.

CHAPTER XLI

Dan said no more about Sir George Galbraith; and indeed he had no excuse, for Sir George did not come again. There were other men, however, who came to the house, Dan's own friends; and now that Beth's eyes were opened, she perceived that he watched them all suspiciously if they paid her any attention; and if she showed the slightest pleasure in the conversation of any of them, he would be sure to make some sneering remark about it afterwards. Dan was so radically vicious that the notion of any one being virtuous except under compulsion was incomprehensible to him.

"Your spirits seem to go up when Mr. Vanrickards is here," he observed one day.

"Thank you for warning me," Beth answered, descending to his level in spite of herself. "I will be properly depressed the next time he comes."

But although she could keep him in check so that he dared not say all that he had in his mind, she understood him; and the worst of it was that his coarse and brutal jealousy accustomed her to the suspicion, and made her contemplate the possibility of such a lapse as he had in his mind. She began to believe that he would not have tormented himself so if husbands did not ordinarily have good reason to be jealous of their wives. She concluded that such treachery of man to man as he dreaded must

be normal. And then also she realised that it was thought possible for a married woman to fall in love, and even wondered at last if that would ever be her own case. Dan had, in fact, destroyed his own best safeguard. If a man would keep his wife from evil, he should not teach her to suspect herself—neither should he familiarise her with ideas of vice. Since their marriage Dan's whole conversation, and the depravity of his tastes and habits, had tended towards the brutalisation of Beth. Married life for her was one long initiation into the ways of the vicious.

Dr. Maclure's sordid jealousy made him the laughing-stock of the place, though he never suspected it. His conceit was too great to let him suppose that any sentiment of his could provoke ridicule. It became matter for common gossip, however, and from that time forward gentlemen ceased to visit the house. Men of a certain kind came still, men who were bound to Dan by kindred tastes, but not such as he cared to introduce to Beth. These boon companions generally came in the evening, and were entertained in the dining-room, where they spent the night together, smoking, drinking, and talking after the manner of their kind. Beth could not use her secret chamber after dark for fear of the light being seen, so she stayed in the drawing-room alone till she went to bed. She found those evenings interminable, and the nights more trying still. She could not read or write because of the noise in the dining-room, and had to fall back on her sewing for occupation; but sewing left her mind open to any obsession, and only too often, with the gross laughter from the next room, scraps of the lewd topics her husband delighted in came to her recollection. When Dan discoursed about such things he was at the high-water mark of pleasure, his countenance glowed, and enjoyment of the subject was expressed in all his person. Beth's better nature revolted, but alas! she had become so familiar with such subjects by this time that, although she loathed them, she could not banish them. Life from her husband's point of view was a torment to her, yet under the pressure of his immediate influence it was forced upon her attention more and more—from his point of view.

When she went to bed on his festive nights she suffered from the dread of being disturbed. If her husband were called out at night professionally, it was a pleasure to her to lie awake so that she might be ready to rise the moment he returned, and get him anything he wanted. On those occasions she always had a tray ready for him, with soup to be heated, or coffee to be made over a spirit-lamp, and any little dainty she thought would refresh him. She was fully in sympathy with him in his work, and would have spared herself no fatigue to make it easier for him, but she despised him for his vices, and refused to sacrifice herself in order to make them pleasanter for him. When he stayed up smoking and drinking half the night she resented the loss of sleep entailed upon her, which meant less energy for her own work the next day. The dread of being disturbed made her restless, and the futility of it under the circumstances exasperated her. She suffered, too, more than can be mentioned, from the smell of alcohol and tobacco, of which he reeked, and from which he took no trouble to purify himself. Often and often, when she had tossed herself into a fever on these dreadful nights, she craved for long hours, with infinite yearning, to be safe from disturbance, in purity and peace; and thought how happily, how serenely she would have slept until the morning, and how strong and fresh she would have arisen for another day's work had she been left alone. Only once, however, did she complain. Dan was going out in a particularly cheerful mood that night.

"Shall you be late?" she asked.

"Yes, probably. Why?"

"I was thinking, if you wouldn't mind, I would have a bed made up for you in the spare room. I only sleep in snatches when you are out and I am expecting you. Every sound rouses me. I think it is the door opening. And then when you do come it disturbs me, and I do not sleep again. If you don't mind I should prefer to be alone—on your late nights—your late festive nights."

Dr. Maclure stood looking gloomily into the fireplace.

"Have I annoyed you, Dan?" Beth asked at last.

He walked to the door, stood a moment with his back to her, then turned and looked at her. "Annoyed is not the word," he said. "You have wounded me deeply."

He opened the door as he spoke, and went out. When he had gone Beth sat and suffered. She could not bear to hurt him, she was not yet sufficiently brutalised for that; so she said no more on the subject, but patiently endured the long lonely night watches, and the after companionship which had in it all that is most trying and offensive to a refined and delicate woman.

After that first display of jealousy Beth discovered that her husband pried upon her continually. He was very high and mighty on the subject of women spying upon men, but there seemed no meanness he would not compass in order to spy upon a woman. He had duplicate keys to her drawers and boxes, and rummaged through all her possessions when she went out. One day she came upon him standing before her wardrobe, feeling in the pockets of her dresses, and on another occasion she discovered him unawares in her bedroom, picking little scraps of paper out of the slop-pail and piecing them together to see what she had been writing. To Beth, accustomed to the simple, honourable principles of her parents, and to the confidence with which her mother had left her letters lying about, because she knew that not one of her children would dream of looking at them, Dan's turpitude was revolting. On those occasions when she caught him, he did not hear her enter the room, and she made her escape without disturbing him, and stole up to her secret chamber, and sat there, suffering from one of those attacks of nausea and shivering which came upon her in moments of deep disgust.

After that she had an attack of illness which kept her in bed for a week; but even then, feverish and suffering as she was, and yearning for the coolness and liberty of a room to herself, she dared not suggest such a thing for fear of a scene.

While she was still in bed Dan brought her some letters one morning. He made no

remark when he gave them to her, but he had opened them as usual, and stood watching her curiously while she read them. The first she looked at was from her sister Bernadine, and had a black border round it; but she took it out of its envelope unsuspiciously, and read the words that were uppermost, "Mamma died this morning." In a moment it flashed upon her that Dan had read the letter, and was waiting now to see the effect of the shock upon her. She immediately, but involuntarily, set herself to baffle his cruel curiosity. With a calm, illegible face she read the letter from beginning to end, folded it, and put it back in its envelope deliberately, then took up another which had also been opened.

But suppressed feeling finds vent in some form or other, and Beth showed temper now instead of showing grief. "I wish you would not open my letters," she said irritably. "All the freshness of them is gone for me when you open them without my permission and read them first. Besides, it is an insult to my correspondents. What they say to me is intended for me, and not for you."

"I have a perfect right to open your letters," he retorted.

"I should like to see the Scripture that gives you the right, and I should advise you to waive it if you do not wish me to assume the right to open yours. Your petty prying keeps me in a continual state of irritation. I shall be lowered to retaliate sooner or later. So stop it, please, once and for all."

"My petty prying, indeed!" he exclaimed. "Well, that is a nice thing to say to your husband! Why, even when I do open your letters, which is not often, I never read them without your permission."

"Indeed," said Beth, who had ceased to be stunned by falsehoods. "Then be good enough not even to open them in future."

Dan tried to express injury and indignation in a long, hard look; but Beth was reading another letter, and took no further notice of him.

He hung about a little watching her.

"Any news," he ventured at last, with an imperfect assumption of indifference.

"You know quite well what my news is," she answered bluntly, "and I am not going to discuss it with you. I wish you would leave me alone."

"Well, you're a nice pill!" said Dan, discomfited.

Beth looked up at him. "What are you doing with your hat on in my bedroom?" she asked sharply. "I thought I had made you understand that you must treat me with respect, even if I am your wife."

Dan uttered a coarse oath, and left the room, banging the door after him.

"Thank Heaven—at last!" Beth ejaculated. She had been too anxious to get rid of him to scruple about the means, but when he had gone a reaction set in, and she lay back on her pillows, flushed, excited, furious with him, disgusted with herself. She felt she was falling away from all her ideals. "As the husband is the wife is"—the words flashed through her mind, but she would not believe it inevitable. But even if she should degenerate, her own nature was too large, too strong, too generous to cast the blame on any one but herself. "No!" she exclaimed. "We are what we allow ourselves to be."

Swift following upon that thought came the recollection of a bad fall she had had when she was a little child in Ireland, and the way her mother had picked her up, and cuddled her, and comforted her. Beth burst into a paroxysm of tears. She had understood her mother better than her mother had understood her, had felt for her privations, had admired and imitated her patient endurance; and now to think that it was too late, to think that she had gone, and it would never be in Beth's power to brighten her life or lessen the hardship of it! That was all she thought of. Every week since her marriage she had sent her mother a long, cheerful, amusing letter, full of pleasant details—an exercise in that form of composition; but with never a hint of her troubles; and Mrs. Caldwell died under the happy delusion that it was well with Beth. She never suspected that she had married Beth to a low-born man—not

low-born in the sense of being a tradesman's son, for a tradesman's son may be an honest and upright gentleman, just as a peer's son may be a cheat and a snob; but low-born in that he came of parents who were capable of fraud and deceit in social relations, and had taught him no scheme of life in which honour played a conspicuous part. Beth had done her best for her mother, but there was no one now to remind her of this for her comfort, poor miserable girl. Her courageous toil had gone for nothing—her mother would never even know of it; and it seemed to her in that moment of deep disheartenment as if everything she tried was to be equally ineffectual.

Hours later, Minna the housemaid found Beth sitting up in bed, sobbing hopelessly; and got her tea, and stayed with her, making her put some restraint upon herself by the mere fact of her presence; and presently Beth, in her human way, began to talk about her mother to the girl, which relieved her. Mrs. Caldwell had only been ill a few days, and not seriously, as it was supposed; the end had come quite suddenly, so that Beth had never been warned.

Dan did not come in till next morning, which was a great relief to her. She meant to speak about the news to him when he appeared, but somehow, the moment she saw him, her heart hardened, and she could not bring herself to utter a word on the subject. The position was awkward for him; but he got out of it adroitly by pretending he had seen an announcement of the death in the paper.

"I suppose I ought to go to the funeral," he said. "There is doubtless a will."

"Doubtless," said Beth, "but you will not benefit by it, if that is what you are thinking of. Mamma considered that I was provided for, and therefore she left the little she had to Bernadine. She told me herself, because she wanted me to understand her reason for making such a difference between us; and I think she was quite right. She may have left me two or three hundred pounds, but it will not be more than that."

"But even that will be something towards the bills," said Dan, his countenance, which had dropped considerably, clearing again.

Beth looked at him with a set countenance, but said no more. She had begun to observe that the bills only became pressing when her allowance was due.

CHAPTER XLII

Some one in Slane gave Sir George Galbraith a hint of Dan's coarse jealousy, and he had judged it better for Beth that he should not call again; but his interest in her and his desire to help her increased if anything. He had read her manuscript carefully himself, and obtained Ideala's opinion of it also; but Beth had not done her best by any means in the one she had given him. She had written it for the purpose, for one thing, which was fatal, for her style had stiffened with anxiety to do her best, and her ideas, instead of flowing spontaneously, had been forced and formal, as her manner was when she was shy. It is one thing to have a fine theory of art and high principles (and an excellent thing, too), but it is quite another to put them into effect, especially when you're in a hurry to arrive. Hurry misplaced is hindrance. If Beth had given Sir George some one of the little things which she had written in sheer exuberance of thought and feeling, without hampering hopes of doing anything with them, he would have been very differently impressed; but, even as it was, what she had given him was as full of promise as it was full of faults, and he was convinced that he had not been mistaken in her, especially when he found that Ideala thought even better of her prospects than he did. Ideala, who was an impulsive and generous woman, wrote warmly on the subject, and Sir George sent her letter to Beth with a few lines of kindly expressed encouragement from himself. He returned her manuscript; but when Beth saw it again, she was greatly dissatisfied. The faults her friends had pointed out to her she plainly perceived, and more also; but she could not see the merits. Praise only made her the more fastidious about her work; but in that way it

helped her.

Sir George's kindness did not stop at criticism however. He was cut off from her himself, and could expect no help from his wife, whose nervous system had suffered so much from the shock of unhappy circumstances in her youth that she could not now bear even to hear of, let alone to be brought in contact with, any form of sorrow or suffering; but there were other ladies—Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe, for instance. Sir George had known her all her life, and went specially to ask her as a favour to countenance Beth.

"I want you to be kind to Mrs. Maclure, Angelica," he said. "She's far too good for that plausible bounder of a barber's block she's married."

"Then why did she marry him?" Angelica interrupted, in her vivacious way.

"Pitchforked into it at the suggestion of her friends in her infancy, I should say, reasoning by induction," he answered. "That's generally the explanation in these cases. But, at any rate, she's not going to be happy with him. And she's a charming little creature, very sweet and docile naturally, and with unusual ability, or I'm much mistaken, and plenty of spirit, too, when she's roused, I should anticipate. But at present, in her childish ignorance, she's yielding where she should resist, and she'll be brutalised if no one comes to the rescue. I don't trust that man Maclure. A man who speaks flippantly of things that should be respected is not a man who will be scrupulous when his own interests are concerned; and such a man has it in his power to make the life of a girl a hell upon earth in ways which she will not complain of, if she has no knowledge to use in self-defence; and girls seldom have."

"As I have learnt, alas! from bitter experience in my work amongst the victims of holy matrimony," Angelica interposed bitterly. "Oh, how sickening it all is! Sometimes I envy Evadne in that she is able to refuse to know."

Sir George was silent for a little, then he said, "This is likely to be a more than usually pathetic case, because of the girl's unusual character and promise, and also

because her brain is too delicately poised to stand the kind of shocks and jars that threaten her. You will take pity on her, Angelica?"

Mrs. Kilroy shrugged her shoulders. "How can I countenance a woman who acquiesces in such a position as her husband holds, and actually lives on his degrading work?"

"I don't believe she knows anything about it," he rejoined.

"If I were sure of that," said Angelica, meditating.

"It is easy enough to make sure," he suggested.

Mrs. Carne, wife of the leading medical man in Slane, conceived it to be her duty to patronise Beth to the extent of an occasional formal call, as she was the wife of a junior practitioner; and Beth duly returned these calls, because she was determined not to make enemies for Dan by showing any resentment for the slights she had suffered in Slane.

Feeling depressed indoors one dreary afternoon, she set off, alone as usual, to pay one of these visits. She rather hoped perhaps to find some sort of satisfaction by way of reward for the brave discharge of an uncongenial duty.

On the way into town, Dan passed her in his dogcart with a casual nod, bespattering her with mud. "You'll have your carriage soon, please God! and never have to walk. I hate to see a delicate woman on foot in the mud." Beth remembered the words so well, and Dan's pious intonation as he uttered them, and she laughed. She had a special little laugh for exhibitions of this kind of divergence between Dan's precepts and his practices. But even as she laughed her face contracted as with a sudden spasm of pain, and she ejaculated—"But I shall succeed!"

Mrs. Carne was at home, and Beth was shown into the drawing-room, where she found several other lady visitors—Mrs. Kilroy, Mrs. Orton Beg, Lady Fulda Guthrie, and Ideala. The last two she had not met before.

"Where will you sit?" said Mrs. Carne, who was an effusive little person. "What a day! You were brave to come out, though perhaps it will do you good. My husband says go out in all weathers and battle with the breeze; there's nothing like exercise."

"Battling with the breeze and an umbrella on a wet day is not exercise, it is exasperation," Beth answered, and at the sound of her peculiarly low, clear, cultivated voice, the conversation stopped suddenly, and every one in the room looked at her. She seemed unaware of the attention. In fact, she ignored every one present except her hostess. This was her habitual manner now, assumed to save herself from slights. When she entered, Mrs. Kilroy had half risen from her seat, and endeavoured to attract her attention; but Beth passed her by, deliberately chose a seat, and sat down. Her demeanour, so apparently cold and self-contained, was calculated to command respect, but it cost Beth a great deal to maintain it. She felt she was alone in an unfriendly atmosphere—a poor little thing, shabbily dressed in home-made mourning, and despised for she knew not what offence; and she suffered horribly. She had grown very fragile by this time, and looked almost childishly young. Her eyes were unnaturally large and wistful, her mouth drooped at the corners, and the whole expression of her face was pathetic. Mrs. Kilroy looked at her seriously, and thought to herself, "That girl is suffering."

Mrs. Carne offered Beth tea, but she refused it. She could not accept such inhuman hospitality. She had come to do her duty, not to force a welcome. She glanced at the clock. Five minutes more, and she might go. The conversation buzzed on about her. She was sitting next to a strange lady, a serene and dignified woman, dressed in black velvet and sable. Beth glanced at her the first time with indifference, but looked again with interest. Mrs. Carne bustled up and spoke to the lady in her effusive way.

"You are better, I hope," she said, as she handed her some tea. "It really is sweet to see you looking so much yourself again."

"Oh yes, I am quite well again now, thanks to your good husband," the lady answered. "But he has given me so many tonics and things lately, I always seem to be shaking bottles. I am quite set in that attitude. Everything I touch I shake. I found myself shaking my watch instead of winding it up the other day."

"Ah, then, you are quite yourself again, I see," Mrs. Carne said archly. "But why didn't you come to the Wilmingtons' last night?"

"Oh, you know I never go to those functions if I can help it," the lady answered, her gentle rather drawling voice lending a charm to the words quite apart from their meaning. "I cannot stand the kind of conversation to which one is reduced on such occasions—if you can call that conversation which is but the cackle of geese, each repeating the utterances of the other. When the Lord loves a woman, I think He takes her out of society by some means or other, and keeps her out of it for her good."

Beth knew that if she had said such a thing, Mrs. Carne would have received it with a stony stare, but now she simpered. "That is so like you!" she gushed. "But the Wilmingtons were dreadfully disappointed."

"They will get over it," the lady answered, glancing round indifferently.

"How are you getting on with your new book, Ideala?" Mrs. Kilroy asked her across the room. Beth instantly froze to attention. This was her friend, then, Sir George's Ideala.

"I have not got into the swing of it yet," Ideala answered. "It is all dot-and-go-one—a uniform ruggedness which is not true either to life or mind. Our ways in the world are stony enough at times, but they are not all stones. There are smooth stretches along which we gallop, and sheltered grassy spaces where we rest."

"What I love about your work is the style," said Mrs. Carne.

"Do you?" Ideala rejoined, somewhat dryly as it seemed to Beth. "But what is style?"

"I am so bad at definitions," said Mrs. Carne, "but I feel it, you know."

"As if it were a thing in itself to be adopted or acquired?" Ideala asked.

"Yes, quite so," said Mrs. Carne in a tone of relief—as of one who has acquitted herself better than she expected and is satisfied.

"I am sure it is not," Beth burst out, forgetting herself and her slights all at once in the interest of the subject. "I have been reading the lives of authors lately, together with their works, and it seems to me, in the case of all who had genius, that their style was the outcome of their characters—their principles—the view they took of the subject—that is, if they were natural and powerful writers. Only the second-rate people have a manufactured style, and force their subject to adapt itself to it—the kind of people whose style is mentioned quite apart from their matter. In the great ones the style is the outcome of the subject. Each emotion has its own form of expression. The language of passion is intense; of pleasure jocund, easy, abundant; of content calm, of happiness strong but restrained; of love warm, tender. The language of artificial feeling is artificial; there is no mistaking insincerity when a writer is not sincere, and the language of true feeling is equally unmistakable. It is simple, easy, unaffected; and it is the same in all ages. The artificial styles of yesterday go out of fashion with the dresses their authors wear, and become an offence to our taste; but Shakespeare's periods appeal to every generation. He wrote from the heart as well as the head, and triumphed in the grace of nature."

Beth stopped short and coloured crimson, finding that every one in the room was listening to her.

Mrs. Carne stood while she was speaking with a cup of tea in her hand, and tried to catch Ideala's eye in order to signal with raised eyebrows her contempt for Beth's opinion; but Ideala was listening with approval.

"That is exactly what I think," she exclaimed, "only I could not have expressed it so. You write yourself doubtless?"

But Beth had become confused, and only gazed at her by way of reply. She felt she had done the wrong thing to speak out like that in such surroundings, and she regretted every word, and burned with vexation. Then suddenly in herself, as before, something seemed to say, or rather to flash forth the exclamation for her comfort: "I shall succeed! I shall succeed!"

She drew herself up and looked round on them all with a look that transformed her. Such an assurance in herself was not to be doubted. The day would come when they would be glad enough to see her, when she too would be heard with respect and quoted. She, the least considered, she in her shabby gloves, neglected, slighted, despised, alone, she would arrive, would have done something—more than them all!

She arose with her eyes fixed on futurity, and was half-way home before she came to and found herself tearing along through the rain with her head forward and her hands clasped across her chest, urged to energy by the cry in her heart, "I shall succeed! I shall succeed!"

"Who was that?" said Ideala in a startled voice when Beth jumped up and left the room.

"The wife of that Dr. Maclure, you know," Mrs. Carne replied. "Her manners seem somewhat abrupt. She forgot to say good-bye. I did not know she was by way of being clever."

"By way of being clever!" Ideala ejaculated. "I wish I had known who she was. Why didn't you introduce her? By way of being clever, indeed! Why, she is just what I have missed being with all my cleverness, or I am much mistaken, and that is a genius. And what is more important to us, I suspect she is the genius for whom we are waiting. Why, why didn't you name her? It is the old story. She came unto her own, and her own received her not."

"I—I never dreamt you would care to know her—her position, you know," Mrs. Carne stammered disconcerted.

"Her position! What is her position to me?" Ideala exclaimed. "It is the girl herself I think of. Besides, I daresay she doesn't even know what her position is!"

"That is what Sir George says, and he knows her well," Mrs. Kilroy interposed.

"But I never suspected that she was in the least interesting," Mrs. Carne protested; "and I'm sure she doesn't look attractive—such an expression!"

"You are to blame for that, all of you," Ideala rejoined, with something in her gentle way of speaking which had the effect of strength and vehemence. "I know how it has been. She is sensitive, and you have made her feel there is something wrong. You have treated her so that she expects no kindness from you, and so, from diffidence and restraint of tenderness, her face has set hard into coldness. But that is only a mask. How you treat each other, you women! And you are as wanting in discernment, too, as you are in kindness and sympathy. She has had to put on that mask of coldness to hide what you make her suffer, and it will take long loving to melt it now, and make her look human again. You misinterpret her silence too. How can you expect her to be interesting if you take no interest in her? But look at her eyes? Any one with the least kindly discernment might have seen the love and living interest there! If she had been in a good position, everybody would have found her as singularly interesting as she, without caring a rap for our position, has found us. She sees through us all with those eyes of hers—ay, and beyond! She sees what we have never seen, and never shall in this incarnation; hers are the vision and the dream that are denied to us. Were she to come forward as a leader to-morrow, I would follow her humbly and do as she told me.... I read some of her writings the other day, but I thought they were the work of a mature woman. Had I known she was such a child I should have wondered!"

"Dear me! does she really write?" said Mrs. Carne. "Well, you surprise me! I should never have dreamt that she had anything in her!"

"You make me feel ashamed of myself, Ideala," said Mrs. Kilroy with contrition. "I

ought to have known. But I could think of nothing, see nothing in her but that horrible business. I shall certainly do my best now, however, when we return from town, to cultivate her acquaintance, if she will let me."

"Let you!" Mrs. Carne ejaculated with her insinuating smile. "I should think she would be flattered."

"I am not so sure of that," said Ideala.

"Neither am I," said Mrs. Kilroy. "I only wish I were. But she ignored us all rather pointedly when she came in."

"To save herself from being ignored, I suppose," said Ideala bitterly. "The girl is self-respecting."

"I confess I liked her the first time I saw her," said Mrs. Orton Beg; "but afterwards, when I heard what her husband was, I felt forced to ignore her. How can you countenance her if she approves?"

"It was a mistake to take her approval for granted," said Mrs. Kilroy. "Ideala would have inquired."

"Yes," said Ideala. "I take nothing for granted. If I hear anything nice, I believe it; but if I hear anything objectionable about any one, I either inquire about it or refuse to believe it point-blank. And in a case like this, I should be doubly particular, for, in one of its many moods, genius is a young child that gazes hard and sees nothing."

"And you really think the little woman is a genius, and will be a great writer some day?" Mrs. Carne asked with exaggerated deference to Ideala's opinion.

"I don't know about being a writer," said Ideala. "Genius is versatile. There are many ways in which she might succeed. It depends on herself—on the way she is finally impelled to choose. But great she will be in something—if she lives."

"Let us hope that she will be a great benefactor of her own sex then, and do great good," said the gentle Lady Fulda.

"Amen!" Ideala ejaculated fervently.

Mrs. Carne tried to put off her agreeable society smile and put on her Sunday-in-church expression, but was not in time. When we only assume an attitude once a week, be it mental or physical, we do not fall into it readily on a sudden.

"Not that working for women as a career is what I should wish her for her own comfort," said Ideala after a pause. "Women who work for women in the present period of our progress—I mean the women who bring about the changes which benefit their sex—must resign themselves to martyrdom. Only the martyr spirit will carry them through. Men will often help and respect them, but other women, especially the workers with methods of their own, will make their lives a burden to them with pin-pricks of criticism, and every petty hindrance they can put in their way. There is little union between women workers, and less tolerance. Each leader thinks her own idea the only good one, and disapproves of every other. They seldom see that many must be working in many ways to complete the work. And as to the bulk of women, those who will benefit by our devotion, they bespatter us with mud, stone us, slander us, calumniate us; and even in the very act of taking advantage of the changes we have brought about, ignore us, slight us, push us under, and step up on our bodies to secure the benefits which our endeavours have made it possible for them to enjoy. I know! I have worked for women these many years, and could I show you my heart, you would find it covered with scars—the scars of the wounds with which they reward me."

When Beth got in that day, she found Dan standing in the hall, examining a letter addressed to herself. She took it out of his hand without ceremony, and tore it open. "Hurrah!" she exclaimed, "it's accepted."

"What's accepted?" he asked.

"An article I sent to Sunshine. And the editor says he would like to see some more of my work," Beth rejoined, almost dancing with delight.

"I don't suppose that will put much in your pocket," Dan observed. "He wouldn't praise you if he meant to pay you."

"But he has sent me a cheque for thirty shillings," said Beth.

Dan's expression changed. "Then you may be sure it's worth double," he said. "But you might get some nice notepaper for me out of it, and have it stamped with my crest, like a good girl. It's necessary in my profession, and I've finished the last you got."

Beth laughed as she had laughed—that same peculiar mirthless little laugh—when he drove past her and splashed her with mud on the road. "It never seems to occur to you that I may have some little wants of my own, Dan," she said; "you are a perfect horseleech's daughter."

Dan gazed at her blankly. He never seemed to understand any such allusion. "You've got a grievance, have you?" he snarled. "Do I ever prevent you getting anything you like?"

Beth shrugged her shoulders by way of answer, and went into the dining-room. He followed her, bent on making a scene; and she, perceiving this, set herself down on a chair and folded her hands.

He took a turn up and down the room. "And this is my fine marriage into a county family, which was to have done so much for me!" he ejaculated at last. "But I might have known better, considering the hole I took you out of. You've soon forgotten all I've done for you."

Beth smiled enigmatically.

"Oh yes! it's a laughing matter," he proceeded. "I've just ruined myself by marrying you; that's what I've done. Not a soul in the place will come to the house because of you. Nobody could ever stand you but me; and what have I got by it? Not a halfpenny! It was just a swindle, the whole business."

"Be careful!" Beth flashed forth. "If you make such assertions you must prove them. The day is past when a man might insult his wife with impunity. I have already told you I won't stand it. It would neither be good for you nor for me if I did."

"It was a swindle," he bawled. "Where are the seven or eight hundred a year I married you for?"

Beth looked at him a moment, then burst out laughing. "Dear Dan," she said, offering him the cheque, "you shall have the thirty shillings all to yourself. You deserve it for telling the truth for once. I consider I have had the best of the bargain, though. Thirty shillings is cheap for such valuable information."

"Oh, damn you!" said Dan, leaving the room and banging the door after him.

Beth signed the cheque and left it lying on his writing-table. She never saw it again.

Then she went up to her secret chamber, and spent long hours—sobbing, sobbing, sobbing, as if the marks of her married life on her character could be washed away with tears.

CHAPTER XLIII

Beth had made fifty pounds in eighteen months by her beautiful embroideries; but after her mother's death she did no more for sale, neither did she spend the money. She had suffered so many humiliations for want of money, it made her feel safer to have some by her. She gave herself up to study at this time, and wrote a great deal. It was winter now, and she was often driven down from her secret chamber to the dining-room by the cold. When Dan came in and found her at work, he would sniff contemptuously or facetiously, according to his mood at the moment. "Wasting paper as usual, eh? Better be sewing on my buttons," was his invariable remark. Not that his buttons were ever off, or that Beth ever sewed them on either. She was too good an organiser to do other people's work for them.

She made no reply to Dan's sallies. With him her mind was in a state of solitary confinement always—not a good thing for her health, but better on the whole than any attempt to discuss her ideas with him, or to talk to him about anything, indeed, but himself.

Beth fared well that winter, however—fared well in herself, that is. She had some glorious moments, revelling in the joy of creation. There is a mental analogy to all physical processes. Fertility in life comes of love; and in art the fervour of production is also accompanied by a rapture and preceded by a passion of its own. When Beth was in a good mood for work, it was like love—love without the lover; she felt all the joy of love, with none of the disturbance. When the idea of publication was first presented to her, it robbed her of this joy. As she wrote, she thought more of what she might gain than of what she was doing. Visions of success possessed her, and the ideas upon which her attention should have been fully concentrated were thinned by anticipations; and during that period her work was indifferent. Later, however, she worked again for work's sake, loving it; and then she advanced. She saw little of Dan in those days, and thought less; but when they met, she was, as usual, gentle and tolerant, patiently enduring his "cheeriness," and entering into no quarrel unless he forced one upon her.

One bright frosty morning he came in rather earlier than usual and found her writing in the dining-room.

"Well, I've had a rattling good ride this morning," he began, plunging into his favourite topic as usual without any pretence of interest in her or in her pursuits. "Nothing like riding for improving the circulation! I wish to goodness I could keep another horse. It would add to my income in the long run. But I'm so cursedly handicapped by those bills. They keep me awake at night thinking of them."

Beth sucked the end of her pencil and looked out of the window, wondering inwardly why he never tried to pay them.

"I calculate that they come to just three hundred pounds," he proceeded, looking keenly at Beth as he spoke; but she remained unmoved. "Don't you think," he ventured, "it would be a good thing to expend that three hundred pounds your mother left you on the debts? I know I could make money if I once got my head above water."

"That three hundred brings me in fifteen pounds a year," said Beth. "It is well invested, and I promised my mother not to touch any of my little capital. There is the interest, however, it arrived this morning. You can have that if you like."

"Well, that would be a crumb of comfort, at all events," he said, pouncing on the lawyer's letter, which was lying beside Beth on the table, and gloating on the cheque. "But don't you think, now that you have the interest, it would be a good time to sell and get the principal? Of course your mother was right and wise to advise you not to part with your capital; but this wouldn't be parting with it, because I should pay you back in time, you know. It would only be a loan, and I'd give you the interest on it regularly too; just think what a relief it would be to me to get those bills paid!" He ran his fingers up through his hair as he spoke, and gazed at himself in the glass tragically.

"Any news?" said Beth, after a little pause.

Dan, baffled, turned and began to walk up and down the room. "No, there never is any news in this confounded hole," he answered, venting his irritation on the place. "Oh, by the way, though, I am forgetting. I was at the Pettericks' to-day. That girl Bertha is not getting on as I should like."

"The hysterical one?" said Beth.

"Ye—yes," he answered, hesitating. "The one who threatened to be hysterical at one time. But that's all gone off. Now she's just weak, and she should have electricity; but I can't be going there every day to apply it—takes too much time: so I suggested to her people that she should come here for a while, as a paying patient, you know."

"And is she coming?" Beth said, rather in dismay.

"Yes, to-morrow," he replied. "I said you'd be delighted; but you must write and say so yourself, just for politeness' sake. It will be a good thing for you too, you know. You are too much alone, and she'll be a companion for you. She's not half a bad girl."

"Shall I be obliged to give her much of my time?" Beth asked lugubriously.

"Oh dear, no! She'll look after herself," Dr. Maclure cheerfully assured her. "I'll hire a piano for her. Must launch out a little on these occasions, you know. It's setting a sprat to catch a whale."

The piano arrived that afternoon. Beth wished Dan had let her choose it; but a piano of any kind was a delight. She had not had one since her marriage. Dan had said at first that a piano was a luxury which they must not think of when they could not afford the necessaries; and a luxury he had considered it ever since.

Bertha Petterick was not the kind of person that Beth would have chosen for a companion, and she dreaded her coming; but before Bertha had been in the house a week she had so enlivened it that Beth wondered she had ever objected to her. Bertha fawned upon Beth from the first, and was by way of looking up to her, and admiring her intellect. She was four or five years older than Beth, but gave herself no airs on that account. She was a dark girl, good looking in a common kind of way, with a masculine stride in her walk, a deep mannish voice; and not at all intellectual, but very practical: what some people consider a fine girl and others a coarse one, according to their taste. She was a good shot, could make a dress, cook a dinner, ride to hounds, and play any game; and she was what is called good-natured, that is to say, ready to do for any one anything that could be done on the spur of the moment. Things she might promise to do, or things requiring thought, she did not trouble herself about; but she would finish a pretty piece of work for Beth, gather flowers or buy them and do the table decorations, and keep things tidy in the sitting-rooms. She

played and sang well, and was ready to do both at any time if she were asked, which was a joy to Beth; and her bright chatter kept Dan in a good humour, which was a relief. She had plenty of money, and spent it lavishly. Every time she went out she bought Beth something, a piece of music she had mentioned, a book she longed for, materials for work, besides flowers and fruit and sweets in unlimited quantities. Beth remonstrated, but Bertha begged Beth not to deprive her of the one pleasure she had in life just then, the pleasure of pleasing Beth, and of acknowledging what she never could repay but dearly appreciated—Beth's sisterly sympathy, her consistent kindness! Such sayings were tinged with sadness, which made Beth suspect that Bertha had some secret sorrow; but if so, it was most carefully concealed, for there was not a trace of it in her habitual manner. She showed no physical delicacy either; but then, as she said herself, she was picking up in such a wonderful way under the treatment, she really began to feel that there was very little the matter with her.

Dan managed to be at home a great deal to look after his patient, and was most attentive to her. He hired a brougham three times a week to do his rounds in, that she might accompany him, and so get the air without fatigue or risk of cold; and he would have her to sit with him in the dining-room when he was smoking, and rolled cigarettes for her; or would spend the evening with her in the drawing-room, listening to her playing and singing, or playing bezique with her, and seemingly well content, although in private he sometimes said to Beth it was all a beastly bore, but he must go through with it as a duty since he had undertaken it, it being his way to do a thing thoroughly if he did it at all.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might," he added piously. "If a thing's worth doing at all, it's worth doing well, I always think."

That was his formula for the time being, but Beth judged him by his demeanour, which was gay, and not by his professions, and did not pity him. She was in excellent spirits herself, for her writing was going well; and it varied the monotony

pleasantly for her to have Bertha to talk to, and walk, play, or sew with, after her work. Bertha's demonstrations of affection, too, were grateful to Beth, who had had so little love either bestowed upon her or required of her.

Bertha had been in the house three months, when one day her mother called, and found Beth alone, Dan and Bertha having gone for a drive together. Mrs. Petterick had just returned from abroad, where the whole family had been living most of the time that Bertha had been with the Maclures.

"Really," Mrs. Petterick said, "I don't know how to thank you for your kindness to my girl. She's quite a different person I can see by her letters, thanks to the good doctor. Before he took her in hand she was quite hysterical, and had to lie down two or three times a day, because she said she had no strength for anything. But really three months is an abuse of hospitality; and I think she should be coming home now."

"Oh no, do let her stay a little longer if you can spare her," Beth pleaded. "It is so nice to have her here."

"Well, it is good of you to say so," said Mrs. Petterick, "but it must be a great expense to you. We weren't well off ourselves at one time. Mr. Petterick's a self-made man, and I know that every additional mouth makes a difference. But, however, you being proud, I won't offend you by offering money in exchange for kindness, which can't be repaid, but shan't be forgotten."

When Mrs. Petterick had gone, Beth sat awhile staring into the fire. She was somewhat stunned, for Dan had assured her that Bertha was a paying patient, and that, it seemed, had been a gratuitous lie. She was roused at last by Minna, the parlour-maid. "Please, ma'am, a lady wishes to see you," Minna said.

"Show her in," Beth answered listlessly. But the next moment she stiffened with astonishment, for the lady who entered was Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe.

"I am afraid I have taken you by surprise," Mrs. Kilroy began rather nervously.

"Will you sit down?" Beth said coldly. "You cannot wonder if I am surprised to see you. This is the first visit you have paid me, although we met directly after I came to Slane some years ago. You were kind and cordial on that occasion, but the next time I saw you—at that ball—you slighted me; and after that you shunned me until I met you the other day at Mrs. Carne's, and then you seemed inclined to take me up again. I do not understand such caprices, and I do not like them."

"It was not caprice," Mrs. Kilroy assured her. "I liked you very much the first time we met, and I should have called immediately; but when I asked for your address, I was told that your husband was in charge of the Lock Hospital——"

"Yes, the hospital for the diseases of women," Beth said. "But what difference does that make?"

"It made me jump to the hasty conclusion that you approved of the degradation of your own sex," said Angelica.

"The degradation of my own sex!" said Beth bewildered. "What is a Lock Hospital?"

Angelica explained the whole horrible apparatus for the special degradation of women.

"Now perhaps you will understand what we felt about you," Angelica concluded—"we who are loyal to our own sex, and have a sense of justice—when we thought you were content to live on the means your husband makes in such a shameful way."

An extraordinary look of relief came into Beth's face. "Then it was not my fault—not because I was horrid," she exclaimed. All the slights were as nothing the moment she gathered that she had not deserved them. Angelica stared at her. But it was not in Beth's nature to think long about herself; only the full force of what she had just heard as it concerned others did not come to her for some seconds. When it did, she was overcome. "How could you suppose that I knew?" she gasped at last. "This is the first hint I have had of the loathsome business. My husband talks to me

about—many things that he had better not have mentioned—but about this he has never said a word."

"Then he must have suspected that you would disapprove," said Mrs. Kilroy.

"Disapprove!" Beth ejaculated. "The whole thing makes me sick. I ought to have been told before I married him. I never would have spoken to a man in such a position had I known. You did well to avoid me."

"No," said Angelica. "I did ill, and I feel humiliated for my own want of penetration—for my hasty conclusion. It was Sir George Galbraith who first made me suspect that you knew nothing about it, and I would have come at once to make sure, but we were just leaving the neighbourhood, and we only returned yesterday. Ideala did not believe that you knew it either, and she rated us all for the way we had treated you. She has been in America ever since she met you at Mrs. Carne's, but she is coming home next week, and has written to entreat me to ask you to meet her. Will you? Will you come and stay with me? Do! and talk this over with us. I can see that it has been a great shock to you."

"I cannot answer you now," said Beth, "I must think—I must think what I had better do."

"Yes, think it over," said Angelica, "then write and tell me when you will come. Only do come. You will find yourself among friends—congenial friends, I venture to prophesy."

When Mrs. Kilroy had gone, Beth went to her bedroom, and waited there for Dan. It was the only place where she could be sure of seeing him alone. He dressed for dinner now that Miss Petterick was with them.

Dan came in whistling hilariously. He stopped short when he saw Beth's face.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Mrs. Kilroy has been here."

"I hope you thanked her for nothing!"

"I'm afraid I forgot to thank her at all," Beth said, "although she has put me under an obligation to her."

"May I ask what the obligation is?"

"She told me frankly why no decent woman will associate with us. It is not my fault after all, it seems, but yours—you and your Lock Hospital. It is against the Anglo-Saxon spirit to admit panders into society."

"Oh, she told you about that, did she, the meddling busybody!" he answered coolly. "I was afraid they would, some of them, damn them! and I knew you would go into hysterics. She didn't tell you the necessity for it, I suppose, nor the good it is doing; but I will; so just listen to me, then you'll see perhaps that I know more about it than these canting sentimentalists."

Beth, sitting in judgment on him, set her mouth and listened in silence until he stopped. In his own defence he gave her many revolting details couched in the coarsest language.

"But then, in the name of justice," she exclaimed, "what means do you take to protect those poor unfortunate women from disease? What do you do to the men who spread it? What becomes of diseased men?"

"Oh, they marry, I suppose. Anyhow, that is not my business. Doctors can't be expected to preach morals. Sanitation is our business."

"But aren't morals closely connected with sanitation?" Beth said. "And why, if sanitation is your business, do you take no radical measures with regard to this horrible disease? Why do you not have it reported, never mind who gets it, as scarlet fever, smallpox, and other diseases—all less disastrous to the general health of the community—are reported?"

Dan shrugged his shoulders. "It's a deuced awkward thing for a man to be suspected

of disease. It's a stigma, and might spoil his prospects. Women are so cursedly prying nowadays. They've got wind of its being incurable, and many a one won't marry a man if a suspicion of it attaches to him."

"I see," said Beth. "The principles of the medical profession with regard to sanitation when women are in question seem to be peculiar. I wish to Heaven I had known them sooner." She hid her face in her hands, and suddenly burst into tears.

Dan scowled. "Well, this is nice!" he exclaimed. "I have had a devilish hard day's work, and come in cheery, as usual, to do my best to make things pleasant for you, and this is the reception I get! You're a nice pill, indeed!" He went off muttering into his dressing-room and slammed the door.

When he appeared in the drawing-room, he found Beth and Bertha chatting together as usual, and as, during the rest of the evening, he could detect no difference in Beth's manner, he congratulated himself that she was going to accept the position as inevitable, and say no more about it. It was not Beth's way to return to a disagreeable subject once it had been discussed, unless she meant to do something in the matter, and Dan conceived that there was nothing to be done in this instance. He considered that he was not the sort of man it was safe for women to interfere with, and he guessed she knew it!

He was mistaken, however, when he supposed that she had let the subject drop, and was going to resign herself to an invidious position. She was merely letting it lapse until she understood it. It was all as new to her as it was horrifying, and she required time to study both sides of the question. Her own sense of justice was too acute to let her accept at once the accusation that so-called civilised men, who boast of their chivalrous protection of the "weaker sex," had imposed upon women a special public degradation, while the most abandoned and culpable of their own sex were not only allowed to go unpunished, but to spread vice and disease where they listed. The iniquitous injustice and cruelty of it all made her sick and sorry for men, and

reluctant to believe it.

A few days after Mrs. Kilroy's visit, Mrs. Carne called on Beth. Mrs. Carne always followed the county people. To her they were a sacred set. Her faith in all they did was touching and sincere. The stupidest remark of the stupidest county lady impressed her more than the most brilliant wit of a professional man's wife. When she stayed at a country-house, whatever the tone of it, she felt like a shriven saint, so uplifted was she by reverence for rank. On finding, therefore, that some of the most influential ladies in the county were diffidently anxious to win Beth into their set, rather than prepared to admit her with confident patronage, as Mrs. Carne would have expected, it was natural that she should revise her own opinion of Beth, and also seek to cultivate her acquaintance.

She called in the morning by way of being friendly; but Beth, who was hard at work at the time, did not feel grateful for the attention. Minna showed Mrs. Carne straight into the dining-room, where Beth usually worked now that Bertha was on the premises. Bertha happened to be out that morning, and Mrs. Carne surprised Beth sitting alone at a table covered with books and papers.

"And so the little woman is going to be a great one!" Mrs. Carne exclaimed playfully. "Well, I was surprised to hear it! I know I am not flattering to my own discernment when I say so; but there! I should never have supposed you were a genius. You are such a quiet little mouse, you know, you don't give yourself away much, if you will excuse the expression! I always say what I think."

"I hope you will not call me a genius again, Mrs. Carne," Beth said stiffly. "All exaggeration is distasteful to me."

"And to me, too, my dear child," Mrs. Carne hastened to assure her blandly. "But I always say what I think, you know."

Beth fixed her eyes on the clock absently.

When Dan came in to lunch that day, he seemed pleased to hear that Mrs. Carne had

been.

"What had she to say for herself?" he asked.

"She said 'I always say what I think,'" Beth replied; "until it struck me that 'I always say what I think' is a person who only thinks disagreeable things."

"Well, I like her," said Dan; "and I always get on with her. If she's going to show up friendly at last, I hope you won't snub her. We can't afford to make enemies, according to your own account," he concluded significantly. "What do you think of her, Miss Petterick?" he added, by way of giving a pleasanter turn to the conversation. He and his patient always addressed each other with much formality. Beth asked him once in private why he was so stiff with Bertha, and he explained that he thought it wiser, as a medical man, not to be at all familiar; formality helped to keep up his authority.

"I have had no opportunity of thinking anything about her," Bertha rejoined. "She has never spoken to me. I have heard her speak, though, and like her voice. It's so cooing. She makes me think of a dove."

"And I shouldn't be surprised to find," said Beth, with cruel insight, "that, like the dove, she conceals a villainous disposition and murderous proclivities by charms of manner and a winning voice. What are you going to do this afternoon, Bertha?"

Bertha glanced at Dan. "I am going to read 'The Moonstone' out in the garden the whole afternoon," she replied.

"Then you won't mind if I disappear till tea-time?" said Beth. "I want to do some work upstairs."

"No, I would rather be alone," Bertha answered frankly. "That book's entrancing."

"I shall go round on foot this afternoon, for exercise," Dan announced as he left the room.

Beth saw Bertha settled on a seat in the garden, and then retired to her secret

chamber. She had not yet come to any conclusion with regard to Mrs. Kilroy's invitation, and she felt it was time she decided. She took her sewing, her accustomed aid to thought, and sat down on a high chair near the window. She always sat on a high chair, that she might not be enervated by lolling; that was one of her patient methods of self-discipline; and while she meditated, she did quantities of work for herself, making, mending, remodelling, that she might get all the wear possible out of her clothes, and not add a penny she could help to those terrible debts, the thought of which had weighed on her youth, and threatened to crush all the spirit out of her ever since her marriage. Dan had never considered her too young to be worried.

From where she sat she could see Bertha on a seat just below, with "The Moonstone" on her lap, but Bertha could not see her because of the curtain of creepers that covered the iron rail which formed a little balcony round the window. Besides, it was supposed that that was a blank window. It was the only one on that side of the house, too, and Bertha had settled herself in that secluded corner of the garden precisely because she thought she could not be overlooked.

Beth glanced at her from time to time mechanically, but without thinking of her. It struck her at last, however, that Bertha had never opened her book, which seemed odd after the special point she had made of being left alone to read it undisturbed. Then Beth noticed that she seemed to be on the look-out, as if she were expecting something or somebody; and presently Dan appeared, walking quickly and with a furtive air, as if he were afraid of being seen. Bertha flushed crimson and became all smiles as soon as she saw him. Beth's work dropped on her lap, she clasped her hands on it, her own face flushed, and her breath became laboured. Dan, after carefully satisfying himself that there was nobody about, sat down beside Bertha, put his arm round her waist, and kissed her. She giggled, and made a feeble feint of protesting. Then he took a jewel-case from his pocket, opened it, and held it out to her admiring gaze. It contained a handsome gold bracelet, which he presently clasped on her arm. She expressed her gratitude by lifting up her face to be kissed.

Then he put his arm round her again, and she sat with her head on his shoulder, and they began to talk; but the conversation was interrupted by frequent kisses.

Beth had seen enough. She turned her back to the window, and sat quite still with her hands clasped before her. It was her first experience of that parasite, the girl who fastens herself on a married woman, accepts all that she can get from her in the way of hospitality and kindness, and treacherously repays her by taking her husband for a lover. Beth pitied Bertha, but with royal contempt. It all seemed so sordid and despicable. Jealous she was not. "Jealousy is a want of faith in one's self," she had said to Bertha's mother once, and now, in the face of this provocation, she was of the same mind. She had no words to express her scorn for a man who is false to his obligations, nor for the petty frauds and deceits which had made the position of those two tenable. As for Dan, he was beneath contempt; but—"I shall succeed!" The words sprang to her lips triumphantly. "Let him wallow with his own kind in congenial mire as much as he likes. No wonder he suspects me! But I—I shall succeed!"

Meanwhile down in the garden Dan was gurgling to Bertha: "What should I do without you, darling? Life wasn't worth having till I knew you. I won't say a word against Beth. She has her good points, as you know, and I believe she means well; but she's spoilt my life, and my career too. I'm one that requires a lot of sympathy; but she never shows me any. She thinks of nobody but herself. Her own mother always said so. And after all I've done for her too! If only you knew! But of course I can't blow my own trumpet. They're all alike in that family, though. Her mother used to keep me playing cards till I was ruined. And Beth has no gratitude, and you can't trust her. She comes of a lying lot, and I'm of the same mind as my old father, who used to say he'd rather have a thief any day than a liar. You can watch a thief, but you can't watch a liar."

"Still, Dan," Bertha murmured, "I somehow think you ought to stick to her."

"So I would," said Dan. "No one can accuse me of not sticking to my duty. I'm an honourable man. It was she who cast me off. I'm nothing to her. And I should have been broken-hearted but for you, Bertha, I should indeed." Dan's fine eyes filled with tears, which Bertha tenderly wiped away.

"Of course it makes a great difference her having cast you off," Bertha conceded, after a little interlude.

"It makes all the difference," Dan rejoined. "She set me at liberty, and you are free too; so who have we to consider but ourselves? I admire a woman who has the pluck to be free!" he added enthusiastically.

"Then why don't you encourage Beth more to go her own way?" Bertha reasonably demanded. "She's always yearning for a career."

Dan hesitated. "Because I've been a fool, I think," he said at last. "I'll encourage her now, though. It would be a great blessing to us if she could get started as a writer. I see that now. She'd think of nothing else. And it would be a blessing to her too," he added feelingly.

"That's what I like about you, Dan," Bertha observed. "You always make every allowance for her, and consider her interests, although she has treated you badly."

Dan pressed her hand to his lips. "I'll do what I can for her, you may be sure," he said, quite melted by his own magnanimity. "I wish I could do more. But she's been extravagant, and my means are dreadfully crippled."

"Then why do you buy me such handsome presents, you naughty man?" Bertha playfully demanded, holding up her arm with the bracelet on it.

"I must have a holiday sometimes," he rejoined. "Besides, I happen to be expecting a handsome cheque, an unusual occurrence, by any post now."

Beth's dividends were due that day.

Just as dinner was announced, Beth swept into the drawing-room in the best evening

dress she had, a diaphonous black, set off by turquoise velvet, a combination which threw the beautiful milk-white of her skin into delicate relief. There was a faint flush on her face; on her forehead and neck the tendrils of her soft brown hair seemed to have taken on an extra crispness of curl, and her eyes were sparkling. She had never looked better. Bertha Petterick, in her common handsomeness, was as a barmaid accustomed to beer beside a gentlewoman of exceptional refinement. She wore the showy bracelet Dan had given her that afternoon, and it shone conspicuous in its tawdry newness on her arm; her dress was tasteless too, and badly put on, and altogether she contrasted unfavourably with Beth, and Dan observed it.

"Are you expecting any one in particular to-night?" he asked.

"No," Beth answered smiling. "I dressed for my own benefit. Nothing moves me to self-satisfaction like a nice dress. I have not enjoyed the pleasure much since I married. But I am going to begin now, and have a good time."

She turned as she spoke and led the way to the dining-room alone. Dr. Maclure absently offered his arm to Miss Petterick. He was puzzled to know what this sudden fit of self-assertion, combined with an unaccountable burst of high spirits on Beth's part, might portend. To conceal a certain uneasiness, he became extra facetious, not to say coarse. There was a public ball coming off in a few days, and he persisted in speaking of it as "The Dairy Show."

"Don't you begin to feel excited about it? I do!" Miss Petterick said to Beth. "I wish it were to-night."

"I am indifferent," Beth answered blandly, "because I am not going."

"Not going!" Dan exclaimed. "Then who's to chaperon me?"

"I should scarcely suppose," Beth answered, looking at him meditatively, "that you are in the stage of innocence which makes a chaperon necessary. Bertha, how you are loving that new bracelet! You've done nothing but fidget with it ever since we sat down."

"Ah!" Bertha answered archly, "you want to know where I got it, Madam Curious! Well, I'll tell you. It was sent me only to-day—by my young man!"

Dan looked at his plate complacently, but presently Beth saw a glance of intelligence flash between them—a glance such as she had often seen them exchange before, but had not understood; and she was thankful that she had not!—thankful that she had been able to live so long with Dr. Maclure without entertaining a single suspicion, without thinking one low thought about him. It was a hopeful triumph of cultivated nice-mindedness over the most evil communications.

When they were at dessert, the postman's knock resounded sharply. Dr. Maclure, who had been anxiously listening for it, and was peeling a pear for Miss Petterick at the moment, waited with the pear and the knife upheld in his hands, watching the door till the servant entered. She brought a letter on a salver, and was taking it to her master, when Beth said authoritatively, "That letter is for me, Minna; bring it here."

The girl obeyed.

Dan put down the knife and the pear. "What's yours is mine, I thought," he observed, with a sorry affectation of cheeriness.

"Not on this occasion," Beth answered quietly, taking up the letter and opening it as she spoke. "This happens to be peculiarly my own."

"Why, it's a cheque," he rejoined, with an affectation of surprise. "What luck! I haven't been able to sleep for nights thinking of the butcher's bill."

"For shame!" Beth said, bantering—"talking about bills before your guest! But since you introduced the subject I may add that the butcher must wait. I want this myself. I am going to stay with Mrs. Kilroy at Ilverthorpe on Wednesday, and it will just cover my expenses."

"This is the first I have heard of the visit," Dan ejaculated.

"I only decided to go this afternoon," Beth replied.

"You decided without consulting me? Well—I'm damned if you shall go; I shall not allow it."

"The word 'allow' is obsolete in the matrimonial dictionary, friend Daniel," Beth rejoined good-humouredly.

"But you are bound to obey me."

"And I'm ready to obey you when you endow me with all your worldly goods," she said; then, suddenly dropping her bantering tone, she spoke decidedly: "I am going to stay with Mrs. Kilroy on Wednesday, understand that at once, and do not let us have any vulgar dispute about it."

"But you can't leave Miss Petterick here alone with me!" he remonstrated.

"No, but she can go home," Beth answered coolly. "Her mother wants her, you know, and I have written to tell her to expect her to-morrow. Now, if you please, we will end the discussion."

She put the letter in her pocket, and began to crack nuts and eat them. But Dan could not keep away from the subject. "Gad!" he ejaculated, "I thought they'd get hold of you, that lot, and flatter you, and make a convenience of you—that's what they do! I know them! They think you're clever—how easy it is to be mistaken! But you'll see for yourself in time, and then you'll believe me—when it's too late. For then you'll have got your name mixed up with them, and you'll not get over that, I can tell you—they are well known for a nice lot. Your Mrs. Kilroy was notorious before she married. She was Angelica Hamilton-Wells, and she and her brother were called the Heavenly Twins. They are grandchildren of that blackguard old Duke of Morningquest. Nobody ever speaks of any of the family with the slightest respect. It's well known that Miss Hamilton-Wells asked old Kilroy to marry her, and when a girl has to do that, you may guess what she is! But they are all besmirched, that lot," Dan concluded with his most high-minded manner on.

"I never believe anything I hear against anybody," said Beth, unconsciously quoting

Ideala; "so please spare me the recital of all invidious stories."

"You'll only believe what suits yourself, I know," he said. "And I've no doubt you'll enjoy yourself. Galbraith will be there, and Mr. Theodore Hamilton-Wells, the fair-haired 'Diavolo,' who will suit your book exactly, I should think."

"I beg your pardon?" said Beth politely.

Dan poured himself out another glass of wine, and said no more.

He and Bertha managed to have a moment's conversation together before they retired that night.

"What does it mean?" Bertha anxiously demanded. "Does she suspect anything?"

"God knows!" Dan said piously, then added, after a moment's consideration, "How the devil can she? We've played our cards too well for that! No, she's just bent on making mischief; that's the kind of pill she is. If she keeps that money it will be downright robbery. But now you see what I have to put up with, and you can judge for yourself if I deserve it."

When he went to Beth, however, he assumed a very different tone. He entered the room with an air of deep dejection, and found her sitting beside her dressing-table in a white wrapper, reading quietly. She smiled when she saw his pose. It was what she had expected.

"I can't do without that money, Beth, on my word," he began plaintively. "I've been reckoning on it. I wouldn't take it from you, God knows, if I could help it; but I'm sore pressed." He took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes, imagining that he still had to deal with the gentle sensitive girl, upon whom he had imposed so long and so successfully.

Beth watched him a moment with contempt, and then she laughed.

"It is no use, friend Daniel," she said in her neat, incisive, straightforward way. "I am not going to take you seriously any more. I am neither to be melted by your

convenient tears, nor dismayed by your bogey bills. I have never seen any of those bills, by the way; the next time you mention them, please produce them. Let us be business-like. And in the meantime, just understand, once for all, like a good man, that I am not going to be domineered over by you as if I were a common degraded wife with every spark of spirit and self-respect crushed out of me by one brutal exaction or another. I shall do my duty—do my best to meet your reasonable wishes; but I will submit to no ordering and no sort of exaction." She rose and faced him. "And as we are coming to an understanding," she pursued, "just explain. Why did you tell me that Miss Petterick was to be a paying patient?"

"I never told you anything of the kind," said Dan, losing his head, and lying stupidly in his astonishment.

Beth shrugged her shoulders. "It is your own business," she rejoined—"at least it is you who will have to pay for her entertainment."

She returned to her book as she spoke, and continued to read with apparent calmness.

Now that she had taken up her position, she found herself quite strong enough to hold it against any Dan Maclure or Bertha Petterick. But Beth was being forced into an ugly and vulgar phase, and she knew and resented it, and was filled with dismay. She was taking on something of the colour of her surroundings involuntarily, inevitably, as certain insects do, in self-defence. She had spoken to Dan in his own tone in order to make him understand her; but was it necessary? Surely if she had resisted the impulse to try that weapon, she might have found another as effective, the use of which would not have compromised her gentlehood and lessened her self-esteem. Her dissatisfaction with herself for the part she had played was a cruel ache, and she thanked Heaven for the chance which would mercifully remove her from that evil atmosphere for a while, and prayed for time to reflect, for strength to be her better self. She was angry with herself, and grieved because she had fought

Dan with his own weapons, and it did not occur to her for her comfort that she had only done so because he was invulnerable to that which she would naturally have used—earnest, reasonable, calm discussion—and that fight him she must with something, somehow, or sink for ever down to the degraded level required of their wives by husbands of his way of thinking.

CHAPTER XLIV

Ilverthorpe was at the other side of the county, and Beth had to go from Slane to Morningquest by train in order to get there. Dan continued to be disagreeable in private about her going, but he took her to the station, and saw her off, so that the public might know what an admirable husband he was.

On his way from the station he met Sir George Galbraith, and greeted him with effusion.

"I hope you were coming to see us," he said, "for that would show that you don't forget our humble existence. But my wife isn't at home, I am sorry to say. She has just gone to stay with Mrs. Kilroy."

Sir George looked keenly at him. "I hope she is quite well," he said formally.

"Not too well," Dan answered lugubriously; "and that is why I encouraged her to go. The fact is, Sir George, I think I've been making a mistake with Beth. My mother was my perfection of a woman. She didn't care much for books; but she had good sound common-sense, and she attended to her husband and her household, and preferred to stay at home; and I confess I wanted my wife to be like her. Especially I wanted to keep her pure-minded and unsuspicious of evil; and that she could not remain if she got drawn into Mrs. Kilroy's set, and mixed up with the questions about which women are now agitating themselves. I know you're with them and not with me in the matter, but you'll allow for my point of view. Well, with regard to Beth, I find I've made a mistake. I should have let her follow her own bent, see for

herself, and become a woman of the day if she's so minded. As it is, she is growing morbid for want of an outlet, and hanging back herself, and it is I who have to urge her on. It's an heroic operation so far as I'm concerned, for the whole thing is distasteful to me; but I shall go through with it, and let her be as independent as she likes."

"This sounds like self-sacrifice," said Sir George. "I sincerely hope it may answer. We are going different ways, I think. Good-morning." He raised his hand to his hat in a perfunctory way, and hurried off. The next time he saw Mrs. Kilroy, he described this encounter with Dr. Maclure.

"This is a complete change of front," said Angelica; "what does it mean?"

"When a man of that kind tells his wife to make the most of her life in her own way and be independent, he means 'Don't bother me; another woman is the delight of my senses!' When he says to the other woman 'Be free!' he means 'Throw yourself into my arms!'"

Angelica sighed. "Poor Beth!" she said, "what a fate to be tied to that plausible hog!"

From having been so much shut up in herself, Beth showed very little of the contrasts of her temperament on the surface,—her joy in life, her moments of exaltation, of devotion, of confidence, of harshness, of tenderness; her awful fits of depression, her doubts, her fears, her self-distrust; her gusts of passion, and the disconnected impulses wedged into the well-disciplined routine of a consistent life, ordered for the most part by principle, reason, and reflection. Few people, meeting her casually, would have suspected any contrasts at all; and even of those who knew her best, only one now and then appreciated the rate at which the busy mind was working, and the changes wrought by the growth which was continually in progress beneath her equable demeanour. Those about her, for want of discernment, expected nothing of her, and suffered shocks of surprise in consequence, which they resented, blaming her for their own defects.

But it was of much more importance to Beth that she should be able to pass on with ease from one thing to another than that she should have the approval of people who would have had her stay where they found her, not for her benefit, but for their own convenience in classifying her. Beth made stepping-stones of her knowledge of other people rather than of her own dead self. She picked to pieces the griefs they brought upon her, dissected them, and moralised upon them; and, in so doing, forgot the personal application. While in the midst of what might have been her own life tragedy, she compared herself with those who had been through theirs and did not seem a bit the worse or the better, which observation stimulated her fortitude; when she contemplated the march of events, that mighty army of atoms, any one of which may be in command of us for a time, none remaining so for ever under healthy conditions, she perceived that life is lived in detail, not in the abstract. The kind of thing that makes the backbone of a three-volume novel, is but a phase or an incident; everything is but an incident with all of us, a heart-break to-day, a recollection to-morrow, a source of encouragement and of inspiration eventually perhaps; the which, if some would remember, there would be less despair and fewer suicides. The recognition of this fact had helped Beth's sense of proportion and was making her philosophical. She believed that life could be lived so as to make the joys as inevitable as the sorrows. We are apt to cultivate our sense of pleasure less than our sense of suffering, by appreciating small pleasures little, while heeding small pains excessively. Beth's deliberate intention, as well as her natural impulse, was to reverse this in her own case as much as possible; she would not let her physical sense of well-being on a fine morning and her intellectual delight in a good mood for work be spoilt because of some trouble of the night before. The trouble she would set aside so that it might not detract from the pleasure.

But fine mornings and good moods for work had not come to her aid since she discovered the mean treachery of Dan and Bertha, and when she left Slane she was still oppressed by the sense of their hypocrisy and deceit. As the train bore her

swiftly away from them both, however, her spirits rose. The sun shone, the country looked lovely in its autumn bravery of tint and tone; she felt well, and the contemplation of such people as Dan and Bertha was not elevating; they must out of her mind like any other unholy thought, that she might be worthy to associate with the loyal ladies and noble gentlemen whose hands were outheld to help her. The people we cling to are those with whom we find ourselves most at home. It is not the people who amuse us that we like best, but those who stir our deeper emotions, rouse in us possibilities of generous feeling which lie latent for the most part, and give form to our higher aspirations; and Beth anticipated with a happy heart that it was with such she was bound to abide.

Mrs. Kilroy met her at the station at Morningquest. "What a bonny thing you are!" she exclaimed in her queer abrupt way. "I didn't realise it till I saw you walking up the platform towards me. There's a cart to take your luggage to Ilverthorpe. Do you mind coming to lunch with Mrs. Orton Beg? She has a dear little house in the Close, and we thought you might like to see the Cathedral. Here's the carriage. No, you get in first."

"But does Mrs. Orton Beg want me?" Beth asked when they were seated.

"We all want you," said Mrs. Kilroy, "if you will forgive our first mistake with regard to you, and come out of yourself and be one of us. And you'll be specially fond of Mrs. Orton Beg when you know her, I fancy. She's just sweet! She used to hate our works and ways, and be very conventional; but Edith Beale's marriage opened her eyes. She would never have believed that men countenanced such an iniquity had she not seen it herself. The first effect of the shock was to narrow her judgment and make her severe on men generally; but she will get over that in time. Man, like woman, is too big a subject to generalise about. He has his faults, you know, but he must be educated; that is all he wants. He must be taught to have a better opinion of himself. At present, he wallows because he thinks he can't keep out

of the mire; but of course he can when he learns how. He's not a bit worse than woman naturally, only he has a lower opinion of himself, and that keeps him down. With his training we shouldn't be a bit better than he is. In all things that concern men and women, you dear, you will find that, when they start fair, one is not a bit better or worse than the other. Here we are."

Mrs. Orton Beg came into the hall to greet her guest. She was a slender, elegant, middle-aged woman, in graceful black draperies, with hair prematurely grey, and a face that had always been interesting, but never handsome—a refined, intellectual, but not strong face; the face of a patient, self-contained, long-enduring person, of settled purpose, slowly arrived at, and then not easily shaken. She welcomed Beth cordially, and placed her at table so that she might look out at the old grey Cathedral. It was the first time Beth had seen it, and she could have lost herself in the sensation of realising its traditions, its beauty, and its age; but the conversation went on briskly, and she had to take her part. Lady Fulda Guthrie, an aunt of Mrs. Kilroy's, was the only other guest. She was a beautiful saint, with a soul which had already progressed as far as the most spiritual part of Catholicism could take it, and she could get no farther in this incarnation.

"I hope you are prepared to discuss any and every thing, Mrs. Maclure," Mrs. Orton Beg warned Beth; "for that is what you will find yourself called upon to do among us. The peculiarity of man is that he will do the most atrocious things without compunction, but would be shocked if he were called upon to discuss them. Do what you like, is his principle, but don't mention it; people form their opinions in discussion, and opinions are apt to be adverse. Our principle is very much the opposite."

"I have just begun to know the necessity for open discussion," Beth answered tranquilly. "I do not see how we can arrive at happiness in life if we do not try to discover the sources of misery. I know of nothing that earnest men and women

should hesitate to discuss openly on proper occasions."

"Oh, I'm thankful to hear you say 'men and women,'" Angelica broke in. "That is the right new spirit! Let us help one another. Any attempt to separate the interests of the sexes, as women here and there, and men generally, would have them separated, is fatal to the welfare of the whole race. The efforts of foolish people to divide the interests of men and women make me writhe—as if we were not utterly bound up in one another, and destined to rise or fall together! But this woman movement is towards the perfecting of life, not towards the disruption of it. I asked a sympathetic woman the other day why she took no part in it, and she answered profoundly, 'Because I am a part of it.' And I am sure she was right. I am sure it is evolutionary. It is an effort of the race to raise itself a step higher in the scale of being. For see what it resolves itself into! Men respond to what women expect of them. When warriors were the women's ideal, men were warriors. When women preferred knights, priests, or troubadours, a man's ambition was to be a knight, priest, or troubadour. When women thought drunkenness fine, men were drunken. Now women want husbands of a nobler nature, strong in all the attributes, moral and physical, of the perfect man, that their children may be noble too, and thus the ascent of man to higher planes of being become assured."

"Great is the power of thought," said Lady Fulda. "By thinking these things the race is evolving them. Thought married to suggestion is a creative force. If the race believed it would have wings; in the course of ages wings would come of the faith."

"And discussion is not enough," Beth resumed. "We should experiment. It is very well to hold opinions and set up theories, but opinions and theories are alike valueless until they are tested by experiment."

"I see you are a true radical," said Mrs. Orton Beg. "You would go to the root of the matter."

"Oh yes, I am a radical in that sense of the word," Beth answered. "I have a horror of

conservatism. Nothing is stationary. All things are always in a state of growth or decay; and conservatism is a state of decay."

"Yes," said Angelica. "That is very true, especially as applied to women—if they are ever to advance."

"Then don't you think they are advancing?" Beth asked.

"Yes," said Angelica, "but not as much as they might. When you mix more with them in the way of work you will be disheartened. Women are their own worst enemies just now. They don't follow their leaders loyally and consistently; they have little idea of discipline; their tendency is to go off on side issues and break up into little cliques. They are largely actuated by petty personal motives, by petty jealousies, by pettinesses of all kinds. One amongst them will arise here and there, and do something great that is an honour to them all; but they do not honour her for it—perhaps because something in the way she dresses, or some trick of manner, does not meet with the approval of the majority. Women are for ever stumbling over trifling details. To prove themselves right pleases them better than to arrive at the truth; and a vulgar personal triumph is of more moment than the triumph of a great cause. In these things they are practically not a bit better than men."

"They seem worse, in fact, because we expect so much more of them in the way of loyalty and disinterestedness," said Mrs. Orton Beg; "and their power is so much greater, too, in social matters; when they misuse it, they do much more harm. This will not always be so, of course. As their minds expand, they will see and understand better. At present they do not know enough to appreciate their own deficiencies—they do not measure the weakness of their vacillations by comparing it with the steady strength of purpose that prevails; and, for want of comprehension, they aim their silly animadversions to-day at some one whose work they are glad enough to profit by to-morrow; they make the task of a benefactress so hard that they kill her, and then they give her a public funeral. I pity them!"

"Oh, do not be hasty," said Lady Fulda. "Human beings are not like packs of cards, to be shuffled into different combinations at will and nobody the worse. There are feelings to be considered. The old sores must be tenderly touched even by those who would heal them. And when we uproot we must be careful to replant under more favourable conditions; when we demolish we should be prepared to rebuild, or no comfort will come of the changes. These things take time, and are best done deliberately, and even then the most cautious make their mistakes. But, still, I believe that the force which is carrying us along is the force that makes for righteousness. We women have in our minds now what will culminate in the recognition by future generations of the beauty of goodness. Woman is to be the mother of God in Man."

Beth's heart swelled at the words. This attitude was new to her; and yet all that was said she seemed to have heard before, and known from the first. And she knew more also, away back in that region beyond time and space to which she had access, and where she found herself at happy moments transported by an impulse outside herself, which she could not control by any effort of will. That day, with those new friends, she felt like one who returns to a happy home after weary wanderings, and is warmly welcomed. A great calm settled upon her spirit. She said little the whole time, but sat, sure of their sympathetic tolerance, and listened to them with that living light of interest in her eyes to which the heart responds with confidence more surely than to any spoken word. The evil influences which had held her tense at Slane had no power to trouble her here. She was high enough above Dan and Bertha to look down upon them dispassionately, knowing them for what they were, yet personally unaffected by their turpitude. It was as if she had heard of some bad deed, and knew it to be repulsive, a thing intolerable, meriting punishment; yet, because it did not concern her, it had lapsed from her thoughts like a casual paragraph read in a paper which had not brought home to her any realisation of what it recorded.

During the afternoon her mind was stored with serene impressions—service in the

venerable Cathedral; the fluting of an anthem by a boy with a birdlike voice; some strong words from the pulpit, not on the dry bones of doctrine, nor the doings of a barbarous people led by a vengeful demon of perplexing attributes whom they worshipped as a deity, but on the conduct of life—a vital subject. Then, as they drove through the beautiful old city, there came impressions of grey and green; grey gateways, ancient buildings, ivy, and old trees, and, over all, sounding slow, calm, and significant, the marvellous chime, the message which Morningquest heard hourly year by year, and heeded no more than it heeded death at a distance or political complications in Peru.

The same party met again at Ilverthorpe, but there were others there as well—Ideala, Mrs. Kilroy's father and mother Mr. and Lady Adeline Hamilton-Wells, and Lady Galbraith, but not Sir George.

In the drawing-room after dinner, Beth was intent upon a portfolio of drawings, and Ideala, seeing her alone, went up to her.

"Are you fond of pictures?" she said to Beth.

"Yes, that is just the word," Beth answered. "I am so 'fond' of them that even such a collection as this, which shows great industry rather than great art, I find full of interest, and delight in. Happy for me, perhaps, that I don't know anything about technique. Subject appeals to my imagination as it used to do when I was a child, and loved to linger over the pictures on old-fashioned pieces of music. Those pictures lure me still with strange sensations such as no others make me feel. I wish I could realise now as vividly as I realised then the beauty of that lovely lady on the song, and the whole pathetic story—the gem that decked her queenly brow and bound her raven hair, remained a sad memorial of blighted love's despair; and that other young creature who wore a wreath of roses on the night when first we met; and the one who related that we met, 'twas in a crowd, and I thought he would shun me; he came, I could not breathe, for his eye was upon me, and concluded that 'twas thou

that had caused me this anguish, my mother. There was the gallant corsair, too, just stepping out of a boat, waving his hat. His curly hair, open shirt collar, and black tie with flying ends remain in my mind, intimately associated with Byron, young love, some who never smiled again, the sapphire night, crisp, clear, cold, thick-strewn with stars, all sparkling with frosty brightness—impressions I would not exchange for art understood, or anything I am capable of feeling now before the greatest work of art in the world—so strangely am I blunted."

"What, already!" Ideala said compassionately. "But that is only a phase. You will come out of it, and be young again and feel strongly, which is better than knowing, I concede. The truest appreciation of a work of art does not take place in the head, but in the heart; not in thinking, but in feeling. When we stand before a picture, it is not by the thoughts formulated in the mind, but by the appreciation which suffuses our whole being with pleasure that we should estimate it."

"But isn't that a sensuous attitude?" Beth objected.

"Yes, of the right kind," Ideala rejoined. "The senses have their uses, you know. And it is exactly your attitude as a child towards the pictures on the songs. You felt it all—all the full significance—long before you knew it so that you could render it into words; and felt more, probably, than you will ever be able to express. Feeling is the first stage of fine thought."

Mr. Hamilton-Wells strolled towards them. He was a rather tall, exceedingly thin man, with straight, thick, grey-brown hair, parted in the middle, and plastered down on either side of his head. He was dressed in black velvet. His long thin white hands were bedecked with handsome antique rings, art treasures in their way. One intaglio, carved in red coral, caught the eye especially, on the first finger of his right hand. As he talked he had a trick of shaking his hands back with a gesture that suggested lace ruffles getting in the way, and in his whole appearance and demeanour there was something that recalled the days when velvet and lace were in vogue for gentlemen.

He spoke with great preciseness, and it was not always possible to be sure that he at all appreciated the effect of the extraordinary remarks he was in the habit of making; which apparent obliviousness enabled him to discourse about many things without offence which other people were obliged to leave unmentioned.

"Nowadays, when I see two ladies together in a corner, talking earnestly," he observed, "I always suspect that they are discussing the sex question."

"Oh, the sex question!" Ideala exclaimed. "I am sick of sex! Sex is a thing to be endured or enjoyed, not to be discussed."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Hamilton-Wells, nodding slowly, as if in profound consideration, and shaking back his imaginary ruffles. "Is that your opinion, Mrs. Maclure?"

"I keep a separate compartment in my mind for the sex question," Beth answered, colouring—"a compartment which has to be artificially lighted. There is no ray of myself that would naturally penetrate to it. When I take up a book, and find that it is nothing but she was beautiful, he loved her, I put it down again with a groan. The monotony of the subject palls upon me. It is the stock-in-trade of every author, as if there were nothing of interest in the lives of men and women but their sexual relations."

"Indeed, yes," said Mr. Hamilton-Wells, with bland deliberation, "but society thinks of nothing else. Blatant sexuality is the predominant characteristic of the upper classes, and the rage for the sexual passion is principally set up and fostered by a literature inflated with sexuality, and by costumes which seem to be designed for the purpose. In the evening, now, just think! Even quite elderly ladies, with a laudable desire to please, offer themselves in evening dress—and a very great deal of themselves sometimes—to the eye that may be attracted."

When he had spoken, he shook back his imaginary ruffles, brought his hands together in front of him with the fingers tip to tip in a pious attitude, and strolled up the long room slowly, shaking his head at intervals with an intent expression, as if

he were praying for society.

"What a bomb!" Beth gasped. "Is he always so?"

"Generally," Ideala rejoined. "And I can never make out whether he means well, but is stupid and tactless, or whether he delights to spring such explosives on inoffensive people. He sits on a Board of Guardians composed of ladies and gentlemen, and the other day, at one of their meetings, he proposed to remove the stigma attaching to illegitimacy. He said that illegitimacy cannot justly be held to reflect on anybody's conduct, since, so he had always understood, illegitimacy was birth from natural causes."

"And what happened?"

Ideala slightly shrugged her shoulders. "The proposition was seriously discussed, and a parson and one or two other members of the board threatened to retire if he remained on it. But remain he did, and let them retire; and I cannot help fancying that his whole object was to get them to go. Sometimes I think that he must have a peculiar sense of humour, which it gives him great gratification to indulge, as others do good, by stealth. He makes questionable jests for himself only, and enjoys them alone. But apart from this eccentricity, he is a kind and generous man, always ready to help with time and money when there is any good to be done."

When Beth went to her room that night, she experienced a strange sense of satisfaction which she could not account for until she found herself alone, with no fear of being disturbed. It seemed to her then that she had never before known what comfort was, never slept in such a delightful bed, so fresh and cool and sweet. She was like one who has been bathed and perfumed after the defilements of a long dusty journey, and is able to rest in peace. As she stretched herself between the sheets, she experienced a blessed sensation of relief, which was a revelation to her. Until that moment, she had never quite realised the awful oppression of her married life; the inevitable degradation of intimate association with such a man as her

husband.

The next day the ladies went out to sit on the lawn together in the shade of the trees, with their books and work. There were no sounds but such as, in the country, seem to accentuate the quiet, and are aids, not to thought, but to that higher faculty which awakes in the silence, and is to thought what the mechanical instrument is to the voice.

"How heavenly still it is!" Beth ejaculated. "It stirs me—fills me—how shall I express it?—makes me cognisant in some sort—conscious of things I don't know—things beyond all this, and even better worth our attention. The stillness here in these surroundings has the same benign effect on me that perfect solitude has elsewhere. What a luxury it is, though—solitude! I mean the privilege of being alone when one feels the necessity. I am fortunate, however," she added quickly, lest she should seem to be making a personal complaint, "in that I have a secret chamber all to myself, and so high up that I can almost hear what the wind whispers to the stars to make them twinkle. I go there when I want to be alone to think my thoughts, and no one disturbs me—not even my nearest neighbours, the angels; though if they did sometimes, I should not complain."

"They come closer than you think, perhaps," said Lady Fulda, who had just strolled up, with a great bunch of lilies on her arm. "Consider the lilies," she went on, holding them out to Beth. "Look into them. Think about them. No, though, do not think about them—feel. There is purification in the sensation of their beauty."

"Is purification always possible?" Beth said. "Can evil ever be cast out once it has taken root in the mind?"

"Are you speaking of thoughts or acts, I wonder?" Lady Fulda rejoined, sitting down beside Beth and looking dreamily into her flowers. "You know what we hold here: that no false step is irretrievable so long as we desire what is perfectly right. It is not the things we know of, nor even the things we have done, if the act is not

habitual,—but the things we approve of that brand us as bad. The woman whose principles are formed out of a knowledge of good and evil is better, is more to be relied upon, than the woman who does not know enough to choose between them. It is not what the body does, but what the mind thinks that corrupts us."

"But from certain deeds evil thoughts are inseparable," Beth sighed; "and surely toleration of evil comes from undue familiarity with it?"

"Yes, if you do not keep your condemnation side by side with your knowledge of it," Lady Fulda agreed.

The night before she returned to Slane, Beth attended a meeting of the new order which Ideala had founded. It was the first thing of the kind she had been to, and she was much interested in the proceedings. Only women were present. Beth was one of a semicircle of ladies who sat on the platform behind the chair. There were subjects of grave social importance under discussion, and most of the speaking was exceedingly good, wise, temperate, and certainly not wanting in humour.

Towards the end of the evening there was an awkward pause because a lady who was to have spoken had not arrived. Mrs. Kilroy, who was in the chair, looked round for some one to fill the gap, and caught Beth's eye.

"May I speak?" Beth whispered eagerly, leaning over to her. "I have something to say."

Angelica nodded, gave the audience Beth's name, and then leant back in her chair. The shorthand writers looked up indifferently, not expecting to hear anything worth recording.

Beth went forward to the edge of the platform with a look of intentness on her delicate face, and utterly oblivious of herself, or anything else but her subject. She never thought of asking herself if she could speak. All she considered was what she was going to say. She clasped her slender hands in front of her, and began, slowly, with the formula she had heard the other speakers use: "Madam Chairman, ladies—"

She paused, then suddenly spoke out on The Desecration of Marriage.

At the first resonant notes of her clear, dispassionate voice, there was a movement of interest, a kind of awakening, in the hall, and the ladies on the platform behind her, who had been whispering to each other, writing notes and passing them about, and paying more attention to the business of the meeting generally than to the speakers, paused and looked up.

Suddenly Ideala, with kindling eyes, leant over to Mrs. Orton Beg, grasped her arm, and said something eagerly. Mrs. Orton Beg nodded. The word went round. Beth held the hall, and was still rising from point to point, carrying the audience with her to a pitch of excitement which finally culminated in a great burst of applause.

Beth, taken aback, stopped short, surprised and bewildered by the racket; looked about her, faltered a few more words, and then sat down abruptly.

The applause was renewed and prolonged.

"What does it mean?" Beth asked Ideala in an agony. "Did I say something absurd?"

"My dear child," Ideala answered, laughing, "they are not jeering, but cheering!"

"Is that cheering?" Beth exclaimed in an awe-stricken tone, overcome to find she had produced such an effect. "I feared they meant to be derisive."

"I didn't know you were a speaker," Mrs. Orton Beg whispered.

"I am not," Beth answered apologetically. "I never spoke before, nor heard any one else speak till to-night. Only I have thought and thought about these things, and I could not keep it back, what I had to say."

"That is the stuff an orator is made of," some strange lady muttered approvingly.

CHAPTER XLV

When Beth returned to Slane, Dan received her so joyously she wondered what particularly successful piece of turpitude he had been busy about. He was always

effusive to her when evil things went well with him. At first she had supposed that this effusiveness was the outcome of affection for her; but when she began to know him, she perceived that it was only the expression of some personal gratification. He had been quite demonstrative in his attentions to her during the time that Bertha Petterick stayed in the house.

"By the way, there is a letter for you," he said, when they were at lunch.

"Is there?" Beth answered. "Who from?"

"How the devil am I to know?" he rejoined, glancing up at the mantelpiece. "I can't tell who your correspondents are by instinct."

Beth's eye followed his to the mantelpiece, where she saw a large square envelope propped up against an ornament in a conspicuous position, and recognised the unmistakable, big, clear, firm hand of Bertha Petterick, and the thick kind of paper she always used.

Beth had been thinking about Bertha on the way home. She knew that, if Bertha had been as wrong in body as in mind and moral nature, she would have had compassion on her; and she had determined to tolerate her as it was, to do what she could for her maimed soul, just as she would have ministered to her had her malady been physical. But Dan's hypocrisy about the letter ruffled her into opposition. He knew Bertha's handwriting as well as she did, and was doubtless equally well acquainted with the contents of the letter; and this affectation of ignorance must therefore mean something special. Probably he was anxious to propitiate her with regard to whatever Bertha might be writing about. But Beth was not to be managed in that way, and so she let the letter be.

As she was leaving the room after lunch, Dan called after her: "You have forgotten your letter."

"It doesn't matter," Beth answered. "Any time will do for that."

The letter was left there for days unopened, and it had the effect of stopping the

conversation at meals, for although Dan did not allude to it again, he constantly glanced at it, and it was evident that he had it on his mind.

At last, one day, when he came in, he said, "I have just seen Mrs. Petterick, and she tells me Bertha wrote to you days ago, and has had no answer."

"Indeed," Beth observed indifferently. "I shouldn't think she could have anything to say to me that specially required an answer."

Dan fidgeted about a little, then burst out suddenly, "Why the devil don't you open the girl's letter?"

"Because you pretended you didn't know who it was from," Beth said.

"I declare to God I never pretended anything of the kind," Dan answered hotly.

Beth laughed. Then she went to the mantelpiece, took down the letter, turned it over and displayed the huge monogram and scroll with "Bertha" printed on it, with which it was bedizened, laughed again a little, and threw the letter unopened into the fire, "There!" she said. "Let that be an end of the letter, and Bertha Petterick too, so far as I am concerned. She bores me, that girl; I will not be bothered with her."

"Well, well!" Dan exclaimed pathetically, looking hard at the ashes of the letter on the coals: "that's gratitude! I do my best to make an honest living for you, and you repay me by affronting one of my best patients. And what the unfortunate girl has done to offend you, the devil only knows. I'm sure she would have blacked your boots for you when she was here, she was so devoted."

"She was pretty servile, I grant that," Beth answered dispassionately. "But that is enough of Bertha Petterick, please. Here is the butcher's bill for the last month, and the baker's, the milk, the wine, the groceries, all nearly doubled on Bertha's account. If adding to your expenses in every way makes a good patient, she was excellent, certainly. I'll leave you the bills to console you; but, if you value your peace of mind, don't dare to worry me about them. You were quite right when you said I was too young to be troubled about money matters, and I shall not let myself be

troubled—especially when they are matters, like these bills, for which I am not responsible." She was leaving the room as she spoke, but stopped at the door: "And, Dan," she added, quoting his favourite phrase, "I'd be cheery if I were you. There's nothing like being cheery. Why, look at me! I never let anything worry me!"

She left Dan speechless, and went to her secret chamber, where she sat and suffered for an hour, blaming herself for her lightness, her contrariness, her want of dignity, and all those faults which were the direct consequence of Dan's evil influence. She was falling farther and farther away from her ideal in everything, and knew it, but seemed to have lost the power to save herself. The degeneration had begun in small matters of discipline, apparently unimportant, but each one of consequence, in reality, as part of her system of self-control. From the moment we do a thing thinking it to be wrong, we degenerate. If it be a principle that we abandon, it does not matter what the principle is, our whole moral fibre is loosened by the gap it makes. Beth, who had hitherto shunned easy-chairs, as Aunt Victoria had taught her, lest she should be enervated by lolling, now began to take to them, and so lost the strengthening effect of a wholesome effort. Other little observances, too, little regular habits which discipline mind and body to such good purpose, slipped from her,—such as the care of her skin after the manner of the ladies of her family, who had been renowned for their wonderful complexions. This had been enjoined upon her by her mother in her early girlhood as a solemn duty, and had entailed much self-denial in matters of food and drink, quantities being restricted, and certain things prohibited at certain times, while others were forbidden altogether. She had had to exercise patience, also, in the concoction and use of delicately perfumed washes of tonic and emollient properties, home distilled, so as to be perfectly pure; all of which had been strictly practised by her, like sacred rites or superstitious observances upon the exact performance of which good fortune depends. In such matters she now became lax. And, besides the care of her person, she neglected the care of her clothes, which had been so beneficial to her mind; for it must be

remembered that it was during those long hours of meditation, while she sat sewing, that her reading had been digested, her knowledge assimilated, her opinions formed, and her random thoughts collected and arranged, ready to be turned to account on an emergency. Until this time, too, she had kept Sunday strictly as a day of rest. Books and work, and all else that had occupied her during the week, were put away on Saturday night, and not taken out again until Monday morning; and the consequence was complete mental relaxation. But now she began to do all kinds of little things which she had hitherto thought it wrong to do on Sunday, so that the sanitary effect of the day of rest—or of change of occupation, for sometimes Sunday duties are arduous—was gradually lost, and she no longer returned to her work on Monday strengthened and refreshed. Little by little her "good reading" was also neglected, and instead of relying upon her own resolution, as had hitherto been her wont, she began to seek the prop of an odd cup of tea or coffee at irregular hours, to raise her spirits if she felt down, or stimulate her if she were out of sorts and work was not easy; all of which tended to weaken her will. Then, by degrees, she began to lose the balance of mind which had been wont to carry her on from one little daily doing to another, with calm deliberation, taking them each in turn without haste or rest, and finding time for them all. Now, the things that she did not care about she began to do with a rush, so as to get to her writing. She wanted to be always at that; and the consequence was a wearing sensation, as of one who is driven to death, and has never time enough for any single thing.

But it was in these days, nevertheless, that she began to write with decision. Hitherto, she had been merely trying her pen—feeling her way; but now she unconsciously ceased to follow in other people's footsteps, and struck out for herself boldly. She had come back from Ilverthorpe with a burning idea to be expressed, and it was for the shortest, crispest, clearest way to express it that she tried. Foreign phrases she discarded, and she never attempted to produce an eccentric effect by galvanising obsolete words, rightly discarded for lack of vitality, into a ghastly

semblance of life. Her own language, strong and pure, she found a sufficient instrument for her purpose. When the true impulse to write came, her fine theories about style only hampered her, so she cast them aside, as habitual affectations are cast aside and natural emotions naturally expressed, in moments of deep feeling; and from that time forward she displayed, what had doubtless been coming to her by practice all along, a method and a manner of her own.

She produced a little book at this time, the first thing of any real importance she had accomplished as yet; and during the writing of it she enjoyed an interval of unalloyed happiness, the most perfect that she had ever known. The world without became as nothing to her; it was the world within that signified. The terrible sense of loneliness, from which she had always suffered more or less, was suspended, and she began to wonder how it was she had ever felt so desolate, that often in the streets of Slane she would have been grateful to anybody who had spoken to her kindly. Now she said to herself, sincerely, "Never less alone than when alone!" And up in the quiet of her secret chamber, with the serene blue above, the green earth and the whispering trees below, and all her little treasures about her: the books, the pictures, the pretty hangings, and little ornaments for flowers; things she had indulged in by degrees since her mother's death had left her with the money in her hands which she had made to discharge Dan's debt—up there at her ease in that peaceful shrine, secure from intrusion, "There is no joy but calm!" was her constant ejaculation. Then again, too, she felt to perfection the fine wonder, the fine glow of a great inspiration, and realised anew that therein all the pleasures of the senses added together are contained; that inspiration in its higher manifestations is like love—that it is love, in fact—love without the lover; there being all the joy of love in it, but none of the trouble.

But, like most young writers when they set up a high ideal for themselves, and are striving conscientiously to arrive at it, because the thing came easily she fancied she had not done her best, and was dissatisfied. She talked to herself about fatal facility,

without reflecting that in time ease comes by practice; nor did she discriminate between the flow of cheap ideas pumped up from any source for the occasion, which satisfies the conceit of shallow workers, and the deep stream that bubbles up of itself when it is once released, and flows freely from the convictions, the observations, and the knowledge of an earnest thinker. Diffidence is a help to some, but to Beth it was a hindrance, a source of weakness. There was no fear of her taking herself for a heaven-born genius. Her trouble had always been her doubt of the merit of anything she did. She should have been encouraged, but instead she had always been repressed. Accordingly, when she had finished her little masterpiece, she put it away with the idea of rewriting it, and making something of it when she should be able; and then she began a much more pretentious work, and thought it must be better because of the trouble it gave her.

Gradually, from now, she gave up all her time to reading and writing, and she overdid it. Work in excess is as much a vice as idleness, and it was particularly bad for Beth, whose constitution had begun to be undermined by dutiful submission. The consulting rooms of specialists are full of such cases. There are marriages which for the ignorant girl preached into dutiful submission, whose "innocence" has been carefully preserved for the purpose, mean prostitution as absolute, as repugnant, as cruel, and as contrary to nature as that of the streets. Beth's marriage was one of those. Until she went to Ilverthorpe, she had never heard that there was a duty she owed to herself as well as to her husband; and, as Sir George Galbraith had said, her brain was too delicately poised for the life she had been leading. Work had been her opiate; but unfortunately she did not understand the symptoms which should have warned her that she was overdoing it, and her nerves became exceedingly irritable. Noises which she had never noticed in her life before began to worry her to death. Very often, when she was spoken to, she could hardly answer civilly. At meals everything that was handed to her was just the very thing she did not want. She quarrelled with all her food, drank quantities of strong coffee for the sake of the

momentary exhilaration, and even tried wine; but as it only made her feel worse, she gave that up. Writing became a rage with her, and the more she had to force herself, the longer she sat at it. She would spend hours over one sentence, turning it and twisting it, and never be satisfied; and when she was at last obliged to stop and go downstairs lest she should be missed, she went with her brain congested, and her complexion, which was naturally pale and transparent, all flushed or blotched with streaks of crimson.

"What's the matter with your face?" Dan said to her one day, apt, as usual, to comment offensively on anything wrong.

"I should like you to tell me," Beth answered.

"You'd better take some citrate of iron and quinine."

"You've prescribed citrate of iron and quinine for everything I've ever had since I knew you," said Beth. "If I have any more of it, I shall be like the man in the quack advertisement, who felt he could conscientiously recommend a tonic because he had taken it for fourteen years. I should like something that would act a little quicker."

Dan left the room and banged the door.

That afternoon Beth, up in her shrine at work, suddenly began to wonder what he was doing. As a rule, she did not trouble herself about his pursuits, but now all at once she became anxious. The thought of all the unholy places that he might be at (and the unfortunate girl knew all about all of them, for there was no horror of life with which her husband had not made her acquainted), filled her with dread—with a sensation entirely new to her, and absolutely foreign to her normal nature. Her feeling for Dan and Bertha, when she discovered their treachery, had been one of contempt. Their disloyalty, and the petty mean deceits which it entailed, made it difficult to tolerate their presence, and she was always glad to get rid of them, wherever they might go. Now, however, she was seized upon with a kind of rage at the recollection of their intrigue, of the scene in the garden, the glances she had

intercepted, their stolen interviews, clandestine correspondence, and impudent security. It was all retrospective this feeling, but the torment of it was none the less acute for that. She recalled the scene in the garden, and her heart throbbed with anger. She regretted her own temperate conduct, and imagined herself stealing out upon them, standing before them, and pouring forth floods of invective till they cowered. She wished she had refused to let Bertha enter the house again, and had threatened to expose Dan if he did not meekly submit to her dictation. She ought to have exposed him too. She should have gone to Bertha's mother. But where was Dan at that moment? She jumped up, rushed down to her room, put on her outdoor things in hot haste, and ran downstairs determined to go and see; but as she entered the hall at one end of it, Dan himself came in by the hall-door at the other. The relief was extraordinary.

"Hallo! where are you off to?" he said.

"Just going for a little walk," she answered, speaking ungraciously and without looking at him. Now that she saw him, her ordinary feeling for him returned; but instead of being quiet and indifferent as usual, she found herself showing in her manner something of the contempt she felt, and it pleased her to do it. She was glad to go out, and be in the open air away from him; but she had not gone far before the torment in her mind began again. Why had he come in so unusually early? Was there anything going on in the house? He was always very familiar with the servants.

She stopped short at this, turned back, and went in as hurriedly as she had gone out. In the hall she stood a moment listening. The house seemed unusually quiet. A green baize door separated the kitchen and offices from the hall. She opened it, and saw Minna in the butler's pantry, cleaning the plate. Minna was parlour-maid now, a housemaid having been added to the establishment when Miss Petterick came, so that that young lady might be well waited on.

"I think we should give the girl full value for her money, you know, even if we do without something ourselves," Dan had said, in the generous thoughtful way that had so often imposed upon Beth.

Beth asked Minna where Drew, the housemaid, was.

"It's her afternoon out, ma'am," Minna answered.

"So it is," said Beth. "I had forgotten."

"Do you want anything, ma'am?" Minna asked. "You're looking poorly. Would you like a cup o' tea?"

"No, thank you," Beth rejoined, then changed her mind. "Yes, I should, though. Get me one while I'm taking my things off, and bring it to me in the dining-room. Where is your master?"

"I don't know, ma'am. I've not heard if he's come in; but it's full early for him yet," Minna replied, as she took off her working apron.

While she was talking to the girl, the worry in Beth's head stopped, and she felt as usual. Going quietly upstairs, she fancied she heard some one moving in her bedroom, and, entering it by way of the dressing-room, she discovered Dan on his knees on the floor, prying into one of the boxes she had had with her at Ilverthorpe, and kept locked until she should feel inclined to unpack it. He seemed to have had all the contents out, and was just deftly repacking it. As he replaced the dresses, he felt in the pocket of each, and in one he found an old letter which he read.

Beth withdrew on tiptoe, and went downstairs again, wondering at the man. She took off her hat and jacket, and ensconced herself with the newspaper in an easy-chair. Minna came presently with fragrant tea and hot buttered toast, and talked cheerfully about some of her own interests. Beth treated her servants like human beings, and rarely had any trouble with them. She had learnt the art from Harriet, who had awakened her sympathies, and taught her practically, when she was a child, what servants have to suffer; and "well loved and well served" exactly described

what Beth was as a mistress. When Minna withdrew, and Beth had had her tea and toast, she felt quite right again, and read the paper with interest. The shock of the real trouble had ousted the imaginary one for the moment.

The next morning, however, as she toiled with flushed face and weary brain, stultifying her work with painful elaboration, she was seized with another fit of jealous rage, just as she had been the day before. Her mind in a moment, like a calm sea caught by a sudden tempest, seethed with horrible suspicions of her husband. His gross ideas, expressed in coarse language, had hitherto been banished from her mind by her natural refinement; but now, like the works of a disordered machine, whirling with irresponsible force, thoughts suggested by him came crowding in the language he habitually used, and she found herself accusing him with conviction of all she had ever heard others accused of by him. For a little she pursued this turn of thought, then all at once she jumped up and rushed downstairs, goaded again to act—to avenge herself—to dog him down to one of his haunts, and there confront him, revile him, expose him.

It was a tranquil grey day in early autumn, the kind of day, full of quiet charm, which had always been grateful to Beth; but now, as she stood on the doorstep, with wrinkled forehead, dilated eyes, and compressed lips, putting her gloves on in feverish haste, she felt no tranquillising charm, and saw no beauty in the tangled hedgerows bright with briony berries, the tinted beeches, the Canadian poplars whispering mysteriously by the watercourse at the end of the meadow, the glossy iridescent plumes of the rooks that passed in little parties silhouetted darkly bright against the empty sky; it was all without significance to her; her further faculty was suspended, and even the recollection of anything she had been wont to feel had lapsed, and she perceived no more in the scene surrounding, in the colours and forms of things, the sounds and motions, than those perceive whose eyes have never been opened to anything beyond what appears to the grazing cattle. In many a heavy hour she had found delight in nature; but now, again, she had lost that solace; the

glory had departed, and she had sunk to one of the lowest depths of human pain.

Not understanding the frightful affliction that had come upon her, she made no attempt to control her disordered fancy, but hurried off into the town, and hovered about the places which Dan had pointed out as being of special evil interest, and searched the streets for him, acting upon the impulse without a doubt of the propriety of what she was doing. Had the obsession taken another form, had it seemed right to her to murder him, the necessity would have been as imperative, and she would have murdered him, not only without compunction, but with a sense of satisfaction in the deed.

She pursued her search for hours, but did not find him; then went home, and there he was, standing on the doorstep, looking out for her.

"Where on earth have you been?" he said.

"Where on earth have you been yourself?" she rejoined.

"Minding my own business," he answered.

"So have I," she retorted, pushing past him into the hall.

He had never seen her like that before, and he stood looking after her in perplexity.

She went upstairs and threw herself on her bed. The worry in her head was awful. Turn and toss as she would, the one idea pursued her, until at last she groaned aloud, "O God! release me from this dreadful man!"

After a time, being thoroughly exhausted, she dropped into a troubled sleep.

When she awoke, Dan was standing looking at her.

"Aren't you well, Beth?" he said. "You've been moaning and muttering and carrying on in your sleep as if you'd got fever."

"I don't think I am well," she answered in her natural manner, the pressure on her brain being easier at the moment of awakening.

He felt her pulse. "You'd better get into bed," he said, "and I'll fetch you a sedative

draught. You'll be all right in the morning."

Beth was only too thankful to get into bed. When he returned with the draught, she asked him if he were going out again.

"No, not unless I'm sent for," he said. "Where the devil should I be going to? It's close on dinner-time."

Beth shut her eyes. "If he is sent for and goes," she reflected, "I shall know it is a ruse to deceive me; and I shall get up and follow him."

He left her to sleep and went downstairs. But Beth could not sleep. The draught quieted her mind for a little; then the worry began again as bad as ever, and she found herself straining her attention to discover to whom he was talking, for she fancied she heard him whispering with some one out in the passage. She bore the suspicion awhile, then jumped out of bed impetuously and opened the door. The gas was burning low in the passage, but she could see that there was no one about. Surely, though, there were voices downstairs? Barefooted, and only in her night-dress, she went to see. Yes, there were voices in the dining-room—now! She flung the door wide open. Dan and another man, a crony of his, who had dropped in casually, were sitting smoking and chatting over their whiskeys-and-sodas.

Beth, becoming conscious of her night-dress the moment she saw them, turned and fled back to her bed; greatly relieved in her mind by the shock of her own indiscretion.

"What a mad thing to do!" she thought. "I hope to goodness they didn't see me."

A mad thing to do!

The words, when they recurred to her, were a revelation. What had she been doing all day? Mad things! What was this sudden haunting horror that had seized upon her? Why, madness! Dan was just as he had always been. The change was in herself, and only madness could account for such a change. There was madness in the family. She remembered her father and the "moon-faced Bessie"—the familiarities

with servants, too; surely her mother had suffered, and doubtless this misery which had come upon her had been communicated to her before her birth. Jealous-mad she was; that was what it meant, the one idea goading her on to do what would otherwise have been impossible, possessing her in spite of herself, and not to be banished by any effort of will.

"Heaven help me!" she groaned. "What will become of me?"

Then, as if in reply, there rose to her lips involuntarily the assurance which recurred to her now for her help and comfort in every hard moment of her life like a refrain: "I shall succeed."

And she set herself bravely to conceal her trouble, whatever it cost her, and to conquer it.

But it was a hard battle. For months the awful worry in her head continued, the same thoughts haunted her, the same jealous rage possessed her, and she knew no ease except when Dan was at hand. The trouble always passed when she had him under observation. She could not read, she could not write, she was too restless to sit and sew for more than a few moments at a time. Up and down stairs she went, out of the house and in again, fancying always, when in one place, that she would be better in another, but finding no peace anywhere, no brightness in the sunshine, no beauty in nature, no interest in life. Through the long solitary hours of the long solitary days she fought her affliction with her mouth set hard in determination to conquer it. She met the promptings of her disordered fancy with answers from her other self. "He and Bertha Petterick are together, that is why he is so late," the fiend would asseverate. "Very likely," her temperate self would reply. "But they may have been together any day this two years, and I knew it, and pitied and despised them, but felt no pain; why should I suffer now? Because my mind is disordered. But I shall recover! I shall succeed!"

She would look at the clock, however, every five minutes in an agony of suspense

until Dan came in. Then she had to fight against the impulse to question him, which beset her as strongly as the impulse to follow him, and that was always upon her except when his presence arrested it. Never once through it all, however, did she think of death as a relief; it was life she looked to for help, more life and fuller. She could interest herself in nothing, care for nothing; all feeling of affection for any one had gone, and was replaced by suspicion and rage. In her torment her cry was, "Oh, if some one would only care for me! for me as I am with all my faults! If they would only forgive me my misery and help me to care again—help me also to the luxury of loving!"

Forgive her her misery! The world will forgive anything but that; it tramples on the wretched as the herd turns on a wounded beast, not to put it out of its pain, but because the sight of suffering is an offence to it. If we cannot enliven our acquaintances, they will do little to enliven us. Sad faces are shunned; and signs of suffering excite less sympathy than repulsion. The spirit of Christ the Consoler has been driven out from among us.

Beth poured herself out in letters at this time rather more than was her habit; it was an effort to get into touch with the rest of the world again. In one to Jim, speaking of her hopes of success, she said she should get on better with her work if she had more sympathy shown her; to which he replied by jeering at her. What did she mean by such nonsense? But that was the way with women; they were all sickly sentimental. Sympathy indeed! She should think herself devilish lucky to have a good husband and a home of her own. Many a girl would envy her. He wrote also to other members of the family on the subject, as if it were a rare joke worth spreading that Beth wanted more sympathy; and Beth received several letters in which the writers told her what their opinion was of her and her complaints as compared to that good husband of hers, who was always so bright and cheery. All their concern was for the worthy man who had done so much for Beth. They had no patience with her, could scarcely conceal their amusement with this last absurdity, but thought she should be

laughed out of her fads and fancies. That was the only time Beth sought sympathy from any of her relations. Afterwards she took to writing them bitter letters in which she told them what she thought of them as freely as they told her. "What is the use," she said to Jim, "what is the use of sisters and wives being refined and virtuous if their fathers, brothers, husbands, are bar-loafers, men of corrupt imagination and depraved conversation? Surely, if we must live with such as these, all that is best in us adds to our misery rather than helps us. If we did not love the higher life ourselves, it would not hurt us to be brought into contact with the lower."

On receiving this letter, Jim wrote kindly to Dan, and said many things about what women were coming to with their ridiculous notions. But men were men and women were women, and that was all about it,—a lucid conclusion that appealed to Dan, who quoted it to Beth in discussions on the subject ever afterwards.

Beth broke down and despaired many times during the weary struggle with her mental affliction. She felt herself woefully changed; and not only had the light gone out of her life, but it seemed as if it never would return. When she awoke in the morning, she usually felt better for awhile, but the terrible torment in her mind returned inevitably, and rest and peace were banished for the day. It was then she learnt what is meant by the inner calm, and how greatly to be desired it is—desired above everything. The power to pray left her entirely during this phase. She could repeat prayers and extemporise them as of old, but there was no more satisfaction in the effort than in asking a favour of an empty room. Sometimes, and especially during the hideous nights, when she slept but little, and only in short snatches, she felt tempted to take something, stimulant or sedative; but this temptation she resisted bravely, and, the whole time, an extra cup of tea or coffee for the sake of the momentary relief was the only excess she committed. If she had not exercised her will in this, her case would have been hopeless; but, as it was, her self-denial, and the effort it entailed, kept up her mental strength, and helped more than anything to save her.

To beguile the long hours, she often stood in the dining-room window looking out. The window was rather above the road, so that she looked down on the people who passed, and she could also see over the hedge on the opposite side of the road into the meadow beyond. Small things distracted her sometimes, though nothing pleased her. If two rooks flew by together, she hoped for a better day; if one came first, she would not accept the omen, but waited, watching for two. By a curious coincidence, they generally passed, first one for sorrow, then two for mirth, then three for a wedding; and she would say to herself, first, bad luck, then good luck, then a marriage; and wonder how it would come about, but anyhow—"I shall succeed!" would flash from her and stimulate her.

One day, as she stood there watching, she saw a horseman come slowly down the road.

"A bowshot from her bower-eaves, He rode between the barley sheaves, The sun came dazzling through the leaves, And flamed upon the brazen greaves Of bold Sir Launcelot."

Beth's attention sharpened to sudden interest. As he came abreast of the window, the rider looked up, and Beth's heart bounded at the sight of his face, which was the face of a man from out of the long ago, virile, knightly, high-bred, refined; the face of one that lives for others, and lives openly. He had glanced up indifferently, but, on seeing Beth, a look of interest came into his eyes. It was as if he had recognised her; and she felt herself as if she had seen him before, but when or where, in what picture, in what dream, she could not tell.

With the first flush of healthy interest she had experienced for a long time, she watched him till he was all but out of sight, then shut her eyes that she might not see him vanish, for fear of bad luck; a superstition she had not practised since she was a child. When he had gone, she found herself with a happy impression of him in her mind, an impression of quiet dignity, and of strength in repose. "A man to be

trusted," she thought; "true and tender, a perfect knight." The flash of interest or recognition that came into his countenance when he saw her haunted her; she recalled the colour of his blue eyes, noted the contrast they were to his dark hair and clear dark skin, and was pleased. In the afternoon she sat and sewed, and smiled to herself over her work with an easy mind. Her restlessness had subsided; Dan scarcely cost her a thought; the tension was released and a reaction had set in; but, at the time, she herself was quite unaware of it. All she felt was a good appetite for her tea.

"Minna," she said to the parlour-maid, "bring me a big cup of tea and a good plate of buttered toast. I'm famishing."

"That's good news, ma'am," Minna answered, for it was long since Beth had had any appetite at all.

The next day Beth stood at the window again, but without intention. She was thinking of her knight of the noble mien, however, and at about the same hour as on the day before, he came again, riding slowly down the road; and again he looked at Beth with a flash of interest in his face, to which she involuntarily responded. When he was out of sight she opened the window, and perceived to her glad surprise that the air was balmy, and on all things the sun shone, shedding joy.

The horrid spell was broken.

CHAPTER XLVI

"A bowshot from her bower-eaves, He rode between the barley-sheaves."

The words made music in Beth's heart as she dressed next morning, and, instead of the torment of mind from which she had suffered for so long, there was a great glad glow. Dan went and came as usual, but neither his presence nor absence disturbed her. She had recovered her self-possession, her own point of view, and he and his habits resumed their accustomed place in her estimation. During that dreadful phase

she had seen with Dan's suspicious eyes, and seen evil only, but had not acquired his interest and pleasure in it; on the contrary, her own tendency to be grieved by it had been intensified. Now, however, she had recovered herself, her sense of proportion had been restored, and she balanced the good against the evil once more, and rejoiced to find that the weight of good was even greater than she had hitherto supposed.

But although the spell had been broken in a moment, her right mind was not permanently restored all at once. It was only gradually, as the tide goes out after a tempest, and leaves the storm-beaten coast in peace, that the worry in her head subsided. She had lapse after lapse. She would lie awake at night, a prey to horrible thoughts, or start up in the early morning with her mind all turgid with suspicions which goaded her to rush out and act, act—see for herself—do something. But the great difference now was that, although she was still seized upon by the evil, it no longer had the same power to grieve her. She had valiantly resisted it from the moment she recognised its nature, but now she not only resisted it, she conquered it, and found relief. When her imagination insisted on pursuing Dan to his haunts, she deliberately and successfully turned her attention to other things. She turned her attention to the friends she loved and trusted, she dwelt on the kindness they had shown her, she forced herself to sit down and write to them, and she would rise from this happy task with her reason restored, the mere expression of affection having sufficed to exorcise the devils of rage and hate.

But it was the strange exalted sentiment which her knight had inspired that began, continued, and completed her cure. Day after day he came riding down the road, riding into her life for a moment, then passing on and leaving her, not desolate, but greatly elated. She had known no feeling like this feeling, no hope or faith like the hope and faith inspired by that man's mien. She did not know his name, she had never heard his voice; their greeting—which was hardly a greeting, so restrained was the glance and the brightening of the countenance which was all the recognition

that passed between them—was merely momentary, yet, in that moment, Beth was imbued with joy which lasted longer and longer each time, until at last it stayed with her for good, restored the charm of life to her, re-aroused her dormant further faculty, and quickened the vision and the dream anew. She prayed again in those days fervently, and in full faith, as of old; for when we pray with love in our hearts our prayers are granted, and her heart was full of love—a holy, impersonal love, such as we feel for some great genius, adored at a distance, for the grace of goodness he has imparted to us. And her heart being full of love, her brain teemed with ideas; the love she lived on, the ideas she held in reserve, for she had been so weakened by all she had suffered that the slightest exertion in the way of work exhausted her. In any case, however, great ideas must simmer long in the mind before they come to the boil, and the time was not lost.

In those days fewer people than ever came to the house. For weeks together Beth never spoke to a soul except the servants and her husband, and through the long hours when her head troubled her and she could not work, she felt her isolation extremely. Mrs. Kilroy and her other new friends sent her pamphlets and papers and hurried notes to keep her heart up and inform her of their progress, and Beth, knowing what the hurry of their lives was, and not expecting any attention, was grateful for all they paid her. She had no fear of losing touch with such friends after they had once received her into their circle as one of themselves, however seldom she might see them, and it was well for her mental health that she had them to rely on during that time of trial, for without them she would have had no sense of security in any relation in life.

She was gradually growing to be on much more formal terms with Dan than she had been, thanks to her own strength of character. She found she was able to reduce the daily jar, and even to keep his coarseness in check, by extreme politeness. In any difference, his habit had been to try and shout her down; but the contrast of her own quiet dignified demeanour checked him in that. Beth had the magnetic quality

which, when steadily directed, acts on people and forces them into any attitude desired; and Dan accommodated his manner and conversation to her taste more now than he had ever done before; but he felt the restraint, and was with her as little as possible, which, as she began to recover, was also a relief—for his blatant self-absorption, the everlasting I, I, I, of his conversation, and his low views of life, rasped her irritable nerves beyond endurance.

One day, coming into the drawing-room about tea-time, with muddy boots and his hat on, he found her lying on the sofa, prostrated with nervous headache. The days closed in early then, and she had had the fire lighted and the curtains drawn, but could not bear the gaslight because of her head.

"Well, this isn't brilliant," he began, at the top of his voice. "A little more light would suit me." He struck a match and turned the gas full on. "That's better," he said; "and some tea would be refreshing after my walk. I've done the whole trudge on foot this afternoon, and I consider that's a credit to me. You won't find many rising young men economising in the matter of horseflesh as I do, or in anything else. I'll undertake to say I spend less on myself than any other man in the diocese." He went to the door instead of ringing the bell, and shouted down the passage to Minna to bring him some tea.

Beth shut her eyes and groaned inwardly.

When the tea came, Dan poured some out for himself, remarking, "I suppose you've had yours." Beth had not, but she was beyond making any effort to help herself at the moment. Dan, who always ate at a greedy rate, left off talking for a little; and during the interval, Beth was startled by something cold touching her hand. She opened her eyes, and found a dainty little black-and-tan terrier standing up, with its forepaws on the couch, looking at her.

"You're a pretty thing," she said. "Where have you come from?"

"Oh, is that the dog?" said Dan, looking round to see to whom she was talking. "He

followed me in. I don't know who he belongs to; but as I happen to want a little dog, he's welcome."

"But he's very well-bred, isn't he," said Beth, "and valuable? Look at his pencilled paws, and thin tail, and sharp ears pricked to attention. He's listening to what we are saying with the greatest intelligence. I'm sure he's a pet, and his owners will want him back."

"Let them come and fetch him, then," said Dan.

Then it occurred to Beth that Dan had probably bought him to present to somebody, but chose to lie about it for reasons of his own, so she said no more.

The next night, about ten o'clock, Dan was called out, and did not return. Beth, being very wideawake, sat up late, playing patience first of all, and then reading a shilling shocker of Dan's, which she had taken up casually and become interested in. The story was of an extremely sensational kind, and she found herself being wrought up by it to a high pitch of nervous excitement. At the slightest noise she jumped; and then she became oppressed by the silence, and found herself peering into the dark corners of the room, and hesitating to glance over her shoulder, as if she feared to see something. She supposed the servants had not yet gone to bed, for she heard at intervals what seemed to be a human voice. After a time, however, it struck her that there was something unusual in the regularity of the sound, and, although she continued to read, she found herself waiting involuntarily, with strained attention, for it to be repeated. When it occurred again, she thought it sounded suspiciously like a cry of pain; and the next time it came she was sure of it. Instantly forgetting herself and her nervous tremors, she threw down her book and went to see what was the matter. She stood a moment in the hall, where the gas had been left burning, and listened; but all was still. Then she opened the door of communication into the kitchen regions, and found that that part of the house was all in darkness. The servants had gone to bed. Holding the door open, she stood a little, and listened

again; but, as she heard nothing, she began to think her fancy had played her a trick, when, just beside her, as it seemed, some one shrieked. Beth, gasping with terror, ran back into the hall, and struck a match to light one of the bed-candles that stood on a table, her impulse being to go to the rescue in spite of her deadly fright. It seemed an age before she could get the candle lit with her trembling hands, and, in the interval, the horrible cry recurred, and this time she thought it came from the surgery. Could any sick person have been left there locked up? Dan always kept the room locked up, and Beth had hardly ever been in it. She went to the door now, bent on breaking it open, but she found that for once the key had been left in the lock. She turned it and entered boldly; but her candle flickered as she opened the door, so that, at first, she could see nothing distinctly. She held it high above her head, however, and as the flame became steady she looked about her. There was no one to be seen. The room was large and bare. All that it contained was a bookcase, some shelves with books on them, a writing-table and chair, an arm-chair, a couch, and another table of common deal, like a kitchen table, on which was a variety of things—bottles, books, and instruments apparently—all covered up with a calico sheet.

Beth, checked again in her search, was considering what to do next, when the horrid cry was once more repeated. It seemed to come from under the calico sheet. Beth lighted the gas, put down her candle, and going to the table, took the sheet off deliberately, and saw a sight too sickening for description. The little black-and-tan terrier, the bonny wee thing which had been so blithe and greeted her so confidently only the evening before, lay there, fastened into a sort of frame in a position which alone must have been agonising. But that was not all.

Beth had heard of these horrors before, but little suspected that they were carried on under that very roof. She had turned sick at the sight, a low cry escaped her, and her great compassionate heart swelled with rage; but she acted without hesitation.

Snatching up her candle, she went to the shelves where the bottles were, looked along the row of red labels, found what she wanted, went back to the table, and poured some drops down the poor little tortured creature's throat.

In a moment its sufferings ceased.

Then Beth covered the table with the calico sheet mechanically, put the bottle back in its place, turned out the gas, and left the room, locking the door after her. Her eyes were haggard and her teeth were clenched, but she felt the stronger for a brave determination, and more herself than she had done for many months.

Maclure only came in to bathe and breakfast next morning, and she scarcely exchanged a word with him before he went out again; but in the afternoon he came into the drawing-room, where she was writing a letter, and began to talk as if he meant to be sociable. He had his usual air of having lavished much attention on his personal adornment—too much for manliness; and, in spite of the night work, his hair shone as glossy black, his complexion was as bright and clear, and his general appearance as fresh and healthy, as care of himself and complete indifference to other people, except in so far as his own well-being might be affected by them, could make it. Beth watched him surveying himself in the glass from different points of view with a complacent smile, and felt that his physical advantages, and the superabundant vitality which made the business of living such an easy enjoyable farce to him, made his inhuman callousness all the more repulsive.

"I should go out if I were you," he said, peering close into the glass at the corner of his eye, where he fancied he had detected the faint criss-cross of coming crows' feet "I'd never stay mugging up in the house, withering. Look at me! I go out in all weathers, and I'll undertake to say I'm a pretty good specimen both of health and spirits."

It was so unusual for Dan to recommend Beth to do anything for her own good that she began to wonder what he wanted; she had observed that he always felt kindly

disposed towards people when he was asking a favour of them.

"And, by-the-bye," he pursued, turning his back to the mirror and craning his neck to see the set of his coat-tails, "you might do something for me when you are out. Wilberforce is worrying for his money. It's damned cheek. I sent him a large order for whisky the other day to keep him quiet, but it hasn't answered. I wish you would go and see him—go with a long face, like a good girl, and tell him I'm only waiting till I get my own accounts in. Have a little chat with him, you know, and all that sort of thing—lay yourself out to please him, in fact. He's a gentlemanly fellow for a wine-merchant, and has a weakness for pretty women. If you go, I'll take my dick he'll not trouble us with a bill for the next six months."

"It seems to me," said Beth in her quietest way, "that when a husband asks his wife to make use of her personal appearance or charm of manner to obtain a favour for him from another man, he is requiring something of her which is not at all consistent with her self-respect."

Dan stopped short with his hand up to his moustache to twist it, his bonhomie cast aside in a moment. "Oh, damn your self-respect!" he said brutally. "Your cursed book-talk is enough to drive a man to the devil. Anybody but you, with your 'views' and 'opinions' and fads and fancies generally, would be only too glad to oblige a good husband in such a small matter. And surely to God I know what is consistent with your self-respect! I should be the last person in the world to allow you to compromise it! But your eyes will be opened, and the cursed conceit taken out of you some day, madam, I can tell you! You'll live to regret the way you've treated me, I promise you!"

"My eyes have been pretty well opened as it is," Beth answered. "You left the key in the surgery door last night."

"And you went in there spying on me, did you? That was honourable!" he exclaimed in a voice of scorn.

"I heard the wretched creature you had been vivisecting crying in its agony, and I thought it was a human being, and went to see," Beth answered, speaking in the even, dispassionate way which she had found such an effectual check on Dan's vulgar bluster.

"You killed that dog, then!" he exclaimed, turning on her savagely. "How dare you?"

Beth rose from the writing-table, and went and stretched herself out on the sofa, deliberately facing him.

"How dare you?" she inquired.

"How dare I, indeed, in my own house!" he bawled. "Now, look here, madam, I'm not going to have any of your damned interference, and so I tell you."

"Please, I am not deaf," she remonstrated gently. "And now, look here, sir, I am not going to have any of your damnable cruelties going on under the same roof with me. I have endured your sensuality and your corrupt conversation weakly, partly because I knew no better, and partly because I was the only sufferer, as it seemed to me, in the narrow outlook I had on life until lately; but I know better now. I know that every woman who submits in such matters is not only a party to her own degradation, but connives at the degradation of her whole sex. Our marriage never can be a true marriage, the spiritual, intellectual, physical union of a man and a woman for the purpose of perfect companionship. We have none of the higher aspirations in common, we should be none the happier for tender experiences of parenthood, none the holier for any joy or sorrow, pain or pleasure, that might come to us to strengthen and ennoble us if rightly enjoyed or endured. And this, I think, is not altogether my fault. But however that may be, it is out of my power to remedy it now. All I can do is to prevent unedifying scenes between us by showing you such courtesy and consideration as is possible. On this occasion I will show you courtesy, but the consideration is due to me. A woman does not marry to have her heart wrung, her health destroyed, her life made wretched by anything that is preventable,

and I intend to put a stop to this last discovered hellish practice of yours. I will not allow it, and if you dare to attempt it again, I will call in the townsfolk to see you at your brutal work."

She spoke with decision, in the tone of one who has determined on her plan of action and will fearlessly pursue it. A great gravity settled on Daniel Maclure. He stood still a little reflecting, then came to the fire, beside which Beth, who had risen restlessly as she spoke, was now sitting in an arm-chair. He drew up another chair, and sat down also, having resolved, in face of the gravity of the situation, to try some of his old tactics, and some new ones as well. His first pose was to gaze into the fire ruefully for awhile, and then his fine eyes slowly filled with tears.

"It must have been a brutal sight," he said at last, "and I can't tell you how sorry I am you saw it. I don't wonder you're shaken, poor little girl, and it's natural that the shock should have made you unreasonable and uncharitable—unlike yourself, in fact, for I never knew a more reasonable woman when you are in your right mind, or a more charitable. I'm not so bad, however, as you think me. I never intended to inflict suffering on the creature. I didn't know he'd recover. I had given him a dose of curare."

"The drug that paralyses without deadening the sense of pain," Beth interposed. "I have heard of the tender mercies of the vivisector. He saves himself as much as he can in the matter of distracting noises."

Dan had mentioned curare to give a persuasive touch of scientific accuracy to his explanation, not suspecting that she knew the properties of the drug, and he was taken aback for a moment; but he craftily abandoned that point and took up another.

"These experiments must be made, in the interests of suffering humanity, more's the pity," he said, sighing.

"In the interests of cruel and ambitious scientific men, struggling to outstrip each other, and make money, and win fame for themselves regardless of the cost. They

were ready enough in old days to vivisect human beings when it was allowed, and they would do it again if they dared."

"Now look here, Beth; don't be rabid," said Dan temperately. "Just think of the sufferings medical men are able to relieve nowadays in consequence of these researches."

"Good authorities say that nothing useful has been discovered by vivisection that could not have been discovered without it," Beth rejoined. "And even if it had been the means of saving human life, that would not justify your employment of it. There never could be a human life worth saving at such an expense of suffering to other creatures. It isn't as if you made an experiment and had done with it either. One generation after another of you repeats the same experiments to verify them, to see for yourselves, for practice; and so countless helpless creatures are being tortured continually by numbers of men who are degraded and brutalised themselves by their experiments. Had I known you were a vivisector, I should not only have refused to marry you, I should have declined to associate with you. To conceal such a thing from the woman you were about to marry was a cruel injustice—a fraud."

"I concealed nothing from you that you were old enough to understand and take a right view of," Dan protested.

"According to custom," said Beth. "Anything that might prevent a woman accepting a man is carefully concealed from her. That kind of cant is wearisome. You did not think me too young to put at the head of a house, or to run the risk of becoming a mother, although I have heard you dilate yourself on the horrors of premature motherhood. But that is the way with men. For anything that suits their own convenience they are ingenious in finding excuses. As a rule, they see but one side of a social question, and that is their own. I cannot understand any but unsexed women associating with vivisectors. Don't pretend you pursue such experiments reluctantly—you delight in them. But, whatever the excuse for them, I am sure that

the time is coming when the vivisector will be treated like the people who prepared the dead for embalming in ancient Egypt. You will be called in when there is no help for it; but, your task accomplished, you will be driven out of all decent society, to consort with the hangman—if even he will associate with you."

"Well, well!" Dan ejaculated, gazing into the fire sorrowfully. "But I suppose this is what we should expect. It's the way of the world. A scientific man who devotes all his time and talents to relieving his fellow-creatures must expect to be misunderstood and reviled by way of reward. You send for us when you want us—there's nobody like the doctor then; but you'll grudge every penny you've got to give us, and you'd not pay at all if you could help it. I should know."

"I was not speaking of doctors," Beth rejoined. "I was speaking of vivisectors. But after all, what is the great outcome of your extraordinary science? What do you do with it? Keep multitudes alive and suffering who would be happily dead and at rest but for you! If you practised with the honest intention of doing as much good as you could, you would not be content merely to treat effects as you do for the most part; you would strike at causes also; and we should hear more of prevention and less of wonderful cures. You dazzle the blockhead public with a showy operation, and no one thinks of asking why it is that the necessity for this same operation recurs so often. You know, probably, but you disclaim responsibility in the matter. It is not your place to teach the public, you modestly protest."

"I don't know how you can say that in the face of the effort we have made to stamp out disease. Why, look at zymotic diseases alone!"

"Exactly!" Beth answered. "Zymotic diseases alone! But why draw the line there? And what are you doing to improve the race, to strengthen its power to resist disease? You talk about Nature when it suits you; but it is the cant of the subject you employ, for you are at variance with Nature. Your whole endeavour is to thwart her. Nature decrees the survival of the fittest; you exercise your skill to preserve the

unfittest, and stop there—at the beginning of your responsibilities, as it seems to me. Let the unfit who are with us live, and save them from suffering when you can, by all means; but take pains to prevent the appearance of any more of them. By the reproduction of the unfit, the strength, the beauty, the morality of the race is undermined, and with them its best chances of happiness. Yes, you certainly do your best to stamp out measles, smallpox, scarlet fever, and all that group—diseases that do not necessarily leave any permanent mark on the constitution; but at the same time you connive at the spread of the worst disease to which we are liable. About that you preserve the strictest professional secrecy. Only to-day, in the Times, there is the report of a discussion on the subject at a meeting of the International Congress of Legal Medicine—where is it?" She took up the paper and read:—"'There was an important debate on the spread of an infamous disease by wet nurses. This question is all the more urgent because, though the greatest dangers and complications are involved, it is very generally neglected.... When a doctor knows that the parents of a child are tainted, should he so far disregard the professional secrecy to which he is bound as to warn the nurse of her danger in suckling the child?' Apparently not! The poor woman must take her chance, as the child's unfortunate mother had to do when she married."

"Ah, now you see for yourself, and will become reasonable, it is to be hoped," he interrupted, rubbing his hands complacently; "for it is precisely in order to check that particular disease that appointments like mine are made."

"It is precisely in order to make vice safe for men that such appointments are made," she answered. "Medical etiquette would not stop where it does, at the degradation of those unfortunate women, if you were honestly attempting to put a stop to that disease. You would have it reported, irrespective of the sex of the sufferer, like any other disease that is dangerous to the health of the community. It is not contrary to etiquette to break your peculiar professional secrecy in the case of a woman, but it would be in the case of a man; so you punish the women, and let the men go free to

spread the evil from one generation to another as they like. O justice! O consistency! I don't wonder we have been shunned since we came to Slane. A man in your position is a mere pander, and right glad am I of what I have suffered from the scorn and contempt of the people who would not associate with us. It shows that the right spirit is abroad in the community."

"Pander!" Dan ejaculated. "I am sorry to hear you use such a word, Beth."

"It is the right word, unfortunately," she answered.

"You oughtn't to know anything about these things," the chaste Daniel observed, with an air of offended delicacy. "Women can't know enough to see the matter from the right point of view, and so they make mischief."

"Ah, you don't appreciate that women have grown out of their intellectual infancy," Beth said, "and have opinions and a point of view of their own in social matters, especially where their own sex is concerned. You are still in the days of old Chavasse, who expatiates in his 'Advice to a Wife' on the dangers of men marrying unhealthy women, but says not a word of warning to women on the risk of marrying unhealthy men. You would keep us blindfolded as we were in his day, and abandon us to our fate in like manner; but it can't be done any more, my friend. You can hide nothing from sensible women now that concerns the good of the community. We know there is no protection for women against this infamous disease, and no punishment for the men who spread it; and we consider the fact a disgrace to every medical man alive."

"You have a nice opinion of the men of your husband's profession!" Dan observed sarcastically.

"I have the highest opinion of medical men—such medical men as Sir George Galbraith," she replied. "I have seen something of their high-mindedness, their courage, their devotion, and their genuine disinterestedness; and I feel sure that in time their efforts will leaven the whole mass of callousness and cruelty against

which they have to contend in their profession. The hope of humanity is in the doctors, and they will not fail us. Like Christ, they will teach as well as heal."

"Rubbish!" said Dan. "As I've told you before, it isn't our business to mind the morals of the people. It's for the parsons to fight the devil."

"But," said Beth, "as I answered you before, you cannot attend to the health of the community properly without also minding its morals. The real old devil is disease."

Dan left his seat and walked to the window, where he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out for awhile.

"Well, this is enough jawbation for one day, I hope," he said at last, turning round. "Marrying a woman like you is enough to drive a man to the devil. I've a jolly good mind to go and get drunk. I declare to God if I could get drunk overnight and feel all right again in the morning, I'd be drunk every night. But it can't be done," he added regretfully. "There are drawbacks to everything."

Beth looked at him imperturbably while he was speaking, then turned her attention to the fire.

"You know my views now on the subject of vivisection," she said at last. "If there is any more of it here, I shall leave the house, and publish the reason. And you also know what I consider I owe myself in the way of self-respect. You must beguile your creditors by other means than my personal appearance."

She had spoken all through in the most temperate tone, and now, when she had finished, she leaned back in her chair and folded her hands with a sigh, as of one who had finished a hard task and would rest.

Dan looked at her with evident distaste, and considered a little, searching for something more to say that might move her, some argument that should persuade or convince; but, as nothing occurred to him, he left the room, banging the door after him in his ill-conditioned way, because he knew that the noise would be a racking offence to her overwrought nerves.

But from that time forward everything he did was an offence to Beth, a source of irritation. In spite of herself, she detected all the insincerity of his professions, the mean motives of his acts. Up to this time she had been more kindly disposed towards him than she herself knew. All she had wanted was to be able to care for him, to find some consistency in him, something to respect, and to which she could pin her faith; but now she knew him for what he was exactly—shallow, pretentious, plausible, vulgar-minded, without principle; a man of false pretensions and vain professions; utterly untrustworthy; saying what would suit himself at the moment, or just what occurred to him, not what he thought, but what he imagined he was expected to say. Beth had never heard him condemn a vice or habit which she did not afterwards find him practising himself. She used to wonder if he deceived himself, or was only intent on deceiving her; but from close observation of him at this period, she became convinced that, for the time being, he entered into whatever part he was playing, and hence his extreme plausibility. Beth found herself studying him continually with a curious sort of impersonal interest; he was a subject that repelled her, but from which, nevertheless, she could not tear herself away. His hands in particular, his handsome white hands, had a horrid sort of fascination for her. She had admired them while she thought of them as the healing hands of the physician, bringing hope and health; but now she knew them to be the cruel hands of the vivisector, associated with torture, from which humanity instinctively shrinks; and when he touched her, her delicate skin crisped with a shudder. She used to wonder how he could eat with hands so polluted, and once, at dessert, when he handed her a piece of orange in his fingers, she was obliged to leave it on her plate, she could not swallow it.

After that last scene the days dragged more intolerably than ever; but happily for Beth there were not many more of them without a break, for just as it seemed that endurance must end in some desperate act, Mrs. Kilroy sent her a pressing invitation to go and pay her a long visit in London; and Beth accepted it, and went with such a

sense of relief as an invalid feels who, after long suffering, finds herself well, and out in the free fresh air once more.

CHAPTER XLVII

When Beth went to stay with the Kilroys in London, it was a question whether she might not end by joining the valiant army of those who are in opposition to everything; but before she had been there a week, she had practically recovered her balance, and began to look out upon life once more with dispassionate attention. Her depression when she first arrived was evident, and the Kilroys were concerned to see her looking so thin and ill; but, by degrees, she expanded in that genial atmosphere, and although she said little as a rule, she had begun to listen and to observe again with her usual vivid interest. She could not have been better situated for the purpose, for people of all kinds came to the Kilroys; and in moving among them merely as an onlooker, she was bound to see and hear enough to take her out of herself. Her own personality was too distinct, however, for her to remain for long an onlooker merely. That mesmeric quality in her which, whether it fascinates or displeases, attracts or repels, marks a distinct personality which is not to be overlooked, made people ask at once who she was, in the hope that her acquaintance might be worth cultivating. For there was a certain air of distinction about her which made her look like a person with some sort of prestige, whom it might be useful to know—don't you know.

One afternoon soon after Beth's arrival, Mrs. Kilroy being at home to visitors, and the rooms already pretty full, Beth noticed among the callers an old-looking young man whose face seemed familiar to her. He wore a pointed beard upon his chin, and a small moustache cut away from his upper lip, and waxed and turned up at the ends. His face was thin and narrow, his forehead high and bald; what hair he had grew in a fringe at the back of his head, and was curly, and of a nondescript brown colour. Had he worn the dress of the Elizabethan period, he might have passed for a bad

attempt to look like Shakespeare; and Beth thought that that perhaps might be the resemblance which puzzled her. While she was looking at him a lady was announced, a most demure-looking little person in a grey costume, and a small, close-fitting princess bonnet, tied under her chin, and trimmed with a big Alsatian bow in front. She entered smiling slightly, and she continued to smile, as if she had set the smile on her lips as she put the bonnet on her head, to complete her costume. After she had shaken hands with Angelica, she looked round as if in search of some one else, and seemed satisfied when she discovered the old-looking young man of Shakesperian aspect. He was watching her, and their eyes met with a momentary significance, but they took no further notice of each other. Most people would have perceived no more in the glance than showed on the surface:—a lady and gentleman who looked at each other and then looked away, like indifferent acquaintances or casual strangers; but Beth's infallible intuition revealed to her an elaborate precaution in this seeming unconcern. It was clear to her that the two had expected to meet each other there, and their apparent insensibility to each other's presence was a pose, which, however, betrayed to her the intimacy it was affected to conceal. She hated herself for seeing so much, and burned with blame of Dan for opening her eyes to behold the inward wickedness beneath the conventional propriety of the outward demeanour; but therein she was unjust to Dan. He had opened her eyes sooner than they should have been opened, but in any case she must have seen for herself eventually. Nothing in life can be concealed from such a mind. What books could not teach her, she discovered from people by sympathy, by insight, by intuition; but she did not come into full possession of her faculties all at once. The conditions of her life had tended rather to retard than to develop the best that was in her, and the wonder was that her vision had not been permanently distorted, so that she could see nothing but evil in all things—see it, too, till her eyes were accustomed and her soul corrupted, so that she not only ceased to resent it, but finally accepted it as the inevitable order to which it is best to accommodate oneself

if one is to get any good out of life. This is the fate of most young wives situated as Beth had been, the fate she had only narrowly escaped by help of the strength that came of the brave self-contained habits she had cultivated in her life of seclusion and thought. It was the result of this training, and her constancy in pursuing it, that her further faculty, hitherto so fitful, at last shot up a bright and steady light which made manifest to her the thoughts of others that they were not all evil, and helped her by the grace in her own heart to perceive hidden processes of love at work in other hearts, all tending to purification, and by the goodness of her own soul to search out the goodness in other souls as the elements find their constituent parts in the atmosphere.

Beth was looking her best that afternoon, although she had taken no pains with herself. She seemed well dressed by dint of looking well in her clothes; but she had not chosen to make herself look well. In the exasperated phase of revolt through which she was passing, she could not have been persuaded to dress so as to heighten the effect of her appearance, and so make of herself a trap to catch admiring glances. To be neat and fresh was all her care; but that was enough. The young man with the pointed beard, who had been looking about the room uneasily, seemed to have found what he wanted when he noticed her. He asked an elderly man standing near him who the young lady of distinguished appearance might be. "A friend of Mrs. Kilroy's, I believe," the gentleman answered, and moved off as if he resented the question.

But Pointed Beard was persistent. He asked two or three other people, strangers, who did not know either, and then he made his way to Mrs. Kilroy, but she was so surrounded he could not get near her. At last he bethought him of the servants who were handing tea about, and learnt Beth's name from one of them.

When Beth next noticed him, he was making his way towards her with a cup of tea in one hand and a plate of cakes in the other.

"I have ventured to bring you some tea," he said, "but I do not know if it is as you like it. I can easily get you some more, however, if it is not."

"Thank you; I do not want any," Beth answered somewhat coldly.

"I'll put it here, then, on this console," he rejoined. "If I move away I shall not be able to get near you again in this crowd. I wonder why Mrs. Kilroy has so many people. Now, I like just a few, eight or ten for a dinner, you know, and twenty or so on these sort of occasions. And they must all be interesting people, worth talking to. I am exceedingly fastidious about the kind of people I know. Even as a boy I was fastidious."

As he uttered that last sentence, Beth was again aware of something familiar in his appearance, and she felt sure she had heard him make that same remark more than once before—but when? but where?

"That is Lord Fitzkillingham," he continued, "that tall man who has just come in—see, there!—shaking hands with Mrs. Kilroy. He looks like a duke, don't you know. I admire people of distinguished appearance much more than good-looking people—people who are merely good-looking, I mean, of course. I saw you directly I came into the room, and was determined to find out who you were; and I asked I can't tell you how many people, whether I knew them or not. What do you think of that for perseverance?"

"You certainly seem to be persistent," Beth answered with a smile.

"Oh, I'm nothing if not persistent," he rejoined complacently. "I'll undertake to find out anything I want to know. Do you see that lady there in black? I wanted to know her age, so I went to Somerset House and looked it up."

"What did you do that for?" Beth asked.

"I wanted to know."

"But did she want you to know?"

"Well, naturally not, or she would have told me. But it is no use trying to conceal things from me. I am not to be deceived."

"You must be quite a loss to Scotland Yard," Beth ventured. "You would have been admirably fitted for that—er—delicate kind of work."

"Well, I think I should," he rejoined. "You see I found you out, and it was not so easy, for—er—no one seemed to know you. However, that does not matter. We'll soon introduce you."

Beth smiled. "Thank you," she said drily, "that will be very nice."

"I'll bring Fitzkillingham presently; he'll do anything for me. He was one of our set at the 'Varsity. That's the best of going to the 'Varsity. You meet the right kind of people there, people who can help you, you know, if you can get in with them as I did. You'll like Fitzkillingham. He's a very good fellow."

"Indeed!" said Beth. "What has he done?"

"Done!" he echoed. "Oh, nothing that I know of. Consider his position! The Earl of Fitzkillingham, with a rent-roll of fifty thousand a year, has no need to do; he has only to be. There, he's caught my eye. I'll go and fetch him."

"Pray do nothing of the kind," said Beth emphatically. "I have no wish to know him."

The young man, disconcerted, turned and looked her full in the face. "Why not?" he gasped.

"First of all, because you were going to present him without asking my permission," Beth said, "which is a liberty I should have had to resent in any case by refusing to know him; and secondly, because a man worth fifty thousand a year who has done no good in the world is not worth knowing. I don't think he should be allowed to be unless he can be made to do. Pray excuse me if I shock your prejudices," she added, smiling. "You do not know, perhaps, that in our set, knowing people for position

rather than for character is quite out of date?"

The young man smiled superciliously. "That is rather a bourgeois sentiment, is it not?" he said.

"On the contrary," said Beth, "it is the other that is the huckster spirit. What is called knowing the right people is only the commercial principle of seeking some advantage. Certain people make a man's acquaintance, and pay him flattering attentions, not because their hearts are good and they wish to give him pleasure, but because there is some percentage of advantage to be gained by knowing him. That is to be bourgeois in the vulgar sense, if you like! And that is the trade-mark stamped upon most of us—selfishness! snobbishness! One sees it in the conventional society manners, which are superficially veneered, fundamentally bad; the outcome of self-interest, not of good feeling; one knows exactly how, where, and when they will break down."

"What are you holding forth about, Beth?" said Mrs. Kilroy, coming up behind her.

"The best people," Beth answered, smiling.

"You mean the people who call themselves the best people—Society, that is to say," said Mrs. Kilroy cheerfully. "Society is the scum that comes to the surface because of its lightness, and does not count, except in sets where ladies' papers circulate."

"I am surprised to hear you talk so, Mrs. Kilroy," said Pointed Beard in an offended tone, as if society had been insulted in his person.

"I am sorry if I disappoint you," said Mrs. Kilroy. "And I confess I like my own set and their pretty manners; but I know their weaknesses. There is no snob so snobbish as a snob of good birth. The upper classes will be the last to learn that it is sterling qualities which are wanted to rule the world,—head and heart."

"This gentleman will tell you that all that is bourgeois," said Beth.

"I believe that at heart the bourgeois are sound," said Angelica. "Bourgeois signifies

good, sound, self-respecting qualities to me, and steady principles."

"But scarcely 'pretty manners,' I should suppose," said Pointed Beard superciliously.

"Why not?" said Angelica. "Sincerity and refinement make good manners, and principle is the parent of both."

"Don't you think that for the most part Englishwomen are singularly lacking in charms of manner?" he asked precisely.

"Just as Englishmen are, and for the same reason," said Angelica; "because they only try to be agreeable when it suits themselves. A good manner is a decoration that must be kept on always if it is to be worn with ease. Good manners are rare because good feeling is rare, for good manners are the outcome of good feeling. Manners are not the mere society show of politeness, but the inward kindly sympathy of which politeness is the natural outward manifestation; given these, grace and charm of manner come of themselves."

She moved off as she spoke to attend to other guests.

"Mrs. Kilroy is obvious," said Pointed Beard, in a tone that suggested sympathy with Beth for being bored. "I wonder she did not give us 'For manners are not idle,' et cetera, or something equally banal—the kind of thing we are taught in our infancy——"

"And fail to apply ever after," said Beth.

"I see you are ready," he observed fatuously, striking the personal note again, which she resented.

"I dislike that cant of the obvious which there is so much of here in town," she rejoined. "It savours of preciosity. All that is finest in thought is obvious. A great truth, well put, when heard for the first time, is so crystal clear to the mind, one seems to have known it always. No one fears to be obvious who has anything good to say."

He stroked his beard in silence for some seconds. "I suppose you go in for politics, and all that sort of thing," he said at last.

"Why?" Beth asked in her disconcerting way.

"Oh, judging by your friends."

"Not a safe guide," she assured him. "My friends have the most varied interests; and even if they had not, it would be somewhat monotonous for them to associate exclusively with people of the same pursuits."

"Then you do not take an interest in politics?" he jerked out, almost irritably, as if he had a right to know.

For a moment Beth had a mind to baffle him for his tasteless persistency, but her natural directness saved her from such small-mindedness. "If I must answer your catechism," she said, smiling, "social subjects interest me more. I find generalisations bald and misleading, and politics are a generalisation of events. I rarely read a political speech through, and remember very little of what it is all about when I do. Details, individuals, and actions fascinate me, but the circumstances of a people as a state rarely interest me much."

"Ah, I fear that is—er—a feminine point of view, rather—is it not?" he rejoined patronisingly.

"Yes," she said, "and a scientific method. We go from the particular to the general, and only draw broad conclusions when we have collected our facts in detail. But excuse me, I see a friend," she broke off hastily, seizing the chance to escape.

A little later Beth saw that the demure-looking little person in the princess bonnet was taking her leave. She passed down the room with her set little smile on her lips, looking about her, but apparently without seeing any one in particular till she got to the door, when her eye lighted on the young man of Shakesperian mien, and her smile flickered a moment, and went out. The young man turned and looked at a picture with an elaborately casual air, then sauntered across the room to Mrs. Kilroy,

shook hands with her, spoke to one or two other people, and finally reached the door and opened it with the same solemn affectation of not being in a hurry, and disappeared. Beth wondered if he kept his caution up before the footmen in the hall, or if he made an undignified bolt of it the moment he was out of sight of society.

At dinner that evening she asked Mrs. Kilroy who and what that thin-nosed man, that sort of reminiscence of Shakespeare, was.

"He is by way of being a literary man, I believe," Angelica answered. "He is not a friend of ours, and I cannot think why he comes here. I never ask him. He got himself introduced to me somehow, and then came and called, which I thought an impertinence. Did you notice that woman with an Alsatian bow in her bonnet, that made her look like a horse with its ears laid back? Her pose is to improve young men. She improves them away from their wives, and I object to the method; and I do not ask her here either. Yet she comes. His wife I have much sympathy with; but he keeps her in the country, out of the way, so I see very little of her."

"What is his name?" Beth asked.

"Alfred Cayley Pounce."

"Why!" Beth exclaimed. "He must be a youth I knew long ago, when I was a child. I was sure I had seen him before. But what a falling off! I wondered if he were an old young man, or a young old man when I first saw him. He was refined as a boy and had artistic leanings; I should have thought he might have developed something less banal in the time than a bald forehead."

"That kind of man spends most of his time in cultivating acquaintances," said Mr. Kilroy. "When he hasn't birth, his pose is usually brains. But Pounce took a fair degree at the University. And he's not such a bad fellow, really. He's precious, of course, and by way of being literary—that is to say, he is literary to the extent of having written some little things of no consequence, upon which he assumes the right to give his opinion, with appalling assurance, of the works of other people,

which are of consequence. There is a perfect epidemic of that kind of assurance among the clever young men of the day, and it's wrecking half of them. A man who begins by having no doubt of the worth of his own opinion gets no further for want of room to move in."

Next day Beth was alone in a sunny sitting-room at the back of the house, looking out into grounds common to the whole square. It was about tea-time. The windows were wide open, the sunblinds were drawn down outside, and the warm air, fragrant with mignonette, streamed in over the window boxes. Angelica had given this room up to Beth, and here she worked or rested; read, wrote, or reflected, as she felt inclined; soothed rather than disturbed by the far-off sounds of the city, and eased in mind by the grace and beauty of her surroundings. For the room was a work of art in itself, an Adams room, with carved white panels, framing spaces of rich brocade, delicately tinted, on the walls; with furniture chosen for comfort as well as elegance, and no more of it than was absolutely necessary, no crowding of chairs and tables, no congestion of useless ornaments, no plethora of pictures, putting each other out—only two, in fact, one a summer seascape, with tiny waves bursting on shining sands; the other a corner of a beautiful old garden, shady with trees, glowing with flowers, whence two young lovers, sitting on an old stone seat, looked out with dreamy eyes on a bright glimpse, framed in foliage, of the peaceful country beyond. Angelica had thought that room out carefully for Beth, every detail being considered, so that the whole should make for rest and refreshment, and she had succeeded perfectly. Nothing could have eased Beth's mind of the effect of her late experiences, or strengthened it again more certainly, than the harmony, the quiet, and the convenience of everything about her—books on the shelves, needlework on the work-table, writing materials in abundance on the bureau, exquisite forms of flowers, and prevailing tints of apple-blossom, white, and pink, and green; music when she chose to play; comfort of couch and chairs when she wished to repose; and, above all, freedom from intrusion, the right to do as she liked gladly conceded,

the respect which adds to the dignity of self-respect, and altogether the kind of independence that makes most for pleasure and peace. Before she had been there three weeks she was happily released from herself by the recovery of her power to work. She began to revise the book she had thought so little of when it was first written. She had brought it to town because it was not very bulky, rather than because she had any hope of it; but when she took it out and read it here alone in peace, it seized upon her with power, and, in her surprise, like Galileo, she exclaimed: "But it does turn round!" The book was already "radiant with inborn genius," but it still lacked the "acquired art," and feeling this, she sat down to it regularly, and rewrote it from beginning to end, greatly enriching it. She had no amateur impatience to appear in print and become known; the thought of production induced her to delay and do her utmost rather than to make indiscreet haste; her delight was in the doing essentially; she was not one to glory in public successes, however great, or find anything but a tepid satisfaction therein compared to the warm delight that came when her thoughts flowed, and the material world melted out of mind.

She had been busy with her book that afternoon, and very happy, until tea came. Then, being somewhat tired, she got up from the bureau at which she worked, and went to the tea-table, leaving her papers all scattered about; and she was in the act of pouring herself out a cup of tea, when the door opened, and the footman announced, "Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce."

Very much surprised, she put the teapot down deliberately and looked at him. He held his hat to his breast, and bowed with exaggerated deference, in an affected, foreign way.

"I insisted on seeing you," he began, as if that were something to boast of. "Perhaps I ought to apologise."

Beth, not knowing what to say, asked him to sit down. Then there was a little pause.

He looked at the tea-table.

"I see that you do take tea," he observed. "Why did you refuse it when I offered you some yesterday?"

"I am afraid I am not prepared to give you a reason," Beth answered stiffly.

"Would it be out of place if I were to ask for some tea?" he said.

Beth silently poured him out a cup, and he got up, took what he wanted in the way of sugar and cream and cake, and sat down again, making himself very much at home.

"Do take some yourself," he pleaded. "You are making me feel such an outsider."

"I beg your pardon," said Beth, helping herself.

She did not know whether to be annoyed or amused by his assurance. Had she not known who he was she would certainly have been annoyed; but the recollection of their days together, when the world was young and life was all pure poetry, came upon her suddenly as she found something of the boy in the face and voice of the man before her, making it impossible for her to treat him as a stranger, and melting her into a smile.

"Confess that you were surprised to see me," he said.

"I was," she answered.

"And not glad, perhaps," he pursued.

"Surprised means neither glad nor sorry," she observed.

"D'you know, the moment I saw you——" he began sentimentally; "but never mind that now," he broke off. "Let me give you my reason for coming, which is also my excuse. I hope you will accept it."

Beth waited quietly.

"I told you I could always find out anything I wanted to know about anybody," he pursued, "and last night I happened to sit next a lady at a dinner-party who turned

out to be a great friend of yours. I always talk to strange ladies about what I've been doing; that kind of thing interests them, you know; and I described the party here yesterday afternoon, and said I only met one lady in the whole assembly worth looking at and worth speaking to, and that was Mrs. Maclure, who was staying in the house. 'Oh, I know her quite well,' the lady said. 'She's a neighbour of mine at Slane. Her husband is a doctor, but I hear she is connected with some of the best county people in the north. She's very clever, I believe, and by way of being literary and all that sort of thing, don't you know. But I don't think she has any one to advise her.'"

"Oh," said Beth, enlightened, "I know who my great friend is then—Mrs. Carne!"

"Yes," said Mr. Pounce, "and when I heard you were literary, I felt a further affinity, for, as I daresay you have heard, I am a literary man myself."

"Yes; I heard you were 'by way of being literary,' too," Beth rejoined.

"Who told you so?" he demanded quickly, his whole thought instantly concentrated on the interesting subject when it concerned himself.

"I do not feel at liberty to tell you," she replied.

"Was it Mrs. Kilroy?"

Beth made no sign.

"Was it Mr. Kilroy?" he persisted.

"I have already said that I shall not tell you, Mr. Pounce," she answered frigidly.

He sat in silence for a little, looking extremely annoyed. Beth, to relieve the tension, offered him some more tea, which he refused curtly; but as she only smiled at the discourtesy and helped herself, he saw fit to change his mind, and then resumed the conversation.

"When Mrs. Carne heard that I was a literary man," he said with importance, "she begged me to do what I could to help you. She said it would be a great kindness; so I promised I would, and here I am."

"So it seems," said Beth.

He stared at her. "I mean it," he said.

"I don't doubt it," Beth answered. "You and Mrs. Carne are extremely kind."

"Oh, not at all!" he assured her blandly. "To me, at all events, it will be a great pleasure to help and advise you."

"How do you propose to do it?" Beth asked, relaxing. Such obtuseness was not to be taken seriously.

He glanced over his shoulder at the bureau where her papers were spread. "I shall get you to let me see some of your work," he said, "and then I can judge of its worth."

"What have you done yourself?" she asked.

"I—well, I write regularly for the Patriarch," he said, with the complacency of one who thinks that he need say no more. "The editor himself came to stay with us last week, and that means something. Just now, however, I am contemplating a work of fiction, an important work, if I may venture to say so myself. It has been on my mind for years."

"Indeed," said Beth. "What is its purpose?"

"Purpose!" he ejaculated. "Had you said pur-port instead of pur-pose, it would have been a sensible question. It is hardly likely I shall write a novel with a purpose. I leave that to the ladies."

"I have read somewhere that Milton said the poet's mission was 'to allay the perturbation of the mind and set the affections in right tune,'—is not that a purpose?" Beth asked. "And one in our own day has talked of 'that great social duty to impart what we believe and what we think we have learned. Among the few things of which we can pronounce ourselves certain is the obligation of inquirers after truth to communicate what they obtain.'"

"But not in the form of fiction," Alfred Cayley Pounce put in dogmatically.

"Yet there is always purpose in the best work of the great writers of fiction," Beth maintained.

Not being able to deny this, he supposed sarcastically that she had read all the works to which she alluded.

"I see you suspect that I have not," she answered, smiling.

"I suspect you did not find that passage you quoted just now from Milton in his works," he rejoined.

"I said as much," she reminded him.

"Well, but you ought to know better than to quote an author you have not read," he informed her.

"Do you mean that I should read all a man's works before I presume to quote a single passage?"

"I do," he replied. "Women never understand thoroughness," he observed, largely.

"Some of us see a difference between thoroughness and niggling," Beth answered. "I should say, beware of endless preparation! We have heard of Mr. Casaubon and The Key to all Mythologies."

"I understand now what your friend Mrs. Carne meant about the manner in which you take advice," Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce informed her, in a slightly offended tone.

Beth, wondering inwardly why so many people assume they are competent to advise, prayed that she herself might always be modest enough to wait at least until her advice was asked.

"I hope I have not discussed your opinion impolitely," she said. "Pray excuse me if you think I have."

Mollified, he turned his attention once more to the littered bureau.

"You have a goodly pile of manuscript there," he remarked; "may I ask what it is?"

"It is a little book into which I am putting all my ignorance," she said.

"I hope you are not going to be diffident about letting me see it?" he answered encouragingly. "I could certainly give you some useful hints."

"You are too kind," she said; and he accepted the assertion without a suspicion of sarcasm. She rose when she had spoken, drew the lid of the bureau down over her papers, and locked it deliberately; but the precaution rather flattered him than otherwise.

"You need not be afraid," he said. "I promise to be lenient. And if we are as fast friends when the book appears as I trust we shall be, the Patriarch itself shall proclaim its merits; if not——"

"I suppose it will discover my faults," Beth put in demurely. "I wonder, by the way," she added, "who told you you are so much cleverer than I am?"

But fortunately Mrs. Kilroy came in and interrupted them before he had had time to grasp the remark, for which Beth, from whom it had slipped unawares, was devoutly thankful.

When he had gone, she sat and wondered if she had really understood him aright with regard to the Patriarch. Certainly he had seemed to threaten her, but it was hard to believe that he had sunk so low as to be capable of criticising her work, not on its own merits, but with regard to the terms he should be on with its author. She was too upright herself, however, to think such dishonest meanness possible, so she put the suspicion far from her, and tried to find some charitable explanation of the several signs of paltriness she had already detected, and to think of him as he had seemed to her in the old days, when she had endowed him with all the qualities she herself had brought into their acquaintance to make it pleasant and of good effect.

Beth had taken to rambling about alone in the quiet streets and squares for exercise; and as she returned a few days later from one of these rambles, she encountered Mr.

Alfred Cayley Pounce coming out of a florist's with a large bouquet of orchids in his hand.

"You see I do not forget you," he said, holding the bouquet out to her. "Every lady has her flower. These delicate orchids are for you."

But Beth ignored the offering. "You are still fond of flowers then?" slipped from her.

"We do not leave a taste for flowers behind us with our toys," he rejoined. "If we like flowers as children, we love them as men. The taste develops like a talent when we cultivate it. To love flowers with true appreciation of their affinities in regard to certain persons, is an endowment, a grace of nature which bespeaks the most absolute refinement of mind. And what would life be without refinement of mind!"

Beth had walked on, and he was walking beside her.

"And how does the book progress?" he inquired.

"It is finished," she answered.

"What! already?" he exclaimed. "Why, it takes me a week to write five hundred words. But then, of course, my work is highly concentrated. I have sent home for some of it to show you. You see I am pertinacious. I said I would help you, and I will. I hope you will live to be glad that we have met. But you must not write at such a rate. You can only produce poor thin stuff in that way."

Beth shrugged her shoulders, and let him assume what he liked on the subject.

They walked on a little way in silence, then he began again about the flowers. "Flowers," he informed her, "were the great solace of my boyhood—the sole solace, I may say, for I had no friends, no companions, except a poor little chap, a cripple, on whom I took pity. My people did not think me strong enough for a public school, so they sent me to a private tutor, a man of excellent family, Rector of a large seaside parish in the north. He only took me as a favour; he had no other pupils. But

it was very lonely in that great empty house. And the seashore, although it filled my mind with poetry, was desolate, desolate!"

Beth, as she listened to these meanderings of his fancy, and recalled old Vicar Richardson and the house full of children, thought of Mr. Pounce's remarks about feminine accuracy.

"But had you no girl-friend?" she asked.

"Only the lady of my dreams," he answered. "There was no other lady I should have looked at in the place. I was always refined. I met the lady of my dreams eventually. It was among the mountains of the Tyrol. Imagine a lordly castle, with drawbridge and moat, portcullis and pleasaunce, and sauntering in the pleasaunce, among the flowers, a lady—dressed in white——"

"Samite?" Beth ventured, controlling her countenance.

"I cannot recall the texture," he said seriously. "How could one think of textures at such a moment! That would have been too commercial! All I noted was the lily whiteness—and her eyes, dark eyes! All the poetry and passion of her race shone in them. And on the spot I vowed to win her. I went back to the 'Varsity, and worked myself into the best set. Lord Fitzkillingham became, as you know, my most intimate friend. He was my best man at the wedding."

"Then you married your ideal," said Beth. "You should be very happy."

He sighed. "I would not say a word against her for the world," he asserted. "When I compare her with other women, I see what a lucky man I must be thought. But," he sighed again, "I was very young, and youth has its illusions. As we grow older, mere beauty does not satisfy, mere cleverness and accomplishments do not satisfy, nor wealth, nor rank. A man may have all that, and yet may yearn for a certain something which is not there—and that something is the one thing needful."

They were opposite to the house by this time, and he looked up at the windows sentimentally. "Which is yours?" he asked. "I pass by daily and look up."

They had stopped at the door. "I cannot ask you in," Beth said hastily. "Please excuse me. This is my time for work."

"Ah, the time and the mood!" he ejaculated. "I know it all so well! Inspiration! Inspiration comes of congenial conversation, as I hope you will find. You will take my flowers. I cannot claim to have culled them for you, but at least I chose them."

As the door had been opened, and the footman in the hall stood looking on, Beth thought it better to take the flowers in a casual way as if they belonged to her. A card tied to the bouquet by a purple ribbon fell out from among the flowers as she took them. On it was written: "Mrs. Merton Merivale." Beth held the flowers out to Mr. Pounce, with the card dangling, and raised her eyebrows interrogatively.

"Ah, yes," he began slowly, detaching the card as he spoke to gain time, and changing countenance somewhat. "I confess some one else had had the good taste to choose these orchids before I saw them; but I always insist on having just what I want, so I took them, and suggested that another bouquet might be made for the lady. I overlooked the card."

Beth bowed and left him without further ceremony.

She tossed the flowers under the table in the hall on her way upstairs, and never knew what became of them. Later in the day she described her morning's adventure to Angelica, and asked her if she knew who Mrs. Merton Merivale was.

"Oh, that woman in the princess bonnet with the big Alsatian bow, you know," Angelica said. "Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce's sometime intellectual affinity."

"Poor Alfred! he is too crude!" Beth ejaculated. "How I have outgrown him!"

Ideala called next day, and found Angelica alone. "I hear that Beth is with you?" she said. "What is she doing?"

"Writing a book."

"What kind of a book?"

"Not a book for babes, I should say," said Angelica. "She does not pretend to consider the young person in the least. It is for parents and guardians, she says, not for authors, to see to it that the books the young person reads are suitable to her age. She thinks it very desirable for her only to read such as are; but personally she does not see the sense of writing down to her, or of being at all cramped on her account. She means to address mature men and women."

"That is brave and good," said Ideala. "What is the subject?"

"I don't know," said Angelica; "but she is certain to put some of herself into it."

"If by that you mean some of her personal experiences, I should think you are wrong," said Ideala. "Genius experiences too acutely to make use of its own past in that way; it would suffer too much in the reproduction. And besides, it can make better use and more telling of what it intuitively knows than of what it has actually seen."

"I do not think you believe that Beth will succeed," said Angelica.

"On the contrary," Ideala rejoined, "I expect her success will be unique; only I don't know if it will be a literary success. Genius is versatile. But we shall see."

Having finished her book, Beth collected her friends and read it aloud to them. "I don't know what to think of it," she said. "Advise me. Is it worth publishing, or had I better put it aside and try again?"

"Publish it, by all means," was the unanimous verdict; and Mr. Kilroy took the manuscript himself to a publisher of his acquaintance, who read it and accepted it.

"Oh," Beth exclaimed, when she heard the reader's report, "I do know now what is meant by all in good time! If I had been able to publish the first things I wrote, how I should have regretted it now! And I did think so much of myself at that time, too! You should have heard how I dogmatised to Sir George Galbraith; and he was so good and kind—he never snubbed me. But I believe I am out of the amateur stage now, and far advanced enough to begin all over again humbly and learn my

profession. But I find my point of view unchanged. Manner has always been less to me than matter. When I think of all the preventable sin and misery there is in the world, I pray God give us books of good intention—never mind the style! Polished periods put neither heart nor hope in us; theirs is the polish of steel which we admire for the labour bestowed upon it, but by which we do not benefit. The inevitable ills of life strengthen and refine when they are heroically borne; it is the preventable ones that act on our evil passions, and fill us with rage and bitterness; and what we want from the written word that reaches all of us is help and advice, comfort and encouragement. If art interferes with that, then art had better go. It would not be missed by the wretched—the happy we need not consider. I am speaking of art for art's sake, of course."

"We need not trouble about that," said Ideala. "The works of art for art's sake, and style for style's sake, end on the shelf much respected, while their authors end in the asylum, the prison, and the premature grave. I had a lesson on that subject long ago, which enlarged my mind. I got among the people who talk of style incessantly, as if style were everything, till at last I verily believed it was. I began to lose all I had to express for worry of the way to express it! Then one day a wise old friend of mine took me into a public library; and we spent a long time among the books, looking especially at the ones that had been greatly read, and at the queer marks in them, the emphatic strokes of approval, the notes of admiration, the ohs! of enthusiasm, the ahs! of agreement. At the end of one volume some one had written: 'This book has done me good.' It was all very touching to me, very human, very instructive. I never quite realised before what books might be to people, how they might help them, comfort them, brighten the time for them, and fill them with brave and happy thoughts. But we came at last in our wanderings to one neat shelf of beautiful books, and I began to look at them. There were no marks in them, no signs of wear and tear. The shelf was evidently not popular, yet it contained the books that had been specially recommended to me as best worth reading by my stylist friends. 'There is

style for you!' said my friend. 'Style lasts, you see. Style is engraved upon stone. All the other books about us wear out and perish, but here are your stylists still, as fresh as the day they were bought.' 'Because nobody reads them!' I exclaimed. 'Precisely,' he said. 'There is no comfort in life in them. They are the mere mechanics of literature, and nobody cares about them except the mechanicians.' After that I prayed for notable matter to indite, and tried only for the most appropriate words in which to express it; and then I arrived. If you have the matter, the manner will come, as handwriting comes to each of us; and it will be as good, too, as you are conscientious, and as beautiful as you are good."

CHAPTER XLVIII

Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce called on Beth continually. He was announced one day when she was sitting at lunch with the Kilroys.

"Really I do not think I ought to let you be bored by that man," Mr. Kilroy exclaimed. "I once had ten minutes of the academic platitudes of Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce, and that was enough to last me my life. You are too good-natured to see him so often. It is a weakness of yours, I believe, to suffer yourself rather than hurt other people's feelings, however much they may deserve it. But really you must snub him. There is nothing else for it. Send out and say you are engaged."

"If I do, he will wait until I am disengaged, or call again, or write in an offended tone to ask when I can be so good as to make it convenient to see him!" Beth answered in comical despair.

"I don't believe he bores her a bit at present," Angelica observed. "He is merely an intellectual exercise for Beth. She watches the workings of his mind quite dispassionately, draws him out with little airs and graces, and then adjusts him under the microscope. It interests her to dissect the creature. When she has studied him thoroughly, she will cast him out, as a worthless specimen."

"Oh, I hope that isn't true," said Beth, with a twinge of conscience. "I own it has interested me to see what he has developed into; but surely that isn't unfair?" She looked at Mr. Kilroy deprecatingly.

"It is vivisection," said Angelica.

"But under such agreeable anæsthetics that I should think he enjoys it," said Mr. Kilroy. "I should have no objection myself."

"Daddy, be careful!" Angelica cried. "A rare specimen like you is never safe when unscrupulous naturalists are about."

"But no microscope is needed to demonstrate Mr. Kilroy's position in the scale of being," Beth put in. "It is writ large all over him."

"Good and true, Beth!" said Angelica, smiling. "You can go and gloat over your worthless specimen as a reward, if you like. But the scientific mind is a mystery to me, and I shall never understand how you have the patience to do it."

Beth found Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce pacing about her sitting-room, biting his nails in an irritable manner.

"You were at lunch, I think," he said. "I wonder why I was not asked in?"

Beth said nothing.

"I consider it a slight on Mr. and Mrs. Kilroy's part," he pursued huffily. "Why should I be singled out for this kind of thing?"

"Aren't you just a little touchy?" Beth suggested.

"I confess I am sensitive, if that is what you mean," he replied.

"Well, yes, if you like," she said, "hyper-sensitive. But I thought you asked for me."

"It is true I came to see you; but that is no reason why I should be slighted by your friends—especially when I came because I think I have something to show you that will interest you." He took a little packet from the breast-pocket of his coat as he spoke, and began to undo it. "I took the trouble to go all the way home to get them to

show you. My mother was the only person who had them. They are photographs of myself when I was a boy."

"I wonder your mother parted with them," Beth said.

"I persuaded her with difficulty," he rejoined complacently. "I have often tried before, but nothing would induce her to part with them, until this time, when a bright idea occurred to me. I told her they were to be published among portraits of celebrated people when my new book comes out, and naturally she liked the idea. Her only son, you know!"

"And are they to be published?" Beth asked.

"Oh—well—of course I hope so—some day," he answered, smiling and hesitating. "But the truth is I got them for you."

Beth did not thank him, but he was too engrossed with his own portraits to notice the omission. She was interested in them, too, when at last he let her look at them.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, showing her a good likeness of himself as she remembered him. "I was a pretty boy then, I think, with my curls! Burning the midnight oil had not bared my forehead in those days, and my beard had not grown. Life was all poetry then!" he sighed affectedly. What had once been spontaneous feeling in him had become a mere recollection, only to be called up by an effort.

"Later it became all excesses, I suppose," said Beth.

"Ah!" he ejaculated in a tone of pleased regret. "I had to live like other men of my standing, you know, and I had to pay for it. The boy was lost, but the man developed. You may think the change a falling off——"

He waited for Beth to express an opinion; but as it was impossible for her to say what she thought of the difference between the conceited, dissipated-looking, hysterical man of many meannesses, and the diffident unspoilt promising boy, she held her peace.

When she had seen the photographs, and he had looked at them himself to his heart's content, he did them up again, and then formally presented her with the packet. "Will you keep them?" he said solemnly.

"Oh no!" she answered with decision. "I am not the proper person to keep them. If they did not belong to your mother, they would be for your wife and children."

"Ah, my wife!" he ejaculated bitterly. "I haven't a word to say against my wife, remember that! Only—you are the one to whom I would confide them."

"I decline the responsibility," Beth said, keeping her countenance with difficulty.

He returned the packet to the breast-pocket of his coat. "I shall carry them here, then," he said, tapping his chest with the points of his fingers, "until you ask for them."

As usual, he stayed a preposterous time that day, and when at last he went, even Beth's kindly forbearance was exhausted, and she determined to see no more of him. He was not the man to take a hint, however, and it was no easy matter to get rid of him. He sent her flowers, for which she did not thank him, books which she did not read; wrote her long letters of the clever kind, discussing topics of the day or remarks she herself had made, which she left unanswered; called, but never found her at home, yet still persisted, until she was fain to exclaim: "Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?"

"It is your own fault," said Angelica. "I warned you that good-nature is wasted on that sort of man."

"But surely he must see that I wish to avoid him," Beth exclaimed.

"Of course he sees it," Angelica rejoined, "but you may be sure that he interprets your reluctance in some way very flattering to himself."

"I shall really be rude to him," Beth said desperately. "He is a most exasperating person, the kind of man to drive a woman mad, and then blame her for it. I pity his

wife!"

Beth stayed with the Kilroys until the end of June, when the season was all but over and everybody was leaving town; and it was the busiest and happiest time she had ever known. She had enjoyed the work, the play, the society, the solitude, and had blossomed forth in that congenial atmosphere both mentally and physically, and become a braver and a better woman.

The Kilroys were to go abroad the day that Beth returned to Slane. The evening before, she went with Angelica to a theatre. But Angelica, being much occupied at the moment with arrangements that had to be made for the carrying on of her special work during her absence, was not able to stay for the whole performance, so she left Beth alone at the theatre, and sent the carriage back to take her home.

Beth, sitting in the corner of a box, had eyes for nothing the whole time but the play, which, being one of those that stimulate the mind, had appealed to her so powerfully that even after it was over she remained where she was a little, deep in thought. On leaving the theatre, she found the footman on the steps looking out for her, and he remained, standing a little behind her, till the carriage came up. While she waited, she was annoyed to see Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce making his way towards her officiously. "You are alone!" he exclaimed, with a note of critical disapproval in his voice, as if the circumstance reflected on somebody.

"Hardly!" Beth said, glancing up at her escort. "But even if I were, Mr. Pounce, I am in London, not in the dark ages, and as sure of respect here, at the doors of a theatre, as I am in my own drawing-room. I believe, by the way," she added lightly, not liking to hurt him by too blunt a snub, "I believe this is the only big city in Europe of which so much can be said; and English women may thank themselves for it. We demand not protection, but respect. Here is the carriage. Good night!" She stepped in as she spoke, and took her seat.

"Oh pray, you really must allow me to see you safe home," he exclaimed, following

her into the carriage and taking the seat beside her before she could remonstrate. The servant shut the door, and they drove away. Beth boiled with indignation, but she thought it more dignified not to show it, and she dreaded to have a scene before the servants. Her demeanour was somewhat frigid, and she left him to open the conversation; but when he spoke she answered him in her usual tone. He, on the contrary, was extremely formal. He stroked his pointed beard, looked out of the window, and made remarks about the weather and the people in the streets, not avoiding the obvious, which was a relief.

The hall-door was opened as soon as the carriage stopped, and they got out.

"Thank you for your escort, and good night," Beth said, holding out her hand to him, but he ignored it.

"I feel faint," he said, and he looked it. "Will you let me come in and sit down a minute, and give me a glass of water?"

"Why, of course," Beth said. "But have something stronger than water. Come this way, into the library. Roberts, bring Mr. Pounce something to revive him."

"What will you have, sir?" the butler asked.

"A glass of water, nothing but a glass of water," Mr. Pounce said, most preciously, sinking into an easy-chair as he spoke.

The butler brought the water, and told Beth that Mr. and Mrs. Kilroy had not come in. She ordered some tea for herself.

Mr. Pounce sipped the water and appeared to revive.

"I have suffered terribly during the last three weeks," he said at last.

"Have you really?" Beth rejoined with concern. "What was the matter?"

"Need you ask!" he ejaculated. "Why, why have you treated me so?"

"Really, Mr. Pounce, I do not see that you have any claim on my special consideration," Beth answered coldly.

"I have the claim of one who is entirely devoted to you," he said.

"I have never accepted your devotion, and I will not have it forced upon me," Beth answered decidedly. "I should like you better, to tell the truth, if you were a little more devoted to your duty."

"You allude to my wife," he said. "Oh, how can I make you understand! But you have said it yourself—duty! What is duty? The conscientious performance of uncongenial tasks. But if a man does his duty, then he deserves his reward. I do my duty with what heart I have for it. No fault can be found with me either as a husband or a citizen. Therefore, as a man, I consider myself entitled to claim my reward."

"I am afraid you are not well," Beth said. "Don't you think you had better go home and rest?"

"Not until we come to an understanding," he answered tragically.

Beth shrugged her shoulders resignedly, folded her hands, and waited, more interested in him as a human specimen in spite of herself than disturbed by anything his attitude foreboded.

There was a bright wood fire burning on the hearth. Mrs. Kilroy liked to have one to welcome her when they had been out late, not for warmth so much as for cheerfulness. The summer midnight was chilly enough, however, for the gentle heat to be grateful; and Beth turned to the blaze and gazed into it tranquilly. The clock on the mantelpiece struck one. Roberts brought in a tray with refreshments on it, and set it down on a small table beside Beth. Before she helped herself she asked Mr. Pounce what he would have, but he curtly declined to take anything. She shrugged her shoulders, and fell-to herself with a healthy appetite.

"How can you—how can you?" he ejaculated several times.

"I'm hungry," she said, laughing, "and I really don't see why I shouldn't eat."

"You have no feeling for me," he complained.

"I have a sort of feeling that you are posing," she answered bluntly; "and I wish you wouldn't. You'd better have some sandwiches."

"How terribly complex life is!" he muttered.

"Life is pretty much what we make of it by the way we live it," she rejoined, taking another sandwich. "We are what we allow ourselves to be. The complexities come of wrong thinking and wrong doing. Right and wrong are quite distinct; there is no mistaking one for the other. In any dilemma we have only to think what is right to be done, and to do it, and there is an end of all perplexities and complexities. Principle simplifies everything."

"I see you have never loved," he declared, "or you would not think the application of principle such a simple thing."

"It is principle that makes love last," Beth answered, "and introduces something permanent into this weary world of change. There is nothing in life so well worth living for as principle; the most exquisite form of pleasure is to be found in the pain of sacrificing one's inclinations in order to live up to one's principles—so much so that in time, when principle and inclination become identical, and we cease to feel tempted, something of joy is lost, some gladness that was wont to mingle with the trouble."

"But principles themselves are mutable," he maintained. "They get out of date. And there are, besides, exceptional characters that do not come under the common law of humanity; exceptional temperaments, and exceptional circumstances to which common principles are inapplicable, or for which they are inadequate."

"That is the hypocrisy of the vicious," Beth said, with her eyes fixed meditatively on the fire, "the people who lay down excellent principles, and publicly profess them for the sake of standing well with society, but privately make exceptions for themselves in any arrangement that may suit their own convenience. Your people of 'exceptional temperament' settle moral difficulties by not allowing any moral

consideration to clash with their inclinations, and misery comes of it. The plea of exceptional character, exceptional circumstances, exceptional temperament, and what not, is merely another way of expressing exceptional selfishness and excusing exceptional self-indulgence."

"Surely you are not content to be a mere slave to social convention!" he exclaimed.

"I am talking of fundamental principles, not of social conventions," she replied; "please to discriminate. Self-control is not slavery, but emancipation; to control our passions makes us lords of ourselves and free of our most galling bonds—the bonds of the flesh."

"What a drawback the want of—er—a proper philosophic training is," he observed. "Culture does a great deal. It makes us more modest, for one thing. I don't suppose you know, for instance, that you are setting up an opinion of your own in opposition to such men as Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer maintained that as the man of genius gave his whole life for the profit of humanity, he had a license of conduct which was not accorded to the rest of mankind."

"If culture leaves us liable to be taken in by a false postulate of any man's, however well turned the postulate or able the man, then I have no respect for culture. The fact that Schopenhauer said such a thing does not prove it true. An assertion like that is a mere matter of opinion. Half the worry in the world is caused by differences of opinion. Let us have the facts and form our own opinions. Have the men of genius who allowed themselves license of conduct been any the better for it? the happier? the greater? Schopenhauer himself, for instance!" She smiled at him with honest eyes when she had spoken, and took another sandwich. "But don't let us talk sophistry and silliness," she proceeded, "nor the kind of abstract that serves as a cover for unrighteousness. Those tricks don't carry conviction to my uncultivated mind. I know how they're done."

"You are lowering yourself in my estimation," he said severely.

"And what comes after that?" she asked.

He shook his head and gazed at her reproachfully. "How can you be so trivial," he said, "in a moment like this?—you who are situated even as I am. If we were to die now, in six months it would be as though we had never been. No one would remember us."

"But what have we done for any one," Beth asked, in her equable way, "that we should be specially remembered?"

He made no reply, and Beth went on with the sandwiches.

"I thought," he began at last, "I did think that you at least would understand and feel for me."

Beth stopped eating and considered a moment.

"Are you in any real trouble?" she asked at last.

He rose and began to pace up and down. "I will tell you," he said, "and leave you to judge for yourself."

Beth looked somewhat ruefully at the tray, and wished that the conversation had been more suited to the satisfaction of an honest appetite.

"I have made it plain to you what my marriage is without blaming anybody," he proceeded. "It is the rock upon which all my hopes were wrecked. I found my ideal. I won her like a man. I haven't a word to say against her. She is a woman who might have made any ordinary man happy; but she has been no help to me. It is not her fault. She has done her best. And it is not my fault."

"Then whose fault is it?" said Beth; "it must be somebody's. I think of marriage as I think of life; it is pretty much what people choose to make it. It does not fail when husband and wife have good principles, and live up to them; and good manners in private as well as in public—not to mention high ideals. When we are not happy in the intimate relations of life, it is generally for some trivial reason—as often as not

because we don't take the trouble to make ourselves agreeable, as because we fail in other duties. I consider it a duty to be agreeable. In married life happiness depends on loyalty, to begin with, the loyalty that will not even let its thoughts stray. All that we want in everyday intercourse is truth and affection, kindness, consideration, and unvarying politeness. If people practised these as a duty from the first, sympathy would eventually come of the effort. Marriage is the state that develops the noblest qualities, and that is why happily married people are the best worth knowing, the most delightful to live amongst. You have no fault to find with your wife, therefore the fault must be in yourself if you are not happy. Do your duty like a man, and cure yourself of it."

"It surprises me to hear you talk in that way," he exclaimed, "you who have suffered so much yourself!"

"I make no pretence of having suffered," she answered. "I have no patience with people who do. We have our destiny in our own hands to make or mar, most of us. If we fail in one thing we shall succeed in another. Life is a fertile garden, full of plants that bud and blossom and bear fruit not once but every season while it lasts. If the crop of happiness fails one year, we should set to work bravely, and cultivate it all the more diligently for the next."

"All this is beside the mark," he responded peevishly. "You are offering me the generalisations that only apply to ordinary people. Allowance must be made for exceptional natures. Look at me! I tell you if I had met the right woman, I should have been at the top of the tree by this time. I have the greatest respect for woman. I believe that her part in life is to fertilise the mind of man; and if the able man does not find the right woman for this purpose, he must remain sterile, and the world will be the loser. I never knew such a woman till I met you; but in you I have discovered one rich in all womanly attributes, mental, moral, and physical; and, beyond these, dowered also with genius, the divine gift—the very woman to help a man to do his

best."

"And what is the man going to do for me?" Beth inquired with a twinkle in her eyes.

"He would surround you with every comfort, every luxury—jewels——"

"Like a ballet-girl!" she interjected. "I am really afraid you are old-fashioned. You begin by offering me gewgaws—the paltry price women set on themselves in the days of their intellectual infancy. We know our value better now."

"You should have all that an ideal woman ought to have," he put in. "What more can a woman require?"

"She would like to know what all she ought to have consists of," Beth replied. "As a rule, a man's ideal woman is some one who will make him comfortable; and he thinks he has done all that is necessary for her when he allows her to contribute to his happiness."

"Ah, be serious!" he ejaculated. "You should be above playing in that cruel way with a man who is in earnest. Hear what I have to say. Remember we are the people who make history. You talk about knowing your own value! You do not know it. Without me you never will know it. You do not know what is being said already about your unpublished work. Those who have read it tell me you promise to be to England what Georges Sand was to France when she appeared, a new light on the literary horizon. But where would Georges Sand have been without De Musset? They owe half their prestige to each other. While they were alive every one talked of them, and now that they are dead reams are written about them. Let us also go down to posterity together. All I want is you; what you want is me. Will you—will you let me be to you—De Musset?"

"What you really do want," said Beth, "is a sense of humour."

"For God's sake, do not be trivial!" he exclaimed. "You cannot think what this means to me—how I have set my heart on it—how I already seem to hear the men at the clubs mention my name and yours when I pass. Night after night I have paced up

and down outside this house, looking up at your window, thinking it all out."

Beth flushed angrily. "I consider that a most improper proceeding," she said, "and I do not know how you can excuse it to yourself."

"I—much may be excused when a man feels as strongly as I do," he protested.

"And how about your wife?" said Beth, "where do you place her in your plans? Has she no feelings to be considered?"

"I shall not hurt her feelings, I assure you, I never do," he answered. "I keep her in a quiet country place so that she may hear no gossip, and I excuse my long absences from home on the plea of work. She understands that my interests would suffer if I were not on the spot."

"In other words, you lie to your wife," said Beth, aghast at the shabby deceit.

"That is scarcely polite language," he rejoined in an offended tone.

"It is correct language," she retorted. "We shall understand what we are talking about much better if we call things by their right names. But are you never afraid of what your wife may be driven to in the dulness of the country, while you are here in town, dancing attendance on other men's wives?"

"Never in the least," he answered complacently. "She is entirely devoted to me and to her duty. Her faith in me is absolute."

"And so you deceive her."

"I am not bound to tell her all my doings," he protested.

"You are in honour bound not to deceive her," Beth said; "and if you deceive her it is none the less low because she does not suspect you. On the contrary. It seems to me that one of the worst things that can happen to a man is to have docile women to deal with."

"I am grieved to hear you talk like that," he said. "I am really grieved. It shows a want of refinement that surprises and shocks me. I maintain that I do her no injury.

These things can always be arranged so that no one is injured; that is all that is necessary."

"These things can never be arranged so that no one is injured," Beth replied. "We injure ourselves, if no one else. We are bound to deteriorate when we live deceitfully. How can you be honest and manly and lead a double life? The false husband in whom his wife believes must be a sneak; and for the man who rewards a good faithful wife by deceiving her, I have no term of contempt sufficiently strong."

"I am disappointed in you," he said. "I should never have suspected that you were so narrow and conventional."

"Are you prepared to defy public opinion?" Beth asked.

"No, that would be gross," he said. "Outwardly we must conform. Only the élite understand these things, and only the élite need know of them. You are of the élite yourself; you must know, you must feel the power, the privilege conferred by a great passion."

"Pray do not class me with the élite if passion is what they respect," Beth said. "Passion at the best—honourable passion—is but the efflorescence of a mere animal function. The passion that has no honourable object is a gaudy, unwholesome weed, rapid of growth, swift and sure to decay."

"Passion is more than that, the passion of which I speak. It is a great mental stimulant," he declared.

"Yes," said Beth, "passion is a great mental stimulant—passion resisted."

"Georges Sand, whom I would have you follow, always declared that she only wrote her best under the influence of a strong passion," he assured her.

"But how do we know that she might not have written better than that best under some holier influence?" Beth rejoined. "George Eliot's serener spirit appeals to me more. I believe it is only those who renounce the ruinous riot of the senses, and find

their strength and inspiration in contemplation, who reach the full fruition of their powers. Ages have not talked for nothing of the pains of passion and the pleasures of love. Love is a great ethical force; but passion, which is compact of every element of doubt and deceit, is cosmic and brutal, a tyrant if we yield to it, but if we master it, an obedient servant willing to work. I would rather die of passion myself, as I might of any other disease, than live to be bound by it."

Pounce, who had been pacing about the room restlessly until now, sat down by the fire, and gazed into it for a little, discomfited. He had come primed with the old platitudes, the old sophistries, the old flatteries, come to treat amicably, and found himself met with armed resistance, his flatteries and platitudes ridiculed, his sophistries exposed, and his position attacked with the confidence and courage of those who are sure of themselves.

"Have you no feeling for me?" he said at last, after a long pause, speaking somewhat hoarsely.

"I feel sorry for you," was the unexpected answer.

"Pity is akin to love," he said.

"Pity is also akin to contempt," she rejoined. "And how can a woman feel anything else for a man who is false to the most sacred obligations? who makes vows and breaks them according to his inclination? If we make a law of our own inclinations, what assurance can we give to any one that we shall ever be true?"

"I have found at last what I have yearned for all my life long," he protested. "I know I shall never waver in my devotion to you."

"That may be," she answered. "But what guarantee could you give me that I should not waver? What comfort would your fidelity be if I tired of you in a month?"

Again he was discomfited, and there was another pause.

"If you did change," he said at last, "I should be the only sufferer."

Beth sat silent for a little, then she said slowly, "What you have ventured to propose to me to-night, Mr. Cayley Pounce, is no more credit to your intelligence than it is to your principles. You come here and find me living openly, in an assured position, with powerful friends, whose affection and respect for me rest on their confidence in me, and with brilliant prospects besides, as you say, which, however, depend to a great extent upon my answering to the expectations I have raised. You allow that I have some ability, some sense, and yet you offer me in exchange for all these——"

"I offer you love!" he exclaimed fervently.

"Love!" she ejaculated with contempt, "you offer me yourself for a lover, and you seek to inspire confidence in me by deceiving your wife. You would have me sacrifice a position of safety for a position of danger—one that might be changed into an invidious position by the least indiscretion—and all for what?"

"For love of you," he pleaded, "that I may help you to develop the best that is in you."

"All for the prestige of having your name associated with mine by men about town in the event of mine becoming distinguished," she interrupted.

He winced.

"I only ask you to do what George Eliot did greatly to her advantage," he answered reproachfully.

"You asked me to do what Georges Sand did greatly to her detriment," Beth said. "George Eliot is an after-thought. And you certainly have no intention of asking me to do what she did, for she acted openly, she deceived no one, and injured no one."

"And you do not blame her?" he exclaimed with a flash of hope.

Beth answered indirectly: "When I think about that, I ask myself have Church and State arranged the relations of the sexes successfully enough to convince us that they cannot be better arranged? Are marriages holier now than they were in the days

when there were no churches to bless them? or happier here than in other countries where they are simple private contracts? And it seems to me that we have no historical proof that the legal bond is necessarily the holiest between man and woman, or that there is never justification for a more irregular compact. I know that 'holy matrimony' is often a state of absolute degradation, especially for the woman; and I believe that two honourable people can live together honourably without the conventional bond, so long as no one else is injured, no previous compact broken. But all the same I think the legal bond is best. It is a safeguard to the family and a restraint on the unprincipled. And, at any rate, all my experience, all my thought, all my hope argue for the dignity of permanence in human relations. Anything else is bad for the individual, for the family, for the state. As civilisation, as evolution advances from lower to higher, we find it makes more and more for monogamy. Our highest types of men and women are monogamous. Those whose contracts are lightly made and lightly broken are trivial people. That useful Oneida Creek experiment proved that the instinct, if not the ideal, of modern humanity is monogamous."

"What was that?" he asked.

"A number of people formed a community at Oneida Creek to live together in a kind of ordered promiscuity, but the experiment failed because it was found eventually that the members were living together secretly in pairs. No. The more I know of life the less I like the idea of allowing any laxity in the marriage relation. In certain cases of course there is good and sufficient reason for two people to separate. But I believe that right-minded people can generally, and almost always do, make their marriages answer. Marriage is compact of every little incident in life, it is not merely made up of one strong feeling, otherwise men and women would be as the animals who pair and part casually; therefore, if two people are disappointed in each other in some things, they must have other things in common to fall back upon. My ideal of life is love in marriage and loyal friends."

"It is interesting to hear you express these views," he said bitterly, "considering what your experience has been."

"I don't see that my petty personal experience has anything to do with the truth of the matter," said Beth, bridling somewhat. "You really have a poor opinion of me if you think I shall allow my judgment to be warped by anything that may happen to myself. Because my own experience is not a happy one, you would have me declare that family life is a mistake! Doubtless many an outcry is raised for no better reason. But do you not see yourself that the tranquil home-life is the most beautiful, the most conducive to the development of all that is best in us—that there is nothing like the delight of being a member of a large and united family. Can you come into a house like this and not see it?"

"This house was not always a model of domestic felicity," he sneered.

"That proves my point," she rejoined. "The difficulties can be lived down if people are right-minded."

"Your argument does not alter the fact that I am a miserable man," he said dejectedly.

"You were not born to be a miserable man," she answered gently, "and 'we always may be what we might have been.' But you have lost much ground, Alfred Cayley Pounce, since the days when you roamed about the cliffs and sandy reaches of Rainharbour with Beth Caldwell, making plans. You had your ideals then, and lived up to them. You cultivated your flowers for delight in their beauty, and went to your modelling for love of the work. You gave your flowers to your friends with an honest intention to please; you modelled with honest ambition to do good work. In those days you were above caring to cultivate the acquaintance of the best people. You had touched the higher life at that time; you had felt such rapture in it as has never come to you since—even among the best people—I am sure; yet you fell away; you deserted Beth—not basely, perhaps, but weakly; and you have been

deteriorating ever since."

He had started straight in his chair when she mentioned Beth Caldwell, and was staring at her now with puzzled intentness.

"What do you know about Beth?" he said quickly. "Have you ever met her?"

She smiled. "I can honestly say I never have," she answered. But she looked away from him into the fire as she spoke, and he recognised the set of her head on her shoulders as she turned it; he had noted it often.

"God!" he exclaimed, "what a blind idiot I have been—Beth! Beth!" He threw himself down on his knees beside her chair, caught her hand, and covered it with kisses.

Beth snatched her hand away, and he returned embarrassed to his seat and sat gazing at her for a little, then took out his handkerchief and suddenly burst into tears.

"What a mess I have made of my life!" he exclaimed. "Everything that would have been best for me has been within reach at some time or other, but I invariably took the wrong thing and let the right one go. But, Beth, I was only a boy then, and I suffered when they separated us."

This reflection seemed to ease his mind on the subject. That she might also have suffered did not occur to him; as usual his whole concern was for himself.

"Yes, you are right, Beth," he proceeded. "I have deteriorated; but 'we always may be what we might have been'—and you have been sent to me again as a sign that it is not too late for me. You were my first love, my earliest ideal, and I have not changed, you see, I have been true to you; for, although I never suspected you were Beth, I recognised my rightful mate in you the moment we met. Yes, I was on the right road when we were boy and girl together, but the promise of that time has not been fulfilled. All the poetry in me has lain dormant since the days when you drew it forth. I gave up modelling when I went to the 'Varsity because they didn't care for that kind of thing in my set, you know. They were all men of position, who wouldn't

associate with artists unless they were at the top of the tree; clever fellows, and good themselves at squibs and epigrams. If you'd ever been to the 'Varsity you'd know that a man must adapt himself to his environment if he means to get on. My dream had been to make my visions of beauty visible, as you used to suggest; but I had to give that up, there was nothing else for it. Still, I was not content to do nothing, to be nobody; therefore, when I abandoned the clay, I took to the pen; I gave up the marble for the manuscript. Many men of position have written, you know, and so long as you didn't mug, fellows didn't mind. In fact, they thought you smart if they fancied you could dash things off without an effort. You understand now why I am a literary man instead of a sculptor."

"Perfectly," Beth said drily. "It was in those days, I suppose, that you were bitten by French literature, and began to idealise mean intrigues, and to delight in foul matter if the manner of its presentation were an admirable specimen of style."

"Ah," he said solemnly, "style is everything."

"It is all work of word-turning and little play of fancy with those who make style everything," said Beth, glad to get away from love, "and that makes your Jack-of-style a dull boy and morbid in spite of his polish. Less style and more humour would be the saving of some of you, the making of others."

"Flaubert wrote 'Madame Bovary' six times," he assured her impressively.

"I wonder how much it lost each time," said Beth. "But you know what Flaubert himself said about style before he had done—just what I am saying!"

"I cannot understand your being insensible to the charms of style," he said, evading the thrust.

"I am not. I only say it is not of the most vital importance. Thackeray was a Titan—well, look at his slipshod style in places, his careless grammar, his constant tautology. He knew better, and he could have done better, and it would have been well if he had, I don't deny it; but his work would not have been a scrap more vital,

nor he himself the greater. I have seen numbers of people here in town studying art. They go to the schools to learn to draw, not because they have ideas to express, apparently, but in the hope that ideas will come when they know how to express them. And I think it is the same in literature. One school talks of style as if it were the end and not the means. They form a style, but have nothing to express that is worth expressing. It would be better to pray the gods to send them the matter; if the matter is there in the mind it will out, and the manner will form itself in the effort to produce it—so said the great."

There was a pause, during which Alfred Cayley Pounce sighed heavily and Beth looked at the clock.

"You were stimulating as a child, Beth," he said at last, "and you are stimulating still. Think what it would be to me to have you always by my side! I cannot—I cannot let you go again now that I have found you! We were boy and girl together."

"That does not alter anything in our present position," Beth answered; "nor does it affect my principles in any way. But even if I had been inclined—if I had had no principles, I should have been just clever enough to know better than to run any risk of the kind you suggest. You do not know perhaps that you have injured your own standing already—that there are houses in which you are not welcome because you are suspected of intrigue."

"Me—suspected of intrigue!" he exclaimed. "It isn't possible!"

Beth laughed. "If it is so disagreeable to be suspected," she said, "what would it be to be found out! And what have you gained by it? What says the Dhammapada? 'There is bad reputation, and the evil way (to hell); there is the short pleasure of the frightened in the arms of the frightened, and the king imposes heavy punishment; therefore let no man think of his neighbour's wife.'"

"It is evident that you don't trust me," he said in an injured tone. "Ah, Beth! does the fact that we were boy and girl together not weigh with you?"

"Well, it would," Beth said soberly, "even if worldly wisdom were my only guide in life. I should think of the time that we got into that scrape, and you wriggled out of it, leaving me to shift for myself as best I could; and I should remember the boy is father to the man. But I have been trying to show you that worldly wisdom is not my only guide in life. I have professed the most positive puritan principles of conduct, and given you the reasons upon which they are based, yet you persist; you ignore what I say as if you had not heard me or did not believe me, and pursue the subject as if you were trying to weary me into agreement. And you have wearied me, but not into agreement; so, if you please, we will not discuss it any longer."

"You will be sorry, I think, some day for the way you have treated me," he exclaimed, showing temper; "and what you expect to gain by it I cannot imagine."

"Oh, please," Beth protested, "I am not imbued with the commercial spirit of the churches. I do not expect a percentage in the way of reward on every simple duty I do."

"Virtue is its own reward," he sneered.

"It has been said that 'the pleasure of virtue is one which can only be obtained on the express condition of its not being the object sought,'" she rejoined good-naturedly. "Try it, Alfred, and see if you do not become a happier man insensibly. Order your thoughts to other and nobler ends, for thoughts are things, and we are branded or beautified by them. An American scientist has been making experiments to test the effect of thought on the body, and has found that a continuous train of evil thought injures the health and spoils the personal appearance, but high and holy thoughts have a beautifying effect. Be a man and embrace a manly creed. Live for others, live openly. Deceit is treachery, and treachery is cowardice of the most despicable kind. Life has to be lived. It might as well be lived earnestly. Life is better lived when it is held earnestly. Personally I detest all flippancy and cynicism, all cheapening of serious subjects by lack of reverence. Irreverence portends defects of character and

poverty of intellect. All serious subjects are sacred subjects, and to treat them with levity or insincerity is to prove yourself a person to be avoided."

Alfred Cayley Pounce was stooping forward with his elbows on his knees and his face between his hands, gazing blankly into the fire. The light shone on his bald forehead and accentuated the lines which wounded vanity, petty purposes thwarted, and an ignoble life had written prematurely on his face, and his attitude emphasised the attenuation of his body. He looked a poor, peevish, neurotic specimen; and although he had only himself to thank for it, Beth, remembering the promise of his youth, felt a qualm of pity.

"What a mistake my marriage has been!" he ejaculated at last. "But I doubt if I should ever have found a woman who would have understood me enough to be all in all to me. For a man of my temperament there is nothing but celibacy."

"I don't believe in celibacy at all," Beth said cheerfully. "Celibacy is an attempt to curb a healthy instinct with a morbid idea. He is the best man and the truest gentleman who honourably fulfils every function of life. And I don't believe your marriage was of necessity a mistake either. But if you must be miserable, be loyal as well. You will find that the best in the end. If, being miserable, we are also disloyal, then we are insensibly degraded—so insensibly, perhaps, that we are not conscious of any part of the process, and only become aware of what has been going on when we have to face a crisis, and find ourselves prepared to act ignobly, and to justify the act with specious excuses." She glanced up at the mantelpiece. "Come," she said, "it is four o'clock, and I am sleepy. I must go to bed."

He started to his feet. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "you can talk of being sleepy when I——"

"Never mind about that now," said Beth, yawning frankly. "Everybody has gone to bed and forgotten us, I suppose. I shall have to let you out."

She gathered the evening cloak she had come back in from the theatre about her as

she spoke, and led the way. He let her open the hall-door for him. It was grey daylight in the street. At the foot of the steps a policeman was standing on the pavement making a note in a little book.

"Is it any use whistling for a hansom at this hour?" Beth asked.

The policeman looked up at her. "I'll try, miss, if you like," he said.

He whistled several times, but there was no response, and Alfred Cayley Pounce at last crammed his hat down on his head with a peevish show of impatience, and walked off down the street, without a word of leave-taking. The fact that Beth was sleepy had wounded his vanity more than any word she had said. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders as she watched him depart, then went down on to the pavement and strolled about, enjoying the freshness. The policeman kept watch and ward, meanwhile, at the open door, and, before she went in, Beth stood and talked to him a little in her pretty kindly way. She found his tone and manner in their simple directness strengthening and refreshing to the mind after the tortuous posings of Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce.

CHAPTER XLIX

At breakfast next morning Beth described the way in which Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce had forced his attentions upon her the night before. Mr. Kilroy was exceedingly angry. "He shall not come into any house of mine again," he declared, and gave the old butler Roberts, who happened to be the only servant in the room at the moment, orders to that effect. "Do you mean to say," he asked Beth, "that the fellow had the assurance to tell you he had actually been hanging about the house?"

"He seemed rather proud of that, as of something poetical and romantic," Beth answered.

"I suppose the illness was all an excuse," Angelica observed.

"I don't know," Beth said. "He certainly looked ill, but he's a poor neurotic creature now, and might easily work himself up into a state of hysterical collapse, I should think. What was your impression, Roberts?"

"He looked real bad, ma'am; and well he might, the way he's been goin' on, 'anging about 'alf the night We've all seen im," Roberts rejoined imperturbably.

"Why didn't you report it to me?" Mr. Kilroy wanted to know.

"Well, sir, I couldn't be sure it was this 'ouse, sir, in partic'lar. You see there's a good many in the square, sir. I was just waitin' to make sure. He come after you'd gone last night, and said he 'ad to meet the ladies, but he'd forgotten where they were goin' to, and James, suspectin' nothin', told 'im."

"Well, I don't think he will trouble me again," Beth said cheerfully, concerned to see Mr. Kilroy so seriously annoyed. "I told him what I thought of him in such unmistakable terms that he walked out of the house without any form of farewell."

Angelica looked grave. "I am afraid you've made a spiteful enemy, Beth," she observed. "That kind of cat-man is capable of any meanness if his vanity is wounded; if he can injure you, he will."

"Oh, as to that, I don't see what he can do," said Mr. Kilroy.

"He can supply the press with odious personal paragraphs, spread calumnies at the clubs, and write scratch-cat criticisms on the book when it appears," Angelica said. "There are plenty of people who will listen to that kind of man, and take their opinions from him."

"But what does it matter," said Beth in her tolerant way. "All you whom I love and respect will judge me and my work for yourselves. If you are pleased, I shall rejoice; if you find fault, I shall be grateful and profit. But I should be a poor shallow thing, like society itself, if I allowed myself to be disturbed or influenced by the Alfred Cayley Pounces of the press. And as to society!" Beth laughed. "At first, when I went anywhere, I used to ask myself all the time when would the pleasure begin!

But now I am younger, thanks to you; and I enjoy everything. I look on and laugh. But for the rest, I must be indifferent. It would be an insult to one's intellect to set any store on such tinsel as that of which the verdicts of society are made."

Beth had been thinking a good deal about Dan lately, and had come to the conclusion that, with all his faults, he was very much to be preferred to the Alfred Cayley Pounce kind of creature. She had more hope of him, somehow; and she went back determined that it should not be her fault if they did not arrive at a better understanding. He gave her a good opportunity on the evening of her arrival. They were sitting out in the garden after dinner, on that comfortable seat by the privet hedge which Beth overlooked from her secret chamber. Behind them the hedge was thick, and in front a border of flowers surrounded a little green lawn, which was shut in beyond by a belt of old trees in full foliage. It was an exquisite evening, warm and still; and Dan, having dined well, and begun a good cigar, was in a genial mood. As he grew older he attached a more enormous importance than ever to meals. If the potatoes were boiled when he wanted them mashed or baked, it made a serious difference to him, and he would grow red in the face and shout at the servants if his eggs for breakfast were done a moment more or less than he liked. He was a ridiculous spectacle in his impatience if dinner were late, and a sad one in his sensual satisfaction if it answered to his expectations. Beth watched him at such times with sensations that passed through various degrees of irritation from positive contempt to the kindly tolerance one feels for the greed of a hungry child. Dan had been "doing himself well," as he called it, during her absence, and was looking somewhat bloated and blotched. His wonderful complexion was no longer so clear and bright as it had been; the red was redder and the white opaque. A few more years and his character would be seen distinctly in the shape and colour of his face; and Beth, who had marked the first signs of deterioration slowly set in, was saddened by the progress it had made. Alfred Cayley Pounce would succumb to his nerves, Daniel Maclure to his tissues; the one was earning atrophy for himself, the

other fatty degeneration. Beth was right. The real old devil is disease, and our evil appetites are his ministers.

"You seem solemn this evening," Daniel said to her. "I suppose you're regretting your friends."

"Yes," said Beth; "but I have been away long enough, and I am glad to be back. I saw some things in the great wicked city that made me think—Dan," she broke off abruptly, "I wish you and I were better friends. So very little would bring us to a right understanding, and I am sure we should both be the better and the happier."

"Speak for yourself," said Dan complacently. "Personally, I feel good enough and happy enough. We have our differences, like other people, I suppose; but whose fault is that, I should like to know?"

"Partly mine," Beth acknowledged. "I don't think I should have been so defiant. But if you had been different, I should have been different."

"If I had been different!" he ejaculated, knocking the ash from the end of his cigar. "Well, I'd like to know what fault you have to find with me? Different indeed!"

"That is the principal one," Beth answered, smiling. "Your great fault is that you don't believe you have any faults."

"Oh, well," he conceded, "of course I know I've my faults. Who hasn't? But I'll undertake to say that they're a man's faults. Now, come!"

This reflection seemed to deepen his self-satisfaction, as if it must be allowed that he was all the better for the faults to which he alluded. As he spoke, Beth seemed to see him at her wardrobe with his hand in the pocket of one of her dresses, hunting for treasonable matter to satisfy his evil suspicions, and she sighed. She would not acknowledge to herself that she was fighting for the impossible, yet even at the outset she half despaired of ever making him understand. It is pitiful to think of her, with her tender human nature, seeking a true mate where human law required that she should find one, only to be repulsed and baffled and bedraggled herself in the

end if she persevered. A good man might have failed to comprehend Beth, but a good man would have felt the force of goodness in her, and would have reverenced her. Maclure recognised no force in her and felt no reverence; all that was not animal in her was as obscure to him as to the horse in his stable that whinnied a welcome to her when she came because he expected sugar. It is pleasant to give pleasure; but there must be more in marriage for it to be satisfactory than free scope to exercise the power to please.

"Well, look here, Dan," Beth pursued. "I'll make a bargain with you. If you will do your best to correct your faults—what I think your faults—I'll do my best to correct all you find in me. Only let us discuss them temperately, and try conscientiously to live up to some ideals of thought and conduct."

Dan smoked on silently for a little, then he said, with some show of irritation tempering his self-satisfaction, "Well, all I can say is, I cannot for the life of me see what you have to complain of."

"I have to complain of your conduct with Bertha Petterick, for one thing," Beth answered desperately. "Let us be frank with each other. I know that you have not been loyal to me. I saw you together here on this seat the day you gave her the bracelet. I saw you put it on her arm and kiss her; and that decided me to go to Ilverthorpe."

Dan looked round about him with an altered countenance, but nothing that he knew to be a window overlooked the spot, neither was it possible to see through the thickness of the privet hedge, nor from any other point, without being seen.

"You must have imagined it!" he exclaimed.

"I did not imagine that bracelet," Beth replied.

"Well, even if I did give her the bracelet," he said, "you're not going to be nasty-minded enough to insinuate that there was anything in that!"

"There was deceit in it," Beth answered, "and in your whole attitude towards that

girl while she was under this roof. If we act so that we cannot be open and honest about our dealings with people, then there must be something wrong. Life would be intolerable if it had to be lived among people any one of whom, while professing friendship for us, was deceiving us in some vital particular. From the moment that we act on our own inclinations rather than up to what the noblest of our friends expect of us, we have gone wrong. But you and I are both young enough, Dan, to put the past behind us, and forget it. Let us start together afresh in another place, where there will be no evil associations, nothing to vex us by reminding us of unhappy days; and let us be loyal to each other, and honest and open in every act, making due allowance for each other, and doing our best to help and please each other. We shall be happy, I am sure. You will see we shall be very happy."

Dan took his cigar out of his mouth, and flicked the ash from the end of it with his little finger: "You'd have me give up my appointment here, I suppose, and the half of my income with it?"

"Most of all I would have you give up your appointment here," she answered earnestly. "No honest woman can endure to have her husband pandering to vice. It would not be so much of a sacrifice either," she added, "for the next session will end this iniquity."

"Thanks to the influence of you cursed women," he exclaimed.

"Thanks to our influence, yes," she answered dispassionately, "and to some sense of justice in men."

"If you knew how men talk about women who meddle in these matters," he said, "you would keep out of them, I think."

"Oh, I know the kind of thing they say," she answered, smiling; "but the people you mean have no influence nowadays. The blatant protest of the debauched against our demand for a higher standard of life is not the voice of the community. It is the cry of those who feel their existence threatened, who only live upon lies, and must be

extinguished when the inevitable day of reckoning comes which shall expose them. Even now the kind of man who catches at every straw of opinion which shall secure to him his sacred carnal rights, at no matter what cost of degradation and disease to women, is out of date, and we pay no attention to him."

"Oh, women!" Dan jeered. "That is all very fine! But who the devil cares what women think?"

"Now don't be old-fashioned, Dan," Beth answered, laughing. "When women only did what they were told, men used to vow at their feet that there was nothing they couldn't accomplish, their influence was so great. But now that women have proved that what they choose to do they can do, men sneer at their pretensions to power, and try to depreciate them by comparing the average woman with men in the front rank of their professions. Really, men are disheartening."

The evening calm had deepened about them, a big bright star was shining above the belt of trees, and waves of perfume from the flowers made the air a delight to inhale.

"What a heavenly night!" Beth pursued. "Who would live in London when they might be here?"

"Well, that's consistent!" he exclaimed, "after entreating me to leave the place!"

"This is not the only peaceful spot in the world," she said with a little sigh; "and I would rather live in London even than have you here in an invidious position. Dan, give it up, there's a good fellow! and learn to look on life from this newer, wider point of view. You will find interests and pleasures in it you have never even suspected, I assure you, and you will never regret it."

"For the life of me," he said again, throwing the end of his cigar into the bushes with an irritated jerk of his arm,—"for the life of me, I cannot see what you have to complain of; and I shall certainly not give up any bird in the hand for two such birds in the bush as you promise me." He rose as he spoke, and shook out first one leg and then the other to straighten his trousers. "I'm going out," he added. "I've a patient to

see. Ta! ta! Take care of yourself."

Some little time after Beth's return, they were sitting at lunch together, and Maclure was reading a daily paper.

"Matters look bad for that fellow, Cayley Pounce," he observed.

"Why, what has he been doing?" Beth asked.

"Poking a fellow's eye out with his umbrella," Dan answered. "He was talking to a girl in the street one night, and got into a row with some roughs, and jabbed one in the eye with his umbrella, and the fellow died. The inquiry is now going on, and it's likely the coroner's jury will bring in a verdict of manslaughter against Mr. Cayley Pounce. His defence is that he wasn't anywhere near that part of London on that particular night, and it's a case of mistaken identity; but as he refuses to say where he was, and produces no evidence by way of an alibi, that story won't avail him much."

"What night was it?" said Beth.

"On the 30th, just after midnight," Dan read out of the paper.

"Why, that was the night he insisted on escorting me home from the theatre," Beth exclaimed. "He did not leave the Kilroys' until four o'clock in the morning."

"Then why on earth doesn't he say so?" Dan asked.

"I can't imagine," Beth said. "I let him out myself; everybody else had gone to bed. And I'm sure of the time, because I thought he was never going away, and I was tired; and I looked at the clock and said, 'It's four o'clock, and I must go to bed.'"

Dan's face had darkened. "Do you mean to say you were sitting up with him alone?" he demanded.

"Yes, for my sins!" Beth answered in a tone of disgust. "The Kilroys were out when I returned from the theatre, and did not come in till very late; and they went straight upstairs, supposing I had gone to bed. As a rule they come into the library first. So

Mr. Cayley Pounce was left on my hands."

"Then," said Dan, pushing his plate away from him with a clatter, "it is obvious why he is holding his tongue. He is determined not to compromise you."

"Thank you!" said Beth, bridling. "I should think I am not so easily compromised."

"Gad!" Dan ejaculated, "I don't know what you call easily compromised! A man takes you home from a theatre, and stays with you alone till four o'clock in the morning; if that isn't compromising I don't know what is. No jury in the world would acquit you, and the fellow knows that perfectly well, and is holding his tongue to screen you."

"I should think it's a great deal more likely he's holding his tongue in order to get the credit of it," Beth observed drily. "It is a mere pose. He knows I shall have to come forward to clear him if he doesn't explain himself. I suppose I must go at once and stop the case; but if it were not for his wife I declare I should hesitate. What is the form of procedure? You will come with me, of course?"

"I go with you!" Dan exclaimed brutally, "and see you make a public exhibition of yourself, and bring disgrace on my name in a court of justice! I'm damned if I do! And what's more, if you go, you don't return to this house. I've too much self-respect for that. You hadn't much of a reputation when I married you, and if you lose the little you've got, you can go and I shall divorce you. My wife must be above suspicion."

Beth folded her serviette slowly while he was speaking, and, when he stopped, she rose from the table.

"It is unfortunate for me," she said, "that the Kilroys have gone abroad. They know the man and the facts of the case, and would have advised me. In their absence I must do what seems right without advice. I cannot see that I have any choice in the matter. You could make it perfectly easy for me by supporting me; if you do not support me I must go alone. I shall pack up and go to town at once in order to appear

in court to-morrow morning, and I shall telegraph to Roberts, the Kilroys' butler, to meet me there, and confirm my story. There are the coachman and footman too, and the police constable—witnesses enough, in all conscience."

"You are determined to go?" Dan demanded angrily.

"I must go," she rejoined.

"It is going to the devil, then," said Dan deliberately; "and I always said you would. Remember, you don't return to this house!"

When Beth arrived in town, she found that there would be no need to appear in the case at all, for the Kilroys' old butler Roberts had seen the name of Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce in the papers, and had unwittingly frustrated his manœuvre by going to the coroner's court himself and volunteering to give evidence. He was accompanied by the footman who had been out with the carriage on the night in question, and the two together had no difficulty in proving an alibi. Thus, in an ordinary commonplace manner, what had promised to be the triumph of his life, the moment when he should stand confessed to the world a chivalrous gentleman, sacrificing himself to save a lady of prepossessing appearance, was converted into another of the many failures of Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce. This ended the case so far as he and Beth were concerned; but with regard to Dan, Beth recognised that her position remained the same. There was no return for her from the step she had taken, and she would have to begin her life anew.

CHAPTER L

Beth went out into the world alone, knowingly and willingly. The prospect had no terrors for her, neither did she feel any regret for the past. She took it all as a matter of course. The days with Dan at Slane were over, but life had still to be lived, and she set to work to arrange it and live it to the best of her ability; what she most urgently felt being merely that there were things she must see to at once and settle

about, and that she was rather pushed for time. The first thing she did in London was to buy a map so that she might find her way about economically, and some newspapers recommended to her by the stationers as likely to have advertisements of respectable lodgings in them. She studied these over a cup of coffee and a roll, cut all the promising addresses out of the papers, found on the map the best way to go by omnibus or railway, and then set off on her quest, taking the red Hammersmith 'bus first of all, and explored West Kensington. Her efforts in that direction were not successful. Everything she saw at first was dear, dingy, and disheartening. Landladies, judging her by her appearance, would only show her their best rooms. When she explained that all she wanted was a nice, clean, roomy attic because she was poor, they became suspicious, and declared that she wasn't likely to get anything of that sort in a good neighbourhood. Beth wondered what the bad neighbourhoods were like if the one she was in were a good one. Later in the afternoon she found herself on the Bayswater side in a street of tall houses off the main thoroughfare. They were good houses, that must have been built for the families of affluent people, and Beth was afraid it would be useless to ask at any of them for the modest kind of accommodation which was all she could afford. While she hesitated, however, standing in the street before the one she had come to find, the hall-door opened, and a young man came out. He and Beth looked at each other as he ran down the steps, and Beth saw something so attractive in his face that she spoke to him without hesitation.

"Can you tell me," she said, "if they have any attics to let at a moderate price in this house?"

"Well, I got one out of them," he said, smiling, "and I guess there's another empty that would just about hold you, dress boxes and all. I'll ring the bell, if you'll allow me, and get Ethel Maud Mary to show you up. You'll make a better bargain with her than with her ma."

The door was opened at this moment by a grimy servant.

"Gwendolen, will you give my compliments to Miss Ethel, if you please," the young man said with grave formality, "and ask her if she will be so good as to speak to me here for a moment."

Gwendolen nodded and retired to the back regions, whence presently a plump, fair-complexioned, yellow-haired young person came hurrying with a look of inquiry on her face.

"Oh, Miss Ethel," the young man began, taking off his hat, "I'm real sorry to trouble you, but I want to introduce this young lady. I've been recommending her to get a room here. I know she'll find you moderate and comfortable, and the situation is one of the best for getting into town."

Beth recognised the wording of the advertisement that had brought her to the house.

"It is handy," Miss Ethel agreed. "But we've nothing but an attic unlet. Are you in Art, miss?"

"No, Literature," Beth answered, with presence of mind.

"Lady's, I suppose?" Ethel Maud Mary observed, meaning lady's papers, and glancing at Beth's dress. "You've got to be smart for that, and it doesn't leave much for living. Come this way, miss, please. And thank you, Mr. Brock, for mentioning us."

She led the way upstairs, talking all the time with cheerful inconsequence. "He's a real gentleman is Mr. Brock, as doubtless you know, though an American, and dry, and you never know which is his fun; and in Art, which is not much to reckon on, and that's why I thought that you might be, though you do look more like Fashion. Art is apt to be towzled, but why, goodness knows. You're not used to the stairs, I see. I wish it wasn't such a height up."

"Oh, I don't mind the height, if the price is proportionately low," Beth said. "I must

live within my means, and keep out of debt, you know."

"That's a rhyme—low and you know. Did you do it on purpose?" Ethel Maud Mary asked with interest.

"No," said Beth.

"Then that's for luck," said Ethel. "You'll keep out of debt all right. I see it in your face. And I know a face when I see it. They'll keep you on the Lady's for the sake of your appearance, even if you're not much use. You're elegant and speak nice, and that's what they want to go about for them, particularly if it's a man."

"If what is a man?" Beth asked.

"The editor, you know. We 'ad a young lady here who used to say she'd undertake to get an extra half-sovereign out of any editor in town; but editresses there was no managing. Which is yours?"

"I don't know yet," said Beth. "I've only just arrived."

"What are you getting?"

"A pound a week," Beth answered, that being her exact income; "but I have a little by me besides, to keep me going till I get started, you know."

Ethel Maud Mary nodded her yellow head intelligently, and began to climb the narrow flight of stairs which led to the attics, moving her lips the while, as if she were making calculations. There was no carpet on this last flight of stairs, but the boards were well washed, and the attic itself smelt sweet and clean.

"This is it," Ethel explained. "Mr. Brock is in the other, next door. There's only two of them. This is the biggest room, but the other is north, and has the biggest window, and being in Art, he's got to think of the light. If you look out there to the right, you'll see some green in the Park. You'll like the Park. It's no distance if you're a walker. Now, just let's see. I've been calculating about the money. Mr. Brock pays fourteen shillings, but you'll not be able to afford more than seven out of a pound.

You shall have it for seven."

"But surely that will be a loss to you!" Beth exclaimed.

Ethel sat herself down on the side of the bed and smiled up at her. "I'll not pretend we couldn't get more if we waited," she said; "but waiting's a loss, and we're doing very well downstairs, and can afford to pick and choose. You'll find in business that it pays better in the end to get a good tenant you can trust, who'll stay, than one who gives you double the amount for a month, and then goes off with the blankets."

"You don't deceive me a bit," said Beth, sitting down opposite to her on a cane-bottomed chair. "Your good-heartedness shines out of your face. But I'm not going to take a mean advantage of it. There's an honest atmosphere in this house that would suit me, I feel, and I am sure I shall do well here; but all the same I won't come unless you make a bargain with me. If I take the rooms for such a small sum now, while I am poor, will you let me make it up to you when I succeed? I shall succeed!" The last words burst from her involuntarily, forced from her with emphasis in spite of herself.

"That's what I like to hear; that's spirit, that is!" Ethel Maud Mary exclaimed, nodding approvingly. "You'll do all right. So it's a bargain. Washing's included, you know. You didn't bring your box, did you?"

"No, I left my luggage at Charing Cross when I arrived last night. I slept at the hotel," Beth answered.

"At the Charing Cross Hotel? Gracious! that must have cost you a small fortune."

"I didn't know what to do," Beth explained apologetically.

"You should have tried the Strand, Surrey Street, and there. You'd have got bed and breakfast for five shillings, and that's more than enough. However, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You'll have to fetch your luggage, I suppose. You can go by train from Nottinghill Gate to Charing Cross. It's about as cheap as the 'bus, and much quicker. I'll come with you, and show you the way, if you like. A breath of fresh air

will do me good."

"Yes, do come," Beth answered gratefully, glad of the kindly human fellowship. "What is your name, may I ask?"

"Ethel Maud Mary Gill; and what is yours, if you please?"

"Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure."

Beth had emptied her secret chamber and packed all her little possessions before she left Slane. She had sometimes suspected that Dan would be glad of an excuse to get rid of her, to relieve himself of the cost of her keep; and that he would do it in some gross way, and so as to put all the blame of it upon her, if possible, she also expected. She was therefore prepared to consider the matter settled the moment he threatened her, and would have felt it useless to remonstrate even had she been inclined. But she was not inclined. She had for years done everything patiently that any one in any code of morality could expect of her in such a marriage, and no good had come of it. As Daniel Maclure was, so would he remain for ever; and to associate with him intimately without being coarsened and corrupted was impossible. Beth had fought hard against that, and had suffered in the struggle; but she had been lowered in spite of herself, and she knew it, and resented it. She was therefore as glad to leave Maclure as he was to get rid of her; and already it seemed as if with her married life a great hampering weight had fallen from her, and left her free to face a promising future with nothing to fear and everything to hope. Poverty was pleasant in her big bright attic, where all was clean and neat about her. There she could live serenely, and purify her mind by degrees of the garbage with which Dan's habitual conversation had polluted it.

The settling-in occupied her for some days, and the housekeeping was a puzzle when she first began. She had only been able to bring the most precious of her possessions, her books and papers, and clothes enough for the moment, away with her from Slane; the rest she had left ready packed to be sent to her when she should

be settled. When she wrote to Maclure for them, she sent him some housekeeping keys she had forgotten to leave behind, and an inventory of everything she had had charge of, which she had always kept carefully checked. He acknowledged the receipt of this letter, and informed her that he had gone over the inventory himself, and found some of the linen in a bad state and one silver teaspoon missing. Beth replied that the linen had been fairly worn out, but she could not account for the missing spoon, and offered to pay for it. Dr. Maclure replied by return of post on a post-card that the price was seven shillings. Beth sent him a postal order for that amount. He then wrote to say that the cost of the conveyance of the luggage to the station was half-a-crown. Beth sent him half-a-crown, and then the correspondence ended. She received letters from some of her relations, however, to whom Maclure had hastened to send his version of the story. Poor old Aunt Grace Mary was the only one, who did not accept it. "Write and tell me the truth of the matter, my dear," she said. The others took it for granted that Beth could have nothing to say for herself, and her brother Jim was especially indignant and insulting, his opinion of her being couched in the most offensive language. Having lived with disreputable women all his life, he had the lowest possible opinion of the whole sex, his idea being that any woman would misconduct herself if she had the chance and was not well watched. He warned Beth not to apply to him if she should be starving, or to claim his acquaintance should she meet him in the street. Beth's cheeks burned with shame when she read this letter and some of the others she received, and she hastened to destroy them; but the horror they set up in her brought on a nervous crisis such as she had suffered from in the early days when Dan first brought her down to his own low level of vice and suspicion, and turned her deadly sick. She answered none of these letters, and, by dint of resolutely banishing all thought of them and of the writers, she managed in time to obliterate the impression; but she had to live through some terrible hours before she succeeded.

Once settled in her attic home, she returned to the healthy, regular, industrious habits

which had helped her so much in the days when she had been at her best. Her life was of the simplest, but she had to do almost everything for herself, such time as Gwendolen could command for attendance being wholly insufficient to keep the attic in order. Her daily duties kept her in health, however, by preventing indolence either of mind or body, and so were of infinite use. She had added a few things to the scanty furniture of her attic—a new bath, a second-hand writing-table, book-shelves with a cupboard beneath for cups, saucers, and glasses, and a grandfather chair—all great bargains, as Ethel Maud Mary assured her. Ethel Maud Mary's kindness was inexhaustible. She took Beth to the second-hand shop herself, and showed her that the writing-table and book-shelves would be as good as new when they were washed and rubbed up a bit; and all the grandfather chair wanted was a new cretonne cover at sixpence a yard—four yards, two shillings, and she could make it herself. She also advised Beth to buy a little oil-stove, the only one she knew of that really didn't smell if you attended to it yourself; and a tin to hold oil for it—crystal oil at sevenpence a gallon, the best.

"You can do all you want with that, and keep yourself warm enough too when the weather's bad," she said; "and there's no waste, for you can turn it out when you've done with it. Fires are too dear for you at sixpence a scuttle for coals, and they're dirtier besides, and a trouble to light and look after. You'll find it as good as a lamp, too, if you're doing nothing particular at night."

When Beth had made a cosy corner of the window for work, arranged her books, put her ornaments about on mantelpiece and brackets, hung her pictures and the draperies she had used in her secret chamber, spread the rugs and covered the grandfather chair, her attic looked inviting. The character of her little possessions gave the poor place a distinction which enchanted Ethel Maud Mary.

Beth fetched up the water overnight for her bath in the morning, and made coffee for her breakfast on the little oil-stove. She lived principally on bread and butter, eggs,

sardines, salad, and slices of various meats bought at a cook-shop and carried home in a paper. Sometimes, when she felt she could afford it, she had a hot meal at an eating-house for the good of her health; but she scarcely required it, for she never felt stronger in her life, and so long as she could get good coffee for her breakfast and tea for her evening meal, she missed none of the other things to which she had been accustomed. She made delicious coffee in a tin coffee-pot, and brewed the best tea she had ever drunk in brown earthenware, which Ethel Maud Mary considered the best thing going for tea. She used to join Beth in a cup up in the attic, but she never came empty-handed. Dull wet days, likely to be depressing, were the ones on which her yellow head appeared oftenest at the top of the attic stairs.

"Miss Maclure, may I come in?" she would say, after knocking.

And Beth would answer, rising from her work with a smile of welcome, "Yes, by all means. I'm delighted to see you. You take the big chair and I'll make the tea. I'm dying for a cup."

Then Ethel Maud Mary would uncover something she held in her hand, which would prove to be cakes, or hot buttered toast and watercresses, or a bag of shrimps and some thin bread and butter; and Beth, sparkling at the kindness, would exclaim, "I never was so spoilt in my life!" to which Ethel Maud Mary would rejoin, "There'll not be much to boast about between two of us."

Beth was busy with another book by this time, but found the work more of a task and less of a pleasure than it used to be. Ethel Maud Mary still took it for granted that she was a journalist, and showed no interest in her work beyond hoping that she got her pay regularly, and would soon be making more. Beth wondered sometimes when the little book which had been accepted in the summer would appear, and what she would get for it, if anything, and she thought of inquiring, but she put it off. Her new work took all her time and strength, and wearied her, so that nothing else seem to signify.

Besides Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen, the only person she had to talk to was Arthur Milbank Brock, the young American, her neighbour in the next attic. She met him coming upstairs with his hat in his hand soon after her instalment, and was even more attracted by his face than she had been when she first saw him in the street.

"You've settled in by this time, I hope," he said.

"Yes, and very comfortably too, thanks to you," Beth answered.

"Ah, Ethel Maud Mary's a good sort," he replied, "golden hair, blue eyes, and all. She has the looks of a lady's novel and the heart of a holy mother. Her grammar and spelling are defective, but her sense is sound. I wouldn't give much for her opinion of a work of art, but I'd take her advice in a difficulty if it came anywhere within range of her experience. She knows this world well, but picks her steps through it in such a way that I guess she'll reach the threshold of the next with nice clean shoes."

He stepped aside for Beth to pass when he had spoken, and stood a moment watching her thoughtfully as she descended. "And may you too," he said to himself as he turned to go up, then, perceiving that the hope implied a doubt, he began to wonder whence it came.

As Beth went out, she reflected on his face, on a certain gravity which heightened its refinement. It was a young face, but worn, as by some past trial or present care, and with an habitually sober expression which contrasted notably with the cheery humour of his speech, adding point to it, as is frequently the case with his countrymen. He wore his thick brown hair rather longer than is usual, but was clean shaven. His features were delicate and regular, his eyes deep and dark, his head large and finely formed. In figure he was tall and slim, and in his whole appearance there was something almost ethereal, as of a young poet or philosopher still moving among his fellow-men, yet knowing himself to be prematurely smitten, set apart, and consecrated to death, by some insidious slow disease from which there is no escape. This was Beth's first notion of him, but she always hoped it was fanciful.

She thought about him a good deal in the solitary walks which were her principal recreation. When she was tired of working or wanted to think, she used to go out and wander alone. At first she was afraid to venture far, for she had always been assured that she had no head for topography, and would never be able to find her way; and so long as she went about under escort, with some one to save her the necessity of observing, she never knew where she was. Now, however, that she had to look after herself, she found no difficulty after her first timidity wore off; and this little experience taught her why it is that the intelligence of women seems childishly defective as regards many of the details of the business of life. They have the faculty, but when they are not allowed to act for themselves, it remains imperfectly developed or is altogether atrophied for want of exercise.

It was in these days of peace that the ugly downward droop of the corners of Beth's mouth, which had always spoilt the expression of her face, entirely disappeared, and her firm-set lips softened into keeping with the kindliness of her beautiful grey eyes; but she still wanted much loving to bring out the natural tenderness which had been so often and so cruelly nipped back in its growth. Beth had been born to be a woman, but circumstances had been forcing her to become a career. Strangely enough, some of the scenes she saw during her rambles in London helped to soften her. While she was under her husband's influence, she saw the evil only, and was filled with bitterness. London meant for her in those days the dirt and squalor of the poor, the depravity of the rich, the fiendish triumph of the lust of man, and the horrible degradation of her own sex; but now that her mind was recovering its tone, and she could see with her own eyes, she discovered the good at war with the evil, the courage and kindliness of the poor, signs of the growth of better feeling in the selfish and greedy rich, the mighty power of purity at war with the license of man, and the noble attitude of women wherever injustice was rife, the weak oppressed, and the wronged remained unrighted; then her heart expanded with pity, and instead of the torment of unavailing hate, she began to revive in the glow of strengthening

gleams of hope. It was in those days too that she learnt to appreciate the wonder and beauty of the most wonderful and beautiful city ever seen; and her eyes grew deep from long looking and earnest meditating upon it. She occasionally experienced the sickening sensation of being followed about by one of those specimens of mankind so significantly called "sly dogs" by their fellow-men. They made themselves particularly objectionable in Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park; but she found that an appeal to a policeman or a Park-keeper, or to any decent workman, was enough to stop the nuisance. Genuine respect for women, which is an antidote to the moral rottenness that promotes the decay of nations, and portends the indefinite prolongation of the life of a race, is of slow growth, but it is steadily increasing among the English-speaking peoples.

During her rambles, Beth composed long letters to her friends, but somehow none of them were ever written. She had managed to send a few hurried lines of explanation to Mrs. Kilroy in the midst of her packing before she left Slane. As she had not known where she would be, she had asked Angelica to address her letters to Slane to be forwarded; but no reply had come as yet, and Beth was just a little sore and puzzled about it. However, she knew that, what with her public and private duties, Angelica was overwhelmed with work, and might well have overlooked the fact that she had not answered Beth's letter, so Beth determined to write again. Time passed, however, and she got into such a groove of daily duties that anything outside the regular routine required a special effort which she always postponed, and letters were quite outside the regular routine. After the first no one wrote to her except the old lawyer who sent her half-yearly dividend; and she had written to no one. She had dropped altogether out of her own world, yet, because of her work and of her power to interest herself in every one about her, and to appreciate the goodness of her humblest friends, her life was full, and she had not known a moment's discontent. Little things were great pleasures now. To be able to get on the top of an omnibus at Piccadilly Circus when the sun was setting, and ride to Hammersmith Broadway,

engrossed in watching the wonderful narrow cloudscape above the streets, changing from moment to moment in form and colour; the mystery of the hazy distances, the impression of the great buildings and tall irregular blocks of houses appearing all massed together among the trees from different points of view, and taking on fine architectural effects, now transformed into huge grey palaces, large and distinct, now looming in the mist, sketchily, with uncertain outlines, and all the fascination of the fabrics, innocent of detail, that confront the dreamer in enchanted woods, or lure him to the edge of fairy lakes with twinkling lights all multiplied by their own reflection in the water. Beth had rolled in that direction in luxurious carriages often, and never joyed in the scene, her mind being set on other things—things prosaic, such as what she should wear, or whether she was late, scraps of society gossip, conversations which had satiated without satisfying her, and remained in her mind to be items of weariness if not of actual irritation. She had noticed in those days how very seldom she saw a happy face in a carriage, unless it was a very young face, full of expectation. Even the very coachmen and footmen in the Park looked enervated, as the long lines of carriages passed in wearisome procession. And in everything there had been that excess which leaves no room for healthy desire. At first, the shop windows, set out with tasteless profusion, no article in the heterogeneous masses telling, however beautiful, each being eclipsed by the other in the horrible glut, had interested her, and she had looked at everything. But she soon sickened at the sight. The vast quantities of things, crowded together, robbed her of all pleasure of choice, and made her feel as if she had eaten too much. Occasionally she would see two or three things of beauty displayed with art in a large window; but everywhere else excessive quantity produced indifference, disgust, or satiety, according to the mood of the moment. And even in the days of her poverty and obscurity, when her faculties were sharpened into proper appreciation by privation, those congested windows teeming with jewels, with wearing apparel, with all things immoderately, set up a sort of mental dyspepsia that was distressing, and she was glad to turn away

to relieve the consequent brain-fag. But by degrees she became accustomed to the tasteless profusion. It did not please her any better, but at all events it did not afflict her by always obtruding itself upon her attention. She saw it, not in detail, but as a part of the picture; and she found in the new view of London and of London life from the top of omnibuses more of the unexpected, of delight, of beauty for the eyes and of matter for the mind, of humour, pathos, poetry, of tragedy and comedy, suggestive glimpses caught in passing and vividly recollected, than she could have conceived possible when she rolled along with society on carriage cushions, soothed by the stultifying ease into temporary sensuous apathy.

Winter set in suddenly and with terrible severity that year. London became a city of snow, cruelly cold, but beautiful, all its ugliness disguised by the white mantle, all its angles softened, all its charms enhanced. Commonplace squares, parks, gardens, and dirty streets were transformed into fairyland by the delicate disposition of snow in festoons on door-post and railing, ledge and lintel, from roof to cellar. The trees especially, all frosted with shining filigree, were a wonder to look upon; and Beth would wander about the alleys in Kensington Gardens, and gaze at the glory of the white world under the sombre grey of the murky clouds, piled up in awesome magnificence, until she ached with yearning for some word of human speech, some way to express it, to make it manifest.

She returned one afternoon somewhat wet and weary from one of her rambles. The little window of her attic was half snowed up, and the gloom under the sloping roof struck a chill to her heart as she entered; but when she had lighted the lamp (a new investment that helped up the temperature besides giving light), and set her little oil-stove going with the kettle on it, her surroundings took on an air of homely comfort that was grateful. As she busied herself preparing the tea, she noticed that her neighbour in the next attic was coughing a good deal, and then it occurred to her that she had not seen him about lately, and she wondered if he could be ill. The thought of a young man of small means, ill alone in a London lodging, probably

without a bell in the room, and certainly with no one anxious to answer it if he should ring, though not cheering, is stimulating to the energy of the benevolent, and Beth went downstairs to ask as soon as the notion occurred to her.

"Mr. Brock? there now!" Gwendolen exclaimed in dismay. "If I didn't forget altogether! I've so much to see to, and the missus ill in bed with bronchitis, and Miss Ethel run off her feet, and not too fit 'erself with that cold as 'ud be called influenza if it wasn't for frightening the lodgers. Whatever it is, it's going through the 'ouse, and Mr. Brock seems to have got it bad. 'E ast me when I went wiv 'is shyving-water this morning to tike 'im some coals and mike 'im some tea, an' I never thought no more about it—I clean forgot."

"This morning!" Beth cried. "Why that was at eight o'clock, and now it is four!"

"I'll get 'em at once," Gwendolen said with contrition. But the girl herself looked worn to death. She had been on her feet since early morning, and had no prospect of a rest till she dropped on her bed late at night, too exhausted to undress.

"Never mind," Beth said. "Give me the coals, and I'll carry them up, and see to the rest. I have nothing else to do."

"Bless you," Gwendolen muttered.

Beth found Mr. Brock in bed, with bright eyes, and burning spots of colour on each cheek. A lamp was burning beside him. When he saw who it was, he raised his eyebrows; but smiled at the same time, as if he were both surprised and pleased. The room struck cold to Beth.

"What! no fire?" she exclaimed.

"I tried to light the pesky thing," he said, "but it wouldn't burn."

"Gwendolen forgot you altogether," Beth said. "She has far too much to do, poor girl, and I have only just heard that you were ill. Why didn't you call me?"

He smiled again.

"We are all of the same family here, you know," Beth said, "the great human family. You had only to say 'Sister!' and I should have come."

The smile faded from his lips, but it was replaced by another expression, which, when she saw it, caused Beth to ejaculate inwardly, "Surely of such are the Kingdom——"

Each had seen in the other's face at the same time something there is no human utterance to describe, and, recognising it, had reverently held their peace.

Beth fetched her oil-stove first, with the kettle on it, and, while the water was boiling, she cut bread and butter and lighted the fire.

"We'll have tea together, if you please," she said cheerfully. "I've a horrible suspicion that you've had nothing to eat or drink all day."

Her sympathy recalled his pleasant, patient smile.

"My appetite is not devouring," he said, "but my thirst is. Talk about selling one's birthright! I'd sell my brains, I believe, for a cup of tea at this moment."

"There's a bowl full for nothing, then," Beth rejoined. "Sip it while I boil you an egg."

He took the bowl in both hands and tried the tea.

"Oh!" he exclaimed with a long-drawn sigh, "it's nectar! it's mead! it's nepenthe! it's all the drinks ever brewed for all the gods in one! But I'm afraid to touch it lest I should finish it."

"Don't be afraid, then," said Beth, "for you'll find it like liquor for the gods in another respect; it will be to be had whenever you want it. What's the matter?"

"Did I make lament?" he asked. "I didn't know it. But I'm all one ache. I can't lie still for it, and I can't move without adding to it. I've been watching the ice-floes on the river from the Embankment and bridges by all lights lately; I never saw finer effects—such colour! It's wonderful what colour there is under your sombre sky if

you know how to look for it; and it has the great advantage over the colour other countries teem with of being unexpected. It's not obvious; you have to look out for it; but when you have found it, you rejoice in it as in something rare and precious, and it excites you to enthusiasm beyond your wont—which should prevent chills, but it doesn't, as witness my aches."

Beth felt his hand and found it dry and burning.

"The doctor is the next and only thing for you, young man, after this frugal meal," she said, "and I'll go and fetch him. I hope to goodness these are the right things to give you."

He objected to the doctor, but she paid no attention to his remonstrance, and when she had done all she could think of for the moment, she put on her wet boots and walking things again, got the address of a good man from Ethel Maud Mary, and sallied out into the snow once more.

Rheumatic fever was the doctor's diagnosis, and his directions to Beth concluded with a long list of expensive medical comforts which it seemed were absolutely necessary. She went out again when he had gone, and brought back everything, toiling up the long flights of stairs with both arms full, breathless but cheerful; and having set all in order for use—sheets of medicated cotton-wool, medicines, Valentine's extract, clinical thermometer and chart—she settled herself to watch the patient, the clock, and the temperature of the room, which had to be equable, with the exactness and method of a capable nurse. Before the household retired, she went downstairs to fetch more coals, fearing they might run short in the night.

"He's 'ad one scuttle to-day," Gwendolen reminded her, warningly.

"He must have two more, then, if necessary," said Beth.

"They're sixpence a scuttle, you know," Gwendolen remonstrated.

"Two for a shilling, and no charge for delivery," said Beth as she toiled up the long ascent once more with her heavy burden.

"Eh! it would be a gay glad world if they all took it like you," Gwendolen muttered, as she stood, with the pencil in her mouth, studying the slate that hung outside the coal-cellar, and let her generosity war with her accuracy and honesty for a little before she made two more strokes on the line that began with the name of Brock; and no sooner done than regretted.

"I wish to goodness I'd put 'em down to old Piggot and Mother Hauseman," she thought. "They'd never miss the money, and it 'ud be a good deed for the likes of them to help their betters, and might likely profit their own souls, though unbeknown."

For many weeks Beth watched beside the sick man's bed, doing all that was possible to ease his pain day and night, snatching brief intervals of rest when she could, and concealing her weariness at all times. She used to wonder at the young man's uncomplaining fortitude, his gentleness, gratitude, and unselfish concern about her fatigue. Even when he was at his worst, he would struggle back to consciousness in order to entreat her to lie down; and when, to please him, she had settled herself on a little couch there was in his room, he would make a superhuman effort to keep still as long as his flickering consciousness lasted. There was only one thing he was ever exacting about—to keep her in sight. So long as he could see her he was satisfied, and would lie for hours, patiently controlling himself for fear of disturbing her by uttering exclamations or making other signs of suffering; but when she had to leave him alone, he broke down and moaned in his weakness and pain for her to come back and help him.

The doctor having declared that the north-east aspect of his attic was all against the patient, Beth insisted on changing with him, and, as soon as he could be moved, she, Ethel Maud Mary, and Gwendolen, with the doctor's help, carried him into her room in a sheet; an awkward manœuvre because of his length, which made it hard to turn him on the narrow landing; his weight was nothing, for he was mere skin and bone

by that time—all eyes, as Beth used to tell him.

It was Christmas Eve when they moved him, and late that night Beth kept her vigil by him, sitting over the fire with her elbows on her knees and her face between her hands, listening dreamily to the clang and clamour of the church-bells, which floated up to her over the snow, mellowed by distance and full-fraught with manifold associations. As she sat there she pondered. She thought of the long way she had drifted from the days when she knelt in spirit at the call of the bells and lost herself in happy prayer. She thought of her husband's hypocrisy, and the way in which, when it dawned upon her, her own faith had melted from her; and she pondered on the difference it would have made if only she had been married early—just to a good man. It would not have been necessary for her to have loved him—not with passion—only to have relied upon him. Some one to trust, she craved for, more than some one to love; yet she allowed that a loveless marriage is a mock marriage. She did not regret the loss of her conventional faith, but she wished she could join the congregation just for the human fellowship. She felt the need of union, of some central station, a centre of peace, unlike the church, the house of disunion. Without knowing it, she leant to Quaker-Catholicism, the name assumed for her religious principles by Caroline Fox—Quaker-Catholicism having direct spiritual teaching for its distinctive dogma.

"What are you thinking about?" Arthur Brock said suddenly from the bed.

Beth started. She thought he was asleep.

"God," she said; with a gasp, "and going to church," she added, laughing at her own abruptness. "I was wanting a church to go to."

"You don't belong to the Established Church, then," he said. "Well, I don't go to church myself; but I make a difference on Sundays. I don't work, and I read another kind of book. It is my day for the plains of heaven. I should like to be there all the time, if I could manage it; but I can't, not being a monk in a cell. When I can, I make

the ascent, however, with the help of the books that take one there."

"I used to read religious books too," said Beth; "but I found little illumination in them, most of them being but the dry husks of the subject, uninformed of the spirit, containing no vital spark, and stained with blood."

"How?" he exclaimed.

"This God of the Hebrews," Beth began, looking dreamily into the fire, "what is his history? He loved cruelty and bloodshed. The innocent animals first suffered in his service; but, not content with that, he went from bad to worse, as men do, and ended by demanding human sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own son. And for that specially we are required to adore him, although it must be clear to the commonest capacity to-day that the worship of such a deity is devil-worship. I do not say there is no God; I only say this is not God—this blood-lover, this son-slayer, this blind omniscience, this impotent omnipotence, this merciful cruelty, this meek arrogance, this peaceful combatant; this is not God, but man. The mind of man wars with the works of God to mar them. Man tries to make us believe that he is made in the image of God; but what happened was just the reverse. Man was of a better nature originally, a more manifold nature. He had intellect for a toy to play with on earth, and spirit for a power to help him to heaven. But instead of toiling to strengthen his spirit, he preferred to play with his intellect; and he played until he became so expert in the use of it, and so interested in the game, that he forgot his origin. And then it was that he projected an image of himself into space, and was so delighted with his own appearance from that point of view, that he called it God and fell down and worshipped it. If you would understand man, consider God; if you would know his God, study man."

Arthur Brock reflected for a little.

"What you say sounds real smart," he said at last, "and there's a kind of glamour in your words that dazzles and prevents one seeing just how much they mean at first. It

is true that religion culminates in human sacrifice both here and in Africa, and, for refinement of horror, we have here the literal bloody sacrifice of a son by his father. But that is not God, as you say; that is the ultimate of the priest. And the priest is the same at all times, in all ages, beneath all veneers of civilisation. His credit depends upon a pretence to power. He is not a humble seeker after truth, but a bigoted upholder of error and an impudent time-server. He destroys the scientific discoverer in one age; in the next he finds his own existence is threatened because he refuses to acknowledge that the discoverer was right; then he confesses the truth, and readjusts his hocus-pocus to suit it. He does not ask us to pin our faith to fancies which seem real to a child in its infancy, yet he would have us credulous about those which were the outcome of the intellectual infancy of the race. What he can't get over in himself is the absence of any sense of humour. I'm real sorry for him at times, and I tell him so."

Beth smiled. "I could not be so kindly courteous," she said. "Some things make me fierce. The kingdom of heaven is or is not within us, I believe; and half the time I know it is not in me, because there is no room for anything in me but the hate and rage that rend me for horror of all the falsehood, injustice, and misery I know of and cannot prevent. A sense of humour would save the church perhaps; but I'm too sore to see it. All I can say is: your religion to me is horrifying—human sacrifice and devil-worship, survivals from an earlier day welded on to our own time, and assorting ill with it. I would not accept salvation at the hands of such futile omnipotence, such cruel mercy, such blood-stained justice. The sight of suffering was grateful to man when the world was young, as it still is to savages; but we revolt from it now. We should not be happy in heaven, as the saved were said to be in the old tales, within sight of the sinners suffering in hell."

"Which is to say that there is more of Christ in us now than there was in the days of old," he said, speaking dispassionately, and with the confident deliberation of one who takes time to think. "I believe those old tales were founded on muddle-headed

confusion of mind in the days when dreams were as real to mankind as the events of life. There are obscure tribes still on earth who cannot distinguish between what they have done and what they have only dreamt they did, and probably every race has gone through that stage of development. I don't know if excessive piety be a disease of the nerves, as some say, although what is piety in one generation does appear to be perversity in the next, as witness the sons of the clergy, and other children of pious people, who don't answer to expectation, as a rule. And I don't go much on churches or creeds, or faith in this personality or that. The old ideas have lost their hold upon me, as they have upon you; but that is no reason why we should give up the old truths that have been in the world for all time, the positive right and wrong, which are facts, not ideas. I believe that there is good and evil, that the one is at war with the other always; and that good can do no evil, evil no good. I've got beyond all the dogma and fiddle-faddle of the intellect with which the church has overlaid the spirit, and all the ceremonial so useful and necessary for individual souls in early stages of development. I used to think if I could find a religion with no blood in it, I would embrace it. Now I feel sure that it does not matter what the expression of our religious nature is so that it be religious. Religion is an attitude of mind, the attitude of prayer, which includes reverence for things holy and deep devotion to them. I would not lose that for anything—the right of appeal; but now, when I think of our Father in heaven, I do not despise our mother on earth."

Beth sat some time looking thoughtfully into the fire. "Go to sleep," she said at last, abruptly. "You ought not to be talking at this time of night."

"I wish you would go to sleep yourself," he said, as he settled himself obediently; "for I lose half the comfort of being saved, while you sit up there suffering for me."

The expression was not too strong for the strain Beth had to put upon herself in those days; for she had no help. Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen felt for her and her patient, as they said; but there of necessity their kindness ended. The other

lodgers kept Gwendolen for ever running to and fro; each seemed to think she had nobody else to look after, and it was seldom indeed that any of them noticed her weariness or took pity on her. Beth did everything for herself, fetched the coals from the cellar, the water from the bath-room, swept and dusted, cleaned the grate, ran out to do the shopping, and returned to do the cooking and mending. Ethel Maud Mary stole the time to run up occasionally to show sympathy; but her own poor little hands were overfull, what with her mother ill in bed, both ends to be made to meet, and lodgers uncertain in money matters. She lost all her plumpness that winter, her rose-leaf complexion faded to the colour of dingy wax, and her yellow hair, so brightly burnished when she had time to brush it, became towzled and dull; but her heart beat as bravely-kind as ever, and she never gave in.

She climbed up one day in a hurry to Mr. Brock's room, which Beth occupied, snatching a moment to make inquiries and receive comfort; and as soon as she entered she subsided suddenly on to a chair out of breath.

"How you do it a dozen times a day, Miss Maclure, I can't think," she gasped.

"Those stairs have taught me what servants suffer," Beth said, as if that, at all events, were a thing for which to be thankful.

"You'd not have driven 'em, even if you hadn't known what they suffer," said Ethel Maud Mary. "That's the worst of this world. All the hard lessons have got to be learnt by the people who never needed them to make them good, while the bad folk get off for nothing."

"I don't know about not needing them," said Beth. "But I do know this: that every sorrowful experience I have ever had has been an advantage to me sooner or later."

"I wish I could believe that Ma's temper would be an advantage to me," Ethel Maud Mary said, sighing; "she's that wearing! But there, poor dear! she's sick, and there's no keeping the worries from her. There's only you and Mr. Brock in the house just now that pays up to the day, so you may guess what it is! He's getting on nicely now,

I suppose; but you shouldn't be sitting here in the cold. A shawl don't make the difference; it's the air you breathe; and you ought to have your oil-stove going. Isn't the fire enough for him? I can't think so many degrees it need be in his room always, when there's no degree at all in yours."

"Oh, I'm hardy," said Beth. "I never was better."

"You look it," Ethel Maud Mary said sarcastically, "like a pauper just out of prison. What are you worrying about?"

"Beef-tea," said Beth. And so she was, and bread and butter, fuel, light, and lodging—everything, in fact, that meant money; for the money was all but done, and she had had a shock on the subject lately that had shaken her considerably.

She had spread out a newspaper to save the carpet, and was kneeling on the floor, one morning, in front of the window, cleaning and filling the little oil-stove, and Arthur was lying contentedly watching her—"superintending her domestic duties," he used to call it, that being all that he was equal to in his extreme weakness just then.

"You're a notable housekeeper," he said. "I shouldn't have expected you from your appearance to be able to cook and clean as you do."

"I used to do this kind of thing as a child to help a lazy servant we had, bless her," Beth answered. "The cooking and cleaning she taught me have stood me in good stead."

"If you had a daughter, how would you bring her up?" he asked.

Beth opened the piece of paper with which she was cleaning the oil off the stove, and regarded it thoughtfully. "I would bring her up in happy seclusion, to begin with," she said. "She should have all the joys of childhood; and then an education calculated to develop all her intellectual powers without forcing them, and at the same time to fit her for a thoroughly normal woman's life: childhood, girlhood, wifehood, motherhood, each with its separate duties and pleasures all complete. I

would have her happy in each, steadfast, prudent, self-possessed, methodical, economical; and if she had the capacity for any special achievement, I think that such an education would have developed the strength of purpose and self-respect necessary to carry it through. I would also have her to know thoroughly the world that she has to live in, so that she might be ready to act with discretion in any emergency. I should, in fact, want to fit her for whatever might befall her, and then leave her in confidence to shape her own career. The life for a woman to long for—and a man too, I think—is a life of simple duties and simple pleasures, a normal life; but I only call that life normal which is suited to the requirements of the woman's individual temperament."

"You don't clamour for more liberty, then?"

"It depends upon what you mean by that. The cry for more liberty is sometimes the cry of the cowardly anxious to be excused from their share of the duties and labours of life; and it is also apt to be a cry not for liberty but for licence. One must discriminate."

"But how?"

"By the character and principles of the people you have to deal with—obviously."

She had lighted her little oil-stove by this time, and set a saucepan of water on it to boil. Then she fetched a chopping board and a piece of raw beef-steak, which she proceeded to cut up into dice and put into a stone jar until it was crammed full. Her sensitive mouth showed some shrinking from the rawness, and her white fingers were soon dyed red; but she prepared the meat none the less carefully for that. When the jar was filled and the contents seasoned, she put it in the pot on the stove for the heat to extract the juice.

"What is it going to be to-day?" he asked.

"Beef-jelly," she said. "You must be tired of beef-tea."

"I'm tired of nothing you do for me," he rejoined. "This is the homiest time I've had

in England."

Beth smiled. In spite of poverty, anxiety, and fatigue, it was the "homiest time" she had had since Aunt Victoria's death, and she loved it. Now that she had some one she could respect and care for dependent on her, whose every look and word expressed appreciation of her devotion, the time never hung heavily on her hands, as it used to do in the married days that had been so long in the living. It was all as congenial as it was new to her, this close association with a man of the highest character and the most perfect refinement. She had never before realised that there could be such men, so heroic in suffering, so unselfish, and so good; and this discovery had stimulated her strangely—filled her with hope, strengthened her love of life, and made everything seem worth while.

She went on with her work in silence after that last remark of his, and he continued to watch her with all an invalid's interest in the little details of his narrow life.

"It would be a real relief to me to be able to get up and do all that for you," he finally observed. "I don't feel much of a man lying here and letting you work for me."

"This is woman's work," Beth said.

"Woman's work and man's work are just anything they can do for each other," he rejoined. "I wonder if I should get on any quicker with a change of treatment. Resignation is generally prescribed for rheumatism, and a variety of drugs which distract attention from the seat of pain to other parts of the person, and so relieve the mind. My head is being racked just now by that last dose I took. I should like to try Salisbury."

"What is Salisbury?" Beth asked.

"Principally beef and hot water, to begin with," he replied. "You'll find a little work on the subject among my books."

Beth read the volume, and then said, "You shall try Salisbury. It is easy enough."

"Yes," he answered. "It is easy enough with a nurse like you."

But in order to carry out the treatment some things had to be bought, and this led to the discovery which was a shock to Beth. Arthur's income depended principally upon the pictures he sold, and no more money came in after he fell ill. He had had some by him, but not nearly so much as he supposed, and it was all gone now, in spite of the utmost economy on Beth's part. Her own, too, was running short, but she had not troubled about that, because she still had some of her secret hoard to fall back upon. She had left it in one of the boxes which were sent on after her from Slane—a box which she had not opened until now, when she wanted the money. The money, however, was not there. She searched and searched, but in vain; all she found was the little bag that had contained it. She was stunned by the discovery, and sat on the floor for a little, with the contents of the box all scattered about her, trying to account for her loss. Then all at once a vision of Maclure, as she had seen him on one occasion with the bunch of duplicate keys, peering into her dress-basket with horrid intentness, flashed before her; but she banished it resolutely with the inevitable conclusion to which it pointed. She would not allow her mind to be sullied by such a suspicion. And as to the money, since it was lost, why should she waste her time worrying about it? She had better set herself to consider how to procure some more. She had still some of Arthur Brock's, but that she kept that she might be able to tell him truthfully that it was not all done when he asked about it—a pious fraud which relieved his mind and kept him from retarding his recovery by attempting to begin work again before he was fit for it. What money she had of her own would last but a little longer, and how to get more was the puzzle.

Her evening dresses had been in the box which she had just unpacked, and while she was still sitting on the floor amongst them cogitating, Ethel Maud Mary came into the attic out of breath to ask how she was getting on.

"Why," she exclaimed in admiration of Beth's finery, "you've got some clothes!

They'd fetch something, those frocks, if you sold them."

"Then tell me where to sell them, for money I must have," Beth rejoined precipitately.

"And it's no use keeping gowns; they only go out of fashion," Ethel Maud Mary suggested, as if she thought Beth should have an excuse. "Gwendolen would manage it best. She's great at a bargain; and there's a place not far from here. I'd begin with the worst, if I was you."

"Advise me, then, there's a dear," said Beth, and Ethel Maud Mary knelt down beside her, and proceeded to advise.

Only a few shillings was the result of the first transaction; but the better dresses had good trimmings on them, and real lace, which fetched something, as Ethel Maud Mary declared it would, if sold separately; so, with the strictest self-denial, Beth was still able to pay her way and provide for the sick man's necessities.

From the time she put him on the Salisbury treatment, he suffered less and began to gain strength; but the weather continued severe, and Beth suffered a great deal herself from exposure and cold and privations of all kinds. She used to be so hungry sometimes that she hurried past the provision shops when she had to go out, lest she should not be able to resist the temptation to go in and buy good food for herself. If her sympathy with the poor could have been sharpened, it would have been that winter by some of the sights she saw. Sometimes she was moved by pity to wrath and rebellion, as on one occasion when she was passing a house where there had evidently been a fashionable wedding. The road in front of the house, and the red cloth which covered the steps and pavement, were thickly strewed with rice, and on this a band of starving children had pounced, and were scraping it up with their bony claws of hands, clutching it from each other, fighting for it, and devouring it raw, while a supercilious servant looked on as though he were amused. Beth's heart was wrung by the sight, and she hurried by, cursing the greedy rich who wallow in

luxury while children starve in the streets.

In a squalid road which she had often to cross there was a butcher's shop, where great sides of good red beef with yellow fat were hung in the doorway. Coming home one evening after dark, she noticed in front of her a gaunt little girl who carried a baby on her arm and was dragging a small child along by the hand. When they came to the butcher's shop, they stopped to look up at the great sides of beef, and the younger child stole up to one of them, laid her little hand upon it caressingly, then kissed it. The butcher came out and ordered them off, and Beth pursued her way through the mire with tears in her eyes. She had suffered temptation herself that same evening. She had to pass an Italian eating-house where she used to go sometimes, before she had any one depending on her, to have a two-shilling dinner—a good meal, decently served. Now, when she was always hungry, this was one of the places she had to hurry past; but even when she did not look at it, she thought about it, and was tormented by the desire to go in and eat enough just for once. Visions of thick soup, and fried fish with potatoes, and roast beef with salad, whetted an appetite that needed no whetting, and made her suffer an ache of craving scarcely to be controlled. That day had been a particularly hungry one. The coffee was done, every precious tea-leaf she had to husband for Arthur, and the butter had also to be carefully economised because a good deal was required for his crisp toast, which was unpalatable without it. Beth lived principally on the crusts she cut off the toast. When they were very stale, she steeped them in hot water, and sweetened them with brown sugar. This mess reminded her of Aunt Victoria's bread-puddings, and the happy summer when they lived together, and she learnt to sit upright on Chippendale chairs. She would like to have talked to Arthur of those tender memories, but she could not trust herself, being weak; the tears were too near the surface.

That day she had turned against her crusts, even with sugar, and had felt no hunger until she got out into the air, when an imperious craving for food seized upon her

suddenly, and she made for the Italian restaurant as if she had been driven. The moment she got inside the place, however, she recovered her self-possession. She would die of hunger rather than spend two precious shillings on herself while there was that poor boy at home, suffering in silence, gratefully content with the poorest fare she brought him, always making much of all she did.

Beth got no farther than the counter.

"I want something savoury for an invalid," she said.

That evening, for the first time, Arthur sat up by the fire in the grandfather chair with a blanket round him, and enjoyed a dainty little feast which had been especially provided, as he understood, in honour of the event.

"But why won't you have some yourself?" he remonstrated.

"Well, you see," Beth answered, "I went to the Italian restaurant when I was out."

"Oh, did you?" he said. "That's right. I wish you would go every day, and have a good hot meal. Will you promise me?"

"I'll go every day that I possibly can," Beth answered, smiling brightly as she saw him fall-to contentedly with the appetite of a thriving convalescent. Practising pious frauds upon him had become a confirmed habit by this time—of which she should have been ashamed; but instead, she felt a satisfying sense of artistic accomplishment when they answered, and was only otherwise affected with a certain wonderment at the very slight and subtle difference there is between truth and falsehood as conveyed by the turn of a phrase.

But now the money ran shorter and shorter; she had nothing much left to sell; and it was a question whether she could possibly hold out until her half-year's dividend was due. Perhaps the old lawyer would let her anticipate it for once. She wrote and asked him, but while she was waiting for a reply the pressure became acute.

Out of doors one day, walking along dejectedly, wondering what she should do

when she came to her last shilling, her eye rested on a placard in the window of a fashionable hairdresser's shop, and she read mechanically: "A GOOD PRICE GIVEN FOR FINE HAIR." She passed on, however, and was half-way down the street before it occurred to her that her own hair was of the finest; but the moment she thought of it, she turned back, and walked into the hairdresser's shop in a business-like way without hesitation. A gentleman was sitting beside the counter at one end of the shop, waiting to be attended on; Beth took a seat at the other end, and waited too. She sat there, deep in thought and motionless, until she was roused by somebody saying, "What can I do for you, miss?"

Then she looked up and saw the proprietor, a man with a kindly face.

"Can I speak to you for a moment?" she asked.

"Come this way, if you please," he replied, after a glance at her glossy dark-brown hair and shabby gloves.

When she went in that day, Arthur uttered an exclamation.

"Do you mean to say you've had your hair cut short?" he asked, speaking to her almost roughly. "Are you going to join the unsexed crew that shriek on platforms?"

"I don't know any unsexed crew that shriek on platforms," she answered, "and I am surprised to hear you taking the tone of cheap journalism. There has been nothing in the woman movement to unsex women except the brutalities of the men who oppose them."

He coloured somewhat, but said no more—only sat looking into the fire with an expression on his face that cut Beth to the quick. It was the first cloud that had come to overshadow the perfect sympathy of their intercourse. She was getting his tea at the moment, and, when it was ready, she put it beside him and retired to his attic, which she occupied, and looked at herself in the glass for the first time since she had sacrificed her pretty hair. At the first glance, she laughed; then her eyes filled with tears, and she threw herself on the bed and sobbed silently—not because she

regretted her hair, but because he was hurt, and for once she had no comfort to give him.

Just after she left him, an artist friend of his, Gresham Powell, came in casually to look him up, and was surprised to find he had been so ill.

"I missed you about," he said, "but I thought you had shut yourself up to work. Who's been looking after you?"

Brock gave him the history of his illness.

Powell shook his head when he heard of Beth's devotion.

"Take care, my boy," he said. "The girls you find knocking about town in these sort of places are not desirable associates for a promising young man. They're worse than the regular bad ones—more likely to trap you, you know, especially when you're shorn of your strength and have good reason to be grateful. You might think you were rewarding her by marrying her; but you'll find your mistake. Look at Simpson! Could a man have done a girl a worse turn than he did when he married Florrie Crone? They haven't a thought in common except when he's ill and she nurses him; but a man can't be always getting ill in order to keep in touch with his wife. I don't know, of course, what this girl's like; but half of them are adventuresses bent on marrying gentlemen. Is she a clergyman's daughter, by any chance?"

"I know nothing about her but her name," Brock answered coldly. "She has never tried to excite sympathy in any way."

"Well, they are of all kinds, of course," said Powell temperately. "But you'd better break away in any case. Nothing will set you up so soon as a change. Come with me. I'm going into the country to see the spring come in, and the fruit trees flower, and to hear the nightingales. I know a lovely spot. Come!"

"I'll think about it, and let you know," Arthur Brock answered to get rid of him.

When he had gone Beth appeared. To please Arthur, she had covered her cropped

head with a white muslin mob-cap bound round with a pale pink ribbon, and put on a high ruffle and a large white apron, in which she looked pretty and prim, like a sweet little Puritan, in spite of the pale pink vanity; and Arthur smiled when he saw her, but afterwards grumbled: "Why did you cut your pretty hair off? I shouldn't have thought you could do such a tasteless thing."

Beth knelt down beside his chair to mend the fire, and then she began to tidy the hearth.

"Am I not the same person?" she asked.

"No, not quite," he answered. "You have set up a doubt where all was settled certainty."

She had taken off the gloves she wore to do the grate, and was about to pull herself up from her knees by the arm of his chair when he spoke, but paused to ponder his words. It was with her left hand that she had grasped the arm of his chair, and he happened to notice it particularly as it rested there.

"You wear a wedding-ring, I see," he remarked. "Do you find it a protection?"

"I never looked at it in that light," she answered. "In this vale of tears I have a husband. That is why I wear it."

There was a perceptible pause, then he asked with an effort, "Where is your husband?"

"At home, I suppose," said Beth, her voice growing strident with dislike of the subject. "We do not correspond. He wishes to divorce me."

"And what shall you do if he tries?" Brock asked.

"Nothing," she replied, and was for leaving him to draw his own conclusions, but changed her mind. "Shall I tell you the story," she said after a while.

"No, don't tell me," he rejoined quickly. "Your past is nothing to me. Nothing that you may have done, and nothing that you may yet do, can alter my feeling—my

respect for you. As I have known you, so will you always be to me—the sweetest, kindest friend I ever had, the best woman I ever knew."

Men are monotonous creatures. Given a position, and ninety-nine out of a hundred will come to the same conclusion about it, only by diverse methods, according to their prejudices; and this is especially the case when women are in question. Woman is generally out of focus in the mind of man; he sees her less as she is than as she ought or ought not to be. Beth did not thank Arthur Brock for his magnanimity. The fact that he should shrink from hearing the story bespoke a doubt that made his generous expression an offence. It may be kind to ignore the past of a guilty person, but the innocent ask to be heard and judged; and full faith has no fear of revelations.

Beth rose from her knees, and began to prepare the invalid's evening meal in silence. Usually they chattered like children the whole time, but that evening they were both constrained. One of those subtle changes, so common in the relations of men and women, had set in suddenly since the morning; they were not as they had been with each other, nor could they continue together as they were; there must be a readjustment, which was in preparation during the pause.

"You have heard me speak of Gresham Powell?" Brock began at last. "He was here this afternoon. He thinks I had better go away with him into the country for a change as soon as I can manage it."

"It is a good idea," said Beth—"inland of course, not near the sea with your rheumatism. I will get your things ready at once."

This immediate acquiescence depressed him. He played with his supper a little, pretending to eat it, then forgot it, and sat looking sadly into the fire. Beth watched him furtively, but once he caught her gazing at him with concern.

"What's the matter?" he asked, with an effort to be cheerful.

"The matter is the pained expression in your eyes," she answered. "Are you suffering again?"

"Just twinges," he said, then set his firm full lips, resolute to play the man.

But the twinges were mental, not bodily, and Beth understood. Their happy days were done, and there was nothing to be said. They must each go their own way now, and the sooner the better. Fortunately the old lawyer had consented without demur to let Beth have her half-year's dividend in advance, so that there was money for Arthur. He expressed some surprise that there should be, but took what she gave him without suspicion, and did not count it. He was careless in money matters, and had forgotten what he had had when he was taken ill.

"You're a great manager," he said to Beth. "But I suppose you haven't paid up everything. You must let me know. It will be good to be at work again!"

"Yes," Beth answered; "but don't worry about it. You won't want money before you are well able to make it."

"I wish I knew for certain that you would go somewhere yourself to see the spring come in," he said, looking at her wistfully.

"All in good time," she answered in her sprightliest way.

When the last morning came, Beth attended to her usual duties methodically. She had made every arrangement for him, packed the things he was to take, and put away those that were to be left behind. When the cab was called, she went downstairs with him, and stood with Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen on the doorstep in the spring sunshine, smiling and waving her hand to him as he drove off. Her last words to him were, "You will go home before we meet again. Give my love to America—and may she send us many more such men," Beth added under her breath.

"Amen!" Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen echoed.

When the cab was out of sight, Beth turned and went into the house, walking wearily. At the foot of the stairs she looked up as if she were calculating the distance; then she began the long ascent with the help of the banisters, counting each

step she took mechanically. The attic seemed strangely big and bare when she entered it—it was as if something had been taken away and left a great gap. There was something crude and garish about the light in it, too, which gave an unaccustomed look to every familiar detail. The first thing she noticed was the chair beside the fire, the old grandfather chair in which he had been sitting only a few minutes before, resting after the effort of dressing—the chair in which she had seen him sit and suffer so much and so bravely. She would never see him there again, nor hear his voice—the kindest voice she had ever heard. At his worst, it was always of her he thought, of her comfort, of her fatigue; but all that was over now. He had gone, and there could be no return—nothing could ever be as it had been between them, even if they met again; but meet again they never would, Beth knew, and at the thought she sank on the floor beside the senseless chair, and, resting her head against it, broke down and cried the despairing cry of the desolate for whom there is no comfort and no hope.

The fire she had lighted for Arthur to dress by had gone out; there were no more coals. The remains of his breakfast stood on the table; she had not touched anything herself as yet. But she felt neither cold nor hunger; she was beyond all that. The chair was turned with its back to the window, and as she cowered beside it, she faced the opposite whitewashed wall. A ray of sunshine played upon it, wintry sunshine still, crystal cold and clear. Beth began to watch it. There was something she had to think about—something to see to—something she must think about—something she ought to see to, but precisely what it was she could not grasp. It seemed to be hovering on the outskirts of her mind, but it always eluded her. However, she had better not move for fear of making a noise. And there was far too much noise as it was—the wind rising and the waves breaking

"All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos——"

No, though; it was a procession of camels crossing the desert, and in the distance

was an oasis surrounded by palms, and there was white stonework gleaming between the trees in the wonderful light. And those great doors that opened from within? They were opening although she had not knocked. She was expected, then—there, where there was no more weariness, nor care, nor hunger. But that was not where she wished to go. No! no! that did not tempt her.

"Take me where I shall not remember," she implored.

Poor Beth! the one boon she had to ask of Heaven at five-and-twenty was oblivion: "Let me be where I shall forget."

Downstairs on the doorstep, Ethel Maud Mary and Gwendolen lingered a while before they turned to follow Beth into the house, and, as they did so, they noticed that a lady had stopped her carriage in the middle of the road, jumped out impetuously, and was running towards them, regardless of the traffic.

"That was Mrs. Maclure who was standing with you here just now and went into the house?" she exclaimed.

"Miss Maclure," Ethel Maud Mary corrected her.

"Oh, Miss or Mrs., what does it matter?" the lady cried. "It was Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure looking like death—where is she? Take me to her at once!" She emphasised the request with an imperious stamp of her foot.

A few minutes later, Angelica, kneeling on the attic floor beside Beth, cried aloud in horror, "Why, she is dead!"

CHAPTER LI

One warm morning when the apple-trees were out, Arthur Brock was sitting with Gresham Powell in the garden of the farm-house where they were lodging in the country, turning over a portfolio full of Powell's sketches, and Powell was looking at them over his shoulder, and discussing them with him. Arthur had just come upon a

clever study of the head of a girl in a hat, and was looking hard at it.

"That's a study in starvation," Powell explained. "It's an interesting face, isn't it? She came into a hairdresser's one day when I was there, and sat down just in that attitude, and I sketched her on the spot. She was too far through at the moment to notice me. Look at her pretty hair particularly. You'll see why in the next sketch, which is the sequel."

Brock took up the next sketch hurriedly. It was the same girl in the same hat, but with her hair cut short.

"I asked the barber fellow about her when she'd gone," Gresham pursued. "He'd taken her into an inner room, and when she came out she was cropped like that. She told him she had come to her last shilling, and she had an invalid at home depending on her entirely, and she entreated him to give her all he could for her hair. I believe the chap did too," he seemed so moved by her suffering and gentleness. "What's the matter?"

Brock had risen abruptly with the sketches still in his hand. The colour had left his face, and he looked as pinched and ill as he had done during the early days of his convalescence.

"The matter!" he ejaculated. "I've just discovered what a blind fool I am, that's what's the matter; and I'll keep these two studies with your permission to remind me of the fact. Choose amongst mine any you like instead of them, old chap, but these you must let me have."

Without waiting for an answer, he took the sketches away with him into the house. When he returned a short time afterwards, he was dressed for a journey, and had a travelling bag in his hand.

"I'm going to town," he said, "to see the original of these sketches. I've run up an account with her I shall never be able to settle, but at all events I can acknowledge my debt, dolt that I am! I was that invalid. And I thought myself such a gentleman

too! not counting my change and asking no questions, trusting her implicitly: that was my pose from the day you came and poisoned my mind. Before that I had neither trusted nor distrusted, but just taken things for granted as they came, beautifully. I was too self-satisfied even to suspect that she might be imposing her bounty upon me, starving herself that I might have all I required, and sending me off here finally with the last penny she had in the world. I told you I was wondering she did not answer my letters. I expect she hadn't the stamp. But you said it was out of sight out of mind, and she'd be trying it on with some one else in my absence. If I'd the strength, I'd thrash you, Gresham, for an evil-minded bounder."

"I'll carry your bag to the station, old chap," Gresham replied with contrition, "and take the thrashing at your earliest convenience."

Ethel Maud Mary was standing on the steps in the sunshine looking out when Arthur Brock arrived, just as she had stood to watch him depart, but in the interval a happy change had pleasantly transformed her. Her golden hair was brightly burnished again, her blue eyes sparkled, and her delicate skin had recovered its rose-leaf tinge. She wore a new frock, a new ring, a new watch and chain, and there was a new look in her face, one might say, as if the winter of care had passed out of her life with the snow and been forgotten in the spring sunshine of better prospects.

"O Mr. Brock!" she exclaimed; "you back! But none too well yet, judging by appearances."

"Where is Mrs. Maclure?" he demanded.

"I wish I knew!" Ethel Maud Mary rejoined, becoming important all at once. "She's gone for good, that's all I can tell you. O Mr. Brock! fancy her being tip-top all the time, and us not suspecting it, though I might have thought something when I saw the dresses she sold when you were ill, only I'd got the fashion papers in my mind, and didn't know but what she'd been paid in dresses! Come into the parlour; you look faint."

"You said she sold her dresses?"

"Yes; sit down, Mr. Brock. A glass of port wine is what you want, as she'd say herself if she was here; and you'll get it good too, for it's been sent for Ma. My! the things that have come! Look at me—all presents—everything she ever heard me say I'd like to have; and Gwendolen the same."

She got out the wine and the biscuits from a chiffonier as she chattered, and set them before him.

"Yes, she sold her dresses, and her rings, and her books, and every other blessed thing she possessed except what had belonged to an old aunt. She got them out too, one day, but cried so when it came to parting with them, I persuaded her to wait. I said something would turn up, I was sure. And something did, for you went away, and directly after—the next minute, so to speak, for you were scarcely out of sight—a lady stopped her carriage—a fine carriage and pair and coachman and footman all silver-mounted—and ran up the steps in a great way. She'd seen Mrs. Maclure go into the house, and she said she'd been hunting for her everywhere for months, and all her friends were in a way about her, not knowing what had happened to her. I took the lady up to the attic, and there was Mrs. Maclure lying on the floor looking like death, with her head up against the big chair where you used to sit. We thought she was dead at first, but the doctor came and brought her round. He said it was just exhaustion from fatigue and starvation."

Arthur Brock uttered an exclamation.

"You needn't reproach yourself, Mr. Brock," Ethel Maud Mary pursued sympathetically. "You weren't worse than the rest of us. I saw her every day, and never suspected she was denying herself everything, she was always so much the same—happy, you know, in her quiet way."

"Do you think she was happy?" he groaned.

"Yes, she was happy," Ethel Maud Mary said simply. "She's that

disposition—contented, you know; and she was happy from the first; but she was happier still from the time she had you to care for. I'd read about ladies of that kind, Mr. Brock, but had not seen one before. It's being good does it, I suppose. Do you know she'd not have told a lie was it ever so, Mrs. Maclure wouldn't!"

"And she went away with that lady?" Arthur asked, after a pause.

"Yes, if you can call it going," Ethel Maud Mary replied; "for the lady didn't ask her leave, but just rolled her up in wraps, and had her carried down to the carriage and took her off. And that's all we know about her. She's written me a letter I'd like to show you, and sent me money, pretending she owed it, because I'd let her have her attic too cheap. She sent the presents afterwards, but no address. The lady came back once alone, and had the attic photographed, with everything arranged just as Mrs. Maclure used to have it. And she bought all the things in it that belonged to us, and had them and all Mrs. Maclure's own things taken away to keep, she said. She sat a long time in the attic, looking at it, just as if she was trying to imagine what living in it was like, and she kept dabbing her eyes with a little lace handkerchief, and then she got up and sighed and said, 'Poor Beth! poor Beth!' several times. She talked to me a lot about Mrs. Maclure. She seemed to know all about me, and treated me as if we'd been old friends. And she knew all about you too, and asked after you kindly. She said Mrs. Maclure was going to be a great woman—a great genius or something of that sort—and do a lot for the world; and she wanted to know if you'd ever suspected it. I told her I thought not. The two letters you wrote she took to give Mrs. Maclure, so she'd get them all right."

"And see the particular kind of fatuous ass I am set down clearly in my own handwriting!" he said to himself.

Then he rose. "I'll just go up and look at the attics," he said.

Ethel Maud Mary waited below, and waited long for him. When at last he came down, he shook hands with her, but without looking at her.

"I'm going to find that lady—Mrs. Maclure," he said, jamming his hat down on his head, "if I have to spend the rest of my life in the search."

CHAPTER LII

Beth, surrounded by friends, saw the spring come in that year at Ilverthorpe, and felt it the fairest spring she could remember. Blackbird and thrush sang in an ecstasy by day, and all night long the nightingales trilled in the happy dusk. She did not ask herself why it was there was a new note in nature that year, nor did she trouble herself about time or eternity. Her eternity was the exquisite monotony of tranquil days, her time-keepers the spring flowers, the apple-blossom and quince, daffodil, wallflower, lilac and laburnum, the perfumed calycanthus, forget-me-nots, pansies, hyacinths, lilies-of-the-valley in the woods, and early roses on a warm south wall; and over all the lark by day, and again at night the nightingale. In a life like hers, after a period of probation there comes an interval of this kind occasionally, a pause for rest and renewal of strength before active service begins again.

While she had been shut up with Arthur, seeing no papers and hearing no news, her book had come out and achieved a very respectable success, for the sort of thing it was; and she was pleased to hear it, but not elated. The subject had somehow lapsed from her mind, and the career of the book gave her no more personal pleasure than if it had been the work of a friend. Had it come out when it was first finished, she would have felt differently about it; but now she saw it as only one of the many things which had happened to her, and considered it more as the old consider the works of their youth, estimating them in proportion, as is the habit of age, and moderately rather than in excess. For the truth was that a great change had come over Beth during the last few months in respect to her writing; her enthusiasm had singularly cooled; it had ceased to be a pleasure, and become an effort to her to express herself in that way.

Mr. Alfred Cayley Pounce had been looking out for Beth's book, and, while waiting for it to appear, he had, misled by his own suppositions, prepared an elaborate article upon the kind of thing he expected it to be. Nothing was wanting to complete the article but a summary of the story and quotations from it, for which he had left plenty of space. He condemned the book utterly from the point of view of art, and for the silly ignorance of life displayed in it, and the absurd caricatures which were supposed to be people; he ridiculed the writer for taking herself seriously (but without showing why exactly she should not take herself seriously if she chose); he pitied her for her disappointment when she should realise where in literature her place would be; and he ended with a bitter diatribe against the works of women generally, as being pretentious, amateur, without originality, and wanting in humour, like the wretched stuff it had been his painful duty to expose. Unfortunately for him, however, the book appeared anonymously, and immediately attracted attention enough to make him wish to discover it; and before he found out that Beth was the author, he had committed himself to a highly eulogistic article upon it in The Patriarch, which he took the precaution to sign, that the coming celebrity might know to whom gratitude was due, and in which he declared that there had arisen a new light of extraordinary promise on the literary horizon. The book, as it happened, was not a work of fiction at all.

Beth had heard nothing more from Dr. Maclure, and knew nothing about him, except that he must have lost his degrading appointment, the Acts having been rescinded. He had forwarded none of the letters her friends had addressed to her at Slane. The Kilroys had endeavoured to obtain her address from him, but he denied that he knew it. Unknown to her, Mr. Kilroy, Mr. Hamilton-Wells, and Sir George Galbraith had taken the best legal advice in the hope of getting her a divorce; but there was little chance of that, as the acute mental suffering her husband had caused her had merely injured her health and endangered her reason, which does not amount to cruelty in the estimation of the law. The matter was therefore allowed to

drop, and Beth had not yet begun to think of the future, when one day she received a letter from Dan, couched in the most affectionate terms, entreating her to return to him.

"You must own that I had cause for provocation," he said, "but I confess that I was too hasty. It is natural, though, that a man should feel it if his wife gets herself into such a position, however innocently; and the more he has trusted, loved, and respected his wife, the more violent will the reaction be. I know, however, that I have had my own shortcomings since we were married, and therefore that I should make every allowance for you. So let us be friends, Beth, and begin all over again, as you once proposed. I am ready to leave Slane and settle wherever you like. Make your own conditions; anything that pleases you will please me."

This letter upset Beth very much. She would almost rather have had an action for divorce brought against her than have been asked to return to Daniel Maclure.

"Ought I to go back?" she asked, willing, with the fatuous persistency of women in like cases, to persevere if it were thought right that she should, although she knew pretty well that the sacrifice would be unavailing so far as he was concerned, and would only entail upon herself the common lot of women so mated—a ruined constitution and corroded mind.

"Why does he suddenly so particularly wish it?" was the question.

The obvious explanation was indirectly conveyed in a letter from her old lawyer. He had written to her in her London lodgings, first of all, but the letter was returned from the Dead Letter Office. Then he had written to Slane, but as he received no answer to that letter and it was not returned, he went in person to inquire about it. Dan declared that he knew nothing about the letter, or about Beth either, if she had left London; but he thought her intimate friends the Kilroys might know where she was. The old gentleman applied to the Kilroys, and having found Beth, wrote to inform her that her great-aunt Victoria Bench's investments had recovered at last, as

he had always been pretty sure that they would, and she would accordingly, for the future, find herself in receipt of an income of seven or eight hundred pounds a year. Dan's sudden magnanimity was accounted for. Beth put his effusion and the lawyer's letter before her friends, and asked to be advised. They decided unanimously that, on the one hand, Dan was not a proper person for her to live with, that no decent woman could associate with a man of his mind, habits, and conversation without suffering injury in some sort; while, on the other, they pointed out that, although it would be nice, it would not be good for Dan to have the benefit of Beth's little income. While he was forced to work, he would have to conduct himself with a certain amount of propriety; but if Beth relieved him of the necessity, there would be nothing to restrain him.

This episode roused Beth from her tranquil apathy, and made her think of work once more. But first she had to settle somewhere and make a home for herself; and although she had ample means for all her requirements now, it was not an easy thing to find the special conditions on which she had set her heart. The first impulse of a woman of noble nature is to be consistent, to live up to all she professes to admire. As Beth grew older, to live for others became more and more her ideal of life;—not to live in the world, however, or to be of it, but to work for it.

"I must be quiet," she said to Angelica one day when they were discussing her future. "I am done for so far as work is concerned when I come into contact with crowds. I want to live things then; I don't want to think about them. Excitement makes me content to be, and careless about doing. My truest and best life is in myself, and I can only live it in circumstances of tranquil monotony. People talk so much about making the most of life, but their attempts are curiously bungling. What they call living is for the most part more pain than pleasure to them; for the truth is, that life should not be lived by men of mind, but contemplated; it is the spectator, not the actor, who enjoys and profits. The actor has his moment of applause, but all the rest is misery. People rush to great centres to obtain a knowledge of life, and do

not succeed, for there they see nothing but broad effects. We find our knowledge of life in individuals, not in crowds. There is no more individuality in a crowd of people than there is in a flock of sheep. All I know of life, of its infinite diversity, I have learnt here and there from some one person or another, known intimately. A solitary experience, rightly considered in all its bearings, teaches us more than numbers of those incidents of which we see the surface only 'in the joy of eventful living;' and, if the truth were known, I expect it would be found that each one of us had obtained the most valuable part of our experience in such homely details of simple unaffected human nature as came under our observation in our native villages."

"Yes," Angelica answered thoughtfully, "the looker-on sees most of the game. But I don't think you allow enough for differences of temperament. You are thinking of the best conditions for creative work. You mustn't lose sight of all the active service that is going on."

"No; but it is in retirement that the best preparation is made for active service also. And I was thinking of active service more than of creative work just then. The truth is, I am in a state of being oppressed by the thought of my new book. I don't know what has come to me. I am all fretty about it. Writing has lost its charm. I doubt if I shall ever do well enough to make it worth while to write at all. And even if I could, I don't think mere literary success would satisfy me. I have tasted enough of that to know what it would be—a sordid triumph, a mere personal thing."

"Ideala does not think that it is necessarily as a literary woman that you will succeed," Angelica answered. "I thought it was because all the indications you have given of special capacity seem to me to lie in that direction. However, versatile people make mistakes sometimes. They don't always begin with the work they are best able to do; but there is no time lost, for one thing helps another—one thing is necessary to another, I should say, perhaps. Your writing may have helped to perfect

you in some other form of expression."

"You cheer me!" Beth exclaimed. "But what form?" She reflected a little, and then she put the puzzle from her. "It will come to me, I dare say," she said, "if I shut the din of the world far from me, and sit with folded arms in contemplation, waiting for the moment and the match which shall fire me to the right pitch of enthusiasm. Nothing worth doing in art is done by calculation."

"I think you are right to keep out of the crowd," said Angelica. "You will get nothing but distraction from without. I should take one of the privileges of a great success to be the right to refuse all invitations that draw one into the social swim. Men and women of high purpose do not arrive in order to be crowded into stuffy drawing-rooms to be stared at."

"My idea of perfect bliss," Beth pursued, "when my work is done, and my friends are not with me, is to lie my length upon a cliff above the sea, listening to the many-murmurous, soothed by it into a sense of oneness with Nature, till I seem to be mixed with the elements, a part of sky and sea and shore, and akin to the wandering winds. This mood for my easy moments; but give me work for my live delight. I know nothing so altogether ecstatic as a good mood for work."

"What you call work is power of expression," said Angelica; "the power to express something in yourself, I fancy."

"Ye—yes," Beth answered, hesitating, as if the notion were new to her. "I believe you are right. What I call work is the effort to express myself."

Mr. Kilroy had come in while they were talking, and sat listening to the last part of the conversation.

"I have just the sort of 'neat little cot in a quiet spot, with a distant view of the rolling sea' that you yearn for, Beth," he said, smiling, when she paused, "and I have come to ask you and Angelica to drive over with me to see it."

"You mean Ilverthorpe Cottage," said Angelica, jumping up. "O Daddy! it's the very

place. Two storeys, Beth, ivy, roses, jasmine, wisteria without; and within, space and comfort of every kind—and the sea in sight! Such a pretty garden, too, grass and trees and shrubs and flowers. And near enough for us all to see you as often as you wish. Beth, be excited too! I must bring my violin, I think, and play a triumphal march on the way."

Ilverthorpe Cottage was all and more than Angelica had said, and Beth did not hesitate to take it. It was Mr. Kilroy's property, and the rent was suspiciously low, but Beth supposed that that was because the house was out of the way. She and Angelica spent long happy days in getting it ready for occupation, choosing paper, paint, and furnishments. Mr. Kilroy saw to the stables, which he completed with a saddle-horse and a pony-carriage. There was a short cut across the fields, a lovely walk, from Ilverthorpe House to the Cottage, and when Angelica could not accompany her, Beth would stroll over alone to see how things were getting on, and wander about her little demesne, and love it. Outside her garden, in front of the house, the highroad ran, a sheltered highroad, with a raised footpath, bordered on either side with great trees, oak and elm, chestnut and beech, and a high hawthorn hedge just whitening into blossom. The field-path came out on this highroad, down which she had to walk a few hundred yards to her own gate. Day after day there was an old Irish labourer, a stonebreaker, by the wayside, kneeling on a sack beside a great heap of stones, who gave her a cheery good-morrow as she passed. Once she went across the road and spoke to him. He had the face of a saint at his devotions.

"You kneel there all day long," she said, "and as you kneel you pray, perhaps. Will you pray for me? Pray, pray that I may"—she was going to say succeed, but stopped—"that I may be good."

The man raised his calm eyes, and looked her in the face. "You are good, lady," he said simply.

"Yet pray," she entreated; "and pray too that all I do may be good, and of good

effect."

"All you do is good, lady," he answered once more, in the same quiet tone of conviction.

"But I want all I do to be the best for the purpose that can be done."

She put some money in his hand and turned away, and as she went he watched her. She had touched him with her soft gloveless fingers in giving him the money, and when she had gone, he was conscious of the touch; it tingled through him, and he looked at the spot on which the impression remained, as if he expected it to be in some sort visible.

"Now Our Lady love you and the saints protect you, bless your sweet face," he muttered; "and may all you do be the best that can be done for every one. Amen."

A few months in her lovely little house sufficed to restore Beth's mind to its natural attitude—an attitude of deep devotion. She even began to work again, but rather with a view to making herself useful to her friends than to satisfy any ambition or craving of her own. Whatever she did, however, she approached in the spirit of the great musician who dressed himself in his best, and prayed as at a solemn service, when he shut himself up to compose. Beth had stepped away from the old forms by this time. She had escaped from the bondage of the letter that killeth into the realm of the spirit that giveth life. It is not faith in any particular fetish that makes a mind religious, but the quality of reverence. Churches Beth had come to look upon, not with distrust, but with indifference, as an ineffectual experiment of man's. She could find no evidence of a holier spirit or a more divine one in the church than in any other human institution for the propagation of instruction. The church has never been superior to the times, never as far advanced as the best men of the day, never a leader, but rather an opposer of progress, hindering when ideas were new, and only coming in to help when workers without had proved their discoveries, and it was evident that credit would be lost by refusing to recognise them. There is no cruelty

the church has not practised, no sin it has not committed, no ignorance it has not displayed, no inconsistency it has not upheld, from teaching peace and countenancing war, to preaching poverty and piling up riches. True, there have been great saints in the church; but then there have been great saints out of it. Saintliness comes of conscientiously cultivating the divine in human nature; it is a seed that is sown and flourishes under the most diverse conditions.

Beth thought much on religion in those quiet days, and read much, looking for spiritual sustenance among the garbage of mind with which man has overlaid it, and finding little to satisfy her, until one night, quite suddenly, as she sat holding her mind in the attitude of prayer, there came to her a wonderful flash of illumination. She had not been occupied with the point that became apparent. It entered her mind involuntarily, and was made clear to her without conscious effort on her part; but it was that which she sought, the truth that moves, makes evident, makes easy, props and stays, and is the instigator of religious action, the source of aspiration, the ground of hope—the which was all contained for Beth in the one old formula interpreted in a way that was new to her: The communion of saints (that inexplicable sympathy between soul and soul), the forgiveness of sins, (working out our own salvation in fear and trembling), the resurrection of the body (reincarnation), and the life everlasting (which is the crown or glory, the final goal).

"But God?" Beth questioned.

"God is love," she read in the book that lay open on the table before her.

Then she clasped her hands over the passage and laid her head on them, and for a long time she sat so, not thinking, but just repeating it to herself softly: "God is love," till all at once there was a blank in her consciousness; thought was suspended. When it returned, she looked up, and in herself were the words: "God is Love—no! Love is God!"

In the joy of the revelation, she arose, and, going to the window, flung it wide open.

Far down the east the dawn was dimly burning; the faint sweet breath of it fanned her cheeks; her chest expanded with a great throb, and she exclaimed aloud: "I follow, follow—God—I know not where."

Beth had a task before her that day which she did not relish in the anticipation. She was going as a stopgap to speak at a large meeting to oblige Angelica. She had the credit of being able to speak, and she herself supposed that she could in a way, because of the success of her first attempt; but she did not consent to try again without much hesitation and many qualms, and she would certainly not have consented had not her friends been in a difficulty, with no one at hand to help them out of it but herself. But to be drawn from her hallowed seclusion into such a blaze of publicity, even for once, was not at all to her mind, and much of her wakefulness of the night before had been caused by her shrinking from the prospect.

Late that night after the meeting she returned to her cottage alone, cowering in a corner of the Kilroys' carriage. She was cowering from the recollection of a great crowd that rose with deafening shouts and seemed to be rushing at her—cowering, too, from the inevitable which she had been forced to recognise—her vocation—discovered by accident, and with dismay, for it was not what she would have chosen for herself in any way had it occurred to her that she had any choice in the matter. There were always moments when she would fain have led the life which knows no care beyond the cultivation of the arts, no service but devotion to them, no pleasure like the enjoyment of them,—a selfish life made up of impersonal delights, such as music, which is emotion made audible, painting, which is emotion made visible, and poetry, which is emotion made comprehensible;—and such a life could not have been anything but grateful to one like Beth, who had the capacity for so many interests of the kind. She was debarred from all that, however, by grace of nature. Beth could not have lived for herself had she tried. So that now, when the call had come, and the way in which she could best live for others was made plain to her, she had no thought but to pursue it.

The carriage put her down at her garden-gate, and she stood awhile in the moonlight, listening to it as it rolled away with patter of horses' hoofs and rattle of harness, listening intently as if the sound concerned her. Then she let herself in, and was hurrying up to her room, but stopped short on the stairs, cowering from the crowd that rose and cheered and cheered and seemed to be rushing at her.

Her bedroom had windows east, west, and south, so that she had sunrise and sunset and the sun all day. When she went in now, she found the lamps lighted and all the windows shut, and she went round and flung them open with an irritable gesture. Her nerves were overwrought; the slightest contrariety upset her. The sweet fresh country air streamed in and the tranquil moonlight. These alone would ordinarily have been enough to soothe her, but now she paid no heed to them. When she had opened the windows, she began to take off her things in feverish haste, pacing about the room restlessly the while, as if that helped her to be quicker. Everything she wore seemed too hot, too heavy, or too tight, and she flung hat and cloak and bodice down just where she took them off in her haste to get rid of them. Throwing her things about like that was an old trick of her childhood, and becoming conscious of what she was doing, she remembered it, and began to think of herself as she had been then, and so forget her troubled self as she was at that moment—fresh from the excitement and terror of an extraordinary achievement, a great success. For she had spoken that night as few have spoken—spoken to a hostile audience and fascinated them by the power of her personality, the mesmeric power which is part of the endowment of an orator, and had so moved them that they rose at last and cheered her for her eloquence, whether they held her opinions or not. Then there had come friendly handshakes and congratulations and encouragement; and one had said, "Beth is launched at last upon her true career."

"But who could have thought that that was her bent?" another had asked.

Beth did not hear the answer, but she knew what it should have been. She had been

misled herself, and so had every one else, by her pretty talent for writing, her love of turning phrases, her play on the music of words. The writing had come of cultivation, but this—the last discovered power—was the natural gift. Angelica had said that all the indications had pointed to literary ability in Beth, but there had been other indications hitherto unheeded. There was that day at Castletownrock when Beth invited the country people in to see the house, and, for the first time, found words flowing from her lips eloquently; there were her preachings to Emily and Bernadine in the acting-room, of which they never wearied; her first harangue to the girls who had caught her bathing on the sands, and the power of her subsequent teaching which had bound them to the Secret Service of Humanity for as long as she liked; there was her storytelling at school, too, and her lectures to the girls—not to mention the charm of her ordinary conversation when the mood was upon her, as in the days when she used to sit and fish with the bearded sailors, and held them with curious talk as she had held the folk in Ireland, fascinating them. And then there was the unexpected triumph of her first public attempt—indications enough of a natural bent, had there been any one to interpret them.

Beth, as she thought on these things, wandered from window to window, too restless and excited to sit still; but, even occupied as she was, after she had changed her dress the old trick came upon her, and she was all the while observing.

It was autumn, and on the south she overlooked a field of barley, standing in stooks, waiting to be carted. She noticed how the long, irregular rows and their shadows showed in the moonlight. Across the field the farm to which it belonged nestled in an apple-orchard. From the east end of the house she obtained a glimpse of the sea, which was near enough, for the drowsy murmur of it reached her even in calm weather. To the west the highroad ran, and in her wanderings from window to window Beth paused to contemplate it, to follow it in imagination whither it led, to think of the weary way it was to so many weary feet, to mourn because she could not offer rest and refreshment to every one that passed.

The night was clear and the air was crisp, with a suspicion of frost in it, such as sometimes comes in the late autumn. The moon was sinking, and the stars shone out ever more brightly. Down in the roadway a little brazier burned, where the road had been taken up and blocked for repairs, and over the brazier the old watchman, who should have been guarding the tools and materials that had been left lying about, dozed in a sort of sentry-box. It occurred to Beth that the task was long and dreary, and that the air grew chilly towards the dawn. Surely some food would cheer and refresh him, and help to pass the time. She went down to the pantry and got some, then carried it out on a tray. But the old man was sound asleep, and, standing there in her long white wrapper, she had to call him several times, "Old man! old man!" before she roused him.

He awoke at last with a start, and seeing the unexpected apparition in the dim light, exclaimed, "Holy Mother! why have you come to me?"

Beth silently set the tray before him and slipped away, leaving him in the happy certainty that a heavenly vision had been vouchsafed him.

But the moon set, the stars paled, and, from her window to the east, Beth watched the dark melt to dusk, and the dusk pale to an even grey, into which were breathed the burnished colours of the happy dawn. Then, when the sun was high, and the accustomed sounds of life and movement that held her ear by day had well begun, down the long road beneath the old gnarled trees the postman came beladen, and there were brought to her pamphlets, papers, cards, letters, telegrams, a fine variety of praise, abuse, sympathy, derision, insults, and admiration. Quietly Beth read, and knew what it meant, all of it—success! and the success she had most desired: that her words should come with comfort to thousands of those that suffer, who, when they heard, would raise their heads once more in hope. In one paper that she opened she read: "A great teacher has arisen among us, a woman of genius—" Hastily she put the paper aside, burning with a kind of shame, although alone, to see so much

said of herself. Beth was one of the first swallows of the woman's summer. She was strange to the race when she arrived, and uncharitably commented upon; but now the type is known, and has ceased to surprise.

When she was dressed that morning, she went down to her bright little breakfast parlour. Before her was the harvest-field, looking its loveliest in the early morning sunlight. As she contemplated the peaceful scene, she thought that she should feel herself a singularly fortunate being. The dead would be with her no more, alas! except in the spirit; but all else that heart could desire, was it not hers? The answer came quick, No! Something was wanting. But she did not ask herself what the something was.

The harvesters were not at work that morning, and she had not seen a soul since she sat down to breakfast; but before she left the table, a horseman came out from the farm, and rode towards her across the long field, deliberately. She watched him, absently at first, but as he approached he reminded her of the Knight of her daily vision, her saviour, who had come to rescue her in the dark days of her deep distress at Slane—

"A bowshot from her bower-eaves, He rode between the barley-sheaves."

"The barley-sheaves!" suddenly Beth's heart throbbed and fluttered and stood still. The words had come to her as the interpretation of an augury, the fulfilment of a promise. It seemed as if she ought to have known it from the first, known that he would come like that at last, that he had been coming, coming, coming through all the years. As he drew near, the rider looked up at her, the sun shone on his face, he raised his hat. In dumb emotion, not knowing what she did, Beth reached out her hands towards him as if to welcome him. He was not the Knight of her dark days, however, this son of the morning, but the Knight of her long winter vigil—Arthur Brock.

Transcriber's note

The following have been changed, as they appear to be typesetter's errors. All other colloquialisms, non-standard spelling, grammar and punctuation have been left as they appear in the original book. To assist the reader, a hyperlinked chapter listing has been added to this html version. There was no table of contents in the original book.

Page 2 "I had quite forgotten the whisky," she said to the maid-of [hyphen added] all-work, Page 34 "What does she do it for? [added "] Page 220 Do I separate myself from Count Bartahlinski [changed to Bartahlinsky]? Page 290 Miss Bey had had great experience of girls, and her sharp manner, which was mainly acquired in the effort to maintain displine, [changed to "discipline"] somewhat belied her kindly nature. Page 395 "I calcalute [changed to calculate?] that they come to just three hundred pounds," Page 468 If we were to die now, in six months it would be as though we had never bee [added n] Page 469 I never knew such a woman tiil [changed to till?] I met you; Page 522 bordered on either side with great trees, oak and elm, chestnut and beech, and a high hawthorn hedge just whitening into blosom. [changed to blossom]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BETH BOOK ***

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